

The Powerful & Weak Jesus

DAVE BAST

Superman was invulnerable, except to kryptonite of course. President Franklin Roosevelt, who rescued our nation from the great depression and led us through World War II, spent much of his life on crutches or in a wheelchair. Well, Jesus displayed mighty acts of power in his ministry, but he also accepted the frailty of the human condition. We are quick to identify Jesus with power, strength, and might; but we struggle in wrapping our heads around the idea that Jesus could be weak and vulnerable. Today on *Groundwork*, we take a look at the Jesus we do not know, who lived with the tension of weakness and power at the same time. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

REGGIE SMITH

And I am Reggie Smith.

DAVE BAST

We are talking in this series of programs about the Jesus we never knew, and specifically, the different, contrasting pairs of qualities about him. You know, he could be compassionate, but he could be hard; he could be loving, but he also hated some things; he knew so much – almost omniscient like God, but also he confessed he was ignorant of things; and of course, everything that we know about Jesus came from his first followers. Jesus did not write an autobiography. He did not leave any memoirs; and who better than Peter to really tell us the inside story – the eyewitness account of the life of Jesus?

REGGIE SMITH

That is right. Peter was the one who is mentioned first in all of the Gospels as the disciple whom Jesus really kind of gelled with; and Peter was one who learned these stories. All these down-to-earth, ordinary stories of how Jesus is trying to illuminate – to show – what he is all about and what the kingdom is all about.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. Peter not only reported the stories Jesus told, he himself told the stories of Jesus' actions. How he healed a sick man who was lowered down through the roof by four of his friends, and how he walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee, and how he fed five thousand people once with just a few loaves and a couple of fish. You just get the sense when you read, especially Mark... You know, Mark is interesting among the four Gospels because it has the least amount of Jesus' teaching. It does not have the Sermon on the Mount, that is in Matthew. It does not have these long discourses about the bread of life and all that; those are in John. Mark is action focused and action oriented, and it has parables and it has miracles and stories, and you get this sense that they really do come from an eyewitness – somebody who saw them – somebody who was there.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right...

DAVE BAST

And that is not Mark himself.

REGGIE SMITH

That is not Mark himself; that comes from Peter. It could be almost an action picture, if you will, that Peter is probably rapidly telling these stories or that Mark can get them down on paper – or papyri; also to show us that Jesus is showing us through ordinary stories to kind of pull us into the full drama of the Gospel of what God came for in the first place, and that is to tell us the story of God is given to you in the life and in the body and in the stories of Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes. You know, one of the favorite words in Mark's Gospel, especially in the first chapter, is the word *immediately*. Read Mark 1 and 2 sometime and mark down how many times the word immediately happens; because it will say: Jesus did this, this, and this, and *immediately*... and then you go on to the next scene; and Jesus said, this, this and this, and then *immediately*... And then you go on to the next.

I have sometimes urged people if they are not familiar with the New Testament, where do you start? And occasionally you will have somebody say: Well, they should start with the Gospel of John. I don't think so. John is pretty deep.

REGGIE SMITH

Yes.

DAVE BAST

That is the deep end of the pool; the shallow end of the pool is the Gospel of Mark. If you have a person with not much familiarity to the Gospel story, start with Mark because that is it; that is Peter's eyewitness recollection of all of the things that Jesus said and did – the essential things.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right. Mark gives us the short version of what God is all about in Jesus Christ, and I love that you bring up the whole thing about *immediately*; it is almost like a commercial break between each scene: And immediately Jesus goes and does this, and immediately Jesus goes and does that; and Peter is just enraptured as Mark is telling this, so that we can kind of get a scene-by-scene, action part by action part, of walking with Jesus through actual life, hearing these stories and telling these stories.

DAVE BAST

Well, one of the things that we have learned from our study of the Jesus we never knew, or we thought we knew, or maybe we forgot about knowing, is how fully human he is; and also at the same time how truly divine he is – the human and the divine, and the tension of needing to hold those together. It is easy to kind of go all to one side or all to the other, but the Gospels present him as both those things...

REGGIE SMITH

Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

And there is a wonderful story here in Mark's Gospel that I think perfectly illustrates both sides of Jesus' nature – the strength but also the weakness – the Superman side but also the vulnerable – at times weary and in need of help and support side of Jesus' life.

