

**Mark 6: 45-52; “Be of Good Cheer! – It is I.”, Sermon # 37 in the series
“Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on February 28th, 2016, in the Morning Worship Service.**

The focus here in these verses is upon Jesus Himself and what He was doing for His disciples. I hope that you will understand that there is a real and substantive difference between the ministry of the Lord Jesus then, and the reality of what He is doing now. In the first He was ministering here on the earth to just a few disciples, in a lowly way; and now He has been exalted by God, because of His sufferings and triumph over sin and death to the Highest Place. We know Him no longer after the flesh. He is risen and glorified, and He is ministering to all of His people, both in heaven and earth in a most profound and powerful way. But overall, His ministry has not changed in respect to His offices. He was ministering then, as the Prophet, Priest, and King of all of His people then when He walked the earth. And He is ministering to us now, in this generation, as He sits at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly sanctuary. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Sometimes we do not think that this is true because we cannot perceive Him with our physical eyes, in the way that they did. This morning, however, I would like us to learn together more about the glorious ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want us to think about this ministry to the disciples then, and apply what we learn to His ministry to us now, in our Christian life and experience. I would like to look 1st of all at His ministry of prayer in relation to them and to us. (Verses 45-47) 2nd – I would like to look at the fact that His coming to help them frightened them at first, as it might us. (Verses 48 and 49) And then 3rd – I want to point out to you the outcome of Jesus’ ministering to them; the outcome in their hearts and hopefully in yours. (Verses 50-52)

1st – Let’s look at His ministry of prayer in relation to them, and to us.

Sometimes we do not understand that our Lord Jesus expects that we should try to perceive Him by faith, in this same way that the disciples did on that dark and stormy night. O, I know that He was seen by them physically then. And we do not see Him that way now. But all disciples of Christ need to learn to spiritually look unto Jesus. This is what it means to trust in Him. These disciples needed to learn something about His ministry to them then, and we may need to learn something more about His ministry to us now. You will notice that after the feeding of the five thousand that it says in verse 45 of Mark 6 that, “Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away.” The King James says, “And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship and go before him unto the other side...” The word “constrained” or “made” usually means to compel. Here it means that He commanded them. The Lord Jesus “made” His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side. Having read the whole passage for you I hope that the same question came to you as came to me when I first read it. Would the Lord Jesus deliberately command His disciples to go across the lake knowing that there was a storm coming? They did not know that there was a storm coming, but He certainly must have.

Does the Lord Jesus sometimes really and deliberately make His disciples go into situations where He knows that there will be great difficulty? I think the conclusion is inescapable. The answer is: Yes He does. But when He does so, He does so knowing in His own holy mind when it is that He will have mercy upon them, and show them His power and His deliverance in relation to the circumstances that He sends them into. In the midst of their greatest difficulties He will manifest Himself spiritually to His disciples and even give them the greatest assurances that they should be of good cheer and not be afraid. “Be of good cheer!” “It is I; do not be afraid.” Why did Jesus send the multitudes away and tell the disciples to get into the boat and cross over to the other side? He did it because as it says in John 6: 15: “Therefore when Jesus perceived

that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.” The last thing that Jesus needed at this point in His ministry was the multitude coming to Him and forcibly lifting Him up on their shoulders and proclaiming Him King in an earthly and political fashion. “The Son of Man did not come into the World to be served, but to serve and to give Himself a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20: 28) He was indeed a King, but His kingdom was not of this World. And no doubt He was very concerned that the people who were following Him would understand that He did not come into the World to establish a political kingdom, or even a popular movement.

