

Meet Jesus in the midst of your present difficulty

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, if you'd like to open your Bibles, we're continuing our series in March Gospel. We're on page 842.

And Chris Lawton will bring our reading to us. Chris, you work here, I understand, in the city centre. Yeah, I do, on Queen Street. And what does your work involve? I work for National Australia Bank.

Yeah. And your accent, are you from Wales? No, New Zealand. New Zealand. How long have you been here? Two years. Two years. And for the foreseeable future?

For a couple more weeks, actually. Going back for the summer, but hopefully coming back. Oh, we hope so. Thanks. Chris will read Mark's Gospel to us now.

And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, where he dismissed the crowd.

[1 : 02] And after he had taken leave of them, he went up to the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.

And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea.

He meant to pass by them. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.

And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. Thank you, Chris.

So our series is called Meet Jesus. And the passage before us today, it's a great passage for getting to know Jesus.

[2 : 09] I like reactions to you. You know, when you're talking to somebody, you can gauge things by how they react to things. You know, like children, when they receive Christmas presents.

You know what they think, don't you, by their reaction. Or the applause after a good concert. Or a student coming home after going trekking around the world.

You know, they're at the airport. There's hugs in the arrivals hall as people sort of navigate around with their trolleys and the baggage on. A weeping mum, as she hugs the now embarrassed student who's come home.

Or we can have a reaction of shock, can't we? You know, our stomachs can churn, our hearts can beat as we realise that we've gone and bumped the car.

And the disciples, as reactions go, they're on the extreme end of the scale. Verse 51, what were they? Do you remember? Utterly astounded, weren't they?

[3 : 11] This week, you know, it's Meet Jesus with the volume turned up. Our first point is the disciples are slow on the uptake. So Jesus, what's he doing?

Well, he defies Newtonian understanding of physics, doesn't he? Walks on water. And think about this. Once Jesus has defied our understanding of the way that the world works, you know, by walking on water, in this particular case, well, he's crossed a boundary, do you see?

He's now incomprehensible to normal classification. So it could be walking on the surface of the water or it could be levitated up in mid-air, couldn't it?

It would be equally shocking, equally supernatural. He's operating outside, think about it, of the boundaries of normal, merely human characteristics.

Am I right? Is anyone here? You know, I could take you to the Clyde and you could walk across the Clyde on the surface of the water. Are we talking logic here? That's the case, isn't it? He's crossed a boundary into the supernatural.

[4 : 28] And so, what do the disciples make of it? What's their take on it? Well, verse 49, they've exhausted human explanations, haven't they? And they're resorting to myth. Do you see there?

They've got no category for their friend distorting the way that the world operates. What do they cry? It's a ghost. Do you see? They cry out, clutching at straws.

Their logic's telling them that, well, it's either a ghost or some sort of supernatural being. It's got to be one or the other, hasn't it? It or he.

Of course, we know, don't we? We know who Jesus is. Mark's told us, chapter 1, verse 1, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So we know.

But it's, well, it's just too big for these disciples to comprehend at this point. 3am in the morning, the fourth watch. Moonlight.

[5 : 25] Must be a ghost, they say. And now they've sort of classified the phenomenon. I suppose they think they can get on with sailing. You know, they've pigeonholed Jesus, haven't they?

Calling him a ghost. But verse 50, the end of verse 50, just look there, right at the end of the verse. Do you see? Take heart, it is I.

Do not be afraid. We've just sung that, haven't we, at the end of verse 4. I know you will be near me and whisper, it is I.

That's what Jesus does, doesn't he? He comes to meet us. Take heart, it is I. Two words in the Greek, ego. That's I, isn't it? Ego, I am. Take heart, I am, says Jesus.

And if Moses was in the boat, right here, he'd take off his shoes. He'd realise that he was encountering the holy God at this point. Exodus chapter 3, the burning bush, do you remember?

[6 : 28] What's your name, says Moses? I am, is the answer. God gives. I am. And Ego, Ema, climbs into the boat, doesn't he, in this passage before us.

The ghost climbs in and the wind, what does it do? Ceases. And what are they there? The end of verse 51. Utterly. Do you see it?

Those two words, the end of verse 51? Utterly astounded. And what do we expect Mark to say here? What do we expect his comment to be? You know, we expect Mark to say in verse 52, well, they were utterly astounded because, well, it didn't quite think in who their friend was.

