

Who then is this?

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. You may like to turn in the Bibles in front of you to Mark chapter 4, page 815.

And we're looking at the end of chapter 4. And as I said at the beginning of the service, this ends our sermon series on Mark chapters 1 to 4 in the last two months or so. Let's pray.

God, our Father, you've caused all of the scriptures to be written for our benefit. To make us wise for salvation in Christ. And so we pray that you may fill us with faith and trust in him today.

And we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen. It's 200 years ago this year, 1805, when Robert Morrison, a 23-year-old thin Englishman, presumably meaning not very robust in health, was recruited by the London Mission Society.

And Robert Morrison, a man who was convinced that God was calling him to evangelize the nation of China, though he spoke no Chinese at all and had never been there, set sail via America to go to evangelize China.

[1 : 17] And 198 years ago, sometime in 1807, he landed in what was then called Canton, now Guangzhou, in the southern part of China. And without speaking any Chinese, he was probably the only Protestant Christian in China.

He began his work of mission to China. After seven years, he had one baptized convert to Christianity. After eight years, another year later, he had finished translating the whole of the New Testament into Chinese.

Another six more years, he finished the Old Testament. And when he died in 1834, after being in China for 27 or so years, he had just 10 baptized converts in a nation of millions of people.

And that was it. Amazing legacy, in one sense, of faithful ministry, but just 10 converts, such a small number. Not even really a scratch on the surface.

Even in Australia today, it's easy to think that here we are with a church that is perhaps in the whole of our nation in decline, relatively small, with little influence.

[2 : 35] And sometimes when I go to Shopping Town or drive through Doncaster, I think of these hundreds and thousands of people just in this area who are not Christian, who don't believe in Jesus Christ, maybe have never heard of him or never really heard the gospel.

And yet even in a church like ours, which some people think is big, I think is middle size, we're such a small number by comparison. I remember when a friend or colleague of mine gave up the ministry some years ago and said something along those lines that, you know, what's it all about?

We just don't seem to have any impact. We're so small by comparison. To our population. Or place yourself in Rome in 60 AD, a generation nearly after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Small house church, maybe a couple of different house churches in Rome, meeting. And how small they would have felt against the might of the Roman Empire.

How few they were in number compared to the population of the whole of Rome, let alone the rest of the Roman Empire. It's perhaps from that setting that Mark's gospel was written.

- [3 : 49] Traditionally regarded that Mark was in Rome. Paul, when he was in Rome near the end of his life, asked for Mark to come and join him there. Along with Luke, maybe they conferred as they began writing their gospels together.

And perhaps it's in that setting, as well as in the original setting of Jesus speaking to the disciples, that we should keep in mind with these opening parables in chapter 4.

Jesus said, The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow.

He does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.

The issue in this parable is not the farmer's ignorance about how the seed grows. That's not the problem. Nor is the issue in this parable his inactivity.

- [4 : 53] That is, he scatters the seed, and then he goes off and just sleeps and rises and does his daily work, and when it's harvest time, he comes back. The issue is not his inactivity in between times.

Nor is the issue here the type of soil. That was the issue last week, if you remember the early part of chapter 4, but not so here. It's not a matter of, is his seed placed on good soil or bad or on rocky ground?

That's not the issue in this parable either. The issue is, in a sense, the contrast between the tiny seed that is scattered, and then at the end, in a sense, almost miraculously, you end up with a plant.

Harvest, the full grain, the ripe grain ready for harvest. There are only two activities, really, in this parable, the sowing, and the reaping at harvest time.

There's a contrast between the two, of the scattering of the seed, and nothing seems to happen, and yet, of itself, the earth produces, and ultimately, you end up with a harvest at the end.

- [5 : 57] The point of the parable, in one sense, is the contrast between the two, the little seed, and then the full harvest at the end. But Jesus, in speaking this parable, is speaking something of his own ministry as well.

He is the sower, and he is the reaper. He is the one who, in his first coming, in the time of his disciples here, in the gospel, is sowing the seed.

And little seems to be happening. Moreover, he, the farmer, will leave, will go through death and resurrection, back to heaven. But, he will come again, as the reaper, the harvester, to harvest, the full harvest, from the seed that is sown, in his first coming.

