

Christ our Rock and our Redeemer

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[0 : 00] How do you get to know somebody? This is my second time with Jodie and Billy coming to visit Bon Accord, and over the last couple of visits, we've got to know some people.

Hopefully we'll get to know some more of you and some of you even better today. But how do you get to really know somebody? Obviously, you start by talking to them. That's fairly obvious, isn't it? That's basic.

You get to know somebody by chatting, having conversations, striking up friendships. But you can't really, truly know somebody, I think, unless you hear what other people who know them well have to say about them.

We love it, don't we? If we meet somebody we've got a mutual friend with, maybe someone they've known for longer than us, we want to get the inside scoop. But a month ago, back in St. Andrews, we had a men's brunch.

This happily coincided with my parents visiting for the weekend. So my dad came along to the men's brunch, and there's some students in our church who I've known for four or five years. I think we know each other pretty well.

[1 : 09] But what's the first thing they did when they met my dad? Give us the dirt. Dish the dirt on Matty. What's he really like? Tell us all the embarrassing stories from his life that we need to know. Thankfully, I think my dad is loyal.

He didn't give them what they were after. But that would have been a really good insight into me. And I'm sure that we've had similar experiences, adding color to what we know of somebody, by finding out all the stories about them from people who know them better than us.

What's interesting about the Bible is that it is a book which contains many, many stories. It contains stories which span centuries.

Stories which span a wide breadth of different literary types and genres. There's poetry. There's wisdom. There's gospel. There's history.

Lots of stories. Lots of stories. Lots of different types of story. And yet, across that span of centuries, across that span of every type of literature conceivable to man, it's amazing that really there's only one story in the whole thing.

[2 : 24] We have a children's Bible that we like to read with Billy. I spotted it in the office back there. It's the Jesus Storybook Bible. The tagline of that is that every story whispers Jesus' name.

All of the Bible, from Genesis through to Revelation, tells us all we need to know about the Lord Jesus. And so that's why in our passage this morning, as Mark is revealing more and more in his gospel about who Jesus is, we find that this is a story full of references to things which happened thousands of years before the events recorded in Mark 6.

It's like Mark is saying to the reader, if you really want to understand who Jesus is, then you need to understand God's plan of redemption as it's unfolded all throughout human history.

And it's within that context that we see Jesus here in Mark 6 being revealed as the great deliverer, the great redeemer of God's people, and as God himself with all of the authority to fulfill mankind's greatest, deepest need.

In this last section of Mark 6, we are drawn to deeper delight in who Jesus is. He really is the one who can save and deliver.

[4 : 06] And therefore, we're reminded that Jesus really is the one in whom we should place all our trust, the one who we should make all our joy.

And if that's where we end up over the next half hour, 40 minutes, as we go out into the rest of the week, that's a good place to get to. It's a wonderful aim for our time together. And to help us along the way, we'll look at this passage under two headings, the first of which is this, Jesus is the

redeemer he provides.

Read with me from verse 30 again. The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. The context here, the disciples have just got back from the world's first ever short-term missions.

And then we've had this big flashback about something that King Herod was doing. Northern narrative picks up with the disciples coming back from their mission journeys. And the first thing Jesus says is, let's go on a staff retreat and get a bit of rest.

[5 : 23] If we know Mark's gospel, we'll know that's pretty consistent. Makes a lot of sense. Jesus himself, consistently in Mark's gospel, eschews the limelight, shuns fame and glory in the crowds and withdraws in a solitary place to pray.

And so I wonder if he's looking at his disciples, conscious that they've just gone out and performed miraculous, wonderful things in his name, and knowing that the very last thing they need, therefore, is to be put in front of a crowd where they might feel a bit puffed up and proud.

So off they go to a quiet place. But Jesus is a bit of a celebrity. First century Twitter blows up and it doesn't stay quiet in their solitary place very long.

