

**Mark 6:48-52** (count it all joy)

**<sup>48</sup> 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. <sup>49</sup> And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; <sup>50</sup> for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." <sup>51</sup> Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. <sup>52</sup> For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.**

We pointed out last week that there is evidence that Christ was not pleased with how his disciples had handled the test that Christ had prepared for them. The disciples were expecting a rest but what they encountered was human need. This happened just after they had returned from a mission trip that surely had to be tiring for them. It would seem that, if these men, like us, are to be followers of Christ, they would have to learn to put the needs of others above their own selfish desires. And maybe, sometimes, even above their own needs.

That is a hard lesson. I am not sure how we measure up in those kinds of tests. Do you know of times when you simply chose to overlook a need that God has shown you because you have needs of your own? That is pretty much what the disciples were trying to do. But they couldn't get away with it because Christ was in their presence.

That is what happened just before our text this morning. Christ told the disciples to get in the boat and go to Bethsaida. In fact, the wording used means that he pretty much drove them to do it. It is not a friendly word. It is good for us to remember that just as we have the opportunity to please Christ, we also have the opportunity to displease Him. And if we are a child of His, that will not cost us the relationship. But it will cost us in terms of fellowship. Christ evidently wanted the disciples out of his fellowship at this time. And not only that. He sent them into the middle of a storm.

I wonder how many storms in our lives are the results of the discipline of God. Certainly not all of them. But I firmly believe that God will teach us the hard way what we are not willing to learn the easy way. And I think our text this morning is an example of that.

The disciples had failed the test in the feeding of the five thousand. They had the wrong attitude. And they would have done the wrong thing had they been alone. So now they are sent into a spiritual "time out".

Then this is what we see next.

**<sup>48</sup> Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them.**

Now remember, Jesus is the one who chose for them to be out on the lake at this point. We learn from the other gospels that these guys were rowing and rowing, but worse than getting nowhere, they were going in the wrong direction. The middle of the sea is about 2 miles wide where they should have been headed. But in the wrong direction it is more than 8 miles wide. They had rowed about 3 or 4 miles and were out in the middle of the sea. The wind was blowing them south into the main body of water.

Have you ever found yourself trying harder than you have ever tried to get your life where you want it to be, and you find you just keep getting worse and worse off? I have read countless stories like this. And I have experienced some of it in my own life. Maybe you have a story too? Maybe you are **in the middle** of a story like this right now.

Sometimes these situations are simply designed to teach us the good things God wants us to learn. But sometimes it is a result of our own decisions. And it may be the only way God can get our attention. It may be the only way we can be weaned from our **self reliance** or **stubborn resistance** to His will. I believe the disciples were in the school of Christ. And they were learning what it meant to serve people the way Christ wants His servants to serve. He was also teaching them what it means to really believe. Remember that at least 7 of these guys were fishermen and boatsmen. And they seem to be generally unable to catch fish and get their boat where it needs to go when Christ is making a point.

Are you tired of straining at the oars and getting nowhere. Take some time out and pray to God. Ask Him to direct your path. And commit to **following His path**, no matter where it might lead. If God is trying to get your attention, the easiest path you can take is to actively and intentionally **give Him** your attention. God can keep the wind against you as long as it takes. You do well to find out what the wind-master has in mind for you.

Notice too that Jesus looked out to see them in their plight. When you are Christ's child, he is never unaware of what you are going through.

**Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by.**

After the disciples got exactly to where Christ wanted them, even though it was not where **they** wanted to be, Christ intervened in their lives.

Now, it was the fourth watch of the night. This is between 3 and 6 am. This tells us several things. Jesus had been praying all night. Here is a good example to follow. If the Son of God needed to pray in order to carry out His mission, we certainly need it more. Christ shows us how to prioritize time. He carried out His ministry in its proper time. And He would not forego prayer due to being very tired. He prayed and gave up sleep. We may not like it. But that is the way that

the Master did it. And that is what we are to do when our choices line up this way.

Now, why did Christ think it was so important to pray at this time? Well it could have to do that earlier in the day the crowd wanted to take Christ and make him the Messiah by force. This would have been something that would have required some direction as to how to handle it.

The other thing we know is that the disciples have been rowing for a long time. They have been at it for probably at least 6 hours and got 4 miles. That is exceedingly slow. They are probably exhausted and maybe worried by now. Things aren't looking good for them.

So Jesus decides to take a stroll. On the water. In the storm.

