

The One in Control

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[0 : 00] But as we get into this passage today, and it's blowing my mind this week thinking about Jesus here, let me tell you about my mobile phone provider. And just so you know I'm not showing preference to mine, we'll just call them a phone voter, okay?

When I first signed on the dotted line with my mobile phone company, I remember there was a big slogan emblazoned at the top, and it just said, power to you.

And it stroked my ego, I remember thinking, yes, yes, love that, power to you. Now, it was British writer Norman Douglas who famously said that you can tell an ideals of a nation by its advertisements.

Take that in for a minute. You can tell the ideals of a nation by its advertisements. You see, here's the thing that I reckon my mobile phone provider and all the big companies have figured out pretty quickly about the human heart.

And it's this. Particularly for us, I think, if we're living in the West today, we know this to be true. It's that deep down, every single one of us on one level or another, we're all control freaks.

[1 : 18] We want to have comfort cells in our world. We want to have every base in our life covered. And yet, despite all the bubble wrap that we try and put around ourselves, we try and put around those that we love and the things that we care about, how often does life, and I wonder if this was true for you last year, as my American friends would say, how often does life curveball us?

In other words, things happen in our lives that we just don't see coming at all. And whoever you are here today, if there's anything in your life right now, as you think about the year past, as you think about the year to come, if there's anything going on right now that makes you fearful, and it makes you nervous and anxious, then we need, our souls need, the man who's at the heart of this passage today.

Now, my one aim is to help us see that we can rest in the truth that we are not in control when we embrace the one person who is in control.

Jesus Christ, this man who we'll see here is so totally committed to his people. He's totally committed to you this morning, if your trust is in him.

He's totally committed to you. And he's totally committed to teaching his people things about them and about him in order that he would woo our hearts closer to who he is and trusting in him.

[3 : 04] You see, the Jesus School of Faith has got many classrooms. In the Gospels, as you read them, and as you read the early chapters of Mark, as you get up to this point, you see Jesus, he teaches people in everyday places through everyday things.

We see him at a well. We see him in the grain fields. We see him beside the sea. We see him in the synagogue. We see him walking with people.

But as well as many classrooms, the Jesus School of Faith has many crucibles. They always say, don't you, that when you want to see what somebody really believes, see how they respond in a moment of crisis.

Right? Think of it, boys and girls, if you're like me in your bath. Right? Ines, do you take a bath at night? No, you don't.

There you go. Well, our girls take a bath at night. And I'm always reminded of this every time I look in and I hold up the sponge. The sponge. Boys and girls, think about it.

[4 : 16] How do you know what's in a sponge? Or adults, think about it. How do you know what it's absorbed? How do you know what it's soaked up?

How do you know what it's taken in? There's only one way to find out what's in a sponge. It's what comes out when you squeeze it. And that's exactly what happens to the disciples today, isn't it?

It struck me when I was reading this through. I wonder if you've ever thought about this before. That Jesus could easily have left the disciples on the shore, given them a pair of binoculars, and said, why don't you watch on from the shore while I calm the storm?

He could have done that, couldn't he, if you think about it? But he takes them with him. Why? Because they are about to learn lessons in this boat, and their character is about to be moulded in ways that it just wouldn't be otherwise.

So I've got three really quick invitations for us today, and they're tied to the three questions that the people in the scene ask Jesus. So come with me to verse 35, and let's get into this drama together.

[5 : 29] And Jesus says, do you see verse 35 to his disciples? He says, let's get into the boat and go over to the other side. Now, do you see how the initiative is all of Jesus here?

It's important to see that the disciples didn't get lost at sea. It's not like the sat-nav failed, or as once happened to Alex and I in a canoe, a rudder gets stuck at the wrong angle and you can't go anywhere.

Jesus said, we're going from here and we're going to there. He's initiated this whole encounter that's about to go down here. From the get-go, do you see how Jesus is in complete control of this situation?

And at some point in the journey, they get caught up in this huge storm. And in addition to the description of the furious squall, and I just love that phrase, when a storm is described as furious, here's what convinces me this was a huge storm.

It's what the men in this boat did for a job. So many of these guys are fishermen. They always say, don't they, that when the professionals say don't panic, you normally know that you don't need to panic.

