

# Mark 4:40

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[ 0 : 00 ] Mark chapter 4. If you would kindly turn that up. Mark 4 and verse 40. Just over the page. He said to them, Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?

! And the Lucas translation of that is, Why are you so dreadfully frightened? Can you still not trust me? Can you still not trust me?

And how often, sadly, the Lord has to say those words to his people, me included. Well, as ever, it's so encouraging to be with you on a Sunday evening and to hear news of progress and much besides.

And it's always an encouragement to consider with you God's powerful word. So we turn again to the Gospel of Mark, which is rather the Gospel of Jesus as told by Mark.

It's a special book for me. I think one or two of you will know. At least 35 years ago, I think it was, our staff at St. Helens started it together and were so encouraged by it that we decided to start a course for all the students who came to us from the various hospitals and student residences around.

[ 1 : 31 ] And we found that even then, 35 years ago, they were astonishingly ignorant. And so we decided that we would get them to study at least one Gospel before they left us.

And we chose this Gospel of Mark. And we also thought that in doing that, we would introduce them to the real Jesus Christ. So that was our aim.

And it's gone on ever since. It's a very simple aim. And I think it's been very effective. And I hope it's led that they would know a great deal more than one Gospel and the person of Christ.

Actually, I remember very little of that beginning. That course is still going strong. But my stage of life, memory is not one strong suit.

As that great philosopher of life, Norman Wisdom, once said, when you get old, three things happen to you. Your memory goes first. And I can't remember the other two.

[ 2 : 30 ] So, because I can't really remember very much of that original study, I've decided for my own nourishment and progress to revise Mark on my own.

And it's been a slow and delightful journey. And I've arrived at chapter 4, verse 35. And I found ahead of me, and I want to share with you some of the things I've found, I found here a typical Mark section on miracles.

Four great miracles, making three sections. If you like, the chapter division is not really very helpful. I suppose the people who published ESV didn't have the authority to change the chapter divisions. But I suppose, really, it should start. Chapter 4, verse 35 should be the beginning of chapter 5. So, this unified section contains three scenes.

First, of course, the furious storm. Just watch it as I say this. First, the furious storm. 4, verse 35 to 41. Then, Legion.

[ 3 : 35 ] This wretched poor man possessed by the devil. 5, 1 to 20. And then, thirdly, the dead child and the sick woman, which stand as one great miracle.

Or, there are two. 5, 21 to 43. Now, these are, for many of you, I know, familiar stories. But they have a unifying theme that runs through that whole section.

They tell of overwhelming destructive forces before which we human beings, whether in the 1st century or the 21st century, are absolutely helpless.

So, why does Mark tell us these stories? And what is their message on the basis of our helplessness? Well, we can be quite sure that there were many miracles that Jesus did.

I should think of hundreds, even not thousands. Would you not think? And he has chosen these with a purpose. What is that purpose? And what is his message? Well, message number one, every Christian can recognize.

[ 4 : 41 ] Mark has been plugging it from the beginning of his gospel. And I'm not going to spend a lot of time on it. You know it well. It's the foundation of the Christian faith. And Mark is recording how the disciples learned it until they came to a firm conviction about it.

And that is that Jesus is Lord. He is none other than the God-man. That with him nothing is impossible. And that he possesses all authority in heaven and earth.

You knew that? Of course you knew that. That's fundamental to the Christian faith. You can't be a Christian without believing it. That is number one message in Mark. No Christianity without Christ as a foundation.

We won't stay long on that. But we'll just get the pattern of it quickly together before we go on to matter that is not quite so well known. First let's look at the destructive forces of nature.

Chapter 4, 35 to 41. I'm not going to look at all the details. You know them well. Here are elemental forces before which everybody is helpless.

[ 5 : 49 ] Today as ever. Just think of tsunamis sweeping away. Homes and hundreds of people in Japan recently. Think of hurricanes.

They know that better in the Midwest of America. Think of earthquakes. Perhaps we're more aware of these things in modern times because of communication.

