

Combating the Relativization of Scripture

Lesson Seven The Battle of the Narratives (Part 2)

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

BASIC CONTEXT:

1. In our texts, Jesus has calmed the storm and the disciples have revealed their lack of faith in Him. The Lord rebukes them for the shortfall in their belief.
2. The narrative development that comes to light in these passages is the reflection of their lack of trust in who Jesus is.
3. Their experience has overtaken their understanding of the identity of Jesus. In addition, for the disciples, the realities of time and space have relativized the power of God.

RELATIVIZATION INDEX:

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

The application of Mark 4, Matthew 8, Luke 8:

1. THE COMMUNITY OF DISCOURSE AS A RELATIVIZING FACTOR:

- (a) Often people refer to what is termed THE COMMUNITY OF DISCOURSE. The term describes the way that a majority of people tend to think, as a group, about significant aspects of life. It does not have to be so, but usually the community of discourse runs counter to revealed or biblical wisdom.
- (b) The community of discourse is formulated over much time and with the consent of human lived experience and human wisdom.
- (c) The disciples were all good men. But as Jesus began His ministry with them, it was clear that they were initially part of the community of discourse as they evaluated many things. For instance, the disciples'

reaction to the furious squall that suddenly came upon them was typical of people who had grown up learning about weather and the handling of small vessels on a body of water. The community of discourse would have contained human wisdom about how to deal with such events.

- (d) The fear and lack of faith displayed by the disciples on this occasion was a direct result of their immersion in the then-present community of discourse. They fully believed that their lives were in danger, and that time and space were going to be determinant in the event.
- (e) Later in the work of the disciples as heralds of the gospel, their message would run absolutely counter to the community of discourse. The world did not thank them for that. To the contrary-- the disciples of the Lord were treated with sometime cruelty, rejection, ridicule; and often general dismissal. This happened in large part because these men stood outside of, and in opposition to, the community of discourse.
- (f) Jesus Himself was the prime example of one who stood apart from and beyond the influence of such discourse. That is to say that the Lord was well beyond the control of a popularly-determined narrative.
- (g) It must be the case, then, that what Jesus calls "faith" in these passages listed implies the formation of a narrative; one that is itself above and beyond the limitation of the community discourse.
- (h) In Romans 16:5 the reader is introduced to a Christian named Epenetus. It is stated of this man that he was "the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia." Such a one does not join any bandwagon. Epenetus made a personal, private, and --one supposes-- a lonely decision. He received no encouragement from the surrounding community. And that community was bound together around, among other things, a discourse that was formulated apart from the word of God.

2. *THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NARRATIVE:*

- (a) The disciples while on the little boat and in the middle of the storm and in the full awareness of some danger constructed one of two possible narratives.
- (b) Construction of narrative must take place the following line:

There are TWO POSSIBLE BEGINNING POINTS for the narrative:

(b1) human lived experience ----- OR

(b2) the revelation of eternal truth-----

SECONDLY a narrative is created out of one or the other of those starting points.

SUBSEQUENTLY one must exert belief or disbelief in the narrative thus created.

- In this instantiation the disciples built a narrative out of experience and proceeded to ground their faith in that narrative.
- That narrative would have to have been part of the popular community of discourse.
- The community of discourse would express the exact same concerns and the precise same physical dynamics at work. It would, furthermore, pronounce the same outcome for the disciples – drowning.

FINALLY, these steps are then followed by action to be taken.

- (c) The Lord is disappointed with their response to this demonstration of space and time in that storm on the Sea of Galilee. Why? Because their reaction to all of this physical force congealed in the storm, as evidenced in their collective narrative, was not of faith.
- (d) Here is what this must mean: For those who have determined to live by faith and create narrative accordingly, then they must stand against the community of discourse as a matter of practice.
- (e) This is the reason why: The narrative of faith departs from the community of discourse because it originates outside the community. The narrative of faith begins with the revelation of God. The narrative of faith cannot begin-- by its very nature-- with the community of discourse.
- (f) The community of discourse in its essence is exclusively a product of human wisdom, and owes nothing to the revelation of the invisible part of reality. Any narrative that begins without the revelation of God is deficient. Such a narrative cannot be the expression of faith.
- (g) The community of discourse finds it difficult to comprehend the sense of the narrative of faith. This fact is put in evidence in Mark 4:41. In this verse, after Jesus had calmed the storm the text says “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him?’”
- (h) This jump from the community of discourse to the personal formulation of the narrative of faith in all circumstances is required. Jesus does not give any indication that this is optional.
- (i) One of the first notifications the world will have that one of its members has become a Christian is made through the narrative that is created. The narrative of faith is distinct from the community of discourse. There will always be a price to be paid for the creation of the narrative of faith. Proof

of this is the church in Thessalonica that endured “severe suffering” (1 Thessalonians 1:6)

- (j) Of course the creation of the narrative of faith expected of us by the Lord is a matter of conscious decision and conscious practice.
- (k) The disciples on the deck of the small boat were supposed to go about consciously constructing a personal and collective narrative of faith –in spite of the apparent dangers in the situation. Such an attitude would challenge their faith; and in our lives challenges ours.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISCOURSE:

- (a) **A DISCOURSE THAT TRIES TO RELATIVIZE SCRIPTURE:** The narrative uttered by the disciples fell short of the mark by eternal standards. In like manner, it is very easy for us to create the same kind of narrative while traversing the hazards of our existence. We will face all of the uncertainties of life, which is really no different than what happened on the deck that night, and we will emit a narrative created by proximity to the reality of God, His power and His promises; or we will remain firmly stuck in the community of discourse.

The community of discourse shows up at home, on TV, at work, at school, among friends and associates. Jesus stood against popular opinion wherever it violated the truth of God. Nor was Jesus reluctant about such confrontation. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord would proclaim “You have heard that it was said . . .’ But I tell you. . .” (Matt. 5:21,27,31,33,38,43) The narrative of faith supersedes our own personal desires, ambitions, and weaknesses; and summons us to a defense of the gospel, of the character of God and of the potential of human language.

- (b) **A DISCOURSE SHAPED BY THE REVELATION OF THE LORD.** The disciples of Jesus while on the deck could have determined to think about their circumstance in the light of who the Lord was and what they knew of His absolute sway over all things. Any narrative built on that basis would have adorned the gospel and served the greater purposes of the Lord. It is our great privilege to serve the risen Lord, at least in part, by how we create the narratives that we use everyday in the confrontation of apparent danger, the execution of our duties and responsibilities, and in the thought, speech and behavior that really determine our final identity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Briefly review the other 8 relativizing factors, other than community. List them and describe how each affects the community of discourse.

2. What does the story in Scripture about Jesus calming the storm say about the relationship between faith and what we're calling the community of discourse?
3. Do you know a modern-day Epenetus? How did his or her life demonstrate a battle against the community of discourse?
4. What are the four steps in the construction of a narrative? How does each one lead logically to the next?
5. How does Matthew 7:13-14 apply to the idea of the community of discourse?
6. In what ways does – or does not – your way of talking about situations reflect a narrative informed by Scripture as a starting point?
7. What situation are you currently facing in which it would be helpful to make a “flow chart” of the four steps in the construction of a narrative?