That's where in verse 34, we get our first big clue as to what's going on in this whole section. Verse 34, when Jesus had landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

So he began teaching them many things. Just imagine you get home from work tomorrow night, you have your dinner, you stick on for the six o'clock news and you see that a politician is being interviewed and they say, what this country really needs is a change in number 10.

[6 : 50] We know instantly what they mean, don't we? And they're not talking about maths. Well, this phrase that Jesus says, sheep without a shepherd, it's a similarly really loaded phrase, lots of deeper meaning in it.

Now, of course, in the first instance, as Jesus says this, it is showing us just what Mark records, his great compassion towards the crowd. It's wonderful that Jesus has such a deep and pastoral concern for the people in front of him.

That's great. But there's even deeper meaning when we understand that sheep without a shepherd is a kind of deep Old Testament term that's really significant.

So if we think of our Old Testament, God himself is described as the shepherd of Israel. Think of Psalm 23, famously, the Lord is my shepherd.

The man who wrote that psalm, King David, arguably Israel's greatest king, is also a shepherd. So the highest point of Israel's history is when the man on the throne was also a shepherd.

[8 : 02] And then at multiple low points throughout Israel's history, when the priests aren't doing their job and leading the people in holiness, when the kings aren't doing their job and leading the people in upholding God's law, what's the phrase that's used to indict the priests and the kings?

The prophets tell us that God's people are like sheep without a shepherd. It is shorthand for God's people having no authentic spiritual leadership.

For the people who are meant to be guarding and leading them are not doing their jobs. And so Jesus, thinking in these terms, is an indictment against the would-be leaders of God's people around him, every bit as much as a change in number 10 is a veiled attempt at criticizing the government of the day for us.

We've actually met a lot of the would-be leaders of God's people by this point in Mark's gospel. I mentioned earlier that just before this section, we read of King Herod, a foolish, weak, sin-blinded, pretend puppet king with no real power.

Multiple times we've also met the Pharisees, setting themselves up as the gatekeepers of God's law, God's word, but actually hypocrites who trust more in their own traditions than they really try to honor God or indeed to care for his people.

[9 : 45] So the religious and the political order of the day, they are not fulfilling their God-given purpose to lead God's people in holiness, to shepherd them.

And so here Mark is saying, well, that's why Jesus is. That's who Jesus is. That's why he came. That's why Jesus' first act of compassion recorded for us here is to teach God's people.

Don't know if you notice that in the text. We have the heading, Jesus feeds the 5,000. He does, we'll get to that. But before he does, he teaches them. God's shepherd feeds his people spiritually before he feeds them physically because that is so much more important.

Then what's more, he's not come just to do a slightly better job than the old leaders and just try a bit harder than them. We see here Jesus has come to do something completely new and that's what's revealed to us in the miracle itself, the feeding miracle.

There's a couple of surface-level things I want us to notice about the feeding miracle. The first is that it's being used to teach Jesus' disciples that they are still reliant on him.

[11:04] Remember, they've just got back from doing these amazing things on their mission journeys, casting out demons and performing healings in Jesus' name. We read verse 35, by this time it was late in the day so the disciples came to him.

This is a remote place, they said, and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and buy themselves something to eat. But Jesus answered, you give them something to eat. Of course they can't.

If there's any part of the disciples that's starting to think, well, we're actually pretty good, we've done all these amazing things on these journeys, Jesus is reminding them that first and foremost, they are still entirely dependent on him.

Second thing I want us to observe about this miracle is that it's a miracle, a real miracle, a miracle of divine provision and not of human generosity.

I say that because you may have come across some interpretations of what's going on in Mark 6 which go along these lines that everyone who had come to see Jesus that day, they'd of course brought their own food with them, but they were interested to see if he could give them something a bit nicer.

[12:19] But when they saw the fine example of Jesus breaking the bread and passing it around, they were moved by his attempt at generosity and so actually they all started eating their own packed lunch and passing around sausage rolls and bits of bread to anyone who didn't have any and that's how everyone was fed that day.

