

Asleep In The Boat: The Faith That Rests

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Mark 4:35-41

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. 40 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!"

Once again I return to the Gospel of Mark and to the life of our dear Lord Jesus Christ. I love to daily allow my soul to soak in the gospels. I find much strength and encouragement studying the life of our dear Lord. Often, when we come to the gospels with a wrong approach. We read them as if they are a biography. But they are not a biography of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospels don't read like present day biographies or autobiographies. Why, two of the gospels don't even say a thing about Jesus' birth and none of them record His childhood, teen years, and early adulthood. All four of them focus on a time span of only the last three and a half years of His life. Even then not all of them cover the same stories. One tells an event that none of the other three mention, and John's gospel is altogether different.

You cannot read the gospels as if they are biographical, rather they are lessons of what Jesus did. They give us some understanding of who He is, what His purpose was of coming to this world, and what He has done for us and what He will do for us. As you read the life of Jesus in the last three years of His life, you read to learn lessons that are most instructive.

Why this particular story in Mark? Matthew, Mark, and Luke record it. John doesn't. Why did the Holy Spirit inspire three of the gospel writers to write this down? I ask that because it's unlike most of the miracles Jesus performed. It's very strange. For example, nobody is saved. Nobody is healed. There's not even a sermon. And for most of the story Jesus isn't even conscious. He's asleep in the boat. Why was this story included?

In order to answer that question, we have to understand what the purpose of Jesus with the 12 disciples. What was He really up to in those three and a half years?

I suggest to you His primary purpose was to enroll these 12 men in what we could call a school of faith. This was His purpose. Yes, His purpose was to redeem them, yes, to train them for their ministries as His representatives, but all of this could not happen separate from faith.

It is my deepest conviction that what they endured those three years was a seminary that primarily taught how to operate in the realm of faith. This was Jesus' main purpose. This story, not only is it recorded to teach us about how to operate in the realm of faith but it actually happened as a life lesson to teach these 12 men particularly about their faith.

As you see throughout the duration of His ministry with them, faith was the main thing. At the very beginning of the ministry, Jesus preaches that great distinctive sermon called the Sermon on the Mount, which would be the foundation of His ministry and the kingdom, and in the middle of that sermon He refers to their weak faith.

“Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:30)

In this story from our text He stands up and rebukes them.

But He said to them, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” (Mark 4:40)

Peter, walking on the water trying to be like His Lord, looks around and begins to sink.

And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31)

Could it be that these men are not the best students? I ask that because by the time they come to graduation they still have not yet earned their diplomas. They don't really believe the Lord and His remarks about His death, and then after His death they certainly don't believe in the resurrection. We seem to single out Thomas over the centuries but he's just a reflection of the others. He said what they didn't have the nerve to say, “I won't believe until I put my finger into the nail prints and my hand into His side.” What did Jesus say to Thomas?

“Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” (John 20:27)

And when they bring back the report of His resurrection do they believe in Him, do they say, “Ah, yes, I knew it!”? No, they doubted once again.

From this text, I wish to show us that Jesus wanted to move the disciples' faith from one degree to another. And that's His purpose for you. You too have been enrolled in the school of faith. You may not remember signing the application but you're in. And now that you're in, you might as well try to learn something. It might be novel for some of us but let's try it, shall we?

Let's see if God can take us from one degree of faith to a higher degree and then a higher degree until we're like Jesus: resting in the boat.

I. Three Degrees of Faith

I've said this to you for years but I was heartened this week to discover D. L. Moody also spoke of this. D. L. Moody spoke of three degrees of faith.

1) Struggling faith.

He illustrated this as a man in the sea, struggling to keep afloat. So if you can see in your mind's eyes, you have faith but it struggles at best, like you're lost at sea without a life vest and you're trying to keep your nose above water. That's the first degree of faith. It's weak, struggling faith.

2) Clinging faith.

The example of D. L. Moody was a man clinging to the boat to keep afloat. He's not out there by himself. He has something to help keep him up but he has to cling to it for dear life.

3) Resting faith.

Jesus illustrates this as a man safe, resting in the boat.

We see two of these degrees of faith in our text. Two. We'll have to go elsewhere to get the third. But let me show you the first two.

The first degree is illustrated by the disciples struggling to keep the boat afloat, bailing out the water as fast as they could. We have to acknowledge that these men did have faith in Jesus, at least enough to be saved. They were regenerated, they were in the kingdom of God, children of God by adoption. They had enough faith to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. But their faith, at best, struggled. We could say, as aptly illustrated in the story, their faith struggled to stay afloat.