Only this week I saw a picture of people in their cars racing away from a dark typhoon that was approaching. Hoping that it would not overtake them. Must have been a terrifying feeling.

The control I think of the forces of nature. Then the restoration of suffering people.

And what we're being told by Mark in this very simple story is that our Lord had complete command over them. Look at verse 39. Just a simple word. Just a simple word.

[ 6 : 45 ] Peace be still. For I suppose in colloquial English she looked down at the storm and said, shut up. And an unheard of result.

The wind stopped. The waves were calm. I wonder how many of you are sailors. I'm sure there are sailors here. I was compulsively forced to go in the Navy for three years.

I quite enjoyed it. And one thing you learn there, I was in the Mediterranean for three years, is that the wind can in fact stop suddenly. But of course what never happens is that the waves are completely calm immediately.

The waves go on. What is called the swell goes on. And if you're a sailor and not a very good sailor, you will know that it is that that makes you ill. It's not the wind.

It's the waves that will take two days to go down after a storm. So here is an astonishing demonstration of the power of Christ over the destructive forces of nature.

[ 7 : 51 ] Next, we look down, what, 20 verses of it again. I won't look at the details. It's the destructive forces of Satan. Now you know as well as I do that he is a very powerful influence in the world.

Jesus tells us he's the God of this world. So his power is very great under the sovereignty of God. And Mark goes out of his way in a number of details to tell us what a helpless and hopeless situation the devil is talking about.

Just look at verses 3 and 4. We won't look at it anymore. He lived among the tombs. No one could bind him anymore.

Not even with a chain. For he'd often been bound with shackles and chains. But he wrenched the chains apart. He broke the shackles in pieces. No one had strength to subdue him.

Mark alone mentions that. But I think he wants us to know that this was an impossibility. People have tried and failed. Yes, the devil has people in his group.

[ 8 : 58 ] And I think this story is meant to be an example of his power in the world. I note that the increasingly apostate Church of England is removing any mention of the devil from the baptismal service.

And we're trying to remove any mention of sin. It's very difficult to know what's left, isn't it? Well, there's been an outcry about sin, but not about the devil apparently. I think this episode stands for the reality of the world that Satan is the cause of all the misery.

That there is. I've only got one cross-reference for you. So keep a finger, if you will, there. If you want to know what the devil is responsible for in the world today, and you want it summarized in one sentence, you'll find it in John 8, 44.

Will you turn to that, and will someone sing out to me, in a loud voice, because I'm not only shrinking, but I'm getting death, what are the two marks of the devil in the world?

In fact, I will give you a hint by reading the verse. Verse 44, John 8. You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

[10:17] He was a murderer from the beginning, and he does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and father of lies.

What are the two things, please? Lies. Murder. And murder, violence, death, terrorism. Right. Now, would you not say that those two things are actually right at the root of our modern world?

If you read the papers, or if you look at your television, you'll see them every day, won't you?

Imagine you could get rid of all the lies in the world. The lies in your office, the lies in your paper, the lies that politicians tell.

And imagine you could get rid of all the terror, the fighting, the murder, the wars. It would be a totally different world, but it's not going to happen. Until Christ returns.

So, what did Jesus do? He said, verse 8, come out of them.

[11:21] That was all. And the result was lovely, isn't it? Verse 8, verse 15 must be a very favorite verse for all of us. When the people came to investigate what had happened to this poor man, they saw one who had been in the legion sitting there, clothed, no longer naked, in his right mind, no longer insane, and they were afraid.

And sitting peacefully, resting, as we were thinking of the children just now. Almighty power. The destructive forces of nature, followed by the destructive forces of Satan, the devil, the demon, forget it.

The world of demons. Thirdly, the destructive nature of sickness and death. Which means that ultimately we all succumb to this great force.

And what is needed for that in the last section, which is verse 21 to the end, all that is needed is that Jesus gives a gentle word, get up, little girl.

And with a grasp of her hand, he helps her to her feet. Verse 41. Taking her by the hand, he said to her, to lead her kumai, which means, little girl, I say to you, get up.