In between, in a sense, even despite his absence, the seed grows. And what Jesus, in teaching this parable, is saying, is to encourage, his disciples, firstly, that even though, they are few in number, small by comparison, even with the Roman, and Jewish authorities, in Palestine, let alone the whole Roman Empire.

And it may look, as though nothing much, is happening. It may look, as though Jesus, is just speaking some words, in the occasional miracle. That something significant, is in fact going on, underneath, of itself, from the seed, that Jesus is scattering.

- [7 : 29] And that even when, Jesus later will go, and depart from them, more work will happen, as the harvest approaches. Jesus, you see, is encouraging his disciples, who may well have thought, that the Messiah, ought to come with force, and might, and power, to overthrow Rome, and overthrow the corrupt, Jewish authorities, and so on.

That somehow, there should be more, that is happening at this time. Jesus is saying, the kingdom of God, is not quite like that. Seeds to start with. The full harvest, yet to come, when he will return, to harvest it.

But in between times, he's encouraging the disciples, that unrelentingly, inexorably, inevitably, irresistibly, the harvest, will come.

The seed will grow. Just like, perhaps again in China, 1949, missionaries, expelled from the nation. Many people thought, the church might collapse, in that time in China.

But in the last 15 years, or so, people have marveled, at the millions, and millions of Chinese Christians, that are now there. As in a sense, the church has grown, of itself, during communist era.

[8 : 42] And what would Robert Morrison, 200 years ago, have made of it today, when you see, over perhaps, 100 million, Protestant Christians, in China. The next parable, says much the same, slightly different angles, and helps us, fill out some of this picture, of the seed, and the harvest.

Jesus also said, with what can we compare, the kingdom of God, or what parable, will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which when sown upon the ground, is the smallest, of all the seeds on earth.

Yet, when it is sown, it grows up, and becomes the greatest, of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds, of the air, can make nests, in its shade. Not literally, is the mustard seed, the smallest, but proverbially, in Jesus' day, it was.

People would say things like, as small as a mustard seed. So he's using, the common idea, that this is something, that's very small indeed. And mustard seeds, are small. And yet, from that small seed, grows a particularly, large tree, or shrub or bush.

The issue in this parable, as it fills out, some detail of the first one, is the contrast, between small and large. Again, it's the kingdom of God. That's what he's talking about.

[10 : 00] And it starts small. Particularly small. And as Jesus spoke these words, to the disciples, and the crowds, by the Sea of Galilee, the kingdom of God, we might say, is just Jesus, and a dozen followers, and maybe a couple of women, tagging along at this stage.

Small, in anyone's words, in anyone's mind. In Mark's days, he wrote this gospel, perhaps well in Rome, in the midst of, growing persecution, in the reign of Nero, the emperor of Rome.

Again, I guess, there's encouragement here, that even these, small gatherings of Christians, on the Lord's Day, in the middle of Rome, that they in fact, might feel quite intimidated, by the might of, imperial Rome.

Nonetheless, the kingdom of God, will at that harvest time, of the first parable, be a mighty tree, in which the birds of the air, nest for shade.

The language of the birds of the air, at the end of that second parable, making nests in its shade, is language that arises, out of the prophets, of the Old Testament.

[11 : 09] In that context, it's not just, it's not just that the kingdom of God, will be big, but that the kingdom of God, will include people, from all the nations. That's the context, behind this expression, here in verse 32.

So Jesus is saying, that the kingdom of God, though tiny, at the time of him, speaking these words, and still very small, when Mark wrote this gospel, 30 or so years later, will ultimately end up, to be a large tree, which incorporates people, from every nation.

Now we already, in 2005 AD, see glimpses of that, of course, around the world, and even within our own congregation, to an extent. But that is nothing, compared to what the day of harvest, will be like.

For there's that great verse, in the vision of heaven, in Revelation, that says, after this I looked, and there was a great multitude, that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes, and peoples, and languages, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, robed in white.

That's the harvest, that's the great tree, in which the birds of the air, take their nest, and have shade. People of every nation, of all tribes, and tongues, and languages, gather together finally, around the throne of God, in heaven.

[12 : 29] You see, on that day, when Jesus, the harvester, comes back to harvest, the seed that he's sown, on that day, the kingdom of God, will far surpass, the majesty of imperial Rome.

On that day, when Jesus returns, to harvest the kingdom of God, that kingdom will, far surpass, the might of Mao's China, for example.

