

Mark 4:35-5:43

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[0 : 00] It's a great privilege for Kathy and myself to be here. I'm very thankful to David for an opportunity. This is a church which is known and loved in many parts of the world and especially in Sydney where I'm from.

We thank the Lord for you. You may know the story of the police cadets who are doing an exam and the first question goes something like this. You're traveling in your car and you come across a major accident.

There are seven or eight cars that have crashed into each other. One of them has hit a fire hydrant and water is bursting into the air. One of them has hit a shop front and people have already begun to loot.

A large crowd has gathered and a boy has just grabbed the handbag of one of the women in the crowd and is running away. A dog has just bitten a small child.

And in the distance you see that fire has broken out on the third floor of a building nearby. What is your first course of action? And one of the police cadets wrote, carefully remove uniform and mingle with crowds.

[1 : 05] And if you are the sort of person who is tempted to forget the privilege of being a Christian or you're thinking of giving up, I hope your series in Mark is going to renew your appreciation for Jesus and your devotion to him and perhaps even the section of our Gospel Mark today.

I noticed in a Canadian bookshop recently that there is a whole collection of books that are attacking the Christian faith. But then you open up the New Testament and you look at this person of Jesus and he is so wonderful and so great and so substantial and so watertight and you wonder why you would turn away from him.

As Peter says, to whom shall we go? So I think you have been noticing in your recent series in Mark that Jesus has come into the world and announced the kingdom and therefore himself to be the king in chapter 1.

This is a kingdom that you don't join by being born. That won't bring you into the kingdom. It's not a kingdom you join by travel. That won't bring you into the kingdom.

This is a kingdom you join by committing yourself, surrendering yourself, placing yourself under the care and the control of Jesus, the king.

[2 : 30] And then you'll notice that Jesus began to act like a king. So he called followers together, he removed problems and he began, as you would expect, to be attacked.

And he explained his kingdom with stories. The message, he said, of the kingdom comes like a seed sown. And the way you receive it is going to, of course, be very significant.

And this seed, said Jesus, is going to produce unstoppable growth. Today we come to four enemies, four great enemies, and we see how all four of them bow down to Jesus.

I noticed as Amy and Sarah were reading for us so helpfully, that even people in these accounts bow down to Jesus. But the four enemies also bow down to Jesus.

And they are the enemies of the world, unpredictable world, forces of evil, sickness, which hovers, of course, in the background and brings anxiety, and the tomb, the sense, the knowledge that down the road we will meet with God.

[3 : 44] And the unpredictable world bows down to Jesus. And the evil forces bow down to Jesus. And the incurable sickness bows down to Jesus.

And the all-swallowing tomb bows down to Jesus. Now, I've been given these 50 verses for today. I was originally given 50 books of the Bible by David.

And then 50 chapters. But I managed to beat him down to 50 verses. It's too much to deal with in one sermon. But there is a wonderful theme running through the 50 verses.

And that is, there is a great king called Jesus Christ, full of power, full of love. And he simply speaks to the storm, simply speaks to the spirits, speaks to the sick woman, speaks to the death, to the tomb.

And they obey him. So let's think about the four very quickly together. The first is the unpredictable world. And when I say world, I mean creation, what people call nature.

[4 : 49] And here, of course, is the great storm. Now, this is a very famous miracle. Very famous. You've all heard this. Perhaps you've spoken on it yourself. The calming of the storm.

How interesting that we're told in chapter 4, verse 35, it took place on that day. Well, what day did this storm event take place?

And the answer is, it took place on the day that Jesus had been teaching about the kingdom. Teaching on and on about the kingdom. The fact that the kingdom is invincible and victorious and unstoppable.

And you can imagine the disciples like us here in church, nodding politely and saying, how nice. How true. How wonderful.

And not really getting it. And so Jesus says, well, let's cross the lake. Let's turn this talk into practice. And so the storm blows up to serve the purposes of Christ.

[5 : 52] And it tests their faith. You may be interested to know that in the Old Testament, in Psalm 107, this event is described in Psalm 107 almost detail for detail.

And it says in Psalm 107, the Lord stirred up the storm. And the sailors were terrified. And then he calmed the storm and brought them into their harbor.

So this stirring up of the storm tests the faith of the disciples. And their faith is not well anchored in Christ. You'll notice. They say in chapter 4, verse 38, don't you care if we perish?