[12:47] And immediately the girl got up and began walking, because she was 12 years of age, and they were immediately overcome and astonished. Would you know, please? Impossible.

Now, in the light of these miracles, which are carefully chosen by Mark, these destructive forces overcome by the power of Christ, an honest person is bound to ask the question, which is the fundamental question of the early Mark's gospel, chapter 4, verse 41.

And they were filled with great fear, and said to one another, who then is this? Well, indeed, who then is this? And this week I was reading a serious verse.

I often pick him up, sometimes late in the evening. It's lovely to have this very clear mind, that your mind is feeling muddy and confused. If you'd gone to Buddha and asked him, are you the son of Brahma?

He would have said, my son, you're still in the veil of illusion. If you'd gone to Socrates and asked, are you zeaths? He would have laughed at you. Listen to this.

[13:57] If you'd gone to Mohammed and asked, are you Allah? He would first rent his clothes, and then cut your head off. Which is probably why a lot of working class young men in this country like Islam, because that's how it deals with its opponents.

If you'd asked Confucius, are you heaven? I think he would have probably replied, remarks which are not in accordance with nature, are in bad taste. The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said, or doing what he did, is out of the question.

In my opinion, the only person who can say the sort of things is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man.

He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who met him. He produced only three effects, hatred, terror, and adoration.

There was no trace of people expressing mild approval. When I first read that some years ago, I thought, no, that's not quite right. It's apathy, terror, and adoration.

[15:04] But now, I've come back to the original. Hatred. Yes, hatred. We're beginning to see that, aren't we, in our culture. Not apathy, but hatred. Hatred of what he stands for.

Hatred of his moral stand. Hatred of his claims to be the only way to God. Well, now we come to the crunch of what I want to say tonight. So, if you've not been paying attention, please be with me now. We Christians, like everyone else, unlike the Lord, are helpless in the face of these great universal destructive forces.

Because we believe in Christ, because we've received and rested in Jesus Christ, as the children were taught just now. And I trust that every one of us here has received him and rests in him. We can't opt out of tsunamis. We can't opt out of the world of terror that is all around us. And we're warned that some of these young men are coming back to this country determined to do ill.

[16:08] And we can't avoid incurable sickness and death. Every one of us will die. So, how are we believers more privileged than the unbelievers?

Well, in a sense, sharing a common humanity, we are not. We live in this present evil age and therefore these great destructive forces are destructive in our lives too.

Nevertheless, certain great blessings are ours. And this is where I want to ask you to recall these, if you can, in the midst of a very destructive and evil world.

We've been given at least three privileges that the unbeliever doesn't have faced with these destructive forces all around us. The first great privilege that we've been given in this fallen world, full of destruction and evil, is we have been given understanding.

And this understanding here in Mark lies actually in chapter 3, but I want you to wait a minute before I tell you what it is. I want to mention, first of all, a man called Mr. Christopher Mayhew, who was the father of one of the girls who came to us some years ago at St. Helens.

[17:29] He was a very fine man, an agnostic, but thoughtful. He was actually Secretary of the Navy for a while. I think you would call him not an atheist, but a questioning atheist, agnostic.

And I recall him articulating the fundamental case for agnosticism, which is worth, I think, getting clear. What the agnostic, with a certain amount of goodwill, will say to us is something like this. You Christians say God is all-powerful. You Christians say that God is all-loving, and we say yes, yes, we do say that. But if this is so, Mr. Mayhew said, and many follow him, it is inexplicable that he does not abolish those things that destroy human happiness.

Therefore, he says, I must conclude, since he does not do this, and these destructive forces are still in the world, and God seems to do nothing about them, he is asleep in the boat.

I conclude, if he is all-powerful, as you say, then he is not all-loving. And if he is all-loving, then he is not all-powerful.

[18:50] And from this dilemma, said Mr. Mayhew, there is no escape. It is quite a powerful attitude, and thousands of people in our country have got stuck there.

Now, the answer lies in chapter 3. The fact that all such men, however clever, fail to take into consideration. And I am not going to ask you to look at it, because I think everybody knows what happens in Mark chapter 3.

