

## 911 Aftershocks Mark 4:1-2a, 35-41

Disclaimer: Material from this message was adapted in part from messages found on the Sermon Central website.

Exactly 21 years ago today, at 8:45 a.m., American Airlines flight 11 crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York. People thought this was a horrible accident until, at 9:03 a.m., when United flight 175 crashed into the south tower; the United States now knew it was under a terrorist attack. At 9:43 a.m., after a third plane crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, the White House and the Capitol were evacuated, all airplanes were immediately grounded and all airports across the U.S. shut down. Only a single plane was left still flying. At 10:00 a.m., a passenger revolt having thwarted the hijackers plans of attacking a fourth target, they then intentionally crashed that plane, United Airlines Flight 93, into a field near Pittsburgh.

That day, in a period of less than two hours, as a result of the four plane attacks, over 6,000 people were injured and nearly 3,000 people died along with America's sense of impregnability; the entire country went into a state of shock. In the aftermath, while many people returned to church, for a while, other's asked why God would let such a tragedy happen to this "Christian nation?"

As Christians, if we are following Jesus, when such terrible storms of life hit us, we need not be shocked.

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The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all record a terrifying storm that shocked the disciples, even though they had Jesus in the boat with them.

The day had begun with Jesus teaching on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee; such a large crowd had gathered that He had to get into a boat, and put out into the lake just to speak to them. That evening Jesus called for His disciples to join Him in the boat and they sailed to the other side. Exhausted from a day of teaching, Jesus fell sound asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat.

But in the middle of the night, their peaceful evening sail was shockingly, terrifyingly, interrupted. A "*great gale arose and waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was being swamped.*" In an instant the Sea of Galilee had transformed from a lamb into a lion; the once placid lake had become a turbulent sea of churning waters. While terrifying to experience, this sudden weather change on the Sea of Galilee is understandable when you learn the topography of the region.

The Sea of Galilee is a large fourteen mile long, seven mile wide, freshwater lake, halfway down the Jordan rift valley bounded on either side by the Galilean hills and the Golan heights. Since the lake is nearly seven hundred feet below sea level, it has a subtropical climate, with warm, pleasant weather year-round.

To the north stands Mount Hermon, which in winter is often topped with snow. When cool air from the mountain drifts south through that natural land trough and meets warm rising air from the lake, severe weather can spontaneously erupt.

For the disciples, a no more horrifying experience could have been imagined. On a small vessel in the middle of the night, with cold winds and rain whipping around them, unable to find a bearing on the far shore and with waves so high that the boat is taking on water faster than it can be bailed out, the disciples panicked.

This unexpected storm shocked them; after all didn't they have Jesus in the boat with them? His disciples had forgotten that such storms have always been a fact of life on the Sea of Galilee and are to be expected. Such storms of one kind or another have always been a fact of life for everyone, including Christians, in every age and place; and our response should not be shock but expectation and confidence knowing who is in the boat with us. ...

### **The shock comes because we have the wrong expectation about what storms the followers of Jesus should experience.**

The Apostles would later have to deal with this same sense of shock in their letters to new Christians, who were dismayed by persecution arising in response to their new-found faith.

The Apostle Peter wrote,

*"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed."* (1 Pet 4:12, 13).

Mark's Gospel adds an interesting note. It records that the disciples took Jesus "*along with them, just as He was*" (I assume meaning asleep) (Mark 4:36).

We need to take Jesus as He is and not as we think Him to be. We often mistakenly bargain with God saying, "*I'll follow, if You meet my conditions.*" Jacob tried making such a bargain as he fled from his angry brother Esau,

*"Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; **then shall the LORD be my God:**"*  
(Gen 28:20, 21)

If that is your understanding of discipleship, then not only will the storms surprise you they will stop you.

