

The Most Important Question

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Date: 21 October 2012

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's great to be here with you tonight, and I'm realizing that there may be a number of you who don't know who I am. I'm one of the clergy on staff at St. John's, and my name is Dan Gifford, and I have been here for probably about 14 years, and I was the pastor of this service many years ago, about 14 years ago as well, and seen lots of changes, people coming and going, but I see actually a few people here who were there 14 years ago.

So that's nice to see. What Jordan didn't tell you about talking with Aaron is that the reason Aaron was calling Jordan was to see if maybe he could lead the service tonight, about 15 minutes before the service.

Is that right? So Jordan, you're doing a great job. Thank you very much, and that is an incredible answer to prayer, to see Bea healing so quickly, to see her back as well, and Amy and Aaron are just really, really excited.

And encouraged at God's work through your prayers for them. So thank you for your prayers. Tonight we're going to be looking at Mark 4 that Richard read for us.

And as we're looking at that, I know that there are many people from different situations here tonight. Some of you have been Christians for a really long time.

[1 : 2 1] Some of you are new Christians. Some of you are exploring who Jesus is. At least I hope there's a number of you in that situation as well. And all of us are coming at this passage with certain questions about God and who he is for us.

The more that you know God and follow Jesus, it seems like the more questions that we have. And it's exciting. It's good. God wants us to be asking questions.

And sometimes the things that we forget are that he asks us questions as well. And that's one of the great things about reading the Bible is looking for those places where God asks us questions.

Because those are often very key for us. They're very important. And questions are important in our daily life as well, aren't they? There's the interesting thing about questions is the answers can change your life.

They are often, they can be very crucial for us. And with questions, there's a certain amount of fear. There's some questions that cause a great amount of fear, some less so.

[2 : 3 4] But you can think of that important questions like, what is the test result? And we can think of academics. And you wonder, what will happen when I get that test back? You know, will I fail?

Will I do well? It can change the course of your life. And there's some fear. If it's a medical test, you wonder, am I really sick? Am I really, really sick? Am I healthy?

Am I healthy? The question might come up, what do you think? Somebody asks you that question. And there can be fear in that because what if people reject what my answer is when they say, what do you think about this?

And what about the question, should I risk that? And that's a decision sometimes you have had to make. Should I risk taking this course of action?

And there is a bit of fear in that, isn't it? I might lose out. I might, there might be something that I give up that is uncomfortable because I risk this. And then there's a question, will you marry me?

[3 : 35] Will you marry me? Now, guys often are the ones to ask this question. Usually they are. And I got to tell you, I think there's fear whether the answer is yes or no. There's more fear, of course, if you don't know for sure what this person is going to say to you.

What is she going to say? She could say no. And there's real trepidation that guys go through. Understand this, women. You know, if this is something that hasn't happened to you yet, have compassion for these guys asking questions like this.

You can say no, but just have compassion. And, but if the answer is yes, there's fear there because things change, right? And you wonder, as the guy, what is going to change in my life?

You know, how will this play out? And so it is a very nervous kind of fearful time in asking that question, will you marry me? And I think it probably is for the woman as well.

But we are looking at a very familiar story to many people. But some of you may not have heard it before. But even if you know it quite well, you'll notice as we go through there that there are four questions in this little passage.

[4 : 50] And they are important ones. Twelve of Jesus' closest friends ask two questions. And there's fear involved in those questions. And Jesus asks two questions as well.

And those questions are revealing of who Jesus is. It actually gets at some of the questions we ask about Jesus. And the questions all take place in the middle of an incredible crisis in the lives of these disciples.

There is a massive storm on the Sea of Galilee. And I don't know if you've ever had your life threatened by nature. It's not something that everybody experiences.

You know, here in BC, we don't really fear nature all that much except for earthquakes. You know, that's something that can happen. When I first moved out to Vancouver, I was surprised to see earthquake drills in the phone book when they used to have phone books back then.

And in schools and so forth. But it's not something that we really interact with much. When we see death and tragedy, it's because people have gone out into the wild, into the mountains where they've gone off limits skiing or on the water.

[6 : 06] You hear of tragedies because of powerful storms and waves. When I was growing up, I lived in an area that had tornadoes. And I was struck by fear often in those times.

Because where I lived, a sireman would go off whenever a tornado was spotted. And you had to go down to the southeastern corner of your basement and wait there until the all clear so that you wouldn't be killed by a tornado.

