

Message #21

Mark 6:45-52

We come now to the second miracle that Jesus Christ performs for His disciples while on the Sea of Galilee. This one is a like no other. We may recall that His first miracle at sea was that He spoke to a horrible storm and the storm obeyed Him (Mark 4:35-41). After He did that, the disciples said, “Who is this”? Well this miracle at sea clearly shows them who He is.

Several years ago we ran advertisement in the Kalamazoo Gazette. For about two to three years, we had a message we communicated to people in every Saturday paper. We did that until they stopped delivering the Saturday paper. We had people actually contact us saying they looked forward to seeing that every Saturday.

Well one of the ads that we took out went something like this: “In order for someone to actually walk on water, He would have to reverse the laws of physics and in order to do that He would have to be God. When Jesus Christ walked on water, it proves He is God.” Well I came into the office that particular Saturday afternoon and the phone rang and there was some irate man who had read this and he was going ballistic. He yelled Jesus was not God; he was a teacher, he was a prophet. Obviously our little newspaper ad hit him hard. Well when he got done spouting off, I said answer me one question: can any normal human walk on water? Have you ever known of any teacher or prophet who could walk on top of water? He was dead silent. I said to him the reason you are so upset is because you know it is true, Jesus is God.

That is what this passage is designed to show His own disciples:

JESUS CHRIST LITERALLY WALKED ON WATER IN THE SEA OF GALILEE TO PROVE TO HIS OWN HARD-HEARTED DISCIPLES THAT HE WAS GOD.

In Job 9, Job lists some things that only God can do. Only God can move mountains (9:5). Only God can cause earthquakes (9:6). Only God can cause sunny and cloudy days (9:7). And Job said only God can tread on the seas (Job 9:8). His point was only God can control the seas and walk on top of its waves. So if some man can actually walk on top of water, that man is not a normal man; He is the God/man.

Now **verse 45** begins with the adverb “immediately.” This puts the disciples in very close proximity to the previous miracle of feeding the thousands of people with five loaves and two fish. You would think by now these disciples would be rock solid in their faith; but the truth is they are still struggling. **Verse 52** says, “they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.” These apostles have no clue that Jesus Christ is the God/man. They still have not figured that out. So we come to another miraculous demonstration of Christ that He makes to His disciples.

Now there are eight historical facts we want to carefully observe:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Jesus made His disciples get in a boat to go to the other side to Bethsaida. **6:45**

Immediately after the miracle of feeding the people, Jesus directs all the action. He “made” His disciples get into a boat to head west toward Bethsaida and ultimately on to Capernaum (John 6:16). They were on the east side of Bethsaida, Bethsaida Julius. There was an eastern side and a western side.

The adverb “immediately” indicates the urgency of the moment and when you add this to a strong verb “made” it is clear that Jesus is forcing this action. Apparently these disciples did not want to get in the boat, so He made them. He is forcing these disciples to get in the boat, which will force them to go out into the water. **Actually Jesus is going to send them out into a storm so He can display to them who He is and His great Divine power.**

In John’s parallel account we learn that the people were intending to make Jesus King by force (John 6:15). Apparently these thousands of people were ready to declare Him to be their King and Messiah. They loved the fact that they had a leader who could make food appear and could provide everything they needed. The problem with this is that they were not admitting their sin and the need of righteousness that only He could give them by dying on that cross. **Jesus did not come the first time to kill and destroy enemies, but to die and save sinners. The next time He comes it will be to kill and destroy enemies.**

This political action of a revolution that would make Him King now, would thwart the entire plan of God and Jesus sensed the danger of it. This crowd of thousands was ready to make Him their physical King, but not their spiritual Savior. So He knew that He and His disciples needed to get out of there. He sent them toward Bethsaida.

Now if we combine the data we get in John 6 and Matthew 14, we believe that the disciples get in the boat and head west toward Bethsaida; but contrary winds and waves caused them to decide to go on to Capernaum, but they couldn’t go forward and the wind and waves were taking them out in the middle of the sea. They don’t end up near Bethsaida, they don’t end up near Capernaum; they end up in Gennesaret.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – Jesus sends the crowd away and went into the mountain to pray. **6:46**

Jesus Himself sent the crowds away. He bid farewell to His followers and sent them home. He Himself went up into the mountain to pray.

