

## Jason Upchurch - Mark 6:45-56 - The Good News that Jesus is God

This morning as we look to the Lord Jesus Christ, we come to one of the most memorable miracles of his earthly ministry: the walking on the water. I feel like every week I start my sermon with “this is an amazing passage of Scripture” but in some ways it’s almost like every chapter gets better than the last - if I can say that without impugning the fact that every passage is the infallible and inerrant Word of God. But this is what Mark is portraying: Jesus just gets better and better and more amazing and more amazing as time goes on. He manifests more and more glory.

But at the same time there’s another theme that is going to become more and more evident: the disciples are more and more confused by Jesus. It’s almost as though the more power he displays the more they don’t understand.

But actually I think that’s part of the beauty of this passage. Jesus is compassionate and merciful with these guys even as they don’t fully understand who he is or what he’s doing.

And we’re very much like the disciples: a lot of times we think we have an idea about who Jesus is or what he’s doing in our lives only to find out we really don’t know. We go through a season of life or we read a passage of Scripture that turns our idea of Jesus on it’s head. We don’t understand the Lord as well as we think we do and yet he is merciful with us as he was merciful with them.

Now, before we dive into this passage let me just say that I’ve heard this passage preached several times and I’ve never been really all that satisfied with what I’ve heard.

I’ve heard this passage preached that we’re going to go through the storms of life and Jesus is there in our storms and will calm our storms. And that can be true, but I hate to break it to you but Jesus doesn’t always calm our storms. Sometimes we’ve got a storm like Jonah and God wants us tossed into the ocean. Sometimes we’ve got storms like Paul and three boats sink in our life. You’d think after shipwreck number 2 Paul’s thinking he’s good for the rest of his life!

Nope, God sends him one more. Listen, life is hard. And it’s harder for some people than for others. And either God is on the throne no matter what he sends your way or he’s not. But God doesn’t always calm the storms so that’s not a great application anyway.

The other irony about that interpretation is that this isn’t even really a storm. It’s just windy and they’re not getting anywhere. Back in **Mark 4** when Jesus was in the boat - that was a storm. That was a storm so violent even these seasoned fishermen thought they were going to die. This is just some wind keeping them from getting to their destination.

The other way I’ve heard this passage preached is that if Jesus needs to break away and pray, then we should break away and pray. The crowds are sent away well into the night and so if Jesus - God in the flesh - needs to stay up late and pray then we should do that too.

Well, should we find quiet times to pray? Of course. But that’s not the thrust of the passage. That’s just an element of the passage. It’s here and it’s a good idea to get away and pray but that’s not the main thrust here.

Which of course begs the question: how do we know what the thrust of a passage is? How do we discern the main point?

Well, sometimes it’s in backing up and looking at the whole context of the passage or even the whole chapter. Sometimes - especially in the gospels - the writer will simply tell us. Sometimes it’s seeing repeated words or themes in a section.

Here I think Jesus ties this bigger section together in **Vs. 51-52. Read**

Mark links the feeding, the walking on water and the wind dying down all to the hardness of the disciples’ hearts. They just don’t understand who he is or what he’s doing.

And yet Jesus is compassionate with them just like he was compassionate with the crowd who needed food and just like he'll be compassionate with the healing tour in the last paragraph of the chapter.

So I think the big theme here is the divine compassion of Jesus toward the disciples and the crowds. And that compassion is true even when things don't seem to go how we'd want them to go.

So as disciples, what do we learn about Jesus and the compassion of Jesus in the midst of this section? I think we learn 3 things.

1) Jesus's disciples don't always get the rest we want. **Read 45-48**

Now, think about the bigger context here. Our section began in **Vs. 30** where the disciples are telling Jesus about their preaching tours. They've been gone for weeks or months.

And they can't even eat and tell Jesus the story because people are still crowding them, so they get in the boat and sail across the lake to find some desolate place so they can get some rest. But they get no rest because the people race around to follow them. And that same day Jesus feeds the people like God fed the Israelites in the wilderness until late evening. And then after the feeding he sends the disciples into the boat again to go to other side of the lake. **Read 45**

This is all the same day. They've already gone across the lake and now they're being told - at nighttime - to go back.

By the time he gets out to them later in the 4th watch - which was between 3am-6am the light is probably breaking for the new day. The sun was starting to come up.

They're pulling an all-nighter rowing across the lake on top of a massive day of ministry the day before, when what they really wanted was rest. And even Jesus was striving to bring them rest. But they don't get it. And it doesn't appear that they get it the following day either because they land on the shore and immediately are bombarded by more people.

