

Darkness and Impossibility

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[0:00] We are going to turn back this morning for a study from the Bible from Mark's Gospel chapter 6 where we read from together.

We continue looking at high speed through the Gospel of Mark which was written to tell us about Jesus and to encourage us and challenge us about Jesus.

I think one of the interesting things about Mark's Gospel, I'm sure the whole of the Bible but maybe particularly in Mark and in his thinking, is a need for us when we read his Gospel to find ourselves being constantly realigned.

That's very true of the Christian life generally. The Christian life challenges us constantly to realign our lives, to see ourselves.

Mark's very concerned that we see ourselves as Jesus sees us, as God sees us. Also for us to see Jesus as he is.

[1:07] Not Jesus that we would like him to be or Jesus that we think that he is or Jesus that would be a fabled kind of Jesus but Jesus as he's presented. Every time we come to the Scripture, the living Word of God, and tonight we're going to look at the Bible and the authority of the Bible and why the Bible's got authority as God's Word in our lives and we're going to spend a bit of time looking at that.

But as we look at the Bible and Mark's Gospel in this chapter, we'll always find that we're surprised by Jesus. We're surprised by who he is.

We're surprised even though we may have read the chapter hundreds of times before. We'll be surprised at what we might find. And I'm surprised when I go to study Scripture again, how much better Jesus is than my understanding of Jesus and how often, how much worse I am than my thinking of myself.

And so the Bible is challenging us and these passages are challenging us to be realigned, realignment constantly around the presentation of Jesus and the presentation of ourselves.

And the aim of that is transformation, that our lives are transformed, that we meet with Jesus through the Word and by faith and he transforms us as Christians.

[2:28] And if you're not a Christian, that you'll be challenged by the presentation of Jesus in the Gospel and by the authority of that. And the mirror kind of sometimes that the Bible becomes to our own heart and soul and what we're like.

So Jesus is presented and really what I'm going to do just in this chapter, I'm going to tap into one or two different things about Jesus in this chapter and I'm just going to lay it before you there quite simply.

That Jesus is presented in this chapter and Mark is presented in a certain way and I'm going to point out some of the different things and I hope that they might be an encouragement and a challenge to us in our lives.

The first thing I want to say is maybe not what you would expect from verse 3. I didn't read this but it was when Jesus was in his own hometown of Nazareth and he's preaching and he's doing miracles.

He can't do many miracles because of the lack of faith and the people who are looking at him, they're grumbling and complaining and they're saying, isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Harry's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?

[3:30] Aren't his sisters here with us? And they took offence at him. Jesus said only in his hometown among his relatives and his own house is a prophet without honour. And what I wanted to pick out just briefly from there is that Jesus is a strong man physically.

That's all I wanted to say. Jesus was, we're told there Jesus isn't this the carpenter? And what I want to stress is that Jesus here is, what we're told about Jesus here is that he's a blue collar worker.

He's a strong guy. He's a DIY man. He was a carpenter. He was an important trade in his hometown. A carpenter would be someone who was an important blue collar worker, someone who was able to do other physical tasks.

He was physically strong. He was technically gifted. He was very probably from a fairly early age, the breadwinner of the home, of the family. And so he's a strong, physical blue collar guy.

And I want to stress that because so often we've got a pansy kind of idea of Jesus. It's a soft, tippy-tappy kind of ethereal white dressed man that's for saps and for people who are not really, or they isn't a strong and real man.

[4:46] And I think that's something we need to disabuse ourselves of and we recognize. And it's so often, I mean years ago, I probably said this hundreds of times, when we're doing missions as a young Christian, we used to do missions and we'd be knocking people's doors in different places.

And usually very often the response you got when you knocked on the door and said, you're about to mission to the church, you want to share the gospel. And if it was a guy who answered the door, the guy would say, hold on, I'll go and get my wife.

And that was it, you see, it was because it was kind of women's stuff, the gospel. And it's because they're kind of soft and gentle, meek picture of Jesus that somehow he wasn't a real man and he wasn't a real person at that level and yet he was a working breadwinner, a carpenter.

And it's great to have men and women in the church and it's important, church isn't just religion and Christianity and the gospel in relationship with Christ, it isn't just for women.

