

The Power of the Messiah over Chaos and Evil

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[0 : 00] Well, politics. Politics. I don't think any of us living in South Africa enjoy politics. Probably not for some time now.

Does anyone actually enjoy politics? Maybe the politicians do. It seems like it's just such a dead-end game, doesn't it? We've got the local elections coming up. The posters are out. And all the politicians are out in force trying to convince us to vote for them because they're going to tell us what they're going to do for us and for South Africa. If we vote for them, they will... Take your pick. Clamp down on corruption, yet again. Lower the tax rate. I mean, I don't know. I wish they would say that they would lower the tax rate. At least that would be something to look forward to.

Maybe they will promise to up the Sasser grants or take away land or give away land that they've received, etc., etc. But nearly all of it will be talk. All talk and no action.

[1 : 00] This opens up the question of trust. How can you trust them to do what they promise they will do? And the only real way that trusts work is if someone says, when they say that they're going to do something, they will actually do it.

That's how trust works. In today's passage, we'll meet a political leader, who happens to be a king, who will most definitely do what he says he's going to do, what he promises.

And that's how you can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you can trust him. Well, we're still in the book of Mark, so keep your Bibles there. We'll open there if you've closed them.

And we saw last week that Jesus taught on the surprising but the inevitable growth of his kingdom. Remember the parables of the sower and the parables of growth?

You remember that? Well, you know, it's one thing to say that that's going to happen. It's another thing to make it happen. It's another thing to do it.

[2 : 04] And today, we'll see that as the Messiah of God's kingdom, Jesus is not just going to talk the talk, but he's actually going to walk it. He's going to make it happen. And so that's why you've got these actions, this action sequence in Mark.

After the words that he's spoken, he says, look, the kingdom is going to do all these things. Then Mark says, okay, well, I'm not going to show you. I'm going to show you this happening. And so what you've got in Mark is the power of the Messiah over chaos and evil, over all the bad things in the world, to make his kingdom or God's kingdom grow.

And that's the first thing we see in this passage, is that Jesus as the Messiah is seriously powerful. Now, I know we've had miracles and things before in the book of Mark, but they seem to be ratcheting up a notch over here.

The main thing that stands out in these two stories is that Jesus has this power. Jesus as the Messiah is invested with huge amounts of power, with supernatural divine power, and we'll get into how that works.

And this power is able to control the forces of nature, the forces of chaos, and the forces of evil. And it's all done for our good. So the first thing we're going to look at is Jesus versus chaos.

[3 : 21] That's the story of the storm. In the first story, Jesus is crossing the lake, the Sea of Galilee. It's at night. It's in the evening.

This huge storm comes up. Now, Galilee is a small lake. If you know the geography of Israel, the Sea of Galilee, Lake of Galilee is way up north.

You often see a map of Israel. Lake of Galilee is up there. Then the Jordan River runs south into the Dead Sea. It's a small lake, but because of the topography, it gets these really intense storms.

Mark says it was a mega storm. The Greek word is mega. It's this massive storm. The waves are crashing over the side of the boat, and everyone is going to drown and die.

The Greek word drown here is actually to be destroyed. The disciples are totally freaking out. They are scared for their lives. And these are hardened fishermen.

[4 : 23] They know how this works. Verse 38. Teacher, they say, don't you care if we drown or are destroyed?

In fact, they would have been screaming, shouting at the top of their lungs, I mean with the wind and the waves. Teacher! Day! Don't you care if we drown? That's an important question that we will come across and we'll come back to later.

Jesus is busy sleeping in the back of the boat. But he wakes up, and he does an interesting thing to the storm. He rebukes it, which is a strange thing to do to wind and waves.

And this first indication that this is not just an ordinary storm. There's something more sinister going on here. The last time Mark used this word is in chapter 1, when Jesus exorcised the demons and he rebukes it.

So there's a personalization of the storm. There's something evil behind it. And we don't know if Jesus cries out, Silence! Quiet!

[5 : 33] Or, maybe more dramatically, he just says in an offhand manner, in an offhand manner, just be quiet. Shh! I'm trying to sleep. I'm trying to sleep here.