Now, 2 weeks ago I mentioned that God in his compassion designed rest and wants us to take rest. And the application there was that we don't always rest when we should. God has designed rest for us, but we often refuse to take it to our own peril.

Here the application is just the opposite: sometimes we want rest, and God doesn't give it to us.

There are times in the life of a believer where we simply don't get rest. We might want it and we might crave it. We might think it's a need, we're working actively for it. But it doesn't come.

And I'm not talking about where **we've** overbooked our schedule or planned too many things or taken on too many projects. Where we slam our calendar so full there's no margin and if anything goes wrong the whole thing collapses. Those are foolish decisions we make to be too busy.

No, I'm talking about God providentially keeping us from rest for a season. Maybe it's a sickness or illness that drains us. Maybe it's a household disaster we have to take care of. Maybe there are needs of others that are pressing in from all around.

So we have to make a distinction. Is the reason we're not getting rest our fault? Or is this something that God is bringing into our lives that we need to persevere through?

And I think there is a distinction that needs to be made so we know what our attitude should be.

I don't know about you, but there are many times I think I could use a few days' rest in the wilderness. And there are times when it seems like I'm almost about to get that only to find that life feels like I'm back out on the lake pulling an all-nighter rowing against wind at 5am.

There are just times when life is hard for a long time. I mean, Jesus is God - this whole passage makes that clear. He's in charge of absolutely everything, even the wind. Why not make the wind blow the correct direction? Why make these exhausted guys row against the wind all night long when you could just give them a peaceful sailboat ride in the correct direction?

Because that's not his will. That's not how he manifests his glory. **Turn to 2 Cor. 4:7-12** for a minute.

This is Paul talking about the difficulties of ministry, and really the Christian life in general. He'll open by talking about how he has treasures in jars of clay - that's where the band got its name. **Read 7**

What is he talking about? He's saying that God puts the infinite treasure of the gospel - the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus - in the hands of us sinners. It'd be like us hiding bricks of gold in plastic flower pots. Usually, we'd put it in a safe or a safety deposit box to keep it secure. God gives us the most valuable treasure in the universe - the gospel of Jesus - and we are clay pots easily broken. Why does he do that? To show that the power belongs to him, not to us. **Read 7-12**

I don't know about you but I can relate to a lot of those descriptions. Afflicted, but not crushed. Perplexed but not driven to despair.

A lot of times life does not feel victorious. **Romans 8:37** says we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. But it says that right after it says we're in danger of persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword.

Here he says it feels like we're the walking dead. Paul actually says that's right. Why are we being given over to death? For Jesus's sake. **Read 11**

God has designed that our lives be hard. He has designed difficulty on purpose so that as we endure these things the life of Jesus is manifest through us.

In Pilgrim's Progress the main character, Christian, comes to a house where he learns some valuable lessons by way of allegory. In one room, he seems a man pouring water on a fire but the fire won't go out, actually the fire gets bigger and bigger. And he asks the owner of the house what the meaning of it is. And the man takes him around to the other side of the fire and shows him Jesus pouring oil on the other side of the fire.

The interpreter tells Christian that Satan will continually try to pour water on us over and over to douse the flame of faith, but it's actually Jesus who pours the oil of grace on us all the more so the flame never goes out and in fact grows.

That's the Christian life. Sometimes God pushes us to our absolute limit so we understand that he sustains us. I've been through some deep water in life and you guys have too. I hate going through it, it's the worst but I look back on it and realize that it is God who has held me fast the whole time.

Even in times when I thought what I needed was rest and God thought, "No, you need more trials." I want a 3 days wilderness nap, God knows what I really need is to pull a 48 hour shift rowing the boat in the middle of the night going nowhere. That I might know that he sustains me.

There'd be no walking on the water - no manifestation of Jesus's glory - if there was no all nighter and no wind?

Let's look back at **Mark 6**. So disciples don't always get rest.

2) Disciples of Jesus don't always understand what Jesus is doing. **Read 45-50**

The whole sequence here is very rapid and we're not given a lot of details and neither are the disciples.

First of all, as soon as dinner is over Jesus makes his disciples get into the boat and head out. Mark and Matthew's gospel both say "immediately" and that Jesus made them. What's up with that? "Dinner's over, get out of here." And he knows they're not going to get any rest and he also doesn't explain anything to them.