It is for women, absolutely, but it's also for men. And that's a good thing. And it's great to have that mixture. And it's great to be able to share that gospel with men as well as with women.

[5:59] That it's not as soft and insignificant and irrelevant thing to men in their lives as well as to women in their lives. Jesus is a strong man, by the way.

He was also an authoritative teacher. We recognize that from what they were saying in the early verses that he, you know, he spoke with authority.

What wisdom has been given to him, we're told, in verse 2 and then in verse 8 that he goes to send the disciples out and he says to them, you know, take nothing for your journey, wear sandals but not extra tunic, whatever you enter a house, stay there till you leave that town if anyone will not welcome you, listen to you, shake the dust off your feet for a testimony against them.

So he's an authoritative leader also, authoritative teacher. That was even recognized by his opponents by the people who didn't like him. He said, well, who is he, but he does speak and preach with authority and he instructed his disciples and he sent them out and he did so with a great sense of authority to them.

He said, look, this is how you're to go and if people wouldn't listen to what you have to say in this message of repentance, move on, go to the next place. We don't have time to linger and to wait about.

[7:11] And so he speaks with great authority, reminding them and us of the solemnity of responding to the message of Jesus Christ and the solemnity of rejecting. I don't think for a minute this was a rejection which meant they could never hear again or never respond again.

But in the time in which the disciples had, they had to go out and share the gospel and move on from town to town. It's this whole kind of fast moving ministry of Jesus that's presented in Mark's gospel.

He was authoritative in what he said. But it's also really good to know that along with his authority, he was also a caring leader.

And we find that authoritative leader, caring leader. We find it in different places, but in the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand here in verse 31, he's sent out the disciples.

He's given them lots of work to do. It's energetic. And then they come together and there's a big crowd and it just seems to be relentless. And he says, look, come with me by yourselves to a quiet place in verse 31 and get some rest.

[8:12] So he's given his disciples work and he's spoken to them with authority. And he also understands the demands that he's making on them and says, look, you need to rest sometimes. He's strong, but he's sensitive, sensitive to their needs.

Great leadership. Isn't that great leadership? Leadership that we should mimic, leadership that you should pray for in the congregation here and in the church that is both strong but also caring.

And he knew himself their needs and he knew that they needed to rest. And he knows our needs and he knows he can't push us too far. And sometimes as Christians, we're struggling with the Christian faith and it's a battle for us.

And he says, well, just take time, pull back. It's difficult. Pull back and take a rest. Stop doing what you're doing. The church will survive without you. You know, the Christian faith doesn't rest on you.

Just take a step back. Take a rest because he's a caring, unsensitive leader and recognizes our need for quietness and being with him. But himself, while being authoritative, strong and caring, he himself is a hugely available leader that is presented here.

[9:23] Because he himself is this intense, concentrated, short ministry which is always being demanded. Demands are always being made of him.

And so here we've got this account of not being able to eat and they try to go by themselves away in the story of the 5,000 in a solitary place.

But many come and saw them and recognize them and they ran on foot. You can imagine the guys are going across in a boat and all the crowd are running around the coastline to get to the other side first and there's, come on, Jesus is going to be there.

Let's go and hear him. So he doesn't get peace and quiet. And we're told that when Jesus landed and saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd so he began teaching them many things.

So while he himself understood the needs of his disciples, he wasn't willing to take the rest himself because he was available as a servant. This Jesus Christ, this Son of God, this glorious one of whom we've been singing, this resurrected Lord, the sovereign, infinite God who comes in the person of the Son is a servant, not a professional.

[10:38] He comes because there's great need and he sees that need and he looks with shepherd's eyes, shepherd of his day, shepherd that loved the sheep, was with the sheep, was to the sheep and he looked at them.

You know, he didn't say, oh, forgive me, give me a break. I've been working already, I've done more than my shift. He doesn't say that. He's available because he has great compassion and because he's the great shepherd of his sheep, the shepherd who wants to teach the crowds, even the crowds that Mark is sometimes quite cynical about in the Gospel.

You know, the crowds, it's always the crowds and then the disciples and the crowds come and go and the crowds like his miracles but they don't really like his teaching and then they end up of course crying to crucify him.

