

Recognising Christ or not

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] If you do have a Bible with you, turn back please to Mark's Gospel, chapter 6, and to the verses we read entitled, Jesus Walks in Water, Then Jesus Healed the Sick in Ganesh at verse 45 of chapter 6 of Mark's Gospel.

I wonder how many of us this morning woke up thinking that coming to church, opening the Bible, praying, praising God, the Word preached would change us.

I wonder how much of it many of us thought that learning about Jesus, that we come not just to church, but when we open Scripture, when we live our lives, that we look for this living Savior, Jesus Christ, to transform us into changes so that we come into a building one way, maybe for a worship service, we look to go out slightly different, because we've met through His Word and through the Spirit among us, the living God.

And we know that that's the purpose of Mark's Gospel. We know he's there to present Jesus to us. We've seen that so much in the last few weeks, that he's there giving us a picture of Jesus and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

And it does seem that he's in a hurry to do that, because he's giving us a quick flash run through of Jesus' life rumbling towards the cross, which is so important in our understanding and obviously in Mark's understanding as well.

[1 : 28] And he moves from one situation quickly to another so that we come to a situation like this. And the first word is immediately, immediately Jesus moved on. There's something happening.

There's always, He's always on the move, and Mark is keen to get that across. And it's foundational truth for all of us. Now this is, it's not simply Jesus walking in the water, there's the little section after that about healing the sick.

But the miracle of Jesus walking on the water is in many ways, it's probably the most famous and most well-known miracle of Jesus. Probably also the one that's most caricatured as being entirely unbelievable and a bit ludicrous and maybe at best a symbol of something that Jesus was doing.

Of course, we recognize and see that what we have here is recorded as cold fact. It's not recorded in any other way by Mark and it's within the historical context that we have these words.

But I think as a result, it's one that's very, it's highly misunderstood by, sometimes by us and those who would seek to caricature it as being a bit ridiculous.

[2 : 45] It's really important theologically and practically for us. So I want to do for just for a little while this morning, slightly different. I want us to join with the disciples for a few moments and think about them and what's happening with them.

If you remember, they have had a really long day in verse 30, we're reminded of what they've been experiencing, the apostles returned to Jesus, told them all they had done and Jesus said, come away and rest for a while, you're tired, you've been busy, everything has been hectic.

And then of course, instead of getting away to rest, thousands of people come to hear about Jesus and we get the miracle of the five thousand. So it's been a long day for them, they're tired, but they're probably buzzing as well a little bit about what's happened.

What a feed! That was amazing! Five thousand men, probably about ten thousand people. Did you see that? We only lost in fishes and Jesus fed everyone. That's going to be great being with Jesus like this.

We'll get all our food with and he said, don't take any food with you, don't take any money. No wonder! If that's the kind of miracle that's going to, what am I, maybe next time he's going to give us some cake and some pudding, something really exciting as well.

[3 : 57] And he's so popular, do you see the crowds? Do you see the people that were coming? It's amazing. It's going to be caught up in that tremendous popularity, the surprises he'll give us.

So let's, sorry, this is cracking again. Let's get ready for bed now. It's the evening. Let's lie down. And then Jesus comes up to them and says, no, wait a minute, wait a minute guys.

I want you to go ahead of me. Go ahead of me, get into the boat and go to Bethsaida. Head out and leave.

Jesus, we're tired. It's been a long day. Jesus said, I'll catch you up, I'm not coming. Can we not sleep first? Can we not get a bit of rest? Jesus, the wind direction is not even that great for sailing, but anyway, they do it.

But for a few hours, it's a complete nightmare. They're absolutely exhausted. You can think what they're going through. Why on earth is Jesus thinking about?

[5 : 05] Why on earth did he make us come overnight in this late night in this darkness in the boat? Why isn't he here? I mean, at least the last time that we were in a boat, he was here, even though he was sleeping and yet he calmed the storm and it was remarkable.

Does he think we can calm the waves now? That's beyond a joke. It's impossible for us to be here. It's 3 a.m. We're blown completely off course.

I don't understand what Jesus is doing and I hate the sea. I hate this. So they have this kind of struggle. The waves are battering against them.

