

The King who conquers chaos and evil

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[0 : 00] Zach, thank you. As some of us might remember me mentioning a couple of years ago, one or two! people will. Dashboard Jesus. Have you come across Dashboard Jesus? Dashboard Jesus is a four and a half inch little figure sitting on a metal spring. You buy him for £11.99 off Amazon and you stick him on your car dashboard. There is Dashboard Jesus. I ordered one a couple of days ago but it has not yet arrived. Quote, put Dashboard Jesus in your car and he'll be your co-pilot. If you don't have a car stick him up somewhere that you could use a little peace or serenity or forgiveness. Dashboard Jesus comes from a 1957 folk song called Plastic Jesus. It goes like this. I don't care if it rains or freezes long as I got my plastic Jesus riding on the dashboard of my car. Through my trials and tribulations and my travels through the nations with my plastic Jesus I'll go far and on it goes.

Dashboard Jesus here. Dashboard Jesus is a bit of a fun joke. Dashboard Jesus is a kind of grinning good luck charm maybe to stick on your dashboard if you want a little bit of peace or serenity. There he is.

Dashboard Jesus makes no demands on your life at all, obviously. And Dashboard Jesus for sure will do absolutely nothing to help your real life fears and tears in an overwhelming and violent world. It's just a little plastic thing. But for 11.99 he will sit there bobbing and grinning away at you. A car accessory, a cheap religious life accessory.

Take him or leave him. My guess is you don't own a Dashboard Jesus. You don't have to own up if you do. Do you know within a culture, a wider culture in the UK today that by and large has finished with and done away with Jesus Christ. He's just a joke figure really. It could be possible, I mean it could be possible to be sat here this morning actually and in reality to have him or to imagine him to be like a kind of Dashboard Jesus. Just bobbing away on the edges of your life.

doesn't demand anything, doesn't get involved, maybe Jesus makes you feel a little bit better or more peaceful from time to time and you suspect really not able to help you with your deepest fears.

[2 : 38] But if you to imagine Jesus like that or to kind of relate to him like that, you would be deceiving yourself, obviously. At Matthew's Gospel, these readings that Zach just brought to us truly and wonderfully, they confront us with the real Jesus, the Jesus of history.

And one thing is absolutely sure in these Bible readings, he is no undemanding, useless joke figure. We have seen so far sent into the world as God's king with all God's authority.

Sent into the world to establish God's kingdom and deal with everything that so ruins our lives, Jesus began his public ministry. Having taught people with divine authority in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5 to 7, in chapter 8, our chapter for this month, he came down from the mountainside to act in kingly power.

He cleansed a leprous man immediately, just with a touch. He spoke a word from a distance and a paralysed servant, suffering terribly, was healed at that moment.

The ill and the demon possessed streamed to him and in his kindness and compassion, he made them well. How are you meant to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ as he comes and acts in this way in his world?

[4 : 00] His kingly demand to those around him then and to us today is very straight and clear. Just in the verses before our reading this morning, follow me, take me as your king, trust me as your saviour, have me as your Lord, follow me, and you will receive a place in the kingdom of heaven.

This morning in verses 23 to 34, the action continues and the focus is on Jesus Christ.

And in these verses, you and I are meant to see here who he truly is in all his total, overwhelming, awesome power and goodness and seeing what kind of man he really is, for he really isn't a

dashboard Jesus.

We're to bring our fears and our lives and come to him and follow him. So come to these verses with me this morning if you've got your Bible open. Please open your Bible again if it's shut to those pages.

And firstly, in verses 23 to 27, we are meant to see his divine kingly authority over terrifying chaos.

[5 : 14] And this is what happens in these few verses. Having spent the day on the edges of the Sea of Galilee, healing many and surrounded by crowds, up in verse 18, just a touch further up, Jesus gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake.

And so in verse 23, having had this conversation with a few people, he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Because following Jesus is what you're meant to do.

The lake here is big. It's 13 miles long by 8 miles wide. The boat that they are in is not a cross-channel ferry, enormous, but small, most likely, wooden and open.