And that is that the people of God reject their Lord, their Messiah, their Savior. And we now live, therefore, in a Christ-rejecting world.

It is more than a Christ-rejecting world, he has rejected them. Chapter 3 is taken up with the fact that Christ has rejected the people who have rejected him, and that he is making a completely new start in the world, and therefore he appoints 12 apostles on which he is going to build his new church and his new universe.

And therefore, from chapter 3 onwards, we have a remarkable picture in Mark's gospel of how this new universe is going to be brought into being. I think Mark is the only gospel who brings the rejection of Christ right down to the beginning of his story, rather than at the end.

[20:11] So, when we get to chapter 4, we ask the question, as these 12 men go into the world, to start to build a new church, which is going to be the new Jerusalem, which is going to be the new heaven and the new earth.

What is the weapon, what is the equipment that God gives them? And you know the answer to that. In chapter 4, the three parables of the seed, he gives them the seed of the word of God, the power of the gospel.

That is all that he gives them, but it is sufficient for them to begin to build a new world. But, what does he give them after that, in this world which is under judgment?

Though it's a restrained judgment, our world is under judgment, it's a world marked by frustration, by turmoil, by suffering, by all these things that we've been thinking about. Well, we've been given understanding.

We've been given understanding that the reason why this world is as it is, is that it is a world that has rejected Christ. He is here by his Holy Spirit amongst us, thank God, but he, as we've sung just now, is at the right hand of God.

[ 21 : 24 ] When we speak of Christ, we will never talk too literally of Christ being here. We talk of Christ on the cross, we talk of Christ at the throne of God, we talk of Christ coming at the last day. But we mustn't talk of the real presence of Christ here now. He's here by his Spirit, but he himself bodily is at the right hand of God. And because this world has said no to its Creator, and because the people of God said no to their Messiah, we must live in a world which is under the judgment of Almighty God because of our attitude towards his beloved Son.

We have been given that understanding. therefore, when we open our daily paper, but of course we don't now because we all have these wonderful machines that we don't have to buy a paper any longer. But whatever you do, whenever you listen to what's happening in the world, I don't know how you do it.

It's all very marvelous, isn't it? The way we can listen as soon as we should be able to listen to the news on our watches, I'm told. Whatever you do to listen to what is happening in the world, you have a clue that other people do not have.

that these awful things that make you tremble and step back and say, how could it be like this in Sudan? How could it be like this in Libya at the moment?

[ 22 : 40 ] Which is a hell hole. How could it be like this in Iraq? I know Christians working in Iraq, I know Christians working in Sudan, you probably do the same. They're living in places which in many ways mark a hell on earth.

But they have the clue and you have the clue as to why God allows these things to continue. Because it is a mark of a world under the displeasure of a God whose son we have rejected. And we cannot live in this world without realizing it and knowing that his hand is upon us for judgment. This is the explanation of all the destructive forces of nature, the destructive forces of the devil in our world, lies and murder, and the destructive forces of incurable sickness and death. They all flow from our rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we Christians first and foremost have been given an understanding.

It's a wonderful thing to have, isn't it? A clue. We don't know everything, of course. But we do have this clue. We do have an understanding of why God acts as he does in judgment as well as salvation.

[ 23 : 48 ] We do tremble. We ought to tremble because of these facts. As the world goes by, hardly aware of this at all and yet suffering because of it. Yes, a God who is all-loving and a God who is all-powerful, but a God who is righteous and will not allow a world that has rejected his son and crucified him to continue gaily as though nothing had happened.

We have been given understanding. Secondly, we Christians have this extraordinary privilege that we've been given a task to do.

I'm not thinking of being a pastor or a preacher or anything of that kind. You'll find this task in chapter 5, verse 18. I love this little part at the end of the story.

It's a fairly unsettling thing to have Jesus around as you may have known in your own life. And the people decided to ask him to leave their region, verse 17.

That's a picture of our world, really. And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he said mercy on you.

