



Speaker:
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Jesus Comes to us

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 21 of 21

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Our reading today is taken from Mark's gospel. We're in chapter six, starting at verse 45.

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Last week, we left the story at the big event that saw Jesus feed around ten thousand people with only a few bits of food. Today, we see Jesus tell the people to go home. It's getting dark, and he has their welfare in mind.

There's another reason for Jesus wanting the crowds to disperse. In a different account, we're told the people decide Jesus should lead them. Remember: the common Jewish expectation of the coming Messiah was he'd lead them in the overthrow of the occupiers. Jesus didn't look like a great leader outwardly, but the great miracles he performed had an effect on the people. And they were so intent on setting him up as their leader, they'd force him into the position if need be.

The Jewish addiction to interpreting scriptures literally was the reason they had a mistaken idea of Messiah's role. He was the deliverer of Israel all right—but not in the way they expected. He wasn't here to deliver Israel from Roman occupation, but to deliver them from sin and the consequences of it.

Today, I intend to pick up this picture of Jesus coming to his disciples. We use the language of “going to” God in prayer. In rebuking the Jews, Jesus declares they refused to COME to him and receive life. Now if you think about it, we don't go *anywhere*. When we approach God in prayer, we don't move. Our interaction with God is represented as us approaching him as a man would approach the seat of a ruler to make his petitions.

Likewise, we can say when the scriptures speak of God “coming” to help us, we understand God doesn't move. His coming to us *describes how he communicates his loving mercy to us* each day. So I think it's very reasonable to use this account of Jesus coming to the disciples on the sea to speak to us about how Jesus daily cares for us. Jesus came to the disciples, and Jesus comes to us.

I have five points for you to consider today. Here's the first:

Jesus Christ comes to us as a prayerful mediator

He's a person who takes prayer seriously. He prayed all the time. He made time for prayer, no matter how busy he was. And we see from the Bible he took special care to set aside time for **solitary** prayer. Here, he goes up a mountain to pray. And it's so important to him, he not only sends away the crowd but even his own disciples.

And he prays.

- Perhaps he prayed for the crowd. They misunderstood the purpose of the Messiah. Many came to Jesus only to be healed physically. And of those who witnessed his miracles, or even partook in them, many would not go on to accept him as Lord and saviour.
- And perhaps he prayed for the disciples too. The twelve would be privileged beyond measure in witnessing more miracles than any individuals in human history. Yet still their hearts were to a degree *hardened*. Man is born with a heart of stone, and seeing all the miracles in the world won't change that. It takes a Holy Spirit work to change their heart of stone into a heart that's softened and sensitive to the movements of the Holy Spirit. So maybe he prayer for the disciples' faith.
- And perhaps he prayed for himself. He leant on his Father continually. In this, he sets us an example. He went to the Father not only to thank and praise him, but also to draw on him for help.

He prays. And he comes to his disciples on the sea having *just* prayed. You who are his disciples today should be encouraged to know Jesus comes to you, and he does so having just left his own place of prayer.

(Romans 8:34) "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God. **And he's devoted himself to the care of all those he died for.** So he uses his position to *plead* for us. And having secured our daily blessings, he comes to us daily and gives us of all these good things. From the mountain of Gods throne, he condescends in love to come and bless us.

Here's our second point:

Jesus Christ comes to us in the midst of our trials

We shouldn't think bad things happen to Christians because God's punishing them. Whenever you meet with difficulty or despair, know it's ultimately of God. And the purpose of your trial is ALWAYS for your benefit.

And so it was with the disciples. They were even in the will of God. They had a specific instruction from Jesus Christ himself, and immediately obeyed. He said, *Get in the boat, and go over there.* And they did.

Now this weather wasn't anywhere near as bad as that time they were caught in the terrible storm Jesus calmed. But it was hard going. They had to resort to hard rowing, but even then they weren't getting very far. Eventually, they'd have grown tired and been unable to fight against the wind anymore. They'd have drifted miles to somewhere they didn't want to be. Somewhere other than where Jesus wanted them to be. And this was in the early hours of the morning, so it would also have been dark.

But their frustration was to turn into something quite terrifying. There, in the middle of the sea, miles from land, **they see a figure out on the water.** This isn't someone swimming. THIS FIGURE IS WALKING ON THE TOP OF THE WATER.

We're so used to this story we'll never be able to appreciate how terrifying it must have been. If we were to ever see such a thing, we'd at least have the benefit of knowing this has been done before! And although the disciples had seen Jesus do many unbelievable things, this was something completely different. Jesus was held above the water by divine power.

They go into a frenzy of fear. The strange form is illuminated only by the light of the moon, and it scares them so much they scream! They were scared to death!