And again, the last time those words were used, when Jesus is telling something or someone to be quiet, is back in chapter 1 with that demon in the synagogue. So Jesus, this massive storm, huge amounts of raw energy, Jesus speaks, an amazing thing happens.

This raging wind stops. These huge mountains of waves just drop down. Moments before, there's a great storm. Jesus speaks, and immediately there's a great calm.

The disciples were scared before, but that's nothing what they feel like now that they've seen what Jesus has done. This, ironically, leads to even more fear on the part of the disciples.

As scared as they were of the storm before, they're even more scared of the man who's able to stop a storm in its tracks. They are utterly terrified of Jesus.

[6 : 45] They've never witnessed this kind of power before. Notice in verse 41, yeah, they were terrified. The Greek again is, they had fear of great fear.

They had fear on top of great fear. They were terrified. I've always wondered what the rest of that boat ride must have been like.

You've got Jesus in one end of the boat, munching on a few sandwiches, and you've got the disciples all sitting there on the other side. Peter's like to John, listen, I'm a bit hungry.

Go asking for something to eat. No, you go asking for something. I'm not going to go there. What exactly is going on here? Just who is this person who even the wind and the waves obey?

What the disciples ask. Now, the reason I say that Jesus is fighting chaos here, and not just natural elements, he's doing a bit of both, well, doing a lot of both, the natural elements, yes, but there's something else going on here as well, is that Jesus fights the storm in the same way he fights the demons in chapter one, which I've mentioned.

[7 : 53] And then you add to that, the sea in the Jewish mindset is a place of, it's a mythic place of chaos and evil.

It's something that can't be controlled. Now, we're deadly scared of it because there's something underneath the sea that causes all these troubles. It's a primordial chaos in their mind that threatens to undo creation, which is why, in the Old Testament, God is often described as one who rules over the waters.

In fact, that comes out in Genesis chapter one, right at the beginning of creation, where the waters are ruling over the face of the deep, and then God has got, God's spirit is hovering over it, and then he brings creation up out of it.

Now, Psalm 104 is often quoted in connection with the story in Mark. You don't have to turn there. I'm just going to quote the section that is often used to bring something out to us.

Psalm 104 says, it's talking about the Lord. He set the earth on its foundations. It can never be moved. You covered it, that is the earth, with watery depths as with the garment.

[9 : 07] The waters stood above the mountains, but at your rebuke, the waters fled. At the sound of your thunder, they took to flight. You set a boundary that they cannot cross.

Never again will they cover the earth. So there's not just massive physical forces at play, but these cosmic spiritual forces being controlled here.

And Jesus, in Mark, is acting with the same power as the God of the Old Testament. Can you see that? The little word where God rebukes the wind, and it's the same thing that Jesus does here in Mark.

But there's also another reference in the Psalms, which gets overlooked in most of the commentaries, but it's an important psalm to look at because it helps our understanding of who Jesus is and what Mark is trying to get at here.

And the reason for that is it establishes that what Jesus is doing here is the work of the Messiah. Remember Jesus in Mark in chapter 1, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God?

[10:10] Okay? So the whole book is trying to tell us, hey, this is Jesus. He's the Messiah. Well, how does what Jesus is doing here tell us that he's the Messiah? Well, Jesus' disciples and possibly Mark's listeners will know the Old Testament well.

What they would have remembered is Psalm 89. And again, that should come up on the screen for us. Psalm 89 says this, I have found David, my servant, with my sacred oil I have anointed him. So talking about David and the Messiah, God is speaking, my hand will sustain him, surely my arm will strengthen him, I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries, I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers.

Isn't that interesting? It's a funny way to speak about your king. He will call out to me, you are my father, my God, the rock, my savior, and I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

And so notice here, the Messiah is promised that God will sustain him, God will strengthen him, and no foe will be able to overcome him, and he's given authority to rule over the sea and the waters.

[11:35] So what Mark is doing here is incredibly joining these two traditions of Yahweh himself who has authority over the waters of chaos, and then the Messiah having that same kind of authority.