Next on *Groundwork*, we are going to be looking at that story – at that passage from Mark.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Along with Reggie Smith, I am Dave Bast.

REGGIE SMITH

As a pastor, I get bombarded with so many opportunities just to be busy; whether that is appointments, counseling sessions, meetings, and I have a Day-Timer that is just full of stuff; but in a sense that Jesus points out that he is also busy, too. He is busy teaching; he is busy healing; he is busy doing all these things because he is bombarded by all the crowds; and he also points out something very differently, and we are going to look at that starting verse 35, and Dave will read that for us.

DAVE BAST

That is right; Mark 4, beginning at verse 35. Just before this, there is a whole chapter full of parables; so Jesus has been teaching; he has been kind of emptying himself for the sake of the crowd. The crowds are thronging around him. You can just imagine what the reaction must have been with all these people with their physical needs, with their spiritual needs, and here comes this great healer, this great physician, in their midst; and so, he spent all day now giving of himself; and he is just – he is worn out.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right.

DAVE BAST

So, we pick up the story at verse 35:

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let’s go over to the other side.” (He is talking about the Sea of Galilee.) ³⁶Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along just as he was in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷A furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” ³⁹He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet; be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. ⁴⁰He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” ⁴¹They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.”

REGGIE SMITH

What a remarkable story. First of all, that Jesus begins this whole thing by following the advice of the disciples. He goes with them, and we get the sense that Jesus does not fight them, he submits to them. He takes an opportunity and says: Yes, I am going to do what you guys say as they take him to the other side of the lake – and this is an important thing here – he allows them to take care of him. I mean, I think that is something that is very important of how we allow other people to take care of us. If Jesus did it, why not us?

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is a beautiful thing, really. We often think of Jesus and we see Jesus in action taking care of the disciples – kind of helping them, bailing them out, protecting them; but this is one instance where he sort of surrenders himself. I mean, who is more vulnerable than a sleeping man?

REGGIE SMITH

Amen.

DAVE BAST

Anything can happen to him, and it is like he is completely spent and they say to him: Hey, come on, Rabbi. You need to take a break. Come on, we will take you back home across the lake, and you just relax and lie down; and he falls asleep like a little child in the stern on a cushion.

REGGIE SMITH

On a cushion.

DAVE BAST

I like that touch, too. I don't know where they got the cushion from in a fishing boat, but there it is.

REGGIE SMITH

There it is; and there we find Jesus sleeping, and then a huge storm comes. Squalls can come at any time in the Sea of Galilee. The hills are high and the winds can come down, and here we find this storm comes out of nowhere, but here are these same guys who know the seas very well. They are good at it. They have done this a million times; but this time...

DAVE BAST

Yes, they are professional fishermen.

REGGIE SMITH

They are professional fishermen...

DAVE BAST

Don't forget that. This is like you and me walking around the block at our house.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right.

DAVE BAST

That is how well they knew it.

REGGIE SMITH

And so, the boat begins to shake and it rattles and it rolls and then all of a sudden, the winds and the rain come down. Now they are very frightened. You have the water up above and the water below. What is going to happen? They are freaking out.

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, it must have been some storm if it even rattled them, because they had to have been in many a storm on those same waters. It was their livelihood, and presumably they knew how to handle the boat pretty well – they are rowing or sailing or whatever – but they are terrified, and there is something about the storm that makes them panic; and so they turn to Jesus, who by the way, is sleeping through this.

REGGIE SMITH

Yes, he is.

DAVE BAST

What do you make of that?

REGGIE SMITH

Jesus decides to calm and to sleep even when everything is going wrong, and notice the disciples. They are all anxious; they are all fearful. Things are falling apart, but are they trusting the one who is trusting what is going on right now? Are they trusting the one who is in the boat? And they kind of miss that, but Jesus at this point is not trying to do anything to fool people. He is not trying to do anything to throw one out. He is just trusting God for what he is doing and taking the provisions that are right before him.

DAVE BAST

He is a wonderful example here of the calm confidence that can come from faith in God. Jesus was completely trusting his whole life. He had committed his life to God and he never wavered in that even to the very end on the cross. There is a wonderful verse in the psalms, in Psalm 3:5 that says: I lie down and sleep. I wake again because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear, though tens of thousands assail me on every side.

