

SESSION FIVE

The Power of Jesus: *Seeing Christ in the Midst of Life's Storms* (Mark 4:35-5:20)

"You will never find Jesus so precious as when the world is one vast howling wilderness. Then he is like a rose blooming in the midst of the desolation, a rock rising above the storm." ~Robert Murray McCheyne

I. Overview

"Who is this Jesus?" is a question plaguing not only the crowds, but also, Jesus' followers (cf. 4:41). Departing from Jesus' teachings, Mark returns to the miracles of Jesus in order to answer this question. In this next section of the narrative (4:35 - 5:43), the Gospel writer will highlight three specific miracles to demonstrate Jesus' authority as Lord. In particular, Jesus has authority over nature (4:35-41), over the demonic world (5:1-20), and over disease and death (5:21-43). Indeed, this set of events only further verify that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God!

II. The Content

A. Authority over Wind and Water (4:35-41)

The Old Testament teaches that human beings are defenseless and helpless before the forces of nature (e.g., Job 38:8-11; Pss 65:5-8; 89-8-9; 107:23-32). Only God controls the elements. This theological backdrop of this scene further highlights the deity of Christ.

vv. 35-36 - The boat, which was used as a pulpit in v. 1, now becomes an object lesson. The "other side of the sea" refers to the eastern shore. This region is inhabited primarily by Gentiles.

v. 37 - Mid-summer storms on the Sea of Galilee are not uncommon. These sudden and violent storms can produce waves of seven feet! In the parallel account in Matthew, the Gospel writer uses the Greek term used for earthquakes to describe the severity of this particular storm (Matt 8:24).

v. 38 - The disciples' response displays extreme panic and fear, as they face what would appear to be an utterly hopeless state (i.e., literary the "boat is full"). Not only had they failed to recognize who was with them, the disciples also failed to remember that Jesus promised they would reach the other side (v. 35). Their plea is one of despair and anger.

Note that the description of Jesus serves as a stark contrast with the panic-stricken disciples. Jesus' resting on a cushion displays sovereignty and security.

v. 39 - The response of these experienced fishermen only reiterates that this immediate ceasing of the storm is miraculous.

v. 40 - While the disciples may have been entrusted with the secrets of the Kingdom, they still lacked faith. Jesus' frustration is not their understanding but their confidence in Jesus'

supernatural abilities. As aptly noted by Guelich in his commentary on Mark's Gospel, "Their fear of the storm overwhelmed their commitment to Jesus and their confidence that he did care for them (4:38), a reflection of their lack of faith that God could be at work in Jesus to protect them even during the threat of a raging storm." (*Mark*, 1:268).

B. Authority over Demonic Power (5:1-20)

Atypical of other accounts from the life of Jesus, Mark devotes considerable amount of attention to this story (330 words vs. only 135 words in Matthew's Gospel). Certainly, the this scene further supports Mark's claim of Jesus' authority. This exorcism also provides the reader with the most striking christological title yet recorded in Mark's narrative. Finally, this miracle introduces a Savior that is not only for Jews, but also, for the Gentiles.

v. 1 - The region of the Gerasenes speaks of the Decapolis, a loose ten-city confederation under the auspices of the Roman Empire. As noted above, this region consists primarily of Gentiles.

vv. 2-5 - Distinctive to Mark's Gospel, this exorcism story details the man's condition.

v. 6-8 - There appears to be an element of conflict between the man's own desires and that of the evil spirits'. The demons' response indicates not only Jesus' superiority, but their response also conveys hostility. Interestingly, the title "the Most High God" is almost exclusively used by Gentiles in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (cf. Gen 14:18-20; Num 24:16; Isa 14:14; Dan 3:26, 42). Ironically, the demons appeal to Jesus' own father for mercy.

v. 9 - Jesus asks the question not because of His ignorance of the demons' name, but rather His questioning seeks to reveal publicly the extent of this man's domination. While the demons could comprise 6,000, the size of a Roman legion, the point of the story is that the man is possessed by an army of demons.

vv. 10-13 - Not only are pigs unclean animals, these creatures were sacrificial animals for the Gentiles. Jesus, not the various gods of the Greco-Roman world, demands the world's allegiance.

v. 14-17 - Rather than rejoice in the restoration of this man, the locals are concerned with the economic loss.

vv. 18-20 - In his commentary on Mark, Stein observes, "There exists between God and Jesus a unique relationship and unity. Jesus in his actions and deeds is the Lord (5:19), and what Jesus has done (5:20) is what God the Lord has done (5:19)." (p. 261).

III. The Intersect

- A. The storms of life are inevitable. Christianity is not a refuge from the uncertainties and insecurities of this world.

James 1:2-4 -

- B. The storms of life can be distractive. The danger for the disciples was not the storm but their unbelief.

Proverbs 3:19-26 -

- C. The storms of life can be an opportunity to witness first-hand the power of God.

Psalm 107:23-32—

“Any battle for victory, power, and deliverance - from ourselves and from sin - which is not based constantly upon the gazing and the beholding of the Lord Jesus, with the heart and life lifted up to Him, is doomed to failure.” ~ Alan Redpath