All God's people experience such negative emotions. They're sometimes dejected. Sometimes fearful. Sometimes even *terrified*. But there's no trouble so bad that Jesus would not come to the rescue. (1 Peter 1:7) "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Christian: *you're* in a boat. A boat of *God's design*. Through his word, God has given you directions. And he promises it WON'T be plain sailing! Obedience to God involves struggle. You know the direction you want to take in your Christian walk, but you find you make little progress. Waves of trouble from the world drive you back. The wind of opposition from Satan hinders you. And the weakness of your own flesh makes your progress even harder. But Jesus will not leave you. He will come to you.

This leads onto our third point:

Jesus Christ comes to us, with words of comfort, to deliver us

The disciples' terror didn't last long. Jesus quickly calms them with words of reassurance. *Don't be scared,* he says. *It's only me. So be happy!*

Jesus approached the boat and climbed on board. And we shouldn't pass over the detail that the wind immediately died down. In one moment, he brings them words of comfort to end their terror *and* removes the obstacle to their progress.

The calming of this wind was perhaps not such a surprise to them. Seeing their master control the elements wasn't something they were unfamiliar with now. But it was nonetheless appreciated greatly. They could now get to their destination. They could now make progress.

I can't help wondering whether Jesus grabbed an oar and started rowing himself or just navigated. But that's irrelevant. Jesus had come to them! So they enjoyed the incredible comfort of knowing Jesus was in the boat with them.

Last week, when we were looking at the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, we paused to consider a tiny detail of the *green grass*. You remember I quoted from that wonderful 23rd Psalm. And had I read a little further, we'd have come across this gem in verse four: (Psalms 23:4) "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

There are many bad things that can happen to us. We could experience family troubles. We could feel opposition from the world. We could be made low by an awareness of our sinfulness. But there's one evil we can never come back from. One no one can rescue us from. And that is **death itself**. And if, through accident or ill health, you've had to come face-to-face with your own mortality, it truly can be like walking in a valley, a low place. And the nearness of death casts a shadow over you like a storm cloud. And remember: death is unnatural! We're not talking about what happens after death. After all, for the Christian, there's the promise that Jesus himself will raise us up at the last day so we can live forever with him.

But dying? No wonder Job described it as the "king of terrors". Dying may be inevitable, and for us it's part of a process that'll lead to our eternal glory. But we shouldn't forget that death came because of sin. It's a **curse**. And it's quite natural for people to recoil from it.

But let's learn from the Psalmist. Such was his faith that he could face death without fear. And this, most surely, is to be the aim of all God's children. In the wisdom of God, we must spend a season in this sinful state and then experienced death. Brothers and sisters: if you've ever worried about the prospect of dying, as most have, take heart from this Psalm. The fear of our demise is a powerful emotion, but Jesus can *and will* come to you with words of comfort. From him, we can receive assurance that **our entire lives, and even the manner in which we leave this world, are all in the sovereign purpose of God**. No matter how distressing or chaotic your experiences of life and death are, God is in them all. As one of the Divine comforters, Jesus comes to us throughout our lives and even in our final moments. Pray to God about this, and experience the comfort of Jesus as he continually comes to you in love.

Here's my fourth point:

Jesus Christ comes to us in ways that are often unexpected

It's a curious detail in our text which says Jesus was going to go *past* their boat. It seems he wasn't initially walking towards them at all! I've heard people claim Jesus had other plans. And, you know, he just happened to be spotted by the disciples and had to change those plans. But I find it difficult to believe Jesus would've walked about *four miles* on the water to the middle of the sea in order to take a shortcut somewhere! I believe it was always his intention to be spotted so he could then come to the disciples' aid.

But this doesn't alter the fact of what the text says. At first, he didn't seem to be aiming for the boat. It got me wondering about the roundabout way Jesus often comes to us. Just think of some of the ways God responds to our prayers:

- Sometimes, he *delays* his answer. Psalms 40:1 says, "I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry." God nowhere tells us to expect an immediate response from him to our prayers. Like the Psalmist, we need to pray with *patience*. Like the prophet, we need to pray, then go and wait for the answer. And if the answer doesn't come, we pray again and wait again. And if our desire is a right one, we should be prepared to pray and watch and pray and watch and pray and watch....**indefinitely**. Unless your request is faulty, God will answer. Through all this, God teaches us patience.
- Sometimes, God's answer is *different from what we expected*. You see, it's as if God responds to our request by saying, *I know you want **that**, but what you really need is **this***. Consider the Apostle Paul. He was dogged by some issue, and it doesn't matter much whether it was a physical health issue or one of mental health. It doesn't matter whether it was a corrupting influence from without or carnal lusts from within. **He wanted it gone**. Let's read how God responded. (2 Corinthians 12:7-9) "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness'. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Paul's prayer **was answered**, even if it wasn't in the manner he expected. And through Paul's experience of prayer, we with him are taught about the sufficiency of God's grace.
- Sometimes, God's answer to our prayer *exceeds what we asked for*. We can find, when we ask for one thing, he gives us that **plus** something else. Do you remember what Solomon asked for? It was a bit like the Middle Eastern myths of the genie granting three wishes, except this offer came from the King of Kings. And I'm sure there'd be many a Christian who would've answered differently.