People were generous, inspired by the example of Jesus, not fed miraculously by him. Of course the text leads us in a different direction. We see that Jesus divides the fish among them all in verse 39 and they all eat their fill.

In verse 43, the fact that there are 12 baskets full of leftover bread and fish, it's a ludicrous amount to have leftover. It's pointing us towards a miraculous abundance.

And then most famously of all, verse 44, 5,000 men are fed and of course it's likely that women and children would have been added to that number too and it's more likely that there were 15,000 people altogether, something around that region, fed that day.

Feeding that many people is a show of abundant, divine generosity. And every time we encounter a miracle in Mark's gospel, if we're new to church, that might be a bit odd for us, but it's interesting that while we might naturally think, well, how could he do that?

[13:50] The question that Mark is routinely more interested in is not how, but who. Who could do something like that? The answer is Jesus, the divine deliverer of God's people.

This is where we come to some of those references I talked about earlier, things which happened thousands of years in the past of God's people. Mark 6 is absolutely brimming full of references to the Exodus, that great seismic saving event of God redeeming his people out of slavery.

Very briefly, let's look at some of them. First of all, there's the location. We'll know that when Israel left Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness. Well, three times it's mentioned here that that's where they are.

That's where this miracle takes place. The NIV translates it three different ways, a quiet place, a solitary place, a remote place. The Greek has it, the wilderness, the wilderness, the wilderness. Just as God's people wandered in the wilderness, lost in the need of God to feed them, here we have people in the wilderness, lost in the need of Jesus to feed them.

[15:04] And just as God does feed the people with miraculous bread in the Exodus account, here Jesus feeds the people with miraculous bread. even superficial, surface level things.

Moses divides up the people to feed them in Exodus. Jesus divides up the people in an orderly way here. All these little references, they build up because Mark wants his readers to see that just like Moses led God's people out of slavery in Egypt, Jesus has come to lead and deliver God's people

too.

But the Exodus event he has come to perform is not a movement out of slavery to a human king. It's deliverance from the ultimate enemies, enemies, sin, and death.

So I'll often say to people in St. Andrews, if you're not yet a Christian and you're just checking things out, then do please keep investigating this Jesus.

And here's more of the reason why. Because this Jesus that we're called to trust in and to follow is not a cosmic killjoy. Nor is he a slightly shy but kindly country vicar.

[16:27] No, the Jesus that we're called to follow and trust with all our lives is God's shepherd deliverer who loves his people and who provides for us richly and abundantly.

I know there may be many reasons why if you're coming along to church with someone just investigating things that you're not quite ready to commit yourself to it. There's many reasons but maybe one is this.

That I just don't think that Jesus is big enough to deal with my sin. As I look at how broken I am, how messed up my life is, I just don't think Jesus can handle that.

Friend, the one with divine authority and miraculous power to feed 15,000 people in the wilderness has all the power and authority he needs to provide abundantly for you to be made right with God by having your sins forgiven.

That's who Jesus is. If you're tempted to write yourself off as being too sinful, too far gone for him, you're not. He is so powerful.

[17:43] He is so able to provide for what you need. And so even for those of us who have been following Jesus for a long time, this passage should draw our hearts towards him in thankful worship.

Because Jesus really has delivered us from sin and death. And so there's a picture here of how trusting in Jesus therefore means knowing abundance, means knowing satisfaction.

I wonder if those are the two words that instantly spring to our minds when we usually think of what a life following Jesus means. or do we ever find just a wee bit that we're tempted to think that life following Jesus is restrictive, it's limiting, that life following Jesus is a life of a perpetual FOMO missing out on all the things that our friends do and that satisfaction is found in what you can earn or where you can travel or who you can or can't go to bed with.

If we ever find ourselves tempted to think that that's even slightly true of the Christian life then we need to remember here that Jesus really is enough.

Jesus has provided richly and abundantly for our deepest need. And so when we just pause a moment to gaze at him even in this very familiar story, I think we therefore find much for our hearts to delight and to rejoice in.

