

# Who is this?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Do you remember the last time that the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus, as in before the event recorded for us that we've read this evening, the previous occasion when they found themselves in that same location? Do you remember how the account ended, certainly as Mark records it, how it ends with a question, a question that is posed by the disciples?

I wonder if you remember what the question was that the disciples posed on that occasion. I'm sure many of you do, but if we just want to aid or refresh our memory, we can turn to chapter 4 of Mark's Gospel and the final verse. And we see the question that was posed by the disciples on that occasion, who is this? Who is this? And no answer is recorded. Of course, the events themselves provided an answer, but there's no verbal answer provided.

I would imagine that for the disciples, there was a sense in which the question simply was left hanging. And maybe they themselves were left to ponder on what the answer was to their question. Who is this? And as we return to the same location, as we return to the same Sea of Galilee, that crucial question that had been posed by the disciples will now receive an answer. There's many ways in which the question has been answered throughout the events that we've been considering, even thus far in the Gospel. But on this occasion, that question in a very clear way, in a very powerful way, is answered by Jesus. And the question is answered by Jesus by demonstrating who He is rather than by verbally declaring who He is. There are occasions where Jesus identifies Himself verbally and declares who He is. But more often, and certainly on this occasion, He answers the question that was posed, who is this? But He does so by demonstrating who He is. How so? Well,

He does so by an act of deliverance or rescue that in turn and quite deliberately serves as an act of self-revelation. There is a sense in which everything Jesus does reveals who He is, be that the intent or otherwise. There's a sense in which that's true of all of us. What we do reveals who we are, and that's true of Jesus, is that by His actions He might reveal who He is, He might answer the question that had been posed. Who is this? And I think we can find in this passage three elements to this self-revelation of Jesus, or certainly three that I want to draw to your attention and highlight this evening. And we can summarize it in this way. Jesus reveals Himself to be the one who walks when only God can walk.

He reveals Himself to be the one who speaks as only God can speak. Three pointers, if you wish, to the identity of Jesus, but they're pointers that can only really be identified as such with the backdrop of the Old Testament with what God has already revealed concerning Himself as recorded for us in the Old Testament. It's only in the light of the Old Testament that these hints, these pointers, can be understood, at least in the measure that it is necessary for us to understand them. So let's think of these three ways in which Jesus reveals Himself. The way He answers that question, who is this? And the first that I'm suggesting is what we just mentioned a moment ago, Jesus walks where only God can walk.

[ 5 : 18 ] Then in verse 48 of our passage, Mark chapter 6 and verse 48, we read, He saw the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, He went out to them walking on the lake. Let's just notice, first of all, what it is that Jesus does that we can then draw conclusions from. The scene is set for what He does in the previous verse. When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and He was alone on land. Even that verse, there's a striking contrast that highlights the predicament, if you wish, of the disciples. They're in the middle of the lake, in the midst of a storm, and Jesus is alone on land. There's this distance between them, and this creates this problem for the disciples. And of course, it's the distance that Jesus intended there to be. He had sent them into the lake. They had gone in obedience to His direction. But there they are, and a storm rises up, and we find the disciples, as they're described here, straining on the oars. This word translated straining is a word that in other contexts in the gospels can be used to speak of torment. Of course, that can be caused by many things. But that's the idea. It's not just that they're having to put in a huge effort. They are. But there's a sense in which they're tormented by their circumstances as they seek to reach the shore. And it's then that we discover what Jesus does. We're told that Jesus walked on the lake, that the disciples see Him there walking on the lake. He walks on water. Now, over the years, those who have sought to demythologize the Bible, to remove from it any vestiges of the supernatural because we don't believe in that kind of thing, come up with all kinds of remarkable explanations that would reach a conclusion that Jesus did the exact opposite of what is said here. But He didn't walk on water because, well, people can't do that. But all their efforts have been foolish. The language here is language that cannot be understood in any other way than what is intended. Indeed, the words that Mark uses are words that literally speak of Jesus walking on top of the water. What is being stated is clear.

You can believe it or you can disbelieve it, but what is stated is beyond dispute. Jesus walking on top of the water. Of course, the disciples and the reaction of the disciples confirms the remarkable nature of what is happening. They're terrified by what they see. And why? Because people don't walk on water.

