

Do You See Who I AM Or Is Your Heart Hardened

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Date: 09 November 2025

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[0 : 00] There we go.

That was my fault. My thanks to Stephen for leading us in remembrance there, and for Alan and the team for that moving song.

! It just makes me think about the passage that we're in as well when the disciples are separate from Christ, and the hope that there is if He is with us and abides with us, and thinking about all those that went to war and fought, you know.

And so, thank you for that. If you have a Bible, please turn to Mark chapter 6. Let's do this.

Let's do this in Mark chapter 6. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word.

[1 : 47] We thank you that your Word is more sure than the foundation of this earth. And as we open your Word, would you open our hearts to know you, and for your Spirit to teach us, and for your Word to point us to Christ.

We pray in His name. Amen. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.

And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea.

He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.

And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. Amen. This is God's Word. Well, throughout Mark's gospel, there are various groups of three. For example, there are three bread stories. There are three boat stories. There are three passion predictions. There are three prayer withdrawals. It's just to say that the passage we're looking at today, as well as having its own surrounding context, it is part of a trio of boat stories. The first one is the calming of the storm. The second is walking on the water. And the third is when Jesus talks about the leaving of the Pharisees. You could put it this way. The first boat story is the who is this story. The second boat story is this is who I am story. And the third boat story is you still don't get it. These boat stories, they mainly deal with Jesus' own disciples and where they are with the big question of who Jesus is. We've already seen various questions and opinions from other people. His own family said he was out of his mind. Pharisees and scribes said he was possessed by the devil. His own townsfolk said that he was just a carpenter. Others, including Herod, said that he was

[4 : 44] John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others said he was Elijah. Or others said he was one of the prophets. And now in the boat, when Jesus calmed the storm in chapter 4, the disciples joined the questioners and said, Who is this? Later on in chapter 8, Jesus will ask his disciples for an answer to that question on who he is. But until now, compared to everyone else, Jesus has given his own disciples more teaching and more revelation than anyone else. And at this point, in a similar stormy situation, he is showing them a greater revelation of who he is. But the question is, do they get it? Do they see?

Do they understand what Jesus is showing them? Unlike Matthew and John's account of the walking on the water, which seems more positive, Mark has this confusing little conclusion that they were astounded because they didn't understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. Mark's not just telling us whether they get it or not. Mark is wanting to tell us why. The reason they're so confused and confounded at this point is because they didn't understand about the feeding of the 5,000. And they didn't understand about that because their hearts were hardened. And so, as we look at this passage, have in mind that Mark is trying to help his readers, his first readers and us, connect the dots so that we see who Jesus is and what he is doing, and so that we do not harden our hearts.

Mark is connecting stories here. He's connecting this big miracle on the sea with this big miracle with bread in the wilderness. And they are connected to Exodus. And then Mark tells us about hardened hearts, which reminds us of Pharaoh in Exodus. And then there is another big Exodus link that we'll get to as we go. But the point is, Mark isn't just saying that people in the story should be thinking about Jesus in relation to the Exodus, but people reading Mark's story, us, should be understanding Jesus in relation to the Exodus. He's shown these connections. We should see Exodus and what Jesus is doing to understand who he is. Now, you might think, why do we need to see these links to Exodus when we've got 2,000 years worth of hindsight on Jesus? But consider that even in our own day and age, people still try to explain away the feeding of the 5,000 by saying that a little boy sharing his lunch encouraged everyone else, encouraged everyone else to share their lunch. People still try to explain it away. People still try to explain away the walking on the water by saying Jesus was just near the shore, or he was walking on some sandbar. And they're trying to explain away these stories.

But the truth is, they don't see who Jesus is because their hearts are hardened. And Mark is trying to show us, his readers, by connecting the story with Exodus. And so, many people, even in our day and age, with all the hindsight and with the complete story, still don't see Jesus for who he is, because hearts are the problem, hard hearts.

And so, this is perhaps a good point to pause and check our own hearts. Where is your heart today? Is there any hardness in your heart? What kind of things cause our hearts to harden? Now, I'm not talking about bad arteries. I'm talking about unbelief, sin, resistance to the Spirit convicting us and pressing us, filling ourselves up with many unhelpful things. We saw these things with Herod, didn't we? Herod had a resistance to repentance, indulgence in sin, unhealthy relationships, and keeping bad company. All of those things caused his heart to harden. Some other things that can cause our hearts to harden, you could say harboring resentment. Holding grudges can harden your heart.

