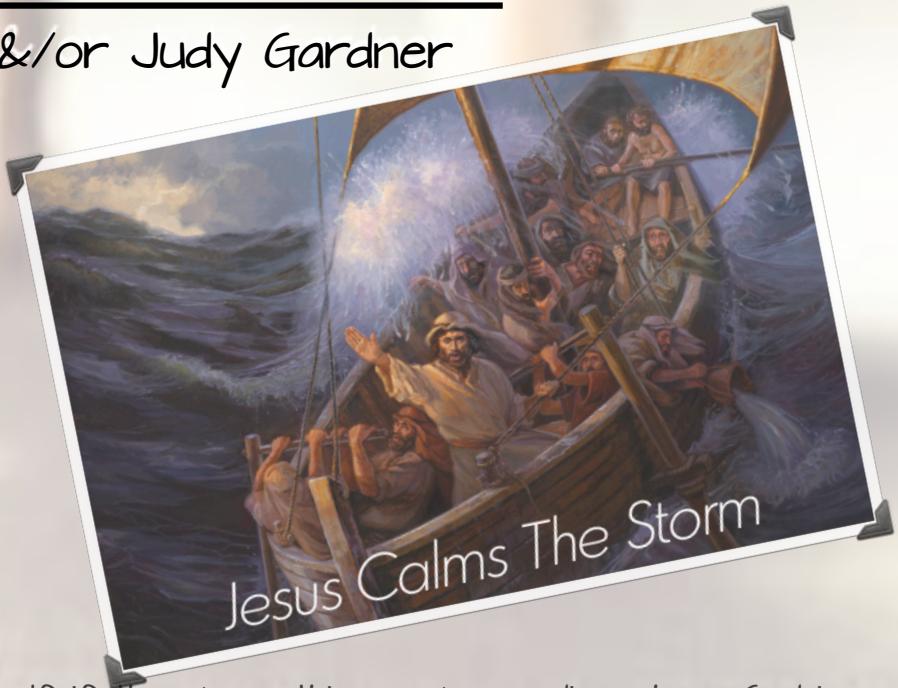


October 16-20, 2023 Edition

Following The Year_(s) Of [^]Jesus Part 94

The Lord Of The Storm

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner



October 14/15, 2023

When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we are going to begin a new phase of the chronological story of Jesus' life- a series of miraculous events that start to open the eyes of the disciples as to Jesus' true identity. If you've been with us throughout this series (all 94 weeks of it so far) you've watched as Jesus taught about the principles of the Kingdom (most notably in the Sermon On The Mount) and illustrated the principles of the Kingdom (with the parables). Now we will watch as He embodies those principles with the way He lives His life. Our job is to take those principles and incorporate them into our lives. There's something Jesus says in His opening remarks of the Sermon On The Mount that always kind of freaked me out- most versions of English Bibles translate those words this way:

But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:46 (NLT)

I don't know about you but that freaks me out. At least it used to. I mean, how am I supposed to do that?!?! I know myself. If that's the expectation I'm in serious trouble. Anyone who is Facebook friends with me knows that much ;o)

Thankfully that's not really how that verse should be translated. If you're someone that likes to study the Bible and you come across a verse that doesn't make much sense to you one way to do some research is to use the Amplified Bible. The Amplified Bible pretty much translates things the way a typical English translation would but adds in brackets some definitions to help us understand the fuller meaning of a Greek word. This is how the Amplified Bible translates the verse about being perfect:

You, therefore, will be perfect [growing into spiritual maturity both in mind and character, actively integrating godly values into your daily life], as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48 (AMP)

The Greek idea of perfection wasn't without flaws. In fact the Greeks often considered flaws a part of perfection. So does Jesus (thank God!). Jesus isn't telling us we have to be perfect- without flaws or mistakes. He's telling us to be mature/whole/integrated. The Amplified Bible clues us into the idea that what God is looking for is someone who is growing (not fully formed but progressing) in spiritual maturity. How do we do that? By actively integrating godly values not our daily lives.

Pew! I may not be fantastic at growing in spiritual maturity and integrating godly values into my life but I can at least see it as a possibility. Whereas being perfect just like God is perfect? Well, good luck with that, Ed!

In the Sermon On The Mount Jesus talks about the great enemies of the human condition. Just about everything He talked about could be fit into one of 4 categories. I remember I once heard a preacher refer to these four enemies of the human condition as R.A.G.S. It was an acronym that stood for resentment, anxiety, greed and superiority. Most of humanity's problems can be traced to one of those 4 things. Jesus teaches about how to deal with these things in the Sermon On The Mount. He illustrates how to deal with these things in His parables. And He shows us how He deals with them in the stories the apostles told about Him. This is one of those stories that shows us how to deal with one of the RAGS that Jesus warned us about. Can you guess which one of the RAGS Jesus will deal with when He calms the storm? If you guessed anxiety you're spot on. Tomorrow we'll start looking at how Jesus

showed Himself to be the Lord of the storm (and every other aspect of creation) but for today maybe spend some time thinking about which of the RAGS cause you the most heartache and talk to Jesus about how you can put those rags off.