Then we see the highest degree of faith in our story is illustrated by Jesus resting in the boat.

Where is the second degree of faith, the clinging kind of faith that holds on to the boat to stay afloat? We don't find it in the story, but we do find it many times told in the gospels. The best example is that poor father who brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus and said, "Lord, if You can do anything, heal my son." Jesus said to him, "All things are possible to him who believes." And the man said, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). And Jesus healed his son. He had enough faith to cling to Jesus, to hold on tightly and say, "Lord, I do believe, but it's not perfect faith, help my unbelief." That's clinging faith. What God wants to do in all of us, especially you who are, with your fingernails turned white, holding on and you're tired of holding on—He wants to bring you in.

God tests us because He wants to move us from one degree of faith to the other. That's the reason for the struggle you're now in. That's the reason for the fight, the battle. God is moving you to a different level if you will only follow.

You're not the only ones who struggle with faith. The disciples and other great men of faith do—we all do. It's just the process.

In the mid-1800's in England, Hudson Taylor was preparing to go to China as a missionary. He knew that if he was to be successful as a missionary in China he had to put his faith to test and learn how to trust God for all his needs before he got to China. In that remote land he would be very isolated from help, especially from the home land.

Taylor developed his own school of faith in order to test his faith. While serving as an assistant to a medical doctor in London as part of his training for the mission field, Hudson Taylor saw a perfect opportunity to cast himself by faith on God. The doctor was a very absent minded man about administrative affairs, including paying Taylor. He repeatedly told Taylor that he should remind him each time his pay was due. Hudson Taylor immediately decided he would never remind the doctor but instead would go to God in prayer and trust Him to provide his needs.

A payday came when the doctor did not remember to pay Hudson. Several days passed with no salary. All of Taylor's money was gone and his rent to a Christian landlady was due that very evening and he knew she needed the money. He wrestled within, for her sake of his landlady, if he should remind the doctor of his overdue wages. Yet by prayer he felt that he had received the strong assurance that he was to wait for God's timing and provision.

At the end of the very day that Taylor's rent was due the doctor remembered his assistant's salary. Hudson was happily relieved thinking his rent would be paid. But his joy was short lived when the doctor said that he could not pay him because he had already gone to the bank and deposited his money and he would have to wait until Monday when the bank opened again to give him his pay. Taylor's quickly found a place to pray and pour out his heart to the Lord. Again he found peace and joy restored, assured that God was not going to fail him. He worked late that night and right before he was preparing to leave, he heard the doctor approaching the office.

The doctor came in and told him that a strange thing had happened. A wealthy patient had come to his residence at ten o'clock at night to pay his bill. The doctor handed Hudson Taylor some of the money and promised the balance to him on Monday. The amount received was more than enough for his rent. Hudson Taylor left rejoicing, knowing that he could live the faith life as a missionary to China.

That sounds like a wonderful testimony, doesn't it? But even then he was on the outside of the boat. His faith was not resting. When the turn of events came and it looked like he wouldn't get what he was believing God for, he would enter into despair and have to go pray again. He's not in the boat. He was in the second degree, the clinging faith.

Years later as a missionary in China, the same Hudson Taylor became under a deep awareness that his faith was not resting in the Lord. He realized that his faith was not like the Lord resting and at peace. His faith was more a struggle than rest. He passed through a great conflict of soul trying to get in the boat of resting faith. He struggled trying to get in the boat He wrote a letter to his sister telling of his anguish and the deliverance of how he ended up getting in the boat.

All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was how to get it *out*. He was rich, truly, but I was poor; He strong, but I weak. I knew full well that there was in the root, the stem, abundant fatness; but how to get it into my puny little branch was the question. As gradually the light was dawning on me, I saw that faith was the only prerequisite, was the hand to lay hold on His fulness and make it my own. *But I had not this faith*. I strove for it, but it would not come; tried to exercise it, but in vain. Seeing more and more the wondrous supply of grace laid up in Jesus, the fulness of our precious Saviour—my helplessness and guilt seemed to increase. Sins committed appeared but as trifles compared with the sin of unbelief which was their cause, which could not or would not take God at His word, but rather made Him a liar! Unbelief was, I felt, *the* damning sin of the world—yet I indulged in it. I prayed for faith, but it came not. What was I to do?

Has his struggle described your struggle? You want more faith, you know you need faith, for without faith it's impossible to please God. The very heart of the Christian faith is this, "The just shall live by faith," and yet it seems so much of the time you don't live by faith you live by feelings or by sight or by the flesh.