And in Jesus, all that power and authority are found in one person. no wonder the disciples were scared. They didn't know what was going on.

And they weren't the only ones who were going to be scared that night. Jesus going over to the other side of the lake to pick a fight with some demons. He's only just getting warmed up with the storm. So we've seen Jesus versus the chaos.

He just speaks a couple of words where he gets really upset and agitated like rebuke is a strong word. Hey! Stop it! You know, when parents get agitated with their kids or whether you're just like, you know what?

Just stop bothering me. Either way, there's some power coming out of him. Now we see Jesus versus a legion of demons. Jesus versus a legion of demons.

[12:44] So, before the disciples can catch their breath, they've landed in enemy territory. Now what you need to know where they've landed is this is the pagan land of the Decapolis.

It's called the land of the Gerasenes in chapter 5, verse 1. But it's also what's called the land of the Decapolis. That's an area of ten cities. In the Old Testament, this was known as the land of Bashan or Bashan, Bashan, however you say it.

And it has a long and sinister history for the Jews. The last time the Jews had anything to do with it was it was ruled over by Og. Remember Og, king of Bashan, who had this huge bed?

Remember how big his bed was? This iron bed that was nine feet long and massive. Now Og was an ancestor of the ancient giant clans which the Jews had to fight as they entered the land and they traced their tradition, their ancestry, all the way back to the issues that caused the flood in Genesis chapter 6.

And there's some very strange things. Remember our series in Genesis a few, oh, it must have been years ago now. There's some very strange things happening in Genesis 6 as to why God brought this flood on planet Earth.

[13:55] So Jesus is taking them into a land ruled by really powerful and ancient dark forces. It's not a place that you would normally go to. And they land at night in enemy territory and this howling banshee of a wild man comes charging down on them.

I don't know what the disciples must have thought. Were they like, okay, this is too much, I'm back in the boat? Or, maybe they're having a bit of faith and like, well, come, bring it, let's see what Jesus is going to do. Who knows? But the person is completely under the power and control of evil and is

in such a pitiable state.

He lives where dead people are. He's totally uncontrollable. He cuts himself with stones till he bleeds. He howls like an animal. But he's got this superhuman strength breaking the chains and the shackles that the locals try and subdue him with.

But they can't subdue him. In verse 4, Mark says, no one had the strength to subdue him. And the reason for this is that he's not just possessed by one demon.

He's got a legion of them. And when Jesus asks the demon its name, he says, yeah, I'm legion for we are many. He's got this interplay between one demon and these many demons.

[15:21] Notice all the singular and the plural different pronouns going on through this whole text. So it's almost like a weirdly schizophrenic, it's a very strange and unsettling scene.

But now this is a serious amount of evil to be present in one person. No wonder he was so broken. What you need to know about a Roman legion is that at full strength it has 6,000 soldiers in it.

I've got a picture of us just to give an idea of what that looks like. Now whether or not he had a full legion of demons, it's debated, but there's at least a horde of them.

Remember as the story goes on, they ask to flee into the pigs. There's 2,000 pigs. So there's a whole bunch of these things living inside this man. Making this person's life a living hell and now confronting Jesus.

Now, but just like Jesus and the storm, this is going to be a one-sided fight. But as you enter the story, you're like, well, which side is going to win?

[16:29] 6,000 versus 1. Well, that's not a fair fight. Now, I don't know the last time you were in a fight, I haven't been too many in my life and I've never won one yet.

I've been in a few. I might have told the story before that I got in a fight with a taxi driver. He attacked me but I did hoot at him. So, you know.

But anyway, and so he gets out of his car, it's all main road in Claremont to Weinberg some years ago and I'm like, I've got to protect my car. So I jump out and we're having at it, you know. I was like, okay, I wasn't winning but I wasn't losing.

It was evenly matched. I was like, okay, if I just landed, I can do this, I can get this done. Anyway, and the next thing is Hachi jumps me from the back. So now there's two of them and immediately I knew I was in trouble.

Two, you're done. It's over. You can't win against two unless you're seriously trained. Three, no. You know in the movies they can do that? Not in real life.

