

The Gospel of Mark – Only What God Can Do

Mark 4:35-5:43

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



As we have studied the Gospel of Mark together, we have come to see Mark's purpose. He desires every reader to see Jesus clearly and follow him accordingly. I realize you are likely tired of me saying that. But, my hope is that now, seven weeks in, we have it committed to memory, and it is the guiding lens for how we read and interact with Mark's Gospel. As we dive back in, we are in a passage that demonstrates who Jesus is and his sovereign power. Jesus is Lord over sickness and death. He is Lord over the spiritual forces of darkness. And he is Lord over creation itself. We've seen Jesus exercise his sovereign power before, but Mark forces us in this section to really answer the question, who is Jesus? So, let's do that. Take a few minutes and share your answer to this question, "If you had to describe Jesus in three words, what would they be?"

Well, which three words did you choose? Savior, Messiah, God,? Gracious, loving, peaceful? Incarnate, brother, son? Teacher, healer, redeemer? Challenger, rescuer, includer? There are any number of words we could choose to describe Jesus that accurately fit with who he actually is. In fact, choosing three feels like a woefully inadequate list, doesn't it? We all have to wrestle with this as we read through Mark, and that is a good thing. If Jesus is just a religious teacher, an example to follow, or an archetype for how we are to live, he offers us little more than anyone else in history. And, to make those claims, you're going to have to wrestle with the fact that **Jesus can do what no one else can do.**

1. "The other side." (4:35)

- a. Context: One of the things that we have noted in our study of Mark's Gospel is the way Mark assumes the reader understands the context when he makes brief geographical notes.
 - i. This can pose a challenge for us as modern readers because there is much for us to glean from the implications of the physical setting in which Jesus and his disciples find themselves.
- b. The Sea of Galilee → See the map at the end of the notes for reference.
 - i. **The Sea of Galilee lies nearly seven hundred feet below sea level in a basin surrounded by hills and mountains that are especially precipitous on the east side.** Thirty miles to the northeast Mt. Hermon rises to 9,200 feet above sea level. The interchange between cold upper air from Mt. Hermon and warm air rising from the Sea of Galilee produces tempestuous weather conditions for which the lake is famed.¹
 1. This "sea" is not actually a sea. It is an extremely large freshwater lake. To be a sea, it would need a direct outlet to the ocean.

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 148–149.

2. The setting is the **Sea of Galilee**, a picturesque lake some seven miles wide and thirteen miles long at the extremities. Lying nearly seven hundred feet below sea level, the Sea is confined by a rather precipitous bank of mountains on the east and by somewhat gentler slopes on the west. Seen from the heights, the lake has roughly the shape of a harp, from which it may have received its name in Hebrew, Kinnereth. **Josephus extols the Sea of Galilee for its pure sweet water and many species of fish, its fertile soil and pleasing climate that supplies fruit and produce ten months of the year. The whole region, he says, is one in which “nature had taken pride”** (*War* 3.516–21).²
 3. **In the first century fishing was a thriving industry on the Sea of Galilee, which counted no fewer than sixteen bustling ports on the lake and several towns on the northwest shore, including Bethsaida (“house of the fisher”), Magdala (“fish tower”), and Taricheae (“salted fish”), named for the fishing trade. So numerous were fishing boats that Josephus was able to commandeer 230 of them during the war in Galilee in A.D. 68** (*War* 2.635).³
- ii. **The regions around the Sea of Galilee are politically and ethnically divided.**
1. Remember when Jesus called Levi back in 2:13ff? Levi is a Jewish man who worked as a tax collector for the Romans. The larger region of Galilee (including the sea) would have been divided by zones and when you crossed from one zone into another you had to pay a tax (i.e., a toll). Levi was a local official that ran a tax booth on the border of one of those zones near Capernaum.
 2. The north / northeastern areas of the sea were primarily Jewish areas. The west / northwestern areas of the sea were Gentile areas.
 3. **When Jesus says, “let’s go to the other side,” he is telling his Jewish disciples to go to the Gentile side.**
 - a. This means not only are they going into a vastly different social setting, which would likely cause them to have interactions that would render them ritually unclean, but they are also going into an area that would have drastically different political allegiances.
 - b. Politically speaking, Jewish people would have seen the Romans as oppressors, and they longed for the Messiah to come and throw off the yoke of their oppressor. Some (the Zealots) took this view to the extreme and became political insurgents. Others would have held varying degrees of this position. But, in the Gentile areas, they would have had a much more favorable impression of the Roman government. That is not to reduce a complicated political landscape to two views. But it gives us a snapshot at what is at stake.
- iii. **Why does all of this matter in our reading of Mark?** → Because it shows us Jesus’ concern not just for “his own” (i.e., the Jewish population of the region), but for all people. The “other side” has clear gospel implications.
- c. **Gospel implications. → Good news for all people.**
- i. This is a statement that we might reflexively say here in the 21st century. Or, that we might look back over the NT and think, of course it is! However, if we put ourselves in