[ 25 : 19 ] And he went away and proclaimed it. This is one of the very rare cases in the early part of Mark's gospel when Jesus is in heathen territory, the cities of the Decapolis.

It's one more of those signs in early Mark that the Gentiles are one day to be reached with the truth from a remarkable early sign. It represents a world that rejects Jesus and yet, what happens? He sends the man who's been wonderfully liberated to be a witness amongst them. It's just one of those lovely little touches that there the world rejects him, God is continually sending those who experience his mercy to go and tell the heathen, the Gentiles, what God has done for them. That's your job and my job. Yes, no, pastors aren't accepted from this. Pastors aren't allowed just to go around preaching as though they didn't have any part in it. All of us are to go back to our own people and tell them what God has done in having mercy upon us.

Isn't that a great and wonderful ministry? That's the task of every single Christian, old or young. We've been given a deep understanding of why the world is as it is and we've been given a task of what we are to do in this heathen world and amongst heathen churches.

[ 26 : 54 ] Everywhere, in the darkness, God commands his lights to shine. That's what lights are for in the darkness. And I would say the darkness should not surprise you.

And the fact that God lights people's lives so that they can go and be a light in that world shouldn't surprise us either. God has given us understanding.

He's given us a task, every one of us, in this heathen, godless world. And thirdly, God has given us confidence in his beloved son. What a lovely, lovely lesson that was.

We adults need it just as much as the children. What is the first work of God the Holy Spirit? It is to uplift Christ so that we put our trust in him. A saving faith is a gift of God.

To believe in Christ as Lord in the midst of a heathen world is because the Holy Spirit is a work in you. Do you believe in Christ with all your heart? Then the Holy Spirit is a work in you.

[ 27 : 56 ] That is his particular joy. Now that's the force, isn't it, of verse 40 in chapter 4. Why are you so frightened?

Do you have no faith? Have you no faith any longer? Are you not, as we were taught just now, are you not resting in faith? No, they're not resting in faith at all. Why? Because he's asleep.

And therefore they say these words that the other gospel writers don't like very much. Don't you care for us? Well, that's typical of all of us, isn't it? Every one of us has said in moments of despair or difficult, Lord, don't you care?

And not Jesus says, has your faith run out already? Don't you care even though I seem to be asleep? And that's often the case, isn't it? When these crises happen in our life and we cry out to God, it seems as though the heavens are brass and the Jesus is asleep.

And they don't trust him. And they're frightened. And we're frightened too. The lesson today for the children is a lesson for all of us. It is receiving Christ, but it's more than that.

[ 29 : 09 ] It's resting in him. Well, we mustn't be surprised. These were experienced fishermen. And they knew all about storms and squalls and forced ten winds and all the rest of it.

And they knew that they were dying and perishing. And therefore they cry out, don't you care? And so do we. And we receive the rebuke. Why are you afraid?

Are you still really unbelieving? And that's the message, isn't it, of chapter 5, verse 36.

Your daughter stayed. Why trouble the teacher any further? It's quite useless. But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, do not fear, only believe.

Our precious and gracious God is saying that to us daily, isn't he? Don't be afraid, only believe. And we need that so much because we're so afraid. So, my dear Christian friends, this evening, it's a very simple message we have, isn't it?

[ 30 : 12 ] The message the children received in the trials that we experience in this present age. We can't opt out any more than the pagan can opt out.

We're all in it together. But, as believers, we have understanding, we have a task to do, and we have a faith that should sustain us until the Lord returns.

And then, if you know, in the book of Revelation, there will be no more sea. I always love that symbolism, because sea in the Bible is the symbol of primal chaos and the trials of the righteous. And there will be no more. And there will be no more Satan because he will be thrown into the lake of fire with the beast and the false prophet. And best of all, no more sickness and death, no more mourning, no more crying or pain.

The old order passed away. What a prospect, isn't it? We don't have it now, but we do have understanding, we do have a work to do, and we do have saving faith in which we can rest.

[ 31 : 24 ] Amen. God bless you. Let's pray.