

# Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”  
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,  
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”  
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

## **He Meant To Pass By Them**

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**Mark 6:45-52**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 6:45; that’s on page 842 in your pew Bibles. I had originally planned to deal with these two stories together – the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on the water. They are intended to be read and understood together; that seems pretty clear. In fact I showed you last week how the concluding verse of this story links back to the failure of the disciples to understand the last story. In Mark 6:51-52 – after Jesus comes to them on the water, Mark says:

they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. (Mark 6:51–52 ESV)

They could not make sense of Jesus walking on the water, Mark says, because they had not properly understood the miracle of the loaves. Mark makes the connection! He wants us to understand this as one story, so we need to go back and remember what was going on in the miracle of the loaves.

In the miracle of the loaves we learned that Jesus is the prophet like Moses. Just like Moses provided Manna in the wilderness so too did Jesus! He is the prophet like Moses! He speaks the very words of God and we should listen to him.

We also learned that he is the shepherd like David. Just like the Old Testament said, he is the Son of David come to shepherd the people of God – to lead and feed them – on God’s behalf.

He is also the Messianic King. He makes his people sit down in peace and he feeds them – RICHLY – without cost.

Jesus is the one we’ve been waiting for! He is everything the Scripture promises – and more.

It was the “and more” that the crowds did not yet see. John tells us that after the miracle there was almost a riot as people began to connect the dots and they began to realize who Jesus was.

John says:

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (John 6:15 ESV)

That verse is directly parallel to the first verse of our story in Mark’s Gospel. Look at Mark 6:45:

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. (Mark 6:45 ESV)

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat. He wanted them out of that crowd before things got out of hand. One scholar puts it this way:

“There is an unmistakable urgency to this verse. The Gk. *euthys eanankasen* is unusually forceful, meaning that the disciples were “compelled posthaste” to depart the scene... Jesus wants to be rid of the disciples so he can dismiss the crowd by himself. Why? ... The disciples are not unsusceptible to the messianic contagion of the crowd.<sup>1</sup>

You see, the crowd is missing a key piece about Jesus. They don’t know enough yet to be helpful and so Jesus hustles them out of there so that he can dismiss the crowd – so that he can diffuse this half-educated enthusiasm before it leads to trouble. And then he comes out to the disciples walking on the water to show them what they should have seen in the miracle of the loaves.

That’s the connection between these stories.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 45:

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<sup>1</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 196-197.

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. 47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 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, 49 but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, 50 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.” 51 And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. (Mark 6:45–52 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Now I think I mentioned in the very first sermon in this series that Mark has put his Gospel together rather like a well written High School essay. In a High School essay you state your thesis at the start, you put your conclusion at the end and in the middle you assemble evidence – and that is how Mark has written. He tells right off the top that Jesus is the Son of God – that’s his thesis – he puts his conclusion in the mouth of a Roman soldier in Mark 15:39. At the end of the Gospel even the most unlikely people have been convinced that Jesus is who he says he is. As Jesus dies on the cross the Roman soldier says:

“Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39 ESV)

If he believed it – you should believe it! That is what Mark is saying across the length and breadth of this Gospel. In story after story he is providing evidence and he is inviting us to respond – and we see that again in this story. This story provides further testimony to the identity and significance of Jesus and it provides further insight into our situation and need as human beings. And it concludes with an invitation for us to respond to all of who Jesus is as God, with us, for our salvation.

Let’s look first of all at what this story says in terms of the identity and significance of Jesus.

### **What Does This Story Say About The Identity And Significance Of Jesus?**

The first thing it says is pretty hard to miss. It says that Jesus is God.

#### **1. Jesus Is God**

This is what the disciples and the crowd were supposed to have seen in the miracle of the loaves. They didn't see it and so they weren't ready to enter the kingdom of God – Jesus wasn't willing to entrust himself to them because they hadn't seen and understood the fullness of who he was. And so there is no doubt that this subsequent miracle of him walking on the water was intended to drive home the point they missed in the miracle of the loaves. This is Jesus the Master teacher driving home the last and most important point. If I was too subtle for you back there in the desert, maybe you'll get the hint if I come walking out to on the waves.

There is no doubt that Jesus intended this to be received by the disciples as a theophany. A theophany is a fancy word that means “a display of divinity”. Jesus wasn't just taking a short cut and he wasn't just showing off – this was an orchestrated display! Mark makes sure that we understand so he adds this weird phrase; he says:

He meant to pass by them (Mark 6:48 ESV)

Now this doesn't mean that Jesus meant to keep on walking all the way to Bethsaida – this is a Bible way of saying that Jesus was revealing his glory. Do you remember when Moses asked to see the glory of the Lord? God said:

“Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and **while my glory passes by** ... and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:21–23 ESV)

This kind of language is all over the Old Testament – when God reveals his glory he causes it to PASS BY – you can't see it full on – Moses had to be hidden in the cleft of the rock – but God grants glimpses and passing displays of his glory to encourage and strengthen and inform his people and that is what Jesus is doing here! This is intended as definitive evidence of what they should have already seen and understood. One scholar puts it this way:

As in the forgiveness of sins (2:10) and in his power over nature (4:39), walking on the lake identifies Jesus unmistakably with God.<sup>2</sup>

Do you see that? Jesus is being so patient here. They should have got it way back in chapter 2 when he forgave the sins of the paralytic. The crowd was even asking:

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<sup>2</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 198.