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 48.

³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 49.

the shoes of these first-century Jewish disciples, this is a radical idea! Yes, the nations were always welcomed to come, convert, and worship God. And, the Temple had the court of the Gentiles. A specific place for Gentiles to worship. But what Jesus is demonstrating here and we will see again in the feeding of the four thousand, is that the Kingdom of God is for all people. Paul will make the implications of this inclusion clear in Ephesian 2:13-17.

1. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.
- ii. Jesus is preparing the disciples for life after the cross.
 1. Remember, we are in the final year of Jesus' life and ministry. And, in this final year, Jesus is working to prepare his disciples, specifically the inner 12, for life and mission after the cross. They are to carry the good news of the gospel to the ends of the earth. (cf. Acts 1:8)
 2. In fact, when we read Luke's Gospel, we can see a clear pattern of Jesus' training of the disciples emerge. → The six fishing trips. With each trip Jesus expands the implications of the Kingdom for the disciples.
 - a. Synagogue – Lk. 4:31-37
 - b. Peter's house – Lk. 4:38-41
 - c. Peter's Partners – Lk. 5:1-11
 - d. Jewish Villages – Lk. 5:12-15
 - e. Crowds and Religious leaders – Lk. 5:17-26
 - f. Tax collectors and sinners – Lk. 5:27-39
 3. **Now, they are here going to the "other side."**
 - a. **If you were a disciple, how might you respond to this inclusion of the gospel?**
 - b. **Who is someone or group that you have deemed "too far gone" or "too far off" to be included in the gospel? → What if they showed up at our church, how would we receive them?**

2. Jesus Calms a Storm (4:36-41)

- a. What happens – Let's look at the context.
 - i. **A violent storm "pops up."**
 1. As we noted above there is nothing unusual for the Sea of Galilee to experience. Yes, the storm is unexpected but the fact that it happened was not. These were professional fisherman who knew this lake and understood the implications of it all.
 - a. The interchange between cold upper air from Mt. Hermon and warm air rising from the Sea of Galilee produces tempestuous weather conditions for which the lake is famed. ⁴
 - ii. **Professional fishermen were afraid.**

⁴ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 148–149.

1. They are not rookies going out for a pleasure cruise or making an impulsive decision to cross the lake. These Galileans were well accustomed to the rigors of and hazards of life on the sea.
2. **“Other boats” – This isn’t just the disciples and Jesus.**
 - a. Mark is the only gospel that tells us of the *other boats* being with Jesus here: the calming of the storm therefore becomes a miracle of mercy on a wider scale than the mere saving from drowning of a boatload of frightened disciples. We may perhaps compare the closing words of Jonah, ‘and also much cattle’ (Jon. 4:11), with its undertone of the infinite mercy of God. Of course, the detail of the other boats may simply be a small irrelevant reminiscence included by the matter-of-fact Mark, which assures us of the historicity of the event.⁵
 - b. Both fore and aft sections of the boat appear to have been covered with a deck, providing space on which to sit or lie. The boat was propelled by four rowers (two per side) and **has a total capacity of about fifteen persons.**⁶
- iii. **He speaks and the storms ceases** - The disciples are not abandoned to watery peril, however. Jesus “got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.” When Jonah is thrown overboard, the sea becomes calm (Jonah 1:15); so also in the tempest on the Sea of Galilee, nature is made to conform to the repose of its Master. The grateful change is effected not by prayer or incantation, but by the authoritative *word* of Jesus, just as God produced order from chaos in the beginning (Gen 1:2).⁷
 1. **Note v. 41 – “Who is this that the winds and sea obey him?”**
 - a. The Greek word for “ ‘Be still!’ ” *pephimōso*, carries the sense of “muzzled.” It occurs in the second person singular, as though Jesus were addressing a personal being. Its unusual perfect passive imperative form indicates that the condition shall persist, that is, “Be still, and stay still.”⁸
 - b. **Why it matters → Jesus is Lord even of creation.**
 - i. They are not wrong to be afraid. → They are chastised by Jesus because of whom they turn to... themselves.
 1. Remember, they are in peril and they know it. Understanding the situation and feeling overwhelmed, scared, nervous, or anxious is not a sin and is not presented as the problem here. The problem, is that they accuse Jesus of being unconcerned and it has been in their own strength to navigate the issue.
 2. The rudeness of Mark’s wording reflects the way frustrated and desperate people speak (cf. Luke 10:40) and is probably a verbatim reminiscence of the disciples’ response in the crisis.⁹