We've just listened to Jesus all day on safety, security, invincible, unstoppable, wonderful kingdom. Don't you care, they say, if we perish?

All the teaching has flown out the window. So they don't greatly trust him. They don't even know really if he cares for them. And he stands up and he simply speaks to the wind and he speaks to the sea.

[6 : 54] He speaks to the invisible wind. And he speaks to the visible sea. He speaks like God, like God speaks. And the wind stops.

Well, they've seen that before. And then the sea goes flat and they've never seen that before. And they suddenly realize they're in the presence of somebody more powerful than the whole world.

So, friends, when a hurricane comes through Prince Edward Island, or you read about it in Florida, and the secular world is talking about the dreadful forces of nature, and you as a Christian, I as a Christian, are tempted to think that this is perhaps just a very random world, the right response to say to ourselves or to others is that these things are not, they are not out of the control of Christ. He's established once and for all that everything serves his power and his purposes. And perhaps these things happen to produce in people a new faith, a new fear, a new wisdom.

Or perhaps we don't know what they're doing, but we do know who is in charge of everything. And that person is Jesus. And if we're ever tempted to say, like the disciples in the boat, don't you care, Jesus Christ?

[8 : 18] It's very hard to go down that road when he has planted like a flag the proof of his love at the cross. Rescuing people from something much worse than a storm.

Rescuing us from a much worse perishing. And at very great cost to himself. So here in this first incident is the king of power and the king of love.

He's establishing his rule over the world and the world bows down to him. So much of our life as Christians, I think, is the fist and the open hand.

We're holding in our fist the promises of God and the proofs of God. And we have on our open hand so much that we cannot explain. But we're not going to drop what we're holding on to, the proofs and the promises.

We may have to have an open agnostic hand for certain things. But this is not going to destroy this. That's what we're seeing here in Mark chapter 4.

[9 : 22] Now the second event is the very real forces of evil in chapter 5 verses 1 to 20. We may be tempted to think that this incident of driving demons out of a man is very, very detached from us.

But let me assure you that the spiritual battle is a very great battle. Why is it that there are so many people in your city and mine who are completely blind to Christ?

They cannot see his greatness. They cannot see his goodness. There is a spiritual battle that is very real. And Abraham Kuyper, who was once the Prime Minister of the Netherlands and a very significant theologian, said that if you could peel back the ceiling above the world, you would see a spiritual battle that makes the wars of this world look like fights in the children's sandpit.

I've no doubt this battle intensified as Jesus came into the world. If the light comes into the world, you would expect forces of darkness to respond in very significant ways.

And this man in Mark chapter 5, possessed by many demons, was beyond human control. But you'll notice he fell down before Jesus because he, the man, wanted to be helped.

[10:43] The spirits may not have been interested, but he himself was interested in being helped. And Jesus merely, in verse 8, spoke to the evil forces.

And they were obliged to leave the man. We have the strange detail of the pigs, as we've been reminded this morning. And the spirits asking to occupy the pigs.

And Jesus agreeing to give the spirits their wish. So unusual. Not a popular passage with some people.

I think the reason that Jesus does all this is not only to prove that he's come to destroy evil. And of course, his life, his death, his resurrection put all the nails in the coffin of the power of evil.

But Jesus is also interested in leaving behind, in this very pagan region, two great gifts. One gift is a presence of a man who is totally transformed.

[11:45] Famously terrible. Now remarkably new. Clothed. Seated. And in his right mind. This man is going to be an evangelist in the region.

Because he's going to tell what Jesus has done for him. And the other thing Jesus leaves behind is not just the presence of a man, but the absence of 2,000 pigs.

Nobody will be able to say, oh, Fred got better. He was in a bad mood, but he improved. No, no, no. 2,000 pigs ran over a cliff.

This was a spiritual battle won by Jesus Christ. So Jesus, you see, has destroyed evil power in this man and created a brand new person.

Undeniable kingship. He looked on this man. Impossible. Unattractive. Beyond human help.

[12:44] And he delivered him from the grip of evil. Now, my friends, do we think this is irrelevant to us? Let me tell you that it is not irrelevant to us. Some years ago, a young minister rang me at my desk and he said to me, I'm in my car.

