

"45 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. 46 After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray. 47 When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. 48 Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He *came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. 49 But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and *said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." 51 Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, 52 for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. 53 When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. 54 When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, 55 and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. 56 Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured." Mark 6:45-56, NAS95.

In this text we see Jesus portrayed again as the Lord of nature (see Mt. 14:22-33). When everyone had gone and Jesus had packed the disciples on to a boat to return to Bethsaida he climbed the hill for a time of prayer alone. He had fed the crowds as Moses had fed Israel in the wilderness with manna. Would they now be in danger of following him purely in hope of food, as before they had done purely in hope of healing? (see Jn. 6:26). Jesus' prayer was interrupted by his concern for his disciples. From the hill he could see the boat far below on the lake, making no headway because of the wind. So, at dead of night, he went to them, walking on the lake. It is impossible to think of this as meaning that he walked along the shore or along a sandbank, as some have interpreted it. The disciples, being fishermen knew their lake well, and they would not have been terrified by that. There are no difficulties with Jesus walking on the water if we remember that he was Son of God. In the OT God controlled the raging waters, and here his Son was doing the same.

We do not know why Jesus was about to pass by them but they did cry out in terror. But even this cry of fear was enough to bring Jesus on to the boat, from where he calmed the wind. They had forgotten the miracle of multiplying the loaves; they had forgotten that he had calmed one storm already. Their reaction was to be completely amazed because they did not understand, even though the powers of the kingdom of

On landing the boat, Jesus was met by a crowd of people bringing the sick to him for healing. Their faith was like that of the woman suffering from bleeding; they only asked to touch the edge of his cloak, for they knew and believed that he could heal them.

A SAVIOR IN THE STORM

Have you ever gotten a pop quiz? It is the sudden, unexpected test which takes you by surprise. It isn't like the final exam for which you spend the previous night cramming. There is no warning. You walk into class and the teacher says, "Take out a sheet of paper because you are going to be tested."

The disciples are about to get a pop quiz. They have just been through an incredible day. After sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing Him teach the multitude, they watched Him feed over 5,000 people, Today maybe it would have been with five bagels and two sardines.

This was not an illusion. This wasn't done with mirrors. There was no trick photography involved. They felt the loaves of bread with their own hands as they passed them out to the multitude. And then they picked up twelve bags full of leftovers. What next? What might the disciples have expected Jesus to do? Jesus followed this up by sending them away.

THE SAVIOR WHO SENDS

And immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the multitude away. 46 And after bidding them farewell, He departed to the mountain to pray. (Mark 6:45-46).

I want you to notice how this story starts. Jesus told His disciples to do something and they did it. They were doing what Jesus told them to do in the right place and at the right time and they still found themselves in the middle of a storm.

And it is so that the storms of life can come upon, in simple obedience to Jesus.

Some might think, "Lord, what did I do to deserve this?" It may be that you have done nothing wrong. It is possible to be completely obedient to the Lord and to still find yourself in the middle of a storm.

Difficult providences are part of life. And sometimes they happen even though you have done nothing wrong. Sometimes they occur simply so that you draw nearer to Him. The disciples had only just come from the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee that very morning. Now they are being sent back. No explanation is given. But as a result of their obedience, they will have an unexpected encounter with the Lord.

THE SAVIOR WHO COMES

And when it was evening, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and He was alone on the land. And seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea (Mark 6:47-48a).

As we read this passage, it is familiar to us. The thing of which you ought to be aware is that it was familiar to the disciples, too. Back in Mark 4:37 they had been in the same boat on the same lake in a similar storm. They had come to this same spot on the lake and the boat had begun to sink. They woke up Jesus who had been sleeping in the back of the boat and He had stilled the storm.

Now they are here again. We don't know what anyone thought but I could imagine someone saying, "I know what to do! We'll wake up Jesus and He can turn the storm off! Someone answers answers, "Uhh, we have a bit of trouble. We left Jesus back on the shore. And to make matters worse, John's gospel tells us that they had taken the only boat.

