

Who is he?

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[0 : 00] We're reading this morning from Mark chapter 4, beginning at verse 35. On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, Let us go across to the other side.

And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.

But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, Teacher, do you not care that we're 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 wind and sea obey him?

[1 : 06] Thanks, Emily. Good morning, everyone. Let's pray as we look at this together. Father in heaven, we thank you very much for your word, and we pray that you would open our hearts to it, and open your word to our hearts.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're back in Mark's gospel. It's great to be back.

And we've got now three or four talks, in fact, looking at these next two chapters. So, well, one and a half chapters, Mark chapter four through to the end of chapter five.

There are four miracles that Jesus performs, and we're going to look at one each in turn. And the subject of this series is that Jesus is an infinitely great savior.

We're to remove all limits from him, both limits to who he is and to what he's come to do. I think that's the subject, Mark's subject, who wrote this gospel, and therefore God's subject for us in these next four weeks, that Jesus is an infinitely great savior.

[2 : 30] I don't know if you've ever walked into a palace. I've never been to Buckingham Palace, I don't think. Well, I've seen it from the outside, but never been inside. But just imagine walking into a palace, and the entrance hall is amazing.

It's grand, it's, you know, gold, gilded, and jewels, and it takes your breath away. You walk into the entrance hall. But then your guide says, well, now follow me through this door into the next room, and you walk through the door, and the next room is ten times the size and the glory, and you can't actually see to the end of it.

It seems to go on forever. I think that is a bit like the journey that Mark is taking us on in his gospel. We've seen the first four chapters, like the entrance hall, breathtaking.

Jesus, the king of God's kingdom. But I think in this verse, four verse 35, into this section, new section now, it's as if Mark says to us, come through into the next room, and let me show you an infinitely greater savior, an infinitely greater king, with an infinitely greater salvation from death itself.

Well, one of our subjects today is death, and you can see that if you look down with me at verse 37. A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat so that the boat was already filling.

- [4 : 18] But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they awoke him and said to him, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? Have you ever been on a plane?
- Again, I'm assuming lots of us have. And the thought has crossed your mind, what if this goes down? I mean, I think that's probably most of us. They do go down, tragically.
- Boeing 737 Maxes, two of them went down recently. I still remember that Air France flight that was lost 10, 15 years ago over the Atlantic Ocean.
- Do you sometimes wonder, what would you do or think in those final moments? Would you be afraid? It's the same situation that disciples are in here.
- Their boat was going down. They are moments from death. What if you get that hospital appointment and you are told, as many of our friends and family have been, and probably some of us will be, you have three months to live.
- [5 : 26] Would you be afraid? That is the same situation that the disciples were in. If you are looking into the Christian faith, when you think about death and dying, that day that is coming to all of us, the abyss, are you afraid?
- Or to put it like this, we all drown in the end, don't we? One day those waves will come crashing into the boat.
- What then? Well, that's the issue of today's passage. That was literally happening to these followers of Jesus at this point as they crossed the Sea of Galilee.
- These kinds of storms are well attested. So there are three reasons why, actually the Sea of Galilee is quite a small body of water. But there are three reasons why you get crazy storms on the Sea of Galilee.
- Number one, it's shallow, it's relatively shallow, so the waves can raise up to three meters or so. It's susceptible to large waves, even from just moderate winds. Wind patterns, so the winds come in from the east, especially from the mountains, and can create really dangerous storm conditions, and they can do that quickly.
- [6 : 48] So you get sudden storms, just out of nowhere, apparently, on the Sea of Galilee. Certainly, this was the worst storm they'd ever seen, these experienced fishermen, and possibly the worst storm that there's ever been on that sea.
- And there they are, in the boat. They've been bailing, and bailing, and bailing, and crying, and shouting orders to each other, presumably. They realize it's hopeless.
- As a last resort, they go to Jesus and say, not save us, but teacher, don't you care?
- Don't you care that we're dying? Now, I wonder, which do you think are the most extraordinary words that Jesus says in these next two verses?
- Surely, verse 39, peace be still, to the wind and to the waves. But as I have meditated on this again this week, I actually think it's a close contest between verse 39 and verse 40.
- [8 : 02] In one sense, in verse 40, I think these are the most extraordinary words. Do you look down?
- He said to them, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? Just pause to think about that for a moment. Having rebuked the wind and the waves, he then turns to his disciples and rebukes them.
- Don't you believe that I can calm this storm? Why did you think that I couldn't command the wind and the waves? Isn't that extraordinary?
- In other words, do you still not know who I am? Well, we're going to pause on these two penetrating questions in verse 40 for the next few minutes as I think they are the sharp end, the application, the lesson of this miracle to them and to us.

So number one, have you still no faith? The point I think that Jesus is making is that they should have known by now who he is. They'd seen his miracles, chapters one to four, his healing power.

[9 : 21] He had healed a leper with a touch. He had healed a whole town of various diseases. He'd cast out demons with a word. He'd raised a paralyzed man. Who alone could act with that kind of power?

But to put the matter beyond doubt, verse 35, Jesus says, let's cross over.