[19:27] Much to enable us to go out, strengthen, to live for Jesus and make him all our joy. He provides so richly and abundantly. There's lots of things that we could say about this but here's maybe two big ways which this might help us in the week ahead.

First of all, if we find ourselves struggling with feelings of guilt, feelings of inadequacy, even as believers thinking, well, well, maybe, maybe he can't deal with this sin.

Maybe I've gone too far this time. Let's gaze at Jesus in this passage. and know that if our trust is in him, we really are forgiven.

When Jesus provides for his people, he's not like a student trying to provide for a Christian union meal and trying to make their budget Tesco pasta stretch as far as it possibly can.

I'm sure Aberdeen CU is better than St. Andrew CU and you're great at catering for people but just bear with me. He doesn't provide like that. You know, when Jesus provides for his people, he provides like a Northern Irish granny.

[20:35] Nobody, nobody is even thinking of leaving the house hungry. That's the kind of deliverer God has sent in Jesus. He doesn't do half measures.

Twelve baskets full of bread and fish bones testify to that. That's the first way if we're feeling inadequate, if we're feeling insecure in the Christian life, Jesus truly can provide.

The second way, if we actually find ourselves on the flip side of the coin, trusting in how much we know or how many rules that we follow and so we find that our Christian lives end up as one end cycle of pride and disappointment, judgmentalism looking down our noses at others and also inadequacy comparing ourselves to others, we need to gaze at Jesus afresh this morning and know that he alone can forgive our sins and therefore offer him our humble praise and thanks.

We'll think more about that as we come now to our second heading this morning. Jesus is the redeemer. God, he alone provides. Only he provides.

As we move on to the next story recorded in Mark chapter 6, we read from verse 49 and we see that Mark is really interested here in how Jesus' disciples respond to him.

[22 : 06] Jumping down to verse 49, when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost, they cried out because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately, Jesus spoke to them and said, take courage, it is I, don't be afraid.

Then he climbed down 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. I don't know if you were like me back in September and when the queen sadly died, you spent a lot of time watching the endless coverage of it on the BBC News and one story that I heard which I find quite interesting in amongst all the various interviews that were conducted was one of the queen's former bodyguards shared a story about escorting her majesty around the Balmoral Estate not too far from here and they, well, when they were on the grounds they met some American backpacking tourists and it became clear they didn't recognise the queen because they said to her, do you live in the area?

And she said, well, actually, no, I live in London but I've got a holiday home just over the hill and they said, oh, wow, that's really cool. How long have you been coming to the holiday home? And she said, well, I've been coming since I was a little girl over 80 years in fact.

And they said, wow, hey, if you've been coming here for that long you must have met the queen. To which her late majesty replied, well, I've not met her but Dick here meets her all the time pointing to her bodyguard.

And so the American tourists then push past the queen, hand their camera to the queen's bodyguard and ask for a selfie with him so that they can go home and tell their friends in America that they met someone who met the queen.

[23 : 45] He convinces them to actually get a selfie all together, including with the queen and they go their way. And as they leave, the queen says to her bodyguard, I really wish it could be a fly on the wall when they go back to America and show those photos to their friends where I hope that somebody is able to tell them who I am.

We can just imagine how mortified they would have been when they got back to the States and someone said, isn't that the queen? We playing that conversation in their minds and being so embarrassed we pushed her out of the way.

I wonder if that's how the disciples felt when they went over episodes like this one later in life.

Maybe gathered around a fireside one night as they're often one of the great missionary journeys traveling from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

They relive the old days and they think about some of the vivid pictures that Mark gives us of who Jesus is throughout the gospel. They think to themselves, remember when Jesus forgave the sins of the paralyzed man?

How did we not see what he was doing there? Or guys, what about that time when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead? What did we think was happening when he did that?

[25 : 02] Or guys, what about that time when we were really scared at sea and he walked past us on the water and said, I am. How obvious can you get?

Because that's the absolute clangor in verse 50. That's quite literally what Jesus says. Not take courage, it is I, but take courage, I am. That's the covenant name by which God had revealed himself to Moses all those years ago.