Listen to Hudson's deliverance as he continues the letter to his sister.

When my agony of soul was at its height, a sentence in a letter from dear McCarthy [John McCarthy, in Hangchow] was used to remove the scales from my eyes, and the Spirit of God revealed the truth of *our oneness with Jesus* as I had never known it before. McCarthy, who had been much exercised by the same sense of failure, but saw the light before I did, wrote (I quote from memory):

"But how to get faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One."

As I read I saw it all! "If we believe not, He abideth faithful." I looked to Jesus and saw (and when I saw, oh, how joy flowed!) that He had said, "I will never leave you." "Ah, *there* is rest!" I thought. "I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I'll strive no more. For has *He* not promised to abide with me—never to leave me, never to fail me?" And, dearie, *He never will!*

There you have it. Hudson Taylor got in the boat and fell asleep in the arms of safety. According to our text and the illustration of Hudson Taylor, this is precisely what you and I must do. We must see Jesus as He really is.

Let me direct your attention back to the text. I believe this is the whole purpose and lesson of this story. As it happened for those 12 men, written for us, here it is: faith must have an object.

II. Faith Must Have An Object

Faith must look and behold upon something that it can trust in order for it to be activated. Jesus wants to teach these men this. Their faith is struggling to keep afloat. They're not even clinging to the boat. They're out there all alone trying to keep their faith above water. Jesus is saying, "Men, you've got to learn, if you're going to increase in your faith, you must have the right object of faith."

A. A Faith Question.

But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" (Mark 4:40)

What is this question referring to? Do you suppose He's suggesting they ought to have had enough faith to stand up and do what He did? Is that the purpose of this question? "If you had enough faith, you ought to be able to say to the wind and the wave, 'Peace! Be still! and it will be quiet and still for you, if you simply had enough faith.'"

I don't know what you're thinking as far as an answer, but I've examined that as a possibility and I've come to the conclusion that it is not what He means in this lesson. There will come that lesson later on in the school of faith. He will say to them after the withering of the fig tree, "If you have enough faith, you can say to this mountain, 'Be removed into the sea,' and it shall be done for you.' There will be time to learn how to have the kind of faith I have that rests in My Father and you can say, knowing it's the will of the Lord, 'Peace! Be still!' but that's not what we need to do. That's an advanced lesson of faith. We need to get down to the elementary lessons of faith. We need to have an object and your object is not right."

I don't believe they understood who was in the boat with them. You could say, "Yes, they had enough faith to at least wake Jesus up and plead for His help?" Do you really think they awoke Jesus in faith? Look at verse 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?" (Mark 4:38)

What kind of prayer is that? It wasn't a prayer. It was a rebuke. "How can You be asleep when we are in one of the most dangerous storms we have ever seen? How can You remain asleep when the waves are crashing in on this ship, sinking it? You're drenched in water and yet You're still asleep? Come on, man. Get a bucket and start bailing. We're drowning!" That's the Durham Translation, but I think that's exactly what's going on here.

You would think if they had enough faith in Jesus, they would have awoken Him and said, “Lord, we’ve been praying but nothing is happening. But we have faith that You can talk to the Father and He will listen to You.” But they didn’t ask for that. They simply rebuke Him for not caring.

Their faith did not believe that Jesus was capable of this kind of power. They never dreamed He could do this. How do I know this?

And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!” (Mark 4:41)

We must remember these are experienced fishermen. This storm had scared them spit-less. I’m sorry for the vulgar term but I thought you might get it. They were scared to death. They knew, as far as they were concerned, this was a failed mission and they weren’t going to make it. After Jesus did what He did, commanding the wind and the wave and then seeing the wind and the wave obeying, the Bible says they were afraid of what they just witnessed. It frightened them even more for a man can’t do what He just did. A man can’t speak to the wind. A man doesn’t speak to the sea and it immediately goes to attention and dutifully obeys.

They hadn’t seen anything like this or even heard of it. “Who is this man?” The question ought to tell you something about their faith. They didn’t even know who Jesus was nor understand Him. The object of their faith was incomplete. They didn’t really know who Jesus was.

B. Jesus is the Fullness of God.

This is key to your faith growing. You must know who Christ is in His fullness, in His perfection. You must know, if your faith is to grow, that God is good, He can be trusted, and He can be absolutely rested upon, leaned upon, reclined upon, and He will hold you up.