We all really know God so very little. If you were in the boat in this storm and thought that Jesus would help you, how would you have expected that help to come? You might think, Jesus will know our dilemma and tell the storm to stop from where Jesus is right now. And that hope or expectation would be a step up from what they have had previously. But would anybody who has not already read this story think that Jesus might just stroll by? I don't think anyone would expect that. God often intrudes into our situations in a way that we least expect. How do you expect God to intervene in your life? Don't think too small. God has shown a rich repertoire of intervention in the lives of those He loves. He does what He wants. Nothing is impossible. No obstacle is insurmountable. You do not know what God will do in your situation. And you do not know how He will do it. But you can trust Him to look out for you, no matter what.

Then it says **and would have passed them by**

From the wording it looks like Jesus was approaching the boat and chose a path to walk parallel to the boat. He fully intended for them to see Him and for it to appear like He was going to pass them by. He was clearly staging this to have the most impact on the disciples.

<sup>49</sup> **And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out;** <sup>50</sup> **for they all saw Him and were troubled.**

Now, could they tell it was Christ? Or did they see this person who was Christ but they couldn't tell who it was? I think that is probably the case. It was dark after all.

So what did they do? They shrieked. This word for cry means to raise a cry from the depth of the throat. It is a scream with a lot of emotion behind it. This word is only used in a few instances in the New Testament. A couple of demon possessed men responded like this when they encountered Christ. The disciples in our story cried out when they saw Christ. And the crowd screamed that Barabas should be released and Christ should be crucified. All the situations where people cry out are emotionally charged situations.

Why did the disciples cry out? They **cried out** because they were **freaked out**. They were encountering something they had no frame of reference for. They had superstitions and fears of the unknown they had probably picked up during the years. Maybe they grew up with ghost stories around the camp fire like many in my generation did. But they didn't know how to process their situation. They didn't know what it could be. It was impossible. So it must be spiritual. And they were partly right. But it was not a ghost. It was a creator. He wasn't avoiding the rules of nature by being spiritual. He was superseding the rules of nature with His own nature. He was suspending the rules of nature, which only someone with power over nature could do. It is hard to be too critical of the disciples. What they experienced never happened before in the history of the world. So it isn't like they could have been prepared for it. But it is interesting that what they believed it to be was not a demon or an angel, which would have been a logical choice given what scripture says. But they thought it to be a ghost or a phantom, which there are very few examples of in scripture. And those are all isolated situations.

Now, given that Christ was human, you have got to believe this would have been amusing to Christ. But it was far more than that. Christ was going to make a point that these men would never forget. They will remember the fear and they will remember the relief. And then they will remember who Christ really is.

**But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."**

The disciples were screaming. What they were saying probably made little sense if it was even words. But we see Christ's response to them.

First, it was immediate. He didn't want to prolong their anguish. He immediately spoke in an effort to relieve their stress.

And He talked to them. It is amazing how many times the real need in our lives is for information. The disciples were thinking wrongly. Christ was going to tell them the truth designed to set their minds at ease.

Often when we are in a mental state like this, when we are freaked out, when our fear has reached the screaming place, what we really need is the truth. We need the truth that reminds us that Christ is in charge, that Christ is with us, and that Christ cares about us. When we really believe that, it changes a lot. This is what we need to know in every situation.

So this is what Christ said.

**Be of good cheer!**

Let's take a look at where else in scripture this is said.

In Luke 8:48 Christ said this phrase to the woman Christ healed with the issue of blood. Be of good cheer. Cheer up. Something good has happened that has changed your position.

In Matt 9 Christ said it to a man who was sick with palsy. Christ told him to be of good cheer because his sin was forgiven.

In Mark 10 a blind man was told to be of good cheer because Christ had called for him to be brought to Christ.

Paul was told in Acts 23:11 to be of good cheer because Paul's work wasn't over. He was going to get to minister in Rome.

In John 16:33 we are told when we face persecution to be of good cheer because Christ has overcome the world.

Look at how, in every instance, this command is given based on a truth that reflects the advantage that is coming or has come. God doesn't tell us, in the midst of a horrible situation that we need to cheer up, because cheering up is good for us. He doesn't say, cheer up so those watching won't get depressed. No. We are pointed to a better reality. It is cheer based on the acts and abilities and intentions of God. These are facts.

