



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 4:21-41

Mark

“Kingdom Parables and Calm Sea”

TRANSCRIPT

We are in the Gospel of Mark and this morning we’re finishing up Mark chapter 4. We’ll look at verses 21 through 41 – the remaining parables of that passage and then invent exhibiting our Lord’s great power at the end of it. Mark 4, if you have your Bibles open follow along with me as I read beginning with verse 21: “And he was saying to them, a lamp is not brought to be put under a peck measure, is it?” Now literally, that can be translated – and in the Greek text this is how it would be translated – the lamp does not come to be put under a peck measure, does it? So there is a definite article before the word lamp, *the* lamp, and the verb is not in Greek text brought, but come. We’ll have more to say about that in a moment, but I bring that to your attention because I think we can make an important point in regard to the parable from that. “Or under a bed. It is not brought to be put on the lamp stand? For nothing is hidden except to be revealed, nor has anything been secret but that it should come to light. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear. And he was saying to them, “Take care what you listen to. By your own standard of measure it shall be measured to you and more shall be given you besides. For whoever has him shall more be given and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken from him.”

“And he was saying the Kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the ground. It goes to bed at night and gets up by day and the seed sprouts up and grows. How, he himself does not know. The earth produces crops by itself – first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. And he said, “How shall we picture the Kingdom of God or what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed, which when sown upon the ground, though it is small – smaller than all the seeds that are upon the ground – yet when it is sown grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches so that the birds of the air can next under its shade.” And with many such parables, he was speaking the word to them as they were able to hear and he was not speaking to them without parables, but he was explaining everything privately to his won disciples. And on that day when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go over to the other side.” And leaving the multitude, they took him along with them just as he was in the boat and other boats were with him.

And there rose a fierce gale of wind and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. He himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they awoke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And being aroused, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush. Be still.” The wind died down and it became perfectly calm. He said to them, “Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?” And

they became very much afraid and said to one another, “Who, then, is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?” May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study together in it. Let’s bow now in a word of prayer.

Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank You that we have this opportunity to come together and to study the scriptures, and what a privilege it is to possess this book, this revelation of Yours, a revelation of Your person, Your work, the revelation of Your will for us, the revelation of Your decreed will for the world as we consider these things this morning. We pray that you would bless them to our understanding, that you would open our hearts and our minds to receive the truth because ultimately it is you that does that. We cannot come to an understanding of the text apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit and we pray that He would minister to us this morning, give us open hearts to the truth, give us hearts that search the truth, search the scriptures and are blessed by it. Edify us this morning, Lord, build us up. Make this an enjoyable time of study that we may be fitted and prepared for the week that lies ahead, that we might grow closer to the image of Christ and be pleasing to You. So we pray this morning as we look at the scriptures that you would empty our minds of distracting thoughts, that you would remove the cares of the day or things that we are looking forward to and for the brief time that we have together, may we have minds that are prepared to receive the truth of the scriptures.

We thank you that we have this privilege to study together and we also thank you for the great privilege we have to pray together and to intercede for one another. There are many this morning, Father, of our assembly and friends of this church that are in need of prayer. We pray for those who are grieving. We pray that You give them comfort. We pray for those who are sick, and we have many who are in the hospital or have been in the hospital and are suffering at home from protracted illnesses, and we pray that You give mercy to them, give healing if that be Your will. Give encouragement to them and encouragement to their families. We pray, Father, for those who are in financial need. We pray that you’d make provision for them. We pray that You would provide them with employment, that they might provide for themselves. And we pray that you move the saints to be of service to them as well. We pray, Father, for meetings that are going on throughout the city and throughout the world at this time and pray that You bless Your people and bless us this evening when we come together again to remember the Lord, to remember his work of sacrifice on our behalf. Pray Your great blessing upon us then.

