

In our study today we will see three themes. The first theme is the voyage. The disciples go through a difficult time. Their difficulty was a nighttime upwind voyage. We can all relate to that, since we go through difficult times also.

The second theme is our Savior – specifically His power, seen in 2 supernatural actions a) walking on water b) causing the wind to stop. The One who was able to still the waves on other occasions, was also able to make the waves a path for His own feet on this occasion. Furthermore, the One who was able to walk on water, is also able to cause the wind to stop, when He got into the boat with the disciples. The Savior is also gentle with the disciples, which encourages us that He is also gentle with us.

A third theme is discovering the condition of the hearts of the disciples. The disciples were not understanding and comprehending the lessons of Jesus, and specifically the lesson of the previous passage – the miraculous loaves of bread that fed the 5,000. Up until now, in Mark’s Gospel, it was always the crowds who did not understand. Here in Mark 6: 52, for the first time in Mark’s Gospel, we are told that it was the disciples who “*did not understand.*” The disciples stood in need of learning to trust Jesus through difficulties. So do we.

To summarize it all in one sentence, is the main point of this sermon: **This voyage of the disciples is a picture of the church, also called to brave our storms by trusting Jesus.**

First, let’s understand the scene. Back in verse 31, Mark told us that the disciples had been so busy with ministry that they did not even have time to eat. The disciples were in need of rest. Jesus provided for them a time of rest, and food would be next. However, the private time of rest for the disciples with Jesus, that had started in Mark 6:32 was interrupted by the crowd, then the teaching of Jesus to the spiritually-hungry crowd, followed by the need to physically feed the 5,000 men (which could have been as many as 15,000 or even 20,000 people). That miracle of loaves being multiplied, and that collection of leftover pieces of food was completed. Now, Jesus had fed the disciples, but the time of rest was still needed, and could now be pursued again. The disciples needed rest, and time with Jesus.

This brings us to the first point.

1. Our voyage.

Our first verse for today. Verse 45, “*Immediately, Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while [Jesus] dismissed the crowd.*”

Immediately is a favorite word for Mark. Jesus seems intent on getting that rest for His disciples. Jesus made them go. Jesus stayed behind and dismissed the crowd in verse 45, and in verse 46, went up on the mountain to pray. Then, verse 47, “*when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and [Jesus] was alone on the land.*”

Let’s consider the lateness of the hour. The previous miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 had begun in the late afternoon hours. The crowds were hungry for supper, remember? Twice we were told back in verse 35, that the hour was late. Since then, considerable time had elapsed while they organized the crowd into groups, they fed the crowd, they collecting of the remaining food pieces, the disciples to board the boat, and for Jesus to dismiss the crowd and climb the mountain. So, when we read in our verse 47, “*And when evening came...*” this was a time well later than we think of with the word evening. This lateness is confirmed by Mark’s phrase in verse 48, “*the fourth watch of the night.*” The nighttime was split up into shifts for nighttime guards, and the fourth watch was the last watch of the night before the dawn. Today we operate by hours of the clock, so we would say it was between 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. This is further confirmed by two mentions of seeing, verse 48, Jesus saw the disciples and verse 49, the disciples saw Jesus. For anyone to see anyone, the pre-dawn light had already allowed some faint visibility. This is further confirmed by the rowing of the boat. However strong the opposing wind, it would not take 10 hours to cross the northern part of the lake of Galilee.

The disciples’ situation was not presented as life-threatening, as in the other occasion of a storm while in the boat in Mark 4:37, but rather the situation this night is presented as painstaking rowing, laborious effort, and difficulty in making progress in the voyage. It was not danger, but rather extreme physical effort causing discomfort. One way to translate the word painfully is the word torment. Sort of how I feel during a very vigorous exercise on the stairmaster, like I am being tormented with pain, or in this case the disciples would be on a rowing machine. But theirs is a real life rowing situation. For those who have experienced rowing a heavy boat against a strong wind, this rings true. You are not going to die, but it hurts and so emotionally it feels like you are going to die.

In verse 48, it is fascinating that Mark did not describe the storm. Instead, Mark only let us know that the storm was there. Rather than describing what effect the wind had on the boat, Mark gave description of what effect the wind had on the disciples. This is presented to us as a battle against discouragement. Can you relate to that voyage? What Mark described was not the storm, but rather the

darkness that fits with the discouragement. Mark told us of about the time of night - and therefore we know that they are operating in the dark. Mark also described the place – the original Greek words tell us that they are literally “in the middle of the sea.”

