

The Astounding King

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[0 : 00] Well, signs are there for people to respond to, and they're important, especially important given the recent severe weather that has hit the United Kingdom with all the storms.

And there are so many incidents of people who have needed to be rescued, basically because they have ignored the warning signs, which have been clear. So I read of one such incident that happened last Sunday in York, currently North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service had to rescue two people from a Volvo because it got stuck in approximately 50 centimetres of flood water.

The only thing that would make the story better if there was a Land Rover instead of a Volvo that was stuck, but it was a Volvo, nothing against Volvo drivers or Land Rover drivers either. Basically, they ignored the warning signs, and so what happened was Fire and Rescue had to come and save them.

And so the Fire and Rescue officer, the manager, he wrote this on Twitter about this incident. He said, the driver ignored the obvious sign, invisible flooding. We will not recover vehicles.

And then block capitals do not drive through flood water. That was station manager Tony Walker. And I can sense Tony's frustration, where really their job is fighting fires, keeping the public safe.

[1 : 21] And he has to send some guys out because that silly Volvo driver is stuck in a puddle, basically. So it's one thing to have signs, isn't it? But it's another thing to obey those signs.

It's another thing to see them, understand them, and then do something about them. Because if we don't respond to signs, and we end up in danger, if we get trouble, it is nobody's fault apart from our own.

We can't blame the signs for not being clear enough, and we can't blame the people who've given the signs to us. It is our fault. They're there for us to understand, and they're there for us to respond to.

Now, the miracles that we see in the Gospel of Mark are like signs. They're like signs because they're there to reveal the identity of Jesus Christ. And so today we look at this miracle of Jesus walking on water.

Last week, or before, was Jesus feeding 5,000 people. So another miracle, another sign, and here Jesus walks on water. And they're signs that are meant to reveal the divine nature of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 26] To say that he wasn't just a man, but he was God come to earth. And that's why he behaves and acts in the way he does. And these signs were for the disciples to see, so that they could grasp for themselves who Jesus really is.

And yet, if you look down at verse 52, the disciples still don't get it. We read that they had not understood about the loaves. That's the last miracle.

Their hearts were hardened. And it's not a tragic response. When they see Jesus feeding all these people with five loaves and two fish, they still don't get who he is.

But it's also a warning for us. Their response is tragic, but it's meant to warn us that we need to be careful. That we don't misunderstand who Jesus is.

But that we take note of the kind of things he said and did. So that we recognize his true identity.

And we respond to him in an appropriate way. So I'd like us to look at three points this afternoon.

[3 : 30] First, there's the resolve of Jesus. Verse 45 to 46. Second, the revelation of Jesus. 47 to 51. And then thirdly, the response to Jesus.

Verse 52 to 56. So the resolve of Jesus. The revelation of Jesus. And the response of... Sorry, the response to Jesus. So first of all, the resolve of Jesus.

This is verse 45 to 46. Jesus is the one who sets the agenda here. Jesus is the one who determines what is going to happen. So 45. Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida.

While he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. So you notice there's an urgency to what Jesus is doing here. So why does he send the disciples away? And why does he dismiss the crowd? Remember, this was a massive crowd. And yet he came to Jesus, perhaps with the hope that Jesus was the Messiah, the long-awaited leader, the ruler that they were looking for.

[4 : 37] And yet his disciples hadn't grasped who Jesus really is. They hadn't got his identity yet. And so it's unlikely that this crowd would grasp it either.

And so before some kind of uprising took place, Jesus quickly sends the disciples away in the boat, on the lake, and then he dismisses the crowd. Literally, Jesus forces his disciples to get into the boat.

That's the strength of the word that's used here. They were going to get on that boat. And there's a significance to that. There was no option for them.

The resolve of Jesus meant that Jesus was controlling events, his way to reveal more of himself. So they're on the boat in the lake. Well, why?

Because Jesus wants to reveal his identity. They don't understand Jesus yet. The crowds don't understand Jesus yet. So Jesus sends them all away. And what does Jesus do?

[5 : 37] Notice that Jesus goes and he prays to his father. However, Jesus needs to spend time with his father. So Jesus resolves to go up on this mountain and to pray at this particular time.

And it's interesting because this is one of the occasions in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus goes off on his own and prays to his father in heaven. So the first one, early on in his ministry, Mark 1, 35, Jesus gets up early in the morning and he goes off to a solitary place to pray.

And then here, Mark chapter 6, verse 46, Jesus sends everyone away and he goes up on a mountain himself to pray. And then again, in Mark chapter 14, verse 32 to 39, Jesus is deeply distressed before his death.