And Father, we pray your blessing upon our nation. As we face a new day, so to speak, with new leaders, we pray that you give them wisdom – great wisdom. We pray that your blessing would be upon them and upon this nation as well. We are commanded to pray for our leaders and we do that. And yet Father, we know that ultimately the great need of this land is not in the political realm, it is in the spiritual realm and we pray that your spirit would move across this land to quicken the hearts of men and women and turn them in faith to Jesus Christ. Use us to that end. Fit us and prepare us now for that end. Remind us of our responsibilities in this day of sowing with the conviction that the day of reaping will come and we are fast approaching that day of the harvest. So give us enthusiasm and diligent work of the ministry that’s before all of us, that we might serve You well and serve You faithfully. Bless our time now, Father, as we sing our final hymn and prepare our hearts for the time of study together. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

I guess it goes without saying that since we last looked at the Gospel of Mark, some significant changes have occurred in our nation. We have a new President-elect and many new members of Congress in both of the Houses. And many are wondering, some with anticipation, others with anxiety, what the next four years will hold for our country and for the world. Well, we don’t know of course – not the immediate future – but we do know the future ultimately and that is

the Kingdom to come. And we know that the present is in the firm control of our Lord. He is moving all events according to His will, according to His glorious goal and even the events that have occurred this past week, somehow in God's wisdom, fit into that plan and are part of it. Our passage this morning gives us, I think, some perspective on the events of our day and reminds us that our kingdom is not of this world. It's the coming Kingdom that is our Kingdom. Our citizenship, while it is at once in this world is ultimately not in this world. It is a heavenly citizenship. And while we are in the present, and we do have responsibilities in the present in temporal ways, we also have responsibilities of a far greater nature. We have a calling in this present day and age that really goes beyond temporal matters. It is the highest calling of all. It is the calling to bring men and women into that Kingdom to come.

That's what our Lord taught his disciples in the parables in this chapter and special stress was laid on that in the first parable, the parable of the sower, which we considered last week; where he explains that the present task of the people of God in this present age is to sow the seed of the gospel, to preach and to teach the word of God, and in so doing gather citizens out of the world and into the Kingdom. Not all are going to receive that word. Only those whose hearts have been prepared like the good soil which receives the seed. So there will be a rejection of the truth. In the parable of the sower, the Lord gave a realistic perspective on the task that is given to the church of preaching the gospel. Many, many will reject it, but what we have assured from that parable is that by the grace of God there will always be those whose hearts have been prepared. There will always be those who do receive the gospel, and as the good ground that receives seed, they too will bear fruit. So we are to be spreading the gospel in this present day and age. The Lord has explained this to the disciples and he has explained or talked to them a series of parables and afterward, when they were alone with him, they asked him to explain them because these parables were abstruse. That is they were difficult for them to understand and the Lord had made them that way by intention, by design.

If you remember, this follows in the wake of blasphemous accusations that were made against the Lord by the scribes, the leaders of the land, and the Lord knew the hearts of the people who were coming to him in great multitudes and he knew that there was unbelief in their hearts. And so he hid the truth from them in parables, but he was revealing to his disciples the mystery of the Kingdom of God. And so he has been teaching them this. He has been giving them revealing to them, the meaning of the parables, revealing this to the disciples. And having explained the meaning of this first parable, Mark now goes on to record other parables that he gave to them. The next one, found in verses 21 and following, is the parable of the lamp. He says in Verse 21, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a peck measure, is it or under a bed?" Now that question expects a negative answer. Of course not. A lamp is brought into a dark room to give light, to dispel the darkness. It doesn't do that by being placed under a bed. That's the point of the next question that he asks. Is it not brought to be put on the lamp stand? And that expects the answer yes. The image of a lamp being put under a bowl, a peck measure or put under a bed might seem odd to us, but the lamps of that day are not like large lamps that we might have in our home. They were, for the most part, small, clay, saucer-like objects that could fit in a person's hand. They were filled with oil and had a nozzle at one end in which a wick was placed. So they could easily be placed under a bed, but to do that would be frustrating to the very purpose of a lamp, which is not to be hidden under a bed. It's to be placed in an open area and shine and give light and remove the darkness.