Do you know what it means when we will not adjust to those truths and we refuse to be of good cheer? It means in our heart of hearts, we really don't believe we have a reason to be of good cheer. We do not believe the truths about God's actions, abilities, and intentions. (I am not talking about those biological things that can happen to people where even **what they think** refuses to influence how they feel.) But when our physiology is working properly and normally, our demeanor follows our thoughts. In most cases, if I think what you think I will feel like you feel. And if you think what I think, you would feel what I feel. There is no great mystery to it. If wrong thinking gets you into a depression, right thinking will get you out. If feeling low is based on a response to some life event, the bad feelings are more than likely based on thinking. If those feelings comes out of nowhere, are unpredictable, are not related to events, and last through things that would normally make you happy, then maybe it is biological. Drugs can help with that. But we as Christians should not be relying upon drugs when the problem lies in what we think, in what we believe.

When Christ said Be of good cheer, do you know what He meant? He meant be of good cheer. Cheer up. The threat you perceived is not real in this instance. A ghost is not coming to harm you. Christ is saying **I am coming to help you.**

Isn't it odd that Christ would command us to be of good cheer even when facing persecution? Do you realize that the only way that can happen is if we are looking for a future city? We **cannot** be of good cheer if we are seeking to save our life, if what we live for is a pleasant **here and now**. We can only receive the good cheer if we buy what scripture says about our purpose. We can only receive good cheer if we believe what God says about our destiny. Good cheer requires trust in the character of God to deliver to us on His promises.

Then Christ says this:

## **It is I; do not be afraid."**

Really, the statement "It is I" is the basis that **the other two statements** are based upon. For us to be of good cheer in a threatening situation and for us to not be afraid in a threatening situation requires some good reason to cheer up and not fear. What is the reason in this situation?

The presence of Christ.

Notice that in this instance Christ does not tell them what He intends to do. He does not tell them anything about their situation. He tells them that they have reason to cheer up and not fear **simply because** it is Christ who is with them. He didn't tell them He was going to still the storm. He did not tell them he was going to end their fruitless effort of rowing. He didn't tell them anything about what was going to happen. He only emphasized that the ghost they feared was not there. It is Christ who is there.

Faith is a very powerful thing. Faith is trusting in the character of God. And it is an all-encompassing belief that allows one to ignore a whole lot of concerns to have one concern. In the end we only need to know one thing. We are in Christ. Christ is with us. We have the promises of Christ to claim. There are so many things we don't know. We don't know how or when we are going to die. We don't know what we will suffer. We don't know what our loved ones will suffer. We don't know what our lives will be like this afternoon. But we can know that Christ is with us. And when He is, we have reason to be of good cheer and reason to not be afraid.

People who believe God, who really believe God, are peculiar people. They respond to life's situations in ways that are unpredictable to the world. The world simply doesn't know how to process those who really have faith. Because faith gives us a perspective that this world cannot have.

I guess we need to note again the command Christ gave the disciples to not fear. There is no way that we can blow over all the statements in scripture about this and still choose to live in fear that reflects an improper view of God. We cannot act faithless and blame it on fear. We are always choosing to believe something. If we choose to believe God, we will cease to live according to the lie that meaningless harm can befall us at any time and we cannot trust God to protect us from it. Living that way is living counter to the life of faith. It is an either/or decision. When Christ said to the disciples that they should not fear, that command was based upon His character. It is still the same for us today. Now, it was at this point in our text that we read about Peter in a parallel text.

### **Matthew 14:28-31**

<sup>28</sup> **And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."** <sup>29</sup> **So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.** <sup>30</sup> **But when he saw that the**

wind *was* boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" <sup>31</sup> And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

We see that Peter gets the point that it is the person of Christ that makes the difference. And He takes it further. If I should be of good cheer, and Peter appears to be of good cheer, And if I must not be afraid, and Peter appears not to be afraid, then maybe I can trust Christ to do the impossible here.

So Peter calls out to Christ and requests the privilege of coming out to Christ on the water. It is like the little kid seeing his dad do something and saying, can I try it dad?

So Peter does. And he is the only human, other than Jesus that we know of, who has walked on the water.

But it didn't last for long. Because after all, Peter is like us. How long do we walk by faith before our sight becomes a distraction? How long do we live with our eyes fixed only on Jesus before they become distracted by some lesser thing, by some evidence that says that Jesus is not enough?

Peter had the right impulse, the right instinct. But he did not realize how little faith he actually had. Notice that the problem is never on Christ's ability to provide. The problem is always on our willingness to trust.