Jesus is demonstrating that here in the boat. He is trusting in God, and that enables him even to sleep in the midst of a storm. I think there is a little symbolism going on here, don't you, Reggie?

REGGIE SMITH

That is right, that is right. The symbolism is that Jesus is calm, not only on the inside even when everything else is falling apart; and I think about even in my own life when I want to focus on the storms, I want to focus on all those things that are just bombarding me, and I miss the picture of this Jesus who was sleeping, who was trusting, and why don't I trust him when all these storms in my own life, and I am sure that for even your life, Dave, that takes us away, takes our focus off of the one who trusts everything, including our own lives.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I also can identify with the disciples here because they turn to Jesus and they kind of shake him awake, and I love their question. I mean, love – I am speaking sarcastically. “Don't you care?” they say to him. “Don't you care that we are going to die here?” How often don't we take that attitude? I mean, we forget that Jesus is with us – he is in the boat with us – and as long as he is in the boat, the boat is not going to go down; not in any ultimate sense; but we are quick to accuse him of not caring when trouble hits us, and I know I do that. It is just a constant temptation.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right; and I have run into people oftentimes in my own church who want to be saved from the storms. The crisis is save me now as opposed to Jesus has never left them; Jesus has never abandoned them. He says: I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. And that should give us a kind of complete confidence and calmness that even for the disciples, as all of this is going around us, the storm, the waves, that they have a calm Jesus who is there. Trust him, trust him as the one who will not allow the boat to go down, but who will do exactly what he said he would do.

DAVE BAST

He kind of gets in their face a little bit – sort of rebukes them, but he does something even more amazing than that once they finally get him up and awaken him. Here is this beautiful picture of Jesus the true man; he is weak with our weariness; he shares our nature; he needs his rest; he is sleeping; he is kind of trusting the disciples to get him home safely; he is certainly trusting his heavenly Father; and then something happens that just blows that humanity away and it is like he drops the curtain on his divine nature; and that is what we are going to look at with *Groundwork* in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

This is *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast, and today I am joined by Reggie Smith, and we are looking at the characteristics of the Jesus we never knew. In today's program, we are considering the strange contrast between Jesus' human weakness on the one hand, as we saw him asleep in the boat after a long, busy day of ministry; and his divine power, which is revealed when the storm strikes and the disciples panic and they grab Jesus and shake him awake and accuse him of not caring about them; and Jesus gets up, and then what happens?

REGGIE SMITH

Dave, I am reminded of firemen who... Firemen run towards fires, and the rest of us run away from fires; and that is what we want from Jesus. We want him to come in as the fireman and put the fire out and to do what he needs to do. As the disciples are saying, “Don't you care?” And then Jesus gets up and he says, “Quiet, be still,” and the waves go away and the wind dies down and the rain stops, and Jesus shows his divine side. Here are those two sides, divine and human, all operating at the same time. Jesus is both. He can do the divine and he can do the human.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is really interesting when you look at the details of this miracle, and then compare it to the other miracles in the Gospels, because in many of those other instances, Jesus prays before he does anything. He calls on the Father, like when he fed five thousand people, you know, and says that he took bread and broke and he gave thanks for it, and then he began to give it out and five thousand... Or when Lazarus died and he approached the tomb.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right, and Lazarus comes out after Jesus prays; and here is the first instance where Jesus does not pray – he just makes things happen.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. It is like he drops the curtain, or opens the curtain, maybe; and there are just a few instances in the Gospels where that happens, and we are given a glimpse of what is really, truly there; and this is certainly one of them. I mean, who in their right mind tries to command the wind and the waves? Get serious, you know?

Actually, there is a great story from history about an early English king, and his courtiers were flattering him and saying all manner of things about him: Oh, you are the greatest king; you are so wonderful; you are so amazing; and he said to them: Okay, if I am so amazing, here, pick up my throne and carry me. They were down by the sea. So he sits on his throne and he gets a bunch of them to pick it up. They carry it in and he says: Set me down here on the edge – just in the water; and the tide was coming in. So he sits on his throne as the tide is coming in and he says: I command you to stop – stop! Stop coming in, tide. And he sits there and the water starts rising higher and higher; and of course, it was an object lesson. He knew very well; he was just a man. A human being cannot command the forces of nature. So he is giving a little lesson to these flatterers, you know. It is a great...