Who can forgive sins but God alone? (Mark 2:7 ESV)

That's a good question! Who indeed? Only God! They should have got it right then and there.

Or they could have got it back in chapter 4 when he spoke to the wind and the waves and they were still. They were asking the right questions then too. After that story they asked the question:

“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41 ESV)

Exactly! Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? That is the right question, but apparently the disciples still haven't come to the right answer. They should have got it in chapter 2, they should have got it in chapter 4, they should have got in chapter 6 in the miracle of the loaves but their hearts were hardened.

But Jesus is gentle and kind. He is patient with them, he knows they are dust, and so he comes to them, walking on the water and he intends to pass them by. He intends to show them – just as God showed Moses – just a piece, just a glimpse of his glory.

He intended to show them that he was God.

But he did it in a way that went further than the theophanies of the Old Testament. He did it in a way that brought God closer than the theophanies in the Old Testament. Jesus passed them by and then HE GOT IN THE BOAT. He is not JUST GOD – he is GOD WITH US!

## **2. Jesus is God With Us**

There is a reason that Jesus selected this particular miracle as the definitive evidence of his divinity. Jesus is counting on the Scripture knowledge of the disciples and so he is making use here of some well known Old Testament imagery. In Job 9:8-11 Job talks about the glory and the majesty of God:

who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea... who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number. Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. (Job 9:8-11 ESV)

Job says that his knowledge of God – his experience of God - is so partial and imperfect, because Job is so small and sinful and God is so majestic and holy – that even when God passes by him he has no real knowledge of him. He passes by – I see him not. He moves on but I do not perceive him.

In the Old Testament God was understood as so holy, so other, so Sovereign that there was little hope that we could know him personally and experientially. Maybe the High Priest could know something of God – once a year when he went into the Holy of Holies with a rope tied around his waist in case he had a heart attack – but the rest of us were outside, in the dark, away from God because of sin. That was the Old Testament view and these were Old Testament men. And they were away from God, in the dark, upon the waves and they were suffering. Surely the God of the heavens would not come to them upon the sea?

But he does.

Jesus means to pass them by – he means to give them incontrovertible evidence of his Majesty and Divinity **AND THEN HE JOINS THEM IN THE BOAT!**

Are you seeing that?

My friends this is why the early church loved to call Jesus **EMMANUEL! EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US!** That is the full miracle and the full marvel of what Jesus was saying to the disciples on that day.

Yes I am the prophet like Moses!

Yes I am the shepherd like David!

Yes I am the Messianic King!

But I am more than that! I am the God of all Creation and I am **EMMANUEL!** I am all the glory of God – all the majesty of God – all the power of God – in flesh **WITH YOU FOR YOUR SALVATION.** That's who Jesus is – that's what this story means and the kingdom of God cannot

begin in your life until you understand and embrace this reality.

You need to see it. You need to believe that this is who Jesus is and you need to believe that this is who you are. Because this is also a story about you and me and lost people in general. Yes it is a story about Jesus but it is also a story about the urgent need and the desperate predicament of human beings.

### **What Does This Story Say About The Need And Predicament Of Human Beings?**

Mark is a very insightful observer of human nature and he says some things about us in this story that we need to see and receive. The first thing he says is that:

#### **1. Apart from Jesus human beings are always at the mercy of hostile elemental forces**

One of the most common themes in Mark's Gospel is that whenever the disciples are not with Jesus, they're in trouble! Even when Jesus has a nap, they're in trouble. It is only when they are with Jesus, under his leadership and authority that they are safe from an increasingly hostile world. That is the point and this is part of the Biblical storyline!

When human beings fell we not only ruptured our relationship with God, we also ruptured our relationship with each other AND with the world! We forget that! But that is why it so often feels like the world is out to get us – IT IS! The Bible says that human beings were intended to be under God and over everything else in creation – including the angels. When we fell we completely inverted the created order. And now a created thing – an angel – is over us and is using all the forces of nature to drive us into frustration and ruin.

That's why in the Old Testament prophecies of the everlasting kingdom they would always talk about the restoration of our dominion over the natural realm. In Isaiah 11 for example it says that in the Kingdom of Messiah:

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.  
(Isaiah 11:8 ESV)

Even the little children – in the kingdom of God – will exercise complete dominion over the natural realm. Formerly hostile aspects of the created world will be our playthings!

