

Who Then is Jesus?

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[0 : 00] So let's read God's word from Mark's gospel, chapter 4, verses 35 to 41. There are some Bibles around the church on some tables.

If you don't have a Bible and you come here today without one, please feel free to take a Bible away from here. We'd be very happy for you to do that. The text will also be on the screen. It's printed in the bulletin. So lots of ways to access it as it's preached this morning. So let's read God's word together. Mark, chapter 4, verses 35 to 41.

And they woke him and said to him, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace, be still.

And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. He said to them, Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

[1 : 28] This is God's holy word. You'll have a Bible to turn back to the passage that's been read from the fourth chapter of Mark's gospel.

I remember when I was a teenager reading a book on ministry saying you should never, if you can possibly avoid it, never preach on well-known passages. But I'm old enough to take the risk now and to direct us this morning to this extremely well-known passage of our Lord Jesus stilling the storm.

Because I think it helps us answer the question, Who really is Jesus? And the question that the older I've got has kind of haunted me.

What was and is Jesus really like? I don't mean in terms of categories that theologians use, but in terms of the words that Corey gave to us earlier on from the prophecy of Isaiah, he was like someone who didn't break bruised reeds or snuff out dimly burning wicks.

And it's a question that I think in some ways, really, if we can get near to some really clear biblical answers, has the power to transform the atmosphere of our Christian lives.

[3 : 04] To use a human illustration, the way getting to know someone else that we know, admire, and love can actually transform the atmosphere of our own lives.

That what the Holy Spirit does through the records of the life and ministry of Jesus is to bring Him close to us and us close to Him so that we sense what He is really like.

And that can change everything. And certainly this was an instance in the lives of the disciples that had the potential to change everything. It began, in a sense, with a storm.

And I don't know how many sermons I've heard on how Jesus can still the storm in your heart, but actually what He did here was create a storm in their hearts in order to loosen their inadequate view of who He really was and lead them into a much more adequate view that would transform their lives wonderfully.

And we love passages like this for different reasons. Some of us may have loved this passage all our lives. We maybe even can remember the Sunday school teacher when we were in primary school who first told us this story.

[4 : 25] And the power of it has kind of resided ever since in our imagination. And then those of you who are of a more aesthetic tendency and who love art may love Rembrandt's great painting of the storm on Galilee.

It's a magnificent painting into which he painted himself just at the back of the ship where he seems to be looking out at the viewer and saying, well, how would you feel if you were in my position?

I've always wanted to meet somebody who's actually seen that painting because it was stolen several decades ago and it's never been seen since. So, if you have seen that painting, we need to go to the local police station where there may be a reward for you.

And then some few of us who have kind of nerdy theological interests may be interested in this passage because it was the passage that brought a man who some people regard as the greatest ever English theologian to a real assurance that he was actually a Christian.

He was in his mid-twenties at the time and very unsure of where he stood spiritually and this was the passage. This simple passage to this great intellect brought a real knowledge of Christ and a real assurance of him.

[5 : 59] So, I want to try and unpack for us a number of things that we find in this passage. Probably, you know that this passage is really in all three of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

But it's told in different ways. And the church has believed for most of the church's existence that Mark's gospel is actually Peter's gospel.

And one of the very early comments about Mark's gospel by a man called Papias indicates that Mark served really as the secretary of Simon Peter.

And that's why of all the Gospels, Mark's gospel is the easiest gospel to turn into the first person singular. And it's a lovely way to read it, actually.

And if you do that, you will catch a sense that, yeah, maybe it is true that Peter wrote this because there's this sense of vitality. There's a kind of, everything happens immediately, which is very Peter-like.

[7 : 07] But there's also this strong sense that this was the story of an eyewitness. And there are little indications of that that you don't find in the other Gospels.

For example, Mark alone tells us the time of day this happened. It was in the evening. None of the other gospel writers noticed that. This was an evening cruise over the calm sea of Galilee.

Another thing Mark tells us that indicates there's an eyewitness behind this is he says there were other boats. My guess is that unless you kind of focus down on that, you would assume that what's described here is what happened to a single boat.

But what happened here apparently happened to a little flotilla of boats. And there's another rather sweet indication that this is the story told by an eyewitness because this is the only gospel that tells us there was a pillow for Jesus to put his head on.

And I think all of us recognize that when we have kind of dramatic emotional experiences, it is amazing what details we remember that nobody else would notice unless they'd been there.