He's in the garden of Gethsemane. He's on his own and he's praying to his father. Each time Jesus is on his own, each seems to take place in the dark and each is at a significant stage in Jesus' ministry.

Because each seems to take place when Jesus is facing a crisis. But after each prayer time that Jesus has, Jesus gets on with his mission.

[6 : 55] He came to earth with a mission to do and he continues until his mission accomplished. So here, the crisis concerns his identity.

The disciples just don't get who he is, despite the signs. The miracles all pointing to Jesus, the Messiah, God's Son, but they still don't understand.

And so here, Jesus alone with his father. We don't know what Jesus is praying, but it's what Jesus needed to do. And so what Jesus is doing here is he is moving things on in his time and in his way. That's the resolve of Jesus. Everything is happening deliberately. Nothing is happening by accident. Jesus is getting set for another revelation of himself.

And so if you're new to reading the Bible, don't ever think that Jesus was a victim of circumstance. That Jesus is planning out his mission.

[7 : 55] So everything he does, every step he takes, every move he makes, is significant. It's significant. So that's the first point, the resolve of Jesus. Second is the revelation of Jesus.

So the camera angle shifts from Jesus on the mountain to the disciples on a boat in the sea. So let's read verse 47 and 48.

Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn, he went out to them, walking on the lake.

He was about to pass by them. So this is no kind of calm sail, like out on the Mediterranean, a nice evening with the sun coming down, sun setting, glass of wine on the sailboat.

This is a storm. And the fact that the disciples are struggling is saying something about the immensity of it because these were fishermen who were used to being at sea and in storms.

[8 : 57] But it wasn't until just before dawn that Jesus went out to them. And Mark tells us Jesus, verse 48, was about to pass by them. Now, it sounds as if Jesus was about to walk on by, which seems strange, but there's something going on here.

And this passing by is deliberate because it's a moment of divine revelation. Jesus is revealing himself to these disciples.

So this phrase to pass by echoes previous revelation of God to people in the Bible. So in the Old Testament part of the Bible, there are times when God chose to manifest himself, manifest his glory, if you like, his being to human beings.

And there are two main occasions. One of them is when God passed by Moses on Mount Sinai, a way back in the book of Exodus, Exodus 33.

So Moses had said to God, show me your glory. Moses wanted to see God. And this is what takes place. And I'll read from Exodus 33.

[10:10] And the Lord said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you. And I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.

And I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But he said, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live. Then the Lord said, there is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back.

But my face must not be seen. So God passed by Moses. Moses didn't see God's face. But Moses was able to be there as God's glory passed by him.

And then the other occasion is with Elijah, another big character in the Bible. Elijah on Mount Horeb in 1 Kings 19. And I'll read from 1 Kings 19.

[11:12] The Lord said to Elijah, Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. And so God passed by Elijah.

And now it's clear here, Mark chapter 6, Jesus, the disciples, the boat on the water. Jesus is doing the same thing. He's passing by his disciples, just like God passed by Moses and just like God passed by Elijah.

The theologians sometimes call this a theophany. Basically, a visible manifestation of God in all his glory to human beings. But there's also an allusion here to another book in the Bible, the book of Job.

Where in Job chapter 9, it speaks of God treading on the waves of the sea. Of God walking on water. And what's Jesus doing here? He is treading on the waves of the sea.

He is walking on water. And then again in Job chapter 9, it speaks of God passing by again. So let me read Job 9 verse 11.

[12:20] When he passes me, I cannot see him. When he goes by, I cannot perceive him. And so here is Jesus Christ passing by on the waves.

But this time, he's passing by with the very purpose of being seen. He's not hiding anything. He's revealing himself to his disciples. So what we have here is this revelation of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is doing what only God can do. Doing what God has done before. And still, his disciples don't understand, don't grasp who he is.

In fact, they're freaked out by the whole experience. Look at verse 49. But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out because they all saw him and were terrified.

So they're terrified. They're thinking, Jesus is a ghost. But Jesus reassures them by what he says.

[13:28] He says, take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid. So Jesus isn't just saying here, don't worry lads. It's me.

No need to panic. It's not a ghost. What he's saying carries a far deeper significance. Because it's another revelation of Jesus to his disciples.

So Jesus literally says here in verse 50, I am. That's an expression that again echoes what God said to his people.

In the Old Testament part of the Bible. And it began when God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. A popular story, Exodus chapter 3. God was sending Moses to rescue his people from slavery in Egypt.

But Moses said to God, if they ask what is his name, referring to God, Moses said, what should I tell him? And so God said to Moses from Exodus chapter 3, I am who I am.