Well that's the purpose of our Lord's ministry – not to conceal, but to reveal. Now we find this imagery elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, over in Matthew 5, the Lord uses this same kind of language in verse 14-16 where he says, "You are the light of the world. A city set on

a hill cannot be hidden, nor do men light a lamp and put it under the peck measure, but on the lamp stand. And it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify the father who is in Heaven." Now obviously, the meaning of that statement by our Lord, that parable, is that as citizens of God's Kingdom, you and I are to be lights in this world. It's not a light that is self-produced, it is light that derived from Christ. We are, in effect, the reflectors of His light in this world and we are to proclaim the gospel. We are to shine and reveal the person and work and nature of Christ.

Well that's our responsibility and that really is the point that our Lord has been making here with the parable of the sower. But while the image is similar to the parable we're looking at in our text, the meaning is different. The context is different. These are parables about the Kingdom of God, and I think the difference is underscored by the wording of this parable. We pointed that out as we were reading through the text, but literally he says not a lamp, but *the* lamp does not come to be put under a peck measure, does it? Well lamps, of course, don't come – they are brought. That's why the New American Standard Bible and the Authorized Version translate this to brought. But literally, our Lord is saying the lamp does not come. Well, this lamp comes and it isn't just any lamp it is *the* lamp – *the* light. And so the definite article 'the' and the verb 'come' indicate that Christ is not identifying his people, he's identifying himself as the lamp – as the light. And just as the purpose of the lamp is to be placed on the lamp stand and shined brightly, so to God's purpose for Christ was not to keep him hidden, but to manifest him opening in his radiance, in his glory, as Israel's King.

Hidden things are meant to be brought into the open, he says, and that will certainly occur with our Lord in the future, in that day when he returns in glory. So he's given them assurance that the day is coming when they will see him in all of his regal, kingly glory and authority. But in the meantime, it was necessary to hide his glory, to hide his full identity, in the apparent weakness of his humanity, until he had fulfilled his mission as the servant of God and he sacrificed for sins. Now there will be some glimpses of his true nature, glimpses into his royalty and his authority. The disciples will get such a glimpse at the end of the day – at the end of our passage – when they were making their crossing of the Sea of Galilee. But for the most part, in our Lord's ministry, things were hidden so the disciples needed to pay close attention to his teaching. They were not going to see the reality, but they would hear about it so they had to pay close attention to what he said as do we because a person's response to the word of God, to the teaching of Christ, has consequences – good and bad. So the Lord gives a warning in verse 24, "Take care what you listen to." To the extent that a person believes God's word, to that extent God increases his or her understanding of His word, but the opposite is also true.

The Lord says, in verse 25, "For whoever has – that is whoever receives this truth, whoever believes it, whoever accepts it, to him shall more be given. And whoever does not have" – and I think we can see this particularly in light of the scribes what would take place later with the nation as a whole, whoever does not have, whoever does not receive it, whoever says enough, no more, you won't believe what is taught. The Lord says even what he has shall be taken from him. This verse has been described as the double law of spiritual atrophy and spiritual growth. There is no standing still in the Christian life, and I know you've heard that on more than one occasion, but it's true. We are either gaining ground or we are losing ground, but there is no middle ground. There's no place where we just stand still and rest for awhile. We are either advancing or we are regressing, and that's the point of this text, but we see that in many areas of life – not simply spiritual areas but material areas of life, we see this principal played out.

We can give a number of illustrations. Some of those that come to mind are the examples of learning a language. Many people have set out in their life to learn a foreign language and many

seminary students have gone to Hebrew and Greek classes because they have been required subjects – not because they particularly wanted to. And they put their time in and they studied and they’ve learned the paradigms and the conjunctions and all the different forms and irregular verbs in the Greek language. It’s a great deal of memory work, but sometimes when they get out of school, oftentimes when they get out of school, they put their books on the shelf and that’s the end of it. A number of years ago a friend of mine who had graduated from seminary before I went was standing there talking to the president of Dallas Seminary at that time, and told him he found that his Hebrew lexicon made a wonderful highchair for his daughter. That’s about the only use he put it to. When that happens, what happens is that people begin to regress. They don’t advance in their understanding of the language, they regress in it. And what they have learned, they soon forget.

