

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Miracles of Jesus	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	12	Gary L.W. Johnson
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THE GREAT QUESTION

David declared in Psalm 65:7, “Who dost still the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves” – the Lord God is the one who makes the storm be still and brings those who sail to their desired haven (Ps. 107:23-30); cf. Mt. 8:23-27 and Luke 8:22-25).¹ It is a favorite of preachers, who tend (regrettably) to *allegorize* or *spiritualize* it, in order to make a spiritual application – in this case, that Jesus can calm the “storm” raging in our lives, and while that is true, “such an application,” remarks Walter Liefeld, “taken alone reduces the force of the historic fact that Jesus actually stopped ferocious forces of nature.”² What is the focus of this event? Before we run off and make some *spiritual* application to our personal lives, we need to pause and observe the purpose intended by the Gospel narratives. Jesus has been teaching the multitude lined up along the shore from a fishing boat (4:2). With the setting of the sun, Jesus and His disciples undertake to cross the lake in order to expand the mission of Jesus as expressed in Mark 1:38.

- I. **THE STORM.** The Sea of Galilee is over six hundred feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills. “In the hot summer sun, the water evaporates. If the vertical air stream is met by cooler air from the Mediterranean, there is great turbulence and an unexpected storm arises.”³ Matthew uses the word *seismos*, which can refer to an earthquake or a sea storm. Mark’s term, *lailaps*, is an old word for a cyclonic type storm. The word is used in the Greek translation of the OT (the LXX) in reference to the whirlwind out of which God answered Job (Job 38:1) and in connection with the storm in Jonah 1:4. The language Mark uses to describe the effect of the waves is graphic. The imperfect tense is used “vividly picturing the rolling over the sides of the boat . . . insomuch that the boat was now filling.”⁴
- II. **THE SLEEPING SAVIOR.** Jesus lay *sleeping* in the stern, out of the way of those involved in the actual sailing or rowing of the boat. Why was He asleep? “Let us avoid the absurdities of these commentators who go about to render a special reason. *He slept to try their faith!* Or even, as good Matthew Henry, *He slept to show that He was a man!* He slept because He was human, because His human life was real and not merely played or acted. He ate when He was hungry and food was to be had. When thirsty, He asked for a draught of water. When His friends were grieved, He wept along with them, and when there was cause for gladness, He rejoiced in spirit. So here He slept because He was tired.”⁵
- III. **THE SCARED DISCIPLES.** The intensity of the storm alarmed even the seasoned fishermen-disciples. Despite the raging storm, Jesus slept – how could He? “Because He had perfect trust in His heavenly Father’s arm. . . . See David lying down to rest ringed around with cruel foes: *I laid me down and slept; I awoke; for God sustained me. . .* (Ps. 3:5).”⁶ The disciples, now desperate, “awoke Him.” This is a strong term in Greek, being an emphatic compound (*diegertheis*), to wake up completely. This is followed by a rebuke, lit. “Is it no concern to You?” – The question “implies not only fear but

indignation or complaint that He should sleep while they were going to destruction.”⁷ However, even in this, “At least Jesus is *LORD* to his frightened disciples; he is no longer just a teacher. . . . In disasters we need a lord not a teacher. *Save* is the right thing to ask the lord to do, too. The disciples do not ask for teaching on how they might save themselves. Tidal waves are not overcome by education. What the disciples need is not for the Lord to help them find a solution, but for the Lord to save them.”⁸

IV. **THE SOVEREIGN SAVIOR.** He who could sleep while the wind howled and the waves rocked and slammed in the boat, awakes to the cry of His disciples.

A. **Rebuking the Storm.** The language that Jesus used in rebuking the elements bears a striking analogy to His address to the unclean spirit in 1:25. The Sea is here *personified* (cf. Ps. 106:9), or perhaps, as many commentators have pointed out, as the instrument of adverse powers.⁹ The word trans. “rebuke” (*epetimesen*) is used by Jesus in Matt. 17:18 of rebuking the wind. He said to the sea, “Peace, be still” (NASB). The Greek word *pephimos* means lit. “to muzzle.” The perfect form indicates “put the muzzle on and keep it on.”¹⁰ As Jerome aptly said, “Creation recognizes its Creator.”¹¹

B. **Rebuking the Disciples.** “He does not chide them for disturbing Him with their prayers,” wrote the old Puritan divine Matthew Henry, “but for disturbing themselves with their fears.” The word “fearful” lit. means cowardly. The word *delios* (trans. fearful) refers to one who lacks physical or moral courage and therefore fails to do his duty in danger.¹² The reference to “no faith” (little faith in Matthew) must be understood in light of *fear*. “Faith chases out fear or fear chases out faith.” To quote Shakespeare, “Our fears do make us traitors” (Macbeth).

