

# Who is This?

**Quinn Hill**

**A study of Mark 4:35-41**



So much of what I like about the gospel of Mark is packed into this text. Its pace is fast, and it beautifully provides brush strokes of color and action all of which add deep meaning to the scene. I imagine what it must have been like to be in one of the small boats on the sea with Jesus in a violent storm. Like all of Mark, we are being pulled along, invited to experience Jesus to learn more about who He is, more about his Kingdom, and, by extension, learn more about ourselves.

The curtain never closes. *“On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side”* (Mark 4:35). Mark is drawing our attention to a significant detail, namely, it was the same day. This text is transitioning us from all that has come before: Jesus’ introduction by John, His baptism, temptation, miracles of healing, power over demons, forgiveness of sin, mixed responses to Jesus, and teaching on the Kingdom of God. All of this comes loaded into the boat with the disciples and Jesus.

If you’re like me, in the preceding section filled with parables of Jesus on the nature of the Kingdom, you think, “There are clearly some insiders who get it and outsiders who don’t.” That’s the idea that we’re given and we’re right, but what does that look like? What does it look like to really get who Jesus is?

In today’s text we’re introduced to a reality that there’s more work to be done. That’s why Mark points out to us **“ON THAT DAY, WHEN EVENING HAD COME”**

Why point this out? We might be tempted to think the disciples have it figured out, but we must know, based on the connection here, that there’s more work to be done. The disciples haven’t arrived. They are following Jesus, yes. They are learning and growing, but they, like us, still have a long way to go.

The question still hanging over the disciples then and even today is this, “Who exactly is Jesus and what does it look like to follow him?” Let’s not sit back and think we’re done or we’ve got all the answers, or ‘we’re the good soil’ and leave it at that. There’s more work to be done in our hearts.

This section is a serge of content. In sewing, the term “serge” means binding two pieces of frayed cloth together. That is what Mark is doing here. He’s tying together Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom with the actions of Jesus as King. Tying the parables of Jesus together with the one who controls nature. This lesson is to bring them one step closer to getting it. Who, exactly, is Jesus and what does it look like to be his disciple? Clearly, the disciples had much to learn, and so do we.

*“On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.” (Mark 4:35-37)*

Jesus must have been exhausted. His life was under threat; his family came to restrain him. He had been teaching a huge crowd from a boat all day. What a day that had to be. Jesus was tired.

Notice all the details we’re given. It was evening, ‘just as he was’, other boats were around him, waves were breaking into the boats which were filling up. If we look further into verse 38 Jesus was asleep, but Mark didn’t just tell us that he was sleeping; he told us where and on what. He was on a cushion in the stern of the boat. Why all the detail? Mark wanted us to see the scene in all its color. He wanted us to see that this wasn’t some made up fairy tale. These events really happened, and it was being recounted to us by someone who was there, right beside Jesus. It might be easy to lose sight of the reality of things in the parables, which pull us away into thought and the nature of complex kingdom truths, but here Mark wanted to snap us back into the presence of Jesus and his disciples in a boat on the Sea of Galilee.

Galilee is notorious for its quick and violent storms. The water sits over 600 feet below sea level. Thirty miles away from this sea is a mountainous region whose highest peak, Mt. Hermon, looms over 9,000 feet high. What happens when you take very warm moist air coming up from below sea level and mix it with fast moving cold air coming down from the mountains? Storms, quick and violent.

Whose idea was it to go across the sea to the other side? Jesus’s. It was Jesus who brought them into the sea. It was Jesus who led them there.

What do you fear most? The thing that always stayed in the back of the disciples’ minds was being caught in a violent storm, in the dark, on the Sea of Galilee. That was something to strike fear into their hearts. Why would it be pointed out that Jesus had the idea to cross when they did? Often suffering in our experience is based on our foolish decisions. However, as those who follow Christ, we should expect to be led into suffering by Jesus.

Would our Savior ever intentionally lead us into a storm? Yes. Why is this an important observation to make? Because there are some religious teachers and churches in our day that would try to convince us that suffering is completely due to our lack of faith. If you only had faith then you’d never suffer, you’d always have the best, you’d always be prosperous, you’d never lose. That is not the biblical picture of the Christian life. The biblical outlook on suffering

is that it is used as God's tool to teach us faith. Peter has much to say on suffering in the life of the Christian. One of his concluding remarks is in 1 Peter 4:12 *"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."*

When Mark was writing his account, persecution was on the rise from Rome. People were suffering for their faith. Mark was showing us something beautiful. If you are in a storm, it does not mean that you have been abandoned by God. Jesus calls us to places of suffering. He is unequivocally good, and he does so for his reasons. Suffering is never wasted on followers of Christ. God calls us, even invites us into storms. I love what Sinclair Ferguson says on this point, "This is why he went to sleep, perhaps with a little smile playing around his lips...these boys ain't seen nothing yet." It's not an accident. Jesus calls into the hard stuff to get Glory. That's where he shines!

So here we are on the dark Sea of Galilee and a storm is raging; our boat is filling; we are sinking; and our boat is ready to tip. Jesus was asleep, in the stern, on a cushion. I love that scene. It is so raw in showing his humanity. He was exhausted, and yet he was perfectly at ease on a stormy sea at night. This was his creation so he was taking a nap.

*"And they woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'"* (v. 38). The first great fear was straightforward, "We are perishing!" The Greek here is a bit more graphic. Do you not care that we are being destroyed? We are ruined? We are lost? Those are all appropriate translations of "perishing". The first question: Don't you even care?