His feeding of the five thousand won Him the admiration of the multitudes; so much so that they wanted Him to make Him king. He made them go away. The reason that He did this was to show them the real nature of His kingdom. The real nature of His kingdom was, and is, spiritual in nature. People need to be saved. They need the bread of life which He alone can give. They need to be rescued from their sinful selves which crave the earthly safety and security and provision of one who could provide all of those needs. Could Jesus have continually provided for their earthly needs? Most certainly He could have, and they correctly perceived that He could. But that was not God’s purpose in sending Him into the World. And further, it was not His purpose in calling His disciples to follow Him that they would continually be feeding people and meeting their earthly needs. I am quite sure that Jesus was very concerned that His closest disciples would imbibe this same spirit of the multitudes. They might want Him to go along with the earthly aims and wishes of the multitudes in thinking to make Him an earthly king. But in His mind it was the advancement of His spiritual cause and kingdom that they were called to. They were called to faith and holiness and self-denial. They were called to learn that advancing His kingdom in righteousness and truth would not come through His becoming popular by feeding the multitudes. It would rather come through His sufferings and death.

Some of these same people who were praising Him for feeding them, would eventually turn against Him and walk away from Him. They were more interested in the food which perishes, but they were not interested in the food which endures to eternal life. And so let us learn this lesson about Christ’s kingdom. Christ’s kingdom has often been advanced by His disciples being sent out into the world with the gospel; a gospel which would not be a popular movement at many points in the history of the Church. It would only go forward and be established through many storms of opposition. Has this not been borne out by 2,000 years of Church History? And so in our day, we too, go forth to live holy lives and to share His gospel by faith in His promise, and in obedience to His commands. The reason that Jesus sent the disciples out to sea at this point is that it was a very critical point in their being taught what was most important. It was most important that they would come to understand what it was going to mean to follow Him. And this is the same thing that you and I need to learn as well.

Jesus deliberately sent His disciples out to sea knowing that they would encounter this storm. They were going to have to learn how to face the opposition of the natural elements of the wind and sea, and to think about the fact that it would only be His power that could help them. It would only be by His power that they would be rescued, and delivered, and given peace in their fulfilling what He had commanded them to do. It was, and it is, a picture of what we face in our day as well. The issue for them was obedience. The issue for us is the same. When He commanded them, they went on ahead; seemingly without Him. They went on together. They got into the boat and they set out not knowing what they would encounter. Similarly, He has placed us here together as a church. He has commanded us to be holy and to be His witnesses. We too, must go and do what He commands, not exactly knowing what will happen. And there will be storms that will rise, and winds that will blow, and there will be real questions of why Christ would lead us into such situations.

But there was something else that these disciples needed to understand, and that was that when they set off on this voyage, that He was doing something that He still continues to do now from the Throne of Grace on high. He was praying for them. Matthew 14: 23 says, "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray." "Now when the evening came, He was alone there." He went up on to the mountain to pray and to be alone, but His thoughts and His prayers were not focused on Himself. They were focused on His disciples. I hope that you will come to realize, as these disciples came to realize, that the whole kingdom of God rests upon the prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ. His prayers for His own dear people are the foundation upon which every Christian stands; the foundation upon which they build. His prayers are the foundation upon which each and every Christian does anything of value, and accomplishes anything for the advancement of His kingdom. He was interceding for His disciples on that evening, and He is interceding for each and every one of His dear brethren now. Oh how great a comfort and source of blessing this is to the Christian. The Lord Jesus has sent us out into this World on a mission. It is not a popular or an easy mission. But He has commanded it, and He prays for it continually.

Let us understand that Christianity is not always advanced by the popular movements of Christians. It is true that it can be advanced by electing wise and good men to public office, but it is always advanced by simple and straightforward obedience to His commands. And it is always advanced and sustained by our prayers, and the intercession of our Lord for the advancement of what is true and right. Let us remember this in relation to the concerns that we have in relation to the upcoming election, and the appointments to the Supreme Court of our nation, which will follow in the wake of it. Our God and our Christ are still ruling and reigning over this fallen world, even though at times we think that we cannot not see the evidence of it. "Though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet." "This is my Father's world; the battle is not done." "Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and earth and heaven be one."

Jesus went up on the mountain to pray, but from this high vantage point He could still see them perfectly well. And where is the Lord Jesus now? He ascended on high, after His resurrection from the dead, and He is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And what is He doing? He is interceding for all of His dear people. Hebrews chapter 7, and verse 24 says, "But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood." "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." And what is intercession? It is His prayers for all of His Elect people. He is praying for all of His people, that they may be holy and that they might by their lives and their lips advance His cause and kingdom. He is praying for them that they would be delivered from every evil work and be brought safely to His heavenly kingdom. I think of the prayer in John 17: 9, "I pray for them." "I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours." "And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them." "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You." "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are."