But that's not the world we live in now is it? We live in a fallen and hostile world. We are at the mercy of wind and wave and current. We live in fear of the serpent – that great enemy of Adam and Eve – and we wait for and long for the one who was promised. That seed of Eve – that child of the woman – who will crush the head of our enemy and bring us home to God. We wait for the one who will rule over nature and will return us to the life we were created and intended to live. That is what we see in this story and that is the human condition! We are at the mercy of the forces of nature under the control of our enemy while we wait for the promised one of God!

And that is who see coming to the disciples – treading on the waves.

William Lane puts it this way; he says:

“Jesus had no intention of simply passing by his disciples in a display of enigmatic glory. His walking upon the water proclaimed that the hostility of nature against man must cease with the coming of the Lord, whose concealed majesty is unveiled in the proclamation “I am he.””<sup>3</sup>

I know who you are – I know what you are dealing with – I know what you are waiting for and I am he.

To understand why Jesus is the Savior that we need we have to understand the human predicament. We are powerless before wind and wave and current. We are at the mercy of elemental forces. The world is out to get us – the world is wielded as a weapon by our enemy. But here is Jesus – walking on the waves.

The other thing we see here is that:

## **2. The less people know about Jesus the more they will be captive to unnecessary fears**

Mark uses three different words for fear in this story. Look at verses 50-52. He says:

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<sup>3</sup> William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 238.

they all saw him and were **terrified**. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be **afraid**.” 51 And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly **astounded**, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. (Mark 6:50–52 ESV)

Because they didn't fully understand who Jesus was they were wrestling with all manner of unnecessary fears. Isn't that interesting? I love the third word that Mark uses there for fear translated in the ESV as “astounded”. It is the Greek word *existemi* from which we get our English word “existential”. It literally means they were outside of themselves – or they were out of their minds. It is the word translated sometimes as “insane”. These are serious fears and they all stem from the fact that the disciples have not yet submitted to the whole truth of who Jesus is.

My friends listen to me, until you come to grips with who you are and where you are – what manner of world you are living in – and who Jesus is as God for you – until you embrace that entire package you will wrestle with serious fears. You will struggle with anxiety. You will have panic attacks. You will have depression. You will be at times out of your mind. Not because you are irrational – but because you ARE RATIONAL. Think about it. If you only have half the picture you know all you need to know to go insane. You know all you need to know to be absolutely TERRIFIED.

You see the Bible says that all people know – instinctively – that there is a God and we will face judgment. We suppress that truth, Paul says in Romans 1, because we don't like the implications – but deep down inside you know that there is a God and that one day you will stand before him. And you know that you are not now the way you were meant to be. You are broken. You are less than you were supposed to be. And you know that you have enemies. You aren't wrong when you feel like the world is out to get you. You aren't wrong when it feels like there is an enemy inside your head. You aren't wrong! You aren't crazy! But if that's all you know then you are absolutely right to be absolutely terrified!

Because until you know that there is One who walks upon the water – until you know that there is one who is Sovereign over the sea – until you know that Jesus is God and he comes for you – then you are absolutely right to be entirely out of your mind with fear. But that is not insanity – that is self awareness.

That's honest. Because you are lost at sea.

You are alone in the dark.

You are very far from home.

And the world is out to get you.

All of that is true.

But so is this: Jesus comes walking on the waves.

Jesus is God and he is near. And if you ask him to he will join you in your boat.

That's the invitation in this text! This text is inviting us to admit the truth of our situation. It is inviting us to acknowledge the reality and rationality of our fears. We fear because we see SOME things that are true. Faith is seeing the rest. Faith is seeing Jesus as God for us walking on the waves.

Faith is asking Jesus into our boat. Faith is – to steal a phrase from Carrie Underwood who stole it from the early church – asking Jesus to take the wheel. You understand that Carrie Underwood didn't invent that phrase. I told you several weeks ago when we looked at the story of Jesus calming the storm that in the early church this was one of the most common ways that Christians had for understanding their salvation. I mentioned to you that:

“in early Christian art the Church was depicted as a boat driven upon a perilous sea; with Jesus in the midst, there was nothing to fear.”<sup>4</sup>

That's the invitation in this story! Invite Jesus into your boat. Admit that you are lost at sea. Admit that you are at the mercy of hostile forces. Admit that you are in the dark, on your own, against the world. Now see Jesus walking on the waves. See him as the glory of God for your salvation and for crying out loud – invite him into your boat! Let Jesus take the wheel! Let him

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<sup>4</sup> William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 178.

still your fears and silence your adversaries and bring you all the way home.

John makes that final point even more forcefully than Mark does. He says that when Jesus got in the boat:

immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going. (John 6:21 ESV)

Do you see that? The presence of Jesus in your life in this world changes EVERYTHING.

My dear friends, that is a picture of the Gospel. That is an open invitation and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.