⁵ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 156–157.

⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 148.

⁷ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 149.

⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 150.

⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 149.

- ii. **As creator, he offers me not just an option, but a whole new life.**
 - 1. I.e., Only the creator can truly recreate.
- iii. We need to pause here and reflect on our own lives:
 - 1. In what way or ways or solutions am I trying to “recreate” myself?
 - a. What do I use as a fix for the storms and insecurities and fears of my world?
 - 2. How am I leaning in on my own strength for my life or to deal with my fear, worries, anxieties, and fears?
 - 3. What would it look like to lean into Jesus a little more in these areas?
 - a. This is not a call to be above those things, it is to have a different approach when they come up.

3. Legion (5:1-20)

- a. What happens – Let’s look at the context.
 - i. **Long “under treatment” –**
 - 1. Don’t forget the situation - The point for our purposes is clear: it wasn’t Jewish land, and the people weren’t Jews. Why, if they had been, would they have been keeping pigs? Everyone knew the Jews regarded them as unclean. That’s the first thing to get straight.¹⁰
 - 2. **The man who rushes out to meet Jesus is about as unclean as you could get.**¹¹
 - 3. **He has been long under treatment** – He lived among the tombs and was bound by heavy chain. This jumps out as cruel to our modern senses, and it is. However, we need to understand that this wasn’t the first option in cases like this. This was the final option after all other options had been exhausted. We are not told about all the efforts that had previously been attempted. Again, Mark assumes the reader is well aware of the implied contextual details.
 - ii. **No one had the strength to subdue him –**
 - 1. The evil forces that torment the man among the tombs equal and parallel the violent tempest that beset the boat on the lake (4:37).¹²
 - 2. Again → It was in the failure of all human methods that Jesus acted decisively. The medical treatment given to this man was that commonly still used in many parts of the world today: he was loaded with chains, in a vain attempt to curb his inner turmoil by outward restraint.¹³
 - a. Jesus’ ability causes the herdsman to misunderstand him and ask him to leave! (vv. 14-17)
 - iii. **Jesus casts out the “legion” –**
 - 1. Yes, Jesus’ power is on display, but so is his mercy. (v.19)
 - a. If the swineherds were supplying the Roman legions with pork, then the raising of unclean food for the detested Roman occupation was doubly offensive. Thus Jesus meets a man with an unclean spirit living among

¹⁰ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 55.

¹¹ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 55.

¹² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 155.

¹³ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 158.

unclean tombs surrounded by people employed in unclean occupations, all in unclean Gentile territory.¹⁴

- b. 'Tell them how much the *Lord* has done for you,' " commands Jesus. The man then went out and told "how much *Jesus* had done for him." For this man, the Lord and Jesus are one and the same. In the Gospel of Mark, the healed demoniac becomes the first missionary-preacher sent out by Jesus. Remarkably, he is a Gentile sent to Gentiles.¹⁵

b. Why it matters → Jesus is Lord over the spiritual forces of darkness.

