

Defining Moments:
Defined by Crisis
Mark 4:35-41

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Text Introduction: We are in a series of messages that we are calling “Defining Moments.” Our lives are sprinkled with defining moments—moments that shape the rest of our lives, moments that are so important that the rest of our lives hang in the balance of these moments.

We have talked about such topics as our births—both our physical births and spiritual births, baptism, and marriage. We even talked about how historical moments are defining moments (wars, hurricanes, etc.) On Easter Sunday we talked about “The Most Defining Moment of all of History”—the resurrection of Jesus.

We have several more defining moments to address. Today, I want to focus on crisis—personal crisis.

Often times, personal crisis will be a defining moment. The question is “How will the crisis define us?” Will the crisis define us by increased or decreased faith? Early in their journey with Jesus, the disciples faced a crisis while crossing a lake on a boat. Their reactions give evidence to how this crisis became for them a defining moment. Let’s read the text.

Text: ³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, He told them, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the lake.” ³⁶ So they left the crowd and took Him along since He was already in the boat. And other boats were with Him. ³⁷ A fierce windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ But He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke Him up and said to Him, “Teacher! Don’t You care that we’re going to die?”

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Silence! Be still!” The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ Then He said to them, “Why are you fearful? Do you still have no faith?”

⁴¹ And they were terrified and asked one another, “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

Introduction: This miracle is an important story in the development of Mark’s narrative to present Jesus as the Messiah. Already Mark has presented stories of Jesus’ power to heal showing His Lordship over disease. He has presented evidence that Jesus is Lord over the Law and the Sabbath. After several parables from the lips of Jesus, Mark returned to the miracles of Jesus. With this miracle, at the end of Mark 4, Mark revealed Jesus’ power over nature. This in itself is a powerful reason to study the miracle of calming the sea even while He calms the sailors, the disciples.

But, since Jesus is also building faith in these disciples, this story becomes a powerful one in regards to His relationship with His disciples. I join a long list of Bible interpreters who see in this story not only a miracle, but a miracle with a message—a message about our own storms or crises.

At the risk of saying something you have heard a thousand times before now, it really is true that all of us are (1) in a crisis, (2) just coming out of a crisis, or (3) about to be in a crisis. Many times, the crisis will be a defining moment. So, I want you to see several things in this story.

Be Ready

Difficult circumstances are inevitable.

Difficult circumstances can come at any time.

(1) On ordinary days

“On that day . . .” (35)

(2) When we are close to God

“they took Him along in the boat.” (36)

Jesus Himself was in the stern.” (38)

React Properly

We see the disciples’ reaction in the phrase, “Don’t you care that we’re going to die?” Everything about that question was wrong. Jesus did care, and they were not going to die. I heard Fred Luter preach on this passage one time and he said, “If the disciples would have paid attention to the first thing Jesus told them, they would have never been fearful in the first place. Jesus said, ‘Let’s cross over to the other side of the lake.’” And in the way that only Fred can say it, he then said, “If Jesus says you are going to the other side of the lake, you are going to the other side of the lake.”

But what do we do? We overreact. We overreact with emotions—“We are going to die.” We overreact because of our circumstances—“A fierce windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.” And worst of all, we overreact even with accusations against God—“Don’t you care?”

So,

- Rather than overreact with our emotions, react with faith.
- Rather than overreact with what we know about our circumstances, react with what we know about God.
- Rather than overreact with accusations against God, react with steadfast belief in His sovereign control.

Max Lucado said, “Doubt your doubts.” Why don’t we doubt our doubts like we doubt our beliefs?

Remember God’s Past Deliverance

“Do you still have no faith?” The disciples had been eyewitnesses to Jesus healing the sick, casting out demons, and possibly other miracles. They had been astonished at His teaching. They had followed Him when He called. They had seen Him stand up to the religious leaders of their day. Yet, in all of this, in

their crisis, they panicked. Faith is not faith until it has to be our faith. Theology that tells others what to believe about their crisis must be the same theology that we employ when we come to our crisis.

Where do we find examples of God's deliverance?

- God's Word

The Bible is filled with God's promises. As the hymn writer declared, we must "stand on the promises of God." Russell Kelso Carter actually wrote that hymn out of his own health crisis.

- God's Work in our own lives

What are your stories of God's deliverance?

Record the Result

In verse 41, literally, "They feared a great fear." Their fear now is not in the storm outside the boat, but a fear of the One in the boat with them." That is, their fear now turns to an awe so that they ask among themselves, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him!" In a sense, they processed what was happening.

God told Old Testament Israel to record the results of His activity in their lives. He created for them the Feast of the Passover to help them commemorate Death passing over their home when they left Egypt. He gave them the Feast of Booths to commemorate His provision while they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. He gave to them the Feast of Purim to commemorate His saving them in the days of Esther. When they crossed over into the Promised Land, God told them to erect a monument of 12 stones so that they could tell their children what happened.

All of this was to record the result of God's past deliverance. We must do the same.

- As Thanksgiving in the present crisis.
- As Testimony for the next crisis.

Like it or not, the next crisis is coming.

Philip Yancey is an author. He has written a lot about his own faith journey. He once told about his father-in-law, who was a Bible teacher through his life and found troubling times in his last days. A nerve disease robbed him of almost all of his motor skills. He could not be up and around. His 39-year-old daughter battled a severe form of diabetes. Because of these health and family matters, financial pressures mounted. In the midst of all of this, He took a piece of paper and he said, "This I believe." He wrote down three things:

Number 1 – life is difficult. Number 2 – God is merciful. Number 3 – heaven is certain.

What would you write down? Last week, we spoke of putting our letter before God. If you were not here, that language comes from the life of Hezekiah. He got a bad letter from the King of Assyria. Hezekiah brought the letter into the Temple and "spread it out before the Lord."

I want to invite you to do the opposite this week. I want to invite you to do what Phillip Yancey's father-in-law did. I want you to write your own letter. I want you to write out "This I believe."