But here the crowds are Jesus' seasoner, the sheep without a shepherd and he wants to protect them and feed them and care for them and carry their young. You see, that great model of leadership.

Isn't it beautiful to see that, that glorious picture of who Jesus Christ is? Is it not magnificent, magnificent to see the children here on a Sunday morning and to be able to share their prayers?

[11:54] Is it not great that this is the kind of Savior that Jesus shows himself to be a Savior who is caring and who is protective and available to whom we can always go, to whom we can always pray with all the youthfulness of our prayers and the simplicity of our requests.

We can go to Him and He's always there. He's always available and that is our Savior and also I believe our example as Christians and as leaders.

But maybe more specifically, there's two things I want to pick out in terms of what is described about Jesus here and that's in the two miracles.

The one of the feeding of the five, and you know these miracles so well, I'm not going to go into them in any depth whatsoever, but the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is a reminder to us here of the Jesus who is the great provider.

Now this isn't just a miracle, we don't read and say, well there's another miracle. Well that's another miracle. He did lots of miracles and it wasn't a great thing that he did miracles, to show his power, to show the kind of things he could do to feed the people.

[13:01] It wasn't just a miracle if we can talk in these terms, it wasn't just to feed the people. There's something greater, there's something deeper, more spiritual in what he's doing.

He does all these things of course, but it's a declaration of who he is. It's a declaration with a kind of Old Testament backdrop, where Jesus knew the Scriptures, Jesus knew his own Old Testament Scriptures.

He's the author of these and the Old Testament Scriptures have all been about preparing for the coming of this Jesus. And so there's this declaration of a Savior who is there to provide, who is there to give people nourishment, to give them what they need, both I think both in physical terms but much more significantly also in spiritual terms.

It does kind of recall some Old Testament miracles, miracle of the provision of manna. You know Moses takes the people through the desert and how are we going to survive this?

And God provides for the manna and they are provided miraculously with food throughout that journey in the desert. Elijah 1st King 17 is miraculously fed by ravens who bring him food.

[14:14] By God or by the angels in 1st Kings 19, where in his tiredness again that sense of God caring for Elijah having done great miracles in his tiredness, he's provided for miraculously by God.

Or Elisha with the widow's oil, when there's this miraculous provision, speaks of the providing God, the God who gives, the God who provides, or maybe even to spiritualize it, I hope that's not wrong to do so in Isaiah 55 where salvation is spoken of as the invitation come to all your thirsty, come to the waters, and you have no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without cost, why spend money on what is not bread and your labor what is not satisfied.

Listen to me, say eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. So this picture, this food picture which relates to the spiritual provision that God gives and it's as if this miracle of the feeding of the 5000, I'm not going to go into the mechanics of it or really the detail of it, but the reality of it that we take and accept is that it's speaking of a God who provides, that Jesus is the greater Moses, is the greater Elijah, is the God who has provided in the Old Testament in these ways and is the God who will provide in salvation.

There's also probably hints in it of the Lord's Supper in the sense that Jesus is directing the meal, he is the host as it were of the meal, he tells him to sit down, he gives thanks, he breaks the bread, he gives it to the disciples to distribute, it's so very like in a sense the Lord's Supper that he institutes at the Passover meal later on and that Lord's Supper which speaks about his own body and his own blood which is shed, take, eat, this is my body which is for you and that physical reminder, do you think, and this is speculation, you could throw it away, but do you think that some of these people who were in the crowd who later on became Christians who maybe watched the crucifixion and then responded on the day of Pentecost, I wonder if they thought back, Jesus did that earlier, he fed us before, he broke bread and he gave us and we gave thanks and it may have spurred in them this kind of mental picture of his own miraculous provision and it's interesting this glorious meal, this abundant meal, this meal with lots left over because he is an abundant God and he gives us far more than we need, he gives us much more because he is extravagant and he is glorious, it's set, it completely injures the position to Herod's meal in this chapter, I don't think meaninglessly or randomly, you know, this kind of depraved and debauched meal that Herod has which is a miserable reflection of celebration and of goodness where there's drunkenness and there's lust and then there's betrayal and murder, you know, where Herodias who's having an affair with Herod, nurses a grudge, you were told against John and wants him killed so that when her daughter dances seductively before a drunk king, he makes promises that he doesn't realise about or think about and she asks for John the Baptist's head in a platter.

