

Jesus Rocks the Boat!

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to turn back a little while, for a little while this morning, to Luke, Mark's Gospel, sorry, chapter 9. And it's a continuation of our study over ages now.

We've been doing it in small chunks for ages. And what I want to highlight at the beginning is really that nobody has ever spoken like Jesus spoke.

Nobody. Nobody's ever spoken like Jesus, ever. We saw a couple of weeks ago that, and everything is recorded in Mark's Gospel in its particular way for a reason.

There was the amazing story of the Transfiguration of Jesus where he was transformed, he was morphed as it were in front of, there was Moses and Elijah were there, and his glory became evident.

There was the seal for Jesus and also for us to understand that he's no ordinary person, he's God the Son, he's divine, that is what his own claim was.

[1 : 04] And that was for his encouragement shortly before he heads towards the crucifixion and the cross. And what Jesus said and some of these things that he did or that were revealed, baffled his disciples.

He didn't really understand what he was doing. Eventually they did and eventually their hearts were turned and their whole lives and their whole thinking was turned upside down and inside out by this man Jesus.

And that's the same for us if we are believers today, that's what's happened to us. It might not have been quite so radically dramatic for us, but nonetheless that's what's happened in our lives. So the title of the sermon was Jesus Rocks the Boat.

And I would say it's not so much that Jesus rocks the boat, he actually blows it right out of the water in many ways when we recognize who he is and are confronted with his truth, which we'll see today is sometimes pretty challenging, and his love, which I hope is embracing and encouraging for us.

That's the testimony of those who are being baptized today and also the parents of the children who are being baptized today and indeed all of us. And I hope for us there's a bit of an ongoing transformation that our lives were getting blown out of the water every so often by the living God as we're challenged by him because his truth is radically different very often from what we want to hold on to.

[2 : 30] And it can really unsettle us. It's miles, in many ways, what Jesus is saying in this passage that we'll look at, is miles away from the thinking and the philosophies of the modern Western secular mind.

But in reality, it was miles away from the ancient Near East and minds as well because the disciples and those around them couldn't understand who Jesus was and what on earth he was coming to do and what he claimed to be.

But truth is truth, you know, and his love and commitment to rescue us both from ourselves and to provide an understanding to the evil we recognize around us, the darkness and the disorder and the chaos in many ways and sometimes in us transforms and trumps the challenges that we face with the truth.

So can I just say these sets the scene in the first place, in the couple of verses we didn't read which were verses 31 and 32 where he says, for he was teaching the disciples and sent him, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, they will kill him and when he is killed after three days he will rise.

But they did not understand what he was saying and they were afraid to ask him. So that's the kind of introduction to the section that we read. And that's kind of really important because Mark is putting it all in its rightful place and he's saying, look, what I'm teaching you is in light of what's about to happen soon.

[4 : 04] This is the second time in Mark's gospel we've seen one of them when Jesus predicts His death and resurrection and each time the disciples say, what are they talking about?

What's happening? What's going on? And he is, in a sense he's preparing them and he's setting the scene. He's the promised Savior.

So you've got this real juxtaposition between a transfigured Jesus, this glorious Son of God, this amazing divine being on the mountaintop and then he comes and says, I'm going to suffer and die and I'm going to be raised again on the third day.

Big man, he's the big man. He's the living God. And this is what he's saying and he says, he's going to die?

He predicts it? But he said, well, we could all predict that. There's no big deal on that. But then he says, on the third day I'm going to rise again. And he's claiming something hugely significant that there was an incredible power and an incredible work that he was going to do that was for humanity, not for him but for humanity proven in his resurrection.

[5 : 16] Now that is tough for us to understand. It's tough for the disciples to understand. But we all die and we're all powerless over that.

So I think it's therefore important for us to listen to one who claims that he has not only predicted his own death but he predicted his resurrection and the purpose behind it.

And we know that the whole of the Bible is pointing forward to that and death and resurrection and the rest of it points back to that because it's so significant. And I wonder if sometimes we're a bit like, I think we are sometimes a bit like the disciples.