NOTE: That the disciples cried to Jesus for help reveals that they believed He could do something. Therefore they were not questioning His ability. Rather they failed to see Jesus could not possibly die in a sea storm. He whom they recognized as Messiah, as God’s Son, will now perish at sea? “They lacked faith,” writes Carson, “not so much in his ability to save them, as in Jesus as Messiah, whose life could not be lost in a storm, as if the elements were out of control and Jesus himself the pawn of chance.”¹³

V. **THE STUNNED DISCIPLES.** The staggering effect this had on the disciples is **the** focus of the narrative. The disciples were afraid of the storm, but *now* they “feared a great fear” (*ephobethesan phobon megan*), a familiar Hebrew idiom. The Gospel of Mark frequently makes mention of this attitude of amazement, astonishment and trembling. This often serves to express an attitude of awe, of godly fear, of obeisance in the presence of a manifestation of divine power or of a disclosure of divine authority. Note the **question** they ask each other. It is *not*, “What has He done here? And what does it all mean for us?”, **but** “Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!” Mark the words of Robert L. Reymond, “Even more pointed, if that is possible, is Matthew’s report of their question on the same occasion: *what kind of person (potapos) is this that even the wind and sea obey Him* (8:27). The force of their question can only be fully appreciated when one recalls that for them as Jews there could only be one proper response to this question (cf. Ps. 93:3-4, 104:7-8, 107:23-32).”¹⁴

CONCLUSION: This was the first of a series of censures Jesus addressed to the disciples for their lack of faith or understanding (cf. Mark 7:18, 8:17, 21, 33, 9:19, 16:14). The disciples did ask the right question – in many ways it is the **most** important question. It is noteworthy that not until Jesus was satisfied that His disciples understood *who* He was that He began to instruct them on the nature of His work of redemption (Matt.16:21-23). Our understanding of *who* Jesus was has a direct correlation to *what* Jesus did. This is why, down through the history of Christianity, the doctrine of Christ has been so often the subject of attack by the “god of this world.” We are witnessing today an intense attack

on the Biblical picture of Jesus. A whole cottage industry has sprung up in the aftermath of the success of the mega-bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*. Literally dozens of copycat books are flooding the market, all claiming that the *real* Jesus is not the same as the Christ of the New Testament. My friend James White has addressed this in some detail. He recently wrote, “May 19, 2006. That’s when one of the most outrageous anti-Christian films we’ve ever seen will explode onto American movie screens. Powered by big stars (Tom Hanks, Ian McKellen) and Oscar-winning director Ron Howard, the film adaptation of Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* represents the investment of millions of dollars in spreading the clear message that the Bible *was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda – to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base* (234) all at the cost of the truth about the *divine feminine*. If you haven’t read the book (unlike more than 20 million others), you may have only heard bits and pieces about its blatant attacks upon the Christian faith. I have had the opportunity of addressing the onslaught. But I would like to document some of the major errors and the way in which they are presented by Dan Brown here on the blog. I encourage you to take this information and be prepared to use this opportunity to present a strong case for the Christian faith. Yes, you read that correctly. We need to see that attacks upon the faith are opportunities *if* we are prepared, and *if* we are willing to count the cost and go against the cultural flow. We all know that nothing like this could ever be produced if the main target were, rather than the Bible and Christianity, the Quran and the Muslim faith, or Judaism. No, that would never be allowed. But Christianity is fair game at Sony Pictures, that’s for certain. But since it is going to appear, we need to be ready to take advantage of it and provide not only a strong denunciation of its errors, but a positive presentation of the truth of Scripture. And in doing so, we need to be willing to draw clear lines between those who call themselves Christians and yet are unwilling to view Scripture as Christ did, and ourselves.”¹⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ Because there are some variations in the Synoptic accounts of this miracle, some New Testament scholars have alleged that the Gospel writers reflect conflicting theologies as well as contradictions. For a good defense and response to these charges, see Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), pp. 115-116.

² Walter L. Liefeld, *From Text to Sermon: New Testament Exposition* (Zondervan, 1984), p. 141.

³ Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Moody, 1987), p. 130.

⁴ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In the New Testament I* (Broadman, 1930), p. 292.

⁵ John Laidlaw, *The Miracles of Our Lord* (Baker, 1956), p. 63. Wilbur M. Smith argues that this story demonstrates the historical reliability of the Gospel record, “one could easily imagine a writer inserting in such a narrative, if it were only a piece of fiction, that Jesus suggested to the disciples that they should lie down in the bottom of the boat and rest for a while, while, by His omnipotence, He would easily take care of bringing the boat to the opposite shore. The very opposite is what we discover: Jesus leaves the disciples to work hard guiding the boat, whereas He Himself actually falls asleep. Has any great preacher taken for his text, *He was . . . asleep on a pillow?*” *The Supernaturalness of Christ* (Baker, 1974), p. 117.

⁶ Laidlaw, op. cit., p. 63.

⁷ J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 107. The terror and haste of the disciples, writes R. C. Trench, “is evidenced by the double *Master, Master* of St. Luke. This double compellation, as it scarcely needs to observe, always marks a special earnestness on the part of the speaker.” *Notes on the Miracles and the Parables of Our Lord* (Westwood: Revell, 1953), p. 155.

⁸ F. D. Bruner, *The Christbook: A Historical/Theological Commentary: Matthew 1-12* (Word, 1987), p. 318.

⁹ Cf. H. B. Swete, *Commentary on Mark* (rpt. Kregel, 1977), p. 90.

¹⁰ Cf. F. Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek Testament*, trans. and ed., C. L. Rogers, I (Zondervan, 1976), p. 98.

¹¹ As cited in Bruner, op. cit., p. 319. Another perspective is offered by Alfred Edersheim, who sees here not so much a manifestation of deity as a demonstration of Christ as the second Adam, “Christ’s dominion over the sea was, therefore, only the Second and Unfallen Adam’s real dominion over creation, and the pledge of its restoration, and of our dominion in the future.” *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah I* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1899), p. 604.

¹² Cf. Swete, op. cit.

¹³ D. A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew*, ed. F. E. Gaebelin, VIII (Zondervan, 1984), p. 216.

¹⁴ Robert Reymond, *Jesus: Divine Messiah, The New Testament Witness* (P & R, 1990), p. 13.

¹⁵ You can go to James’ website www.aomin.org for this series of articles on *The Da Vinci Code*.

