

“A Contrary Wind” • Mark 4:35-5:20; 7:31; 8:1-10

Have you ever heard someone say, or maybe you've said it yourself, “Every time I start to move forward with God something bad happens!” Some people are convinced the wisest thing they can do is keep a low spiritual profile. Believe in Jesus, but don't get too excited. Don't pray too much, don't read the Bible too much, don't go to church too often, and whatever you do, don't go on a mission, join a Life Group or serve in a ministry. That's just asking for trouble. Something bad will happen as soon as you do, so don't bother. Stay in the background, and hope the devil doesn't notice you.

This sort of thinking actually sounds superstitious, but there are believers who are convinced it's the way things work for them, and there are unbelievers who are afraid to come to Jesus for the same reason. This fear causes people to shrink back and stay passive and frustrated. And here's the shocking truth we learn from this passage: they may be right! People will indeed face serious spiritual opposition when they begin to function as a true disciple. This dramatic encounter with a storm in the middle of the Sea of Galilee lays bare the reality of spiritual opposition and gives Jesus an opportunity to show us how to handle such situations. And then as the story progresses, we discover what amazing miracles God can do if we don't let a “contrary wind” stop us.

A “contrary wind” (Mk 4:35-41)

The prevailing winds across the Sea of Galilee are from west to east, however, occasionally the direction of the wind reverses and rushes in from the hot deserts to the east producing a fierce gale that blows from east to west. Normally this is caused by nothing more than irregular weather patterns, but on this particular evening it was caused by a very different source. This wind was meant to prevent Jesus from coming to the eastern side of the lake. That region was not primarily populated by Jews, but by Gentiles. As always, Jesus was going there because He was responding to the Father's leading. Someone who lived there needed Him, and the devil knew it. We learn from this event that the devil, as well as God, can control the weather, and this wind had been sent by him to prevent Jesus from rescuing a man whom he held in bondage. Terrified and angry, the devil tried to drive Jesus back from the eastern shore, hopefully swamping the boat and drowning Him in the process. This wasn't just an accidental storm, it was a “contrary wind.” It's a vivid example of the kind of spiritual warfare every disciple of Jesus will face.

Plunder the strongman (Mk 5:1-17)

Jesus was on assignment. He came to the “country of the Gerasenes” with one purpose in mind. He was there to rescue a man filled with demons. I assume that in his agony this man cried out in prayer for mercy, and God heard him. There are not always people available for God to send, but in this case there was. Jesus was on the other side of the lake so He sent Him. Listen to God's heart as spoken through Isaiah:

“Can the prey be taken from the mighty man, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? Surely, thus says the Lord, even the captives of the mighty man will be taken away, and the prey of the tyrant will be rescued; for I will contend with the one who contends with you, and I will save your sons...And all flesh will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior...” (Isa 49:24-26).

Now listen to Jesus,

“Or how can anyone enter the strongman's house and carry off his property unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.” (Mt 12:29)

“When a strongman fully armed guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder.” (Lk 11:21, 22; spoken after casting out a demon).

This is exactly what Jesus was doing. He was plundering the devil's “house,” which in this case was a man with a legion of demons living in him. Why this man? Because he wanted to be free. How do we know? Look who met Jesus as soon as he landed, and then stop and think for a moment about the effort it must have taken that man to get there. He wanted to be free so badly he dragged an enormous nest of demons to the last place on earth they wanted to go: the feet of Jesus. As he staggered toward the Lord he didn't need to say a word. Jesus immediately recognized his heroic desperation and started casting the demons out while this pathetic soul was still off in the distance. When he arrived the man bowed down, but the demons in him spoke through him, fully aware of who Jesus is and of their own future doom when He sits in judgment. Amazingly they beg for mercy because the time for their eternal doom has not yet arrived...and He grants it. Notice they long to dwell in living creatures, so He allows them to go into pigs. Notice also that they were terrified of Jesus. They still are.

Before we move on, did you see how the people in that region responded to Jesus (vs. 14-17)? This is the Decapolis. These aren't Jews, they're Greeks and Romans, and after looking at the man sitting there in his right mind and hearing about the pigs...they begged Jesus to leave. This was a cold, spiritually unresponsive place.

An apparent rejection (Mk 5:18-20)

The man begged Jesus to let him travel with Him, but Jesus would not permit it. Instead He gave him an assignment. He said, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” (Mk 5:19)

Mark says the man “went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed” (v20). But that isn't the end of this story. This fellow didn't just go home and tell a few friends. He became a dynamic evangelist, to such an extent that the next time Jesus returned to that region the response was very different.

Jesus returns (Mk 7:31; 8:1-10)

This time a large crowd gathered to hear Him. They were so interested, they went without food and slept out in the open for three days. Remember these are Gentiles, not Jews. And once again Jesus multiplied bread and fish to feed them, only this time instead of twelve baskets left over, one for each of the tribes of Israel, there were seven baskets left over, one for each of the seven Gentile nations who occupied the promised land when the Exodus arrived (Dt. 7:1). In this symbolic way Jesus declared that He had come not only to save the people of Israel, but the Gentiles as well (Mk 8:19-21).

The lessons

Whenever you or I move to “plunder the strongman” he will oppose us. We can count on it, but we can also count on the fact that Jesus has given us His authority to stop the assault and continue on to successfully complete our assignment. This is what Jesus was trying to teach His disciples in the boat. It's why He was so frustrated when they reacted like someone who is ignorant of spiritual realities. The Rabbi was teaching His disciples important lessons. When they faced a “contrary wind” they must:

- 1) Refuse fear: Opposition will come, but don't react in fear. It weakens us and renders us helpless. It allows the enemy to control us.
- 2) Don't accuse God of forsaking you (Mk 4:38): If we grow angry and distrustful toward God we cut ourselves off from our Source of help. He's not the problem, He's the solution.
- 3) Recognize the spiritual source behind the opposition: Every problem isn't caused by the devil, but some definitely are. We must learn to discern and recognize the “schemes of the devil” (Eph 6:11). Is there a pattern to this opposition (“every time we...”) Is the timing suspicious (“as soon as I start...”) Does it prevent you from obeying your assignment from the Lord?
- 4) Address the strongman, confidently using the authority God has given you through Christ. Listen, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Mt 28:18, 20)
“Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.” (Lk 10:19)

Application

Whenever we step out to share Christ with someone, pray for the ill, counsel a troubled marriage, befriend a lonely youth, open our home for ministry, give to the Lord's work, or even at a personal level when we decide to grow as a disciple by studying God's Word, regularly attending church, and praying daily, we're likely to experience a “contrary wind.” Will it frighten us and cause us to withdraw? Will it shake our faith in the goodness of God? Or will we become like our Rabbi? Will we refuse to turn back, exercise the authority of Jesus, and move forward to plunder the strongman's house? Remember, Jesus doesn't expect us to endure the storm, He expects us to stop it!

Who is facing a “contrary wind” right now? Then, standing confidently in the authority of Jesus, say this to the strongman, “Hush, be still!” Notice how simple that is. It doesn't require an elaborate ritual, just faith that He's with us and that the strongman must obey.

Questions

- 1) Re-read Mark 4:38. Why do you think the disciples reacted like this? What thoughts were going through their minds?
- 2) Re-read Mark 4:40. Why did Jesus react like this? What did He want them to do?
- 3) Have you ever faced a “contrary wind”? What happened? What was it trying to prevent you from doing? Did it succeed? If so, how will you respond in the future?