And in verse 24, suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake so that waves swept over the boat. I read this week, I don't know this, the Sea of Galilee lies 600 feet below sea level.

And when hot and steamy air starts to rise, a rushing wind from the desert can sweep in without warning and churn up the water violently. A sudden, furious storm without warning.

[6 : 22] I don't know whether you've ever been in a storm on the sea. Some of us will have. You may remember, even from in a big cross-channel ferry behind double-glazed perspex window, you may remember just the sheer frightening power of a battering wind and frothing waves and the swirling depths beneath.

Here, can you imagine this? The waves were sweeping over the open boat and drenching them and starting to cover them. This is terrifying chaos and approaching death by drowning.

And it is the world that we live in. A world of earthquakes in Mexico and hurricanes and fires and volcanic eruptions and flash floods and avalanches and furious storms sweeping in from the Atlantic.

We call it nature. Life-threatening danger. From a physical world around us that sometimes we realise is so violent and powerful and before which we cower helpless.

And the disciples in the boat at this moment, they fear for their lives. But, did you notice here, Jesus was sleeping.

[7 : 46] Like, he is human, of course, Jesus Christ. He's exhausted from his day and his ministry. And yet, it is almost like he does not fear. He knows he is safe.

And in verse 25 now, in the middle of the storm, the disciples went and woke him saying, Lord, save us, because we're going to drown. There is some kind of faith here.

They're grabbing him for help. And yet, is it just desperation? But they've seen Jesus come into the world as God's king and heal the sick.

He is more than a little dashboard, Jesus. But in the face of this storm, you'd imagine he can't do much, can he? And Jesus replied, you of little faith, why are you so afraid?

And then, told so straightforwardly, this mind-blowing moment, he got up, rebuked the wind and the waves. Like an owner, with a well-trained dog, stop, get down.

[8 : 55] He rebuked the wind and the waves, and it was completely calm. That is, there and then, straight away. There was no gradually disappearing wind, there was no ongoing swell, from a great storm, to a great calm, immediately.

I wonder what you make of that, this eyewitness testimony, or what you make of him. In verse 27, the men were amazed.

I don't know what I'd have written there. You imagine stunned, gobsmacked, breathing heavily, relief flooding through them, as the water drips off them. They were amazed, and they asked, what kind of man is this?

And of course, that is the question. What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the waves obey him?

What kind of man sleeps from exhaustion in a boat, and yet has the very same, in that moment, has the authority to speak a word, and tame nature? What kind of man is he?

[10 : 06] He is not a kind of man like us. I remember years ago, I hope this isn't embarrassing, to whoever it is I'm about to mention, I remember hearing a small voice, from inside the bathroom, as someone was having an evening bath, and the little voice went, be still, to the bath water.

And then, a kind of, oh, of disappointment, when it didn't work. And of course it didn't work. Meg was never going to be able to do that.

And that wasn't her. King Canute, the early 11th century Danish king, was a very, very great and powerful ruler, and so powerful, that some of his subjects, started to think too highly of him, and too little of God.

And so, King Canute, orders his throne, to be taken down to the beach, at low tide. And he sat down on his throne, and he commanded the water to stop, and not come any closer, and not wet his feet, and his robes.

And the sea paid no attention, and the tide continued to rise. And as the water splashed around his feet, and his legs, King Canute stood up, and he declared to those around him, let all men know, how empty and worthless, is the power of kings.

[11 : 27] For there is none worthy, to be called a king, except the one, whom heaven, earth, and sea obey. And that is right. In the boat, in the storm, told so simply, and shortly, he spoke, and the wind, and the waves, obeyed him.

And that is because, Jesus is so obviously, a million miles, from a little plastic figure, or just a regular person, like you and me. That is because, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the divine king of all. It is because, all of creation, obeys his voice. It is because, this God man, had then, and has today, total, and complete, authority, over terrifying, chaos.

Did you know that about him? This kingly authority, of Jesus Christ. There is no one like him. There is nothing, in all of creation, that can match him, or overwhelm him.

He is the Lord. And that does mean, for those of us, who will come and follow him, and take him as our king.