That doesn't happen. And so if you see somebody doing that, then that is a terrifying experience. So that's what happened. But what we're concerned with perhaps is to just explore a little, why did Jesus do this? Why did He walk on water? Was this some random display of His power to impress His disciples for some reason? Why did He do this? Well, it was an act of rescue. They were in trouble, and this was the way in which He could get from A to B. But that doesn't exhaust the question or the answer to the question, why did Jesus do this? It was an act of rescue, but more significantly, it was an act of revelation. And this is where we turn to the Old Testament for help. We read in the book of Job, and we can just return there. In Job chapter 9, we won't return to all that we read, but particularly focus on one of the verses within that passage, in Job chapter 9 and in verse 8. Maybe before we read the verse again, just to make a comment on the whole thrust of the passage that we read. And the whole thrust of this passage is Job emphasizing the awesome separation between God and man. And he does so by speaking of all these things that only God can do. And so his intention, his purpose is to convince and to demonstrate that God is altogether other. He's so different to us. What He can do, we can't do.

That's the whole emphasis of what Job is saying. And within that, he speaks of this matter. In verse 8, he alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He alone can walk on water.

This language of walking on water, we use it. It's come into our language as an expression to describe exceptional ability. But even when we use it, of course, we use it knowing that it's just hyperbole. It's not literally so. I was intrigued that even as I had in my mind this passage yesterday, I was listening for just a brief moment. I think I was in the car. I don't know what it was. The radio was on and Murray was playing Nadal in the Madrid Open. And he won. And the commentator was speaking about Nadal, especially in the context of Madrid. And he said, the crowds here in Madrid believe that Nadal can walk on water. It's the very expression that the commentator used.

[ 11 : 33 ] And of course, it's just been used to speak of how brilliant they consider him to be. But of course, the crowds don't believe that. They don't believe that Nadal, however good he is, can walk on water.

Why? Because people can't do that. However extraordinary they are, that's something that men and women can't do. That is not within our capacity to do. But God can. That's the whole point that Job is making. He's speaking about all these things that are only true of God and that are not true of man. Only God walks on water. And Jesus walks where only God can walk. So, who is he? Who is this?

And the conclusion is inescapable. We've already met this same logic in Mark's gospel when we were confronted with Jesus forgiving sins in chapter 2. The same logic allowed us to reach the conclusion.

Only God forgives sins. Jesus forgives sins. Who is this? And we find it again here. Only God walks on water. Jesus walks on water. But let's just notice something else here. And this, I think, is a very beautiful thing to notice. The very capacity that Jesus demonstrates to do what only God can do, that Job presents as creating an unbridgeable chasm between God and man. This is Job's emphasis. God is so other, so other to us. There's this huge chasm between God and between man.

And he grounds this conclusion on all these things that God does that man cannot do. And yet that very capacity that Job uses for that purpose is employed by Jesus to bridge that chasm, to come near to the disciples in despair. So far from distancing Jesus from us, that very power draws him close to us. He walks on water. He does what God can do and only God can do to come to his disciples, to come to their aid, to come into the boat, to calm the storm that they are confronting. Who is this? This is the one who walks where only God can walk.

[ 14 : 17 ] But let's continue looking at the passage and notice a second way in which I will suggest that Jesus reveals something of his identity. This second way is far less explicit than what we've just noted, Jesus walking on water. But I think it is justified to come to the conclusion that I'll come to in a moment. But I leave it certainly to your prerogative to weigh up whether you feel it's legitimate what I'm going to suggest.

The manner in which I've titled this second manner in which Jesus identifies himself is that Jesus passes by as only God can pass by. Now that language is found at the end of verse 48, immediately following on us being told that he was walking on the lake. We read there at the end of verse 48, he was about to pass by them. So first of all, let's just think about what does that mean?

What has been described here? He was about to pass by them. It's an intriguing thing to say. It's an intriguing thing to do. Why would Jesus pass by them?

What purpose would be served by Jesus passing by them? Presumably the whole point is to head straight to them and come to their aid. That's why he's walking on water. And of course in a few moments, that is precisely what he will do. He will get into the boat and the sea will be calm and he will bring them comfort. So why have this detour as it were? Why appear to pass by them before he gets into the boat? What is going on? Whatever we conclude, I think we'd have to acknowledge that it's somewhat puzzling. He passes by them. Before we bring to bear the Old Testament to perhaps shed some light on this language, it is important to note that the language that Mark uses is language that points to very deliberate intention. Perhaps as we read what is said here, it's just one expression, one phrase, he was about to pass by them, that isn't immediately evident. But the language that is used here is language of deliberate intention. Jesus, with deliberate purpose, does what he does. Appears to pass by them. There is a deliberate intent on the part of Jesus. It's not just that that's what seemed to be happening. You know, some have sought to explain that in that way.