[8 : 34] And so, I think it's really helpful for us to see the shadow of Simon Peter in the background here. And if I can remember to do it, I will come back to that towards the end of the sermon.

But the other little eyewitness detail that I think is really important to notice is the way Mark's gospel describes the atmosphere in which this event began.

And you'll see this right in verse 35. When evening had come, Jesus said to them, let us go across to the other side.

And lest I also forget to say this, the great thing is that they did get to the other side. But then, Mark says, leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat.

And it's the next phrase I want you to focus attention on because I think this conveys the atmosphere of the evening. They took him just as he was.

[9 : 44] Just as he was. I heard somebody in the Westminster Seminary group, which is the reason I'm imposed on you this morning, because I'd rather Corey were preaching, say, so, what's the dress code?

I didn't say anything. But what I thought was, just come as you are. Right?

Just come as you are. And so, there's something, there's something almost magical about that little phrase. They took him just as he was.

They had no reason, they had no reason to deny his encouragement, let's go over to the other side. Because they would take him there.

I mean, some of them at least were masters of this little stretch of water. And those of you who have seen it, it's sea, it is not, it's a loch. And they must have known it's every inch, almost it's every fish.

[10 : 53] And so, nothing special about this. They probably had done this often enough. Let's just go out on the boat for a wee while tonight. But it's the dramatic contrast between that little phrase and the question at the end that bookends this extraordinary experience they had.

They took him just as he was. But by the end of the story, they're really saying, we didn't really know who he was at all. We thought we knew who he was.

And we thought we knew what we were capable of. But we didn't really understand either. And what Jesus is doing here is bringing these disciples who have really come to know him, obviously come to love him, and in a sense come to trust him, he's taking them a stage further into helping them to understand what he is actually really like.

And the great thing here, I think, is to remember, which I remind myself of very often, what Hebrews 13 says, he is the same today as he was yesterday. I often say, when Hebrews says he's the same yesterday, today, and forever, it's not a long-winded way of saying he's eternal, although that's true. What it's saying is the Jesus of today, of our time, readers of my letter, is exactly the same as the Jesus of yesterday, the Jesus of whom you read in the Gospels.

[12:27] So, there are three stages, I think, that you find in this story, which isn't a joke because most stories have three stages to them.

And the first stage, I think, is this. And it's kind of stunning to notice it. It is that Jesus led them into difficulty in the storm.

Jesus led them into difficulty in the storm. Yes, the text says they took him, but they only took him because he said, I want to take you.

Let's go across to the other side. So, if you think about this experience in this context and ask the question, why were they in the storm in the first place?

Why were they in the storm in the first place? The answer is because Jesus took them into the storm. It's a staggeringly illuminating illustration of Jesus' confidence in Himself to get these disciples over to the other side no matter what happens.

[13:42] But Peter is making clear through Mark's Gospel this was Jesus' idea. It was Jesus' idea to sail into the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

And you can almost hear Simon Peter using this as an illustration when, for example, later on he's writing in 1 Peter 4, 12 and saying, don't be surprised by the fiery trials that are coming to you as though this was strange.

And that's what this passage teaches us. But the Lord Jesus, as He draws us to Himself and as we begin to trust Him, finds occasions to lead us into difficulties.

And the reason He does so is because as long as we live a life without difficulties, we never actually grow. And what is so interesting, I think, in this context is that many Christians don't seem to think that way.

I had a very dear friend, a man I respected enormously, who knew me very well. And whenever I made a major life decision, of which I've made a few, and it was as though the sea opened up and things went smoothly, he used to say to me, isn't it just like the Lord to do that?

[15:16] Isn't it just like the Lord to do that? And I dearly loved this man, but I actually found that marginally irritating. Because the truth is, it is just like the Lord to do that, but it's also just like the Lord to do this.

And I think this story is a wonderful illustration of the principle that we should never think that our simple trust and obedience to the Lord Jesus is a reality from which we can extrapolate how the future is going to be.

And not to discourage those of you who are young, but as I, because I've been thinking about this passage the last couple of days, as I look back on my own life, I'm kind of, I'm really struck by the fact that having made major decisions and assuming, and everyone else I knew, assuming where that would lead, in almost every single case, that's not where they've led.