Just put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. You thought you were getting rest, you got no rest. You thought you were going to enjoy a nice evening after a massive feast of bread and fish, no nice evening. You've already crossed the lake once, now you're told to hurry away again. What is going on? If you're the disciples you're probably a little perplexed.

Well, **turn to John 6:11-16**. We get a little glimpse of what's happening amongst the crowd. **Read**

Oh, so there's a lot more going on here. The masses of people are eating fish and bread and they're realizing who Jesus is. This is the new Moses! This is the Prophet that Moses talked about in **Deut. 18:15-22** that would come into the world. Let's make him king right now!

In fact, John says it was more than a murmuring. **Read 15**

They were going to have a political insurrection on the plain right there. Jesus would be made king right then and there. Here's the amazing thing: the masses who will reject Jesus the next day get it, but the disciples don't. They don't get that he's the new Moses.

Jesus perceives this, but the disciples don't seem to know this. And Jesus doesn't tell them. He just gets them in the boat.

Now, you'll notice a little bit of a difference in timeline between John's and Mark's version. In John it seems like Jesus goes to the mountain and then the disciples go to the boat, Mark has it just the opposite. Which is it? I think Mark's version is the correct order of events. I think what John is doing is **telling us why** Jesus did what he did.

Why did Jesus go up on the mountain? To get away from the people. The people were going to forcibly make him king. That's not his goal.

Why are the disciples sent away? Probably for the same reason. To separate Jesus and the disciples so the people really have no one to follow so they can't act on their insurrectionist ideas.

But let's go back to **Mark 6**. The thing to keep in mind here is that we're never told that the disciples know why Jesus told them to head to Bethsaida. Only Jesus seems to perceive the insurrection about to happen. But he does tell them to go to Bethsaida.

Now, I will tell you there is a lot of debate about where all these locations are. I'm going to just save you some time and say I think this map is correct. The vast majority of archeology in Israel has happened in the last 20 years and has made more sense of how we understand the geography and the biblical stories.

But however we slice it, the disciples don't end up where Jesus tells them to go.

#### **Map:**

The best I can tell the feeding of the 5,000 is at 3 o'clock. The disciples are told to take the boat up the shoreline to Bethsaida, at about 1 o'clock. That's only a couple miles away.

But the wind is against them and they end up on the opposite side of the lake.

Now, let's put some pieces together. First of all, who is in charge of the wind and waves? Jesus - we saw that a month or so ago. So nothing they're going through is accidental.

Second, why does Jesus go up on the mountain? To escape the crowds who are trying to make him king. The crowds are not following Jesus's mission. He wants to get away from them.

Third, Jesus told the disciples to go to Bethsaida, which is just up the way. Bethsaida is really the closest town to the feeding location. If the crowds are going to go anywhere, they're going to probably head to Bethsaida where the disciples are headed. They'll spend the night and maybe even keep up their attempt to make Jesus king.

So the disciples head out to go up the shore and instead where does the wind push them? The exact opposite side of the lake.

I think Jesus does this intentionally. I think he's trying to keep the crowds away from the disciples and away from himself. How can he do that? Tell the disciples to head one direction - which they do - and send the wind to take them to the furthest side of the lake from the crowds in a completely different direction.

I think this is actually Jesus's miraculous way of keeping the insurrection at bay. And of course we even see some confusion in the amazing miracle itself. **Read 47-49**

So Jesus comes back down off the mountain. The Romans broke up the nighttime into 4 watches from 6pm to 6am. They didn't have Timexs back then so these are just approximations with no sun to help them. The first watch was between 6-9, then 9-midnight, midnight to 3am and the 4th watch was somewhere between 3am and 6am.

So this is very, very early in the morning. And most people believe it's probably around daybreak because he can see the disciples struggling. He may have seen them by moonlight if it was closer to 3 - that's possible.

But he sees them and he goes to them. This is one of the most profound miracles of Jesus. How do you walk on water? It's not possible to walk on water - and that's the whole point.

Back to our friendly liberal theologians: they will often say that what really happened here is that Jesus wasn't walking on water, but that he was walking along a sand bar in the middle of the lake so it only appeared like he was walking on water. Oh, well, thank you for that.

Even if that was true, that would be a massive miracle to make a 4-mile long sandbar going all the way across the lake that the fisherman had never seen before. And, Mark doesn't record this but John does, Peter even goes out on the lake and walks for a few steps before he sinks. That's not much of a miracle if there's a sandbar.

No, this is the most unimaginable miracle so far in Jesus's ministry. He's not swimming or in another boat. He's just walking along the waves to their boat as only God could do.