[9 : 31] Having unforgiveness in your heart, unwillingness to repent or say sorry to someone can harden your heart. And neglecting to meet together with one another, the saints, all of these things harden the heart. And like hard soil, they make no room for the seed of God's Word to grow and bear fruit.

And so, every one of us, we all need to regularly check our hearts. Being in prayer, being in the Word of God, and being with the people of God can help us to check our heart. People with the wrong view of Jesus can pull you into a wrong view of Jesus. And we get a sense of that. In this moment of time with Jesus and His disciples, at the start of the passage, verse 45, after feeding 5,000 people, you might think that Jesus would use the twelve to help direct and dismiss the large crowd. But He doesn't. He seems more keen to get His disciples away from the crowd than to have them help. And we get a little clue from John's gospel. In John's gospel, we read that the crowd were so excited by the miracle that they wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him their king. The things that people will do for some bread.

Perhaps Jesus wanted to get His disciples away from this kind of thinking. He doesn't want His disciples having that kind of thinking as well, to take Jesus and make Him king by force.

And we also see, at the same time as that temptation, we see Jesus wants to be alone to pray. And so He is keen to send the crowd one way and to send His disciples another way, both in different directions. And in verse 46, after taking leave of them, He went on the mountain to pray. This pattern of Jesus is a really helpful pattern is a really helpful pattern, to take leave of everyone and physically go somewhere, if you can, to get away from everyone and everything to pray. There's only a few recorded times, actually, that we see Jesus doing this. And so, in Mark's gospel, no surprise.

How many times do you think Jesus goes away to pray that's recorded? If we know Mark, we know it's three. Not that Jesus only prayed three times. That would be ridiculous. Jesus had a very healthy prayer life. But Mark is trying to show us something. They're not random, but they are important points that Jesus withdraws to pray. The first time is in chapter 1, when everyone was looking for Jesus, and they wanted Him to stay in one town where He already had a lot of success healing everyone.

[12 : 35] Why don't you stay here, Jesus? Everyone loves you here. You've got a lot of success here. Let's just do ministry here. Jesus needs to preach elsewhere, even if He is rejected. Jesus needs to press on. Temptation for Jesus to stay in one place where He is accepted and where He's successful Jesus wants to fight against that temptation. The world needs Him, not that one place.

The second time that we see Jesus withdrawn is in our passage, where people want to take Him by force and make Him king. And the third time, most of you can guess, where is the third time we see Jesus withdrawn to pray? It's in a garden, the garden of Gethsemane. There's a temptation and threat every single one of these moments. There's a temptation and threat against His mission. And every temptation in these moments wants to limit Jesus. Each temptation wants to contain Jesus. Each fork in the road moment for Jesus could potentially lead Him off the track that leads to suffering, rejection, and crucifixion. Every point when Jesus has to withdraw to pray could lead Him potentially away from suffering, rejection, and crucifixion, which is His mission. And if He didn't do that, it would be devastating for the world. And so Jesus withdraws for the sake of His mission. It's helpful to see these moments are not random. No doubt He would have had a really good prayer life. But these moments are more about where

Jesus finds resolve to do His Father's will. And sometimes you might be faced with points in life where you need to withdraw to find resolve to keep doing the Father's will. But that's not really the point. The point is, Jesus made sure to do that for our sake. And so the crowds go away on foot, the disciples go away on the sea, and Jesus goes up the mountain. Verse 47 gives us an emphasis on time and location. When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and He was alone on the land.

I think the reason, one of the reasons why Mark includes this verse, you could read the whole passage without this verse, and it would be fine. But He's telling us the time and the location and really sets up the problem. The problem is, Jesus sees that they're out on the sea making headway painfully painfully, for the wind was against them, but He's on the land. There's no way they can get to each other. They're in completely different places, and there's a big thing in the way.

And they're on their own. They're out at sea. Jesus is on the land. They're not getting anywhere. And humanly speaking, Jesus has no way to get to them. I was with a young friend yesterday having breakfast, and he was telling me of his recent adventure during summer to paddleboard the length of the Great Glen Fault from Fort George, just outside Inverness, to Corrin, just outside Fort William, all the way through. Paddleboard all the canals and lochs all the way through. And he was telling me that one of the days he made such massive progress on Loch Ness, because it was calm. The water was still. And then near the end of his journey, just at Fort William, you could see him from the car park.

[16 : 32] It took him hours just to get less than a mile across to the other side, because the wind was blowing. The wind was against him, and it took him ages, just across a short period.