[6 : 48] I take it that's why they had Chris Whitty on our screens every single day during the COVID pandemic saying, it's okay. But see, when the professionals start panicking, that's when you sit up and you pay attention, don't you?

Here are fishermen panicking. And yet strangely, all this time, will they go into survival mode?

Do you see Jesus, verse 38, what's he doing? And this is hugely profound in ways that I just hadn't really thought about before until this week. What is he doing? He is sleeping.

Notice the eyewitness detail there. He's sleeping, but he's sleeping on a cushion. So they're drowning and he's napping. And here's where we get our first question.

And it's from them to him, verse 38. And I don't imagine they asked it quietly. I don't imagine they asked it philosophically. I imagine they screamed it and they say, teacher, don't you care if we drown?

[7 : 55] It's not so much a question as it's an accusation, isn't it? Do you not care? Do you really love us? Why would you take us all the way out here only for this to happen?

Because remember that these are the same disciples that Mark has just told us at chapter 3 are the ones that Jesus has chosen to come and be with him. And more than that, these are the disciples that are making the trip that Jesus told them to make.

So we can understand their question. So here's the first thing I think the invitation that we need to see this passage makes to us. Here's the first one.

Friends, never believe in a cold-hearted Jesus. See, the very reason he's in the boat. More than that, the very reason that he's in the world.

More than that, the very reason that this gospel will end with him going to the cross and dying for them and rising again is because of his commitment to and love for them.

[8 : 58] Now some commentators, I remember that I read, said of this scene, what a ridiculous question for the disciples to ask. I would just custard pie that thought and say it just strikes me as a very human question to ask.

I love, one of the things I love most about the Bible is it's filled with people who are just like me and who lose it and who panic and who fret.

Jesus is sleeping while they're panicking. You see, for Jesus to sleep, this is more than just that he was just tired. Although being fully man, he is.

He's not sleeping because he's not panicking. Now maybe you can think of it like this. Boys and girls, I don't know where your bedroom is at home, but our kids, their bedroom is upstairs.

And our bedroom is downstairs. And one of the reasons for that is really simply so that those guys will sleep well at night. Because they know if anybody comes into that house, they have to go through us before they get to them.

[10 : 14] And it's true, isn't it, of us as human beings. We sleep best when we know we're safe. Jesus here, as a full man, is showing us the perfect example of human trust in a sovereign God.

A sovereign God who remembers Psalm 121 that we read at the start. A sovereign God who neither slumbers nor sleeps. A sovereign God who is keeping his people.

Jesus doesn't sleep because he's trusting in the one who is in control of all things. And as God, he's showing us that we can sleep because he's in control and he's not panicking.

In other words, to get to us, ultimately, death needs to get past him first to get to us. I love this in the words of Charles Spurgeon.

He put it like this, The sovereignty of God is the pillow upon which the child of God rests. His head at night, giving perfect peace.

[11 : 32] Dear friends, know that just because Jesus is seemingly inactive, it doesn't mean that he's ceased to be the one who is holding the stars in place.

Just because he is seemingly inactive doesn't mean that he's ceased to be the one that is giving you and I breath every single minute of every single day. There is wonderful comfort for us to be found in a sleeping Savior.

Now, you might be here today and you're asking, Why? Why did something happen in my life? How do I know this God cares?

Listen, let me lovingly just say to you, there might be so many possible answers to that question. Some of them might be to do with stuff that we've done. Some of them might just be to do with the reality of the fact that we are living our lives in a world that is east of Eden, which is another way of saying in a world that is broken and is groaning and is longing for its creator to renew it.

But among those possible answers, if your trust is in this Jesus, the answer cannot be that he has dropped the ball. The answer cannot be that he doesn't love you.

[12 : 54] And you say, How can I know that? Well, it's ultimately, isn't it, that we can look to the place that these disciples will look for their answer to that question.

Isn't that amazing when you read the pastoral epistles particularly? When you read John and Peter speaking, two men that would have been in that boat, when the topic comes up of how do we know God loves us?

They don't say God showed his love for us in this, that while we were at sea, he calmed it. No, no, no. They say, How did God show his love among us?

He sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. His precious blood covered all of our wrongs. We can look ultimately today to the same place that these disciples will look for the ultimate answer to that question.

We look to the cross. The place, and we've got to see the bigger picture here, the disciples understand that how God showed his love to us wasn't in just calming our present situations.

[14 : 04] No, no, no. It was by dealing with our eternal security. This Jesus is right now at the Father's right hand making intercession for us.

Friends, if you're struggling just now, remember those two rights. Right now, right hand. That's where he is. He is interceding for us.

He is representing us. He is praying for us. He is holding us. And underscoring the gospel is the affirmation that Jesus loves us.

But in the text, you see how this same Jesus wakes. And don't miss the utter absurdity of what happens next. Jesus doesn't grab a bucket and join in the frantic bailing out of water.

That's what I would have expected him to do. No, Jesus speaks to the sea. Now take that in. He speaks to the sea. Is that not just plain strange?

[15 : 16] If this fails, then it is time for the men with the white straitjacket to come and collect this man. He speaks to nature. No hocus pocus, no rhyme and riddle.

Jesus just utters three words. Quiet, be still. And the wind died down. And the sea was completely calm.

See, the relationship that Jesus has with creation is the same as the one that you and I have with our Alexa. Isn't it?

Alexa, play the best of the Beatles. Alexa, what's the weather like tomorrow? Alexa, what's the capital of Armenia? We speak to Alexa and Alexa does. If you want to go for Siri, you can have Siri as well.

We speak, it does. What's going on here is Jesus speaks and creation does is that creation is really simply recognizing the voice of its creator.

[16 : 20] The headline on the Galilee News at 10 is that God's in the boat. And taking the bigger Bible story here in the same way that in Genesis 1 that God spoke and things happened, here is Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, the one through whom all things were made, and he's being true to form.

And maybe just another angle on this, again, I've just not seen before until I thought about it this week. Maybe the sea in this day is more than just the physical sea.

It represents evil. And it's just this little foretaste that we get that this same Jesus will, one day, he will make all things new.

One day when he returns, he will speak and evil will be banished. And he will say, not be still, but he will say, be gone.

And so we get the second question and it's verse 40 and it comes from him to them. He says, why are you so afraid?

[17 : 43] Do you still have no faith? In other words, your view of me is still way too small. And so here's the second invitation that this passage makes to us today is don't settle for a small scale Jesus.

In our heads and in our hearts, do we end this year with him in our minds as just a slightly souped up, better version of us?

Is he in our minds like one of those lucky mascots that we used to take into the exam hall when we were young? We'd rather have him on our team than not on our team. He calls his followers here to replace faithless fear with fearless faith.

And let me be clear that this is not about us upping our spiritual game for Jesus. As good as many of the things that we will plan to do this year, probably we will talk about them over the next 24 hours or so.

Bible in a year plan, wonderful idea, get involved in that. Attending more things, wonderful idea, get more involved in that. But this is not about us upping our spiritual game for Jesus.

[18 : 59] There's a man called Sam Albury. I don't know if the quote on the screen, apologies for that. But he always said this and it's just made such a profound impact on my life. He said, we need to understand that Christian maturity in the Christian life is not about realizing that we need Jesus less.

It's about realizing that we need Jesus more. Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing to pray this year? Lord Jesus, help me see that I need you more.

Have we settled in our understanding of who we think this man is? Let me just say, it's the thing about the Christians over the years who've made the biggest impact on me.

Do you know what it is about them that connects them? It isn't their sorted lives. It wasn't their impressive lectures. It wasn't and isn't their spectacular gifts.

It's the people who I can look at today who are a lot older in life than me and I can tell by the way that they walk and they talk that they've never stopped growing and they've never stopped learning things about Jesus that blows their minds.

[20 : 07] As we watch the disciples here get a glimpse of Jesus' full glory as they encounter him in all his majesty, let's never settle for a small scale Jesus.

And so the third and final question comes at verse 41 and it's from them to them. They say to each other, do you see, who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?

And so here's the third invitation really quickly is not to miss out on a life-giving Jesus. For the question that they ask, it's not only the big question that dominates the first half of Mark's gospel.

Let me just say it's the biggest question that any of us can ask in life to do wrestle with, to do battle with, to get our heads around. Who is this man?

