

Storm Pictures in the Gospel of Mark

Mark 4:35–5:43 • Sunday Bible Class • October 18, 2026

What's the Worst Storm You've Ever Encountered?

Well, good morning. We're glad you're with us today as we get started with class again. It got cool this week finally, so hopefully that's going to continue out there. Today we are in a class that I look back on. We studied the Gospel of Mark in 2019, I think it was, and this class we're going to have today took three classes then. So understand what this class is. It's highly compressed, and it's a different kind of concept, because there are a lot of things we'd like to dig into, but we really can't because of the nature of time.

But we want to start with a simple question: What's the worst storm you've ever encountered?

When we moved to the Gulf Coast, I went down for my final interviews a week and a half after Hurricane Alicia hit. At the time we lived in Central Texas in a trailer, which will come up later, and they assured me it would go nowhere because it was tied down. Well, I went and saw. I took a picture, and the picture was of a trailer sitting on its roof with the tie-down still in place. So I took the picture. The lesson: never, never make promises you cannot keep, because that's going to happen.

The Passage and the Trouble in It

We're going to talk a little bit about storms today. Mark chapter 4, verse 35, through chapter 5, verse 43. That's a huge passage. We are not going to read through all of it, because that would be the end of class. As I told you before, if you do nothing more, take a Bible and look at the headings. Read through the headings real quick and answer the question: What kind of trouble are the people in?

Generally, trouble. Specifically, there's a storm at sea, on the Sea of Galilee. There's the death of a child, a twelve-year-old. It's every which way.

The interesting thing is that this passage has four different stories in it. These are storm pictures. These are things that you see in life on an everyday basis. As we go through this, you could probably identify someone who has been through these situations in some way, and so we're going to look at them through a series of storm pictures.

What Storms Are Like

Storms come suddenly

That's one of the things you realize about a storm: you don't get a lot of advance warning. Sometimes you do. Sometimes you don't. This past weekend we were over in Keller for the funeral of my wife's cousin. While we were there, we reconnected with another cousin and his kids. One of his kids is about fifty-seven years old, a retired home builder. When he was five, he was in our wedding, and he remembered wearing shorts at our wedding, so I said, "It's nice seeing you in long pants again." He lives in Florida, and we started asking when they were getting back. They said the hurricane hit them pretty hard, and they only had about a day and a half of warning. In that day and a half, his mother-in-law fell and broke her wrist, so they were taking care of her and couldn't do anything else. Storms come up suddenly. You don't get a lot of advance notice, and that's true about nearly everything in life.

Storms disrupt life

A storm tears everything up. You're emotionally upended. There may be physical issues you have to deal with. There are messes to clean up. Everything changes when a storm comes alive that way.

Storms are outside our control

Very few things in life we can control. I always liked what Will Rogers said: everybody talks about the weather, but nobody can do anything about it. That's true of a lot of things. If you have an accident, it will alter your life significantly, and it will be completely out of your control. When a death comes, you have no control over it. A lot of what happens in life is of that nature.

And with the storms of life there is always chaos, and that's where nobody knows how to direct it. We'll come back to that idea as well.

Four Storms and Three Questions

There are four storms we're going to look at. First, a physical storm: the storm on the Sea of Galilee, which is about to sink a ship. Second, a spiritual storm: a man on the other side of the sea who is occupied by unclean spirits, thousands of them, and it upends his life in ways no one can imagine. Third, a health storm: a woman with an issue of blood that has drained much of what her life would be. Fourth, a mortality storm: a child dies.

None of these is out of the ordinary for us. We all encounter weather. We all encounter some spiritual difficulties. We all have health issues. And there comes a moment when

we all face mortality. I think Mark orders these deliberately. Each one gets a little bigger and more personal along the way. There's a big one, and then it narrows down to the fact that somebody has died in front of you. That's a different kind of experience.

We'll sort through the lesson with three questions:

1. What's the fear? What are people afraid of? Everybody's afraid of something, and Mark talks about fear all through these stories.
2. What's the faith? Where do people bring their faith, or where is the problem with their faith in these stories?
3. What does Jesus do in each situation?

