

**“WHO THEN IS THIS THAT EVEN THE WIND AND SEA OBEY HIM?”**

“...and they were filled with awe, and said to one another, Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

Looking at the Sea of Galilee it is hard to imagine that it could get stirred up by a massive storm. It is more of a lake than an ocean after all.

However, it does have a reputation for sudden wind storms coming down from the surrounding hills and causing mayhem.

The boats were pretty small anyhow.

On the subject of boats, they of course were working boats all set up for fishing, and not the most convenient spaces for passengers or other purposes.

In the stern though, there was a kind of bed. I doubt that it amounted to much more than a plank with some sort of mattress on it.

St Mark records that Jesus was in the stern asleep on the cushion, and they woke Him and said to Him: “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” Jesus then calmed the storm with a word.

This is the point at which a lot of people who regard themselves as being sensible and rational, begin to choke. Many a time I’ve had people say to me: “Yes Jesus was a great moral leader who said some pretty good things which have been generally useful as a framework of a good life. But miracles!!

Surely this kind of thing has to be in the realm of allegory - parable - fable - a story which points to a moral truth.

As such they are acceptable - but that Jesus actually walked on water - stilled the storm - healed with a word - raised the dead to life - you have to be barking mad to believe that.”

This view is made more credible when we consider that each of the miracles does have this element of parable in it - the miracle is often the parable. It deserves our attention because this is one of the ways God speaks to us.

Simply to marvel at the miracle and ignore what it tells us by way of the parable, is to turn the life of Jesus into some sort of one man circus. Such seven day wonders die as quickly as they appear.

We know well enough that sensation lasts as long as whatever causes it, is present, and evaporates as soon as that cause is removed.

The only on-going life it has is confined to those moments when memory enables us to relive an occasion, and it is always to a much reduced degree.

The Son of God did not come to earth to amaze a generation of Jews, He came to bring a message to His children, a message of the Father’s love.

You may recall that the miracles were generally performed for the eyes of the inner group. Jesus tried to play down the extraordinary and amazing powers that He had, because He knew the fickleness of sensation.

You remember when He healed lepers He said: "Tell no-one of this but go and show yourself to the Priest."

At times when the crowds were agog at something He did, He removed Himself and went off to another place.

If you want to debunk the miracles of Jesus or explain them away as being just stories with some ethical or moral teaching as their sole purpose, you will find yourself with many friends and you can tell yourself that you are not barking mad, but a sensitive rational human being, and that makes you feel good.

You should realize though, that you are pinned down (as it were) fenced in, preventing you from having any spiritual perception as far as Jesus is concerned. This seriously inhibits you from considering whether Jesus is the Son of God. Your earth-bound intellectual processes won't allow it.

One of Jesus' great messages to us, is that a Christian walks by faith, not by sight.

As we know faith can have no place in the mind of the material rationalist – it's a contradiction in terms.

When Jesus said: "We walk by faith not by sight" He didn't mean we give up all rational thought.

Like it or not we live on this earth, and God has provided us with the intellectual tools to do it.

We use the same basic logic as everyone else - believer or non-believer. This is how God has made us and it is good.

There's nothing wrong with having a certain degree of agnosticism as a precursor to faith.

The word agnostic means one who doesn't know - he or she is not an atheist.

It comes from the Greek word 'gnosis' which means knowledge.

This healthy degree of agnosticism that I am talking about enables one to stand back and consider, with a view to asking the question (as the disciples did) ; "Who is this?"

When you do this you might find, to your surprise, that it is not just a matter of weighing up one set of evidence with another, but that God is calling you to take the path of faith and to believe.

This is certainly my situation, though it was only much later that I came to recognize it.

Is Jesus the Son of God? - The incarnation of God Himself ? - God present in the form of a human being?

The uncomfortable truth is that at some point we have to make up our minds about that.

You might hear somebody say (with a certain amount of pride) "I've got an open mind on such matters".

Well, an open mind as a permanent state is about as satisfactory as an open mouth. It is no mind - it'll lead you nowhere.

The disciples of Jesus in the boat said: "Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

This is the degree of agnosticism I am talking about.