So the great contrast between the ugliness of sometimes our celebrations and the way we do things without God and His amazing provision both physically and spiritually.

[18:24] But we also see that He craves fellowship Himself, He craves fellowship as God with His Father in verse 46. Again the busyness of His ministry, He goes with the disciples into a boat and then He dismisses the crowd and He leaves them the disciples and He goes up on a mountainside to pray.

And again it's that picture, we mentioned it on Wednesday night, this picture of Jesus Christ longing to be in the presence of the Father, this Trinitarian longing.

And it speaks to us just that He just longed to be in that place of prayer. The sacrifice, it means as if the sacrifice of His incarnation ripping Him as it were from the Father's breast.

And I wonder these times if He prayed and was tempted to return to His Father, what a guy, these guys, they reject me, they're not interested.

They just go home now. But certainly we know that it speaks of the cost to set us free, that He needed to be strengthened and encouraged and built up by the Father in prayer as He did this ministry on their behalf.

[19:44] And the last thing that I want to mention about Jesus as it's related to us here is again that He, who He is, that He's God in the flesh for us. So we've got another miracle, Jesus walking in the war.

Another miracle, He feeds people, He gives them bread and then He walks in water. The cause of much hilarity and laughter over the centuries, Jesus walking in the water. You know, who could ever walk in the water?

That's crazy, it's mental. But it's not written as mental, it's not written as fable, it's not written as myth, it's written in the context of a factual historical account of the Jesus who is a miracle worker because of who He is, because He is God.

And again, it's more than just, I'm God because I'm walking in the water. It's more than that, especially as we look again with the kind of Old Testament understanding of God being revealed right through that.

So here we have God, Jesus Christ, and He's gone up the mountain and said to pray, but He's praying with one eye open. That's good, isn't it? It's fine, it's good to pray with one eye open because He's watching the disciples as well.

[20:50] Obviously, He can see them in the lake, well, in the boat, in the lake, and they're struggling. They're straining at the oars and things are difficult. He saw the disciples straining on the sea-brain with one eye open.

And then we're told that about the fourth watch of the night, He went out to them walking in the lake. He was about to pass them by, not a terribly accurate translation, He passed them by, he's probably more accurate when He saw them walking in the lake.

They thought it was a ghost, they cried out, and then He goes on to say, take courage, it's high, don't be afraid. Now again, it's not a kind of Pythonesque farce, but the language that's used, where we told that He passed them by is a very significant language because it's the same language with Old, you know, as we look through Old Testament shadows, it's the same language that's used of God appearing to Moses in Exodus 33, where God passed by and revealed Himself to Moses and revealed His glory to Moses because Moses needed that because he was afraid.

It's the same kind of image that's used in 1 Corinthians, sorry, 1 Kings 19 of Elijah, when Elijah needed to see God and we're told that God passed by and His glory was real.

Remember, not in the earthquake, not in the hurricane, but in the gentle whisper, He passed by. And it's the same language that's used here of Jesus, He passed by.

[22:22] You know, we get the impression that He was about to walk past them. Is this if He was just going for a walk in the water and they go, oh, there's a boat, the disciples in it, and He just happened to be here. It's not like that at all.

There's something much more divine about this, is that He's passing by because He's revealing who He is. It's almost transfigurational. You know, the transfiguration where His glory is revealed, it's like that.

And you see, we recognize that because the disciples say, well, there's Jesus walking in the water, that's great, how did you do that? I don't like that. They're absolutely terrified.

They saw Him and they cried out and they were terrified because this isn't the kind of Jesus they thought, you know, that it was a kind of fancy magic man that could walk in water and that isn't as great. They were terrified because this was a revelation of Him as God.

And why can we have more assurance that that's the case? Well, again, it's because He says when He spoke to Him, He said, take courage. And what He literally says is take courage, I am.

[23:24] He said, take courage, I am. Now we know from the Bible that that is the same, translated, it's the same as Jehovah.