Those questions help us understand the undergirding of this passage, because three words occur over and over: fear, afraid, and faith. That's the repeating refrain.

Storm One: The Physical Storm

Mark 4:35–41

Into the Heart of the Storm

We know this story very well. Jesus tells his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side." It's nighttime. He leaves the crowd behind. They're going to cross the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night, and he'll either get some rest or find something else on the other side. He just needs to get away. There are other boats with them, and as they move along the very placid Sea of Galilee, a furious squall comes up that upends everything, and the boat is almost swamped.

The disciples are afraid. I find that highly interesting, because you have experienced sailors on that boat who are deathly afraid. They haven't seen anything like this before. So they wake Jesus up with that interesting question: "Don't you even care?" You're sleeping while we're all afraid. Get up and be afraid with us. Misery loves company, I suppose.

Jesus gets up and rebukes the winds and the waves. "Quiet! Be still!" And it became calm. Then he turns to the disciples: "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" See the connection again? But they were terrified. "Who is this man?" That's the question being pulled out all through Mark. He's a different kind of teacher. Who is this man? He has power over demons. Who is this man? He has power over the elements.

Notice that Jesus is sailing into the heart of a storm, and the disciples don't know it. God knows when we're about to go into a storm. We don't. There's this little armada sailing along quite well, and then the squall comes up.

What a Squall Is

The term squall has an interesting concept to it. It's not just a strong wind. We always think of a gale. This is more like a tornadic thing. It has circulation to it. The word means to come from all four compass points. Everything is moving east and west, north and south, constantly, and there's nothing to do about it. And it's at night. Think about being on the water in complete darkness. You don't know what's going to happen. Jesus is calm in the storm, and the disciples are concerned about dying. Sometimes that's how we feel as well.

This is what that boat would have looked like. A boat was dug out of the bottom of the Sea of Galilee by archaeologists, I think in 1989. It's a first-century fishing vessel. It's not the boat Jesus was in, but a boat like it. It is twenty-seven feet long, about as far from here as the last pew. It is seven feet wide, a little wider than the aisle, and four and a half feet deep. That's what you've got to work with. You've got thirteen men packed into a boat that's being pitched back and forth, with water coming over the edges all the time, and the boat is about to sink. And this one did.

Why Galilee Does This

The reason this happens is the geography. Galilee works differently than most people think. It's a basin. The side Jesus left from is Lower Galilee, and he's headed toward the upper Syrian basin, what we call the Golan Heights today. Genesaret is the other name for the lake. The water is only about 150 feet deep, but it sits 640 feet below sea level, with hills on both sides. When wind sweeps across the mountains, it comes down to the bottom like a spoon that picks everything up and empties it back out.

I had that experience in Central Texas. The night before my oldest daughter, my first child, was born, we had one of those weird Central Texas thunderstorms. It was 98 degrees on February the ninth. About one o'clock that night a cold front rolled across the hill country, and it kicked up tremendous tornadic activity. One touched down about a mile from our house. We lived in a trailer, and it was rocking and rolling like I was having a party. I wasn't. I was scared to death. My first child was about to be born, my wife was in the hospital, and I thought, this is going to kill me right here. I know what the disciples were feeling. And the next morning, after my daughter was born, it was nine degrees. That's what a tremendous gradient does. It creates complete turmoil.

“Quiet. Be Still.”

Jesus gets up and uses just two words. Silence. Calm. The sea becomes like glass, and the disciples don't know what to do with it.

In the physical storm, the fear is that we're going to die. There are times you think, I don't know how we're going to get out of this alive. That's how they felt. Their response was undeveloped. The only thing they could do was wake him up. Nobody thought, “Jesus is here, nothing's going to happen.” We tell people, “Don't worry, the Lord's with you.” That's real good if you're not in the middle of the storm. Their faith wasn't exactly what it should have been, but Jesus speaks to the sea and to the wind, and it calms.