I'm going to visit the home of a lady who tells me that her son is demon possessed. What should I do? I didn't really know what to say. And by the way, I should say to you something that Jim Packer used to say, which is that you know you're demon possessed if you have a huge hostility to Jesus. At least he said that is the way of distinguishing normal sinfulness from something which is much more sinister.

So don't get depressed as if you're demon possessed. Ask yourself this question. Are you angry and antagonistic toward Jesus? That's much more serious. But I said to this young man on the phone, I said, when you get there, why don't you ask him if he would like you to go through the good news with him and explain to him the gospel of Jesus.

And as you get to the end of the gospel, ask him if he would like to receive Jesus Christ as his saviour and Lord. Because if he does receive Jesus as saviour and Lord, he will cross over from the powers of darkness to the powers of light.

[14:05] And my friends, that applies to every cultivated person in this city. Every person who welcomes Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord does cross over from darkness to light.

It may be a sophisticated darkness, but it's a real darkness. And it's only through Christ that a person will cross over from darkness to light. Well, the overthrow of evil is what we see in this second incident.

And this announcement by Jesus to this man has been achieved profoundly and eternally through the cross.

Where we're told in Colossians, Jesus disarmed the principalities and the powers at the cross. Jesus took the weapons out of the evil hands.

And so here is the king of power and love showing his rule over evil. Thirdly, the threatening fear of sickness in verses 25 to 34. There won't be many people here today who are not affected by the reality or the fear of sickness.

[15:12] And you'll notice that there are many people in our culture who seem to delight in spreading more fear and gloom for us. And sometimes it's on those medicine bottles that tell you this will cure your cold, but you'll get 27 other diseases if you take the pills.

And here in 525, Jesus is on his way to a sick girl. He's been asked to help a sick girl. But as he's traveling, he stops to help a sick woman.

And this woman, as you know, pushes through the crowd to touch him. And the disciples are right when he stops and says, who touched me? Because they say, everybody is bumping into you. Why would you think somebody has done something different? But this was a different touch because this woman had touched him with faith. Now, why was Jesus so interested in pulling this woman out into the open and in a way embarrassing her?

And the reason is because she needed to go home with more than an experience. If she had just gone home, having been healed, she might have said to herself, well, I wonder how long this will last.

[16:16] And I wonder whether this is going to work at all. She needed the word of God. If she had gone home with just the experience of being made well, she had no guarantee of anything.

She had no assurance or reassurance. She could only hope things would last. But you see, it's the promise of Jesus to this woman that gives her her hope.

And he says to her in verse 34, daughter, go in peace. You're healed. She came to him in the crowd, fearful and trembling. And she walked from him with peace and wellness.

Now, this woman, of course, may have no idea what greater riches than healing she had received from Jesus. Better than healing, she'd been given peace and probably adoption into the family of God.

This word daughter is a loaded word, isn't it? This word peace is a loaded word. And if ever she'd been isolated because of her sickness and now brought back into the community, she had been much more seriously isolated by her sin and was now brought into the very community of God, the family of God.

[17:30] Well, this, of course, took place because Jesus himself would exchange places with her. He would be isolated at the cross so that a believer like you or me or this woman might be brought into the very center of God's family.

Please notice that Jesus didn't heal everyone on the earth and didn't promise to heal everyone. But he has proved that sickness is under his control.

It will not have the final word with his people. These miracles of healing in the New Testament are therefore not insurance claims that we take to God and say to him, well, you healed somebody in the past.

You should heal me. No, these miracles are assurance claims that we go to him and say, how wonderful to know you're in charge. How wonderful to know you have power.

How wonderful to know you have love. Help me to trust you. Help me to trust you with what you've given me. And Jesus, of course, has said that nothing, not sickness, not anything will pluck you out of his hand.

[18:33] So there is the king of love and peace and power and control over sickness. And then finally, the beckoning voice of the tomb at the end of chapter 5.

I once saw a cartoon of a man who was stuck in an hourglass, you know, a glass hourglass with the sand falling through. And as the sand was falling through, this man stuck in the top was holding the sides with his hands and legs so that he wouldn't drop through with the sand to the future.

And unless Jesus comes, we will meet him, won't we? We will go to meet him. And that will be a joyful day for the believer.

And that will be a terrible day for the unbeliever. This man called Jairus in chapter 5, verse 22, might never have come to Jesus if his daughter had not got sick.

