

Combating the Relativization of Scripture

Lesson Six The Battle of the Narratives

Texts: Mark 4:35 – 41; Matthew 8:23 – 27; Luke 8:22 – 25

BASIC CONTEXT:

1. Jesus and His disciples are on a small boat on the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly a “furious squall” (Mark 4:37) came up.
2. This situation helped to induce great fear in the disciples.
3. Jesus Himself was asleep in the stern and undisturbed by the great storm.
4. The disciples, in their concern for their lives, awakened the Lord and begged Him to do something about it.
5. The Lord’s reaction was to calm the storm and then to issue a rebuke to them regarding their state of fear.
6. He asked them two questions in order to illicit a certain type of reasoned response from them. These questions were not about the storm but rather about their psychological condition of exaggerated fear.
7. He asked: “Why are you so afraid?” and “Do you still have no faith?”

RELATIVIZATION INDEX:

The design of the lesson is to now link or index the nine or more suggested categories of relativization to the personalities in the passage, and note the results. By way of review, the categories of relativization are: EXPERIENCE, HUMAN INTELLIGENCE, TEMPORAL VARIABLES, COMMUNITY, HISTORY, CULTURE, RACE, TIME, and DESIRE/AMBITION.

APPLICATION TO MARK 4, MATTHEW 8, LUKE 8

At least one source or form of relativization can be detected:

FEAR:

- (a) The disciples were in a well-known danger. That is, well known to any experienced fisherman.
- (b) There was a great deal of physics washing across the deck of their small vessel. Human beings live within more or less well-established tolerances. The disciples' fear was legitimate, they believed, given the circumstances.
- (c) Consequently, they awakened the Lord to beseech His intervention so that they might be spared drowning (Mk. 4:38).
- (d) Life is a precious substance and we place a high value upon it in most cultures.
- (e) The five senses of each one of the disciples were acutely engaged in this situation. The sensorium became the basis for comprehension of the event. This response is routine for all human beings.
- (f) But Jesus did not share their logic regarding the sense of immediate and catastrophic danger. The Lord reflected upon the fact that His presence with them on the deck did not in any way ameliorate their fear. None of the previous words, teachings, nor promises had any effect on their interpretation of the event.
- (g) **THEY WERE AS VULNERABLE AS EVER!** The Son of God was asleep on the stern, yet these men could not deal with the ever-present factor of fear. Apparently the disciples had not suffered a change of understanding of time and space relative to God.
- (h) The application for us is immediate. Does fear have a way of relativizing the grammatical structure of the word of God? We have been given promises by the Lord Himself. So, are those promises made quite relative to the facts of space and time, or are they set above such things?

THE CREATION OF THE NARRATIVE:

- (a) Let's analyze what had to be going on in the mind of each disciple. Each one of these men was busy creating a narrative about this unsettling event in which they were trapped. One can say trapped, because for them unaided there was no way out.
- (b) And so it is... one can often feel trapped inside of the dynamics of events and know that one can exercise no power over the situation.

- (c) Here is the nature of the narrative the disciples created during this crisis. They said something like this: “We are in serious trouble. We have all seen storms just like this before and we know of fellow fishermen who have fallen victim to them. Here we are and this time our necks are in the noose! Unless something happens soon we are all going to drown!”
- (d) We human beings always create narratives just like that when in dire straits and when we are uncertain of the outcome. If the outcome that we think is going to come about is disastrous, then it is possible to collapse in the neutralization of fear.
- (e) But they also created a narrative about Jesus Himself. The Lord was obviously unconcerned about the storm even after He was awakened. The disciples said to Him: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” (Mk. 4:38)
- (f) The Lord’s apparent dismissal of the danger was a matter of complete surprise to them. It was clear to them that He should have been equally concerned as were they. But clearly He was not. That must have meant that He didn’t care.
- (g) This was because Jesus had created a very different narrative!
- (h) Now this has to mean that “faith” (Mk. 4:40) has everything to do with the creation of the narrative that results. The Lord said that their narrative was faithless! In other words, the way they thought about the event, the way they spoke about the event, and their behavior in the middle of the event were without faith! All of this was betrayed by the appearance of their narrative.
- (i) Everybody creates narratives around the clock if we are conscious. These narratives are about all of the things of life in which we are involved. What is more, apparently, we can not help but do this. We are going to create narratives about every event as it unfolds.
- (j) Jesus instructs us all here in these passages indicated that we should create narratives *according to our faith* in the reality of and the power of God.
- (k) We are, therefore, in THE BATTLE OF THE NARRATIVES!
- (l) Within each us there can rage a battle between narratives regarding all aspects of life. One or the other type of narratives will emerge as preferred and influential.

- (m) This is documented thoroughly in both the Old Testament and in the New: Numbers 13 and 14 – The Israelites created the narrative of unbelief while Joshua and Caleb created the narrative of faith. Second Corinthians 1 – Even the Apostle Paul succumbed to the narrative of faithlessness during the encounter in Asia. Of course, he reports that he learned much from that occasion.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISCOURSE:

The disciples had the ability to choose between two types of discourse:

- (a) A DISCOURSE THAT TRIES TO RELATIVIZE SCRIPTURE. The correspondence here is that the disciples were in the presence of the Son of God who was with them on the boat. The Lord had told them of their place in His mission; and they could not fulfill their part in that mission and die that moment on the Sea of Galilee in a storm. So we learn that their personal fear and their ability to create narrative demonstrated their lack of belief in Jesus and in the words that He previously brought to them. In other words their experience of the storm served to relativize the word of God.

The creation of the narrative will either be a manifestation of true faith in God and in His promises, or it will be a narrative that only reveals the spiritual condition of prevailing confidence in human experience.

- (b) A DISCOURSE SHAPED BY THE REVELATION OF THE LORD. The disciples were expected by Jesus to emit a very different personal narrative regarding the event. They should have said something like this: “The Lord of all things is here with us on this small vessel. How is it possible to be lost while such a One is here as our teacher, leader and protector? Surely Jesus is the master of all time and space and we, in spite of appearances, are quite safe.” The disciples created a narrative, individually and collectively, that relativized even the presence of God.

This means that the power to create narrative will certainly overwhelm one thing or the other. Narrative can overtake faith in God, the expressed will of the Lord, the revelation itself, and our best inclinations. Or it can subvert our personal weaknesses by causing us to rise above our own limitations.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. From the first lesson on relativization, describe how in Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve must have created a narrative about their situation. What would have been the elements of that narrative?
2. From lesson two, how did David in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21 show that he created a narrative about numbering the troops? What were the elements of that narrative?
3. From the text in lesson three, found in John 11:1-46, what narratives do we see operative? What elements would they have included?
4. From lesson four (whose texts were 2 Kings 20:1-11 and Isaiah 38:1-22 that dealt with the illness of Hezekiah) what narratives are apparent? What would those narratives have sounded like?
5. Describe the narratives we see in Acts 17:16 – 34, which was the text under consideration in lesson 5.
6. In lesson 6, we discussed the relativizing power of fear. Do you see any other of the nine relativizing factors operating in our texts: Mark 4:35 – 41; Matthew 8:23 – 27; Luke 8:22 – 25 ?
7. Think of a situation that you're currently facing, in which relativizing facts would be powerful against your devotion to a Scriptural mindset. What kind of narratives have you created in describing this situation to:
 - ❖ Yourself?
 - ❖ Those closest to you, such as spouse or best friend?
 - ❖ To the Lord, as you've described the situation in prayer?
8. How would you counsel a good, godly friend to create a narrative about a similar situation in his or her life?