The disciples are getting nowhere. The Sea of Galilee is around seven miles wide, and John's gospel tells us they'd gone about three or four miles. So they're smack in the middle of the Sea of Galilee.

And it's the middle of the night, in the middle of a large body of water, with no life jackets and no coast guard. This is really dangerous. And the wind and waves are now against you. This is quite a predicament. Not quite as life-threatening as the storm in chapter 4. That was a great storm.

But it's a pretty bad situation, and they are separated from Jesus. At least in the storm, Jesus was in the boat. He might have been sleeping, but he was in the boat.

If they really knew who Jesus was, they would have known the boat's not going to go down with Jesus in it. But now they are in a boat without Jesus. This is really bad. They are not in control, and they cannot seem to get anywhere without him. Does life ever feel like that? Yeah, out of control, and we can't get anywhere without Jesus. And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. Talk about a sentence that is understated.

[18 : 11] The fourth watch of the night was between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. Some of you have seen that just recently, if you've got a wee one. It was up at all times in the morning.

When I was young, I spent a year living in Mallorca in Spain, and I used to work every night until 3 a.m., until the fourth watch of the night. And I would leave my work at 3 a.m., and I'd go back to the apartment, and sometimes I would go for a wee night swim. For some reason, the water seemed to be still warm at nighttime, and the beach was empty, and you had relative freedom to just go. It was nice and peaceful. And so, more than once, I went a wee swim at night, and there was a wee floating thing further out, and you could swim out and just sit in that. And it was peaceful. However, it was, I think, just about every time it was peaceful until I began to overthink things.

And I don't know if you've ever been swimming at night in the sea, but when you get to a depth that you're floating and you can't touch the bottom, there's something really unsettling about being in the sea in the dark, and you cannot see what's in the water. And you think about the word lurking? What is lurking underneath me? What's going to get me? In my whole year of being on that island, there was never a report of a shark. But on those nights, I thought about sharks and all sorts of creatures. You see, in the Bible, the sea is more connected with chaos. It's the abyss. It's the home of Leviathan, and the sea itself is a wild, unruly part of nature that could swallow you up into its darkness. The disciples are not just thinking about drowning. They're thinking about this sea being very hostile to God's plans. They're at the mercy of this powerful, unruly part of nature, teetering above the abyss. And equally for Jesus, this miracle is not just that walking on water can defy physics.

That's not only what it's about. It's about this hostile, chaotic part of nature that Jesus can just trample all over. That's what it's about. It's about who can trample on the waves of the sea.

Psalms 77 says, When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid. Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters, yet your footprints were unseen.

[21 : 09] You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. The sea was afraid of them. You see how this is connected to Exodus? When the disciples cannot get to Jesus, nor can they get anywhere, Jesus is able to make a path on the sea to them. I was out last night for a walk, and I was thinking about the time that it would take Jesus to reach the disciples.

I don't think he teleported. I think when it talks about when evening came, he saw them, and then at the fourth watch of the night, he came to them. I think that's the difference of the time that it took him to get down the mountain to the shore and across the sea. And remember, John says they're about three or four miles out into the sea. And what I was thinking about last night, I don't know when the last time you went for a walk for an hour, and you were just walking for an hour.

At least an hour, Jesus was walking on the sea without anybody seeing. He's not doing it for His glory. He's not doing it for an applause. He's not doing it for a parlor trick. He's not nervous about the water. Think about the confidence of Jesus to just see the disciples go down the mountain and just step on the water and walk for an hour to meet them before they even know that He's doing that. They might be thinking, He's never going to find us. We're going to get blown off course. We could die, but He probably has no idea that we're out here struggling. Meanwhile, Jesus is spending an hour walking on water. It's incredible. Every step with confidence. Think how many steps.

I think there's about an average of 5,000 steps in an hour. Humans walk at an average speed of three miles per hour. And I just thought, that's incredible. Jesus is just walking himself.

He's only getting himself to entertain. What's going through his mind for an hour walking on the sea? Just think about that. It's incredible. So, Jesus comes to them.

[23 : 45] There's nothing they can do. When the disciples are on the same water, think about this. Jesus and the disciples are on the same water.

For the disciples, there's nothing they can do. And for Jesus, there's nothing that He cannot do. And they're on the same body of water in that same moment. There's no struggle for Jesus.

There's no trial, no power against you that Jesus cannot cut a path right through and easily walk all over. There's no situation that can keep Jesus away from getting to any one of us to bring us aid.

