

Miracles Around *the* Lake



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 4:35–41, Ps. 104:1–9, Mark 5:1–43, Num. 27:17.*

Memory Text: “However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you’ ” (*Mark 5:19, NKJV*).

Jesus' ministry was largely focused in Galilee, especially in and around the Sea of Galilee, a lake approximately 13 miles (21 kilometers) long and 8 miles (13 kilometers) wide. It is the largest body of water in the area and was the center of life for people living nearby.

Mark 4 ends with Jesus and His disciples traveling across the Sea of Galilee. A storm arises that Jesus calms by speaking to the wind and waves. Mark 6 ends with a similar scene, but this time with Jesus walking on the water toward His disciples in the boat. In between these scenes on the water are numerous miracles of Jesus that were done on land and His disciples' first missionary activity. These stories are the subject of this week's study.

The overarching characteristic of these dramatic stories is to let the reader see who Jesus is. He is the One able to calm a storm, cast out demons, heal a woman who simply touches His clothes, raise a dead girl, preach in His home town, send out His disciples on a preaching mission, feed with a few loaves and fish, and walk on water—incredible displays of power that are drawing the disciples closer to an understanding that He is the Son of God.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 3.

Calming a Storm

Read Mark 4:35–41. What happens in this story, and what lessons can we take from it about who Jesus is?

At the beginning of Mark 4, Jesus steps into a boat to teach the crowd on the shore. In Mark 4:10–12, it seems He may have gotten out of the boat and talked with the disciples privately. Now, after a long day of teaching, the disciples take Jesus in the boat “as He was,” in other words, very tired. He immediately falls asleep on the boat’s cushion, which would be in the stern of the boat. A great storm arises on the lake, and the boat is at risk of sinking when the disciples awake Him. Dramatically, Jesus commands the wind and waves to cease. A great calm settles over the lake. Understandably, the disciples are deeply afraid at the display of divine power.

Read Psalm 104:1–9. How does the picture of Yahweh here compare with Christ calming the storm?

The story in Mark 4:35–41 fits within a common biblical pattern: that of a “theophany”—the appearance of God or one of His angels. Five characteristics are common to these events: (1) the display of divine power, (2) human fear, (3) the command “Do not fear,” (4) the words of revelation for which God or the angel appeared, and (5) human response to the revelation. Four of the five are present in this story—the calming of the storm is the display of divine power, the disciples’ fear is the human fear. The question, “Why are you so afraid?” is the “Do not fear.” The disciples’ question, “Who then is this?” is the human response. What is missing is the words of revelation. This missing detail plays into the revelation/secret motif that runs through the entire book, where the truth about Jesus will come out. Here the disciples’ question, “Who then is this that the wind and the sea obey Him?” pushes the reader to fill in the answer of the missing words of revelation—He is the Son of God, the Lord Himself.

Think about the power of God. How can you learn to lean on this power and to trust it in all things in your life?

Can You Hear a Whisper Above a Shout?

Read Mark 5:1–20. What can we learn about the great controversy from this amazing account and, again, about the power of Jesus?

If the night before on the lake was unforgettable, the arrival at the Gadarenes the next morning was just as impressive. The history of the demon-possessed man is laid out in heartbreaking detail. Breaking away from all constraint, he lived in the tombs and cut himself with stones. “No one had the strength to subdue him” (*Mark 5:4, ESV*)—and then he met Jesus.

The man rushed at Jesus—no word about the disciples (they probably ran off). When the man came near to Jesus, he fell down before Him. The words “fell down” translate the Greek verb *proskyneō*, usually translated “to worship.” It seems the man recognized that Jesus was Someone who could help him. But when he opened his mouth, the demons inside him shouted at Jesus, who could hear the man’s whispered plea for help above the demons’ shouts. When they asked to be released into a herd of pigs, Jesus permitted them to enter the pigs. The entire herd, about two thousand, rushed down the embankment and drowned in the water. It was a financial disaster for the owners.

What’s amazing is that the demons knew exactly who Jesus was, and they also knew their impotence before Him, which was why they “begged Him” twice (*Mark 5:10, 12, NKJV*) to do what they asked. Obviously, they knew His power over them.

This story has two overriding characteristics. First, it is filled with items of uncleanness or ceremonial defilement according to Old Testament law. Tombs and the dead were unclean (*Num. 19:11, 16*). Bleeding made one unclean (*Leviticus 15*). Pigs were unclean (*Lev. 11:7*).

But, second, overarching this litany of defilement is the back-and-forth battle between good and evil forces. Jesus drives out the demons (two points for Jesus), the demons kill the pigs (two points for Satan). The townspeople ask Jesus to leave (two points for Satan), but Jesus sends back the healed man as His witness (three points for Jesus). In some ways this man was the unlikeliest missionary, but he definitely had an amazing story to tell.