We are a little bit afraid to ask about it. They were didn't understand us saying that they were afraid to ask Him. I think sometimes, maybe you're not a Christian today, but you're here is fantastic.

I'm so delighted you're here. But maybe we've seen it with our friends. You think they're kind of afraid to breach that subject. They're afraid to talk about the claims of Jesus, afraid to ask Him.

[6 : 17] I really hope not. I hope if you are afraid today. I hope that you'll overcome that fear and speak to someone who you maybe know as a Christian or to myself or to any of the people here who go to church, at least just to ask and find out a bit more about the Christian faith.

Because the great thing about the disciples here is they stuck with Him. They didn't know everything. They didn't understand everything. They were scared sometimes to ask. They struggled, they failed, they ran away, they betrayed them at different points.

But they did generally, and they went on to stick with Him because He was compelling, because He was authoritative, because He was good.

And He had such a deep and strong love for them. Sometimes we don't see that on the flat pages of written Scripture. It's clearly and obviously that amazing, powerful relational love that kept them following Jesus.

And I do believe that's our confession as Christians as well. It's good to be reminded of that. Don't need to understand everything. Don't even need to agree with everything.

[7 : 36] We simply trust that He's good and that He is loving and He's already shown His incredible commitment to us in salvation. So that's setting the scene.

And what He's doing in this passage here, what Mark is doing for us is He's taking that claim of death and resurrection, what it means to follow Jesus. And He then goes on to teach the disciples, is what He does all the time.

He's teaching the disciples. Therefore, He's teaching us as well what it means to follow Him, a crucified and a risen Savior. What does it look like following Jesus?

What does it look like to be a follower, a disciple of Jesus? And I think for us it's an important reminder and a challenge. And if you see the passage, it's divided into three little chunks, handily.

We'll look at them and we'll try and do that quickly this morning before the baptism. And He's speaking to the disciples and the first thing He's telling them, and it's really important, it says, in Christ's name, don't be proud.

[8 : 41] Don't be proud. That's that first section entitled, Who is the Greatest? Because the disciples are going along the road and they're arguing with themselves and they arrive at the house.

And Jesus, it's almost quite a comical picture. Jesus says, what are we talking about in the road? And you can kind of imagine the embarrassment looking down and well, what can I talk about?

Who's the greatest? And it's sort of an embarrassing moment. It's almost like a father speaking to his children, catching them out, doing something a bit embarrassing and wrong.

They were like spoiled kids along the road. They were asking, who's the greatest? And He is radically wanting to transform their thinking about that.

And it's something we often are charged, you know, who wants to be first? Who wants to be most? What do we regard as greatness and what is important to us? And so what He does is He says, like, who's the greatest?

[9 : 41] Well, if anyone would be first, He said, he must be last on the servant of all. And He took a child, which is really great and relevant today because we're going to be taking children up in our arms today.

And He put them in front of them and taking them in His arms. He said, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. Whoever receives me receives not me, but have sent me. And He's talk. Now, can I just put maybe a slightly different slant on this?

Because this is not primarily about one being childish. He says, you know, we're not to be like children being childish or immature or naive.

It's not that. Not as He's saying, Christians, you should be cute and cuddly. You might be. All the better. But it's not really about that because in the ancient Near East, when Jesus was writing, it would have been pretty radical to take children and take them on His knee as a teacher and as a master, as it were, and someone that was followed by others and say, you have got to regard yourself like these little children because children in the ancient Near East had no rights whatsoever.

They had no status. You know, in the old days, I used to hear people saying that children should be seen and not heard. But in the ancient Near East, probably children weren't even to be seen or heard.

[11 : 03] They were really expendable. There was a lot of infanticide. Children were disregarded. They were unimportant, generally speaking.

And that is what Jesus is speaking into. And He's saying, in our relationship with God, actually, we have no rights. We should be humble because we have spiritual needs.

We have no claim on Him. We can't go into His presence and knock on the door and say, hey, accept me, take me. And we're equal. In fact, I'm better.

I look down and judge you. It's not like that. And in many ways, we come into God's presence and we should be like little children with no rights to claim ourselves yet.