[17:37] Most of us can't take on two people at once. How about 6,000? And the irony is there's not even a fight.

They run up to Jesus and they fall down before him and beg for their lives. 6,000 devils and they're like, Jesus, please don't hurt us.

They're not even going to try and pick a fight with him. They want to leave. They want Jesus to leave. What have you to do with me? They say. That's basically a way of saying, hey, just leave us alone.

They immediately know who Jesus is. You are Jesus, the son of the most high God and they beg him not to torture them. Okay, so they're seeing something very interesting about Jesus.

Mark gives us some more irony in that the demons just about fall over themselves in trying not to fight with Jesus. Hey, just don't hurt us. We'll just go live in the pigs over there.

[18:42] Is that alright with you? We don't want to fight. Let's be friends. We'll just go live in the pigs. We'll leave this guy alone. Just don't hurt us. Leave us alone and we'll go quietly.

But they can't just do what they want. Even though, in a sense, this is their territory, this whole area on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, they now have to ask Jesus permission to do anything.

Please, send us to the pigs. So just notice Jesus' power and authority again with a nod or a word. He dismisses them and they run for their lives.

How's that for an unfair advantage? 6,000 demons scared of one little human having a laugh, mate. What's going on here? Well, Psalm 68 helps us understand this.

The one that we, the Old Testament Psalm from earlier. In Psalm 68, David is singing a hymn to the God who helps him defeat his enemies and saves his people, but especially those who are held in some sort of captivity and particularly captivity in the land of Bashan, of all places.

[19:57] The Psalm talks about how the land of Bashan is going to look on in jealousy as God frees people from being held captive there. I'm just going to read some verses from verse 16 from

that Psalm for us to get the drift.

Why gaze in envy, you rugged mountains of Bashan, at the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the Lord himself will dwell forever? When you ascended on high, that's when God goes to his mountain, you took many captives with you.

You received gifts from people, even from the rebellious, that you, Lord God, might dwell there. So where God goes, he wants people to come with him and he's freeing them from captivity. So what Jesus is doing here is making a clear statement of intent.

He is saying to the forces of darkness, it's time for you to leave this land and this people belong to me now. And as in the previous story, the power of God is being exercised in the person of the Messiah, which explains why Jesus finds it so easy to overcome these hordes of demons.

So the power of Jesus brings liberation to this poor person, this wretch of a man, and they're tormenting him and he finds himself suddenly free and in his right mind.

[21 : 19] And that's a beautiful Greek word being in his right mind or sound mind, some translations have it. It's a mind that's been delivered from some external corrupting force.

It's been rescued. It's been salvaged. And now it's healthy and safe and secure and protected. The man understandably wants to join Jesus, but Jesus needs him to stay in that area.

He needs a vanguard. He needs someone in the fight against evil. This is Jesus' first foray in a sense into enemy territory and he needs to leave behind a fighting force.

He leaves one man. Well, you think just of one man? Yeah, but just look at the power of Jesus. Now this man is on Jesus' side, so he's got nothing to worry about.

He's to go into the whole area of the Decapolis and tell them what God has done for him. He does so, but with a twist. He tells them about Jesus. And this begins to link back to the parables that we saw last week, the parables of the sower and the growth of the kingdom.

[22 : 35] Jesus is now left a person who's going to sow seed in an area that's going to produce fruit. In fact, later on in Mark, I think it's in chapter 7, Jesus goes back.

He goes on these tours of the whole area and he goes back to the land of the Decapolis. And people, instead of running away from him because they're so scary, are now bringing people to him to get healing, which is interesting.

So just in summary of what we've learned so far, these two stories cast Jesus in the role of this mighty warrior king who's going to make war on the strongholds of evil and chaos and who will not let anything stop him from carrying out his mission in the world.

Jesus is this supernaturally powerful king who saves his friends from destruction and liberates broken souls from hell by confronting and defeating the cosmic forces of chaos and evil.

You see how it's a storm yes but there's something else going on and then of course you've got these huge demons but Jesus is saying I'm taking back this land now. Well where does that leave us today?