I don’t mean that you must simply know that intellectually. I’m sure that you all know this. Everyone here could pass a written test about faith. You’ve heard it so much, you’ve learned it, you could pass the test—yes, God is good and can be trusted. But I’m not asking if you can pass a written test. Can you pass life’s test? Can you pass the test from the school of faith and move from the head to the heart so your heart will not quiver in the moment of alarm? There it is, the real test of faith.

One of those great verses of the faith, Colossians 2:9-10 gives us a glimpse of who Jesus is.

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” (Colossians 2:9-10)

That Man, standing in the boat after being awakened by those faithless men, had all of God dwelling in Him. They couldn’t see that. They couldn’t understand that about Jesus. They didn’t know this was more than a man. They agreed He was a great prophet and teacher, and yes, even the

Messiah, but still a man. They had great faith that He could even heal the sick but He was still a man. But only God could calm the wind. They didn't understand who it was in that boat with them. Their faith was incomplete. They didn't see Jesus for who He was.

Often you don't know who He is either. I suggest to you that you're not alone, you have 12 men who have made the same mistake.

I love the hymns of Charles Wesley. He's my favorite hymn writer and he wrote these words,

*Thy gifts alone cannot suffice,
Except Thou be given.
For Thy presence make my paradise,
And where Thou Art is heaven.*

Has your faith come to the place where it's not the gifts or the blessings of Jesus that you pray mostly for, but you pray primarily for the experience of Jesus Himself? He is the gift. See, faith that can rest has clearly as its object of trust Jesus. Not the gifts, not the blessings, not the answers to prayer. I want to teach you that your prayers often hinder your faith because the object that your faith is looking toward the gifts or the blessings or the answers, not Jesus.

For some of us, often we approach Jesus subconsciously unaware that Jesus is the obstacle to getting our prayers answered. I've got to somehow overcome His reluctance and convince Him that I'm somehow worthy so He ought to do this for me. Am I not right?

Often Jesus is an obstacle not the object of your faith. Dear friends, you have to see Jesus for His own sake. That's what happened to Hudson Taylor—He finally saw that all of Jesus was already in him and he had nothing more to do. No more struggle, no more trying, no more trying to make his faith better.

Are you trying to make your faith greater? Are you trying to increase your hope in God and your ability to trust Him? Your faith is not in Jesus it's in you. You have faith in your faith.

This became painfully aware for me, once again, on Friday. Forgive me for giving a personal illustration. Often my faith is either first degree or second degree. Either I'm struggling out there by myself or I'm clinging to the boat. Sometimes I get in the boat but do not stay there. You can move from one of these degrees to another, you don't have to abide in one. God's goal is that you would always abide in the third degree, resting faith, that's His goal for us. But sometimes we move from one to the other.

Friday is payday for RTM, and I didn't have anything to give the employees. This is the second week in a row that had happened. I do not tell this story to plead and appeal to your sympathies. Don't think about RTM right now. Listen for your own benefit. This is not an appeal for money, play on your emotions. If you're feeling guilty and that we need to do something, like take up a

special offering or something, no. That's not the point of the story. This story is so real to me though that I cannot get through this sermon without telling you what God has done for me.

I cannot tell you the pain and the hurt it is for me to come on a Friday morning and not have a paycheck, much less have this happen for the second week in a row. I walked in to open up our daily prayer meeting to tell them I had nothing. So I said to them, "It seems to me if God cannot meet our needs on a consistent basis then that must mean that RTM has outlived its purpose and we just need to shut it down." I meant it.

It was time to pray. I got down on my knees and all I could do was cry and weep before the Lord. I couldn't even pray out loud. After waiting for me to pray for a while, Joseph began and then Sophie and then they waited around for me to pray but all I could do was cry. Finally I knew they probably wouldn't leave until I got up, so I got up only to get them out of the room. Once they left, I got back down and cried and prayed some more.

I confess to you that morning I was angry with God. I was upset. But He, so tender and compassionate, dealt with me as a son. He began to show me my heart and that my problem was not that He was not good or somehow not faithful, the problem was my faith was in my faith. He showed me what was really on the inside. He has taught me this lesson before! I hate flunking classes and having to take them again. I'm ashamed of myself. But I tell you the truth, once again He showed me that my faith wasn't really in Jesus. He wasn't the object of my faith. My faith was the object of my faith.

He showed me that I was thinking if I had enough faith this ought not to have happened. If I could believe God this would never happen. What I was really doing was wallowing in my self-pity that I didn't have enough faith to keep a steady supply of finances coming into this ministry. This object of my faith wasn't Jesus, it was Michael.