Does a Storm Mean Punishment?

By the way, does a storm mean you disobeyed, or that it is punishment for something you've done? No. We've made it that way. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, I heard some gospel preachers say they were getting the results of their sin. Hooey. That's a tropical storm that comes off the coast of Africa, crosses the Atlantic, and smashes into America two or three times a year. People are caught in storms because they're storms, not because of what they've done. What they've done may be punished, but it won't be like that.

Storm Two: The Spiritual Storm

Mark 5:1–20

The Man Among the Tombs

When Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee and gets to the other side, it's a completely different territory. It's the Gentile world, Syria on the other side, the region of the Gerasenes. And the first person he encounters is a man who is out of his mind.

Mark paints him as a wild man. He's strong. His hair is unkempt. He's naked. He lives among the tombs, and because he has unclean spirits, he makes no sense. He's dangerous, so dangerous he's been exiled. You stay out where the dead people are, because you're as close to dead as we know how to get you. That's what the town was saying. It wasn't the man; it was the spirits. The man was still there, just covered up by the evil. They tried to bind him with chains, and he broke them. No one could subdue him. At night he walked among the tombs in the dark and howled like a wolf. Can you imagine, from town, hearing the howling of this madman and the fear it must have caused?

“What Is Your Name?”

Yet when Jesus encounters this man, the spirits cry out. “We know who you are. You’re Jesus, the Son of the Most High God.” They have all the right answers. The only ones in Mark who have the right answers are the spirits. Spirit recognizes spirit, and they tell him what they told him in Capernaum: get away from us, you have no business here, we know why you have come.

Jesus says, “Come out.” Then he asks, “What’s your name?” When you ask somebody’s name, it means you want to have control. Go back to Genesis, to Jacob at the river Jabbok. In the middle of the night he wrestles with, we find out, God. The whole time Jacob has hold of this angel, he keeps asking, “What is your name?” Who cares? If I know your name, I have control over you. Jesus is letting them know he has control over them.

“My name is Legion, for we are many.” A Roman legion had six thousand soldiers. Think about how miserable this man must have been. Jesus casts them into a herd of pigs. I always like the ironic twist in Mark: he sends the unclean spirits into the most unclean animal you can imagine. They belong together. The whole herd rushes over the cliff into the sea.

Were the pigs part of the community’s livelihood? Apparently the men were herding them, which tells us they were Gentiles. Pigs were the livelihood of the community. I guarantee they were mad. But they were afraid, too. What’s the next thing he’s going to do? Some people want to pull back and say, “I don’t know about him.” (I had a deacon once in Central Texas who raised hogs. He ran a private home for shell-shocked veterans, and did a good job. They raised pigs and slaughtered pigs. He invited me to come at slaughtering time. I did that one time. Never again. You don’t want to know the smell.)

Afraid of the Healed Man

The people run up to find out what happened, and they find the man sitting quietly, in his right mind. And they were afraid. They were afraid of the man before, but they’re more afraid now that he’s not what he was. They heard the reports, and they said to Jesus, “Leave us. Get away from us.” Fear can also push you away from what God wants you to do.

The man wants to go with Jesus. Jesus says no. “Go home. Tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.” He goes to the ten cities of the Decapolis, areas that, from what we can tell, Jesus never visits personally. But he does, through this man, and his message is very simple: here’s what the Lord has done for me.

Think about it. When the man was at his worst, the people of the town banished him. When Jesus came, he showed him mercy. He had never experienced that in his whole life.

In the spiritual storm, the fear is that we're out of control. We don't know what to do with all this. We can't handle it. But in the end, the faith that shows up is this man, calm and quiet, sent to tell.