And they are absolutely terrified. They're not terrified of the waves, like they were the last time. They're terrified of the person walking on water. They think that it is a ghost, a phantasm in the Greek. An apparition of some kind.

Now, there are no ghosts. I fully believe that what people think are ghosts are demons. For what it's worth I think that what people think are aliens are also demons. Demons have been messing with people for a long time.

But they can't possibly imagine it's actually Jesus. Mark says he meant to pass them by. That's weird. Why would he plan to just walk by them? Well, the original language is a flexible. I'm not sure he was actually thinking of passing by then decided instead to get into the boat. I think what Mark is saying is that **from the disciples perspective** it looked like Jesus was going to walk by. That's what it seemed like to them, not what Jesus was actually planning to do.

But either way they're all freaking out. There's a guy who looks like Jesus walking in the middle of the windy lake! What in the world is going on? They are terrified - ταρασσω - which means they are so afraid they are

shaking. Ironically, it's actually used of the waves of the sea. What's going on inside of them is what's going on in the water all around them. They're swelling up and down with the waves beneath them.

And then Jesus gets into the boat and tells them to take heart. Don't be afraid. It's me. And their emotion goes from being absolutely terrified to one of utter astonishment! How can Jesus do this! How is this possible?

They just have no idea who they're dealing with. Now, one thing people will pick up on is that is that when Jesus gets into the boat he says "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." And they'll say that middle part "it is I" is actually "ego eimi" in the Greek, which is God's divine name from the OT. Remember when Moses asked God to tell him his name so he could tell Pharaoh who sent him and God said "Tell him 'I am' sent you." Well, the OT is in Hebrew, but in Greek that comes out to "Ego Eimi." So they'd say that this is Jesus defining himself as God here.

I'm not convinced that's the case here. In John's gospel Jesus does use this very phrase several times. And every time he does people know exactly what he means. "Before Abraham was, I what?" I am. And they picked up stones to kill him for blasphemy.

But ego eimi is also just the normal way you say "I am" or "It's me" without divine implications.

Now, just to be clear, the Bible teaches Jesus is fully God. Other passages use the ego eimi formula and other passages just simply state it. I'm just not convinced that's what's going on here. I think here he's just saying "It's really me." I'm with you now and you don't need to be afraid.

Now, I said the second point here is that Jesus's disciples don't always know what Jesus is doing. This is probably not the way we would have designed this day and night to go down. The disciples know basically nothing of Jesus's plan or what he's trying to accomplish. They certainly weren't expecting him to come walking across the lake.

And think we need to take a moment and realize: we don't always understand Jesus's plans either. We don't always know why he's orchestrated for us to do something. Why we have to go through things.

I'll be honest, there are times when something really random or small happens - I take a wrong turn and get completely rerouted or forget something at home and have to go back or even something big happens that turns out to be nothing - and I just wonder was God protecting me from something? Was there some eternal purpose in this that I just don't see?

But whatever we go through, we need to understand he's sovereign and good even if we don't know the whole plan. We just have to live out our part faithfully.

So disciples don't always get rest when we want it, we don't always understand what God is doing.

### 3) Disciples of Jesus are sometimes hard hearted. Read

This is really a key verse to understanding the main problem. The issue here isn't that these guys are confused or are missing information. Whenever you see a hard heart in the Bible the issue is sinful unbelief. A sinful unwillingness to submit to what God has said or done. Sometimes it's God who makes a person's heart hard as an act of judgement.

Here, they've had every opportunity to believe Jesus. But the more he does the less they seem to believe.

Mark says they don't understand about the loaves. I think this is allusion to the reality that Jesus is the new Moses. He's the guy **Deut 18** is talking about. They crossed the sea, like Moses. They ate in the wilderness, like Moses. And interestingly their hearts are hard like who? Like Pharaoh. It's all the same language.

But let me ask you: does Jesus give up on these guys? No. Here he is in the boat after doing miracle on top of miracle, he knows their hearts are hard and he's still gentle and patient with them. He's still their telling them to take courage and not be afraid.

There are going to be times you guys when we're going through some crazy stuff and our hearts are hard. Where we don't understand and frankly we're unbelieving and sinful.

The goodness and compassion of Jesus is that he doesn't give up on us. He stays with us because he's chosen us to serve him.

If your heart is hard, if you're perplexed at your situation, walk in faithfulness. Ask the Lord to soften your heart and submit to him in faithfulness.

**Pray**