Well, that's what the disciples thought was happening. They saw him and it appeared as he was passing by, but of course he wasn't. He was coming to the boat. But I don't think the language allows for that. Jesus, in a very deliberate way, does what he does.

[ 17 : 31 ] Is this action on the part of Jesus, is it to be understood? Can it be understood also in terms of self-revelation? And if so, what is being revealed about Jesus? Well, in the Old Testament, this expression, to pass by, is charged, on some occasions when it's used, obviously not on every occasion, is charged with special force, signaling a rare self-revelation of God. It's curious that even in that same passage that we've read in Job, mention is made of God passing by, though there it's much more cryptic and far from clear what is going on, but the language is used. There in verse 11 of Job chapter 9, when he passes by, I cannot see him. When he goes by, I cannot perceive him. There I think it's just a coincidence of language. But if we focus rather on Exodus chapter 33, and notice there, where you do have, in a very deliberate way, God passing by in order to reveal himself.

So, Exodus chapter 33, and we'll read from verse 18. Notice how the subsection here is entitled, in our Bibles, Moses and the glory of God. And if we pick up the account from verse 18, we read, then Moses said, Moses is speaking to God, he says, now show me your glory. 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 will 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. In response to this request of Moses, that God would reveal his glory, what does God do? God passes by Moses, and he does so in order to reveal himself to Moses. What does he reveal? He reveals his glory, the very thing that Moses was asking of. He reveals his name, his identity. He reveals his goodness. He reveals his compassion. In all of these ways, he's revealing himself in this peculiar manner as he passes by Moses. And however we understand the details of this account, what is beyond dispute is that to pass by, certainly in this passage in Exodus, is an act of self-revelation by God. In this way, God reveals himself to Moses in a manner that Moses can receive, that doesn't strike him down.

I think we can say, regardless of whether we feel that in the passage in Mark, there is a deliberate intention to allude to what we find there in Exodus and on other occasions in the Old Testament, what we can certainly say is that the incarnation itself is, in a sense, God passing by and revealing his glory to us in a way that we can comprehend, in a way that we can receive. We're reminded of what John says at the beginning of his gospel. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the one and only the one and only the Father, full of grace and truth. Jesus passed by that we might see his glory.

And it may be that on this occasion, the language that is used and the deliberate intent of Jesus to act in this peculiar or puzzling way can be understood in the light of what we see of this same action on the part of God in the Old Testament. Who is this? This is the one who passes by as only God passes by. But let's notice, thirdly and finally, another way in which Jesus reveals his identity, a way in which Jesus answers the question that had been posed on the same lake sometime before, who is this? And he does so by speaking as only God can speak. We turn to the passage to verse 50 of Mark chapter 6. Second half of the verse, we read, immediately he spoke to them and said, take courage, it is I, don't be afraid. They're the words that he speaks. They're words, easily understood, words of comfort, words of encouragement. But are they more than that? Are they more than simply words of encouragement for men who were in need of encouragement? The words themselves, of course, are words that mortal men like you and me could utter. We could use these words in given circumstances. They're maybe the kind of words we would use if we were trying to comfort a frightened child. Imagine if you're a wee boy or a girl or woke up in the middle of the night, a nightmare.

[ 23 : 16 ] You might go into the bedroom and say, it's me. Don't be afraid, it's me. We can say that. You might be able by doing that to bring some comfort to a frightened child. So the words themselves aren't words that can only be spoken by God. But though we recognize that, is it the case that these words spoken by Jesus on this occasion are words that reveal something of his identity? Or is it to suggest too much, to read too much into the text to draw that conclusion? Well, again, we turn to the Old Testament to see if it can shed light for us on the words that Jesus uses. And I think many of you will know to where we'll be heading on this occasion. We head to Exodus again, but on this occasion to chapter 3 and verse 14. Very familiar words on the occasion that God reveals to Moses his name, or in any case reveals or explains the divine name to Moses. And we read there in verse 14 of Exodus chapter 3,

Moses, I am who I am. That is, this is what you are to say to the Israelites, I am has sent me to you. I am. I am. God's name revealed by God, explained by God. I am. Now, the Old Testament, as we know, was translated into Greek. That version of the Old Testament or that translation of the Old Testament was available at the time of Jesus and the disciples, known as the Septuagint. And this verse and the words of God, I am, in Greek are translated as ego, I am. I am. They're words that we find often in John's Gospel. You're familiar with the I am sayings of Jesus and the great significance of those sayings. And we have those Greek words, ego, I am. And these are the words that Jesus employs here.