And they're beginning to see that he's God in human form. But look, look at verse 52. And you really must see this, friends. Look at verse 52. Do you see?

For they did not understand about the loaves. A packed lunch, it explains it all. Says Mark.

- [7 : 32] Well, I don't know about you, friends, but I would have never have put those two things together, you know, loaves and the controller of the universe. Would you? Would you have done that there? Wouldn't have occurred to me.
- But listen, this is important. What's Mark doing here? What's he doing? Mark's playing on the keys of God's revelation, isn't he? He's showing us that it all fits together, do you see? God's revealing himself. Is he revealing himself instantly? Like he's got some communication port into people's brains, you know, and a USB lead or something like that.
- No, it's progressively, isn't it? And Mark's putting it together. Relationships are like that, aren't they? Am I right? Are your relationships like that?
- You don't suddenly learn everything about a person within five seconds of meeting them, do you? You know, think about a husband and wife. They get to know each other, don't they, over the course of time.
- [8 : 33] It wasn't until we got married that Catherine, my wife, realised that some items of clothing, last me three days. You know, we get to know each other progressively, don't we?
- Think of a potential employer. A potential employer would want to shortcut the process, wouldn't they? Am I right? They want a CV. They want to look at your past, do you see?
- Check out your references. Have they done that when you moved to a new job? That's the sort of thing we do. It's only logical. And Mark says, look at Jesus' CV. See what his last job was. Just look for yourself.
- What does it tell you about him? And he's asking us. He's saying, what does Jesus' last job tell us about him? Verse 52, they didn't understand about the loaves.
- And so what's Mark doing? He's adding, isn't he? He's adding interpretive information, do you see? Do you see the logic of it? It's sort of floating messages through time to us and helping us, enabling us to see it all together.
- [9 : 37] Let's just pause for a moment and think of the logic of this. Remember what Jesus has just done. Just imagine if I put it onto a tract in town.
- That's what I do on Saturdays. I'm out on the streets. Jesus walks on water. Got a tract like that. Can you see it at the back? Jesus walks on water. What's the logic of that according to Mark?
- Well, according to Mark, people will look at the tract and they'll think that Jesus is a ghost. Do you see? Do you see the logic of that?
- So, we need to be reading, think about this, big chunks of scripture. Not just an isolated verse here and there. Why?
- Because the Bible is progressive revelation. Progressive revelation. You know, it's not the norm for God to download his entire word in a few seconds.
- [10 : 38] You know, you didn't get to know your friends like that, did you? And so we need to be, friends, listen, reading the Bible regularly. Seeing how it all fits together. Chatting with each other as Christians.
- Getting, what is it? Getting to know God. Friends, yesterday, were you reading the Bible and so it's the loaves, says Mark.
- That's the interpretive clue. And if you think about it, Jesus seems to have ratcheted up, doesn't he? All that Moses was doing. Not bread from heaven, going back to that passage, but bread out of his hands.
- Not the Lord parting the sea for Moses, but Jesus walking upon the sea. Complete mastery, listen, of all that is.

That's Jesus. Could this be another exodus in our very midst? Not this time from Egypt, but from the world, from this world order.

[11 : 45] An exodus into the promised land of the new creation. Evocative stuff, isn't it? A bunch of fishermen. A group of us here on a Wednesday afternoon in busy Glasgow.

Now, friends, in just 20 minutes, this might just be too astounding. In fact, you might be with the disciples.

Verse 51, you're utterly astounded. If you're a Muslim listening in on the internet, you'll be utterly astounded. That's you. You're with the disciples. And they put the shutters down.

Look at the end there of verse 52. Look right at the end of verse 52. But their hearts were hardened. Donald English says that they still treat each miraculous event as self contained.

A flash in the pan, you know, this walking on water business. It's like staring at just one little tile, isn't it? Of a mosaic.

[12 : 46] You'll never see the big picture. Took the disciples, didn't it? Until chapter 8, verse 29, to work out Jesus' true identity.

Sinclair Ferguson, in his commentary, there's just one left down there, it's five pounds, he says, like us, like us, Sinclair says, that's you and me, they're all too slow to believe it.

Page 97 of his commentary. And brothers and sisters, that is us, yes, today, even as Christians. Our sin, think about this, it stems from treating Jesus as a ghost.

Do you see? Regression, not realising his true identity, not living out our lives as if we're his ambassadors. So that was our first point, the disciples are slow on the uptake.