And you see what Jesus is teaching us as He does this in our lives, what He was teaching them, that we need to understand that there will be times when He will open up the sea and we will walk across on dry land, but because He wants us to grow strong, and we grow strong by the exercise of our muscles, and sometimes that kind of exercise hurts, there will be times when trusting Him and following Him will also lead us into difficulties, into storms, which is why, you know, every, every Christian minister I know would be able to tell us the numbers of people who have said to them, why is it now I become a Christian that many things seem to be more difficult than they used to be? It's because that's the way He teaches us to trust Him. That's the way we grow in trust for Him.

[17:27] the only thing I watch in the Olympics is the weightlifting, and I love to see these giants come on to stages like this and lift up these barbells, like amounting to you lifting up the three heaviest people you know, and their legs are quivering, and they, you know, and then they get it up, whatever it is, and I sit on the couch saying, I could do that.

Why can't I do that? It's because I haven't endured any of the hardship, any of the stress, any of the exercise that has slowly built these men and women up to be able to do that kind of thing.

And it's the same in the Christian life. That's why training is used as a metaphor for the Christian life. And I think what is so fascinating here is that I know this is slight speculation, but I think the text gives us every reason to believe that these disciples followed Jesus because they thought they were masters of the situation.

And what Jesus wanted to do was to teach them that there is no situation of which we are master. But He is master of every situation. And that speaks to us, doesn't it?

I mean, there are so many things that we know better than Jesus about. And what He's teaching these disciples is sometimes it's in the areas where we think we know best that He needs to teach us that He actually knows best.

[19 : 17] So that's the first stage in this story that it was Jesus who actually led them into these difficulties in the storm. The second thing to notice, and this emerges in their response to Him and His response to them, is that at the core of this story, Jesus is testing the reality of their faith in the storm.

And it's interesting how the different gospel writers record this. Mark records it in the harshest of ways. The other gospel writers, their language is not quite so harsh.

Here you'll notice what Mark records is, and presumably Jesus asked several questions, but the ones that Mark records are, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?

And you'll remember how Matthew, for example, puts that as, oh, you of little faith. Why are you afraid, oh, you of little faith? So this question, have you no faith, faith?

It's not so much doubting that they have any faith, but do they have faith for this situation? Do they trust Him in this situation?

[20 : 30] And if you use your imagination, you can't help thinking that when Jesus put His head down on the pillow, He was thinking to Himself, how long will it be before they are shaking me?

and these strong, proud fishermen asking me, carpenter of Nazareth, to save them in the situation. And what is in a way so marvelous about Mark's account is that this very straightforward language continues, and you'll see it in verse 38, they woke him and said to him, maybe the cruelest words they ever said to him, don't you care if we perish?

So you hear Mark again, but you know, Peter, if this is Peter's voice, this is absolutely straightforward. There is no concern that people might misunderstand what they are saying.

Maybe in Matthew's gospel there's a concern that I do not want people to misunderstand what's actually happening here, but here it is absolutely brutal. It is the kind of thing you do not say to the person sitting beside you on a Sunday morning in St.

Columbus when you're asked the question, how are things? You don't say to them, the Lord doesn't care if I'm perishing.

[22 : 03] But nevertheless, many of us will have said that and have been in situations where that is exactly what we have felt. Everything has gone against us.

We see no way through our difficulties. It seems that God has abandoned us. Don't you care if we are perishing? Now, the truth of the matter was that he wouldn't have been in the boat in the first place of the world.

He wouldn't have called them if he didn't care. But, you know, the supreme demonstration that he cared was, of course, he was going to die for them on the cross.

God so loved the world he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but of everlasting life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

They couldn't see that, even although he had given little indications earlier on that something was going to happen, even although they should have known what Isaiah was talking about when he spoke about the coming Savior.

[23 : 17] But they couldn't see who Jesus really was. And, of course, that's my problem, isn't it? when I feel deserted, when I feel he doesn't care, I've lost sight of who he really is.

Remember how Paul puts it in Romans 8.32? He says, listen, if God didn't spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, we can be absolutely sure that he will give us everything we need to get us from here into his glorious presence.

But we take our eye off the ball, or more accurately. We take our eye off the Savior. And that's what they were doing. And so their hearts spoke through their lips about what they were saying was, you are cruel to us, Jesus.

Don't you care that we are perishing? And in a congregation like this, it wouldn't be surprising if some of us felt that way today as well.

My friend Derek Thomas, Corey's friend Derek Thomas, tells the story of a Welsh minister who had a lady come to him and she said, I'm struggling in my Christian life.