2. Our Savior.

Importantly, Mark has informed us of the absence of Jesus. However, equally importantly, this was only the geographic absence of Jesus. Jesus was engaged in prayer alone on the land, and more specifically, up on the mountain. As Mark paints a picture for us, Mark wants us to keep these two items together. A) Christ’s prayer, including prayer for the disciples and B) the disciples facing difficulty and discomfort. The result of Jesus knowing the disciples were in need, and Jesus being in prayer, is that Jesus would be praying for the disciples to be spared and to be strengthened by the trial, so that they can better fulfill their mission. For all of our discouragements troubles and distresses in this world, for every crisis of heart that we face, we can remember this scene, and be comforted.

In verse 48, since Mark specifically mentioned that Jesus coming to the disciples followed Jesus seeing their difficulties, and that Jesus walking the water seemed to have a destination of the disciples, when we see the phrase, “*He came to them,*” it is surprising to us to read that Jesus “*meant to pass by them*” or that Jesus intended to walk past them. It is best to read this from the perspective of the disciples. Rather than us knowing what was in the mind of Jesus, it makes sense that Mark, who was not a reporter interviewing disciples later, but was himself one of the disciples in the boat, is stating what this mysterious figure seemed at first to be doing – walking past the boat.

Mark is showing us the power differential. That Jesus could walk faster than their boat, so it seemed that Jesus would walk right past the boat. That with all the muscle power of the disciples as unified team, and with some very experienced fishermen included, all rowing vigorously, Jesus seemed to be making better headway by walking on the water! The disciples did not have the supernatural option of walking ON the water, for they were limited to rowing the boat through the water. The boat was ‘out on the sea’ as verse 47 revealed, and that phrase can be translated, in the middle of the sea. Jesus had walked quite a distance on the water, in order to arrive at the boat and then join the disciples in the boat.

In verse 49, Mark tells us that the response of the disciples to Jesus walking is that they thought it was a ghost. Not a ghost of Jesus, for they had no reason to think Jesus was dead. Rather, they had not yet recognized that this was Jesus at all, so

they thought the physically impossible action of a living person walking on the water could better be explained if it were a ghost.

Verse 50 says they ALL saw. They all saw Jesus. Not just Mark or a few of them. And the response from all was the same as the response would be to anyone who thought that they had seen a ghost – they were all terrified. And Jesus did not delay in speaking to soothe them of their terror by assuring them of His true identity, which is of course Jesus in human body, alive and well. As soon as Jesus convinced them that it was He, the theory about the ghost ends. The fear and terror also ended. In addition, Jesus commanded them to have courage, and Jesus told them not to be afraid.

3. Our hearts.

In verse 51, with the disciples now calmed down, Jesus got into the boat. This scene tells us about the hearts of the disciples, with lessons for our own hearts. Without us being told that Jesus issued any command to the wind, the wind suddenly ceased, coinciding with the action of Jesus to get into the boat with the disciples. In response to that, the disciples, who were no longer afraid, now were filled with a different mindset and a new emotion, “*they were utterly astounded.*” They were amazed at the 2 supernatural actions of Jesus. 1) to walk from land to the boat on top of the choppy water and 2) to stop the wind from blowing anymore. So, we have a whole new situation. They were no longer laboring at rowing. They were no longer in an uncomfortable situation on the boat, a situation in which Jesus had placed them, in a boat crossing the water in a wind storm. The wind was no longer keeping them from getting to their destination easily. They were no longer without Jesus in their boat. And they had now witnessed 2 more miracles.

In chapter 6, we are told how the disciples had just experienced a roller-coaster of emotion from being so busy in ministry that they did not have time to eat, to grief in burying the body of John the Baptist, to being told by Jesus that they would have time to rest, with Jesus in a secluded area, to being disappointed that crowds followed them, to enjoying a long set of teaching from Jesus, to getting concerned for a hungry crowd with no food, to the miracle of the loaves and fish, to eating until they were full, to collecting more food at the end than they had at the beginning, to being whisked away and commanded to get in the boat. Then working hard at rowing, followed by a sighting of a supposed ghost causing a fear that made them cry out in terror, to amazement at their own rabbi displaying power over gravity that allowed him to walk on the water, and power over the strong force of the wind, that He caused the wind to cease. This brought the disciples to a whole new situation that has been related to us in just a few sentences. What a day,

for the disciples! That day is now concluded. In fact, it is a new day, the dawn is literally dawning.

