

The Storm on the Lake.

Read Mark 4. 35-41.

Although violent storms were common on the Sea of Galilee, clearly this was no ordinary storm. Even experienced fishermen were filled with fear, v. 40.

We read of three 'great' things.

(i) **A 'great storm'**, v. 37.

Each of the first three gospels lends its own emphasis to the incident.

Matthew traces the storm to a violent 'movement to and fro'¹ in the sea bed beneath the surface of the lake, causing great turbulence to **come up** to the surface above (Matt. 8. 24).

Mark describes graphically how 'the waves were beating **into** the boat, so that the boat was now filling' (Mark 4. 37 lit.). That is, Mark is saying, the waves, churned up by the strong wind, were cascading over the side of the boat, as a result of which the water level inside was rising frighteningly fast.

For his part, **Luke** says, 'a storm (the word signifying a whirlwind or hurricane²) of wind **came down** on the lake', Luke 8. 23).

Later, when Jesus cried out in the face of the cross, *the disciples slept* (Mark 14. 37-41); now, when the disciples cried out in the face of the storm, *He slept*. And, in words once spoken of ancient mariners, the disciples 'were at their wit's end' (Psalm 107. 27).

(ii) **A 'great calm'**, v. 39.

Confronted (i) with all that came **up** from **below**, (ii) with all that came **in** from **outside**, and (iii) with all that came **down** from **above** (not to speak of twelve terrified disciples), the rudely woken Lord 'arose and rebuked the winds and the sea' (Matt. 8. 26) with the words, 'Peace ('hush'), be still ('be muzzled'³).

Now it was the turn of the winds and the waves to go to sleep,⁴ and *the 'great storm' became a 'great calm'*.

(iii) **A 'great fear'**, v. 41 lit.

The disciples underwent a great 'fear transfer', from fear of the storm⁵ to fear of Him who with His word had subdued it (Mark 4. 40-41).

Small wonder that, having witnessed the very elements of nature report to Him, the disciples were awestruck at His authority, and questioned, 'Who is this,⁶ that even the winds and the sea obey him?'⁷

Perhaps they recalled that, long before, a psalmist had addressed 'the Lord God of hosts' with the words, 'Who is a strong Lord like you? ... *you rule the raging of the sea ... when its waves rise, you still them*' (Psa. 89. 8-9).⁸

In the face of Jesus' seeming indifference, the disciple asked, 'Do you not care?' A little over 30 years later, one of those disciples was able to assure believers who were going through another storm (in their case, that of persecution) that, yes indeed, although at times He may **seem** to be remote and unconcerned, most certainly He **does** care ... that it really does 'matter to Him about you' (1 Pet. 5. 7 lit.).

I suspect that, to all who are tempted nowadays to echo the disciples' question, Peter would say, 'Why don't you **cast your cares where your sins were once laid?**' (1 Pet. 2. 24; Isa. 53. 6).

Jesus had spoken clearly to the disciples of their *destination* (Mark 4. 35). And, in due time, 'He brought them to their desired haven' (Psa. 107. 30; Mark 5. 1). But He had not promised them a *smooth crossing* ... any more than He has promised us one!⁹

Let us trust Him. Today, we can enjoy (and possibly sing) the words of the children's chorus, 'With Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm'.¹⁰

Notes

¹ W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary*, article 'Earthquake'. The word translated 'tempest' (σεισμός) occurs 14 times in the New Testament, and is rendered 'earthquake' on every other occasion.

² 'A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*'. William F Arndt & F Wilber Gingrich.

³ The same word as is used of muzzling an ox in 1 Cor. 9. 9.

⁴ The picturesque word translated 'ceased' (ἐκόπασεν) indicates toil and weariness. 'The sea sank to rest as if exhausted', M. R. Vincent, '*Word Studies in the New Testament*'.

⁵ Jesus asked, 'Have you still no faith?' (Mark 4. 40). Clearly, they lacked faith, not only in His word (Mark 4. 35; cf. 5. 1), but in His person. For, if He truly was the Son of God, it was absurd to suppose that a storm could kill Him. Their panic betrayed an inadequate grasp of who Jesus was. They should have realised that, though the presence of Jonah in the ship had once endangered the lives of those with him (Jonah 1. 4, 12, 15), the presence of Jesus in the boat guaranteed the lives of those with Him.

⁶ This was not the only time that men asked, 'Who is this?' See (i) Luke 5. 21; (ii) Luke 7. 49; (iii) Luke 9. 9; (iv) Matt. 21. 10. And compare, at His second advent, Isa. 63. 1.

⁷ Mark 6. 51-52: The amazement of the disciples betrays the sad fact that they had reflected very little on the miracle Jesus performed just a few hours earlier. For the person who can so control nature as to be able to take a few scraps of food and feed thousands of people could doubtless handle nature well enough to subdue a storm.

⁸ Ponder the mystery of the person of Christ. He slept, yet calmed the storm. He hungered, yet withered the fig tree. He was weary at a well side, and yet knew the details of the Samaritan woman's life. He wept at a graveside, yet raised the dead.

⁹ 'He has never promised you an easy passage, only a safe landing', quoted by Mrs L. B. Cowman in '*Streams in the Desert*', for 31 March.

¹⁰ It may well be that this chorus was based on the two last lines of the first verse of John Newton's hymn, 'Begone, unbelief, my Saviour is near'.

(Mr Newton was certainly no stranger to storms at sea. It was in a great storm on the 21st of March in 1748, when sailing from Sierra Leone to England aboard the ship Greyhound, that he experienced his spiritual awakening.)

The first verse of his hymn reads:

Begone, unbelief!
My Saviour is near,
And for my relief
Will surely appear;
By prayer let me wrestle,
And He will perform;
**With Christ in the vessel,
I smile at the storm.**