What do you do when you are alone in the midst of the storm? You know that Jesus is aware of what you are going through. But look as you might, you can't see Him.

The passage seems to indicate that, although Jesus could see His disciples from His vantage point where He had gone to pray, they could not see Him. This situation continued until the fourth watch of the night.

I believe that there was something in the boat that should have comforted the

power and the compassion of God. When they looked at those 12 baskets, they should have realized that the God who provided for the needs of the multitudes would not fail to provide for them in the midst of this storm.

We are guilty of the same thing. We have been blessed by the Lord in an abundant way, but when the storm comes, we forget. That is why we are instructed to remind one another. The world says, "Drink and forget your troubles." Jesus says, "Drink and remember."

This storm was no accident. It started when the disciples got out into the middle of the Sea. It ended when Jesus got into the boat with the disciples. It was meant to be. It was there for a purpose and when that purpose was accomplished, the storm stopped.

Storms are not very pleasant. They can be frightening. They are loud and wet and uncomfortable. But your storm is not an accident of nature. God has ordained your storm. It is His storm. He has a reason for it, even if you do not know what that reason is. And when that reason has been fulfilled, then your storm will end.

Now I want to ask you a question. Why did Jesus come walking on the water? It is more than that He merely wanted to get to the other side. It is to teach the disciples something. But what is it?

It is not to teach the disciples how to walk on water. They never learn to walk on water after this and most people running around today claiming to be able to perform miracles have problems with this one.

Jesus walks on water to prove to the disciples that He can. He can always do the impossible. Why do they need to know this? It is a pretty good illustration of what He will require of them in the future. He is going to send them out to do the impossible.

He is going to commission these very ordinary men to go out and make disciples of all men in every land. Impossible! They are not natural born leaders. They are not even

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seminary graduates. But they will accomplish the impossible. With God, all things are possible.

Why do you need to know this? Because God has called you to do the impossible. He has called you to leave a clean life in a dirty world. He has called you to be a faithful witness of Him. He has called you to be Christ to the world. And He has shown you that this is possible because He is with you.

THE SAVIOR WHO IS RECOGNIZED

And seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them.

But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were frightened. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid."
And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, 52 for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. (Mark 6:48-52).

The Jews divided the night into three watches. The Romans divided it into four watches.

First Watch 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Second Watch 9:00 p.m. to midnight

Third Watch Midnight to 3:00 a.m.

Fourth Watch 3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.

The fact that Jesus came to them in the fourth watch means the disciples rowed against the storm all night. And right when it seemed as though things could get no worse, they did. Or at least, they seemed to.

Notice something - The disciples had been straining at the oars all night. Evidently, they had been fighting the storm all night. But as bad as the storm was, the boat remained afloat in the storm throughout the entire night. There is a lesson here. It is that things

A man was walking along a railroad track on a very dark night when he came to a bridge. He had gotten halfway across when he heard a train whistle up ahead. He quickened his pace, but soon could see the light of the oncoming locomotive approaching. With nowhere else to turn, he got down and lowered himself over the side, hanging onto the trestle as the train thundered past above him. However, after the train had passed, he found that he hadn't the strength to pull himself back up. He called out for help, but there was no answer. He hung there all night, terrified that he might slip and fall into the yawning abyss below. As day broke, he looked down to see a drop of only six inches.

We are like that man. We look at our situation and it looks really bad. If we could only see it from God's perspective, it would be nothing at all.

Someone once said, "Jesus said that with faith we could move mountains. But the reverse is also true. Without faith, we tend to build our own mountains."

When the disciples finally did see Jesus, they did not recognize Him. I don't know what they were expecting. I don't know what they were expecting. But I do know that they were NOT expecting to see Jesus walking on the water. They knew that people cannot walk on water and they knew that Jesus was a person and they reasoned that this could not be Jesus. And since Jesus came in a way that they did not expect, they almost missed seeing the answer to their prayers. Unless we look and listen closely, we risk the same thing.

Jesus must have felt the same way with the disciples.