So, with only one verse left in our passage, what will Mark focus on as the lesson from all of this? A later calm and reflective Mark, looking back at that event with the advantage of time and perspective, here wrote an important statement in verse 52. Mark realized that as the sun was rising, they were still not understanding about the loaves from yesterday. With this statement, Mark showed us that the disciples could not keep up with the events, the miracles, and the lessons of their rabbi. They were still not fully processing what had happened in the previous miracle of Jesus. The loaves refers to the feeding of the 5,000 men with loaves of bread and also feeding them with fish. When we say we had chicken for supper, we mean we had chicken, rice, and bread. When Mark wrote “the loaves” he meant that the disciples did not understand about the loaves and the fish. The miracle of Jesus to multiply the loaves and to multiply the fish. A full meal.

What was the extent of the spiritual perception of the disciples of Jesus that day? Amazement or fear has been a common for the crowds in the Gospel of Mark, responding to the ministry of Jesus. Here Mark took the utter astonishment of the disciples as an indication of their lack of understanding. But there was more. Mark also observed, as he wrote these words of Scripture being carried along by the Spirit of Christ, that the hearts of the disciples were hardened. This has an ominous ring to it, as we hear an echo from Isaiah 6:10, “*Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*” And we hear the echo of hard-heartedness in our current study of the book of Jeremiah!

What our author Mark was observing was that by this time, the crowds who ate the miracle loaves, and certainly the disciples who also ate, but then saw Jesus walk on water, and stop the wind, should have proceeded beyond the stage of instinctive astonishment. They should have arrived at a place of understanding who Jesus is. What had prevented them from understanding who Jesus is? Hard-heartedness. Not a ghost, but the Son of God. Not just a miracle-worker, but the Messiah. Not Elijah not John the Baptist, not John the Baptist risen from the dead, not just a very special rabbi, but the Bread of Heaven, the Great Physician, and the Creator, Sustainer, and Rebuker of the wind and the water.

But Jesus had not given up on them, just because they had hard hearts. In particular, it is the loaves, the whole preceding miracle story, which should have caused the disciples to arrive at a new understanding of Jesus. Later, in Mark

chapter 8:14-21, Jesus Himself would specifically rebuke the disciples for failing to understand bread, and specifically failing to understand the feeding of the 5,000, and the other occasion, the feeding of the 4,000. Something supernatural must be true of Jesus, for there was more food left at the end, than there was at the beginning. Perhaps the feeding stories should have special evidential value, because the disciples themselves got to actually eat some of the bread. What more evidence should the disciples need?

Mark is preparing us for a changing and less flattering perception of the disciples in the coming chapters of Mark's Gospel.

Mark is also preparing us for Jesus to take his own nighttime voyage to the cross, and that voyage for Jesus would be fatal. However, fitting with His power, Jesus was able to conquer death in His resurrection. In that way, we are promised His presence and safe passage to our final harbor of heaven.

Conclusion:

1. Our voyage is the same, so expect it.

Like the disciples, we are tossed back and forth by storms, and we do not have the visible presence of Jesus with us. Like the disciples, we will see Our Lord one day, and it may be a time of storm and difficulty when He arrives. Like the disciples, all of our problems on our journey will be changed for the better when He arrives. One day, we will no longer experience storms. One day, there will be a great calm.

2. Our Savior is the same, so look to Him.

a. Christ Jesus sees us in our predicament. Whatever our circumstances, He sees us. Whether we are alone in quarantine, or together with others. Whether we are suffering in sickness or we have a strong health. Whether we are in danger at sea, or safely on land. Whether we are facing problems in the cities of our country, or in the rural areas. Whether our problems are natural disasters or governmental failures, or in the workplace or school or home. The same eye that saw the disciples, sees us. We are never beyond the reach of His care.

