

Follow the Saviour Pt 2, Week 3
'God the Deliverer' (Mark 4:35–5:20)
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Jesus walks the talk

Well, we're into our third week of Follow the Saviour: a series of sermons looking at the gospel of Mark. So far we've seen Jesus teaching his disciples about farming and gardening, telling them parables, and encouraging them to listen (akuo) to him.

Jesus has been talking a lot about the Kingdom of God. Today we're going to see Jesus walk the talk. He's got a date with two storms: one on the inside and on the outside and in Mark 4:36 we read:

"That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat."

(Mark 4:35–36)

Jesus has been teaching on the good side of Galilee: a side with lots of sympathetic listeners who cared about God and wanted to know him. Today he's crossing over to the other side of the lake with intention. After all this teaching, there's something he needs to do and there's someone he needs to meet.

It's been said that there are three types of people: people going into a storm of life, people going through a storm, and people coming out of a storm. Here Jesus is sailing directly into two storms: one on the outside and one on the inside.

A storm on the outside

The sea of Galilee, or Kinneret as it's known today, is the lowest freshwater lake on earth. It's a small lake, 21km long and 13km wide but because of its location the winds coming off the outlying hills are known for whipping up sudden storms that cause chaos for boats small fishing boats.

Jesus and his flotilla of boats set sail and find themselves in a hurricane. At least 3 of Jesus' disciples were fishermen before they'd met Jesus, but even they are freaking out. The boat is taking on water and the disciples wake Jesus up and shout in v.38:

"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

Jesus gets up tells the storm to be quiet. Be still. Remarkably the winds and the waves listen (akuo) to him, and the group of boats are left on a sea of glass. Jesus scolds his disciples; they'd seen him heal people and work wonders, but now they're truly terrified, not of the storm, but of the one who the storm listened to.

Now Anglican theologian JC Ryle offers five helpful applications worth taking from this text.

-Disciples are not exempt

First we need to see that the disciples are not exempt. Being a follower of Jesus won't storm proof your life.

But note the difference between Jesus and his disciples. While seasoned sailors are losing their heads, Jesus is resting. Jesus is in a state of complete trust in God's sovereignty while the disciples overlook the fact that, they have the one who made the sea and the wind in the boat with them.

Jesus doesn't get up the disciples for waking him up and asking for help. He rebukes them for their despair. *"Don't you care if we drown?"*. Of course Jesus cares, and he cares enough to expose their lack of faith. Jesus has just spent the whole day teaching on faith and trusting God. As he walks the talk the disciples need learn that faith is knowing that if Jesus is in your boat, you can smile at any storm life throws at you.

-Jesus got tired

The second thing worth noting here is that Jesus got tired. This is the first time we see him sleeping in Mark and here we see his humanity. Sleeping and resting are natural parts of being a human. Sometimes we can kid ourselves into thinking that to be a good person, hard work and hustle, are key, but rest is a vital part of living for God.

In the restless panic of this world and the storms we face, so often we forget to rest on the Lord. If God is in control, I'm not and that's a good thing. It's good and godly to take time to rest and recover.

-Jesus is powerful

The third thing we need to recognise here is Jesus' power. The key question Mark wants us to ask is on the lips of the disciples: *"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

Mark knows the answer and he wants us to know it too. Jesus is God in person. A hero might steer the ship to shore, a great leader might help the crew to ride it out, but only Jesus can calm the storm.

The way Mark recounts this miracle is clearly intended to compare Jesus with Jonah. Jonah tries to run away from God but when God sends a storm on the boat that he's sleeping in, Jonah gets the crew to throw him into the sea and the storm calms down. Here Jesus is better than Jonah, he is the sleeper but he's also the one who calms the storm. Like Jonah, he will sacrifice himself, but not to the storm. Jesus will die on the cross for his crew and to rescue us all from sin and death.

-Jesus is patient

The fourth thing JC Ryle notes is that Jesus is patient. He doesn't lose his cool with his disciples. Instead, he calms the storm and then encourages them to build their faith.

We sometimes kid ourselves into thinking that if God showed up in our lives, we'd believe in him and have no doubts. Here we see that the disciples have God in the stern and still think the storm is more powerful. Jesus shows incredible patience, again showing us that whatever storms of life come our way, God is for us, and God is with us.

-Jesus is still in your boat

The final thing I want us to draw from this text is that Jesus is still in our boat. If you've never put your trust in Jesus, you can invite him into your boat today and we'll pray that at the end of the sermon. But if you're trusting in Jesus, he's in your boat today. He's here with us now by the Holy Spirit and he's will never leave you or forsake you.

Storms in life knock our confidence and trick us into forgetting about God. Jesus sails his disciples into the storm, but he doesn't send them in there alone. In the same way God allows the storms in our lives to roll on in, but he'll never leave us alone to deal with them.

So, what are you facing friend? What storms are you or your loved ones enduring? How can we pray for you? How can we support you?? How can you be asking God to help you with the storm you're facing today? He may not calm your storm immediately, but you can bet your bottom dollar that God will get you through.

A storm on the inside

The disciples sail to shore on a sea of glass, but another storm is brewing. Stepping ashore, someone with a storm on the inside meets Jesus: a demon possessed man.

-Demons are real

As a preacher, it's tempting to explain away the demon stuff. In our culture demons aren't talked about and exorcisms are for fiction movies. But if you believe in evil, and you encounter it enough, one day you may encounter evil you can't explain.