What hope can you draw from this story about the power of Jesus to help you in whatever you are struggling with?

On the Roller Coaster With Jesus

Read Mark 5:21–24. What characteristics particularly stand out about Jairus?

Religious leaders such as Jairus were not typically friends with Jesus (see Mark 1:22; Mark 3:2, 6; and Luke 13:14). So it is likely that he is desperate. This desperation is exemplified by Jairus’s falling on his knees before Jesus. His plea is understandable to any parent—his daughter is dying. But he has faith that Jesus can help. Without a word, Jesus departs with the father to go to his home.

Read Mark 5:25–34. What interrupts the progress toward Jairus’s house?

The story suddenly cuts away to another scene that evokes pity—a woman experiencing 12 terrible years of sickness. This story of Jairus and the woman is the second sandwich story in Mark (see Mark 3:20–35, covered in lesson 3). In this story the contrasting characters, Jairus and the woman, come to Jesus for help.

The woman comes up behind Jesus and touches His clothing. Immediately, she is well. But Jesus stops and asks, “Who touched My clothes?”

The woman, who had been so sick, was suddenly well. Yet, she feared that Jesus was angry at what had happened. It was a wild ride for her emotions. But Jesus wanted to heal not only her body but also her soul.

Then, back to Jairus (see Mark 5:35–43). It was a wild ride of emotions for the synagogue ruler, as well. Jesus allowed no one else to go with Him and the parents except Peter, James, and John. Jesus states that the girl is not dead but asleep. He casts out all the mourners and goes into the room where the dead girl lay. Taking her hand, He says, “*Talitha kum.*” Mark translates these words, “Little girl, get up.” Actually, the word *Talitha* means “lamb” and thus would be a term of endearment for a child in the home. The command to keep things secret is part of the revelation/secret motif that runs through Mark and points toward who Jesus is and that, ultimately, He cannot remain hidden.

Rejection and Reception

Read Mark 6:1–6. Why did Jesus' hometown people reject Him?

Usually when a small-town person becomes popular, people back home bask in the attention. Not Nazareth. They were offended and surprised at Jesus' success as a teacher and healer. His shift from being a builder to a teacher seemed hard for them to accept. There also may have been some animosity that He did most of His miracles in Capernaum (see *Luke 4:23*). And He had already had a disagreement with His family (*Mark 3:31–35*).

Read Mark 6:7–30. How does the mission of the Twelve Apostles contrast with the beheading of John the Baptist?

This is the third sandwich story in Mark (see lesson 3). The mission of the Twelve Apostles in taking the message of Jesus everywhere stands in sharp contrast with the imprisonment and silencing of the Baptist. The disciples are told to travel light and depend on others for support. This strategy actually makes missionaries dependent on the people they serve, which helps bond them to those who need their message.

But the Baptist had no such bond with Herod and his family. John's death is told in shocking detail as the plotting Herodias takes advantage of Herod's ambivalence and lust. Herodias's daughter seems to add to the scandalous plan by the grotesque request that the Baptist's head be delivered on a platter.

The silencing of the clarion voice of the Baptist occurs at the same time as the Twelve Apostles proclaim repentance, just as the Baptist did. John's death foreshadows Jesus'. John is put to death, buried, and reported as risen from the dead (*Mark 6:14–16, 29*), as Jesus would be (*Mark 15 and 16*). These parallel stories point toward a coming crisis for Jesus and His followers.

Have you ever been rejected like Jesus was or experienced some hard-to-understand crisis? What did you learn from those experiences that could perhaps help you the next time something like that happens?

A Different Kind of Messiah

Read Mark 6:34–52. What was the problem Jesus and His disciples confronted, and how was it solved?

After the disciples return from their mission, they go with Jesus to a remote area on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee to rest. But a large crowd of 5,000 people arrives at the location before them. Jesus sees that they are like sheep without a shepherd. He teaches them the entire day.

In the evening the disciples recommend sending the crowd away to find food, but Jesus tells them to feed the crowd. The ensuing dialogue (*Mark 6:35–38*) illustrates that the disciples are thinking in human terms about how to solve the problem. However, Jesus resolves the problem by miraculously feeding the large crowd with just five loaves and two fish.

Characteristics of this story play into the popular concept of Messiah in Jesus' day. The expectation was that the Messiah would liberate Israel from her enemies and would bring in righteousness and peace. A large number of men in a desert setting would carry with it military overtones of revolt (*compare with John 6:14, 15; Acts 21:38*).