Tuesday Reflection: So let's talk about the story for this week- Jesus as the Lord of the storm. Remember that Jesus has been teaching about God's Kingdom and illustrating God's Kingdom and now He's going to start showing off the power of God's Kingdom:

As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." Mark 4:35 (NLT)

As soon as Jesus mentions going to the other-side-of-the-lake the apostles would all have started feeling a similar emotion. This emotion would have made them feel nervous. It would have caused a cold sweat to break out on their foreheads and probably created some heat rising up the back of their necks. That emotion would have certainly been anxiety. None of them wanted to go to other-side-of-the-lake- especially at night. Why not?

Well first of all they would have been told all their lives to never go to the other-side-of-the-lake. Why not? Because that's where all kinds of bad things happened (in the view of Jewish parents anyways). The other-side-of-the-lake was a region called the Decapolis. Literally that means the ten cities but these 10 cities were Roman/Greek communities created by Julius Caesar for retired legionaries. Caesar began the practice of giving retiring legions land where they could farm and live together. These cities solved two problems- first they gave a band of very dangerous and highly trained soldiers something to do with their lives rather than make trouble for Rome. It also provided a trained militia that could organize at a moment's notice and deal with whatever threat to Rome might have popped up.

It was a great deal for Rome- but for the people of Israel (especially the Jews) it created toxic towns where nothing good happened. If you've watched the third season of the Chosen then you know what I'm talking about. Some Jews would venture into the Decapolis but for the most part Jewish children were warned so thoroughly that they stayed away at all costs. Every Jewish child would have been put to bed with stories of what happens to little boys and girls who go to the Decapolis. They believed the Decapolis was a place of monsters and boogymen.

So when Jesus says "let's go to the other-side-of-the-lake" everybody would have immediately gotten nervous. I'm guessing that everybody was in agreement that this was a very bad idea. They were probably thinking that surely someone was going to explain to Jesus why this was a terrible idea. But nobody did:

So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). Mark 4:36 (NLT)

What's Jesus up to? Well, that's never an easy question to answer. But it's pretty obvious that one of Jesus' go-to strategies for transforming His disciples from weak, ineffectual spiritual knuckleheads (that's a deep theological term that means they weren't very good at the spiritual side of things in case you were wondering) into the powerful men and women who would face down an empire and change the world was to put them in stressful situations where they had no choice but to look to God for their survival. Seems like it worked, huh?

And that brings us to... well us. I can't tell you how often I've wondered why Jesus wasn't making things easier for me. I have a feeling you might have felt that way too at one or two points in your own life. Maybe you feel that way right now. Yeah, me too. Turns out God believes I am capable of so much more than I believe I'm capable of. He thinks the same of you. So maybe for today we can all spend some time thinking about why God allows us to go through such difficult and stressful things when He could just snap His omnipotent fingers and fix everything.

Wednesday Reflection: Ok so we pick up the story of Jesus calming the storm today and we left off yesterday with Jesus and His disciples getting in a boat and heading out to the other-side-of-the-lake. If you recall the disciples were nervous about going to the other-side-of-the-lake because of what they expected to find over there (and in a couple weeks we'll see they were right to be worried) but they were also nervous for a couple of other reasons.

First of all is a very practical fear- that a storm might crop up. Because of Israel's unique geography and the weather patterns associated with those unique geographical issues storms are sudden and violent. Mount Hermon sits 30 miles to the north of the Sea of Galilee and rises to an elevation of almost 10,000 feet. The Sea Of Galilee is actually below sea level (700 feet below to be exact). So when weather patterns are right (or wrong depending on your perspective) cold air can pour down from Mount Hermon and when it comes in contact with the warm air over the Sea of Galilee a sudden and violent storm can occur.

I'll never forget my first night at the Sea of Galilee. We had been in the south of Israel for 3 days- based in Jerusalem and then riding a bus to different sites in southern Israel. On the first night in Jerusalem I asked our guides if it would be ok for me to walk from the hotel to a store to buy some stuff I forgot to pack. He looked at me, shook his head and told me it's not a good idea. Get whatever you need here in the hotel's store but don't go out walking in Jerusalem after dark. Jerusalem was amazing but it was also dangerous, noisy, crowded and dirty. I didn't realize just how stressful it was and how on edge it had made me until we got to the Sea of Galilee. It was so peaceful. It was quiet and calm. There were flocks of birds everywhere and flowers and everything was green. I went down to the beach to watch the sunset. There were a few clouds but nothing that looked like a storm. I walked back to my room and as I was getting ready for dinner my son Jonathan asked me what that noise was.