And our second point is, Jesus tracks us down. Have a look with me at verse 48. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.

[14 : 02] And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass them by. He meant to pass them by. Whatever does that mean? I've looked at several commentaries and they're not all exactly sure about this.

Listen to Paul Barnett. when they first saw him, they concluded that he was about to pass by them, probably assuming he was in another boat standing up, like a popemobile.

Was it that? Was that what was going on here? Well, I think William Hendrickson and Sinclair have got it. Just listen to this.

Mark tells us, says Sinclair, that Jesus was about to pass by them. That seems a strange comment until we remember that Mark is probably recording the very words he had heard Peter use in a sermon.

And then he speaks about the words that Peter probably used. We saw this strange figure coming to us across the water. We thought it was a ghost. It was about to pass us by when we cried out.

[15 : 14] And I want us to dwell on this verse because I think there's more to it than meets the eye. Think about this. The Bible has so much about relationships.

It's in relational language, isn't it? Much of the Bible. Indeed, it's quite often romantic language. Do you agree with me? John in Revelation is calling the church, isn't he, the bride of Christ.

And you'll know that we're made in the image of what? A relational God. That's you and me. Three persons in a loving, eternal relationship.

He made us. We're relational beings. Doesn't that ring true? With yourselves? Aren't relationships the most important thing to us? Am I right?

Wasn't Adam's biggest problem that he was outside of a relationship with his creator? And so throughout history, God has revealed himself in order, why?

[16 : 16] For us to respond to him. Am I right? Do you see? And is not the purpose of his revelation to provoke that response in us?

Where are you? He says, doesn't he? In the garden of Eden to Adam, as like you and me, friend, he's hiding from God. You know, God's in the business, isn't he, of provoking a response?

He'll be doing that with his word just now, do you see? His word today will elicit a response in our hearts. There's purpose in all that God does.

Exodus chapter 3, we're going back there, the bush appeared to be burning, didn't it? Moses happened to be in that area tending his sheep. He's attracted, isn't he, drawn to this bush.

He goes over to see the strange side, and revelation has become what? Communion, hasn't it? God and Moses there. I wonder if you've ever been attracted to somebody of the opposite sex.

[17 : 20] You know, you ask yourselves, well, you quite fancy them, and you ask yourselves, well, what are they thinking? Are they thinking the same as me? How's this thing going to develop? I really do find them very attractive, and they are Christians after all.

So, well, perhaps you arrange to be at a certain place at a certain time when you know that they're going to be passing by. The Sea of Galilee, and their paths cross, don't they?

It's like, I have surely seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, God said to Moses, Exodus chapter 3, and here, verse 48, Jesus says, he saw that they were making headway painfully, says Mark.

And so Jesus, he longs, doesn't he, he longs to be with his people, his disciples. You know, just visit the Sea of Galilee in your mind's eye, friends, this lunchtime.

Just think it through, it's the fourth watch. You know, moonlight, it's quite dark, everything's almost obscured, and the waves are washing over the deck, but in this most unexpected manner, God is meeting, man.

[18 : 36] Humans could never conceive of such a thing, could they? You know, he comes to meet us in the most unexpected way. He visits us, gets his hands dirty.

This isn't the distant God of the made-up religions of this world, is he, friends? No. This is God amidst his people, and he's here to bring them, think about it amidst him.

Do you see? It's the exodus, a cold night in Bethlehem, and the baby cries in a stable. Nothing to attract us to him, says Isaiah.

He looks human, in brackets. And so the disciples are struggling, because he's just like one of them. He's not like the God of their imagination.

Golgotha and a carpenter watches, but somebody else crouches over him and raises a hammer. It was the moment he was born for, wasn't it?

[19 : 46] It was why the disciples found him so human. It was so that the Lord could lay on him the iniquity of us all.

Here he is, friends, our God. He became flesh, and he tracks us down. Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, into this world.

And we hear afresh his words to these disciples, and also to us through Mark's Gospel. Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid. And we pray, Father, that we would hear his voice indeed this day, and whatever our situations are, we pray that we would be drawn to your Son, and thereby orientate our lives, and look forward to an eternal relationship with him in a new creation, the ultimate exodus, into your hands for all of eternity.

So we pray, Father, that you would go with us now this afternoon. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and forevermore.

We ask in Christ's name. Amen.