He might have been perfectly happy in his Jewish world. Now, why would Jesus go with him when he could have just spoken and said, go home, she's well, as he did on other occasions?

[19:36] Because he wanted to teach Jairus that he had power, not just over sickness, but he would teach her that he had power over the tomb. And so there is this delay.

That's why the delay takes place. Because the woman is going to delay things so that the child will die. So that Jesus can show that he has power over the tomb. And sadly, in the middle of this delay, this terrible voice comes to Jairus, your daughter is dead.

Don't bother the teacher anymore. And Jesus turns to Jairus and said, listen to me. Trust me. You've just heard something terrible.

Trust me. Trust me. This girl, of course, was definitely dead. They knew how to work out if somebody was dead. But she is not out of the reach of Jesus.

And that's why he describes her with that lovely word, sleeping. He takes three disciples with him. And he simply speaks to the dead girl.

[20 : 39] And the tomb cooperates and gives her up. Just as he spoke to the storm and it bowed down. And to the spirits and they bowed down. And to the sickness and it bowed down.

Now he speaks to the tomb. And it gives up the dead. Somehow the family, verse 43, were to keep this to themselves. I don't know how they did that.

But I presume this was to prevent an avalanche of people bringing in their dead relatives. And because this girl was being brought back to the real world, Jesus very wisely says she's to be given something to eat.

Now this word sleeping is a very great word for the Christian. Because sleeping is something you do normally, which is temporary and safe. And when Jesus talks about death for the believer, it's a temporary safe experience.

And the reason that it's a temporary safe experience is because we're told in 1 Thessalonians 4, we will sleep, the believer, because Jesus died. Jesus did not have a safe and easy execution.

[21 : 46] He had a judgment. And it's because he took the sting of death. The believer will sleep. Temporary and rising. So here's the king of power, the king of love, facing what is probably the greatest enemy of all.

And it bows down to him. When Martin Luther lost his 12-year-old daughter, and they were nailing down the lid of the coffin, he called out in a loud voice, hammer as hard as you like.

Nothing will stop her from enjoying the resurrection. And many pastors have taken those difficult funerals for a child, perhaps a little girl. And we've taken hold of these verses in Mark chapter 5, where Jesus says, little girl, get up, arise.

Full of power and full of significance. Well, time, my friends, will prove to you and to me that because of Jesus, these temporary enemies are unable to stop the plans of Jesus Christ.

All these great things that we see in these events, the calm, the peace, the relief, and the eternity are the privileges of belonging to Jesus Christ.

[22 : 59] And you can be sure with God that if he is clever enough to make the world and preserve the world and powerful enough, he is good enough to finish what he has begun as he's promised and proved.

So three things to take home with you this morning. First of all, we live in the world where travel, you may have noticed, is being idolized as if the world is the great answer to our woes.

And I have been traveling in your beautiful country and appreciating it enormously. But our troubles will not disappear, will they, just with travel. Go to Disneyland and see families fighting and you'll know what I'm talking about.

We need Mark chapter 4 and 5 to remind us that there is someone, Jesus Christ, who is the only person who can really solve these great problems.

And somehow we need to say to ourselves and we need to say to people, you know, there's a greater travel to do than this global travel. It's to do a tour of God's word and to see his son, who is the real hope and answer to the problems of the world.

[24 : 09] For those of you who like or hate acronyms, I notice that these four events, these four enemies, W, E, S, T, world, evil, sickness, tomb.

Here we are in the West. We think we can solve all our problems, but actually we cannot solve the problems, can we, of the world? Look at Florida. We cannot solve the problems of evil. We cannot solve the problems of sickness.

We cannot solve the problems of the tomb. We need to remind people, don't we, as to who really wins the West. And the answer is Jesus Christ. So this is not the time, dear friends, to remove your uniform.

This is the time for you to be even more grateful for Jesus, more thankful, more joyful, more useful, and in God's goodness, more fruitful. Because this king, this king of power and love, nobody can afford to do without.

And all who receive him are infinitely blessed. Let's pray. We thank you, gracious God, for your very precious and powerful son, full of love, full of power, full of wisdom, full of grace.

[25 : 22] Pray that you would help us to trust him, to cling close, to walk with him, and in your goodness, to bear fruit for him. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.