

Meet Jesus: It's more than an evidence based encounter

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[0 : 00] Well, we're continuing our series in Mark's Gospel, and we'll be looking at chapter 8, which is on page 843 of the Visitor's Bibles.

Mark chapter 8, reading from verse 1. In those days, when again a crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat.

And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away. And his disciples answered him, how can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?

And he asked them, how many loaves do you have? They said, seven. And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people.

And they set them before the crowd. And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them.

[1 : 19] And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. And there were about 4,000 people. And he sent them away.

And immediately he got into the boat and with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmathewa. And he said, why does this generation seek a sign?

And truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation. And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side. Now, they had forgotten to bring bread.

And they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, watch out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.

And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes, do you not see?

[2 : 30] And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces do you take up?

They said to him, twelve. And the seven for the 4,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And they said to him, seven. And he said to them, do you not yet understand?

Imagine being a Jew way back in the first century. You know, let's just put ourselves in the shoes of the Jewish people back in the first century.

You know, the Old Testament part of the Bible, it had not been added to. Does anyone know how long for? Around 400 years. It seems that the prophets were silent.

It was like radio silence with God. Like a sub stranded on the ocean floor. You know, cut off and isolated. And the Roman overlords, they'd be strutting the streets, row upon row of them in resplendent armour.

[3 : 42] And it wasn't the Hebrew God that they should worship, but the Roman Emperor. And for hundreds of years, there'd be no great acts of deliverance.

In the cafes, they were probably speaking with each other and saying, well, if only God would show his hand again. But no. No angel of death striking the Romans.

No victorious King David. No miraculous phenomenon to overwhelm their oppressors. No. And each time they sort of unraveled those Old Testament scrolls.

Through his word, God would be promising deliverance to the Jewish people. But when they lifted their eyes, all they saw is the might of Rome.

They'd probably be praying. Probably be praying, send us the Messiah. Your kingdom come. They probably prayed together. But all was quiet on the Jewish front.

[4 : 51] And then one day, says Mark, well, Jesus turns up, doesn't he? On planet Earth. Chapter 1, verse 11. And God the Father declares from the heavenly realms, you are my beloved son.

So God is visibly on the move again, isn't he? On planet Earth. Yes. Trouble was, well, this Jesus, he looked very human.

He looked very much like a carpenter's son. Because that's exactly what he was. He didn't sort of look like the person that the Jews wanted. He didn't look like he owned the whole of creation.

No. He looked just like a carpenter's son. 700 years previously, Isaiah had written, And he had no form or majesty that we should look at him.

And no beauty that we should desire him. And so the disciples are confused, aren't they? I suppose we'd be confused, wouldn't we?

[5 : 53] We tend to evaluate things on sight. And Jesus, well, he doesn't seem to fit the bill. And the first half of Mark's gospel is about what?

It's all about the identity of Jesus. Mark's laying it out for us. And our first point is sort of a recap over the first half of Mark's gospel.

It's called, our first point is the evidence so far. So in the first half of Mark's gospel, we've followed the disciples, haven't we? As they've been stunned by what their eyes are taking in.

They're sort of encountering evidence that when they press the equals button, it should display right across the screen, Messiah. But it's a journey of discovery for these disciples.

They're a bit slow on the uptake, like most of us friends. But it's a journey of discovery, isn't it? For example, in the Old Testament, God, through Elijah, he brings a little boy back to life.

[7 : 02] And the disciples are watching as Jesus brings this little girl back to life again. It's all very run-of-the-mill for Jesus. Give her something to eat, he says at the end of chapter 5.

And today, Patricia Hewitt with £96 billion of budget in the NHS. Well, there's still 100% of us die, isn't there?

She can't make any inroads onto that statistic. But Jesus, what does he do? He reverses death, doesn't he? Before their very eyes.

Good news, says Mark. Chapter 1, verse 1. I hope that sounds like good news to you, friends. He also forgives sin, doesn't he? Chapter 2.

And the Pharisees rightly ask, Who can forgive sins but God alone? That's what they ask him. And who could do such a thing, friends, apart from God?

[8 : 02] Back in the Old Testament again, we read in the book of Exodus, don't we? How the Hebrews are rescued out of Egypt, you know, through awesome external intervention.

It's like a porter's opening the door for you as you walk into the hotel. God opens up the sea and the Israelites walk through as it parts before them.

And in the same way, with just a few words, Jesus calms a storm, doesn't he? And there's eerie silence in the boat and it's broken with a question.

The question is, Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him. Mark's putting it all together for us, isn't it?