We both listened and both of us at the same time said, "is that rain?" It was. I opened the sliding glass door and while it was dark it was plain to see- a HUGE storm had hit not more than 10 minutes after I got back to our room. The palm trees were being blown around and the rain was falling in torrents. It was crazy. I watched and thought to myself, "no wonder the apostles didn't want to go to the other-side-of-the-lake." It wasn't just what they were afraid they'd find over on the other-side-of-the-lake- it was what could happen to them while on the lake that they were also worried about. But Jesus was not worried:

But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. Mark 4:37-38 (NLT)

How does one sleep through a storm like that? I'm not sure. Maybe He was so trusting and so at one with His Father that nothing really worried Him. Maybe He was REALLY tired? Who knows but Jesus is sleeping and the disciples are freaking out. I imagine that when the wind first picked up the disciples started looking at each other. Maybe they made hand signals to communicate that someone should awaken Jesus. I can just see all of them thinking that, surely someone will wake Jesus up. I'm not going to do it. I don't want to be that guy but surely someone will awaken Him. And finally someone does:

The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?"
Mark 4:39 (NLT)

Now Mark doesn't tell us which disciple woke Jesus up screaming, "DON'T YOU CARE THAT WE'RE GONNA DIE?!?!?!" but I imagine it was Peter. It sounds like Peter, doesn't it? And since Peter was Mark's source for the eyewitness testimony of Jesus' life it kind of makes sense. There are a few stories that Mark tells that Matthew and Luke also tell. Sometimes Mark will tell us what happened but leave out who said/did certain things. In Matthew and Luke we sometimes discover it was Peter who said/did that thing. We don't get that insight in this story from Matthew and Luke but I have a tough time believing it was not Peter. And it's a legitimate question, right? Why isn't Jesus doing something?

We'll learn in the next two days that Jesus did indeed do something. When the time was right. I believe the same is true for us. I don't know about you but I've spent some time in the last couple of years wondering when Jesus was going to step in and do something about what was going on in my life or the lives of the people of Riverside Community Church. Some things He's taken care of. Miraculously. Some things I'm still waiting for Him to do something. I imagine that if Jesus was here in the flesh I might pull a Simon Peter and grab Jesus by the lapels of His robe (do robes have lapels? I don't know but you get the picture) and screaming, "LORD! DON'T YOU CARE THAT I/WE ARE ABOUT TO DROWN HERE?!?!?"

Maybe you can identify with that. Maybe today we should spend some time reflecting on why Jesus doesn't always work on our time schedules.

But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, do not despair, for these things will surely come to pass. Just be patient! They will not be overdue a single day!
Habakuk 2:3 (TLB)

Thursday Reflection: This week we're looking at the story of Jesus calming the storm. We've looked at a different aspect of this story the last few days and when we left off yesterday we know that the disciples concerns about crossing the Sea of Galilee was a bad idea (especially at night) were confirmed, that Jesus had fallen asleep in the back of the boat and when things got really bad someone (probably Peter) woke Him up screaming, "LORD, DON'T YOU CARE THAT WE'RE GONNA DIE?!?!?" So what happened next? Let's read:

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Mark 4:39 (NLT)

Jesus woke up (you can almost see Him sort of rubbing His eyes and looking around while wondering what all the hubbub was about), and told the storm to "be quiet". It's fascinating to me that Jesus' words to the storm are the exact same words that He spoke to demons:

Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" But Jesus reprimanded him. "Be quiet! Come out of the man," he ordered. At that, the evil spirit screamed, threw the man into a convulsion, and then came out of him. Mark 1:23-26 (NLT)

What does it mean that Jesus spoke the same words to the storm as He spoke to the demon (basically He said, "shut up!")? There are a lot of scholars that believe it means that this storm that Jesus and the disciples are caught up in was no ordinary storm. There's another storm that Jesus' disciples get caught up in later in the story of Jesus' life that is called a "squall" by Matthew. This storm is called a "mega storm" by Mark. This is Satan's attempt to finish off Jesus and His disciples before they can really get started. So Jesus tells the storm to "shut up" and it does. Just like the demon did in Mark chapter 1. And what happens? The storm shuts up. Immediately. Completely. But Satan isn't done attacking. As soon as they get to the other-side-of-the-lake they will come face to face with a man named Legion- called Legion because of the vast numbers of demons that possessed him. Jesus will deal with the man gently but the demons will get a similar treatment from Jesus- shut up and leave.

