

Background Information for Mark 4



The gospel of Mark is a fast-paced la tour de France piece that leaves the reader starving for more, while at the same time is filled with the spiritual food mystery. Much has been written about what has come to be known as the mysterious “Messianic Secret” in this gospel. Essentially, this term refers to Jesus’s behavior and teachings in many episodes in Mark that are shrouded in mystery.

Jesus consistently warns those that he teaches, heals, or frees of demons to not disclose His identity to others (Mk 1:44, 3:12, 5:43, etc.). The exact reason for this is unknown, but it is believed by most that Jesus wanted to remain relatively hidden in His earthly life in order to leave enough room for supernatural faith (St John Henry Newman being one of them). This allowed for those who were ready to receive the good news of the kingdom of God to actually do so rather than be caught up in the hype of external signs. The whole gospel of Mark could be summed up as Jesus offering communion to those who have faith in Him and are willing to do His will.

Jesus’s wide range of parables throughout this gospel certainly point to this reality as well. In fact, this passage of Jesus’s calming of the storm comes immediately following Jesus’s preaching a day’s worth of parables (see Mk 4:1-34). One thing to know about parables is that they are only understandable to those who have faith. What Mark reveals through the story of the calming of the storm is that these disciples are still clearly not getting Christ’s message because they lack faith (see Mk 4:40).

Finally, it should be noted that the word “awe” in Mk 4:41 is much better translated as “fear.” This is a holy fear of course, but fear, nonetheless. They are amazed and afraid at this Person of Jesus in front of them. They want to follow Him, but at the same time they are afraid of what that might entail.