It’s true in other areas, music for example. A child takes up piano usually because his or her parents decide that’s what they need to do, and so they pound away on the piano for a few years and when they get the opportunity they quit. They don’t advance in their understanding of it and over time they begin to lose the skill that they had developed. And so in terms of God’s truth we are to use what God gives us. There’s no middle ground. You’re either advancing or you’re regressing, and it will increase while the one who doesn’t use it, in that person it won’t increase. He or she will lose what they have gained. In fact, the Lord says what he has will be taken from him. So there’s a punitive aspect to that, a judgmental aspect in that. What he has will be taken from him and the suggestion of that is not just a loss of knowledge, but also a loss of everything in regard to the Kingdom of God.

A person who ignores or rejects the words of our Lord will suffer absolute ruin. And what this does is it underscores for us the principal that a casual attitude for the word of God, a superficial hearing of it is a very dangerous thing. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. We are to give attention to what the Lord says. We are to take care what we listen to. Now with that warning, the Lord returns to his parables. His third parable is the parable of the seed growing and it shows a close relationship to the parable of the sower. It amplifies the story of the sower. Both describe what is occurring in the present age, in this interim age before the revelation of the Kingdom of God in its glory. But in the parable of the sower, stress is laid on human responsibility – the responsibility that we have to sow, the responsibility that we have to give the gospel as well as stress upon the condition of the human heart, as determining how that seed will be received.

In the parable of the seed growing, stress is on God’s sovereignty in the power and the effectiveness of the gospel and the two are inseparably connected. So these go well together. And again, in this third parable, the Lord compares the work of the Kingdom in this present age to the work of the farmer. We read that he casts seed upon the ground, goes to bed at night and gets up by day. In other words, once he sows the seed he leaves it. He carries on with other responsibilities, but as far as the seed is concerned, he leaves it to the process of germination. He has no power over that and he leaves the seed to the natural course of things. Over the days and nights to follow, it develops. As he says in verse 27 it sprouts up and grows. How this all occurs, the farmer doesn’t know. It occurs unnoticed. It occurs unaided. The farmer doesn’t cause the growth. It’s power is a mystery to him. Verse 28: “The earth produces crops by itself. First the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head.” The key expression there is that expression “by itself.” It’s the word in Greek text from which we get our word ‘automatically.’ It’s almost a transliteration of it.

The seed contains the principal of life within itself and in combination with the soil, produces growth. And the gospel, the spiritual seed is invested with power. It’s invested with life-changing power. So one point that is made from this parable, one very encouraging point – and it’s made in a similar way in the parable of the sower, is that we were sent out on the monumental task of declaring words of life to men and women who are spiritually dead; seemingly an impossible

task if we look at it on the surface of things. But the encouraging thing is that we are given a gospel that is powerful. This is a supernatural task that's been given to us, a gospel that has life-changing power. As the author of Hebrews writes, "The power of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edge sword." When it combines with the good soil, the regenerated heart, it is received and it bears fruit in a conversation of the one who hears. How the Lord doesn't go into the work of the Holy Spirit in all of this, but the Holy Spirit is the one who gives power to the gospel. He is the one who produces regeneration. He is the one that prepares the heart, the good ground.

Our Lord doesn't really go into that, but Paul does and the other writers of the epistles do. Paul develops that point in such statements as 1 Corinthians 3:6, using much the same kind of language – I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. That's clearly the point of this parable. The work of conversion, the work of soul-winning, is supernatural. The farmer casts out seed, but he doesn't make the seed grow. And the evangelist proclaims the gospel and the gospel must be proclaimed. Where there is no word there is no faith that is produced. The gospel is essential, but it's the Lord who causes the reception of the gospel. It's the Lord who causes the growth. To use the brief statement of Jonah that really says it all, "Salvation is of the Lord." Throughout this age of sowing, there has been growth. There has been great success with the gospel. This whole gospel age has been like a great field in which seed has been sown and the crop has been growing, as in each generation men and women come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

And just as the growing season of a field culminates in the harvest, as verse 29 states, when the crop permits the farmer immediately puts in the sickle. So too this present age of evangelism and spiritual growth will come to its end in the harvest of the judgment. In fact, the image of the harvester and the sickle is used elsewhere in the Bible – a rather common expression for those very points. And we find elsewhere where they are used of the judgment that is coming. Let me give you a few examples. In Joel 3:13-14 we read, "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread for the wine press is full." It's very clear from what follows that he's not speaking of a material harvest, but a spiritual one. "The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."

