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Introduction

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is a man of action. He swiftly moves from one situation to another. He will appear suddenly on the scene, and just as quickly disappear. With all this action, Mark’s focus is on discipleship to Jesus. When it comes to our discipleship, we have decisions to make concerning what type of disciple we will be for Him. Are we going to respond to the troubles of life with fear or faith? As disciples, are we going to develop dependence upon or independence from Jesus? Mark invites us on a journey of faith to answer these questions and more about our decisions of discipleship.

About the Author

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To this day, I remember with clarity what happened when I was a teenager and the phone call came to tell our family that my grandmother had died in a car accident. I can tell you where I was and what I was doing at that very moment. The feelings of grief and loss still well up inside me all these years later. It was a life-changing event.

It doesn’t take much for our lives to become chaotic. The economy takes a downturn and our financial security is threatened; jobs are lost and retirements are in jeopardy. One second we are going along thinking everything is status quo, and in the next moment our world is changed forever. The hardships of life come no matter what we do. What matters is how we respond to them, especially as disciples, because we can respond with faith or with fear.
Jesus has been telling people about the kingdom of God and uses a boat in the Sea of Galilee as His teaching platform. Once He is finished, He instructs the disciples to head for the opposite shore.

Their peaceful cruise across the lake is interrupted by a horrific storm. The Sea of Galilee lies nearly 700 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills and mountains. The interchange between the cold air from the mountains and warm air rising from the sea is the ideal place for violent storms. This particular gale is so bad that the waves are breaking into the boat and filling it with water. The disciples are no doubt attempting to bail the water, but they are fighting a losing battle.

Jesus is blissfully unaware of what is happening. He lies exhausted in the stern in a deep sleep, having spent the day teaching. With the storm raging, these experienced seamen do not share in Jesus’ tranquility. They assume His sleep shows a lack of concern for their welfare and an indifference to their distress. They are frightened by the storm, and they wake Jesus to reprimand Him for His callousness. Doesn’t He care if they all drown? Shouldn’t He do something to help them out of this problem?

He answers their anxious cries with a reprimand. “And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:39). Nature responds to the commands of the Master. The change is affected not by prayer, but by the authoritative word of Jesus. Notice, He “rebukes” the wind and the sea. This is the same terminology used when Jesus casts out demons. The Greek indicates that He’s not just telling it to quit, but to
be still, and stay still. ¹ His power demonstrates that Jesus can do what only God can do. The disciples respond to the storm in fear because they fail to understand who was in the boat with them. Their faith must continue to grow and become stronger as they face life’s hardships and trials.

Ironically, the disciples greet this miracle with even greater terror than they had for the storm. After rebuking the sea, Jesus reprimands the disciples for panicking. He wants to know why they were afraid, and why they lack faith. In calming the storm, Jesus invites the disciples to recognize who He is.

The purpose of this event is to increase their faith, but the disciples still do not understand. Even when they are confronted with a miracle of this magnitude, the disciples are still unsure. Jesus has power over the forces of chaos and can rescue them from whatever storms may rampage through their lives.

He doesn’t chastise them for their deficiency in knowledge, but for their absence of faith and for being fearful. The real threat to faith doesn’t come from a lack of understanding but from doubt and fear. Clearly, faith is something that can ebb and flow, depending on circumstances, and is most likely to fizzle in situations of danger. Mark wants his readers to see Jesus as the One who delivers His people; in His hands, they are safe.

In the midst of the storm, the disciples panic and accuse Jesus of forsaking them. We can easily claim to be courageous when everything is calm. We can have faith in God’s deliverance when we do not sense any urgent need to be delivered. When we come under pressure, the courage and assurance that Jesus even cares for His own, let alone preserves them from danger, can fade fast. We are sometimes tempted to believe that God is indifferent to our hardships

¹ Edwards, p. 150.
and suffering. We cannot wrap our heads around the thought that a loving God would allow this to happen to us.

The reality is that we live in a world that is still under Satan’s sway. There are many times when it looks like evil is winning and Christians are losing, but Jesus has already saved us. The problem is that He didn’t save us from the hardships and trials of this life, but for the eternal life to come. This truth should give us confidence and allow us to face all threats with courage and trust. The apostle Paul knew something about feeling crushed and despairing of life. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” How are we going to react when our lives feel tossed about and swamped by waves of opposition? What will it take for us to know that Jesus will protect us even through death?

**COOL DOWN**

The point of this story is that God reigns through a chaotic and hostile world. Fear leads us to believe that somehow God does not care. The miracle of the storm does not teach us how to survive the storms; rather it explains to us who Jesus is. Having faith in Him can make all the difference.

We are unable to escape from the storms that are a part of life. Tragedy can quickly turn our lives upside down. The story assures us that God does care. Mark helps us to learn to trust in a Savior who does not deliver us from the storms, but through the storms. Christianity is not a refuge from the uncertainties and insecurities of the world. However, it does teach us to trust in the One who has already secured our future. The question for you is: Are you going to live in fear or live in faith?
Discussion Questions

1. What storms have you faced in your life?
2. How do you typically respond to the hardships of life?
3. Have you ever felt as if God doesn’t care about your situation? Share your story.
4. How does understanding who Jesus is help to calm the storms of your life?
5. What have you been able to learn from your past storms?
6. How would you describe the fear/faith balance in your life.
7. How are you going to make the transition from facing the storms of life in fear to facing them in faith?