Storm Three: The Health Storm

Mark 5:21–34

Jairus and the Woman Who Touched Him

Now two stories are blended together, one happening in the middle of the other. First there's Jairus, the head of the synagogue, what we would call the president, charged along with a council of ten men with ruling the synagogue. Now I'm reading into this, but Jairus had probably been pretty cool toward Jesus, because the official line coming out of Jerusalem was to leave the guy alone because he's infected with a demon and we're going to kill him. He had no other choice now. He has a twelve-year-old daughter. He comes and begs Jesus on his knees: "Please come, my little daughter is at the point of death." The literal word is "at the end." Think about how desperate you have to get to swallow your pride and go to the man you really don't want back in your synagogue.

Jesus starts going with him, and then there's this encounter with a woman, and it's not deliberate; it's accidental. She has had twelve years of bleeding. She spent everything she had. Nothing made her better. Everything made her worse. If you have an issue of blood, you are ostracized from the synagogue and all Jewish worship. You're unclean. So here is a woman who has nothing left. She doesn't have her health. She's probably weak as can be, because if you've been bleeding for twelve years you are almost bled out. She's penniless, hopeless, and outside. She has heard about Jesus. She has no earthly idea about him. She's never watched any miracles. She's just heard the stories, and she says, "Maybe if I can just brush up against him."

She touches him, and Jesus says, "Power has gone out from me." I don't know what that means. Did he feel it? Apparently. But he understood that something happened, so he asks, "Who touched me?" And I love the disciples' answer: "What do you mean, who touched you? You're in a crowd, folks. Everybody's touching you."

Have you ever gone to the fair on the train? Vickie and I went one year, the last Friday it was open. We thought that would be a good time. Wrong. About closing time we got to

the station, and there was a massive mass of humanity, five thousand people trying to get on a train that holds three hundred. I had Vickie in front of me, trying to make sure I didn't lose her, and there was a woman behind me the Dallas Cowboys should have offered a contract as a linebacker. That train door opened and she went, "Whoa!" and started shoving people. All the way downtown we rode like that. Can you imagine saying, "Who touched me?" What kind of nut are you? Everybody's touching you.

But Jesus had been touched, and he turns around. The woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet, trembling with fear. She's afraid of being exposed. She has been neglected and ostracized by everybody. This is her last chance, and she fears it will be withdrawn. Instead Jesus says, "Daughter." A tender word. "Your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." Very calm. And the woman, for the first time in a dozen years, finds peace.

That's the health storm. She has no other avenue. She is absolutely hopeless, and sometimes when people get that hopeless, they don't know what to do anymore. Her faith drives her to touch Jesus, not knowing what will happen, and Jesus stops, heals her, and sends her on her way in peace. Her fear created her action, and her action created Jesus's response.

Storm Four: The Mortality Storm

Mark 5:35–43

"Do Not Be Afraid; Just Believe"

Jesus lingers. There's a girl who is dying. She's at the end. While Jesus is still speaking, chatting it up with some folks, he is in no urgency to get there. That's not the only time the Gospels portray Jesus as a non-urgent person while everybody else is urgent. When Lazarus dies, Mary and Martha say, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Why didn't you hurry? And that must have been the sense here.

Somebody comes up and whispers in Jairus's ear: "Don't bother the Teacher anymore. She's dead." Jairus's heart must have sunk. But Jesus heard them, and he says this interesting thing: "Do not be afraid; just believe." Fear and faith, placed together. What do you mean, don't be afraid? She's dead. I may have been afraid before, but now I have nothing to be afraid of, because there's nothing left. Believe in what? Resurrection? Never seen it happen. Impossibilities.

Still Jesus continues on his way, and Jairus goes with him.

Chaos Everywhere

When Jesus arrived, he saw the commotion. There's chaos wherever storms are. In the boat, a terrible, chaotic situation: the disciples afraid they're going to drown and not knowing what to do. There's chaos in the graveyard; the man can't think straight, and everything is crazy. There's chaos in the life of the woman whose life has been turned upside down for twelve years. And now you get to the household, and you have commotion. In Jewish culture, family, relatives, and friends would come, and women would wail. That was their job. They would sob and wail, and you hear all this noise.