Oh, it's his initiative. He knows what's going to happen. In other words, he says, I have something more to show you. I want you to see who I really am.

Now, look again at verse 39. He awoke and rebuked the wind and the sea and said to the sea, peace, be still. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

Now, as I've looked at this, I think I've realized something I've never realized before. which is, I think I'd always imagined that Jesus stood up throughout his arms and cried out, peace, be still.

[10 : 38] He doesn't really say that. He awoke. Did he even stand up? Peace. Be quiet. Those two imperatives actually, literally, be quiet to the wind be quiet to the waves.

And at those words, those first followers remember the wind ceased and the waves dropped to nothing, only the gentle lapping of water against the side of the boat.

And actually, I wrote that line and realized it's probably wrong because Mark records not just a calm but a great calm.

Why that word great? What is a great calm? I take it it's much more likely that the sea was pond, flat, glassy, not even a ripple on the surface.

And Jesus turns to his disciples and says, do you not yet realize who I am? Have you still no belief?

[12 : 02] Their response in verse 41 is understandable. They're now even more afraid of Jesus than they were of the storm. and they're still clueless about who he is.

Who is this then? That even the wind and the waves obey him. Before we move on, I want to speak to the question of whether this actually happened. You will have to make up your mind.

It is utterly essential. If it didn't happen, then this has no more meaning than Jack and the Beanstalk, no more relevance. If it did, change, it changes everything, everything about reality.

And there is nothing in between those two options. But let me point out some things from this passage that smack very much of eyewitness testimony. Firstly, Mark is so matter-of-fact and so brief and so understated.

there is nothing here of the embellishment that you would expect from somebody inventing such an out-of-this-world event. Secondly, why mention bizarre details that seem to add nothing to the narrative if you're making it up?

[13 : 25] Verse 36, and other boats were with them. Well, why does Mark say that? He doesn't come back to it. It has no bearing on the story.

Except that there were other boats, and he invites the original readers, I take it, to check up with others if they want to. This was witnessed more widely.

Jesus asleep on the cushion. Again, a bizarre detail to make up and put in there. It almost seems comical, which you wouldn't put in if you're trying to fabricate something and make people believe it.

Unless, in fact, it was actually the case. But then there's the disciples' reaction and the realism of their response to Jesus.

You know, if you're making this up, you don't have your key eyewitnesses completely shivering with fear and not understanding what's just happened.

[14 : 24] Instead, you say, and they said, hooray, wonderful, you must be God. But instead, verse 41, they're even more terrified.

Of course, just imagine for a second, you were on Millennium Bridge over the Thames. You're just walking across, minding your own business. Somebody stands on the bridge and says to the Thames, stop.

And the whole thing just stops, a wall of water. What's your initial response? It's terrified of that kind of power. It's very real.

Of course, it's real because that's how we would have reacted and that is how they did respond. It has an eyewitness ring of truth.

What is the point of this miracle? Why did Jesus do it? Well, to find this, I think we just need to do a little bit of work and we're going to come back to the Old Testament for just a second.

[15 : 23] So could you keep a finger in and turn back to page 576. and Psalm 65. And we're just going to do a brief tour of some Psalms.

Psalm 65 verse 7. So it's on page 576, I think, of the church Bibles. So Psalm 65 verse 7.

I'll just read actually from verse 5. By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness. O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth. And then verse 7.

Who stills the roaring of the seas, speaking of God, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Turn now with me to Psalm 89 verse 9.

Psalm 89 verse 8. I will read from verse 8. O Lord, God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you, you rule the raging of the sea.

[16 : 35] When its waves rise, you still them. Psalm 93 verse 4. Psalm 93 verse 4.

Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty. Psalm 95 verse 5. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

Psalm 106 verse 9. Giving us a run around, I know. Psalm 106 verse 9. He that is God rebuked the sea.

It became dry. Psalm 107 verse 29. He that is God made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Psalm 114, finally, 114 verse 4. Verse 5. What ails you, O sea, that you flee?

[17 : 46] O Jordan, that you turn back? Verse 3 as well. The sea looked and fled, Jordan turned back. And then verse 7. Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord.

Come back to Mark chapter 4. What point do you think Jesus is making about himself? as he engineers this event?

As he sleeps in the boat with the confidence of the owner, not of the boat, but of the sea. And he demonstrates his effortless power.

What point do you think he's making about himself? He is revealing himself is he not? The gospel introduced Jesus as the Christ, verse 1, the Messiah.

But who is the Christ? That's one massive question, isn't it? Who exactly is the Christ? And as Mark leads us in chapter 4, he shows us that the answer is that the Christ is none other than almighty God, the creator, the son.

[19 : 13] Do you see? And so this question comes to all of us here, from Jesus, do you not yet realize who I am?

Secondly, and flowing from this, why are you so afraid? Why are you so afraid? The point, I think, is if you knew who I am, then you wouldn't be afraid because you'd realize just how safe you are with me.

You are so safe, disciples. You couldn't be safer than to be with the creator God himself, who has creator's rights, and who loves you.

And let's be clear, this is about the fear of dying. They are perishing. And so the fear that he rebukes them for in verse 40 is the same fear that we might feel in the plane that tips and plummets to earth.

