

'A King Worth Following'

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Date: 26 April 2026

Preacher: Peter Young

[0 : 00] As we come back and look into God's word, let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for your word.

! Over the last weeks, we've been traveling through the first part of Mark's gospel, and the recurring question that Mark's kept before us as we've read through these first five and a half chapters is, who is Jesus?

Who is Jesus? Now, Mark wants to keep that question in front of us, but there's no suspense in it. There's no sort of question as to what his answer is, because from the very first verse of Mark's gospel, he says, this is the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. Spoiler alert, he has told us what the answer is, and he's been showing through these chapters that Jesus really is the Messiah, the God's King.

He is the Son of God. And those who've been here in these last couple of weeks will remember that we've seen him as a powerful king, as a king who calls his disciples, his followers, to do that, to follow and obey him in ministry and even in suffering.

[2 : 03] Today, we're going to look at a couple of stories that give more depth of insight into who Jesus is.

We'll see that he is the powerful and compassionate Son of God. And these serve to show that he really is worth following.

So we start the story with the disciples coming back to Jesus. Now, you'll remember that earlier in chapter 6, Jesus had sent them out on mission with the power and authority to do the things that he was doing.

His power and authority, the power and authority he already had. He was given to them and sent them out to do that in the villages around, to exercise that power and authority.

And we don't know quite how long they had been gone. Some scholars estimate it might have been up to a matter of months. But here in verse 30, we're told that the disciples had just come back from their mission trip.

[3 : 24] And as you imagine, they had stories to tell. But the problem was, there were people everywhere. They didn't even have a chance to eat, let alone debrief their experiences.

So Jesus suggested they go away to a quiet place. And they took a boat to a place that they knew to be out in the bush, a solitary place.

But, wouldn't you know it, the crowd followed them. The boat went out to this solitary place. And the people, seeing that that's where they were heading, went round and were there ahead of them, waiting.

And you can almost hear in the story the shoulder slump that this was.

They are, the disciples were, as we just said, tired and hungry and they just want to be alone with Jesus. And yet here's this crowd, bigger than ever.

[4 : 35] Their mission had been almost too successful. But that isn't the way Jesus saw it. He saw the crowd when he landed.

And he had compassion on them. He looked at them and saw their spiritual state. They were like sheep without a shepherd.

Now, as we read in our Old Testament reading in Ezekiel, the metaphor of sheep without a shepherd is not a random one.

In fact, this is an image that recurs time and time again throughout the Old Testament. Israel, God's people, were like sheep.

And God appointed leaders over them to tend to tend to them. And when those leaders didn't fulfill their role of looking after God's people, God's people were like sheep without a shepherd.

[5 : 49] God's people, God's people, are like sheep without a shepherd. God's people, are like sheep without a shepherd. Just as Jesus sees them here. And when Jesus saw that, he had compassion.

And that compassion led him to doing something about their need. And that's why he said, so he began teaching them all things. many things.

Now the rest of the story is from verses 35 down to 44 can be understood in light of this Old Testament image of sheep and shepherd.

You see, because the sheep have another need, a physical one this time. And the disciples point this out to Jesus.

And their solution was to drive the sheep away, to let them fend for themselves. It's already late.

[7 : 04] Send them away. Let them look after themselves. But Jesus challenged that. Verse 37, he answered, you give them something to eat.

Now remember, these disciples are people to whom Jesus had already given authority and power to do the things that he did in teaching and in miracles.

They'd just come back from a concerted time of practicing that. exercising that power and authority. And they were full of their experiences. So Jesus' challenge to them is a challenge to their faith. how far did they think Jesus' power and authority actually went? Is it really up to satisfying the hunger of this huge crowd of people?

Well, their faith obviously wasn't. The rest of verse 37 makes that very clear. They said to him, that would take a huge amount of money.

[8 : 13] And even if we had the money, where are we going to go and get? This is a solitary place. How's that going to work?

No. And so Jesus took over and showed them that he was indeed not only capable of meeting the need, but actually doing so in abundance.

How many loaves do you have? He said. Go and see. And they found out and they said, five and two fish.

It's almost comical. Then Jesus directed them to have the people sit down in groups in the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.

And taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave it to the disciples to distribute amongst the people.

[9 : 27] He also divided the two fish amongst them all. And they ate and were satisfied. And not only that, the disciples picked up 12 basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.

And the number of men only was 5,000. We don't know how big the crowd was, but it was a big crowd of people. Wow.

But notice. That Jesus actually did get the disciples to do the work.