We are shocked by storms in our life and we are shocked when we think God is sleeping. **"But [Jesus] was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'"** (Mark 4:38)

The disciples in their panic had nowhere else to turn. As sailors, they have given it their best efforts, but the situation looks hopeless. So they awaken the Master. John MacArthur wryly noted, "*When Sailors ask a carpenter what to do in a storm, you know they are in a lot of trouble.*"

Do you ever pray and it seems as if the Lord is sleeping?  
Does it make you ask, "*do you not care that we are perishing?*"

There is a reason for this: Jesus never rescues those who are intent upon saving themselves. As long as you think that you can handle it, He will allow you to try.

As a nation we were upset that God allowed the 911 attacks. Was He asleep? Or was it because we continue to want to steer our own ship in another direction?

It is vitally essential in our Christian life to recognize Jesus is not a passenger, He is the Pilot. We ought never say, "*Christ I receive you into my life, now, get in the back, I'll pilot my own ship and if I need You, I'll call.*"

Of course we will never feel that need, until a storm comes and we almost perish, which is precisely why they come. Only then will we learn like Peter to, "*cast all your cares on Him, because He cares for you*" (1 Pet 5:7).

There's always an end to a rope. And regardless of the world's opinion, the best advice is not to "tie a knot and hang on." Few people get anywhere while hanging on to the end of the rope. When you get to the end of the rope, the right answer is to let go of the rope.

Jack fell off a cliff, but managed to grab a tree limb on the way down. In desperation he begins to call out. "*Help! Help! Is anyone up there?*" He was about to give up when he hears a voice.

*"Jack, I can see you, are you all right?"*

*"Yes, but . . . Who are you, and where are you?"*

*"I am the Lord, Jack. I'm everywhere."*

*"The Lord? You mean, GOD?"*

*"That's Me."*

*"God, please help me! I promise if You'll get me down from here, I'll stop sinning. I'll be a really good person. I'll serve You for the rest of my life."*

*"Easy on the promises, Jack. Let's just get you down from there; then we can talk. Now, here's what I want you to do. Listen carefully."*

*"I'll do anything, Lord. Just tell me what to do."*

*"Okay. Let go of the branch."*

*"What?"*

*"I said, let go of the branch. Just trust Me. Let go."*

There was a long silence.... finally Jack yelled,  
"**HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE?**"

<https://bible.org/illustration/anyone-there>

We are shocked by storms. We are shocked when we think God is sleeping and we are shocked when He speaks.

Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "*Peace! Be still!*" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm." He said to them, "**Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?**" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*" (Mark 4:39-41)?

The answer is: this is God-in-the-flesh, the God-man, Jesus Christ!

O Lord God of hosts, who is as mighty as you?  
O Lord, Your faithfulness surrounds you.  
You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise,  
you still them." (Psa 89:8, 9)

To Christ, our fear and lack of faith are unbelievable: "*Why are you afraid?*"

How is it His disciples had no faith?"

1. They weren't trusting in **His Word**. Jesus had said *let us go across to the other side*. Not, "Let us go down to the bottom?" (Mark 4:35).

2. They were not trusting in **His Will** which is vitally connected to His word. The very purpose of His Word is to reveal His Will. "*let us go across.*" So, even in the midst of any terrible storm, the safest place in the world is being in the will of God.
3. They weren't aware of **His Constant Presence** in their lives – Jesus is always in our boat.

For example, the newly converted Paul believed that God had a mission for him to accomplish and would accompany him all the way along on this journey (Acts 9:15-16). I can't imagine God saving a soul through the blood of Jesus Christ and not having a purpose for their life and a mission for that person to accomplish.

From the day that he was saved, all that Paul was thereafter concerned about was to finish the mission that God had planned out for him. After 14 years of mission work – taking the gospel to the Gentile nations – where he was often beaten and imprisoned, but continued to plant thriving churches, Paul was headed down to Jerusalem for what he knew would be his last visit home. Everywhere he went people would say, "*Paul, they're going to throw you in jail and kill you if you go down there!*" How did Paul reply?