What would you do? Who knows? You might just ask for a few million pounds, a new car, a new house, but also a nice new church building. What an opportunity Solomon had! Yet he threw away the chance of wealth and glory, asking instead for heavenly wisdom. It's a choice the world could never understand. And what does God do? He gives Solomon what he wants...then adds a ton more stuff on top! Those things low down on Solomon's list, like riches and honour, he gets *as well as* wisdom.

If I'd written down every time God exceeded my petitions, I could probably write a book. A situation comes up. There's no way to fix it. I go to God and beg him to do something. I usually don't know what I want him to do. *Just to fix it.* Whether it's a few minutes later or a few days later, the answer comes powerfully. And the change I wanted goes further than I could have expected. And I marvel at God's generosity and love. Jesus comes to us with the gift boxes of answers to prayer, and he often comes laden down with extra gifts.

He's my final point:

Jesus Comes to us despite our hardness of heart

Even redeemed men and women suffer from hardness of heart.

- We don't have such faith in praying that we can move mountains
- We keep much of our sin hidden from others, not caring that God sees our very thoughts
- We have so little care for the lost that we could list our evangelistic efforts on a scrap of paper

But I don't think it's unfair of us to be surprised at the hardness we see in the hearts of the disciples. It's great to read about Jesus's miracles, but it would've been better if we could've seen them for ourselves! These men HAD seen incredible things before this day, so you'd think nothing could shock them now.

But they were amazed. And they didn't know what this was. They all saw him, it says. Presumably, there was enough moonlight to enable them to identify Jesus. But in their extreme fear—due to their hardness of heart—they thought it was some kind of demon. A ghost perhaps.

Superstition was rife among the Jews. They were so convinced that scary demons came out at night, many would refuse to greet people after the sun had gone down in case they were saying "hello" to an evil demon!

After all they'd seen, a proper reaction would be something like this: *Look everyone, it's Jesus. He's walking on the top of the water!* I don't know about screaming; they should have been cheering! Instead, their first thought was this was some evil entity, something they had no reason to believe could even exist.

But before we shake our heads in disbelief at the faults of others, we should bring to mind that useful principle: we probably commit the same sin, albeit in different ways. And concerning this sign of superstition:

- We may think we're not superstitious because we don't believe in ghosts, but we might think there's something special about our church building—that it's a holy place.
- We may not touch wood for good luck, but we might believe if we don't pray one morning bad luck will follow us all day.
- And we may not take astrology seriously, but we might never throw away uselessly-tatty old Bibles because we think it'd be an insult to God.

Despite the stupidity of the disciples, Jesus didn't refrain from coming to them. To comfort them. To deliver them from their difficulties. And why does he come to his children and not others? After all, the disciples shared the superstitions of the Pharisees. The difference is **they had faith**. They had genuine faith in their Lord. It may have been very small, which means we have something in common with them! But it was real. And this small faith in the heart of God's people is the very mark of God, just as unbelief in a man's heart is nothing less than the mark of the beast.

And friends, **this is why Jesus will come to us**: because we have faith in him. He comes to us:

- Despite our lack of faith
- Despite our lack of fervency in prayer
- Despite our lack of excitement at his word
- And despite our lack of determination to resist sin

He comes to us still. And he has all power to grant things above and beyond what we can even imagine. Job's testimony, that God treads on the waves of the sea, may have been portrayed quite vividly by Jesus walking on the water, but it means far more than that. God has absolute power over all this world. He creates and destroys entire civilizations. And this all-powerful Lord of Lords comes to us. We should believe there's nothing he cannot do!

2 Timothy 1:12 says, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Jesus *perseveres* with us. The one who is truly leaning on Jesus Christ has no cause to fear the loss of salvation. He will, of course, wholeheartedly repent of sins he's committed. But no sooner has his repentance left his lips than the remembrance of Christ's precious promises comes to his mind. Promises like, *I will never leave you nor forsake you*; and *None shall pluck them from my hand*.

So Christian: approach Jesus in prayer. Pray often. Pray earnestly. Don't give up on your holy petitions. Reach out to him in prayer, having faith that if you could just touch the hem of his garment, as it were, he would bless you.

COME TO US, LORD JESUS CHRIST!

COME TO US FROM THE MOUNTAIN OF GOD,
BEARING THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID.

COME TO US DAY BY DAY AS OUR WONDERFUL HELPER.

AND QUICKLY, LORD, COME TO US FINALLY
TO BRING AN END TO THIS EVIL WORLD.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Amen.