[14:33] That is what you are to say to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you. And so when Jesus walks on water, he's not just acting like God.

We can get that. He's acting like God. But he is also taking on God's name. He is revealing his true identity to the disciples.

Even the fact that Jesus follows up his words by saying, don't be afraid. It's so God-like. Because Jesus is speaking the same way that God speaks.

So again, all through the Old Testament, God continually says the same thing to his people time and time again. Do not be afraid. Fear not. Do not be afraid.

Fear not. And so the disciples should have picked this up as they see Jesus and as they hear Jesus. They should have known that they've got nothing to fear. So Jesus proves they've got nothing to fear by getting into the boat with him.

[15 : 38] And you notice that his presence with him stops the wind and it takes away their fear. So Jesus doesn't just get into the boat because he's going to catch a ride to the other side of the lake. He gets into the boat to reveal how God has come to be with his people.

He's showing his power. He's showing his glory. He's speaking God's words. And through his presence, he's driving out all fear, which is one of God's promises all through the Old Testament.

So Jesus is revealing himself loudly and clearly to these men so that they might believe in him.

And so if you're here today, you may call yourself a Christian or you may not be quite sure what you believe. And so you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. Well, we've got to see that these signs are signs that are pointing us to Jesus.

So if you don't believe in Jesus, then you need to recognize his true identity. He's not just a figure of history, but he is the Lord God himself who entered into this world.

[16 : 51] But if you would call yourself a Christian, then if you do believe in Jesus, then you need to remember his true identity. Because being a Christian doesn't just mean you won't have any struggles in life.

It doesn't mean everything will be plain sailing. Because Jesus might send us into difficult situations, just in the same way he sent these disciples into a difficult situation.

In other words, a storm. Because Christianity is so different from every other religion, every other philosophy, and every other worldview.

Because Christianity is saying to us, God himself has come as a person. Christianity is not saying, follow all these lists of rules, follow all these laws.

It's saying, follow this person. Look to him. And because Christian belief is about a person, then we can be in a relationship with this person.

[18 : 04] And that's why there's nothing to fear. I told this story before about my son Matthew. When he was really small, he used to have nightmares. And he would scream.

And then, so, the thing that helped was not going into his bedroom and then explaining, nightmares aren't real. This is the philosophy of nightmares and why you shouldn't be afraid.

What really helped him was the presence of his mum or his dad being with him. And that's what helped these disciples here. It was that Jesus, God himself, came to be alongside them.

To help them. And so, they had nothing left to fear. And so, when the storms of life come to you, let me tell you that Christianity offers the best resources.

It doesn't just offer a watertight argument. It offers a watertight person. A person who will be with you. And never leave you. And so, not only can we trust the one who's got control over the storms in this world.

[19 : 06] But we can trust the one who will be with us. And will walk with us through those storms. So, we don't need to be afraid. So, that's the second point. The revelation of Jesus.

First, the resolve of Jesus. Second, the revelation of Jesus. And third, the response to Jesus. And this is in verse 52 to 56. So, again, the shocking response of the disciples is recorded there in verse 52.

Let's read it again. For they had not understood about the loaves. Their hearts were hardened. So, they still don't get who Jesus is. Well, fine. Well, it isn't because of the lack of evidence.

The real issue, Mark tells us, is their hearts were hardened. So, earlier that day, they had witnessed Jesus feeding this massive crowd with five small loaves and two fish.

And it was an amazing miracle. And yet, they failed to grasp that it was a sign pointing them to Jesus' identity. So, they failed to see the significance of the sign of the miracle.

[20 : 07] That doesn't mean they're stupid. But their misunderstanding is a reflection of their unbelief. Their hearts were hardened. So, they didn't believe.

They had witnessed Jesus' divine power and authority on numerous occasions. They'd heard Jesus teach. And now, they just witnessed these two astounding miracles. Not only that, but they'd been involved in these astounding miracles.

And so, with all of this evidence, they should have believed in Jesus. And so, rather than respond with sheer terror, they should have responded with simple faith in him.

They didn't understand who Jesus is. And neither do the people who want Jesus to heal them. So, let's look at those closing verses. 53. 53. When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there.

As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried those who were ill on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages, towns, or countryside, they placed those who were ill in the marketplaces.

[21 : 21] They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak. And all he touched it were healed. So, Jesus is popular. His reputation had spread over the whole region.

People were coming from everywhere. And it must have been a remarkable sight seeing all these people healed. Even those who touched his cloak were healed. And again, it is Jesus acting with the power and the authority of God himself.