At the other end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, the same wording is used of the same event. In Revelation 14:14, the following we read, "And I looked and behold, a white cloud and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man having a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple crying out with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle and reap because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe." And he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth and the earth was reaped." The growing season of this present age may seem slow. I suppose to the farmer it seems rather slow, though he has learned patience in the growing season of a field and he knows that that time of harvest will come. It comes every season. And we, too, while it is a rather slow season seemingly to us – some 2,000 years now – it will come to its end. The harvest will come, because everything, this whole development of the field, is following God's plan. The harvest will come.

Now let me say this. The harvest that we read about puts its emphasis on the judgment to come, but in that same harvest in which God reaps a field, it is a field not only of tears, but of wheat. So it is a time of judgment on the one hand, but also salvation for God's people and that day is coming. And that's the lesson here. God is raising up a spiritual crop of redeemed people and in the process of all that's going on now, some of us sow, some of us water, but God causes the growth. And when the last of his elect have come to faith, then immediately He will put in the sickle. There will be no delay. It's going to follow the precise timing of our Lord according to His

decreed will. And at that point in time, when the crop permits, the harvest will occur. Salvation will come, God will gather His sons into his Kingdom and then the Kingdom will be revealed in all of its splendor. That splendor, the glory of the Kingdom to come, is the point of the fourth parable, the parable of the mustard seed in verses 30-32 and He describes it by way of contrast. It begins like a tiny mustard seed, but will become like a great tree-like shrub with branches that give shade where the birds of the air can nest. The mustard seed was considered by the Jews to be the smallest of all seeds. It's not actually the smallest seed that there is, and that's not our Lord's point here. Sometimes criticism has been raised about our Lord, that he didn't understand the true nature of things.

He wasn't giving here a lesson on botany. His point was that the mustard seed is the smallest that his audience was familiar with. The mustard seed was proverbial in Jewish literature at this time for its smallness. However, while it is insignificant in its outward appearance, within it is the potential for a great plant – one, our Lord says, larger than all the garden plants. So it is in the Kingdom of God. It came in Christ because He is the King and the Kingdom is in Him. So it is embodied in Him. He is carrying that Kingdom in Himself. One man embodying the Kingdom of God and one man who seemed by all appearances to be insignificant, when they looked up on him they didn't see a great Caesar, a great conquering King. In fact, Isaiah gives us a description of what he evidently looked like in appearance. He said that he was like a root out of the parched ground, without stately form or majesty. If you've seen a root, as I know all of you have, there's nothing particularly beautiful about a root. In fact, there's nothing beautiful about a root. A root is essential to the growth and the stability of the plant, but of itself, we don't admire the beauty of a root.

So our Lord evidently had no stately form or majesty. When he was crucified by Pilate in what appeared to be a colossal defeat for that great movement that he had brought in Palestine and then Pilate mockingly put a sign over his head, "King of the Jews," as if to say this is the only kind of king that the Jews can produce, a king who is crucified, a king who is rejected even by his own people. How ridiculous. And yet it was through his death that he established his kingdom and when he returns, what began in such a seemingly insignificant way – it began as a mustard seed – will become a great tree, a glorious kingdom, a worldwide kingdom sheltering the inhabitants of the earth. This is the lesson of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. You remember he had a dream of a great image that was made of gold and silver and bronze and iron with feet of iron and clay. It represents the great empires of the gentile world and their glory and their power past and future. It's the image representing the time of the gentiles.