We see that Christ embraces them and takes them and loves them and redeems them. And that's what He's reminding us in terms of humility.

[12 : 00] That as Christians, we are humble. We ought to be humble at all times because we realize we have no rights to claim before God. Saying that we could earn in His presence.

But because of what He's done in salvation, we can come into His presence and be loved and be forgiven. And our identities can be found in Him.

And Jesus is taking that and saying, because of that, you should treat other people with great respect and with great love and with serving heart.

So the greatest in the kingdom is the one who has a serving heart. So there shouldn't be in the church any peck in order. We shouldn't have any self-righteousness and there should be no damning judgment on one another because we recognize how much God is love does and we recognize how unworthy we are, not worthless, but how unworthy we are of His love.

And therefore, we treat one another with great love and equality and respect. Remember, He's speaking here to disciples. They've been quarreling about who's the greatest and He says, get a grip.

[13 : 14] Understand what it means to be a Christian. It's not about greatness. That's the first thing. The second thing is, He says, in Christ's name, and He's speaking primarily again here to disciples, He says, we're not to be tribal.

So easy to be tribal as Christians because we learn that John said to Him, teacher, someone is coming and casting out demons in your name. We try to stop Him because He was not following us.

He wasn't one of us. Jesus said, don't stop Him. No one who does a mighty work in my name will speak evil of me. The one who is not against us as for us and so on. So again, He's speaking to the disciples.

He's teaching them in the light of His own death and resurrection which He's predicted. And He's saying, you've got to recognize that there's a catholicity about the Christian faith, we're to be kingdom-centered and we're not to be tribal.

We're to have a warm and loving generosity towards everyone who claims to follow Jesus Christ and recognizes His salvation and who serves Him.

[14 : 20] So for us in the free church today, particularly, I speak to our congregation to St. Columba's here primarily at this point. It's not a club that we'll belong to.

It's not, we're not to think it's just my own folk, the people that are like me, because the gospel and Jesus Christ breaks every social, every ecclesiastical norm, as well as breaking and should break cultural, ethnic and racial barriers as well.

And we should recognize that because that was what the New Testament church was like. It brought people from all different backgrounds and all different social status and all different parts of the community, together as brothers and sisters.

So you had slave and free, you had businessman and you had employee, you had young and old and you had different nationalities during Samaritan, during Gentile, coming together under Jesus Christ.

And so it's important for us to remember as Christians that we may be diverse, we don't all think the same. We don't all have the same focus at every level, but we're not to be exclusivist or separatist as Christians.

[15 : 35] We can be very ignorant easily and think that our tiny expression of the Christian faith has all the answers, was like us.

I have no doubt that heaven will surprise us by who is there and who isn't. A generosity of spirit, Jesus says, is absolutely vital and that we set, again we serve with a cup of cold water, whoever is in the name of Christ and beyond that, obviously, as well.

So, then the third thing, this is where it gets really tough, in Christ, he says the third thing, Christ's name we are not to be tribal, Christ's name we are not to be proud, and also in Christ's name we are to deal with sin and live at peace together.

So the section starts with division and arguments and separation and it ends with peace because Jesus is showing us the way to be peaceful with one another as disciples, followers of Jesus, and He's also showing us how to be at peace with Him.

He's rebuking the disciples in His teaching for being proud and not dealing with their own sinful attitudes to themselves and to others. I'm better than them, I'm the greatest, I want to be first.

[16 : 52] And He's dealing with that in these sections. And what He's encouraging them and us to do today, all of us, look into our own hearts.

Don't look around you to see how much better you are than others in deserving of glory or fame or popularity or salvation or whatever.

He's saying to them, and He's saying to us, deal with your heart attitude and deal, remember that as a believer you are an example to other people.

And that's what He talks about in this difficult section which talks about temptation as sin and He talks about cutting off your hand and gouging out your eye and hell and all these things.

And what we need to understand within this as well that He is using really strong but exaggerated language and visual imagery.