His account's communication to us, par excellence. You know, we have in our hands, friends, here, a masterpiece.

[9 : 04] Mark's crafted a genre of communication that reaches into our humanity, listen, in the same way that God reached into this world and broke into it.

And as we read, we see these disciples, we realise they're a little bit slow on the uptake as we sort of follow their fumbling along. And we realise, it begins to dawn on us, that Mark has us in mind, his reader, as we read the account.

He has us painted in as we go through Mark's Gospel. You know, we thought the distance and the time would separate us, that we could sort of look on at these scenes like watching a TV news report, but Mark's after our souls.

And he's doing a very good job. He's engaging us with the God that he knew. He knows. So the disciples, well, they're trying to work out the identity of their friend, Jesus.

He's obviously not the average carpenter, is he? But who exactly is he? And they're uncertain. The Messiah has arrived, says Mark, chapter 1, verse 1, but they don't yet see him, the disciples.

[10 : 25] So at this stage, in Mark's Gospel, they're a little bit like spectators. They're sort of students of their Rabbi, Jesus. Think about this.

It's only when we get his identity right that we can properly grapple with his authority. It's identity first, and then the implications of who he is.

You know, the burning bush. Moses walks up, doesn't he, to the burning bush. He says, I will go over to see this strange sight, why the bush doesn't burn.

So first of all, he's establishing the identity issue. And then Moses responded appropriately, didn't he? He took off his shoes before God's presence.

And our understanding of somebody's identity, it determines our response. Am I right? I guess that's how it works when you're at work.

[11 : 26] That sort of thing. Our understanding of someone's identity determines our response. I guess we only need to look up West George Street to see this principle working its way out, you know, when there's a traffic warden on the prowl.

The principle of identity and then a response. People running to the cars before it's too late. So we won't be able to live appropriately on planet Earth until we've got the identity of the Creator right in our thinking.

We need to see that Jesus Christ is our Lord, our owner, our God. God. So chapter 1, verse 1, Mark is telling us it's as big as that.

And even as Christians, we can get confused about Jesus' identity from time to time. You know, we sort of try and override it ourselves. Think about this.

Sin is not allowing God to reign in our lives. Do you see? Am I right? It's editing him out in this area or that area of our lives.

[12 : 37] You know, we're just like Adam. We think we know better. And the first half of Mark's Gospel is all about the identity of Jesus.

Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him. And then we get to chapter 8, verse 29, and Peter's got it.

Do you see chapter 8, verse 29? And Jesus asked them, but who do you say I am? And Peter answered him, you are the Christ.

The pen is dropped, hasn't it? He's worked it out. And then, leading up to this crescendo where Peter gets Jesus' identity right, it's like Jesus is conducting the orchestra of his creation.

And Mark's busy there writing the score for us so that we encounter our creator through his word. So that was our first point.

[13 : 38] We were backtracking, we were looking at the evidence so far. And our second and final point is that we think we need more evidence. So that's our second and final point.

And it's chapter 8, I think where we are in Mark's Gospel, we're getting towards that verse 29 where Peter gets the identity of Jesus. You are the Christ. And verses 1 to 10, it's another feeding miracle, isn't it?

Do you remember that? So we look back in our thinking, we think of the Exodus out of Egypt and God fed the Jews, didn't he? Exodus chapter 16.

And now here, Jesus, well, first of all, he feeds the 5,000 a couple of chapters ago and now in chapter 8, it's like the needles got stuck in a groove. It's the same sort of thing.

What's going on, we ask? You know, surely now, the disciples, well, they can see their Old Testament God before their very eyes. Or are they just still seeing him as a carpenter?

[14 : 43] Verse 16. And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread?

Do you not perceive or understand? I once remember coming home from school with a load of maths homework. It was algebra.

My dad was trying to explain it to me. It was very clear in his explanation. But I just couldn't pick it up. I was trying to understand it. Trying to understand all these formulas.

But the more I tried, the more difficult it got. And I can remember I started to guess at answers. Just give random answers to the questions that he was asking.

And it wasn't long before I was crying. And the disciples, well, they just can't see, can they? Just look at verse 18.

[15 : 46] Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? Says Jesus. And do you not remember when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand? How many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?

They said to him, twelve. And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And they said to him, seven. Exodus chapter 16, verse 12.

In the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God. So just think this through. Think about God's track record.

Number one, there's manna from heaven, Exodus chapter 16. Number two, the feeding of the five thousand, Mark chapter 6. Number three, the feeding of the four thousand, Mark chapter 8.