I wonder if you see that the Lord Jesus prays for you, that you might be kept in your faith, and that you would be preserved in a true spiritual unity with other believers; a unity for which He went to the cross, and died to establish it. We, as a church need to see how important it is to our Lord Jesus that we act together in our obedience to Him and not be those who are going it on our own in our own independent obedience. We will do much more in our obedience together than we will in individually going our own ways. May the Lord help us to row together in our obedience to Him. And may we all see the spiritual nature of His kingdom and how it is advanced. May we see the Lord Jesus as our Mediator and our friend, coming to us as a church as well as individuals who need Him.

Secondly - I would like to look at the fact that His coming to help them frightened them at first, as it might us. (Verses 48 and 49)

Verse 48 says, "Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them." "Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by." "And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled." Matthew's gospel says that "the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves for the wind was contrary." So here we have the boat tossed by the waves and they are making little headway in getting across; they're straining at the oars and they look out and see Jesus, they thought that they were seeing a ghost. And, well might human nature take fright at the approach of a figure walking on the water 3 to 4 miles out into the sea. It was a dark night, and although they could not see clearly, they did see His form. Perhaps the moon was shining upon the sea and illumining Jesus' way to them. It must have had quite an eerie effect when the waves were so high; His walking upon the water as the waves were raised up. I think that we often picture it upon a quiet sea. But it was boisterous. Recognition of Jesus was difficult because of all these circumstances. Matthew's gospel quotes Peter as saying, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." His doubt was because of the darkness and the winds and the waves. They prevented clearer recognition. This was why it was so frightening to them. They did not immediately know that it was Jesus. They thought that what they were seeing was a ghost.

It is often because we as people don't always know what we are looking at, that we become afraid, and our fears lead us to cry out because we do believe in the possibility of the supernatural invading our space. We fear that ghosts, or specters, or demons might be present, and somehow they might have the ability to take a form that we can see. We know that by nature we cannot walk on water. But, we reason to ourselves: a spirit could! Our reasoning is not always right; especially when it comes to understanding what our Lord is doing. We do not always realize that our Lord Jesus has a greater power than ghosts and demons. We do not always realize and that He is the One who is coming to us full of love and blessing, when we are overwhelmed with fear. His drawing near to us causes us fear when it should cause us to rejoice. It was because of His love for His disciples that Jesus came walking on the water to them that night. We do not generally recognize Jesus in those kinds of circumstances. We recognize Him blessing us and giving us life and peace in our everyday circumstances, but we do not, except by grace, recognize Him in the dark and difficult situations that we pass through. We often think more of the Devil being at work in those kinds of situations, rather than it being our Lord.

The way that the Lord approached them lended itself to their fears as well. The text says that it looked like He "would have passed them by". If he were a friendly spirit, would he do such a thing, they think? They are willing to place the worst construction on the most thoughtful of His actions. But, really, all that Jesus was doing was to try to do was to give them a better view of Himself so that they wouldn't be frightened. If He had directly approached them they might have been more frightened yet. Now this has a number of applications to us here today. First of all, will you not see how easy it is to be frightened at what is unknown? These were experienced fishermen. They had been out on the sea many times, and perhaps had seen more than a few storms while out on it. But still they had a fear of ghosts coming to them in that situation. They had never seen a sight like this. And they were overtaken in their minds by this appearance of a man coming to them walking on the water. They superstitiously thought that an evil spirit was going to do something to them when really it was their loving and powerful Lord coming to them to be with them and help them.