Do you see at the start how the disciples are fearful of what's out there? And at the end of this scene they are fearful of what's in the boat.

[21 : 21] It's a lovely little fear contrast, a fear swap, isn't it? At the beginning of this scene they are fearful of the storm. Now at the end they are fearful of Jesus. And it's not a fear that causes them to run away and hide.

It's a fear that compels them to come close and delight. See, to fear God is to be magnetically drawn in like a paper clip to a magnet to savor the beauty of our three-in-one God.

and to find yourself in that place where you can honestly say that upon no one else am I placing the direction of my eyes nor the affections of my heart.

And the Bible would say that that place is where true wisdom is to be found. The fear of the Lord. As we wrap this up, do you know there will be so many times this year, friends, when you and I will realize that we are not in control.

Despite all the things that the world sells us and tells us, we will not be in control. There will be things that will happen this year that we will say we just did not see that coming.

[22 : 35] But we can trust the heart of the one who is in control of all things. The one who is so committed to us.

The one who loves us so, so much. And let's be like the disciples here. Let's allow the fear, the fear to gaze our eyes on this Jesus.

You know, just as we close, let me tell you about one of my best friends. His name is Hamish. Studied with him at university all the way through for many years.

He remains to this day one of my dearest friends. He's one of the kindest and the most intelligent people that I think I've ever met in life. He was actually one of the first people back in 2019 who I heard of that suffered and got COVID.

And sadly as well, he's one of the first people that I heard of and knew that suffers still to this day with what they call long COVID. And that, plus a few other health issues in his life, have meant that the past three or so years of his life have been so incredibly tough for him and his family.

[23 : 53] What was initially just a period of being signed off work, it turned into he's just going to have to be off work completely. That's where he is still to this day. But I remember speaking to him early on in the days of his illness and he said, do you know what?

It's just like that kid's book. We're going on a bear hunt. He said, this kind of stuff, do you know what? I can't go over it. I can't go under it.

I'm just going to have to go through it. But I know that this God has got me. And so Hamos, he set up a WhatsApp group for updates on his health.

Tons of people in this WhatsApp group. It's one of those groups where you can't respond because it just tires them having the same conversation with so many different people because people genuinely love him and want to know. So he sends updates on this group.

But every time I read this WhatsApp group, I'm struck by two things that he asks us to pray for. Two of the same things every time. And here's the two things.

[24 : 59] He said, would you pray that I would be honest in my weakness? And secondly, would you pray that I'd be aware of God's faithfulness? And I take it that somebody who's learned that in the storms of life, the best place to be, when you don't understand, when it's out of your control, the best place to be is looking at the one who's in control of the wind and the waves.

You know, we used to sing this song at Boys Brigade when I grew up. It's kind of gone out of fashion a little bit, but I always love it to come back to it because it's a wonderful challenge and a wonderful assurance.

It says this, will your anchor hold in the storms of life when the clouds unfold their wings of strife? Will, when the strong tides lift and the cables strain? Will your anchor drift or firm remain?

We have an anchor that keeps the soul steadfast and sure while the billows roll, fastened to the rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love.

Why don't we pray as we close our time together? words of Psalm 121, I lift up my eyes to the hills.

[26 : 35] From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber.

Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. And so, Father, we're so thankful today that we can trust our uncertain tomorrows to you, the God who knows the end from the beginning.

Father, thank you that that is not a truth that comes to us this morning cold. It's a truth that comes to us this morning wrapped in affection and love. So, Lord, I pray, Father, that this morning, whatever is going on in our lives, I pray that your Spirit would be at work in our hearts.

Would he be bringing that sense of conviction that we need to, maybe even for the first time today, respond to who Jesus is? Father, would he be bringing that sense of assurance and comfort that truly our lives could not be in better hands?

So, Father, as a church family today, we would pray, Lord, as we step into another year, looking back on your faithfulness this year to us and certain of your faithfulness to us in the generations to come, Lord, that you would help us to be a church that's grounded prayerfully in a true dependence on who you are.

[28 : 13] So, Father, we thank you that you love us and we pray these things confidently because we pray them in the powerful and in the strong name of Jesus.

Amen.