Where these healings were revealing his true identity. And yet, the crowds here just seem to be like the disciples. Because they can't see past the miracles either. They're signs.

But they fail to grasp their significance. The disciples don't understand. And their hearts are hardened. And the crowds don't understand. Because they just want to be healed.

They want Jesus to do something for them. And so, it can be possible to see the mighty power of Jesus and still fail to understand who he is.

[22 : 25] Everybody here in these stories can see the power of Jesus before their very eyes. But it still doesn't turn into belief. They still don't believe in him.

And so, this revelation of Jesus to them then, and also to us now, to the world, the revelation of Jesus doesn't necessarily equate with a response of faith in Jesus.

So, the evidence can be there. And yet, our hearts can still be hard. And the disciples are a perfect illustration of this. Because if they responded with hard hearts to Jesus, it is no surprise that people respond today.

To Jesus with equally hard hearts. When I talk to people who are skeptical about Christianity, people who've got questions or doubts about the Christian faith, quite often, I hear people say things like, Well, I would believe in God if there was enough evidence.

Or, if I saw a miracle myself right before my very eyes, then I believe in Jesus. I'd have the evidence. And you might be here and you're thinking to save yourself.

[23 : 38] But what we've got here is a miracle that doesn't produce belief. And so, having all the evidence in front of you still won't produce belief. It won't change you.

And so, if you've got doubts or questions about Christianity, maybe you need to doubt your doubts. What I mean is, you need to honestly ask whether you're justified in having those doubts.

And whether Christianity actually makes better sense of the world and life on your own position.

And if you've got questions about Christianity, perhaps you need to be careful to make sure your questions aren't just a smoke screen to avoid believing in Jesus.

In other words, you're not letting the evidence take you to the obvious conclusion. And so, you're avoiding making a decision by asking lots of questions.

Because when it comes to Jesus, it can't really be a case of the revelation isn't clear enough. Or, the evidence isn't strong enough. The problem is always misunderstanding the revelation.

[24 : 45] Or, refusing to let the evidence lead us to the conclusion. Because if Jesus reveals himself as God, which I'm claiming he did, and if he backs it up with all of this evidence, then we ought to not just pay attention to him, find out about him, investigate him, but we ought to believe in him.

Because that's why he came. Or, to put it another way, if all the signs are there, and we've got eyes to see and ears to hear, then we should pay attention to the signs, and then we should respond accordingly.

We must follow them. And so, while the disciples, don't you understand, and their hearts were hardened, they did come to understand and believe in Jesus at that point. And yet, after the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus, they did come to understand and believe, and were

prepared to risk their lives for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Which says something to us. It means that, no matter where you are right now, in relation to God, no matter what your doubts, or your questions, or your understanding, it doesn't mean that you need to stay in that place.

Like the disciples, people can move, from not understanding, from having a hard heart, through to, faith and belief in Jesus Christ. So I encourage you, don't give up investigating Jesus.

[26 : 12] Come to a place like this church. Look at what Jesus says himself. See what he did. Ask questions. Find out for yourself. And I guarantee, you won't be let down by anything that you find out.

And you may even decide that you have to believe, and then your life will be changed. So don't give up investigating Jesus. You've got nothing to lose. Because, I guess for us, living this side of the cross, as we do, we have even more reason to believe.

Less reason to doubt. More than we can understand. Less occasion for our hearts to be hardened. Because we can look back, and see this man, who claims to be God, living, dying, rising again, transforming the world, and changing people's lives.

So if this is who Jesus is, that he has revealed himself to us, then why is it important that we believe in him? And with this, I close. Because this miracle tells us that Jesus sat in a wooden boat, but he was on his way, as part of his mission, to be nailed to a wooden cross.

So Jesus left the glory of heaven, and came down into a world where he would die. His mission was to die. Why? So that God would not pass us by, by leaving us in our hopeless and helpless state, and heading for hell.

[27 : 41] Because on the cross, Jesus took the punishment for our sin, so that we might be saved. So Jesus willingly faced God's wrath, so that God's wrath could pass by, you and me.

And that's why we need to understand who he is, and why he came, so that we don't harden our hearts against him. So don't fail to act on the knowledge that you have of Jesus Christ.

Don't let your heart remain hardened against him in unbelief. See the signs. God has revealed himself to us. He became a man, entered into history, so he could save.

So God could make himself, or his purposes, any clearer than he has. And we could see that in the person of Jesus Christ. And so, I would urge you, turn to Jesus Christ and be saved.

And find in him all that you need for this life, all that you need to see you through death, and on into eternity. Don't let this astounding king pass you by.