And then a stone appeared, cut out without hands. In other words, a supernatural, heavenly stone, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. And with the feet crushed, the statue collapses and the stone then grinds that statue into dust. Then the stone becomes a great mountain and it filled the whole Earth. That's our Lord's kingdom. And what is described there occurs when our Lord returns at the Second Advent. In the dream a stone becomes a great mountain. In the parable a seed becomes a great tree. And the contrast between its beginning and its end is so great that it will cause wonder and amazement – the kind that occurs when one considers the tiny mustard seed and the great plant that comes from it. So that glorious end of history is our hope and the parable is intended to give encouragement and it's intended to give perspective on life during these present days of toil, during these days of sowing and laboring in the field of the gospel. It can get a big discouraging at times, but there's no reason for discouragement. When things are moving along as God has planned according to His course and they're moving toward that great day when He will return and His Kingdom will be manifested in its glory. That Kingdom has been established with the cross. The seed has been planted with his death, burial and

resurrection, and this glorious manifestation is just a matter of time. And every day that goes by draws us closer and closer to that time.

Well, the parables that Mark recorded are just a sampling of those that our Lord taught on that day by the Sea of Galilee. That's where he states in verse 33. A fuller record of them is given in Matthew 13. The reason that Mark cited so few parables, only four, may be found in the audience to whom he wrote. Most believe that he wrote to the Church of Rome, the church that would be then undergoing persecution shortly after this, and so a church that would need to hear some of the things about the parables and the event that follows in a moment, being very important for them. But one of the characteristics of the Romans is that they were a people interested in action, interested in power and conquest, maybe a bit like the American people who were known as Pragmatists. They were very much Pragmatists, interested in power and conquest, and so following these parables which our Lord does not labor – or rather Mark does not labor, he gives an account of the King. And so he moves from parables about the Kingdom to an account of the King himself in action – ruling the elements, subduing the sea, which demonstrates that he is not only Lord over the church but Lord over nature. Not only King of his people, but he is King of the whole Earth.

The disciples were about to receive a lesson that would expand their knowledge of Christ, and in a sense we could say give them a peek of that lamp that is, in their time, hidden but a sense of what it would be like when it would be revealed – who he really was. It was at the end of the day and the Lord was very tired. It had been a day of teaching, a day of controversy. He had been engaged by the scribes who had made their blasphemous accusation that he casts out demons by the power of Beelzebub. He had left them to go down by the seashore and teach and he had taught all day in parables and then he had explained some of these parables. So it had been a long day and the Lord was physically tired. He was mentally exhausted. He needed a rest as did his disciples. And so he instructed them to leave the multitudes and cross over to the other side of the sea of Galilee. He had been teaching from a boat just off shore and evidently it was in that same boat and from that spot that they set off for the eastern shore to the region of the Gerasenes. As they made their way across the sea, the Lord went to the back of the boat, laid down and fell asleep. The voyage had started peacefully. Normally it is a peaceful sea. It's about seven miles wide and 13 miles long, a small sea that's really more a lake than a sea.

I've seen it in all four seasons of the year and it's a very picturesque place. It's roughly 700 feet below sea level, surrounded by high hills on the east and west and Mount Hermon with its snow-capped peaks to the north. I've stood on the heights of the northern rim overlooking that lake, getting a panoramic view of it in the fall when the deep blue of that lake is framed in the golden brown of those hills. And also in the spring when the green grass covers the hills and it's sprinkled with wildflowers. It's a very beautiful place, but it's notorious for turning ugly and it did that with our Lord and his disciples. While they were making their crossing of the sea, a tempest broke with what Mark describes as a fierce gale of wind and with wavers that literally the text says were breaking over and into the boat. So the boat was being swamped. Storms such as this are not uncommon on the Sea of Galilee due to its topography. When the cold air from the northern mountains and hills sweeps down onto the lake with its warm water, the winds become violent. They stir up the waves. That's the situation we see here. Those kinds of storms can occur without warning and that's what happened here.