Jesus comes in and says, "Why all this commotion? The child is not dead but asleep." I don't know how long it had been, but I suspect rigor mortis was starting to set in. As soon as death takes place, decay begins. They can know if there's breath. They can know if there's blood flow. She's dead. "No, she's just sleeping." And they laughed at him.

Inside or Outside?

So he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in to where the child was. For those who are not prepared to hear, believe, and see what needs to be done, he puts them outside. We've been saying that for the last three or four weeks. The people who are not receptive get to be on the outside, where they can't see what's happening. But the people who will grasp the message, who have some hope of hearing and understanding and asking the right questions, he puts inside. The question is always the same: Who are you, inside or outside? Outside means I cannot comprehend this ever being true. Inside says I want to try. You have the scene of the outsiders wailing and the insiders calm.

"Little Lamb, Get Up"

Jesus takes her by the hand and says, "Talitha kum," an Aramaic expression that really means "little lamb." Think about what he said: little lamb, get up. And immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around. She was twelve years old, and they were completely astonished. He tells them not to tell anyone. Why? Probably because the outsiders wouldn't buy it anyway. And he says, "Give her something to eat."

I want to point out something about this passage. This is not resuscitation. I've known a few people who had near-death experiences, who "died on the table" and were brought back. You know what happens? They keep you in ICU for a week at least. They don't say, "Good, let's get up and go to the cafeteria." But that's what happens here. The girl got up and began walking. That's not recovery. That's resurrection.

In the mortality storm, the fear is that it's too late. Nothing can be done. But I think it's interesting that Jairus keeps walking with Jesus and doesn't turn him away. He wants him there, and Jesus does exactly what he hoped for: his daughter lives again.

Putting It Together

Here's the whole thing in a chart. Everybody has a storm, and in every storm there is a place where you have fear, a place where you can find faith, and something Jesus will do.

Physical storm: the fear is that we're about to die. Jesus can be brought to bear, and he calms the storm.

Spiritual storm: the fear is that we're out of control. Jesus can do something about that.

Health storm: everything is bad, and Jesus can heal.

Mortality storm: it's too late, and Jesus can say, "Arise."

Fear Is Not the Problem

Fear is never the problem. We are made to be fearful, because that's the protective instinct God has given us. The response to fear is the problem. The town asked Jesus to leave: "We're afraid. We don't want you here." But the disciples, the man, the woman, and Jairus all end up at the feet of Jesus. The response to the fear is more important than the feeling of the fear itself.

Who Was Jesus Really Speaking To?

I always liked this passage for one reason. I want to ask the question: Who was Jesus really speaking to? On the boat they wake him up and say, "Do you not care that we perish?" And Jesus says, "Silence. Calm." I don't think that was only for the storm. I think that was for the disciples in the storm. When you're caught in the storm, the thing you need to hear is: Quiet. Calm. I'm here in the boat. Don't worry about it. Jesus even says that to the crowd at Jairus's doorstep: "Don't be afraid. Just believe." Quiet. Calm.

You can't make sound decisions if you're emotionally upset. If you can't keep calm, nobody can, and the person who needs help is the one you're there to help. That's just it. There are times I get real anxious and I struggle, and the only prayer I have left to say is, "Lord, help me to hear your 'Peace, be still,'" because the storm is simply too big in that moment.

Closing Question

So the question for you and me is: What storm are you in right now? At some point in life, you're always in a storm. What step of faith do you have to take to overcome that fear? Next week we continue. Thank you very much.

And if Jesus is in the boat, you know the boat's not going to sink.

Notes on This Transcript

Member comments and class conversation were removed so that only the teaching remains; the original otter.ai transcript and the audio keep the full discussion.

Transcription errors were corrected from context (for example, "Gyrus" to Jairus, "Getter seems" to Gerasenes, "Jabuk" to Jabbok, "Matthew chapter five" to Mark 5, "Gospel of Mark" for "Bospora Mark"). Two items worth a quick check before you post: the Sea of Galilee boat was discovered in 1986 rather than 1989, and the Aramaic phrase was transcribed as "Arabic."