[24 : 39] He said, what's the problem? He said, I've become very impatient. And he said, well, we can fix that. Let's pray. And he prayed briefly, dear Lord, send some trials into my sister's life.

Amen. And she began to express a little impatience. But you see, then he sat her down and explained to her that you don't develop patience except in situations that would evoke from you a spirit of impatience.

And you will only learn that patience when you begin to look not within yourself to your own response to the situation, but to who Jesus has become in your life, to what you know of Jesus, and to the way in which he is able to see you through situations that previously evoked impatience, to have his patience.

And that's what Jesus is doing. He is always testing our faith in him. And in a sense, the only way he can do that is by dismantling our easy assumptions that having confessed that we trust him fully, we do actually trust him fully.

And you know, those of you who are parents, you know that when your son or daughter has something they're gripping onto in their hands, and you say, please give that to me.

[26 : 27] And he says, please give it to me. And then you drop the please, and it's give it to me.

And then you drop the give it to me, and you give it to them. And you have this battle to open their hands so that whatever it is they are holding onto lies open in their hands so that you can take it out.

And we foolishly forget that we are all guilty of infantile regression in the Christian life. And there are many things that we hold on to tightly, our own capacities, our own abilities.

I have no doubt that's what Jesus was doing. That's why this took place on the sea, because these men were fishermen. This was their area of mastery. And you see in Scripture, that is often the problem, isn't it?

Think about Isaiah. What does Isaiah cry out about when he sees the glory of the Lord? He cries out about his sinful lips.

I imagine him going down after that experience to his best friend and his best friend seeing that he is in distress and saying, what's the problem, Isaiah? And Isaiah says, my sinful lips.

[27 : 43] And his friend saying, you and Mrs. Isaiah and the boys need to go on holiday. You're overwrought. You are the finest preacher we have had in this city in decades. And I like to think of Isaiah, this is my Scottish imagination, lifting him up by his robes and saying, you're not listening to what I'm saying.

My problem is, it's right into the strengths of my life, my best gifts in life, that my sinfulness and mistrust has been woven.

And I felt in that place that God was beginning to dismantle and deconstruct me in order that he might reconstruct me again.

And that's surely what the Lord Jesus was doing here. He was exposing the frailty of their faith in order that he might strengthen that faith.

And he does this, of course. And this is how the story ends. He leads them into difficulty. He tests their faith's reality. And then in the Sea of Galilee, he shows them his glory.

[29 : 00] And we were singing about that. This passage is like a fulfillment echo of Psalm 107.

Men going down into the sea who were used to plying their trade on the waters and suddenly finding themselves in a storm and crying out to the Lord and the Lord saving them and the Lord bringing them to a safe haven.

It's like the fulfillment of a shadowy prophecy from the Old Testament. But it's also, I think, not just a fulfillment of a shadowy prophecy.

It is itself a kind of reworking of the shadow of an earlier prophecy that is still a kind of shadow of something that is to come.

Because it's interesting that the psalm that is most used with reference to the passion and death of the Lord Jesus Christ is not one of the better known psalms.

[30 : 07] It's actually Psalm 69. And it's the psalm that the apostles picked out little details from and saw that they were fulfilled in the crucifixion.

And it's a psalm actually about a water ordeal. The waters have gone over my head. And you can see how then Jesus, I should say in this church, by whatever means Jesus was baptized, the waters went over his head in the river Jordan.

And he saw that as a kind of miniature water ordeal that pointed to the greater ordeal described in Psalm 69, his ordeal that he described later on as the baptism with which he was still to be baptized.

And whereas in the river Jordan, if you think about it, you can understand John the Baptist's reluctance because this river Jordan is now symbolically full of the pollution of confessed sins of perhaps tens of thousands of people.

And this is the water he's going to baptize Jesus with? But you see, that's the point, isn't it? It's water polluted by the sins of others in which Jesus will be baptized symbolically in Jordan and actually on the cross of Calvary, and the waters will go over his head and engulf him.

[31 : 41] And so it's not just the disciples who are in the storm here. It's Jesus who is in the storm here. That may be the reason for the use of this very surprising verb that Mark records, that when Jesus got up, you notice, he rebuked the wind and the sea.

That's the verb that's going to be used later on when Jesus rebukes the powers of darkness and death and hell. So there's something happening, not just to the disciples here, but there's something happening to Jesus here.

There's something about his sense that he too is going to be engulfed that makes him rise from sleep and rebuke the wind and the waves and say, peace be still.