[17 : 55] It's not literal, it's not telling anyone to do anything like that physically. I hope you all get that. It's exaggerated what we would call hyperbole, but He's using it to get across solemn truth.

It would be like me in a much more trivial way at the festival in Edinburgh saying, I walked up the Royal Mile and I must have passed at least a million people. Now that's exaggerated language, it wasn't it?

Maybe there was. It did seem like it. But no, there wasn't a million people. But that's hyperbole. Or sometimes we hear more sadly and more solemnly, we hear about a tragedy and say, well, it sounds like hell on earth.

Now that is also hyperbole at one level, but it's getting across the seriousness and the devastation of an event. And when Christ uses language like that and hyperbole and exaggeration, it's because He's wanting to get across really a significant truth.

And the truth He wants to get across here is that I'm sure there's much more than I'll say. But there's at least, He's reminding us that our hearts as Christians and indeed everyone need radical surgery.

[19 : 14] It's the background of the death and resurrection of Jesus, as Clayton remember that he mentions that we mentioned at the beginning. He's saying, in fact, we can't change to be right with God unless we come to Christ and His death and resurrection.

Because in that we find the power to be forgiven and to root out the selfish and hurtful death desires that are in our hearts. We can't do it ourselves.

He's saying that. He is saying that. He's saying that before God's holiness and justice, we can't live right.

And we have to engage in a radical heart surgery in order to... Heart surgery that He will perform, that He gifts to us.

It's not a work that we do in our own strength. He says our hearts need rather... He's talking about the seriousness. Remember, it's in the context of discipleship. And He's saying to the Christians, He's saying to us here, there's Christians, there's believers here.

[20 : 16] He's saying, get a grip. Get a grip on your heart and recognize the way you treat God sometimes. But more especially the way you treat others.

You're not taking your heart seriously. You're stamping with big heavy boots on other people. And you think that grace is cheap and that it's easy just to believe in, yeah, Jesus died of my sins.

Woohoo. But He's saying grasp the cost and grasp the reality is what Jesus is saying. And what He's also saying is God, He's saying that there is an unseen spiritual reality.

Hell is real. There, I've said it. It's not something we want to talk about, something that makes us uncomfortable and squirming our seats. I'm not happy talking about it because it's such a challenging and awful reality.

Unimaginable. But Christ, gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who is God eternally, who takes on human nature and a human body, knows the unseen world.

[21 : 26] And He speaks with a perfect and settled knowledge about the afterlife and about the reality of heaven and hell. Places that fulfill either every perfected longing that we can enjoy in Christ or a place where our deepest dreads are realized.

Now, it is uncomfortable truth. But He's reminding us, and He's reminding the disciples in their salvation, and He's reminding all who will hear Him that our sin puts the Bible, our wrongdoings, the Bible calls sin, which ultimately is just not loving Him first and not loving one another before Him.

Our sin is consequences. So every believer and every baptized believer has come to Jesus saying, I know that. I recognize my need for cleansing.

I recognize His astonishing love, and I recognize that He is... What gives us any kind of frightening confidence about His truth is the crucifixion that He predicts and speaks about, where He has taken our hell and taken our guilt and our punishment on Himself on the cross.

That transforms it, doesn't it? He doesn't just expose something and say, that's dreadful. You're damned. He says, I'll take it because I love you. I know there's no other way.

[22 : 53] That's God. You know, I said at the beginning that it turns our world upside down. There's no one as ever spoken like that. No one can ever make that. He's either a nutcase, it completely deluded or it's true because it's such a remarkable and outstanding claim.

That's why He speaks so bluntly. And He gives that relatable... He speaks about hell and He gives images and pictures, some here and some in other places.

And I just very briefly want to say why, you know, I think we misunderstand a lot about it sometimes. But really, ultimately what He's saying is, if we don't deal with our sin, ultimately we're going to be on the outside of something really very, very good.

Heaven is... and the recreated heavens and earth is going to be a recreation of all that is good and perfect from the inside out. No shadow, no death, nothing to destroy or harm.