If this was the way with them, then you should be able to see how easy it might be, for us to draw wrong conclusions, when we let our fears get the best of us. We may be facing a situation that is very difficult, and yet we do not see the Lord coming to us in it, and wanting to help us

through it. Let us understand, that not only is the Lord praying for us, but He will also come to us to be with us in our trial. And He will be giving us grace to help us through the trial. It is no trouble for the God-man to walk on the water, which He as the second person of the Divine Trinity, created in the Beginning of the World. And neither should we forget that the same Christ who helped create the World in the Beginning is the one who walks on the water of our agitated lives. He can and does come to the souls of all of His troubled people. Job says in Job 9: 8 – “He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea.” The right conclusion is that Jesus Christ is God. He the only one with this ability in Himself. And, if He can walk on the water, He can also come to your soul to help you. He has not come to scare you, but rather to take away all your fears. Psalm 56: 3 says, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.” Will you not receive His words to the disciples that night as words to yourself? “It is I; do not be afraid.”

And 3rd – I want to point out to you the outcome of Jesus’ ministering to them; the outcome in their hearts and hopefully also in yours. (Verses 50-52)

“But immediately He talked with them and said to them, ‘Be of good cheer!’ “It is I; do not be afraid.” “Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased.” “And they were greatly amazed beyond measure, and marveled.” The episode of Peter’s walking with Jesus on the water evidently took place before the wind ceased and before Jesus got into the boat with them. But what was the outcome? They were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure. Now why was this the case? They had seen Jesus still the winds and the waves before in Mark 4: 39-41. After He did that it says: “And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, ‘Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?’” He had said to them, “Why are you so fearful?” “How is it that you have no faith?” Here in this passage we have much the same outcome. In the first passage He stills the elements with a word. In this passage He walked upon the water as though it were dry land. I think that the outcome for these disciples was that even though they saw Jesus do these things with their own eyes, they still could not believe it and receive it so that they would draw the right conclusions and live by them. This is what it means, I think, when it says in verse 52, “For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.”

It does not mean that their heart was hardened in the same way that an unbeliever’s heart is hardened like Pharaoh’s was when he was unwilling to let the children of Israel go. It is the kind of hardening in which the person does not see the connections in regard to the power and ability of Jesus Christ to help them and to minister to them. They did not really perceive or understand how great the glory of Christ was. John Gill says, “They were not blinded by sin, or against Christ, much less in a judicial way: but there was a great deal of dullness and stupidity, and lack of attention in them.” “The glory of Christ, which he manifested, and showed forth in his miracles, was not so clearly and fully discerned, attended to, and acknowledged by them, as it might reasonably be thought it would; for notwithstanding these miracles, which they daily saw, they stood in need of divine illuminations, that the darkness of their minds being removed, they might behold the glory of Christ, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father.” (End of quote)

I would say that they did have faith in Christ. The evidence was right in front of them and they marveled and were amazed beyond measure. But they did not see the connections in truth. They should have seen the connections when He multiplied the loaves and the fishes, but they did not; not in the way that they would trust in Him more, and ponder the greatness and glory of this man who was also God. No, miracles are not enough without also the Divine illumination upon them, so that we would be more and more turned to trust in Christ. And miracles are not enough if they do not lead us to see the truth of Christ’s kingdom as being a spiritual kingdom where all of His saints are to abide forever. We are too easily pleased and satisfied with earthly

things and do not see that the spiritual and heavenly things are the only things that last. They are the only things which truly satisfy. And it is only Christ who can give us those things.

And so, let us remember that these things were not written merely for their sakes. They were written for our sakes. Let us receive the truth of this lesson. Be of good cheer; Christ is ruling and reigning over the turbulent waters of your life. The glory of knowing Christ is much greater than we ever dreamed; and this will need to be proved to us over and over again in this life, even after we are converted to Christ. These men were converted, but they hadn't understood about the loaves. They had marveled over Jesus' walking on the water as though they had never seen Him do anything before this that would indicate that He was God. But He had already done many things to show forth His glory to them. This is not a lesson which is meant so much as a rebuke to them and to us. It is rather that we would understand something more of how much we need the grace of Christ to be able to see Him as He really is; God made manifest in the flesh. And even more; that He is our God who is willing to prove Himself over and over to us, as the only One who can sustain and nourish our spiritual life and bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom. We shall never be able to fathom the depths of love so Divine; a love which does not have a bottom to it, or an end to all of what He will do for the one trusting in Him. Be of good cheer; it is I, says our Lord.