So it's really something growing up hearing that. And then I found out as a teenager, they made a big change and they said, okay, actually you're supposed to go to the southwest corner of your basement. So thanks a lot.

But there's this great power in nature that we are often shielded from in cities. But the life-threatening storm in this passage is really fresh in Peter's mind.

And by the way, Peter is the one who gave Mark all the information or much of the information in this gospel of Mark. Mark didn't know Jesus, but Peter was very, very close to Jesus.

[7 : 14] And Peter was in the boat that night. He was a fisherman. It may have even been his boat that they were using to go across the lake.

And that's why there is this eyewitness feel about this little passage. And I want you to follow with me on verse 35. In verse 35 on page 839.

Peter remembers that it was a really long day at the end of it. And this small group of followers, which we heard about last week, go with Jesus.

Jesus says to them, let's go to the other side of this lake, the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. It's a pretty big lake. And raise your hand if you've been to the Sea of Galilee.

Has anyone been here? Well, this is interesting because what you may have seen if you've been there is that they raised up a boat from the mud in 1986.

[8 : 13] And you can see that near the Sea of Galilee. And they carbon dated it at between 140 BC and 40 AD. So right around the time of the disciples.

So it was probably very similar to this boat that they were using. And this boat that you may have seen if you were there is very well preserved. And it's about 26 feet long, about 7 feet wide.

It's only about 4 feet high. And it's got these decking in the stern and in the bow as well. So there is a place where a person could lie down in the stern.

And this night, it seemed like a decent night for rowing through the night and having a quiet time away from these crushing crowds that were pressing on Jesus all the time.

And if you look there in verse 36, it says, Leaving the crowd, they took him, Jesus, with him in the boat just as he was.

[9 : 16] Which is a strange thing to say. And what it's saying is that everything about Jesus looked normal going into this incredible night. There's no hint of the amazing things that are going to happen.

And there's this eyewitness little point here that there are other boats around them as they start going towards the other side. They want to stay close to Jesus.

But at some point in the night, this powerful windstorm hits them. And it is massive. These storms happen today all of the time.

Because if you've been to the Sea of Galilee, or you know about that area, you'll know that 30 miles away, up near the Golan Heights, just past it in Syria, there is Mount Hermon.

It's 9,200 feet. A huge mountain. The Sea of Galilee is 700 feet below sea level. It's the lowest freshwater lake in the world. And there's even ski hills on Mount Hermon.

[10 : 17] It's so high. And it's cold air up there. Warm air. Sea of Galilee. They come together. And these wild storms get whipped up. And this one was one of the worst that Peter and the other fishermen had ever seen.

And these guys were professional fishermen. They'd seen many storms on that lake. But verse 37 says that this storm, the waves were just pounding on the boat.

And it was quickly filling with water. And no matter how hard they worked, and these guys were strong. They were the kind of guys you want to have if you're in a boat in the Sea of Galilee.

They knew what they were doing. But they couldn't control the boat. The storm was too big. It was massive. And they were absolutely gripped by fear because it became clear that they were going to die.

They were going to drown. There was no doubt about it. And in the middle of this, Peter the fisherman would always remember a shocking sight. He looks over in the stern, and there is Jesus asleep on the cushion, it says there.

[11 : 28] And you wonder, why does that cushion, why does he mention the cushion? Well, for some reason, that pillow stuck out in Peter's mind. And when he's telling Mark, he brings that up.

And Jesus is lying down asleep. He's probably not in the water because the stern is a little above in that little decking. But all around him, there is howling wind.

There are these disciples shouting at each other, trying to get each other to do what they want them to do. And the boat is pitching wildly up and down and back and forth.

And it's filling up with water. Now, the only thing that we can think of is that Jesus had a huge day of teaching because he is sound asleep. And they must have wondered, the disciples must have wondered, what is wrong with this picture?

There is something wrong with this picture. His actions don't match the crisis. And so the Bible tells us here in verse 38 that they woke him up. And the original says, you know, they lifted him up and they scream at him through the wind and the waves.

[12 : 37] And there is a rudeness about the wording. It's the kind of speech that would be if you're frustrated, if you're panicking, if you think you're gonna die.

And so it's like an accusation. And they say, you know, why aren't you panicking like we are? Teacher, don't you care that we are dying? And that's the first question.