This notion is strengthened by the reference to Jesus' seeing the people like "sheep without a shepherd," a partial quotation from Numbers 27:17, where Moses asks God to appoint a leader for Israel after him. This phraseology about a shepherd for God's people appears elsewhere in the Old Testament, typically with reference to Israel's lack of a leader or king (*compare with 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 18:16; Ezek. 34:5, 6*).

Yet, Jesus does not meet their false expectations. Instead, He sends His disciples away and dismisses the crowd. And, rather than lead a rebellion against Rome, what does He do? He retreats to a mountain to pray—not what the people were expecting.

In place of the popular view of the Messiah as a king who liberates Israel, He comes to liberate people from the bondage of sin. His walking on the water displays to the disciples that He is, indeed, the Lord of nature. But He does not come to rule but to give His life as a ransom for many (*Mark 10:45*).

What should this story tell us about why a correct understanding of prophecy is important? If a false understanding of Christ's first coming led to disaster for some, how much more so could a false understanding do the same for some in regard to His second?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Peace, Be Still,” pp. 333–341; “The Touch of Faith,” pp. 342–348, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In all who are under the training of God is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and everyone needs to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Ps. 46:10. Here alone can true rest be found. And this is the effectual preparation for all who labor for God. Amid the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, the soul that is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. The life will breathe out fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men’s hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

“Their dissatisfied hearts queried why, if Jesus could perform so many wondrous works as they had witnessed, could He not give health, strength, and riches to all His people, free them from their oppressors, and exalt them to power and honor? The fact that He claimed to be the Sent of God, and yet refused to be Israel’s king, was a mystery which they could not fathom. His refusal was misinterpreted. Many concluded that He dared not assert His claims because He Himself doubted as to the divine character of His mission. Thus they opened their hearts to unbelief, and the seed which Satan had sown bore fruit of its kind, in misunderstanding and defection.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 385.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How would you respond if someone asked you, *What has Jesus freed you from?*
- 2 Discuss why it is that God sometimes allows a good person such as John the Baptist to be placed in prison and to be executed. What solace or hope can we find, despite these difficult things?
- 3 What lessons are there in the feeding of the 5,000 for a church congregation with few resources?
- 4 Compare popular views of Jesus today with the picture of Him in Mark 5 and 6. That is, what about those who use Jesus to seek political power and to dominate others?

Unexpected Change of Heart

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

As a university student, Anush heard many times, “When you graduate, we will give you a job.” But when she graduated, no one offered her a job.

Father was deeply worried. In Armenia, fathers often help their children get jobs. Some fathers even bribe companies to hire their children. But Father didn’t give a bribe, and Anush was jobless in her town in Armenia.

Then she learned about an interdenominational missionary organization from the United States that was looking for an Armenian translator. The job came with a small salary and required her to relocate temporarily to a nearby city, Vanadzor. She asked Father for permission to work as a translator. Armenia is a largely patriarchal society where fathers are consulted on many decisions. Father thought that working with Americans would be a good opportunity for Anush. “Yes, you can go,” he said.

Anush got the job. She was happy. Four years earlier, Father had forbidden her from going to church and getting baptized. Now she was reading the Bible, sharing Jesus with others—and getting paid for it! As she worked, a desire grew in her heart to become a missionary. When the job ended, she returned home, wondering how she could fulfill her dream. After praying and fasting for three days, she read in Exodus that God told Moses at the burning bush to ask Pharaoh to let His people go to serve Him. She felt as though God was saying to her, “Go ask Father to let you serve Me.” She went to Father. “Would you allow me to study to become a missionary in another country?” she asked.

“No,” he said.

The next morning, Anush read in Exodus that Pharaoh rejected Moses’ request, but God sent Moses back, saying, “Go, talk to Pharaoh.”

She went to Father. “Would you allow me to study in a missionary program to serve God?” she asked.

“No,” he said.

She continued reading Exodus. Again and again, God sent Moses to talk to Pharaoh. Every time Moses talked to Pharaoh, Anush spoke to Father. Father became upset. One day, he exploded. “Can you just go to the local church and get baptized and forget about becoming a missionary in another country?” he exclaimed.

Anush was confused. She hadn’t anticipated such a response. She decided to go to church. She went to a nearby city where an Adventist church was holding evangelistic meetings. When the preacher asked who wanted to be baptized, she stood up. “Are you sure?” the preacher asked. “What about your father?”

Everyone knew her story. “Father is fine with my decision,” Anush said. Father didn’t stop the baptism. With joy, Anush plunged under the water.

Part of last quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush’s in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: Anush sets her heart on praying Father into church.