They've got aching limbs. It's dark. They're in the unknown. And Jesus comes walking towards the boat on the water. What in the world is going on?

They're terrified. Are they going to die? Is this a sea demon that's come up to frame them? And then Jesus speaks to them. He says, it is I.

[6 : 02] Do not be afraid. And all fear is gone from them. And in verse 51, we have these words that were told that they were utterly astounded.

Double superlatives are being used there. They were exceedingly, abundantly amazed. God almost doesn't have the words to express and explain what they experienced.

This time Jesus didn't even command the waves. He just simply walked back into the boat, climbed into the boat and the waves and the wind calmed down.

And then they land, of course. They've been blown off course. They land in a different place. But amazingly, the crowds are gathering again. There's no mobile phones, but the words seem to have got round very quickly, nonetheless that Jesus was there again.

And this phenomenon who comes and this healer, and he comes to them, and they come with all their sick, and they come with all their needs.

[7 : 07] And he heals them. He lets them touch his cloak. It's quite incredible. And maybe sometimes we say, if only we could see these mackles.

If only we could see this power. And yet, as Mark goes on in the following verses and chapters to describe the disciples, he reminds us that even then they didn't get who Jesus was and what he was really trying to say to them.

And they were lost for genuine understanding. In verse 17 of chapter 8, Jesus said, I think I've read this before, your hearts are hardened.

Don't you understand? Have you not seen? Have your ears not heard? Don't you remember when I broke the five loaves and how many basketfuls were taken up? And then also the feeding of the 4,000.

And he said, do you not yet understand? They simply didn't understand. And we know that, don't we, from the on going, I'm dipping forward a little bit just for a moment. But they battled and struggled with unbelieving hearts.

[8 : 15] They misunderstood Jesus and his mission. When the time came at the cross, at the crucifixion, at the trial, he all ran away. Peter denied him. Judas betrayed him.

And what about the crowds? The crowds here that see so much, that come up with so much apparent faith to Jesus for him to do this amazing healing work. They flocked to him on both sides of the Sea of Galilee.

Is it superstitious reverence? Do they see him as some kind of magic man, wonder worker? They all come to Jerusalem a few years later, a few months and years later, for the triumphal entry when he comes in.

And they claim him as their great king. Worship him. Christ may be of their own imagination. Because days later in their disappointment, they cry, Crucify Jesus Christ.

Crucify Him. So neither the disciples nor the crowds understand fully who Jesus is. So who is this Christ that we're talking about today that we worship?

[9 : 25] Because Mark wants us to know Him, to understand Him, to worship Him and allow Him to change our lives, allow Him to change and transform our hearts.

So if you remember last week with the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, it wasn't just a miracle that gave them full bellies. He wanted them to understand that he was the great God who was the bread of life.

It wasn't just about physical food. And he wanted them to understand his authority and that if he would feed them physically, how much more would he nourish them with the bread of life?

Man does not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God. Everything the Word of God says. And here it's not just about the calming of the wind, the releasing of the disciples from fear or even the healing of all who came to him to be touched by him.

It's something beyond the miracles themselves into the character of God himself and the character of Jesus as it's revealed here. And to do that, it's helpful to know a little bit about the Old Testament context into which this is written because it gives us a glimpse of what Jesus is doing here and what Mark is doing here also.

[10 : 41] Because that cultural and that Old Testament background is always important because for the Jew, the sea always represented chaos.

It represented something that was unruly, that couldn't be calmed, couldn't be tamed. And they had a genuine fear of it. Not many of them were great fishermen or great sea worthy people.

And Jesus, as before, is revealing his authority over creation and over the sea and in his Lordship and revealing his authority and his power. By walking on the water and by calming the wind, he's revealing who he is.

So you've got this revelation here, if only they would see it, if only we would see it, of an Old Testament, the Old Testament God.

That's what we have here. It's a revelation of Jesus as the great Old Testament God. We sang a little bit about God having power over the waves in Psalm 107.

[11 : 49] And Psalm 65, 68 says, Who formed the mountains by your power having armed yourself with strength, You stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of the waves, the tumult of the nations, the whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders.

So you've got these Psalms and you've got Job in Job chapter 9 speaking about God's mastery over the waves. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.