Don't you care that we are dying? Verse 38. You see, they didn't realize it, but that question is hugely important. It just came out.

But it tells us a deeper meaning. Because the reality of Jesus is that he could have said, yes, I do care that you are dying.

That is why I came. That is why I came. You and all the world are dying spiritually. And that is why I came into the world.

[13 : 35] Just two chapters earlier, Jesus said, I'm a doctor. I came into the world to call sinners. In other words, he's saying, I call the spiritually sick, not people who think that they have it all together.

And the reason he came is because God's relationship with every person has been distorted by sin. And nothing in this world can offer peace with God.

Not money, not education, not yoga, not even the most loving relationship, the perfect relationship with a person you can imagine.

All of creation experiences this disharmony. Jesus has been very clear that this is the spiritual diagnosis of the world. And it wasn't not only in his words, and he said, you know, that we need a change of heart.

Every human being needs a change of heart. You need to change your heart towards God. That's what he preached all the time. But he also healed the sick and cast out evil spirits.

[14 : 43] And in doing that, he reveals what I think that you and I know in our hearts, that God's good creation has been fundamentally affected by evil.

That evil distorts many, many good things in our world, including our relationships with God and with each other. But God cares deeply for his creation.

That's why this question is so important. He so loved the world, Jesus said, that he gave his only son so that anyone who trusted in him would not die, but instead have eternal life.

He came to give life. And Jesus cares so much that at the end of Mark, he will give himself on a cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

And he will die in our place, in other words, so that God forgives us and God reconciles us to him in Jesus. That is the great rescue.

[15 : 46] That is why he came. And love, the care of God, is behind it all. And that's why Jesus is going to teach in a couple of chapters, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So in response to Don't You Care, Jesus doesn't say anything. He stands up. And the focus is on him. And the disciples are wondering, what is he doing?

What is he looking at? And he did the most incredible thing. He talked very sternly. He rebukes the wind. And he says to the sea, peace, be still.

Now literally what he was saying was, be quiet and stay quiet. And he said it with complete authority. Now this is a strange thing.

The only time people talk to weather is if you are frustrated, if you are angry, or if you are mentally unbalanced. This is the only time that you would shout at the weather.

[16 : 57] But Jesus talked to creation with the authority as though he knew creation intimately. And he did. Because the Bible teaches that it was his voice that spoke to creation at the beginning of time, bringing it into existence.

God created all things through him. And his voice is the voice that has authority over all things created.

And we know this in this passage because the moment he said those words, the wind stopped and there is this great calm. It's the way that Mark talks about it.

A great calm. Those words are very deliberate here. It's a very powerful calm immediately replacing a great windstorm. Now you can imagine how this affected the people who were in that boat.

Because the wind could have stopped by coincidence. He could have said it and suddenly the wind just happened to die down very quickly. but it is impossible for massive waves to completely flatten out in an instant.

[18 : 09] And this large lake looked like glass. Just like that at his word. And that sudden silence would have felt even more powerful than the storm when it was at its height.

They must have just looked at that and wondered. And Jesus says this most unexpected thing. You know, you'd think the disciples would be jumping up and down but they're just in awe.

What happened here? And Jesus says this unexpected thing. He says another question, two of them. Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?

And I think that that question is a question for you and for me this evening. Because the question is where, what are your fears tonight?

What do you, what fears do you come with to this service to hear God's word tonight? We know what Jesus' friends fears were. It's the crashing of waves against the boat, the water coming in, inability to control the boat.

[19 : 15] They are fearing for their lives. They're fearing drowning. And those fears push all thoughts about Jesus and his authority right out into the outside of their lives.

But we have our own fears. You and I have our own storms. I was talking to someone this morning after David Short preached on this passage to somebody who was really fearful about her company reorganizing.

She had a real fear of losing her job and a fear of homelessness because she was very, very vulnerable, she and her husband. And she said that fear of homelessness was actually a worse fear for me than death.

And she was very, very thankful that just a few days ago the company had somebody at the last minute invest in her company. but she said that fear was just about debilitating and it can push out thoughts of who God is and who Jesus is.

There are other fears that you might have. The anxiety about failing a course or a test you're studying for. The fear about a relationship that you are in.

[20 : 30] Things that could happen with it. Things that are going wrong. There can be fear for our children. Parents have this deep desire to see the well-being of their children.