They saw Him in the middle of the storm and they called Him a ghost. They saw the glow but did not recognize God. They saw the light but missed the Lord. When we see small lights on the horizon of our storms, we often have the same reaction

Because we look for the bonfire, we miss the candle. Because we expect the shout, we miss the whisper. But God often comes in the still, small voice. And the next time you

Apparently, the wind had driven the disciples far to the south of their original destination, Bethsaida.

Instead, they land in the Gennesaret which was a fertile plain running along the western shore of the Galilee, just a few miles to the north of largest city in the area, Tiberius. At the time of Jesus, the area was densely populated. We immediately get a sense of how wide-spread Jesus' popularity had become. As Mark puts it in verses 53-54,

“when they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus.”

No one was expecting Jesus to arrive, and yet his arrival generated an instantaneous response. Once the people recognized that Jesus had come to their area, Mark describes the reaction in verses 55 and 56.

“They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.”

Here again we see the horrible effects of human sinfulness which is indicative of our fallen race. People who were sick and who suffered with no relief correctly saw in Jesus their only hope of being delivered.

And so they flock to him. Who can blame them? And yet they cannot see beyond their own immediate circumstances to the bigger picture. Jesus did not come to heal all manner of diseases—although in his

grace and mercy, he healed countless people in the Gennesaret region. Jesus came to deal with the underlying cause of all human sickness and suffering, and that is the fact that ours is a fallen race and that our sin leaves us under the curse of death. We also see that Jesus' fame was now so great that everywhere he went, people had anticipated his arrival and had brought their sick and infirm loved ones so that Jesus might heal them. We read that all who touched Jesus were indeed healed.

But as many commentators have pointed out, while the people see Jesus as a

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healer/miracle worker/exorcist and seek to touch him, they do so because they think that magically they will be healed.

Jesus is not preaching the Gospel here. It would not have mattered who the attractions were, if he was able to relieve the suffering of the people.

The underlying theme throughout this transitional phase of Mark's Gospel is the question as to Jesus' true identity. Those who see that God is working in and through the ministry of Jesus are struggling to figure out how Jesus relates to the key figures in Israel's history. Such people identify Jesus with John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets.

Then we have the disciples. Jesus has called them out of this larger group and is slowly but surely

revealing to them detailed information about just who, exactly, he is. They, in turn, will teach the others.

The disciples have already witnessed Jesus forgive sins, raise the dead, calm a storm, cast out demons, feeding five thousand in the wilderness. And then when Jesus comes to rescue them on the sea, they think he is a ghost. They do not recognize their own master. Mark tells us that this because their hearts were still hardened and that they did not understand what the feast in the wilderness was all about. It is not until Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ in Mark 8, that the disciples are said to begin to truly grasp the significance of Jesus' person and work.

And then there are the crowds. There are those who are seeing the Messiah only in worldly terms and want to make Jesus their king and thrash the Romans.

Finally, we have the citizens of the Gennesaret. Like the people around Capernaum, they don't care much about Jesus' true identity. They just want to be healed and delivered from their suffering. These people are pitiful and while we can understand their plight and feel compassion for them, and not neglect those like them today, they miss the whole point of why Jesus has come. They are consumers and seekers. These

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are the same people who will turn on Jesus just as soon as he fails to give them what they want.

How similar this is today with many we try to reach, through compassion to preach the Gospel. When Jesus doesn't meet the felt need the way they want it, they are through with him.

The point is simply this. Mark is telling us that we must take Jesus as we find him in the New Testament.

Jesus is not someone who we accept as Savior, but not Lord. Jesus is not someone we can control or adopt as our mascot because he supports our cause or our politics.

While we repeatedly see his amazing compassion, the Jesus of Mark's Gospel is not the "Jesus meek and mild" of so much of Christian literature. Jesus is not interested in pleasing the multitudes or meeting the felt needs of seekers—he's about his Father's business. Jesus has no time for the religious people—the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, who see themselves as better than others, all the while unable and unwilling to see their own sins. He eats with tax-collectors and sinners. The Jesus we find in the gospels simultaneously confronts us in our sins and then delivers us from the guilt of them—if we repent and believe.