- i. There is nothing that can overcome the power of Christ.
 1. **What is in my life that I treat as if it is too much, too strong, too complex for Jesus to speak into and over it?**
 2. Rom. 8 → Paul writes of the power of love that we experience in Christ. In fact, his love is so complete so powerful that nothing can separate us from it or him.
 - a. ³¹**What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.** ¹⁶
 3. If Jesus is willing to extend mercy over this unclean Gerasene man, why do I live as if Christ is unwilling to extend mercy over me? → I.e., Do I live as if God's mercy couldn't apply to me?

4. Two more healings. (5:21-43)

- a. What happens – Let's look at the context.
 - i. We have come off the calming of the storm and the healing of the demonic, and now we Mark gives us two more healings. These next two miracles continue with the theme of human despair and helplessness meeting with the power of God in Jesus.¹⁷
 - ii. **Jesus and the disciples have left the Gentile area, crossed the sea again, and are back in the predominantly Jewish area.**
 - iii. Both stories are of females healed by the touch of Jesus; both are called "**daughter**" by Jesus; and the woman's illness and the girl's age are both given as twelve years. In both

¹⁴ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 155.

¹⁵ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 160.

¹⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:31–39.

¹⁷ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 163.

stories Jesus is met by rebukes (vv. 31, 40), and both stories bring Jesus into contact with uncleanness (the menstrual hemorrhage of the woman and the corpse of the child). **The aspect of uncleanness connects the present sandwich narrative with the previous story (5:1–20). All three characters in Mark 5 transfer their uncleanness to Jesus, and to each Jesus bestows the cleansing wholeness of God.** Mark 5 might be called the “St. Jude chapter” (the saint of hopeless causes), for the Gerasene demoniac, the menstruating woman, and Jairus **each find hope in Jesus when all human hopes are exhausted.**¹⁸

iv. **Jairus** – One of the rulers of the local synagogue. (v.22)

1. *Jairus by name*: there is no conceivable reason for the name to appear here in Mark, unless because it was firmly embedded in the tradition. It therefore shows the conservative way in which Mark handled his sources.¹⁹
 - a. The ruler of the synagogue, accordingly, was not a worship leader or a professionally trained scribe or rabbi but a lay member of a synagogue who was entrusted by the elders of the community with general oversight of the synagogue and orthodoxy of teaching.²⁰

v. **A woman with a bleeding disorder** –

1. In v. 29 Mark describes her condition as a *mastix*, a graphic expression meaning “whip, lash, scourge, or torment” (see Acts 22:24; Heb 11:36). The term combines physical suffering and shame, hence something akin to punishment. In a dramatic volley of Greek participles, v. 26 graphs the woman’s condition precipitously: *having* a blood flow, *having suffered* from many doctors, *having exhausted* all her wealth, *having not improved* but *having gotten worse*.²¹
2. She operates in bold and remarkable faith, but not blind faith. If we go back to 3:10 we see people touching the hem of Jesus’ robe and being healed.

vi. **Jairus’ “sleeping” daughter** –

1. Jesus was indeed starting a revolution, and he was indeed bringing God’s healing power, but his aim went deeper; these things were signs of the real revolution, the real healing, that God was to accomplish through his death and resurrection. Signposts are important, but they aren’t the destination.²²
2. Why does he forbid them from sharing about what happened? → Likely the pressure is mounting, and Jesus doesn’t want them to be discredited nor for the crowds to misunderstand who he is. We’ll see that happen soon enough with another raising, that of Lazarus. Then we will have the events of the passion week.

b. **Why it matters → Jesus is Lord over sickness and death itself.**

- i. The things that confound humanity do not confound God.
 1. I.e., I can walk in confidence in the face of uncertainty.

¹⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 160–161.

¹⁹ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 163.

²⁰ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 161.

²¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 163.

²² Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 64.

- ii. **I can have confidence not just because of Jesus' power but because of his compassion and mercy.**
 - 1. **"So Jesus went with him."** In that simple statement, which recalls the equally simple description of Jesus' purpose in 1:38 ("This is why I have come"), Mark testifies to Jesus' commitment to minister to human need and to the inestimable worth of the human individual for Jesus.²³
 - 2. Discipleship is not simply getting our needs met; it is being in the presence of Jesus, being known by him, and following him.²⁴
- iii. **Question to consider: Am I willing to approach Jesus because I've encountered his mercy and compassion?**
 - 1. Jairus and the woman had confidence not just in his ability but in his character too.

²³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 162.

²⁴ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 165.