[12 : 44] And if I can put it like this, let me say what I mean. You do not need, to be so afraid. My guess is, that some of us, many of us, spend quite a lot of time, feeling afraid, do we not?

Of all sorts of things. Of being hurt, of being got, of drowning, of dying. It is a dangerous world, out there, and the tension in our shoulders, says we are fearful.

You will know this, Jesus does not promise, that if we're in the boat with him, if I could put it like that, you and I will be, protected from earthquakes, or storms, or going through our deaths.

He does not promise that. But do not think, that he is a little dashboard Jesus, who can do nothing, to address your, out of control fears. He is the king.

He is the one, whom heaven, sea, and earth, obey. Nothing happens, outside of his control. And he is your king. And if I can put it like that, he promises, that through the storms of life, he will be with you, personally.

[14 : 02] He will care for you, deeply. And he will save you, eternally. And welcome you, into the kingdom of heaven.

Your life, is in his, big hands. And he will not let you go, now and for all eternity. You do not need to be so afraid, when you are in the boat with Jesus.

For he rules, with divine, kingly authority, not just over healing, sickness. He rules over all things.

And that is what Matthew 8 is showing us. He rules over sickness and disease. He rules over chaos and nature. And now, secondly, this morning, verses 28 to 34, come to this next little passage, this next episode.

And see this Lord Jesus Christ, ruling with divine, kingly authority, over violent evil. from verse 28.

[15 : 11] When he arrived at the other side of the lake, in the region of the Gadarenes, this is the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, this is non-Jewish territory, straight away, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him.

This isn't a casual meeting, the two men wandering up with their hands in their pockets to see who's just come ashore. Coming to meet can be the language of war.

If you've seen the films Troy, or Alexander, or Gladiator, or you've known something of that in your country, think of armies of people running to the battle line, coming to meet each other, and a clash as they engage.

These two men come to meet him, and they are demon-possessed. That is, personal evil spiritual forces have entered them and grabbed hold of them.

I've said before, I think before Christmas, that as a white British middle-class man, brought up in the 1980s in the West Country, me and my mates didn't really believe in anything like demons.

[16:17] The devil was a joke figure, just silly stuff for Halloween. Maybe for some of us, round here at your school, clever and sophisticated people would say, would you stop it with any kind of supernatural evil stupidity?

You might be tempted to think that too. However, on the other hand, maybe from your culture or background, or from your own personal history, what you've seen or experienced, you know that there is such a thing as the demonic, personal, supernatural evil, and you would be right. And at the start of his public ministry, in Matthew chapter 4, Jesus himself was tempted in the wilderness by the devil, by Satan, who has, ever since the beginning of history, been the great enemy of God, a liar and a murderer, whose evil aim is to oppose God and see people destroyed. Know that in our world, the devil and his demons are no fiction. You don't see him. He is a spirit. But wherever you see lies and murder, wherever you witness out-of-control violence, and where you see people led away from God or destroyed, do not imagine that the devil is far away. He is not. Here, these two men come from the tombs like living corpses to meet Jesus. And they were so violent, verse 28, because that is the mark of the devil, that no one could pass that way. [17:53] You say, what happens? Faced with dark, violent, supernatural evil before which you and I would quake and may have done.

Notice here. There is no drawn-out battle. There is no good versus evil, uncertain fight. But instead, again, the divine, kingly authority of Jesus.

See what happens here. As the two violent men see who it is, they clock him. The demons shout out. It's not a hardened battle cry we've come to get you, but the desperate words of those cornered by someone so much stronger.

What do you want with a son of God? They shouted. They know exactly who he is, by the way. Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? You see, there will be a future day, did you know this, an appointed time, when all violent evil will be done away with, and the devil will be thrown into a lake of burning sulfur and tormented day and night forever.

The appointed time when evil is done away with, finally and fully, will come. But Jesus came here before the appointed time.

[19:13] And for these demons here, because of that, their time is up. See what happens? Some distance from them, a large herd of pigs was feeding, about 2,000 pigs, Mark's Gospel says. And the demons begged Jesus, if you can drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.