Jesus would say to us, why are you so afraid? you're with me. It's the same fear that we would feel with the diagnosis of the brain tumor.

[20 : 31] Why are you so afraid? He says to his people. It's quite a rebuke, isn't it? You're safe with me. Don't you realize?

We have this thing in our family with daddy long legs. nothing can strike fear in our family like daddy long legs with the kids or only with the kids in fact.

I mean Anna is perfectly okay with them most of the time. And I have the experience of saying look it's nothing to be afraid of to the kids.

It's just the daddy long legs. I can get rid of it. But it's really hard to persuade them. They're still terrified of them. Here we have Jesus with his disciples.

But the daddy long legs is death itself. Why are you so afraid? He says. Do you not realize who you're with? Why are you afraid of dying brother or sister?

[21 : 38] Of that deep dark water to come? That storm that awaits all of us? Have you still no faith my people? Says Jesus. Do you not know who you are with?

Well what does this mean for us? If I can just speak to Christians here which I know is most of us for a second I'll come and speak to those who are looking into things in just a second how similar we are to the disciples in practice we're afraid of all kinds of things aren't we?

We don't need to be we need to hear this rebuke we may tick the Jesus is God box but actually our fear life is what tells us what we're actually believing at any one moment most of our fears are connected somehow to death in his book there's a guy called Ernest Becker who's not a Christian but wrote a book called The Denial of Death and he says the fear of death is the basic fear that influences all others a fear from which no one is immune no matter how disguised it may be I think he's probably right when you look at all the main phobias you see that he's got a point most phobias have a pretty obvious connection to death I was looking up I mean there's loads of them but fear of heights fear of flying fear of spiders!

There was one that threatened to disprove this theory fear of tetraphobia does anyone know what tetraphobia is? Fear of the number four that did threaten to disprove the theory except when you look into it that is a fear particularly among East Asians do a little bit of digging and the word for sounds very similar to the word for death in a lot of East Asian languages and so to be unafraid of dying should liberate us from almost all kinds of fear I say almost all I think there are two kinds of fear in the Bible that are good two kinds of fear that are unrebukable number one is the fear of God the fear of the Lord Jesus the fear that they were left with the right fear the awe of who he is the other kind of fear that I think is not rebuked in the

Bible is fear for other people's spiritual state anxiety for the churches Paul talks about his anxiety on behalf of other people for their spiritual state beyond that Jesus I think liberates us from all fear because if we're with him we are as safe as we could possibly be he is the creator God there is no safer place to be the waves of death may crash in but he will not let you sink in the end but will take you safely to that further shore the eternal life of his kingdom to come I say that again he will not let you sink in the end though the waves of death may crash in he will take you safely to that further shore that is his kingdom to come can we think for a second about the lesser fears therefore that we face let's think about the fear of people and what they may do to us

[25 : 29] Jesus says I think! why are you so afraid of people? Have you still no faith? As we seek to live and speak as Christians in the workplace or in the school Why are you so afraid?

just think for a second we who know more than those disciples and face less than those disciples how much more could that rebuke come to us?

Why are you so afraid? By the way I think it would be great as a church if we could get out on the streets of Dulwich and share the gospel terrifying as that may seem it may not it won't be all of us necessarily but I think as a church it would be great if we could be doing that and actually if you'd like to do that come and speak to me and it would be a great application of this passage actually fearless faith as we head out so the fear of people and what they may do to us secondly why so afraid of the unknown future?

Have you still no faith? Do you still not know who is with you? It's so liberating to be a Christian Jesus is the saviour who scatters our fears if we are with Jesus and he with us there is nothing to be afraid of not even death and so Christians here today we may need to rebuke ourselves if their fear was rebukable how much more some of the things that we fear why so afraid?

Jesus is with us and these aren't bad words to store away for when the diagnosis comes and the waves break in but there is just one more piece of good news here that I want to pause on before we close notice he saves them anyway do you see that?

[27 : 45] he does not save them because of their strong faith they have no faith to speak of it melts away he saves them why does he save them?

because they are with him they are his he loves them and so they say to him do you not care and the answer he gives yes I do Christ therefore the great Lord the infinite saviour but Christ the gentle saviour he will save all his people whether trembling with unnecessary fear or standing firm in faith and yet he does rebuke them where is your faith?

why this needless fear? remember who I am and so a great prayer to pray I think Lord help me to see and believe who you really are and grow my faith and fearlessness if you are looking into the Christian faith this is written for you the same question comes to you from Jesus do you not yet realise who I am?

he stands with arms wide open to you too what is stopping you from coming and finding everlasting life with me? well let's pray as I close father in heaven we thank you for an infinitely great saviour in Jesus thank you that though the waves of death may crash in he will not let us sink but take us safely to that further shore of his everlasting kingdom and we want to thank you Lord Jesus for who you are we recognise that you are the eternal everlasting almighty God the son and that with you we really are safe forever and we do pray

Lord that you would scatter our fears rebuke our little faith and send us out as increasingly fearless and faithful disciples and we ask it in your name Amen to