He's the maker of the bear and the irai and pleides and the constellations of the south. So you've got this great Old Testament picture that spoke about the kind of God that God was.

He was a God who was sovereign over the chaos and the unruly nature of the waves and he walked on them. He stretched out the heavens and he walks on the waves of the sea. And Mark is saying, Look beyond the miracle here and look beyond what's being said and who is being revealed.

This is the Creator God in the flesh, very God and very man, yet one Christ. That is what is being, we're being reminded of here.

[12 : 55] And it's really important for us to always remember that, who Jesus is and what he means to us. There's a fantastic chapter in the Westminster Confession of Faith which speaks about this paragraph 2 of chapter 8.

The son of God, I'm going to read it. One of God, it's in a slightly up to date version. The second person of the Trinity is truly the eternal God, one substance, an equal with the Father. On the fullness of time he took on himself, the nature of man with all the essential qualities and ordinary frailties of man, except that he was sinless.

Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and the womb of the Virgin Mary out of her substance. These two complete, perfect and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in the one person of Jesus without being altered, disunited or jumbled.

The person Jesus is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man. Fantastic verse chapter paragraph that speaks of who Jesus is and what Mark is trying to get across.

And it's backed up further by what he says in verse 50. When he comes to them, he's going to pass them by and then he speaks to them because they're terrified and he says, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.

[14 : 15] Literally he's saying take heart, I am, do not be afraid. He's taking on, as he does elsewhere, that great Old Testament designation of God, the Savior, God, the Redeemer, the name of God that was revealed to Moses when Moses says, who will I say sent me to Egypt?

And God says, tell him I am, I sent you. The great I am, this great Lordship Yahweh, Jehovah God that's revealed in the Old Testament.

He's claiming that as he uses that title when he speaks, revealing his power over creation and channeled later into the healing signs also.

And there's maybe one further evidence here that Mark is linking and relating what's happening here to a revelation of an Old Testament God. And it's in the phrase that we have in verse 48.

He said in the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea he meant to pass by them. I don't know if you can remember an Old Testament reference to that.

[15 : 28] Someone God passing by. There's two very clear references and it's the same word that Mark uses here as is used in the Old Testament when God reveals himself first to Moses and then to Elijah in Exodus 33.

Moses, show me your glory and the Lord passes him by. And then in Kings 19, Elijah in the cave, you know, and God doesn't come in the earthquake and in the powerful evidence, he comes in the still, in the quiet one and he passes by and that's still small voice.

And so what we're being told here is that Jesus was passing by in the same way in revelation. He was revealing who he was to give them assurance.

That's interesting, isn't it, that Moses and Elijah, the same two Old Testament, great Old Testament prophets and leaders among their people. They stand with Jesus later on in the Mount of Transfiguration discussing his exodus, his departure.

This great, incredible, greater than Moses, greater than the King David, greater infinitely because he is the living God, monumental truth.

[16 : 44] So we have this revelation in this miracle of walking in the water. Mark is reminding us of who Jesus is, tremendously important.

But there's also, with that Old Testament context, there's a New Testament reality that we read about from the Westminster Confession that this God becomes one of us.

This God becomes one of us, yet without sin, but dependent on fellowship with the Father and on the power of the Holy Spirit.

What does he do after the feeding of the 5,000? He dismisses the disciples and he goes to pray. He goes to pray to his Father, went up a mountain to pray.

How often do we see that spoken of in the Gospels about who Jesus is and what he does? How often he prays? Prayer as the one who is fully man, yet without sin, is critical to him, critical for his ministry, for his miracles, for that spiritual perspective, for that he needed trinitarian family time.

[17 : 54] That's what he needed. He needed that reassurance, that voice that had come from the Father. This is my beloved son, who I'm well pleased. And it was his priority, even in the busyness of ministry life.

And there was no one really, it was in more demand than it was busier than Jesus, yet he left the disciples to go and prepare the way because he had to speak to his Father and he had to spend that time with him all the way to the cross, all the way to being the atoning sacrifice for our sin.

He prays the same prayer, Lord, not my will, but yours be done. Even on the cross in the sense of forsaking it, he's saying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He clings on in hope and trust. So we have the great Old Testament context of who is being revealed here as Jesus.