I am. It's the Old Testament revelation of the name of God. You know, it was given to Moses at the Burnabooge teller, tell them I am sent you. I am this Yahweh, the Jehovah name of God.

And so Jesus says here, they're terrified as they see Him walking by, this revelation of who He is. And He says, take courage, I am. God, don't be afraid.

And He does that because we're told here, it's explained that it's because they didn't understand about the miracle of the loaves, their hearts were hardened. And this is to help them understand who He is.

I know the best bit about this story is I am. This transfigured God who passes them a new reveals is going, what does He do?

[24 : 23] I love this bit. He climbed into the boat with them. King of kings scrambles into the boat to be with them, climbs into the boat.

This revelation of who He is and this glory is what a great picture and what great words, you know, don't be afraid, take courage. I'm coming into the boat with you. I'm going to be in your troubles.

It's just a picture of this God, this incarnation God. It's a picture of Philipians that we're going to sing at the end of the service today who made himself nothing, who climbs into the boat. He climbs into your boat, the struggles that you have, the difficulties.

He comes in, He is with us. This is a God that we're asked to trust in. Don't be afraid, He says, take courage. We're so afraid so often. So these are some of the pictures of Jesus that we're given here.

Now very briefly as we close, there's also pictures of ourselves. So we realign ourselves to the Jesus who's revealed, a Jesus who's authoritative, who is compassionate, who's caring, who's glorious, who is strong, who's a provider, who's a miracle, but who points towards His death and resurrection.

[25 : 35] But then ourselves, the people, and ourselves. It's no different, you know, people are no different. They're different culturally, different in time, but really we're all the same. And sometimes it's not pretty what the Bible tells us, but it only tells us because it's kind of like a diagnosis.

It wants us to point us towards the great healer, to the one who will give us forgiveness and hope and a future. So it's like the bad news of going to a doctor and being told you've got something wrong with you, but the good news of being told, well, we've got a cure.

It's in order, and it's not like that in the sense that the cure here is guaranteed because of His death and resurrection on our behalf. Just to understand our need, in other words, we'll never go and look for Jesus if we don't understand our need.

So we've got pictures of people here that remind us sometimes of ourselves, people who we saw before who take offense at Jesus. They took offense at Him.

They grew up with Him. They knew who He was, the people in Nazareth. They didn't have anything against Him. They couldn't say, this guy's a hypocrite. This guy's not really who He says he is.

[26 : 39] But they're offended that He's so wise and He can do miracles and yet He's the Son of Mary. In other words, He's so ordinary. They wanted a flash Savior.

They wanted more drama. They wanted someone who had credentials, not just a carpenter from Nazareth, not a blue-collar worker from Nazareth to be the Savior. They took offense at Him.

And that's the reality, isn't it, that we take offense at Jesus. And maybe today you're not a Christian and you take offense at the idea of a crucified and a resurrected Jew from 2,000 years ago as God and claims authority over your life and claims one day that He will meet you and be our judge.

We take offense at the message. We take offense at the exclusivity of the message, that there's one way that He says I am the way, the truth in the life.

And the Bible reminds us that that is how we are. We can easily take offense at Jesus because it's in our nature to be offended by God because of our sinful hearts.

[27 : 49] But more than that, we can reject Him. Jesus tells the disciples in verse 11, you will go and tell people about the Gospel, about Jesus and about the message of repentance, you will be able to do great things and people will not listen to you, they will reject you.

So great miracles were done and still they rejected. The reminder is that it's not more proof that we need to turn to Jesus, it's a changed heart.

Because all these people had amazing miracles, maybe you're sitting here today saying, well, I've had more miracles to show me. I don't believe in Jesus. But if we're not believing in blue-collar worker from Nazareth as revealed in Scripture, we'll not believe any miracles that may happen because the problem is not proof and evidence and miracles, the problem is our heart, is that it's a message that comes from God that saves but also condemns when we turn our back on Him.

It's a rational hatred of good news. This is good news of the Gospel. Jesus says, I love you so much. I've gone to the cross, I've satisfied divine justice, I've risen from the dead, I'm alive, I'm offering you eternal life.

It's good news but of course it's in the backdrop of our need and sometimes we reject that. But more than that, and humanity is all these colors and to a lesser or greater degree, we are in our own sinful hearts, is that we can hold a grudge against God and ignore Him altogether.

