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Sermon Summary #18

An Early Morning Stroll on the Sea! Mark 6:45-52

*“Jesus, the very thought of Thee, with sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see, and in Thy presence rest”*
(Bernard of Clairvaux)

Not everyone would agree with Bernard! King Herod might have said: “Jesus, the very thought of Thee, with **intense fear** fills my breast.” Or perhaps the Pharisees might have said: “Jesus, the very thought of Thee, with **self-righteous indignation** fills my breast.” Everywhere Jesus went he stirred up in people widely divergent responses. Whether love or hate, fear or faith, joy or dread, no one remains neutral when they see Jesus or hear him speak or wrestle with the claims he made. To Herod he was a political threat, to the Pharisees a religious menace, to many an average man in those days he was just another street magician. But to those who followed him then, and I hope to you as well today, he was Master, Lord, God incarnate.

Who is Jesus to you? To use Bernard’s words, with what is your heart filled at the very thought of him? Indifference? Rage? Intimidation? Confusion? Mystery? Joy? Fear? Love?

“Immediately” following the feeding of the 20,000 or so he dismissed the entire crowd and “made” or literally “compelled” his disciples to get into a boat and row to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (v. 45). Why? (1) So that he might pray in solitude. (2) John 6:15 . . . Perhaps Satan had now returned and pressed upon Jesus the temptation to ascend to political power and to enjoy its many pleasures and perks. (3) To protect the disciples from being caught up in the same political fervor that captivated the crowds.

The disciples once again found themselves in trouble on the Sea of Galilee. They had rowed about 3 or 4 miles, which means they were smack dab in the middle of the Sea (John 6:19). The wind was in their face and they weren’t making much headway. It was the fourth watch of the night (v. 48; sometime between 3 and 6 a.m.).

Consider how often in the gospel record we see Jesus showing up at a time that most people would consider “too late”. He seems to delay his arrival and the provision of help for no apparent reason (see John 11). It causes me to wonder about the apparent “delay” of Jesus in our lives. When we need him most *he seems to take his sweet time in showing up!* But Jesus had not forgotten them. He hadn’t forgotten Lazarus. And he hasn’t forgotten you. That doesn’t mean he’s always going to show up and do what you think needs to be done. But he will always show up and do what is ultimately best for those whom he loves.

What do we say to the person, perhaps you, who says: “But this is physically impossible. Water does not possess the solidity necessary to sustain a human body. Everyone knows this”

Water is what it is and functions the way it does because that is the will of the self-existent, eternal, all-powerful Creator who made it and ordained that the laws of physics and chemical reactions be such as they are. He is the Lord over every quark and proton and electron and atom and molecule in the universe and **they do his bidding every nano-second of every day.** If the Creator chooses to suspend himself on the surface of a body of water without sinking, we should not marvel. If God should choose to utilize water in a way contrary to its normal function and in defiance of its normal properties, that is His prerogative and power as water’s Creator and Providential Lord. The only reason why water always freezes at a particular temperature and always boils at a particular temperature and always vaporizes at particular temperature and cannot normally sustain the weight of a human being who seeks to stand upon it is because *God so wills.*

But we come now to the most amazing and, to be honest, one of the most **baffling** things Mark says anywhere in his gospel record. Look again at *the second half of v. 48*

- “*he came to them*” (understandably so, since it seems his purpose would have been to help them in the middle of this storm)
- “*he meant to pass by them*”

OK, which is it?

First of all, these men knew that in the OT Scriptures **only God walked on water! Read Job 9:8; 38:16; Psalm 77:19.** In walking on the water Jesus is doing what only God can do.

Second, for the words translated “pass by” see **Exodus 33:17-23; 34:5-8.** And listen again to **Job 9:8.** In saying that Jesus walked upon the water and intended to “pass by” the disciples Mark isn’t saying he wanted to sneak past them unnoticed. He intended to be seen! He intended to be revealed! He intended to be disclosed in the most marvelous and glorious way as the very God who “passed by” Moses in Exodus and was made known as the one true God, the great and majestic Creator of all mankind!

Third, notice that he also speaks and in doing so claims to be God in unmistakable, breathtaking terms. **Exodus 3:13-15!** The Greek behind the English “It is I” = “**I am!**” *Ego eimi!* Jesus is saying, “The great and awesome and eternally holy Yahweh of the OT is now before you in human flesh! **I am the I am!**” In Jesus of Nazareth we come face to face with the God of Israel, now in human flesh. The Creator and Redeemer God who made himself known to Moses in causing his glory to “pass by” is now “passing by” yet again in the person of Jesus! The great and glorious “I am that I am” of Exodus is now present in the person of Jesus!

And what was their reaction? Initially they thought it was a ghost (*phantasma*)! But once Jesus got into the boat and the wind ceased, “they were **utterly astounded**” (v. 51). Once again he shows up and nature bows in his presence. The wind obeys its Creator and Lord!

Mark tells us that the reason for their amazement is that they still didn’t fully understand what had happened with the loaves and fish. They still didn’t grasp the depths of what that miracle said about who Jesus really is. They were still somewhat hard of heart and thus resistant to the claim that Jesus was making for himself. We must never lose sight of the fact that the disciples grew in their understanding of who Jesus was. They didn’t launch out following him with a full-blown and comprehensive grasp of who he was and what he was doing. It came in stages. It was a process, as it is for all of us.

But the good news is that when we read Matthew’s version of this story we discover that in this movement from initial hardness and blindness on to amazement and still a measure of confusion they eventually come to terms with what has just happened: “And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God’” (14:33).

For **Peter’s** response, see **Matthew 14:28-31** . . . Was this Peter again acting impetuously? Was it a silly risk in the attempt to impress others? Was it a childish search for a supernatural thrill? Was he “testing” God unrighteously?

Most likely, Peter was moved to ask this of Jesus for one simple reason: he wanted to be with his Lord. As comforting and safe as being in the boat may appear to the natural mind, being with Jesus was better still. You’ve no doubt heard it said by others that it was safer to be out of the boat and on the water so long as you are with Jesus than it is to be in the boat and out of the water and away from Jesus.

But what’s the most important lesson to learn here? It is simply this: adversity and trials and the threat of harm, whether from nature or other people, all have a tendency to paralyze us and take our eyes off Jesus and who he is and what he can do in the worst of circumstances. That was certainly true in Peter’s experience. He allowed the power of the storm to cloud his confidence in the power of the savior. His physical senses told him one thing, namely, “You’re in danger! Be afraid!” His faith in Jesus told him another: “If Jesus says you can walk on the water, you can walk on the water.” The moment Peter took his eyes off of Jesus all he could see was the danger surrounding him.

What’s the answer? What’s the lesson? Look at Jesus! See Jesus! Know Jesus!