And then they get into this boat, don't they? And they're short of bread again. Seems quite a familiar problem to me. I don't know if it does with you. Should have been with the disciples. They're a bit short of bread.

[16 : 50] They should say, oh, we've got a bread shortage, but we've got Jesus with us. That should be their response, shouldn't it? But they're blind, aren't they?

Think about what their eyes have seen. The imagery of baskets upon basket upon basket of leftover bread. It's like their cups are overflowing.

It's abundant provision, a banquet, but they just don't see. And when you and I sin, friends, there's something like that going on.

It's because we've not got God properly enthroned in our lives. And so Jesus wants us to hear these words that he said to his disciples, do you not yet understand?

You know, we sometimes think there's something we need, don't we? Something that God isn't giving to us. How sad when he shows us such love.

[17 : 54] Do you remember the beginning of the passage? I have compassion on the crowd, Jesus said, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way.

And some of them have come from far away. And like us, the disciples simply can't remember Jesus' provision, the love and provision of the one that they were with.

Look at the birds of the air, said Jesus. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Matthew chapter 6. As we finish, two reactions. A, the disciples follow Jesus and B, the Pharisees mock Jesus.

So the disciples, they sort of continue to fumble along, don't they, following Jesus. And after the next miracle of opening blind eyes, eyes like ours that we were singing about earlier, Lord, I was blind, I could not see.

[19 : 05] After giving sight to the blind, well, Peter's eyes are opened, aren't they? Verse 29, he sees who Jesus is. So it wasn't, think about this, it wasn't ultimately external miracles that were needed in the life of these disciples, but for Jesus to miraculously open, blind eyes.

Just like he broke into the world, we ourselves need external intervention in order to see who he is. And so, friends, think about this, if you know Jesus, if you know who he is and you're living accordingly, it's because he's broken into your life through his spirit and he lives in you, he's visited you.

And this was Peter. So what about the Pharisees? Well, so often people say to me outside, they say to me, well, if I could only see Jesus, if he would come to Glasgow and do a few miracles, then I might believe.

And often that is genuine. But also at the same time, it's often a smoke screen. Chapter 3, verse 6, and the Pharisees, they don't want to follow Jesus, what do they want to do?

Right back, chapter 3, verse 6, they want to kill him. And now, in our passage, verse 11, the Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.

[20 : 36] Perhaps they wanted some sort of cosmic display, but Jesus knows their hearts, doesn't he? He knows their hearts and many today, they deny Jesus' identity, the made-up religions of this world, they all do that.

Or even within the church, people deny the cross, or they deny the resurrection, and Mark's noticed them all, Mark's noticed them all, and just listened to them in their venomous attack.

He notices them around the cross. He saved others, but he can't save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down from the cross, that we might believe. And yes, like the Pharisees, we can choose to mock Jesus, can't we, rather than to follow him.

So what about Mark's reader? What about you and me? How's our understanding? Well, like the disciples, life will throw many things at us, won't it?

And yes, that man in the boat, he didn't look like the owner of the universe. He didn't look like God incarnate. But think about this, he's come, hasn't he, with a provision of all that we'll ever need.

[21 : 59] It's all too easy, isn't it, friends, to rely on sight, to make our own decisions based upon the here and now, and to live like that. And that's always going to be a problem, thinks Mark.

And Jesus says to his disciples, he says, look what it is to be with me. Look at those baskets upon baskets of provision. And the eye of faith, friends, can look on, can't it?

And we know that the Saviour has visited planet Earth. And so we're left with a question, aren't we? Will we trust him? That's the question.

Will we trust Jesus? Listen to this. Verse of a song, just as I am, though tossed about, with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without.

O Lamb of God, I come, I come. And that's what we need to do, isn't it? To follow him and come to him as our Lord and Saviour and the provision of all we'll ever need as human beings.

[23 : 06] Shall we pray? dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for visiting us through your word, your son.

We thank you for this revelation, how we see in him the total provision of all that humanity could ever need or desire.

So we thank you for that. We pray, Father, that you'd help us to manifest that in our lives, to live accordingly, to have him enthroned in our lives as our Lord and our Saviour, and to be able to follow him and to radiate him in all the situations that you put us in.

And we especially thank you, Father, as we look back at Easter. We thank you for the resurrection from the dead and the great confidence that we can have in that through your son, Jesus Christ.

So we pray now, Father, that you'd go with us, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of you, God the Father, would be with us, and the fellowship of your spirit this day and forevermore.

[24 : 18] Amen.