It was night when unexpectedly the boat was caught in a tempest. Again, in the midst of it, with the churning waves and the howling wind, the Lord was asleep in the stern of the boat. It's a magnificent glimpse of our Lord in his humanity. He was a genuine man – flesh and blood, human nature just as you and I have, yet without sin. And because of that he needed rest. He got thirsty, he got hungry, he got tired and yet, as a man, in the midst of a storm, he was at peace. He was

sleeping in the midst of this storm. That indicates that in him there is peace in the midst of storms. And it shows something about his humanity, that in all times in his life he was living in complete trust in his Father, even in times of rest. His trust in his Father never failed. I think it's very interesting that this is the only occurrence of our Lord sleeping that is recorded in the gospels. He slept every night with the exception of those nights when he prayed through the night, and we have a few of those recorded. But this is the only time that they record that he slept. And he's sleeping in a storm – a violent storm – because he was at peace and peace is to be found in him.

The disciples, on the other hand, some of whom were experienced fishermen, were in a panic. They'd grown up on the sea, they knew the danger of the sea, they knew what these kinds of storms were like. They knew their lives were in danger and so they rushed upon the Lord. They woke him and cried out, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" That was not simply a desperate cry for help, it was a rebuke, with carried with it the accusation of indifference on his part. They were saying, "Lord, you really don't care about us." Evidently they weren't concerned about him either. Their concern was that he didn't care about them and they were – he was letting this go on and it couldn't go on any longer. So there's a rebuke in what they have to say, but notice the Lord's response. He doesn't sit up and begin to debate, "Yes I do care," or carry on with them at all. He didn't say a word to them. Never in a panic and calm and in control, he stood up, rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush. Be still," or as it can be translated, "Silence. Be muzzled."

Some have seen this possibility that the Lord is speaking to a demonic force behind the winds and the waves, but there's no mention here of demons. What I think we're to understand by this is that he is simply speaking in a very forceful way to assert his authority over the elements with the result that the sea became perfectly calm. He rules the wind. He rules the waves. He rules the elements. And in doing that, he demonstrated that he was more than a man. He is the very one the psalmist wrote of in Psalm 89 verse 9, "Thou dost rule the swelling of the sea. When its waves rise, thou dost still them." And almost in fulfillment of that very statement he does this and he did it in a very remarkable way. At his command, the storm didn't merely die down, the winds stopped and so did the waves. They became perfectly calm. Now normally when a storm stops, the winds will diminish but the waves will continue to roll for awhile. But here, at the Lord's command, everything is suddenly still and the sea becomes smooth as glass. It was so startling, such a dramatic contrast, that it caused the disciples to be afraid verse 41 states. It was a miracle that manifested his deity as his fatigue and his sleep had shown his humanity.

So as the God-man he intervenes on behalf of his people and in so doing, by that very action, he shows that he is one of compassion. He cares about his people. He is the one who saves his people. Commenting on this scene Calvin writes, "His human nature was refreshed by sleep like that of other men while his divinity was watching." As the psalmist writes in Psalm 121, "Behold he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." The disciples doubted that. They accused him of indifference. And so having rebuked the elements, he now turns to them with a mild rebuke and he says, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" Their failure was not insensitive to the danger of the moment. It was not in crying out for help; that was proper. In fact it wasn't even in the fact that they were fearful. It was a fearful situation. It was a situation that prompts fear in a person. Their failure was in their lack of trust in Christ. So he says why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith? In light of all that they had seen, all that they had heard, they've seen his miracles. They've seen him heal people of incurable diseases and cast out demons. They knew the greatness of his power. They'd heard his teaching – teaching with authority.

That very day they had received teaching on the mystery of the Kingdom of God. But when put in a place of difficulty, they were not able to trust the King of that Kingdom. They doubted

their security with him. They doubted his care for them. Their knowledge was put to the test, but they were unable to appropriate that knowledge by faith. Their knowledge failed. It failed to consider the question could the one who had promised to bring the Kingdom perish before the Kingdom had been established. Of course he couldn't. They were secure with him. They were in the most secure place in all of the world – in the middle of that sea surrounded and engulfed by a raging storm, they could not have been more secure than they were at that very moment. But they lacked faith. They lacked the faith that would apprehend that knowledge and appropriate it and live according to it. And while their lack of understanding and lack of faith is amazing, it's not unusual and I think we have to say it's a good picture of each and every one of us. How many times do we fail in adversity? Times get hard and the difficulties continue. They don't let up. They go on and on just like that storm. It just went on and on and they looked through the blinding sheets of rain and they could see no stars coming through, no let up in the storm. It just went on and on and they wondered where is the Lord? What's he doing?