All of this would have made perfect sense to Jesus' disciples (the part about demonic attacks happening out on the Sea of Galilee at night especially) because the Jews and Gentiles alike that lived around the Sea of Galilee believed that the lake is where the souls of the evil dead went when they died. It's the reason why the disciples believe Jesus is a ghost when they see Him walking on the water during the next (normal) storm they find themselves in. The Sea of Galilee was referred to as "the abyss" by the people of Galilee. Make sure you remember that for when we get to the story of Legion because it will play into that story as well.

So Jesus calms the storm and then looks at His disciples and asks them a question:

Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!" Mark 4:40-41 (NLT)

What does it mean when Jesus asks us if we have no faith? Or if He looks at us and exclaims, "o ye of little faith, why did you doubt"? Is it a rebuke? It doesn't sound like it. He seems genuinely curious. I love the way the Jesus Storybook Bible translates this:

Why were you scared? Did you forget who I am? Did you forget I was with you?

What's the message? If Jesus is in the boat with us then we can be courageous and strong- even in the face of insurmountable odds. So maybe today we can all think about how we're doing at that. And if/when you feel like you're doing so well at that take heart because neither were the disciples and Jesus never gave up on them. He won't give up on you either.

Friday Reflection: The last thing I want to focus on this week when it comes to the story of Jesus calming the storm is what this story would have meant to the people of the first century who read it. People who were familiar with Jewish history and were steeped in the culture of the Old Testament. What would they have immediately thought upon reading this?

That Jesus is God. Not that Jesus was connected to God in a way that the rest of us aren't (although He was) and not that He had more of God's power flowing through Him than anyone else (although He did). No, they would have immediately gone to this- this guy is God! Mark doesn't spell it out for us but he did for the first century Jews that would have read his gospel.

Why? Because of something that happened in Israel about 200 years earlier. If you know anything about the history of Israel then you will remember that Israel ruled itself until about 600 years before Jesus' birth. First they were occupied by the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Persians and finally the Greeks when Alexander the Great swept through that part of the world and took everything the Persians had. But when Alexander died without an heir his empire was split up into 3 parts with one of his generals ruling their own little mini empire. One general ruled in Greece and Europe. One general ruled over Egypt and northern Africa and one general ruled from Syria. The Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanies ruled Israel as well.

But Antiochus was a terrible king from the Jews point of view- but to be fair the Jews were terrible subjects from Antiochus' point of view. He was constantly trying to get the Jews to leave behind their mystifying fanatical allegiance to the idea of monotheism and join the rest of world. He tried everything but nothing worked. The Jews hated Antiochus. It was sacrificing a pig in the Most Holy Place of the Temple in Jerusalem that was the final straw and made the Jews rise up in revolt but there's something else that made the Jews apoplectic and was also a big part of their rebellion that sheds some light on today's reflection.

Antiochus Epiphanies claimed to be able to control the wind and the waves.

BLASPHEMY! the Jews cried. Only God Himself can control the wind and the waves. For any man to claim that ability was heresy plain and simple. So when Jesus calms the storm and saves the disciples you'd think they'd be happy, right? You'd think they'd be slapping each other on the back and making jokes about to one another about how scared they got and another one would say "I wasn't scared at all... it was Bartholomew that was crying like a baby." That's what I'd imagine. But instead this is what happened:

The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!" Mark 4:41 (NLT)

They were more scared after Jesus calmed the storm than they were while the storm was raging. Why? Because they all knew the story of Antiochus Epiphanies. They knew that it was the Jewish belief that only Yahweh could control the wind and waves. Now Jesus has controlled the wind and waves, they saw it with their own eyes and now it's dawning on them what that means. Somehow Jesus isn't just closer to God than the rest of us. Somehow Jesus IS God. And they're not sure what to do about that. Now suddenly Jesus isn't just doing

Messiah type stuff, which would be impressive enough on its own. Now Jesus is doing stuff that is only God's department. And if you're thinking it's a stretch to say they believed Jesus was God because of story about a Syrian king who claimed to be able to control the wind and waves let me leave you with this Psalm written 1,000 years before Jesus calmed the storm:

"Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He calmed the storm to a whisper and stilled the waves. What a blessing was that stillness as he brought them safely into harbor! Psalm 107:27-30 (NLT)

Whoa! It almost sounds like this Psalm describes in intricate detail something that Jesus would do 1,000 years later. The only thing missing is Peter shouting, "DON'T YOU CARE THAT WE'RE GONNA DIE?!?!?! How is that possible? What does it mean?

I guess that's something we can all ponder and reflect on today.