On that day, the kingdom of God, will far exceed, the glory, of secular society, in which we live. On that day, the kingdom of God, God, in its might, and strength, in its glory, and majesty, will far, far be greater, than any might, of any world empire, in any point, of history, at all.

Something, which ought to encourage us, even when we see, in our society, many, many thousands, of Christians, and yet still, in many respects, small.

See what an encouragement, to his disciples. Here they are, perhaps wondering about, you know, the powerful force, of overthrowing Rome, is this kingdom of God, when's it all coming, in power?

[13 : 40] And Jesus is saying, small beginnings, seeds, but the full harvest, is coming. It's a mustard seed now, but it's a large tree, at the end. And at the end of the Bible, we see that wonderful picture, of the full glory, and majesty, the might and power, of the kingdom of God, far exceeding, any empire, in world history.

And indeed, in the book of Revelation, in particular, far exceeding, the might, of imperial Rome. What an encouragement, to the disciples. What an encouragement, to Mark's original readers, in 60 or so AD.

What an encouragement, these words may have been, for Robert Morrison, the only Protestant, Christian in China. And when he died, 27 years later, just 10 converts, from such a ministry.

What an encouragement, to us today. We know that, on this particular day, Jesus taught many parables, the next verses tell us. Not all of them, are recorded for us. Mark's been highly selective, in what he has written down, for us.

Jesus has spent the day, on a boat, just off the shore, of the Sea of Galilee, on the eastern side, around Capernaum, or Magdala, or somewhere like that.

[14 : 53] And he's been speaking, to large crowds, in parables. He's been explaining them, more intimately, to the disciples, on the boat with him. He said, we read in verse 33 and 4, that with many such parables, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.

He did not speak to them, except in parables, but he explained, everything in private, to his disciples. So there he is, on the boat with his disciples, the crowds before him, on the beach. And as we saw last week, at the beginning of chapter 4, some of the issue, of explanation, of why Jesus chose, to speak, speak in parables.

Well now it's evening time, the end of this day of teaching, and Jesus instigates, movement of his disciples, in the boat, across to the other side, of the sea, to the west side, of the Sea of Galilee.

As verse 35 says, come, he says, let us go across, to the other side. And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them, in the boat, just as he was, other boats were with him.

A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat, was already being swamped. The Sea of Galilee, is about the size, of Lake Ilden.

[16 : 04] It's a more compact sea, than Lake Ilden, which seems to have, lots of tentacles, going off up little valleys. The Sea of Galilee, is surrounded by high hills, on the west, the Golan Heights, and on the east, high hills of Mount Tabor, and Abel, and others.

A little valley, coming from the east, in between some of those high hills, and then opening out, to the valley to the south, where the Jordan River, leaves the Sea of Galilee, heading south towards, the Dead Sea.

And sudden storms, can arise, as a wind will come, perhaps from the east, and because of the nature, of the hills around, it will actually be quite ferocious, on the Sea of Galilee. And we know that, some at least, of Jesus' disciples, were professional fishermen, the Sea of Galilee, was their home, that's where they fished, as people today, still fish, the multitude of numbers, of fish, that you can find, in the Sea of Galilee, even to this day.

This must have been, some storm, because some of Jesus' disciples, would have been, professional fishermen, they'd fished at night, on this lake, many many times, one assumes. And here, they are terrified, of the storm.

As verse 38 says, they wake him up, Jesus is asleep, at the back of the boat, on a cushion, and they wake him up, and say to him, teacher, do you not care, that we are perishing?

[17 : 24] And the amazing verse, of this story, is verse 39. Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind, and he said to the sea, peace, be still.

Now that would have been, odd, eccentric behaviour, if not for the end, of the verse. Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

Imagine the power, of those words, to calm the wind, and the waves. Imagine walking, outside here today, and we could all, with the top of our voices, shout and shout and shout, you know, be hot and sunny.

It won't happen. You can try it if you like. It won't happen. And the Bureau of Meteorology, in Melbourne, they can't even predict, the weather totally accurately, let alone control it.

But here is Jesus, calming wind, and waves, at a word. Some of course, dismiss this as, pure coincidence. And to be honest, if we all stood out there, as a crowd, and at the top of our voices said, be hot and sunny, and we did that for about, two or three months, eventually it would work.

[18 : 48] I suspect, that would be coincidence. But it works immediately for Jesus here. Some years ago, on holidays in Wales, when I used to live in England, there's a beautiful little lake, the Talaclin Lake.