What storm is blowing in your life? Are you trusting Christ's capacity to allow you to walk through it? Or are you letting the circumstances convince you that this is more than He can handle? This is too impossible? This is too big of a problem for Christ? He cannot get me through these billows safely.

Remember, Christ said be of good cheer. Do not fear.

<sup>30</sup> **But when Peter saw that the wind *was* boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" <sup>31</sup> And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"**

Isn't this beautiful? Christ doesn't only save those with **perfect** faith. Christ doesn't only save those who treat Him the way that He is worthy of being treated. Praise God for that. He saves us where we are. We can call out to Him **to be able to walk triumphantly** and we can call out to him **when we are sinking tragically**. And He will meet us in our need. He will **enable our faithfulness** and **rescue us from faithlessness** when we call out. The point is, as long as we breathe, it is never too late to call out to God if you feel the need to do so. He rescues us where we are. Praise God for such a grace.

Jesus didn't mince words with Peter. Why did Peter sink? Because of Peter's failure to believe. It wasn't Christ's fault. And Christ asks the piercing question, the question that needs answered for Peter to grow. It is the same question that needs answered for us to grow. Why do we doubt? We need to clarify that. We

need to get to the heart of the problem. What lie do we believe that keeps us from fully trusting Christ? What is the obstacle to our belief? It is only when we answer that question that we can overcome the obstacle and move on to the next one. The problem is never in the ability of Christ to provide. It is always in our failure to trust.

**<sup>51</sup> Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.**

So Christ got into the boat with the disciples. And the storm they had fought for 6 hours disappeared. Other texts tell us that they also arrived immediately at their destination. A destination they were trying to get to but being blown in the opposite direction for 6 hours.

This statement about their response is a superlative. This blew the disciples minds. They were shocked, astonished, breathless, amazed, and on and on. We would say, they couldn't get over it. It made a most profound impression upon them. They knew that every bit of what Christ did was absolutely impossible. It makes you wonder what more He would have been able to do to impress them with His Lordship.

And why?

**<sup>52</sup> For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.**

We learn about this word "hardened" in the following text.

**Mark 3:1-5**

**<sup>1</sup> And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. <sup>2</sup> So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. <sup>3</sup> And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward." <sup>4</sup> Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.**

**<sup>5</sup> And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts,**

This hardness of heart is a result of rebellion. It is a stubbornness to believe. And it describes anyone who hears the truth but who will not respond appropriately. Our hearts just get harder and harder.

So it was not a compliment.

Christ was blaming the disciples for their lack of understanding. It was their fault that they did not get the point when Christ created food out of nothing. They should have understood that He was the creator and had absolute control over matter and the world. It should have impressed them that what they encountered was only something God could do. But they didn't get it. And they didn't get it because they were resisting what God was doing.



But we learn in Matthew that this lesson was not lost on them.

**Matthew 14:33**

**<sup>33</sup> Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."**

God is so good to us in that He does not give up until He causes us to get whatever point He wants us to get. Evidently the disciples could have gotten the point at the feeding of the 5000. But they didn't. So then things escalate. The disciples will have to pay a higher price for this next education, but it is well worth the price. And when it is done, they will have gotten the point.

Christ is the Son of God. They had to get this right. They had to understand that Christ was deity. This is a point in their theology and their beliefs that they must get.

And we must get it too. Until we believe that Christ has ultimate power over everything in life, we will not live in a way that glorifies Him. It is not until we trust Him as Lord that we represent Him to the world as He truly is. We must trust Him as Lord before we can truly proclaim Him and represent Him as Lord. I hope this text has been an encouragement to us this week.

One clear application for us is to answer the question- why do we doubt? This question is at the core of most of our failures. And if we have the courage to analyze our failures, to question why we fear, and why we willfully sin, and why are discontented with our lives, and why we think we will never overcome the obstacles in front of us, if we will question those things, we will find doubt. And if we look further, we will find lies that we believe instead of believing truth. That is the core of our problems. And the solution is belief. We must, by faith, replace the lies with God's truth. And that is where the victory and growth come from. And do you know what the greatest enemy will be in that process? It will be excuses. It will be the ways that we defend our current position so that we are not responsible to change.

Will we live courageously this week and challenge our doubts, our failures, our sins? That is what the Bible calls sanctification. And that is what every Christian is called to.