But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

Acts 20:24

Paul's only concern was to finish his ministry, which an angel had personally told him would be in Rome. So, as predicted, in Jerusalem, when a mob tried to beat him to death out on the streets, Roman soldiers, hearing the noise, rescued him and put him in jail. Forty Jews then bound themselves under oath to neither eat nor sleep until they had killed Paul. But God had a little boy, Paul's nephew, standing there whom nobody paid attention to. Hearing the whole plot, he told Uncle Paul what they were planning to do the next day. Paul then informed the Centurion and by 9 p.m. that evening he began his journey to Rome, riding on horseback, accompanied by 200 soldiers with 70 Calvary men riding alongside (I wonder how long those 40 men kept their vow and went without eating or sleeping?).

Now on the Mediterranean Sea, sailing to Rome, a violent winter storm came up; lasting for two weeks, it was tearing the ship apart. Paul writes, "*All hope that we should be saved was lost. But that night the angel of God stood by me ... and said, Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and God has also granted safety to all those who are sailing with you.*" (Acts 27:23-26)

Which is what happened, the ship eventually wrecked on the island of Malta, but all the crew are saved. While Paul was picking helping to gather wood for a fire to warm and dry themselves, a poisonous snake fastened itself onto his hand. The watching locals, knowing how deadly that snake was, decided that Paul must be under a curse – having escaped the sea only to be bitten by a snake – and are expecting to see him swell up and die. When nothing happens they change their mind, thinking that maybe he is a god. Paul then spent the rest of the winter months as a lavished guest of the head man the on the island, healing their sick and sharing the gospel before resuming his journey to Rome.

So Paul gets to Rome, where he lives and preaches the Gospel for years. Afterwards, tradition says he was released for several more years and traveled on to preach the Gospel in Spain. Then, he was again arrested and came to the end of his life writing his final letters to the churches from a Roman prison under a death sentence by the insane Emperor Nero. They would soon cut off his head and Paul knows it. But they couldn't do it until he wrote...

Here then are the Reasons for " ***'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?'***

It only happens, when

- we aren't trusting in the Word of God
- we aren't confident in the Will of God
- and aren't mindful of the Presence of God – He's always in the boat with us.

The faith that casts out fear recognizes God's unseen presence throughout our lives.

**Thomas Andrew Dorsey** was a black, jazz musician from Atlanta. In the twenties he gained a certain amount of notoriety as the composer of jazz tunes with suggestive lyrics, but he gave all that up in 1926 to concentrate exclusively on spiritual music. "Peace in the Valley" is one of his best known songs, but there is a story behind his most famous song that deserves to be told.

In 1932 the times were hard for Dorsey. Just trying to survive the depression years as a working musician meant tough sledding. On top of that, his music was not accepted by many people. Some said it was too worldly—the devil's music, they called it. Many years later Dorsey could laugh about it; saying, "*I got kicked out of some of the best churches in the land.*" But the real kick in the teeth came one night in St. Louis when he received a telegram informing him that his pregnant wife had died suddenly.

Dorsey was so filled with grief that his faith was shaken to the roots, but instead of wallowing in self pity, he turned to the discipline he knew best—music. In the midst of agony he wrote the following lyrics:

Precious Lord, Take my hand,  
Lead me on, let me stand,  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn,  
Through the storm, through the night,  
Lead me on to the light;  
Take my hand precious Lord,  
Lead me home.

--Norman L. Bales, Pulpit Helps, May 1992, p.20

When we know God and trust that He has a purpose for our life, we needn't fear or be shocked whatever storms that may come along to keep life exciting. Having God in your boat does not mean that you will not face any storms, but it means that no storm can sink your boat.

In the middle of Westminster Abbey is the grave of John Laird Mair, 1st Baron Lawrence of the Punjab, who was so respected by the locals in his service to the crown, that he was able to keep peace in the province even while the rest of India was revolting. The inscription on his tomb reads, *His devotion to public duty was ennobled by the simplicity and purity of his private life. "He feared Man so little, because he feared God so much".*

Wouldn't that be a nice epilogue to have recorded on our headstone?

Let's pray about this.