"Who is this?"..... it's our question too, and our answer is the thing that determines our entire attitude to the Gospel and subsequently to our lives.

The identity of Jesus is the paradigm - it determines our interpretation of everything about the faith.

You think about it - if God did inhabit this world in human form for a time, would we expect that His presence would not be surrounded by wonders that are beyond the scope and understanding of ordinary people? I frankly can't see how that could be.

In the event of you wanting to get rid of the miracles from the Gospel you can do this in one of three ways - or perhaps all three.

1. You can dismiss them out of hand as irrational, superstitious nonsense. You'd have to be mad to believe them.
2. You may say they are merely the product of the Jewish propensity for story-telling. In the telling they have become legends and in this day and age you can't take them seriously.
3. They are really just parables - nothing more.

Well, you can do that if you want to, though I would suggest that you really can't honestly take any view until you have asked the big question: "Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey Him."

I have to confess to being, in some people's estimation, barking mad. I do believe that Jesus was God in human form; I do believe that He performed the wonders and miracles that we read about; I do believe He healed the sick and raised the dead. I see in these things not just some trick, but the power of God which ordinary humans cannot match and too often refuse to understand.

Some years ago I was attending some memorial lectures and was very moved to hear a highly respected physicist speaking about the raising of Lazarus. He said there was no doubt Lazarus had died. Jesus had waited several days before He went to console Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha.

He described how the creator of life - the power over all life - stood before the entrance of the tomb and called a dead man back to life.

The clue to all this was that this man of science believed in Jesus.

Well, I believe it too. I believe in the Christ, the eternal "Son of the Father"; the second person of the Trinity, as I know most of you do too.

Jesus did calm the storm - but only after the disciples put their faith in Him - only after they came to Him and appealed to Him.

This opens up to me, I believe, so much of reality that I wouldn't otherwise know. The things that Jesus said are the truth. There is no greater authority.

When Mary, the sister of Lazarus, came to Jesus she said: "Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask of the Father He will give it to you."

Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and I am life, he who believes in me though he die yet shall he live.....do you believe this?" And Mary said "Lord I believe that you are the one sent from God." Implied in that is whatever you say it is true.

Jesus also said just before His death on the cross: "I go before you to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am, you may be also."

"He who believes in me though he die, yet shall he live."

"I will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also."

How marvelous is that? - and there's so much more.

But what of the parable in this incident of Jesus stilling the waves? It is a simple and straightforward one.

Certainly at that time, and in fact writers and poets and people generally in all ages, have seen in the sea, an excellent illustration of life. Life, like the sea, has its grandeur and its serenity; it has its storms and its calm; its terror and its beauty.

Bishop Trevor Huddleston who fought valiantly against apartheid in South Africa and was thrown out of the country for his efforts, wrote a book about it. He titled his book with words from a poem by G K Chesterton. Huddleston could see the horror and the misery that was to come as this human abomination was taking shape.

The poem began:

"I give you nought for your comfort,  
Yea nought for your desire  
Save that the sky grows darker yet  
And the sea rises higher."

Again the sea is the ideal parallel

One of my great interests in life from the time I was a school boy was sailing, and I know what it is like to be thirty miles off shore in the middle of the night in a full gale - winds gusting at fifty five knots and waves as high as houses. It isn't comfortable I can tell you. One is reminded how small we are against the power of the sea.

Prayer is natural and spontaneous.

I also know the beauty of the calm that usually follows - and did in this case when we came into port at Kangaroo Island, as the sun was coming up.

You too know these feelings though you may never have associated them with the sea.

A man told me that when things get too much for him he would go into the church and read the second collect from evening prayer - the collect for peace - and he would be calm again.

“O Lord who art the author of all peace and lover of concord in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: defend us thy humble servants” - - and so on. That settled him and put things in perspective for him.

Perhaps a greatly loved son or daughter is making a right mess of his or her life, especially if bad company, or drugs, or alcohol are involved - it breaks your heart.

Where do you find your peace - your miracle?

Where do you look - to whom do you appeal?

There's only one that I know.