And we, too, can get into that kind of frame of mind when we begin to wonder where is God? Is He sleeping? Is He unaware of what I'm suffering? Is He completely indifferent to my situation? No, He's not. He's never that. As His response shows here, he cannot fail us. He can never be indifferent to us. He is the King. He rules all of nature. He rules all of the affairs of men, even those affairs that seem so puzzling to us at the time. He's in control. We see that here, but we get a fuller picture of it elsewhere in the scriptures. For example, Paul develops this in Colossians 1:16-17 where he says, "For in Him all things were created, both in the Heavens and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is all things and in Him all things hold together." Now if we are in Christ and all things hold together in Him, is it possible for circumstances to destroy us – to destroy those for whom Christ died, those for whom he gave his life and shed his blood? Is it possible that having done that, then, the circumstances of life, which he controls, could destroy us? Of course not – and that was true for the disciples in a storm on the sea. It's true for us in our present circumstances, whether we are in an economic crisis or a political crisis, and wonder what the future may hold for us, what the future may hold in the next four years.

He is with us, and as we pass through the difficulties he uses them to strengthen our faith and give us a deeper insight into his character. That was the affect that this incident had on the disciples. In the providence of God a storm broke on the sea for the purpose of testing their faith and showing them who Christ is. And it's often the case that we learn best in a crisis, and as a result of this crisis and the sudden supernatural stillness that came over the sea, they became very afraid, filled with a feeling of awe and they were asking one another, verse 41 states, who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? The question is left unanswered, but the answer is obvious. He is the son of God and because of that, we can find comfort and refreshment and peace in him. We only need to ask. The Lord has not promised us a life without storms, but he promises to be with us in every storm, with us whatever the crisis. And so like the disciples, we are to call on him. We are to follow their example in that, but we're not to follow their example in the attitude of mind, we're to call upon him with faith and trust.

Things may get bad for us personally. They may get stormy nationally and globally. I think that we probably can expect that. I'm not saying that simply from current events, but I think the scriptures would suggest that, that in the end times things are going to get difficult, but the Lord has promised that the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against his church any more than the winds and waves can prevail against his boat. It's understandable why the early church, which suffered much persecution, adopted the ship as a symbol of the church in its Christian art. Christ is with us on this ship of the church. Christ is our savior and he's our protector, and he has promised a Kingdom to

come and it will come. That's our hope. And so in the present we are to labor confidently. We are to labor in whatever field we are in. In our business, we're to labor diligently to be good businessmen, to be good housewives, to be good doctors and lawyers and all of that.

We are to be involved in the political affairs of the day to the extent that we can do that. But that's not our goal and that's not the great work that's been given to us, and that should not become a diversion to us, because the great work that is given to the people of God and the church of God is the work of sowing the seed of the gospel, of laboring in this field of the gospel, living for the Kingdom of God, calling out citizens from this world for the Kingdom of God. That's how we are to live. We are to live in this present day as Peter exhorts us in 2 Peter 3, looking for and hastening the coming of the Day of God. May God help us to do that. May God help us to have a proper perspective on life and labor in light of that. If there are any in attendance this morning who do not know Christ as King and as Savior – and I urge you, believe in him; him who died in the place of sinners, took their death in their place so that they might have forgiveness and eternal life. Believe in him and become a citizen of his eternal Kingdom. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for the truth that we see presented here and the encouragement and the perspective that it gives. We are living in an interim period, a period that will pass just as the ripening of the field eventually passes and gives way to the harvest. And that day is coming. The great harvest is coming. So help us to be diligent workers in the field in which you have placed us, looking forward to that day when our son returns and the harvest is made, the harvest of salvation and a harvest of judgment. We pray, Lord, that if there be any in attendance this morning who do not know Christ, that you would help them to realize that that harvest is coming and that you would give them no rest, no peace until they realize that. That you would bring a storm within their heart so they might turn to Christ, the only one who can still the storm, the only one in whom there is real peace. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.