There's no place that we can end up where He cannot see us and come to our aid. He spent more time trampling the waves with no witnesses for their sake than He did with an audience. And He's not doing parlor tricks for His own ego. He just is simply sovereign over every part of creation.

If He wants to walk in the water, He can walk on the water. If He wants the wind to stop, He can make it stop. He can do whatever He wants. And then it says in the passage, in verse 48, He meant to pass by them. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw Him and were terrified. What does it mean that He meant to pass by them? Does Jesus suddenly think, of all the places on the Sea of Galilee, I end up bumping into you guys. What are the chances? No, that's not what it means. Now, let me tell you a little story.

[25 : 41] When I was 16, I worked at McDonald's in East School Bride. And one day, I pulled a sickie. I phoned in sick because I didn't want to go to work. However, it was in the town centre, and I had to go visit my mum for something. She was working in the town centre. And the usual route would be to pass by McDonald's. Okay? But I didn't want to be seen because I was supposed to be off.

So I went another way. I didn't pass by. I bypassed it. There's a difference between passing by and bypassing. I went a different way. But on this other way, to my surprise, one of my bosses walked round the corner on his break. And I absolutely panicked and ran into the nearest shop. And I sat down with my head down and my hood up. And the next day, my boss confronted me by saying, did I see you in Nail Zone yesterday? I had no choice what shop I was running into, but it was one of these nail parlours. And what was I going to say to him? I took the day off for a manicure. I knew I was caught red-faced, but I said no in embarrassment. Passing by would be in view of McDonald's. But I tried to bypass it. Two different things. Jesus isn't trying to bypass the disciples and beat them to the other side. He's trying to go somewhere in view of them for a certain reason. The Greek phrase comes from the words, to come and beside, and by the side of.

To come by the side of something. To come near. Pass by in proximity and view. And listen to what it says in Job chapter 9. Who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea?

Behold, he passes by me. He passes by me, and I see him not. He moves on, but I do not perceive him. And as I said earlier, there's another link to Exodus. Can you guess where the link to Exodus is when Jesus wants to pass by? Remember when Moses asked God to see his glory, and God hid him in the cleft of a rock and does two things. God passes by him and proclaims his name. And there's two things that Jesus wants to do here. He wants to pass by them, and he wants to proclaim his name. And it's unfortunate because we don't get it in English. But in the Greek, the same term that Jesus says in Mark's gospel here is the same term in John's gospel throughout when he says, Ego am I, which is the Greek for I am. Jesus says, Take heart. I am. Do not be afraid. Jesus passes by and proclaims his name.

Now, the term was used by other disciples to explain what Jesus was saying, the I am statements of John's gospel. And in Greek, you know, it was also used to say, I am hungry or I am thirsty or whatever. But when you're trampling on the waves, walking on the sea, and you say a statement like that, and you just happen to be Jesus, the Son of God, then it's no coincidence. No coincidence. Who else but the great I am can trample on the waves? I remember a while back going through to Straven with the boys on a stormy night. We went up a hill monument, and we felt the wind blowing, an absolute hoolie.

[29 : 38] And the rain coming down. And afterwards, in the car on the way home, Levi said a profound statement. He said, I think God was trying to tell us something. Are we getting what God is trying to tell us?

Are the disciples getting what Jesus is trying to show them? Are they getting it? Who lives in a pineapple under the sea? Come on, disciples. SpongeBob SquarePants.

Who tramples the waves and walks on the sea? Jesus, the Son of the Most High. Jesus could have stopped the wind and waves at any point. You ever thought about that? When he was up the mountain and he saw them, he could have, there you go, disciples on your way. At any moment, he could have calmed the sea. But instead, he chose to walk his way to them in the midst of their trial.

He came walking all over the impossible challenge that they faced. He is definitely trying to tell his disciples something, but they didn't understand. Remember, in the first boat story, their question was, Rabbi, do you not care that we are perishing? You see, we must never interpret our own struggle as Jesus not caring. And we must never think that if our struggle is ongoing that it means that Jesus is not coming. Their struggle kept going, but Jesus was on the way. He was on the sea.

They might have been struggling at the oars, but Jesus has walked down a mountain and over the sea for them. What can he not do, and what will he not do in order to come to us and make himself known? What will he not do, and what has he not done in order to come to us and make himself known? But do we have eyes to see? Do we understand, or is our heart so hardened that we miss who it is that is passing before us? They think it's a ghost. Why? Maybe because people don't walk on water?