And so it's the clearest sign that for all the ways that we saw earlier that Jesus is like Moses, he's also fundamentally not like Moses.

Because Moses is used by God and Jesus is God. Jesus does it all by himself in these verses. And that's clear in the other Exodus-y type stuff that's going on here.

Moses oversaw a miraculous crossing of water and then went up on a mountain to meet God. Jesus goes up on a mountain to pray and then performs a miraculous crossing of the water because he is God.

[26 : 13] Not just a new Moses, a better one. Not just sent from God to deliver his people, but God himself come to deliver them from the ultimate enemies of sin and death.

But the disciples don't get it. This group of God-fearing Jews who would have known their Old Testaments better than we probably ever will, they don't get it. Not for the first time in Mark's Gospel, we see that their reaction to Jesus doing something wonderful is terror and confusion. And Mark makes it clear in the next few chapters that's because it really does take a miracle to truly, fully understand who Jesus is. He records here that at this point the disciples are being hardened. They're being kept from fully understanding who Jesus is until his earthly ministry is complete. And so I take it there's a real need for humility then that we can look at this story this morning and see Jesus for exactly who he is. Not just Redeemer, but Redeemer God. [27 : 28] And this passage then is asking us the question, how much do I really believe that and delight in it? How much do I allow myself to marvel at the fact that the God who made his presence known in the burning bush, in pillars of cloud and fire coming down from the mountain, in inapproachable, inaccessible light, that that God chiefly dwelt among his people by his Son taking on human flesh and living an earthly life for 33 years?

And that by his Holy Spirit he dwells in our hearts by faith this morning? How much do I allow myself to marvel at the fact that not only did Jesus come to deliver and provide, but that as God in human form only Jesus could do this?

and how then does that shape how I live for and worship him in the week ahead? Well, I take it that right away it pours cold water over any sense of pride that we might have.

Any of these subtle ways in which we might think that we've earned special status before God because of what we know or how we live. My friends, if it took the miracle of incarnation, God taking human flesh and walking the earth, if that's what it took to deal with the problem of human sin in the first place, I think we can safely assume that he's not going to be that impressed on the days where we get a few things right, the day where we happen to read our Bibles for a good long half an hour. wonderfully, though, on the flip side, if once again we're tempted to view our sin as too big for him to deal with, whether we've put our trust in the Lord Jesus or not, or if we're tempted to feel weak and useless in the Christian life, like we just can't get it right, that we just can't sort ourselves out, that God must somehow be disappointed with us.

[29 : 53] Well, I think this passage also allows us to look to Jesus and to marvel. Because the one with authority to heal the sick, as we see at the end of Mark 6, the one with authority to command nature, the one who feeds the multitudes in front of him with just a word of prayer, well, he is the one who has declared definitively our sins are forgiven, the one who has bid us come and follow him, the one to whom Psalm 130, which we sang earlier, points towards as it says, with the Lord there is plentiful redemption, and the one who has promised that he will bring his work in us to completion on the last day when he comes again.

Friends, this is who Jesus is. This is the Jesus in whom we trust, and we can therefore trust in him with confidence and with joy, because he really is the Redeemer God who alone has made provision for our most pressing and deadly need.

So as we go out together this morning, let's keep our gaze fixed on him, full of confidence, joy, and thanksgiving.

Let's express our thanksgiving now together in prayer as we close. God, our Father, we thank you for how you've provided abundantly for our deepest need, the need to be forgiven our sins and freed from death by sending the Lord Jesus, our great rock and our Redeemer.

We pray that you would help us this week to not be proud, to remember that only Jesus can provide for our deepest needs and to be thankful. And we pray as well that you would keep us from despair, from feelings of inadequacy and wrong sense of guilt.

[32 : 03] When we're tempted to feel these things, draw us again to the wonderful truth that Jesus truly has forgiven us and help us then to delight in and give him our thanks and to delight in living for him.

In whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.