[23 : 41] I think it leaves us with the challenge of trusting in Jesus. The challenge of trusting in Jesus. You know we're so jaded with people in the world who break their promises but we have in Christ a leader who's incapable of letting us down.

And he says he's going to do something. He's got the ability to make it happen. Are you with me? So the first thing we learn we can trust in Jesus because he cares for his friends.

Or rather let me say this you can trust in Jesus because he cares for his friends. Going back to Jesus to the question they ask in the first part of the story.

Teacher don't you care if we drown? And Jesus' answer to the question of his disciples is in effect, it's kind of obvious, yes, I do care for you.

To care here is to be concerned about, to pay attention to, to take an interest in. I'm worried about them. I need to do something to make sure they don't get hurt.

[24 : 51] Jesus knows each of his people by name. He takes an interest in all that they do and in everything that happens to them. Nothing slips from his attentiveness towards his people.

We trust someone when we know that they're looking out for us, when they've got our best interests at heart, when they've got our backs, when they mean good to us and not evil, when they're on our side.

And Jesus is saying that as long as you're on his side, he will care for you and protect you. Maybe Peter was thinking back to just this incident when he was writing his letter.

Remember what he wrote in 1 Peter 5? Cast your anxieties on him because he cares for you. And so that's something that we can do knowing that Jesus cares for us.

But there's a flip side to this care and that is that Jesus says you need to trust him. See there was a small little rebuke in what Jesus said to them. Verse 40, why are you so afraid?

[25 : 55] Do you still have no faith? And so trust and faith, we use the word faith, but it's the same word. Trust and faith is really the same thing. Jesus says you need to trust him.

Jesus says you need to trust me. He says I let Jesus' actions speak louder than these words. You need to trust me and you need to trust my ability to deliver you from death out of your fear. Your trust must drive out your fear. I don't want you to be in perpetual state of wondering about whether I care for you or not. Sort it out.

Make up your mind. Trust in me, says Jesus, and don't keep worrying about it. We've got a job to do, a world to conquer, and I need people that are not going to let their fears keep tripping them up. So he does care for you, but you've got to place your trust in him so you can get work done. Does that make sense? And then lastly, you can trust in Jesus because he's stronger than any force or power that is at work in the world.

[27 : 03] You can trust him because he's stronger than any force or power that is at work in the world. Maybe you're tempted to despair. Maybe you look around at the world around you and you're like, well, how can this thing work out?

Or maybe you're looking at your own issues, your own worries, and they can be big. We sometimes face really big issues. Then you need to know that Jesus has power over those things in your life that you feel powerless about.

The point of these stories is to remind you that Jesus really is strong enough to take on all the forces of chaos and evil and easily overcome them.

Now, is this the Jesus that is working in your life? God's love? Are you ruled by fear? What are you holding on to that you think he cannot deal with? Take any issue that you will ever face in your life and stack it up against the king who can calm the storms of chaos and defeat a legion of demons. Which one is more powerful? Whatever is holding you back should pale in insignificance compared to the power of Christ.

[28 : 20] So let it pale into significance. Let it die. Let Jesus defeat the issues that you face. Take your fears to him. Place your faith in him. Trust him.

Faith is trust. It's a deep down rock bottom trust that Jesus won't let you get swept away while whatever you think is threatening to undo you. Jesus is strong enough to see you through every evil, every storm, every hurt that you will ever go through or have gone through and bring you safe through it to the other side even if that means death.

In closing, Paul knew all about this power of Jesus. He had seen it in action time and time again in his life. He's writing a letter to the Romans and he reminds them of this truth.

What shall separate us from the love of Christ? I'm reading from Romans chapter 8. shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I'm convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[29 : 50] Amen? Amen. Let's pray. Dear Lord Jesus, what a wonderful reminder of how strong and powerful you are, of your Messiahship and of your divine power.

Lord, help us to trust you no matter what happens in our lives, that you are strong and powerful, that you care for us because we belong to you and keep us safe through all our life, even past death, and raise us up again to join you and to reign with you in the new kingdoms, in the new heaven and new earth.

In Jesus' name, Amen.