And on a good day, the reflections in the little lake, of the mountains behind it, were mirror image. And so one day, the friend I have holidays with, who's a good photographer, very pedantic about photos, said, we're going to take a photo of this.

So we went down, it was a sunny day, the reflections would be beautiful. And just as he's getting out his tripod, and setting it all up, a little boat, with an outboard motor, goes across the lake.

Now I'd never realised, how long it takes, for the ripples of a little boat, to disappear. But well over half an hour later, finally the lake, was perfectly still.

Enough for a photo, of the reflection. The implication of Jesus, calming the wind, and the waves here though, is not that he says, peace be still, and the wind drops, and then half an hour, or more later, finally the waves ease.

[20 : 03] The implication, of verse 39, is there was a dead calm. That is, instantly the wind stops, and instantly, the waves stop. You see, this is not coincidence.

We can't dismiss this, as just, Jesus fluked the time, when the wind would stop, and ease, and abate. That is, there is a special, unique force here, that stops, not only the wind, but the waves, instantly.

And there was a dead calm. All around, wind, and waves, dead calm. Amazing.

The disciples, make two mistakes, in this episode. In verse 38, when they wake him up, they say to him, do you not care, that we are perishing?

They attribute to Jesus, a lack of care. He's asleep. Because he knows, that a storm, is no threat, to him. They accuse him, of not caring.

[21 : 12] The very opposite, of what is true, in fact. Because the whole reason, of Jesus coming, to this earth, was to show his care, and love, in dying, in particular.

But so often, when things are difficult, when we're in the midst, of some strife, our reaction to God, is don't you care for me? When we're sick, or jobless, or bereaved, or struggling, in some way.

It's so tempting, at least in our mind, to shake our fists, and complain, to God, don't you care? And we see it, in the scriptures, several times. For example, when ancient Israel, arrived into the wilderness, en route to the promised land, having been miraculously, rescued from slavery, in Egypt.

Their first reaction, of getting out of Egypt, is in effect, to say to God, don't you care? You've brought us, to the desert, to die. What ungrateful people.

And yet, how typical of us, that we so often, complain to God, you don't care. Or to Jesus, you don't care. Jesus has deliberately, led them to the lake.

[22 : 22] He's the one who said, let's go across, to the other side. He's led them, in a sense, into the midst of a storm, not because he doesn't care, but because he does. And he wants to show them, his care, and show them, his powerful care, in this whole episode.

You see, the care, and love of God, and of Jesus for us, does not mean, that we skirt around storms. But that rather, through the midst of them, we know, with confidence, that God is with us, and that is sufficient.

So in Isaiah the prophet, we read, when you go through the waters, I'll be there. Not, I'll spare you from going through floods, and fires, but when you go through them, I will be there.

And as Psalm 23 says, when you go through the valley, of the shadow of death, I am there with you. Not, I'll prevent you from going through, the suffering of the valley, of the shadow of death.

But when you go through it, I'll be there. And that's in effect, what Jesus is demonstrating here. I've taken here the disciples, you disciples, through this storm.

[23 : 26] I am with you. I care for you. Is what Jesus is in effect, teaching them, at this point. So in the midst of the strifes, and the difficulties, whatever we face in life, God cares for us.

We ought not to attribute to him, a lack of care. And related to this issue, but their second mistake, is expressed by Jesus' reply to them, in verse 40.

After calming the wind and the waves, he said to them, why are you afraid? Have you still no faith? Their second mistake, is fear.

Fear, because they lack faith. You see, faith in the Lord God, and in Jesus Christ, God's son, casts out fear, or it ought to.

Because we know that God, and his son Jesus, are sovereign over all things, that they care for us, and therefore we have no reason, to fear anything at all, because nothing can separate us, from the love of God in Christ.

[24 : 35] Nothing is more powerful, than God and his son Jesus Christ. So there is no place for fear, anymore. And the same Israelites, who'd come out from Egypt, in the wilderness, at the same time they say about God, he doesn't care for us, they also say, we are afraid of the people in the land, who are fortified, we're not going to cross into the land.

Both those things come together, in the same verse, in Deuteronomy 1, that are here in the disciples as well. Lack of care, of God, attributed to God, and lack of faith, evidenced, in fear.

