


The Gospel of Mark
Part 16
The Stilling of the Storm

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

A publication of  the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

2024.3.3



Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?
...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- Do you have difficulty accepting the idea of miracles? How, when and why has your opinion changed?

An "*a priori* assumption" is a commitment of the mind one makes prior to an examination of evidence. Dr. Richard Lewontin (Harvard) made the following shocking admission (the *italics* are *his*):

"We take the side of science *in spite of* the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, *in spite of* its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, *in spite of* the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is an absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door."

Does this seem intellectually honest to you? Why or why not?

- At YouTube, watch this video: "How Does A Seed Become A Plant?" You'll find it here: Come up with some "natural laws" which describe this amazing, mysterious process.



Now, read Psalm 104:14 & 147:8. To what **ultimate** source does the Bible attribute plant growth?

The biblical view of "natural laws" is called the doctrine of "divine providence", which describes God's care for his creation, preserving its existence and meticulously guiding it to his intended ends. How have you seen God's providence at work in your own life?

- Pastor Doug noted that God sometimes miraculously delivers us from difficulties, but that typically he accompanies us as we walk through difficulties. How do you see this in action in Psalm 23?

Discuss the events of Acts 12:1-17, using the categories of "providence" and "miracle".

Sermon Summary Key Text: Mark 4:35-41

Today we will be looking at Mark chapter 4:35-41 which contains the story of Jesus stilling a storm. This is just one of several miracles recorded in Mark's gospel. For the Christian, miracles confirm the power and message of God. But for the non-Christian, miracles are a stumbling block—a proof that religion is just a bunch of fairy tales. In their worldview there is no divine intervention; there are no miracles; there is only natural law. If miracles are not possible, we should all go home, forget about God and abandon our faith. But living as we do in a secular culture, I think it is helpful for us to carefully examine the argument put forth by skeptics that miracles are impossible.

The argument against miracles goes like this:

1. Miracles are violations of natural law.
2. Natural laws are immutable.
3. It is impossible for immutable laws to be violated.
4. **Therefore** miracles are not possible.

I have no problem with the idea that miracles are “violations” of natural law (because, as Christians, we understand that “laws” are *descriptions* of how God typically runs his universe, rather than *prescriptions* which God somehow is obligated obey). I do have problems with statements two and three: “Natural laws are immutable”—how do we know that? This is an assumption, not a statement of fact. The assumption is that there is nothing outside the natural system that can act on that system. This assumes what the atheist hopes to prove...that there is no God!

But we have credible historical evidence of miracles: the New Testament. The New Testament documents are the most credible ancient documents we possess. When scholars seek to determine the reliability of ancient documents—whether secular or sacred—two issues are of the utmost concern. [1] What is the time interval between the original document and oldest surviving copy? The shorter the interval between original and copy, the more accurate the copy is likely to be. The earliest undisputed manuscript of a New Testament book is a fragment of the gospel of John which is dated between AD 117-138 (the John Rylands Papyri or P52). That means that the time interval between the writing of John's manuscript (ca. AD 95) and the earliest surviving copy is only 20-40 years. No other book from the ancient world has as small a time gap between its original composition and the earliest manuscript copies as does the New Testament. It is not even close!

The second question scholars ask is: [2] How many copies survive for comparison? The more copies we have, the easier it is to determine the exact content of the original. In terms of the sheer number of available manuscripts, the New Testament far surpasses any other work of antiquity. We have roughly 5700 manuscripts of the New Testament—almost ten times as many as the next closest ancient document (Homer's Iliad, with 643 copies).

Note: This might be something you'd like to clip out and keep in your Bible.



New Testament scholar John A. T. Robinson writes,

“The wealth of manuscripts and above all, the narrow interval of time between writing and the earliest extant, make it the best attested of any ancient writing in the world.”

Bruce Metzger, the great Princeton scholar, asserts that the New Testament we hold in our hands today is 99.5% pure. (Robinson puts that number at 99.9%.)