There's a fear of being single long-term. What will that look like? I don't want that. There can be a fear of illness as well of what might happen or what is happening in my life.

There are many storms that beat against us all of the time. And they might not be literal waves but they cause that kind of fear in us. And so we need to hear the searching questions of Jesus in that stillness in the lake that day.

Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? It is a call for us. It's an incredibly important moment for the disciples and for us because Jesus is speaking to us and he's calling us to place our faith in him in the midst of fears.

In the middle of our fears. We don't get rid of all these things and then come to Jesus. He says, come now. Have faith in me now. And he's actually saying that whether you have ever trusted him in your life before or whether you have known and followed Christ for many years.

[21 : 50] The Bible is about now. Now is the time to answer that question. Will you have faith? Will you trust me? And that's a question that's for us even when we see Jesus seems to be sleeping and unaware of these storms in our life.

There's a call here to place our faith in him. And it is important for us to know that Jesus doesn't take away all fears. Long-term Christians continue to love and are deeply concerned about those they love.

Christians will be worried. You'll always have some fear of the unknown. But you see, the presence of Jesus, the reality of Jesus, replaces the deepest fears that we have.

It replaces it. It goes deeper than them. And in the presence of the worst fear, even death, Jesus is here saving us, giving us peace and life with God the Father.

Will you trust him for this? That is the question that God asks us tonight. And as we start to come away from the passage, something very unexpected happens after Jesus asks those two questions of faith.

[23 : 06] A different kind of storm rises up in their hearts. They're filled with a great fear that was as big as the great storm and the great calm.

And it comes because it dawns on them what this means. That their very familiar-looking friend, the guy they knew and talked to and just was there with them, he was not only man, he was God as well.

Now that is mind-blowing. You know, that is something. How do you take that in? This real man who got tired and hungry and wet was fully human with all of our frailties.

This man has their lives in his hands. He has power over life and death. He has power even over creation. This is incredible.

How can this be? And that's why they ask this question in awe. Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? And I hope that as you go through your week this week that you hear this question over and over again in your mind.

[24 : 19] Who is this man? Who is this one who even the wind and the sea obey? Because there is something that we have to do with that.

You really only have two choices when you look at this account that we've been hearing tonight. There's two choices. You can dismiss it completely because it's outside your experience and it really is impossible from this human point of view.

If you do this then the early church and all of its leaders and Jesus himself were liars and they were frauds and they went to great lengths to make this look like an eyewitness account.

That's one possibility and the only other possibility is that you must accept that Jesus has the power of God. Power over creation.

He is God and man because only God can tell the forces of creation what to do. There's no other options. You come to this passage. If this account is true then you can entrust Jesus with your life.

[25 : 30] In fact there doesn't seem to be any other way to respond. We entrust him with our lives. His death on the cross does forgive your sin if he is God.

He will give you peace and fellowship with God forever. It is guaranteed he is God. He is man. It means he loves you and he came for you.

He came from heaven for you and he is worthy of your worship and he speaks to you tonight inviting you to trust him even when it seems like he is asleep in your storm.

If you look hundreds of years before this there was a man with trouble and fear in his life like no one else I think and that was King David and he prayed to God in a famous psalm he said even if I walk in the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me Jesus came to fulfill that in Jesus we need fear no evil because the one whom the wind and the waves obey is with us he cares he came for us and he asks us will you trust him will you trust what he has done for you and going deeper than your deepest fear and you will never ever lose that peace with God that fellowship with him and the knowledge of his love for you and I want to just pray for a minute in a minute and just let you know that at the end of the service actually

I think right after you who would like to pray for you to pray for you to about your trust in Jesus whether you would like to renew that trust in him you're welcome to talk with me as well it is good for us to receive this invitation from Jesus with somebody else it's not necessary but it is good to do it is a very personal call that Jesus makes to us and this is in the Bible for the one reason that we would entrust our lives to Jesus who alone is worthy of our trust let's pray together Jesus we thank you because you are God and man we thank you that you care for each of us so much that you came for us and you gave your life for us we thank you that even in the times when it seems that you are asleep and not interested in our storms that you are worthy of our trust that you have our best interest in heart at heart because you know us you created us and we thank you for your invitation and ask that you would help us by your

[28 : 39] Holy Spirit to place ourselves in your hands to answer a very risky question will you trust me and to give ourselves to you help us to do this and we ask that you will give us the joy of your salvation in in Jesus name we ask amen