Friend, if the object of your faith is how much faith you have or don't have, your boat is going to sink. Guaranteed.

To help you understand what I'm saying, picture in your mind's eye a man from the South visiting the north country during winter. I don't like cold so this is hard for me to imagine, but I'm going to try, so try with me. The lakes are iced over and people are on the frozen playground ice-skating. Now imagine his host encouraging the southerner to get off the bank and walk on the ice. He has never done anything like that and so he declines his host's invitation. "Come on! It will be safe. The ice is thick," pleads the host, "You won't fall in. Besides, it may be your only opportunity to walk on water."

The guest then nervously ventures out on the ice. He inches his way, carefully inspecting for any signs of cracks, the entire distance of two feet. He then whirls and scurries back to the shore. Relieved he made it, the northerner and his southern guest get back into the car and drive home. But before they leave the lake the southerner spies a man out on the middle of the lake ice fish-

ing. The man looks so relaxed and at ease. He remembers tiptoeing out on the frozen lake fearing any moment that the ice might break sending him into the frigid water. He looks at the man ice fishing not worried at all about the ice giving way.

As he is watching the man fish, he asks his friend, "I wonder how he worked up the nerve to do that?"

The driver answers, "He lives here. He knows the ice."

He knows the ice. *He knows the ice.* He understands the properties of ice. He understands how the temperatures work and how the lake freezes. He knows when it's safe and when it isn't safe. He knows the ice.

The lesson of this story that rang true for those men in the storm tossed boat is the lesson that God is shouting and sending forth this morning—You've got to know Jesus, if you're going to rest in faith. You have to know Him, His attributes, His ways. You've got to know Him. What's in His heart, what's His will, what's His objective, who is this God-Man we call Jesus Christ?

"And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; For You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You." (Psalms 9:10)

"... the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits." (Daniel 11:32)

That's what the Bible says. "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." Faith has one object—Jesus and Jesus alone. You must see Him as He really is: the Gift, not just the Giver. Everything you need is in Christ.

The greatest kind of faith is one that will rest in Jesus despite the circumstances and the storms. One of our problems about the lesson of faith is that we always want to associate the word *faith* with *miracles*. If you believe faith is always connected to miracles then, once again, you have the wrong object. Your faith is trusting in the wrong thing. Yes, there is the Hebrews 11 kind of faith where men trusted God and put the armies of the aliens to flight and they received their dead back to life again. They believed God when the womb was barren and God performed miracles. They believed God for great things and saw many wonders.

But that's not all faith saw in Hebrews 11. There are others.

"[Others] received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith..." (Hebrews 11:35-39b)

The writer of Hebrews is telling us that great faith is a faith that can rest through the storm, can sleep in the boat, trusting the Captain.

I want to see God do miracles. I want to see Him do these great feats and show this generation that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but, my dear friend, you never testify of the greatness of God better than when you are able to stay fast asleep in the midst of the storm, trusting in the Maker of the wind and the waves.

So today, my dear friend, if you are not a Christian I hope you can understand this. He doesn't expect you to have resting-in-the-boat kind of faith. He doesn't even expect you to be a theologian and know everything there is to know about Jesus the incarnate one; His virgin birth, His hypostatic union—His two natures—all of those theological terms. God does not expect you to know all of that before He'll save you. No, all He demands of you is a faith that can trust that Jesus died for your sins.

If you can believe God for that, God says that is sufficient faith. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Can you trust in Jesus to this degree? You might not be able to believe Him for a miracle. You might not be able to see that God can answer these great prayers that have been prayed over the years, but can you see a Lamb slain, whose blood is effectual for the washing away of your sins? Can you at least believe that about Him? Can you believe that on the third day God Almighty raised Him up out of the tomb and has seated Him at His right hand victoriously over His enemies?

Can you have that kind of faith? Then, my dear friend, by that faith you are saved. Right here, this very moment. If you are trusting Jesus for your eternal wellbeing, then you are not going to be saved, you are saved. Cling to Him. Even if you're on the outside of the boat and not on the inside—cling with all thy might, He will not fail you!

Should you have enough faith to get out of the boat and walk on the water and you fail, remember Peter—Jesus will not allow you to perish. He will grab you and lift you up and sustain you back to the boat.

Oh, will you trust Him? Look away to Jesus! Look at Jesus, who is the Author and Finisher of our faith. As the prophet Isaiah said, "Look and live." Amen.