[29 : 25] Herodias, she nursed a grudge against John for his teaching and as a representative, a prophet of God, held a grudge against God as a result.

When we leave God out of the picture of our lives, we hold a grudge against God, then very often the kind of hedonistic and pleasure-seeking celebrations of Herod's feast become what life is about.

And yet it descends, isn't it? It's descending downwards, a spiral downwards and God's left out of the picture.

And we have a reminder in Scripture here that evil isn't evolutionary, nor is evil reasonable, not even is it natural.

Evil is the moral rejection of a good God and His goodness and it leaves us under His judgment. Now, we can be ostriches and we can just stick our head in the sand and ignore Him but we recognize that there needs to be a coherent reason that you can give for the existence of evil apart from God if you're going to do that.

[30 : 44] Not just out there but in our own hearts. And then also we see here doubt, a response to Jesus and this is very much from the disciples.

You know when Jesus says, give them something to eat in the miracle of the five thousand, they say, what? That's eight months wages. There's no way we can do that.

And then of course in 52 in the walking on the water incident, they were completely amazed for they had not understood about the loaves of hearts were hardened.

They didn't know what was happening. They didn't understand. There was doubt there. And that's so often what we're like, we're slow to believe and sometimes we're blind to Jesus.

But the great thing is that these disciples is how Jesus persevered with them and loved them and didn't let them go. And they became world beaters turning the world upside down with this glorious gospel that they shared with others.

[31 : 49] Ordinary people, that's who they were. Ordinary people. And tonight we'll look at the Bible, even being authored by ordinary people. The God breeze is truth into.

So we recognize our hearts. Well, sorry, I don't want to make any assumption of what you recognize. I recognize what I see in my own heart.

I recognize the doubts and the fears and sometimes the opposition towards the holy and pure God and the need for forgiveness and grace.

But the beauty of grace is that it's not about me. It's not about my goodness and my efforts. But like the disciples, we just keep going back to Jesus Christ and receive His gift and receive His encouragement and His teaching.

He's the one who transforms us. He's the one who is hugely significant and He's the one who transforms our hearts and makes us the kind of people that He wants us to be.

[32 : 54] And that's great. Can I do it? What I finished with this? It's just, it's not so much about what you hear from the service, however significant is that.

It's not so much being part of a great church or not, however important that is. But it's about being in touch with Jesus Christ.

You know that old adage, give a man a fish and you will feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish for a woman to fish and you will feed them for a lifetime.

The aim of preaching is not just to give you fish for a day, it's to point you to Jesus who will feed you for a lifetime spiritually. So everything here is to point you to Jesus because He's the one who will feed you.

He's the one that you need to be in relationship with. He's the one you will stand before. That's the relationship that matters. Not your relationship with one another necessarily in spiritual terms, not your relationship with the church.

[33 : 56] However, God uses all these things, I'm not diminishing the importance of them. But I'm saying in our lives it's about being fed and being nourished and being in relationship with Jesus personally.

And that is what the word encourages and I hope the Spirit will encourage you to do and me to do in our lives that we go to Him for the nourishment, for the feeding to see Him as He is, to recognise He's the great God and to hear Him saying, take courage.

Don't be afraid and to put your faith and trust in Him. If you don't believe in Jesus then I do encourage you to pray to Him and ask Him to show Himself to you in the Bible and to show the truth of Himself to you that it will challenge and move and change and transform you as we all need to be moved, challenged and changed and transformed by Him.

May that be our experience. Let's bow our heads and pray together. Father God, we thank you for your words. We thank you for the constant challenge to be realigned both in our understanding of who Jesus is and also in our understanding of who we are because we find that in is going to be freedom for us and forgiveness and repentance and hope.

We thank you for that message which is one of repentance and trust. We turn away from our independence and our often selfish pride and rejection of Jesus and that we come and recognise His Lordship and His glorious love and His great grace and His glory.

[35 : 41] So Lord we pray that you would have your own way today through your word as it is preached and shared and read and sung today and that you bless us as we gather again this evening in Jesus' name and that you watch over us throughout this day in all that we do and that God would be given the glory.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.