[31 : 57] I don't know. They cannot see because they didn't understand who Jesus was from the feeding miracle, the feeding of the 5,000. Maybe they thought when he calmed the storm, maybe they thought, well, Elijah was a man, and he prayed, and the rain stopped. Maybe when he fed the 5,000, they thought, well, Moses was a man, and he fed them in the desert. However, walking on the sea, that's a whole different thing. He isn't merely a prophet. He can trample the waves because he made the sea, and he is sovereign over nature and all of creation, and so they are utterly astounded.

Now, this term, utterly astounded, this is not like in Britain's Got Talent when you see someone doing something amazing, and you're like, wow, that's amazing. The actual term means dumbfounded. They're unable to make sense of it. They aren't impressed. They're confused. They're confounded. They're bewildered and beside themselves. The original language, actually, in Mark's gospel in Greek makes a big deal about their bewilderment. In the Greek, it says, exceedingly and excessively in themselves they were astounded. Or it says, exceedingly in superabundance in themselves they were put out of their wits. That's what's going on. They're not just impressed or amazed.

They were superastounded and superconfounded. They were unable to make sense of what was happening, and Mark is saying that the reason they're unable to make sense of it is because, verse 52, they didn't understand about the loaves because their hearts were hardened. People who don't get Jesus don't get him because their hearts are hardened. Jesus is coming again. The question is, will we see it? Will we recognize him? Will we know who he is, or will our hearts be hardened?

And so, this event can help us to look back at something else. This event is reminiscent of his first coming. Seeing the man out at sea, in despair, rowing but never getting anywhere, wind against us and lost in the dark, Jesus from heaven sees us. He is in communion with his Father, and he sees us, and he comes down to earth to our aid. Yet in his coming he intends not just to release us, but to reveal himself to us. He wants to show us who he is. He no more wants to leave us with hard hearts than he wants to leave us rowing against the wind and vain and the dark. Do you see who he is?

Do we understand? Does the heart prevent the eyes from understanding what they are seeing? This event also helps us to look ahead. The event is like how he will come again, because he has ascended the hill. Just like in the story where he climbed the mountain to pray to his Father, he has now ascended into heaven by his Father's side, and he is interceding for his own.

[35 : 20] He knows the struggle of his disciples here on earth. If you're a disciple, he sees you, and he knows your struggle. He can see our every weakness. He can see our trials and temptations.

He can see that we are making headway painfully. How do you feel like you're getting on in your Christian life? Do you feel like you're winning? Do you feel like you're super close to perfection? Do you feel like you're making headway painfully?

He sees that. He knows that we cannot do this on our own. Without him, we cannot make it to the other side. We can't.

Even when he begins a good work in us, we cannot finish it, because it's his work, not ours. Our work is to look to him, to have faith in him, and to wait for him, and to trust in his promises, no matter how it looks. Even when the most confident Christians, at the end of their lives, think about this, they know that they don't feel any closer to perfection than when they first started.

We cannot complete our own sanctification. We cannot deliver ourselves from death, and we certainly cannot present ourselves blameless before God. But he can, and that's what he's coming to do. Just don't let your hearts be hardened. Not everyone in the boat stayed loyal to Christ. That's the scary thing. Not everyone in the boat stayed loyal to Christ.

[37 : 04] But there is a great hope and comfort that although we do not yet see him, he sees us. Peter says, though you have not seen him, you love him. And though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with a joy that's inexpressible and filled with glory.

And so while we do not see him, he sees us. And while at times, all we may think about are the waves around us and the wind against us, he's mindful of us.

He's mindful of our struggle. He's mindful of our frame. He loves us, and he always intends on saving us. And while we may wonder if he will ever show up, if he's ever going to come and get us, if he is even there, will he ever show himself, he has already determined that he is going to come, that he's going to come to us and show us a greater revelation of who he is than we could possibly ever expect or imagine. They were not expecting Jesus to come walking on the water.

When Jesus appears, it will not be like a ghost. The whole world will see him in his glory. And when he appears, his disciples will not be despairing or confused. We will be rejoicing.

When he appears, we will see him as he is, in all his glory, our God and our Savior, and he will take us with him to the other side to be with him where he is. Let me pray.

[38 : 48] Lord, we take great comfort from these words. These words are of a true occasion in your life. And we thank you for what it teaches us. We thank you that it shows us who you really are. We thank you that there is nothing impossible for you.

We thank you that it reminds us that we cannot get there ourselves, but that you are coming for us, that you do see us, and that you do love us, and that there is nothing that you can cut a path through, because you are the God and Savior of all. And so we thank you for this hope that we have, and we thank you that you are coming again. In your name we pray. Amen.