REGGIE SMITH

It is a great story.

DAVE BAST

A great counter-story, yes, to what Jesus does. If Jesus were just a man, they would put him in the nuthouse for standing up and pulling a stunt like that.

You know that old hymn: Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side. The wind and waves still know his voice who spoke to them while he dwelt below.

REGGIE SMITH

And to think that Jesus is the one who stops the natural world – who commands the natural world to obey – and we miss that that he can even do that in our own lives; that he can be the one who calms our storms, calms our fears; that he is the one who can command things to stop at a moment's notice, but at the same time we allow those fears to take over our lives, the storm pushes us away from Jesus. It pushes us in the corners where we really do not want to be, and we find ourselves isolated and we say: Jesus, don't you care? Don't you care? And he has always been there. He has always been there; but we fail to recognize who he really is and how he really chooses to deal with the storms in our own lives.

DAVE BAST

Yes; well, one of the great things – this whole story is great – and almost every line of it, every sentence that is spoken is worth paying attention to and thinking about, and I especially like the way it ends because – here is the last verse; I will just read it again:

⁴¹The disciples were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.” So, point number one: They were more scared after the storm was calmed down than they were during the storm when it was hitting them.

REGGIE SMITH

That's right.

DAVE BAST

It was a different kind of fear. They had physical terror when they thought they were going to drown, but they had a kind of spiritual awe that crept over them when their eyes were opened to the reality of Jesus' power.

REGGIE SMITH

They really saw him for who he really was, and they began to see him with new eyes and with fresh vision, that this is a man who is greater than what we ever thought, and we don't have him quite all figured out; and I think for the disciples... I imagine when Jesus went through all of that, there had to be an incredible amount of silence as Jesus is commanding the natural world to obey, and now they have questions about who really is this guy? Who does this kind of stuff?

DAVE BAST

Yes, talk about the Jesus we never knew, this is the ultimate right here. Just when we think we have it all down – maybe we have our doctrine straight or we have got him figured out or we can explain him in human terms or maybe in theological terms, whatever; something happens; somehow he breaks through and we are faced with the same question.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right.

DAVE BAST

Who is this? Who is this man that even he does this? He does this sort of thing? And frankly, I think maybe that is the point of this story, for us to ask ourselves: Who is this?

REGGIE SMITH

Yes, and what we make of that he enters into our lives and we have to look at him from a fresh angle – a new perspective – and we can never say as long as we live our lives that we have Jesus pretty much figured out because Jesus will not stay in our box; He will not stay in our canon. We will not have him completely pigeon-holed, and I think that is a good thing.

DAVE BAST

Yes, the skeptic reads a story like this and they just say: It is a fantasy; it is a myth; it is not true; but we come back to where we started here. Peter is giving a pretty faithful account. I frankly do not think he is making things up. I think he is an eyewitness, and if you examine the Gospels closely, it is very difficult to dismiss them just as a legend or a fantasy or a myth. We keep coming back: Who is this Jesus who says and does these things, who has such an impact on the people who knew him best. You know, I know what my answer is to the question, who is this man? I believe he is and remains the eternal Son of God; true man and true God; who came for us and for our salvation; that he is the one who is still with us.

The early Church – you know, one of the symbols they used for the Church was the boat – the ship, and Christ in it with us; and as long as he is, I think we will be okay.

REGGIE SMITH

I think we will be okay. I think it is for all of us to come back to the point: Is Jesus our only savior or are we looking for a Plan B or C or D; and if we can embrace that Jesus is our only savior, then we are brought back to square one that he is the man which we will never figure out, but thanks be to God, he is the one who saves us.

DAVE BAST

I think, too, not only our only savior, but is he enough? Is it enough for you that he is with you, or do you need an extra compartment or two in your boat for houses and lands and possessions and money and a retirement account and...

REGGIE SMITH

Amen!

DAVE BAST

And all the rest; or is it enough to say he is with me; he is here. That is all I need for time and for eternity.

REGGIE SMITH

Amen, amen.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation today, and do not forget, it is listeners like you who will keep our topics relevant to your life. So let us know what you think. Give us some feedback on what you are hearing and maybe suggest a topic or a passage you would like to hear us talk about on a future *Groundwork* program. You can visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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