And Jesus said to them, go. Go. Just one word from Jesus, in this whole episode. One irresistible word of command.

Go. And so they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and died in the water, and it is all over. Please don't feel sorry for the pigs, by the way. Please don't feel there's some kind of moral question here, with Jesus and animal cruelty, that's the most important thing. What does Jesus want to demonstrate here, to his disciples, and to those looking on?

He would have us see the horror of violent evil, and his absolutely, obviously superior authority. You imagine being at the lakeside with Jesus, and over there, the herd of 2,000 pigs.

[20:22] And Jesus says, go into this herd. And there and then you watch, as these scattered pigs, as if possessed, turn and gather, and I guess in a thunderous, mad stampede, trip and fall and pile with grunts and snarls, and their bodies fill the water, and they're dead.

And you draw back, at this violent, demonic, destructive power, and then with your eyes wide open, you turn and gaze on Jesus, by whose one word, the demons are defeated.

What kind of man is this? Who is he? And we said at the beginning, he is no dashboard Jesus. Of course he isn't. Dashboard Jesus is undemanding, and useless, just a religious life accessory. Not so the real Lord Jesus Christ, the Jesus of history, who lived and died and rose and rules our world today.

This morning, from these verses, would you see his divine, kingly authority over terrifying chaos and violent evil, before which you and I cannot stand.

[21:39] He simply speaks, and wind and waves and demons cannot but obey. Do you see what kind of man he is? In the middle of a world still marked by chaos and fear, and evil and death, you and I are meant to see who this Lord Jesus Christ is, and we're to follow him.

Bring your fears and cry out to him. Take your concerns and put your faith in him. For there is no one else who can help.

And it is Jesus, it is only the Lord Jesus Christ, who has the total overwhelming authority to deal with both chaos and evil, and to take people like you and me through life and to the kingdom of heaven.

Only Jesus. But, well, well, when you start to see who Jesus really is, when you start to come into contact with or appreciate his divine, kingly authority, the truth is that some people, some of us even, maybe, might instead push him away.

It's a strange note that chapter 8 finishes on, don't you think? Having encountered the person and the power of Jesus, having seen what he did, in verse 33, those tending the pigs ran off and went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed man.

[23 : 23] You think that must have been quite a conversation. This man commanded demons, our herd is gone and dead. These violent men have changed. Jesus has stepped. How do you respond to the Son of God stepping ashore, breaking in, acting in power, coming as king?

In verse 34, the whole town went out to meet Jesus. Just like the demon-possessed men in verse 28.

And when they saw him, they pleaded with him, just like the demons did in verse 31. Did they plead with him to stay?

Thank God you have come, Lord Jesus. We see who you are. You're so powerful and good. Save us, we will follow you. They did not. They pleaded with him to leave their region.

Get away from us. We don't want you here in our lives. There's no reason given for that in the text.

[24 : 30] Could it be though that faced with the real Lord Jesus Christ, the chaos and evil defeating Son of God who steps into our world and demands that we follow him and turns lives upside down, could it be that some then, or even some people today, or even one or two of us, would prefer to be left alone by him?

Might someone secretly prefer dashboard Jesus? Undemanding, uninvolved, just bobbing away on the edges of your life?

Matthew's Gospel would say to us, don't do that. Don't plead with Jesus to leave you. Don't push him away.

This week, recognise this Son of God, Jesus, as Lord of all and roll your fears onto him and trust him because this divine king who comes into your life demands your all this divine king who conquers both chaos and evil.

He is the one, the only one, who will save you and he really will save you and take you through to the kingdom of heaven. Let me lead us in a prayer.

[25 : 53] We're going to pray together. What kind of man is this?

Let even the wind and the waves obey him. Gracious Father, we, your creatures, are at the mercy of the elements and at the mercy of supernatural evil.

We can neither help nor save ourselves. we praise and thank you this morning for your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for his unstoppable, awesome power, for his compassion and kindness and his utter doing away with evil.

Please make us, men and women, who don't deceive ourselves, save us from a little view of this Lord. May we recognise in our lives his total and utter authority.

May we bow before him and trust him. we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.