After all. How many loaves do you have? You go and see. And when they found out, they reported back.

So Jesus directed them to do the administration, to get the people to sit down in their groups of hundreds and fifties. No small task.

[10 : 40] And then he gave, after he'd broken the bread and the fish, he gave it to the disciples to distribute. And then, when it's clean up time, it's the disciples who pick up the leftovers.

Jesus provides as the good shepherd, but the disciples are also involved in the ministry. They act as under shepherds, if you like.

They are involved in ministry. Even though it's Jesus who actually does the work. His disciples are ministering under him.

So as we think about that story, and we've heard it many times, I'm sure, what do we actually learn about it, from it?

Well, firstly, we learn that Jesus is more powerful than we usually give him credit for. He can do beyond what we expect, what we think is possible.

[12 : 16] He surprises us like that. Secondly, Jesus is compassionate. He loves the sheep.

He's the compassionate good shepherd. He provides for the sheep, first and primarily in the spiritual sense, but also physically. There's nothing too hard for him.

And he loves to provide for his people. And notice that Jesus is the shepherd who God said he would be.

In Ezekiel, as we read that passage, God said that he would be the shepherd of his sheep. And here is Jesus being the shepherd who God said he would be. He is God himself. He's definitely the shepherd worth following. And if Jesus is the good shepherd who's worth following, we are under-shepherds, if you like.

[13:40] He gives his followers the authority to be his under-shepherds. We, as his under-shepherds, have privilege and responsibility.

We have the privilege of the power and authority of Jesus himself, but the responsibility of looking after his people, his sheep.

And that's not just restricted to pastors and leaders in the church. It's the task of all God's people. We can look for ways to show Jesus' compassion for his church in practical ways. Look at these verses from 1 John 3.

This is how we know what love is. Jesus laid down his life for us. That's compassion. That's the depth of Jesus' love for us.

[14:47] That he died so that we might be his people. We might come to God. And that also sets the bar for us.

It tells us what love looks like. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech alone, but with actions and in truth. I love the way that so many in this church show practical love when others are going through a hard time. That is such an encouragement, such a demonstration of God's love amongst us. Let's keep that up.

Let's look for ways to do that. Let's be sensitive to how each other are travelling, which in turn means being ready to let others know when you could use some support.

[16:17] Let's be welcoming of people you haven't seen before. Let's be praying for each other. You know, it's easy when we're talking, we hear a concern, we say, oh yeah, I'll pray for you.

Easy to say that and just as easy to forget all about it. I know. Maybe a better way to do it is to say, can I pray for you about that now?

Let's pray. It's a bit awkward. It's a bit sort of not the sort of thing that we see happen all the time. but it's real and it shows our love for each other. It's a practical way we can support each other and we can also encourage each other from Scripture.

What have you been reading recently that's encouraged you? Well, have you shared that with anybody? Have you told anybody about that?

[17:31] because that can be such an encouragement to each other, a way of caring for each other. There are many, many other practical ways we can do this.

things. This story, this feeding of the 5,000 is the only event in Jesus' ministry, apart from the events of Jesus' death and resurrection at the end of his earthly ministry, that is recorded in all four Gospels.

it's rich in Old Testament imagery, as we've seen, but the image of the shepherd, the sheep and the shepherd is only one dimension of Old Testament references within that, the story.

we can't ignore the allusions to Moses and the Exodus, and in John's Gospel, he brings that to the fore and we see it very plainly, but it's still here in Mark as well.

Let's have a little look, a second look at this story and look for these allusions to Moses and the Exodus.

[19:00] First of all, it takes place in the wilderness. The Old Testament wilderness was the place where God traditionally met with his people, tested them and blessed them, none more so than during the Exodus time when they were led out of Egypt into the wilderness.

And the fact that this is the wilderness in Mark's story is shown in several places. they went by themselves in a boat to a solitary place, wilderness place.

And then it's emphasized by the disciples. They came to him, this is a remote place, this is wilderness, Jesus. And Jesus, like Moses, gives the people teaching in the wilderness.

But finally, of course, the big pointer to Moses is the fact that in the wilderness, God provided manna for the people.

God provided something to eat when the people were hungry in the wilderness. And Jesus provides here.

[20 : 21] God is there. But notice that in providing food for the people, Jesus is no longer taking the role of Moses. But he was doing what God does, actually providing food that wasn't there before.

Jesus, in this miracle, is showing that he is God. not just showing that he's the shepherd that God promised that he himself would be in Ezekiel, but he's also doing things only God could do, only God did in Exodus.