The words that he's recorded as employing by Mark. Translated, it is I. But the words he uses are ego, I mean, I am. Of course, these words by themselves don't necessarily carry that divine weight. But in the context of Jesus walking on water, in the context of Jesus passing by the disciples as he has just done, it seems certainly improbable not to understand them in the light of the divine name that we've just noticed there in Exodus chapter 3. Jesus then, by these words, reveals his identity, I am, and his mission to calm the storm and dispel their fears, to rescue his people.

His mission is only possible in the light of his identity. If we think of these words, they're recorded for us in Mark. Take courage, it is I, and don't be afraid. Imagine if those words were deprived of the very core. I am, it is I. And all you had was take courage, don't be afraid.

Of course, we know it's the same Jesus who would be speaking these words, and so they would carry great weight. But it's those words in the middle that give them their weight. You see, the reason the disciples can take seriously what has been said, don't be afraid, is precisely because of who is speaking.

[ 27 : 11 ] I am is speaking. Hence, this call to take courage, this call to not be afraid, carries such weight. Take courage. It is I, I am. Don't be afraid.

Who is this? This is the one who speaks as only God speaks. Well, let's just finish by giving some brief thought to how the disciples respond.

Do the disciples get it? We're saying that in what Jesus does, in this act of deliverance, he's, in the first instance, in, we might say, principally revealing his identity.

But do the disciples get it? Well, Mark is clear. They don't. What is it that Mark tells us there in the passage? We read there in verse 52, Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down.

They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves. Their hearts were hardened. What don't they understand?

[ 28 : 25 ] We're told that they don't understand. They didn't understand about the loaves, and they don't understand about Jesus walking on water. But what is it they don't understand? They know what happened.

They know that Jesus performed this miracle in providing food for the 5,000. They know that he walked on water. They saw it. They know that. So what is it they don't understand? They don't understand who Jesus is.

They don't see the signs. They don't understand the signs. They don't understand who Jesus is. And why don't they understand? Well, Mark tells us the answer to that question.

Their hearts are hardened, and they don't see or understand the signs. They had not understood about the loaves. Now, that comment by Mark is very helpful in, if you wish, validating what we're doing this evening in trying to find signs.

What Mark is saying is that what Jesus does is full of signs. When he feeds the 5,000, it's not just about feeding the 5,000. It's about revealing who he is. So we're not trying to force something that's not there.

[ 29 : 27 ] Mark is saying you've got to look for the signs. Now, we can sometimes mistakenly imagine there's a sign when there isn't. That is possible. But to look for signs is something we must do.

That's what the disciples weren't doing, and so they couldn't understand. Do the disciples get it? Well, no, not yet. But perhaps a more important question with this question we close is do you get it?

Do you see who Jesus is? What is your answer to the disciples' question? Who is this? Have you come to the point?

Are you able to declare? In answer to that question, who is this? This is the one who walks where only God can walk.

This is the one who passes by as only God can pass by. This is the one who speaks as only God can speak. And so come to the only and inevitable conclusion concerning his identity, and then bow down in worship.

[ 30 : 35 ] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you are a God who reveals your glory. We thank you that knowing who we are and our limitations, you reveal your glory in the measure that we are able to receive and to perceive.

We thank you for the manner in which you have done that in the history of your dealings with your people, but we thank you very especially in the manner in which you have revealed yourself in the person of your Son, Jesus Christ.

We thank you that the Word did become flesh and dwell among us. And we thank you that your people beheld your glory in the person of your Son, full of grace and truth.

We pray that we too would see Jesus for who he is. And as we see him for who he is, and as we are enabled to understand his identity, so we would respond to him in the only reasonable way, by bowing down before him in worship and offering up our lives in service to him.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.