Jesus needed time alone. We can certainly understand why. Pharisees want to kill Him; Herod wants to kill Him; Scribes want to kill Him and other leaders from Jerusalem want to kill Him. His own disciples don’t believe in Him. It is no wonder He needed to spend some time alone with God in prayer.

We don't know what specifically He was praying about. He would have been justified praying for His dumb disciples, who don't seem to have much sense. We may assume contextually that part of this intimate communication between God the Son and God the Father was about the whole plan and will of God. Keep in mind the crowds were willing to make Him King without having to go to the cross and I am certain this was one key topic He was talking over with His Father.

There is a lesson for us to learn here. Even when wonderful things have happened, we need to keep praying. We are only safe and strong when we are praying.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – In the evening the boat was out in the middle of the sea. **6:47**

Now the entire group of apostles is in this boat. His whole kingdom team is out in this boat and the boat was nowhere near where it was supposed to be. The boat was supposed to follow the shoreline around Bethsaida, but that is not where it was.

The disciples were all in the boat out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and Jesus is alone up on a mountain praying. Now the middle of the sea is about 3 to 3 ½ miles from the shore. The Apostle John specifically says they were 3-4 miles out in the sea (John 6:19).

So these disciples are not close to shore. They are out in the sea quite a great distance. They are certainly beyond swimming distance. Now the reason they are out in this sea is because they were obeying the Word of God. This storm situation had been caused by doing what Jesus told them to do and because they had been willing to do what Jesus told them to do, they were about to see God do something miraculous.

Now apparently this storm was not as life-threatening as the previous storm, but it was dominating their world and it was making progress impossible. They were struggling in the middle of the sea and getting nowhere. Now the first time they were out in a storm Jesus was in the boat and they doubted His power. This time Jesus is not in the boat and when He comes to them they doubt His presence.

Sometimes when you are doing what God wants you to do, you will find yourself out in the middle of a storm, seemingly going nowhere. There doesn't seem to be much forward progress. But when we find ourselves in the middle of a storm like that, we are ripe to see God do some amazing things.

It has been wisely observed that if you never do certain things you won't experience any hardship. If you never climb a mountain, you will never sweat, gasp for breath or stumble. But you will also never stand on top of a mountain to see and experience the glory of God. If you never play football, you will never get tackled or injured, but you will also never score a touchdown. If you never play baseball, you will never strike out, but you will also never hit a home run. If you never witness for Christ, you will never be ridiculed or challenged, but you will also never see someone come to Christ through your witness.

If you never go into a storm, you will never be afraid, but you will also never see Jesus Christ deliver you.

Sometimes we must go into the storm to experience the elation of victory after the storm. That is what these disciples were learning.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – Jesus sees His disciples rowing in the middle of the sea getting nowhere, so He walks on water out to them. **6:48**

This is happening in the fourth watch of the night which would place this from 3 AM to 6 AM. The Romans had four watches: **Watch #1**- 6-9 PM; **Watch #2**- 9-12 AM; **Watch #3**- 12-3 AM; **Watch #4**- 3-6 AM. This occurred in the fourth watch, in the wee hours of the morning. They are out in the middle of the sea and were straining and accomplishing nothing and Jesus saw it all.

There are two great principles to see here:

- 1) Jesus does actually see us when we are straining in difficult times and storms.
- 2) We cannot accomplish anything unless He is with us and helps us.

Here is a great theological lesson to learn about salvation and about sanctification. Our works cannot save us. Human effort cannot save us. We can struggle and work and be as active as we can be and still not be saved. Only Jesus Christ can save us.

Well Jesus saw them and decided to leave the mountain and go for a walk out on top of the water to where the boat was. The participle “walking” is the normal word for walk. The Greek reads he was “walking upon the Sea.” The preposition “upon” (epi) would suggest He is walking on top of the sea. **Now only God can walk or tread on the waves of the sea (Job 9:8).**

Since the wind is blowing, the waves are obviously surging and what I understand the Greek to mean is that Jesus is walking on top of the water in a normal way, like you and I would walk on a sidewalk. The wind and waves are not affecting His walk one bit. I am not even sure His feet are wet.

The text says that “he intended to pass them by.” Now that phrase means at least two things:

- 1) He wanted to walk by the boat so they could all see it was Him. He wanted to reassure them.
- 2) He wanted to pass by them to show them that the presence of God was with them in their struggle.