b. Christ will provide for us according to His own wisdom. He may not answer when we would like Him to answer, but He will never let us utterly fail. He who walked on the water never changes. He will always come at the right time to uphold us. So, in your discomforts and in your many fears, when Jesus is not yet coming to the rescue and you are scared at 3 a.m., wait patiently. Jesus will not forsake us. But we go a little deeper. The disciples were exactly where Jesus wanted them to be. Jesus purposefully removed them from the crowds of people, and Jesus purposefully sent them into trouble in the boat on the water. They were

in the right place, and yet they were dealing with a nighttime upwind voyage. Jesus may send us into troubles and difficulties, but always with a redemptive purpose. Jesus has power. Jesus governs all things by providence. His plans for us are not always easy. His plans for us are not always what we want. But his plans for us are always best.

c. Jesus prays for us. With Jesus as our Shepherd, we have no cause for alarm. But with Jesus as our intercessor, we can be comforted. There are lessons for us here. Anytime that Jesus Himself faced a crisis, He prayed for Himself. And anytime others faced a crisis, Jesus prayed for them. We are comforted that Jesus prays for us, and as we want to become like Christ, we will take on a habit of praying for others in their spiritual battles. John Piper says, “Until you believe that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for.” Ephesians 6:18, “...*praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.*”

d. Jesus has power and uses that power to bring us through our problems. Jesus uses that power to guide us through fear, and through ignorance and through hard-heartedness. Jesus does not give up on us. Jesus did not rebuke the disciples, but rather showed His power by walking on the water, and showed His tender compassion by gently telling them not to be afraid.

3. *Our hearts are the same, so repent and trust in Christ.* We have terrified hearts and hardened hearts. The same verb “terrified” or “troubled” is also found in the scene when the disciples were in the upper Room, and Jesus was giving us the gift of The Lord’s Supper. What should be done about our fears? In John 14:1, Jesus said, “*Let not Your hearts be troubled. Continue to trust in God; and continue to trust also in Me.*” Jesus soothed us and consoled us in our fears. We must stop being alarmed. We must remove fear from our hearts, and which makes room for joy in our hearts. We should take courage. The difficulty has our focus and attention. When Jesus breaks in, our hearts are surprised. That surprise gives way to tremendously glad surprise and delight.

What was the reason for the hysterical alarm of the disciples, when they thought that they saw a ghost, and what was the reason for their delighted amazement a moment later? Hard hearts. Same as us. Hard hearts are hearts that do not understand. If they had understood the significance of the miraculous feeding of the 5,000, they would have known that Christ can bend the material universe. Not only could Christ multiply the loaves of bread, a product of the soil’s

wheat, but Christ could also change the currents of the air and the billows of the sea. What was missing was the understanding in the hearts of the disciples.

Our hearts are the place where our faith impacts our feelings. Listen to Paul support this truth in Ephesians 1:17-18, where Paul was praying *“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of [Christ], having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you...”* or again Paul wrote over in 1 Corinthians 2:12, *“...we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God...”*

The lesson of our study today is the paramount importance of our hearts. Proverbs 4:23, *“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from [your heart] flow the springs of life.”*

When we read that the disciples’ *‘...hearts were hardened...’* it means that they had an inability to draw the necessary conclusions from the miracles of Jesus. This was the result of their sinful neglect to ponder and meditate on these marvelous works, and what it means about the nature of the One who performed these miracles.

Their hearts failed to ask themselves what could be expected from such a divine being as Jesus? The disciples’ hearts were not hardened like the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees were hardened. The Pharisees had an attitude of unbelief and even hatred. NO, the disciples believed, and the disciples loved Jesus. But the disciples hearts were hardened because they had small faith. They had a little faith. They had not yet worked out all the implications for their lives of the type of Savior that they had. His love would not result in them being harmed in the boat. That is not going to be the end of the story. Jesus’ power would not be limited.

Jesus would not only have the power to forecast the weather, and therefore, ask them not to get in the boat at that time, because of knowing about the storm. Jesus would be able to instantly change the weather.

Jesus would not only have the power to forecast the coronavirus, and therefore, prevent the world from descending into a pandemic, because of knowing the future. Jesus would be able to instantly change the condition of any person, and of the health of the world. Jesus would be able to use the virus, and all of the resulting situations in relationships, economics, government, commerce, medicine, and education, to work His perfect purposes.

The issue is our hearts. Our hearts need to be sufficiently wide awake to draw legitimate conclusions about having a Savior who can walk upon the top of

the water and still the wind. Paul wrote in Romans 8:31, “*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He 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?*” The question is, do we take this to heart?