Because that's what he's going to do in Calvary. Even the use of the word peace is interesting, isn't it? It's actually the first word that Jesus used to the disciples hiding away there in their upper room when he appeared on the evening of the resurrection.

First word, peace. Be still. It's like, it's like what we've got here is a trailer for what is going to happen in the future.

[33 : 10] And here in the midst of the storm, Jesus is showing them his glory that he's able to overcome and still the storm because ultimately he's going to experience the storm.

And through his death for their sins and his resurrection, he is going to bring them peace. And maybe that's the reason why in Revelation 21, we're told that in the future world, there will be no more sea.

Well, that's a pity. There'll be no more sea. What does that mean? Well, the book of Revelation is full of picture language, isn't it?

I don't think it's saying in the new heavens and the new earth, there'll be no more mountains and no more sea. I think it's saying in that world, there will be no more of that kind of sea because Jesus' peace and Jesus' glory will be absolutely everywhere.

Get back to Simon Peter for a moment. I've always thought reading this passage, especially in Mark's gospel, if indeed it's Peter's gospel, Peter, you're not telling us something here.

[34 : 35] You're not telling us what was going on in your head when Jesus said, okay, boys, we're going over to the other side tonight. You're not telling us how for once in your life you kept your mouth shut.

And you didn't say to the others, he's a carpenter. We're the fishermen. There might be a storm tonight. And I've sometimes extrapolated from that in my imagination.

So, what would have been like for Simon Peter to have dug his heels in and watched the other friends sail over, the storm come in? And of course it would have broken his heart, but part of that man would have been saying, I told you so.

You should have listened to me. I knew best. But what would actually have happened to Peter if that had been true? Well, Peter would never have seen the glory.

He'd never have seen who Jesus really is, what Jesus can really do. And the wonderful thing is, as you fast forward from Mark's gospel into the Acts of the Apostles and see the way the Lord dealt with Peter, you remember how by Acts chapter 12, Peter is in prison.

[35 : 46] And Luke tells us, the night before he was about to be taken out, and that sounds a bit Glaswegian, and that's what it means. He was really about to be taken out, presumably tried and executed.

And the Lord sent an angel to rescue him. And the thing that I find so fascinating is what Peter was doing that night. He was lying fast asleep, and the angel had to shake him and wake him so that he would be rescued.

His life had been wonderfully transformed. And that's what Jesus is like. I mentioned that those of you who are theological nerdy might love this passage because you know the story of either the conversion or the real assurance that he was a Christian of perhaps the greatest English theologian.

His name was John Owen. He went with a friend to a church in London when he was in his mid-twenties. I think he wasn't really sure whether he was really a Christian or not, although he had the whole Christian baggage behind him in his life.

He was a minister's son. He was an Oxford graduate. He was brilliant. But he wasn't sure he was a believer. And they went to hear a famous preacher.

[37 : 20] And a substitute came in to the pulpit. And his friend said to him, let's go around the corner and hear somebody else. You can do that in Edinburgh, apparently. And Owen was so melancholic.

He said, now I'm just going to stay. And the man preached from this passage. And John Owen was brought into an amazingly new experience that Christ was his and he was Christ's.

And the wonderful thing is he was never able to discover the name of the man who had preached the sermon. And I can't help thinking that if you did actually come here because somebody said to you, you need to go and hear Cory Brock in St. Columbus in Edinburgh.

And you kind of groaned inwardly when he said, it's an old Scotsman who's going to be here. And if that's the case, please God, you forget his name.

But if this was Owen's story, it can be your story too. Because this is what Jesus is like.

[38 : 34] And this is what he wants to be like for you. And he did get them to the other side. And he'll get you too if you trust him to the other side.

Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for these wonderfully simple stories that these four men under the guidance of your loving Holy Spirit penned for people they knew and loved, but also for people that they loved but never knew, including ourselves.

And we pray, Lord, as we think about the Lord Jesus, see him as someone who does not break bruised reeds or snuff out dimly burning wicks, but comes to us in our need and our distress, that in his providence he has unpacked for us.

And when we sometimes cry, Lord, do you not really care about me? We pray that we may see who he really is find him in his grace and glory and trust him not only in the areas where we feel inadequate and incapacitated, but in those areas where we foolishly think that we know best.

So, we give ourselves to you with faith and joy and the assurance that you will see us home to the other side.

[40 : 27] So, impress this on us we pray as we thank you for your word in Jesus name. Amen.

Thank you.