That phraseology of “passing by” was used in the O.T. when God “passed by” Moses (Ex. 33:19, 22), showing him that He was with him. It was also used of Elijah to reassure him that He was with him (I Kings 19:11-12). **By passing by, Jesus wanted to show His disciples that He is God and He is with them.**

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – Jesus’ disciples respond to seeing Jesus walking on water.

6:49-50a

Now we will certainly admit if we were out in the middle of a storm and we saw a man walking on top of the water beside our boat, it would be a little unnerving.

However, let us remember that these disciples have been traveling well over a year with Jesus Christ so you would think they would have some clue as to who this might be. But that is not how they responded. You know Jesus must have got a real kick out of these guys. Some of their responses to Him, if they weren’t so sad, would be funny. When they saw Jesus there, they responded in three ways:

Response #1 - They thought they were seeing a ghost. **6:49a**

The word “ghost” is interesting. It is the Greek word *phantasma* which means some apparition that becomes visible. They thought they were seeing some phantom spirit-being (G. Abbott Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 466). They thought they were seeing some fantasy spirit-being. What is crazy about this is that they had never seen such a thing in their lifetime, so instead of saying this must be Jesus they make up something that is almost like science fiction.

Response #2 - They started screaming. **6:49b**

The word “cry out” means they started yelling and screaming and shouting (*Ibid.*, p. 31). So these guys think they are seeing a ghost and just start yelling and shouting.

Response #3 - They were terrified. **6:50a**

The word means they were very troubled and dismayed. This was unnerving to them (*Ibid.*, p. 440). Their faith is obviously not strengthened; what we have here is a boatload of emotional wrecks.

HISTORICAL FACT #6 – Jesus speaks to His disciples. **6:50b**

This to me is pure grace. Probably most of us would have been tempted to say I’ll just keep walking and go find some other guys to be my disciples. But these were His choices and He was not about to give up on them. This is so encouraging for us. This is so good for us to know. Now Jesus gives three messages to His disciples:

Message #1 - Take Courage.

The word here means to cheer up and be of good courage (*Ibid.*, pp. 202-203). God wants His people courageous about their relationship with Him.

Message #2 - It is I.

Now this statement in Greek is part of the “I AM” formula that was used in Exodus 3:14. **Jesus is identifying Himself as being the “I AM” God.**

Message #3 - Do not be afraid.

The word for fear here is the word from which we get our English word phobia. Jesus is telling these disciples stop being such a bunch of phobics.

HISTORICAL FACT #7 – Jesus gets into the boat with the disciples. **6:51a**

When Jesus got into the boat with the disciples, “the wind stopped.” This is the second time Jesus has done a miracle with a storm, while they were in a boat (Mark 4:35-41).

HISTORICAL FACT #8 – The disciples respond to Jesus Christ. **6:51b-52**

This is an amazing miracle, but as amazing as it was, it did not produce faith. Many people say, “If I could just see some miracle, I would believe.” Well these disciples did see one. In fact, these disciples saw many miracles. They saw Jesus speak to a storm; raise a dead girl, cast out demons and provide a meal for 15,000-20,000 people and they did not believe. There are three responses:

Response #1 - The disciples were astonished. **6:51b**

Response #2 - The disciples had not gained any insight. **6:52a**

Response #3 - The disciples had hardened hearts. **6:52b**

It is interesting to me that Mark, who was such a close friend of Peter, doesn't add the part about Peter getting out and walking on water, too. Matthew tells that part of this in his account (Matt. 14:28-31). It may be that Peter did not want to draw attention to himself in this story.

Mark did not add this, probably due to Peter's request; but the truth is the entire group had hearts that were not right with God.

Also John says the moment Jesus got in that boat, they were immediately at the shore (John 6:21). The disciples did not have to row anymore.

God only permits those who are faithful to Him to see special things. They had obeyed Him and they found themselves in the middle of a storm and even though their faith was a disaster, they still saw Jesus take care of them.

Jesus Christ is God and He has the power to calm down the storms. I think there is a prophetic picture of what Jesus Christ will do for the church. We are living in the storm of this world and one day Jesus will come in the sky and He will transport us to His heaven. The One who walked on water will rapture His church.