Jesus is God the Son and the New Testament reality that he's God the Son in fleshed who depends on a relationship with his Father and the Spirit of God.

[19 : 00] So briefly, what is the Holy Spirit teaching us? What do we take from a passage like this for our own lives to be transformed and to be changed? Well, it reminds us as we come, that Jesus is God and that Jesus has become one of us in order to redeem us.

There's no small thing. You're not insignificant. Jesus is certainly not insignificant. Our need is so great that it took God the Son to be born of the Virgin and to come and to be one of us in order to redeem us.

It's not insignificant truth. It's not truth we can take and change and mold and adapt. The disciples needed to learn it and they were slow to learn.

So do we. To quote Tim Keller, probably his most famous quotation and one of his most helpful, the Gospel says, you're more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, but more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope.

That's the Gospel message. That's the truth of the Gospel. Like God the Son went to hell and back on our behalf because that's where all of this Gospel is heading.

[20 : 14] It's heading to the cross and to the three hours on the cross and to his death and engravement and his resurrection and ascension for humanity to defeat death, setting us free from the fears and the anxiety and the guilt and the failure that cripples us in our lives.

Do not be afraid. I am. He keeps saying. And we, if we're honest with ourselves, very like the disciples, we too have hard hearts.

We remember what is being spoken of here again and again about discipleship. And I hope none of us for a moment point the finger at the disciples and say, what a wretched bunch.

And I slept. I was there. I would have believed it. I would never have disowned or betrayed Jesus, not at chance.

Just as we see in Adam and Eve, do we not see ourselves in the disciples who are much more unbelieving than we think we are? We struggle away on our own.

[21 : 22] We think we're good enough that we've got it. We've grasped things. I don't need to come to church and be changed and transformed. I think I've got a hold of it all. We struggle on our own and we moan about how tough it is doing God's will.

We wonder why He makes demands of us and why we're rowing away in life and where is Jesus? He's somewhere spiritual, useless to us, far away from our needs.

What on earth is God doing in our lives? Expecting our lives as Christians to be full of miracles that make it so easy, peasy, for us lots of cake and enjoyable things.

We see healing sometimes as something that's skin-deep and temporary. Just make me better, Jesus. He's our genie in a bottle. We rub the bottle and out comes the genie and gives us what we want.

We simply find ourselves overwhelmed then with fear because of our circumstances or sometimes because of the spiritual realities, because we've forgotten sometimes that He's wanting spiritual heart surgery on us.

[22 : 29] That's what He's looking for. That's what He speaks to the disciples, seeing these great miracles, being healed by Him, listening to His voice saying, don't be afraid. And He says in chapter 8, are you still so heart-hearted that you don't believe?

Do you still think it's all about surface realities and about miracles and flashing fireworks and bright lights? Do you not see that the gospel is about how I want to take and own your heart and transform your heart and renew your heart and redeem your heart?

Because we are heart-hearted. But isn't it great that it doesn't stop there? Isn't it great that Jesus gets us? Isn't it great that Jesus says here to them, even though they're terrified, even though they don't take assurance from the fact that He's passing them by in the water there?

They don't understand Him. He says, take heart. I am. Don't be afraid. Isn't it great? Isn't it so good that Jesus understands us far better than we appreciate and realise ourselves?

He takes our struggles. He sees them. He doesn't condemn them. He doesn't criticise them here. He doesn't take them on a theology course. He says, but don't be afraid.

[23 : 49] Do not have courage. He sees our struggles and He comes to us. You know, we're told earlier on that He sees their struggles from the land. He saw that they were making headway painfully.

He goes to them. That's the Redeemer. That's the message. That's the Messiah that we have. He is the one who gets us. He's patient, unbelievably patient, who loves us, who's always there for us.

And as we will go to Him, will bring us the words of assurance and comfort and strength to be transformed. Because, remember, this is not the end of the story of the disciples.

Great things happen as they see and know and understand more. And we can look back with our great privilege perspective, much more than they had.