And we see that more as we go into the next story of Jesus walking on the water, from verses 45 down to 52. Exodus theme is extended there.

And again, it shows some profound things about who Jesus is. Let me just cast our minds back to Exodus chapter 33.

This is a chapter in which Moses asked two really bold requests from God. God. He says to God, I want your presence to go with your people.

[21 : 57] And secondly, he says, and God, I want you to show me your glory. God gives his answers to Moses.

In Exodus 33, verse 14, the Lord replied, my presence will go with you and I will give you rest. And then a few verses later, in Exodus 33, verse 19, the Lord said, I will cause my goodness to pass in front of you and I will proclaim my name, the Lord in your presence.

Yahweh. When you see the Lord in capitals in our translations of the Old Testament, it's actually translating that name of God, Yahweh.

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So let's look at this story of Jesus walking on the water.

Well, firstly, immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida while he dismissed the crowd.

[23 : 21] After leaving them, he went up on a mountain side to pray. Again, if you're in thinking about Moses, Jesus going up on a mountain side to pray, that's what Moses did.

And especially here in Exodus 33, where we just looked. Moses walked through the sea, Jesus walks on the water. water. But when Jesus does, look at what he does.

Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on the land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them.

And shortly before dawn, he went out to them, walking on the lake. And here's the surprising bit. He was about to pass them by. These guys are in trouble on the lake, straining at the oars, really struggling against the weather, and Jesus is going to go straight past them.

But think of Moses. God showed his glory as he passed by Moses.

[24 : 47] And although Moses couldn't see his face, he got a glimpse of the glory of God. Again, Jesus is not like Moses in the story.

He takes the place of God himself because he goes past the disciples, and we don't know quite what it was like, but they had a look at it, and they saw him walking on the lake, and they thought it was a ghost.

They cried out because they saw him and were terrified. But Jesus spoke to them and said, take courage, it is I, don't be afraid.

afraid. The words that are translated here as it is I are actually I am. God's name. Yahweh.

Jesus is saying the name of God. He is in effect saying, take courage, I'm God, don't be afraid.

God, God declared his name to Moses.

[26 : 09] Jesus declared God's name, referring to himself, to his disciples. And then, this is really surprising, he climbed into the boat with them.

The wind died down. Why did Jesus get into the boat? He was walking on the water, he didn't need a boat.

He got into the boat for their sake. He got in with them. His presence was with them. All of these things go to show that Jesus is God himself.

He has all authority and he is king.

He's surely a king that we should worship and most certainly one that we can follow. Now, it says the disciples were completely amazed.

[27 : 29] I'm sure this is an understatement. They had been terrified, then relieved because Jesus got into the boat, it was Jesus and he got into the boat and now they're amazed.

They're just flabbergasted. it. But they still didn't get it. They didn't understand what the incident of the loaves, the feeding of the 5,000 had taught them about who Jesus is.

And seemingly they were missing what this event was telling them about who Jesus is. They didn't recognize who he really was and had failed to learn from the feeding of the 5,000 that Jesus had more power than they had thought and was actually God himself.

Now, think about the disciples. Earlier that afternoon, they were gathering around Jesus. They'd just come back from their mirror. They were reporting into Jesus.

There were crowds around them. They had been excited by Jesus' power and authority that they had been given and they'd been able to exercise.

[29 : 02] They'd seen it in action. They were full of stories about it. But by the end of the day, in that boat, they were absolutely flummoxed because Jesus' power and authority and claims of who he is far exceeded what they were ready for.

They had been bombarded with messages that Jesus is not only the Messiah, not only God's King, but he is God himself.

Does Jesus still astound us? Does the fact that he was and is God almighty become a human being still astound and flummox and excite you?

God's spirit would spark more of that excitement and wonder and appreciation of who Jesus is in us.

Because how would that view of Jesus impact our prayers, impact our lives?

[30 : 35] Does knowing who Jesus is infuse our prayer life with a deep sense of rest and trust and expectation?

Let's pray that it does. Jesus is the powerful and compassionate son of God and he really is worth following.

He is worthy of our praise and our allegiance. God and the fact of who he is should cause us to delight in the fact that he invites us to be under shepherds in what he is doing in the world.

He has called us to lovingly administer his word to each other and seek practical ways to care for each other and to be his agents in declaring his gospel.

What a privilege. What an exciting thing. Let's pray.

[32 : 07] Lord God, we thank you. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for his compassion, his power, his love for us such that he died for us.

And we pray that we would be people who live for him. In Jesus' name. Amen.