The New Testament you are holding in your hands today is essentially a photocopy of the original! The gospel accounts were penned either by eyewitnesses of the events, or by those who consulted with the eyewitnesses. Archeology consistently corroborates the Bible.

In the New Testament, we have credible historical evidence for miracles. Acts 2:22 describes Jesus' power with three terms: "mighty works", which speaks to the divine power behind miracles, "wonders", which speaks to the awe that miracles invoke in those who witness them, and "signs", which speaks to the purpose behind miracles. And what was their purpose? Miracles were an attestation by God that Jesus was who he claimed to be, the unique Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the long promised Messiah. Jesus' miracles confirmed that the Kingdom of God was being established with power. Jesus exercised power over nature, the spirit world, death and disease. There is no area of life over which God does not have control. Jesus is Lord of all!

Mark 4:35-41 records an astonishing demonstration of Jesus' power over nature. After a long day of teaching a massive crowd by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was exhausted. "When evening came Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side'" (4:35). They were looking for a quiet place where they could have a meal and recharge. Try to imagine the scene: suddenly a wild wind swoops down on their tiny boat! All they could do was trim the sails and hope to ride it out. But hope turned to despair as the waves begin lashing the sides of the boat, filling it with water. They were in grave danger—and they knew it. Meanwhile, Jesus is sleeping peacefully through it all, oblivious to the raging storm.

The contrast between Jesus' peaceful sleep and the disciples' frantic efforts could not have been more stark. Finally they awaken Jesus: "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?!" It's interesting, isn't it, that when we face difficulties we are quick to accuse God of not caring. We reason that if God really cared he wouldn't allow difficult circumstances. We equate God's caring with a life of health, wealth and comfort. A life without difficulty. But ironically, it is precisely during such times of ease that we forget about God. When all is well, He takes a back seat to our pleasures. Think about it: In the good times we fail to acknowledge God—and in the bad times we accuse Him of not caring! But there is no discrepancy between the existence of trials and God's love for us (James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5; John 16:33). We need to replace anxiety with trust, and fear with courage. And we can do that, because we know that God is in control. Sometimes God walks with you through trials, and sometimes he delivers you from trials.

When Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (v. 41). Their question highlights the purpose Jesus performed this miracle: to open their eyes to who he really is. Jesus was not just a great moral teacher. The wind and waves do not obey mere human teachers! Jesus is the divine Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. This is the Jesus we worship, and who invites us to trust him. The disciples wrongly accused Jesus of not caring (v. 38), but he accurately accused them of lacking faith. Unbelief and fear always go together. They never should have doubted their safe arrival because when Jesus said, "Let us go over to the other side" (v. 35), his divinity guaranteed that they would indeed arrive on the other side!

Sometimes God uses trials to strengthen our faith and refine our character while occasionally he miraculously delivers us from difficulties, as he did here. Deuteronomy 29:29 promises us that many of God's ways are beyond our ability to know (also see Romans 11:33-36). What circumstances have caused you to doubt God's loving care? Talk to God about it. Let him know that you're hurting, confused, even angry. But then also look at the cross—God demonstrates his love there (Romans 5:8). Ask him to help you trust him and walk by faith. God wants you to know how much he loves you. He wants you to receive Him as your Savior and Lord. He wants to forgive you. He wants you to follow Him in discipleship.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

"Five Question Bible Study" (see below) *is useful for studying any topic. Let's use it to explore just a few* (see John 20:30) *of Jesus' recorded miracles...*

Monday—Study Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-15.

Tuesday—Study Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:16-21.

Wednesday—Study Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45 and Luke 5:12-14.

Thursday—Study Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39.

Friday—Study John 9:1-41.

Saturday—Study John 11:1-46.

Need help to grow?

Get free counseling at:

BiblicalHopeAndHelp@gmail.com

Five Question Bible Study

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]