That's what He speaks about when He speaks about what He's going to achieve from His death and resurrection. There's a sentient to heaven that He's returning to usher all of that in nothing to harm or destroy, a perfect feast of friendship, of relationships, of love with God and His love and His warmth and His purity and His generosity and His abundance at the very core of that.

[24 : 19] It's kind of a picture of the greatest family gathering that you could ever imagine. And He says it's to be outside of that.

I think that's a relatable picture. If you've got a really loving family, it's a relatable picture being on the outside of that. If you've never had a loving family, you can relate to it because it's something you would long for, to be in that place.

And that's one of the descriptions He gives. The other is, it would be like choosing to live in a rubbish dump. The word He uses here for hell is Gehenna, which is just the valley of Hinnom, which was outside of Jerusalem.

And it was originally a place for brutal child sacrifice at one point, but it became just a burning rubbish dump.

You wouldn't go there, stank. It was horrible. And it would be, you know, it's like you would never choose to go to Craig Miller Recycling Center by a bit of land there and set up home.

[25 : 30] All the kind of stuff that's going on, the dump and the rubbish and the smell and everything that goes with it, times a million.

That's the pictures that He gives it. But He does so in the light of the good news of the gospel, is that He has been on the outside. He's been on the rubbish dump on the cross.

He's been outside of the city. He is knowing the darkness and the forsakenness in order that we don't need to. You know, we're all very ordinary people.

Can you imagine someone famous? If you were, I don't know, if you were guilty of some heinous crime or no, maybe a massive debt that you owed and you were going to be bankrupted.

But can you, no, that doesn't work either. Sorry. I'm just talking as I'm going along here. Like all of them cities, can you imagine someone important and famous willing to die in your place so that you could live?

[26 : 29] That would be an amazing thing, wouldn't it? It would be amazing if someone paid off a great debt as well. But if someone was willing actually to give up his life, someone famous and important and significant so that you could be free and you could live.

I know it's a bit of an unbelievable thought, but that is actually what has happened in the cross times a million is that God, the Son, said, I love you so much.

I know you can't make yourself right with me and you can't deal with death and overcome it and resurrect yourself. He said, but I will do that for you. I will satisfy divine justice and divine love as they kiss mutually at the cross in order that you may live.

And as justice either he pays for our guilt and our breaking of his laws of love or we face the consequences of that on our own. And he's saying that primarily to disciples.

He's saying, don't treat your heart lightly. Don't think that your heart doesn't need to be on in an ongoing way changed. We've got girls coming forward for baptism today, Lois and Hannah Ryan and they made a profession and a faith and Viola last night was baptised.

[27 : 44] Now that's just the start of the journey. It doesn't stop there. And it's an ongoing recognition of transformation, of being distinctive.

Jesus was always teaching the disciples about him and we will always be learning about what it means to follow him because he's got it. And it blows our understanding of life right out of the water.

And in conclusion, he says, therefore, that is how we live as salt and it's to be flavourful, salt is good and that is how to live at peace with one another.

And that's what we're called to do. As Christians here today, we're called to be distinctive by being transformed by God's love, loving him and loving others.

There's a great... I don't know if it was a song, it might have been a song, but it was a kind of act in many ways. It was joy, it was very old.

[28 : 45] Jesus first, others next to yourself last. And it was good in the sense that it reminds us of the priorities of love, of divine love for us.

We love him, love one another and then we love ourselves. Not arguing, not fighting about who's the greatest, not pushing for importance and significance, but serving God.

That's discipleship. And that's how we live at peace and not arguing with one another and being divided. And that is the great call of the gospel to us as Christians.

But it's also a hope, you recognize a great invitation to you if you're not Christian, to consider these truths that Jesus makes on our lives as the answer to our own needs, answer to our own death, the answer to the world in which we live, which is messed up.

And that's the testimony of our dear friends today, of Lois, of Hannah Ryan and of their parents who Ryan and Kelly, who will also be joining in membership today along with Hannah Ryan.

[29 : 53] And it's the testimony of Colin and Georgie and Eric and Kelly as the parents who by faith bring their children for baptism today. So let's rejoice in that visible symbol in baptism today.

Amen.