In my work I occasionally meet people who are dealing with such intense spiritual darkness that it's impossible to put their experience down to natural causes. People who are under such emotional and spiritual attack from outside themselves that it's impossible to put things down to chemical imbalances or hallucinations. Evil is real and demons are real.

-Don't get digressed, possessed, or obsessed by demons

Now it's at this point that we can get stuck. Satan doesn't mind if you don't believe in him, as all he wants to do is distract you from God. This is what the Gerasene people were doing, putting demon boy in the graveyard, beside the pigsty to keep evil at arm's length. Sadly, this suits Satan fine as people who are avoiding their spirituality are easy to control and he can get on with digressing your thoughts from God.

Thinking that evil isn't real can often lead us to dabble with tarot cards, horoscopes, or letting evil into our lives. We can kid ourselves into thinking that it's all just harmless fun. Sadly, this is when evil gets in through the back door and we need to recognise that there is a battle for our souls being waged in a spiritual world that we can't see or touch but is very real.

Sometimes though, when we begin to recognise spiritual darkness in our lives, we make the opposite mistake by becoming obsessed by Satan and demons. We see Satan lurking behind every rock, and all of a sudden, my stubbed toe is a form of spiritual attack. We need to recognise that the spiritual realm is very real, but we don't need to name every demon or let evil become our focus.

We mustn't become digressed, possessed, or obsessed with demons because Jesus is our Ghostbuster: he deserves our attention.

-Jesus the Ghostbuster

If you've ever watched the Ghostbusters, you'll know that one of the tag lines is *"I ain't afraid of no ghost"*, and Jesus isn't afraid of the Gerasene demoniac.

Jesus eyeballs the man straight up. He's living among dead bodies, beside pig styes, and he's harming himself and others. In this region Roman soldiers regularly abused and pillaged the people, and this man has a legion (a collective noun for 6000 soldiers) marching through his heart. He's been confined to the darkest place because his people don't want to know him. He runs up to Jesus, falls on his knees and cries in v.7:

“What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!”

(Mark 5:7)

The man can't help but kneel at Jesus presence and the demons beg him for mercy! They know their days are numbered and so they beg to be cast into the pigs.

Now Jesus doesn't use magic words or lengthy prayers. His word is enough to sort the demons out and calm the storm in this man's heart. It's also worth noting that Jesus gives them permission to go into the pigs. In the book of Revelation chapter 20 we read of Satan and his demons being thrown into a lake of fire and sulphur, dealt with forever, but Jesus hasn't landed the knockout blow yet. He hasn't died defeated Satan on the cross and so Satan, sin, and death are still have some power, they're still no match for Jesus.

So ghostbuster Jesus drives the demons out and they possess 2000 pigs that immediately destroy themselves. It's graphic depiction of the storm inside this poor man's heart. And the result of this ghostbusting episode is laid out for us in v.15:

“When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind;”

(Mark 5:15)

-Wholeness in our hearts

Here we see the wholeness of the Kingdom of God coming up against a storm of inner darkness and the storm loses. The poor man who was naked, scarred, and out of his mind, is now sitting at Jesus' feet, fully clothed and in his right mind.

Jesus has been talking about the kingdom of God and now he's walking the talk; he's filling this dark place with God's light.

Friends, here we need to see that Jesus has power to drive out the darkness in our hearts. We live in a nation encountering a mental health epidemic where levels of anxiety, depression, self-harm, gender dysphoria, and suicide are skyrocketing. Just this week a study on gender-based violence in

Anglican households came out that showed that domestic violence is rife in the homes of our people.

As a nation we're richer, more educated, and living longer than ever before but the storms inside us keep raging. While it's good to turn to medicine, doctors, psychologists, and other forms of support to help us to deal with our problems is it any wonder that as we cut ourselves off from God and stop looking to Jesus to help us through the storms in our lives that we're panicking like the disciples?

Here Jesus brings the kingdom of God into this man's life, the darkness is driven out, and wholeness comes. The man wants to follow Jesus back across the lake, but Jesus has another plan for him.

-Wholeness in our community

I think one of the reasons Jesus wants the man to stay in his community is that he wants the wholeness of the Kingdom to wash over the community.

Some of us might worry about the pigs in this story or about the loss of livelihood for the farmers but this is exactly why the community needs the wholeness of the kingdom of God.

They're so freaked out by Jesus that they ask him to go away. There's something worrying about a community when we're more concerned about livestock or economic prosperity than people. If asked, the people here would have chosen for the poor man to remain in bondage than lose the pig money. They don't want to listen to Jesus; they don't want the kingdom of God to upset their agendas.

So Jesus honours their request. In v.18:

"As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed."

(Mark 5:18-20)

Jesus wants not to just heal this man but to heal his community. And even though they won't have a bar of him, he leaves them a witness and the message of God's power spreads

-Apostles to the gentiles

Here we see this man becoming one the first people to take the good news of Jesus to a non-Jewish community. And here we see that God doesn't just deliver us from the storms so we can serve our own needs. Instead, God

delivers us for a purpose: to help others and tell them the good news of God's Kingdom.

God's Kingdom is breaking into our world right now, bringing healing and wholeness to every heart it touches. God doesn't keep us from storms completely, instead he stays in our boat and gives us the Spirit we need to get through.

So, as you ask yourself, what storms am I facing today? Don't forget to think about the storms the people around you are facing and think about how God is sending you into a stormy world so you might be an agent of the kingdom wherever you go. Amen.