And we can see God at work and open our own lives. And lastly, I'm sure there's many, many more things. This spirit may be teaching us or you, but the last thing I have is that His presence, Christ's presence, God's presence in our lives is everything.

[25 : 06] That's why Jesus kept going back to prayer, not only because of His great need as one dependent on the Spirit and in fellowship with the Father.

But He did it also as an example. If you ever feel that you've gone beyond that example and have risen above some kind of spiritual plane where you don't need to fall on your knees and cry out to the living God and pray, then you've gone some different direction because His presence with us is everything.

And that presence is found and known and experienced primarily in prayer. It's grasping. That's what we mean when we... What's the Bible mean when it says pray without ceasing? You mean we're always going to bow down our knees?

No, of course it doesn't. It recognizes the presence of God, the spirit of God in our lives and the reality of union with Christ, which is one of the great doctrines of the Bible, that in Christ we are through faith, we are united to Christ.

And prayer is the great expression of that. It's the great conversation that comes from our union with Christ. It's the company that we want. It's the dependence that we feel we need.

[26 : 15] Jesus Christ, the sinless one, is our great example of fellowship, divine fellowship, wanting the company of God simply for who He is, not just to be our genie in a bottle, not just to answer us in our need where we will be in great need of Him.

That is right, of course, but simply because He's beautiful. God is beautiful. He's our God, and we are to want His company and His presence in our lives.

He comes to us. He comes to us. Are we going to Him? Is that our priority? Is that our lifestyle? Is that the way that we think and live that we go to Him?

That when we see that at the end of a busy day, and there's another busy day coming, will our priority be I need that strength and that energy from the living God?

The title of this sermon was Recognising Jesus or Not. Do we recognise Him for who He is as the living God?

[27 : 24] Life, just as it was for the disciples and for Jesus, is really too busy, isn't it? And it might be too busy even doing the Lord's work. Yeah, amazing.

Maybe the demands of obedience. Whatever it might be, life is so terribly busy. And so we have no time. Time for everything else, but we just, we can't make time for prayer.

I'm sure Jesus understands. I'm sure it's fine. We'll just get by, He's done His work for us. I'm sure it's okay that we have no time. No time for prayer alone.

And certainly no time for prayer at city. No time for pleading before God as a people about our resources, about our spiritual needs, about our lostness, our emptiness sometimes.

No time for maybe that early morning, Zoom call on a Friday morning. So easy to make busyness, doesn't it? Our identity.

[28 : 24] When someone asks us how we are or what we're doing, what's the first thing we say? And I'm very guilty of this. I'm not preaching at anyone, by the way. Oh, I'm so busy.

That good. Pat me in the back. I'm so busy. I'm so busy doing the Lord's work. I'm so busy serving you all. So easy to make our identity in that, isn't it? So easy to say that that's what God will be happy with.

Because that's the way we think. We think we earn things before God and the busier we are, the more pleased God will be surely with us. Isn't that what so often we think, and yet to rest in grace is to say, I need Him more than anything.

I need His company more than anything. We need His company more than anything. So hard to row against the busyness of life without resting in the living God for strength and grace.

And to hear His gentle voice saying, it's me. Don't be afraid. It may be that we follow Jesus' example and hear His words of comfort and look to Him, not simply as obviously as an example, but as a redeemer.

[29 : 36] Let's take this Mark's Gospel. Maybe every week we're looking at it, maybe go home and read it right to crucifixion and to the burial and to the ascension, resurrection, ascension to remind ourselves of who Jesus is and His great love for us and His great arms being opened in salvation and redemptive power.

Amen. Let's pray. Father God, help us we pray to come under your truth and under your words and to be moved, to be transformed, to be changed, to be amazed, to grasp the double superlatives that Mark uses of the disciples' response to Jesus, even though it seemed to fizzle away so quickly.

And how often for us does it fizzle away quickly the mountaintop experience where we feel close to God and we feel His grace and His favour and how quickly we then descend into self-reliance and prayerlessness and struggle all over again.

I'm so grateful today that you're patient and gracious and long-suffering and kind and you understand us and you pour out, you fill us again and again and again when we seem to leak and be empty of your spirit and of your grace and goodness.

Have mercy on us we pray and bless us and transform us in your amazing living power. Amen.