So many of us can relate to the disciples here. In the midst of the storms of life, we begin to question the Lord. "We are perishing! Don't you even care?" Do you think that Jesus is suddenly careless of you in the storm? Has he forgotten you, even for a second, in his sleep on the cushion? Have you escaped the notice and love of God?

What had the disciples seen up to this point? They had seen Jesus do incredible things right in front of their eyes, and they still didn't get it. Remember who this is, Jesus, the very Son of God, creator of the universe. The reason he was here, amid this storm, was to redeem a people for himself. He was on that water at that very moment because of his vast love. He was in that boat, physically exhausted, because he had left his place at the side of the Father condescending to come to earth to redeem from the curse. Yes. Jesus cares for his people. That's why he was in the boat.

Why were they really afraid? What was underneath the fear of perishing in the storm? It was a fundamental misunderstanding of exactly who was asleep in the stern. The disciples didn't really understand who Jesus was. If they did, they would remember that it was his idea to go to the other side, and they would trust him. Yes, they were fearful, but only because it hadn't sunk in yet who they are dealing with.

Why test them like this? On the shore, with the calm sea and crowds around them it was pretty easy for the disciples to see themselves in the parables as the good soil, as the plant

growing tall, as reflector of the light, and as those being given a measure. However, without delay, their faith got put to the test of a small boat with nowhere to hide in the middle of a very angry raging Sea of Galilee. Jesus has a way of exposing hearts. Typically, answering “yes” to being a Christian is easy when things are going well, but what about when the unexpected comes along? What about when brokenness crashes in on us and the wheels fly off? Do we follow Christ then? That is what we are being invited into, beautiful childlike faith.

In our house we love the Harry Potter series. One reason is that the magic is so cool. They use wands to cast spells. They can do incredible things with wands. Or, Lord of the Rings, the power of the ring or Gandalf with his staff wielding incredible magical power. All of that is intriguing to read about. But that is fantasy. Let’s take the fantasy out of it and say this, when people are in real trouble they cry out to someone else to help them. I wonder how many mariners in the midst of a storm have cried out to God or to pagan gods to control the storm? Why? Because people just can’t control the sea and the weather. Who can? God.

Now, please let us not let our familiarity with the text blind us to what happened next. Jesus woke and said two words in Greek:

**Peace:** “Be silent” we’d say something like “Hush”

**Be still:** “to put to silence, to muzzle.” We’d say something like “Stay quiet!”

**Be quiet and stay quiet.** It’s like something you’d say to a child.

The wind ceased and there was a great calm. It was a mega calm sea! The wind stopped, and the sea was perfectly still, like glass. Don’t let familiarity with this passage dull you. Let the reality of this event stun you. What must it have been like to be on that boat? You could probably hear a pin drop. Into the chaos of a raging moment, Jesus stilled the storm with his words. He talked to the storm as a parent might to an unruly toddler, and here’s the beauty: IT OBEYED.

This is an astounding moment. I imagine, for the rest of their lives they remembered this moment in vivid color. You can almost see it with them. This is power. This is the raw unmitigated power of the one who spoke all things into existence, and it had its intended impact on those who saw it.

Jesus asked: Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? These questions drive home the lesson of Jesus. Yes, the sea in a storm is to be feared, but not when you are in the boat with the creator. Trust him; he’s good. Everything he appoints is best. He loves you. Jesus is not saying don’t be afraid of a storm at night on the sea. He’s saying, don’t you guys know who I am? Don’t you trust me?

Do you know who Jesus is? Do you know that his perfect love casts out fear? What would happen to your fears, all of them, if you knew beyond any doubt that Jesus, the very Son of God is with you? That he cares for you? Would you fear anything knowing that the very creator God loves you and knows your name and welcomes you into his presence? What would that do to your fear?

Christ reorients our fears. Look, just because you encounter Jesus in a saving way doesn’t mean all fear is gone, now it is oriented in the right direction.

*“And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’”* (v 41). The response of the disciples was holy fear. This is appropriate fear. They simply marveled at Christ with reverence and awe. Fearing the storm was the wrong sort of fear. What should truly cause us fear is the one who can still the storm with a word. This fear lead the disciples to ask the question that is ringing in our ears as we study Mark, *“Who is this then, that the wind and sea obey him?”* We could go on: Who is this then that opens heaven? Who is this that faces temptation of Satan and overcomes? Who is this that heals the leper, the blind, the paralytic? Who is this with a word casts out demons? Who is this who forgives sin? Who is this who teaches with unrivaled authority? Who is it? Mark is taking us to that answer. Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Have you asked the question, “Who is Jesus?” There is no better question you could ask.

Why was no one tossed into the sea in Mark? Because that is where the whole story is going. In scripture, salvation and judgment always exist side by side. Jesus saves his disciples from the judgment and death of the storm because he came to take the judgment on himself. This scene points to the very heart of what Jesus came to do. Jesus came to face the true storm of God’s wrath against sin, against the fall. Jesus came as the truer and better Jonah who would be consumed for his people in the storm of God’s wrath and would conquer death, hell and the grave in triumphant resurrection. Truly good news.

What was the response of the disciples to Jesus? Awe, holy fear! What is our response to the salvation we have been given in Christ? May we be people of absolute AWE at our Savior’s power to save even sinners like us by taking the storm of God’s wrath in our place.

*The entire Mark series available on audio at the Glimpses of Grace website.*