

SOUTH ASIA BIBLE COMMENTARY

General Editor

Brian Wintle

Theological Editors

Jacob Cherian, Finny Philip,

Havilah Dharamraj, Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj, Paul Swarup

Theological Advisors

**Ashish Chrispal, Ajith Fernando, Ashkenaz Asif Khan, Christina Manohar, David Samuel, Ivan Satyavrata,
Takatemjen, Godfrey Yogarajah**

ord will not remain a dead
context of the world.

s. In some parts of South
t dream. Even in regions
re often power cuts. So a
minent position where it
at its light fills the room.
community must not hide
or the glory of God in the
21).

idden is meant to be dis-
rlier statement that the
sealed in the parables he
to that statement by the
has ears to hear, let them
iples might have misin-
ing that they could keep
t, disclosing them only
ppened in the mystery
God's intent. He wants
; there is a correct time
will mark the turning
declaration (9:9; see

ith the measure you use,
has will be given more;
have will be taken from
itute a call to be faith-
e who are faithful will
ies, while those who
faith. They challenge
being successful in

Asia farmers depend
echnology. Although
rowing plants, they
e harvest is depend-
nlight and natural
familiar situation to
God partners with
:17).

f God (Luke 8:11),
od's work in this
ings of this world
in building God's
without us. Paul
paphor when he told
planted the seed,
aking it grow" (1

We are to be partners with God, discovering and accept-
ing our role in the work he has in hand. For example, when
it comes to evangelism, we cannot make the seed of the
word grow in someone's life. That is God's task. But we are
called to do the work of faithfully scattering the seed and
caring for the harvest. The coming of God's kingdom is a
mysterious, sovereign work of God.

4:30-34 THE MUSTARD SEED. South Asian cooks know that
even a small amount of mustard adds taste and flavour to
bland food. Cooks in Israel knew this too. Although they
used a different kind of mustard seed, there was a similar
contrast between small size and large result. The mustard
seed was the smallest of the seeds planted by farmers, but
grew rapidly into a large plant, reaching a height of about
three metres (ten feet). Christ's point was that we should
not look down on things that have small beginnings. The
kingdom that was beginning with his small group of follow-
ers in Galilee would grow and spread (**4:31-32**; see also
Ezek 17:23).

Similarly the good we do may seem small but may have
great consequences. Many schools, hospitals and hostels
had very small beginnings but have grown into huge move-
ments offering care, love, peace and justice. This is the
ultimate purpose of God's kingdom in this world. It is to be
a source of hope and shelter for all.

Jesus used these parables to communicate the message
of his kingdom so that people could understand as much
as they were able (**4:30,33**). The disciples, however, were
being trained for leadership and so to them *he explained
everything* (**4:34**).

4:35-5:43 Miraculous demonstrations of power

Having taught the people about the kingdom of God in his
parables, Jesus went on to teach his disciples more about
who he himself is by demonstrating his power over the
natural and spiritual forces that can destroy life.

4:35-41 JESUS' AUTHORITY OVER NATURE. Ministry is never
static. At times Jesus needed to shift from a crowd-based
ministry to a place where he could be alone with his dis-
ciples. Thus his decision to *go over to the other side* of the
Sea of Galilee was not just about a change of place, it was
also about giving his close followers a chance to experience
God's power over nature (**4:35-36**).

The Sea of Galilee (also called the Sea of Tiberias or the
Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1; John 6:1) is twenty-one kilo-
metres (thirteen miles) long and eleven kilometres (seven
miles) wide. It lies well below sea level and is subject to
violent storms when winds funnel through the surrounding
hills and stir up the waters. In 1992, for instance, a storm
sent three-metre (ten-foot) high waves crashing into the
modern town of Tiberias. Something similar happened while

Jesus and his disciples were crossing the lake. *A furious
squall (windstorm) came up and waves broke over the boat, so
that it was nearly swamped* (**4:37**). Jesus, who was probably
exhausted after a long day of teaching, was fast asleep.
His terrified disciples *woke him* up with the first of the four
questions that are key to this incident: *Teacher, don't you
care if we drown?* (**4:38**).

Jesus responded to their fear and calmed the storm
(**4:39**). Then he asked them the second key question: *Why
are you so afraid?* (**4:40a**). It was not that they doubted his
care for them, but rather that their fear paralysed them,
leaving them powerless and wrecking their chances of
survival.

We all understand the fear of physical danger, but we
also need to recognise the existence of other types of fear
that are deeply rooted in our cultures. In South Asia, fear is
also experienced when there is any challenge to the family,
community, accepted myths and oral traditions. Such chal-
lenges can cause great stress and anxiety.

The third question in this story captures Jesus' chal-
lenge to the disciples: *Do you still have no faith?* (**4:40b**).
Our faith should come first, not our fears.

The disciples did not answer the question, for they were
now experiencing a different kind of fear, a blend of terror
and awe, as they asked the fourth question: *Who is this?*
(**4:41a**). This same type of fear would seize them when they
saw Jesus walking on water (**6:50**), at the transfiguration
(**9:6**) and at the empty tomb (**16:8**). These were all times
where they became aware that they were in the presence of
one who has divine powers.

This awareness would have been driven home not only
by the calming of the storm but also by the words Jesus
used. *Be still* echoes Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that
I am God" (**4:39**). Jesus' power over *the wind and the waves*
would have reminded them of God's power when he parted
the waters of the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to escape
slavery in Egypt (**4:41b**; Exod 14:21-29). Some of them
might also have remembered that the churning waters of
the sea had often served as a metaphor for the threaten-
ing chaos from which God delivered his people (Pss 65:7;
68:22; 89:9; 104:7; 106:9; 107:23-29).

Jesus used this opportunity to teach his followers that
his power and authority transcend even nature and natural
laws. We need to remember this and rediscover God's pres-
ence in Jesus Christ in the midst of the storms of life.

5:1-20 JESUS' AUTHORITY OVER EVIL SPIRITS. Jesus' authority
was constantly challenged by evil in various forms. This is
demonstrated by an incident that took place on the other
side of the Sea of Galilee in *the region of the Gerasenes*
(**5:1**; 4:35). This was part of the larger area known as the
Decapolis (**5:20**), from the Greek words for "ten towns". The
majority of the population there were probably Gentiles,