LESSON *three*

INTO THE STORM

Mark 4:1–41

GETTING STARTED

When was a time that you faced an overwhelming and fearful situation? How did you respond?

Setting the Stage

Mark 4 records one of the most extraordinary events in the Gospel narrative: Jesus' quieting of a storm at sea. As Mark relates the miracle, there are some telling details of which to take note. The first is that *the disciples didn't get into the storm because they had done something wrong.* Jesus had said, "Let us cross over to the other side" (4:35), and the disciples set about making it happen. They were in the storm because they were being obedient.

When we have problems, it's not a bad idea to examine our hearts to see whether we are walking in fellowship with the Lord. However, we should not automatically assume that every storm we encounter signals that we have breached fellowship with God. Sometimes, He is up to something in our lives that we won't comprehend until much later.

The second detail to note is that these men, who had seen Jesus perform incredible miracles, *never thought for a moment that He might be the answer to their problem.* Although it wasn't apparent to the disciples, Jesus was in complete control of the situation. He simply had to speak for the wind to cease and the waves to calm.

It wasn't wrong for the disciples to be frightened in the storm, but it was wrong for them not to turn to Jesus until after panic filled their hearts. It was wrong for them to approach Him in an accusing manner by asking, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (verse 38). Not only did Jesus care, but He alone had the power to see them through the storm.

Exploring the Text

The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1–20)

1 And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude
was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on
the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea.
2 Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them
in His teaching:

3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And it happened,
as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of
the air came and devoured it. 5 Some fell on stony ground, where it
did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it
had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up it was scorched,
and because it had no root it withered away. 7 And some seed fell
among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded
no crop. 8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop
that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty,
and some a hundred."

9 And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

10 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve
asked Him about the parable. 11 And He said to them, "To you it has
been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those
who are outside, all things come in parables, 12 so that

'Seeing they may see and not perceive,
And hearing they may hear and not understand;
Lest they should turn,
And their sins be forgiven them.'"

13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable?
How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows
the word. 15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word
is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away
the word that was sown in their hearts. 16 These likewise are the ones
sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately
receive it with gladness; 17 and they have no root in themselves, and
so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution
arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. 18 Now these are
the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word,
19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the
desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes

unfruitful. [20] But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

1. In this teaching by the sea, it is likely Jesus chose to talk about a man sowing seeds as the subject of His parable because there was a farmer sowing seeds nearby (see verses 3–8). Why would this kind of "immediate" teaching have an impact on His listeners?

2. Most people have "ears to hear" (verse 9). But why could only certain people *understand* Jesus' parables (see verses 11–12)?

A Lamp on a Stand and a Growing Seed (Mark 4:21–29)

21 Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket
or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? 22 For there is
nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been
kept secret but that it should come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to
hear, let him hear."

24 Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the
same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who
hear, more will be given. 25 For whoever has, to him more will be
given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken
away from him."

26 And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter
seed on the ground, 27 and should sleep by night and rise by day, and
the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.
28 For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head,
after that the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain ripens,
immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

3. A lamp is useless unless its light shines into the darkness. How is this also true of people who follow Jesus (see verses 21–22)?

4. How is sharing God's Word with others similar to a farmer scattering seeds on the ground (see verses 26–29)?

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30–34)

30 Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or
with what parable shall we picture it? 31 It is like a mustard seed
which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds
on earth; 32 but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater
than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of
the air may nest under its shade."

33 And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as
they were able to hear it. 34 But without a parable He did not speak
to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His
disciples.

5. The mustard seed was tiny, but when planted it grew into a huge treelike shrub. How was Jesus saying this was similar to the growth of the kingdom of God (see verses 30–32)?

6. Jesus challenged His disciples, but He also "explained all things" to them so they could understand His message (verse 34). What impacts how a person is "able to hear"?

Jesus Calms the Storm (Mark 4:35–41)

35 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let
us cross over to the other side." 36 Now when they had left the
multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other
little boats were also with Him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and
the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. 38 But He
was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said
to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

39 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea,
"Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.
4 But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have
no faith?" 41 And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another,
"Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

7. Four of Jesus' disciples were experienced fisherman who had lived on the Sea of Galilee since their childhood. They probably knew every mood of the wind and waves. What does their reaction tell you about the circumstances they were facing (see verse 38)?

8. How did this incident on the Sea of Galilee change the way the disciples thought of Jesus (see verse 41)?

REVIEWING THE STORY

The Sea of Galilee plays a key role in the events of Mark 4. When the crowd on the shore grew too large, Jesus climbed into a boat and taught from there. He noticed a man sowing seeds nearby and spun a trio of parables involving sowing. He also urged His followers to let their spiritual light shine. But the peaceful setting turned ominous when Jesus and His disciples started to cross the Sea of Galilee later that night. A storm arose that tested the disciples' resolve and made them reassess their faith.

9. In Jesus' parable of the sower, the seed represents God's Word and the soil represents people's hearts (see Mark 4:13–20). What kind of heart is most receptive to God's Word?

10. In what ways are Christ's followers light to the world (see Mark 4:21–22)?

11. In Jesus' day, the mustard plant was often seen in a negative light because it grew wild, spread quickly, and was nearly impossible to kill. How would this description further fit with Jesus' description of the kingdom of God on earth (see Mark 4:30–32)?

12. What lessons do you think Jesus' disciples took away from their experience on the stormy sea (see Mark 4:35–41)?

Applying the Message

13. When was a time in your life that someone served as a light to guide you through a dark or uncertain situation? What did that person do to help you?

14. What are some events in your life that have caused you to question—or might cause you to question—whether Jesus cares for you?

Reflecting on the Meaning

A "perfect storm" in your life may involve a combination of struggles with your finances, relationships, job, physical or emotional health, or some combination of them all. When it hits, you feel overwhelmed, almost as though you're drowning. So what do you do when the perfect storm hits? Let's take some wisdom from the disciples' experience in Mark 4.

First, *never fall for the lie that believers are exempted from storms.* Following Jesus does not guarantee smooth sailing or cloudless skies. Storms are part of life for believers and unbelievers alike (see 1 Peter 4:12–13). So you need to understand there's a high probability you *will* face storms in your life.

Second, *consider the course Jesus has charted for you.* In Mark 4:35, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let us cross over to the other side." He didn't say,

"Let us go to the middle of the sea and drown in the storm." He charted a course for them to get to the other side of the sea. And if Almighty God in the person of the Lord Jesus says, "We're going to the other side," then you *are* going to the other side. Nothing is so powerful it can thwart His plans.

Third, keep in mind that *Jesus knew the storm was coming and directed His disciples into it.* If you don't have any storms in your life, you will get comfortable with a kind of happiness that falls far short of what God wants for you. He wants you to find your joy and happiness in *Him*. He wants you to experience the incredible peace that comes from knowing Jesus is with you when you are in the midst of a storm—a perfect peace that leaves you feeling as though you would rather be there with Him than any other place in the world!

Journaling Your Response

What do you want people to learn from your example as you go through storms in life?