And that verse from Isaiah the prophet, when you go through the waters, I'll be with you, is bracketed before it, and after it, by statements, do not be afraid, for I am with you.

So our fear, is to give way, to faith. And that we, when we have faith, in the powerful God of the Bible, and of his son Jesus Christ, there is no place for fear.

For there is no enemy, or opposition, or threat, or storm, or whatever, that is not under the sovereign care, and love, and power of God, who works for our good.

[25 : 55] So the disciples' second mistake, was fear, in place of faith. And so often, it seems to me, we Christians express fear, because we lack faith, in the power, and the good intention, of God, for us.

This amazing miracle of Jesus, in calming the storm, follows on from his teaching, of the smallness of the kingdom, of his day. And in some ways, they are related.

Because as Jesus has taught, about how small the kingdom is, leading to an ultimately large harvest, he is now demonstrating, the power of the kingdom. So in calming the wind, and the waves, he is showing a power, far greater than Rome could exercise, far greater than any human beings, could exercise.

So that he is in a sense, giving confidence, to his words earlier. That a small, mustard seed of a kingdom, which his disciples, might now see.

They can have confidence, will become a big tree. Because the mighty power, of Jesus, is behind that same, kingdom of God. No wonder then, the disciples declare, that they were filled, with great awe, and said to one another, who then is this, that even the wind, and the sea, obey him.

[27 : 25] In effect, that's a climax, of some of the things, we've seen in the last two months. Because constantly, we've seen amazement, and astonishment, on the lips of those, who see or hear, what Jesus does, or says.

Back in the synagogue, in chapter 1, verse 22, they are astounded, as he's teaching, for he teaches, as one with authority, and not as the scribes. Later on, in the same chapter, they are amazed, when he casts out, an evil spirit, at the power, that he exercises.

In chapter 2, when he heals, the paralyzed man, by saying to him, get up and walk, your sins are forgiven, they are amazed, at the power, of his healing. And now, the disciples, the same.

Who is this, that even wind, and waves, obey him? But surely, the answer is clear. Who is this? For the Old Testament, scriptures, make it very clear, who's got the power, over wind and waves.

You silence, the roaring of the seas, and the roaring of the waves. Psalm 65 says. You rule, the raging of the sea, when its waves rise, you still them.

[28 : 37] Psalm 89 says. He rebuked the Red Sea, it became dry. Psalm 106 says. And as we heard, in the first reading today, from Psalm 107, he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea, were hushed.

Who is this, that even wind, and waves, obey him? This is God's power, no less. God's power, exercised, in a human being.

But in the divine, Son of God, at one and the same time. only the creator God, has such power, over the elements, of our universe.

And Jesus manifests, that full power, in a word. Peace, be still. And there was a dead come.

In Mark's gospel, this question is unanswered. Who is this, that even the wind, and the waves, obey him?

[29 : 44] For Mark wants us, the reader, to answer the question ourselves. Who is this? And indeed, later on, in chapter 8, Jesus will ask his disciples, well, who do people say that I am?

And then he asked them, who do you say that I am? Well, that's the point of the gospel. It's not some academic exercise, about who Jesus is. It's not about, what other people think he is, or what Mark thought he was.

The point of the gospel is, who do you say, that Jesus is? How do you answer the question, who is this?

That even the wind, and the waves, obey him. What's your answer, personally? How do you respond, to the authority, and power, that Jesus exercises here?

Do you submit your life, as a follower, of him? Have you faith in him, or, are you afraid? afraid?

[30 : 55] For he has the power, and authority, over both wind, and waves, over demons, death, disease, and our destinies. Have you responded, to him, with faith, to follow him?

Or, are you still afraid? what are you doing, about Jesus, in your life? Leaving him, at arm's length, as an interesting, character, an odd person, as the song, we sang at the beginning, said, an outlaw, a politician, a rebel, who do you say, that Jesus is?

What are you doing, about it, in your life? Who then, is this, that even, the wind, and the waves, obey him?

of his, haven't been able to do that. Please wait. Let's go to another lake. Let's go.

Thank you. Let's go to another lake. You can get a level of aptor ■■■■, chapter 2. By the way, the wind, going, and catching free together, as the wind. And the wind, the wind, in your life?

[32 : 30] But what? Yes, tell a story. Five ways, and suffer suffer some of the love who do you things like that fixing or admitting things like that.