

IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM (Mk. 6:45-56)

Mk. 6:45 And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people. 46 And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. 47 And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. 48 And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. 49 But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: 50 For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. 51 And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. 52 For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened. 53 And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. 54 And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, 55 And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. 56 And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

This is an amazing story ... Amazing not only because Jesus walked on water but also amazing because of the lesson being taught to His disciples. They had just witnessed the most spectacular miracle of Jesus feeding tens of thousands of people, beginning with only five loaves and two fish. ... Now, surely after such a miracle experience, - so remarkable that all four Gospel writers include it, - ... after such a miracle the disciples ought to have been trusting Jesus implicitly!

These verses begin with one of Mark's characteristic words, εὐθέως, ... translated seventeen times as 'immediately', and nineteen times as 'straightway'. It's a fast-moving Gospel story and that is why there is not so much of the protracted detail contained in the other Gospels.

We are moving from the small village/town of Bethsaida on the eastern coast of the Sea of Galilee, where He carried out the great miracle. This was not the city of Bethsaida to the north, where Peter and Andrew and Philip originally came from ... Other little fishing villages are understood to have been known as 'Bethsaida', which simply means 'house of the fish'.

So, Jesus and the disciples are planning to return to the north-west region, into the land of Gennesaret (v.53), and to the *other* well-known city of Bethsaida, inland to the north of Capernaum. ... Understandably, Jesus remained quite a phenomenon throughout the region and Mark now brings us *specifically* to the impact, - or otherwise, - this made upon the twelve disciples. It was understandable the general population not realising who Jesus truly was. They had witnessed His many miracles, but were unable to realise Jesus Christ as the Son of God, as John commented, **Jn. 1:10** He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

However, there was no excuse for His disciples ... They had been granted a specific knowledge as to Who He was. They had been with Him for some time, they had listened to Him speak, they had witnessed His miraculous powers ... and yet we read concerning their fear when the winds lashed against their boat on the Sea of Galilee, **Mk. 6:51** And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. **52** For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

Even though they had just recently experienced the great miracle of Jesus feeding the multitude they continued to find it so difficult to believe certain fundamental aspects concerning Him. Is that strange? ... Perhaps, to some degree, they were able to ‘understand’ and accept with their minds, but it had not yet fully penetrated their hearts. ... It was one thing the multitude not being able to believe in Jesus, but it is quite another for the disciples, - the men whom Jesus chose, - not to believe completely! ... And they could not believe because *their heart was hardened* [πρωτόω, *covered with a thick blanket of unbelief*].

This wasn't simply just a few doubts and fears ... this was outright unbelief! Christ's disciples who had been with Him and who could testify to His power, ... and with the same mighty power they themselves had gone out from Jesus previously to heal and to teach (Mk. 6:30) ... *they* were in the throes of unbelief!

Believers unbelieving! Before, they were very hesitant to leave Jesus and go out into the boat, - they wanted to stay with Him, and also be there for the next spectacular miracle He would perform. Indeed, they wanted to remain with Jesus so much He had to *constrain* them to go, - they did not want to leave Him. The word ἀναγκάζω means He had to compel them, insist, demand they get into the boat ... otherwise they would not have went for, - hovering over this whole scenario, - Jesus had a plan and purpose as to why why He straightway ... *constrained his disciples to get into the ship* (Mk. 6:45). Jesus had to *force* them to go!

In the meantime, - as they were putting out to sea, - v.46 He [*Jesus*] departed into a mountain to pray. ... Jesus, why can't we go with *You*? ... Or why can't *You* come with us? ... No, said Jesus, you get yourselves into the boat, and launch out into the sea. ... Imagine, they were arguing with Jesus!

And notice again, - what we mentioned in a previous study, - they were told specifically which boat to get into ... *the* ship (v.45, 47, 51,54). ... Not *any* ship, but one *particular* ship ... the ship Jesus had already arranged and set aside for them! All those ships on the shores of the Galilean sea would have taken them but they were instructed as to which explicit ship to board! ... What is the significance? ... The significance is that Jesus knew what was shortly about to happen and the disciples had to do exactly as He told them and go to the specific ship He had chosen for them to be on. ... All ships are the same ... No, this ship was the only ship *guaranteed* to keep the disciples safe in the storm Jesus knew was about to be unleashed. ... How did He know the storm was coming? He knew for His Father is in charge of the winds, **Amos 4:13** *lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind*

These were busy times for the Saviour. Before He left Heaven, every moment on earth was accounted for, **Mk. 6:46** *And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray* ... not to rest, but to pray ... To pray for what? ... No, to pray for *who*. He went alone into the mountains to pray to His Father on behalf of His disciples. He always prayed for His disciples. For example, when he told the wayward Peter, **Lk. 22:31** *Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: 32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not* ... He also prayed for His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, **Jn. 17:11** *And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.* ... Yes, Jesus prayed for His disciples, and no doubt He was praying for them on this eventful evening ... as they went to board the boat, before the storm came.

And *there* is a very specific and telling description of the whole scene, **47** *And when even was come [i.e. between six and nine o'clock], the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land,* - they were far apart from each other. ... But where were they actually going? They were supposed to be going to Bethsaida, - this *is* now the *large* city of Bethsaida where Philip, Peter and Simon had come from ... just a little distance inland from Capernaum where James and John lived. So, altogether, this was absolutely familiar country, along the top of the Sea of Galilee (or also Gennesaret, v.53) ... They had travelled it more times than they could remember! However, notice where they were, *the ship was in the midst of the sea* ... they were away off course, - they had drifted away and were off the direct route Jesus had sent them on to the north of the lake! Expert fishermen, taught to sail the Sea of Galilee since they were little boys ... and yet they had drifted away off-course from where they were originally going!

What caused them to drift? It was nothing less than carelessness for there was no mention of a storm at the beginning, - they simply had not been paying due attention to the course they should have been sailing ... Familiarity with their surroundings had bred carelessness. And the consequence of their negligence inevitably brought them into deep trouble.

Jesus, though, is on the mountain praying for them ... not just for their safety in the boat, but also for their faith to be made stronger. Now, they have been in a storm not so long before (Mk. 4:37) but the difference was in that storm Jesus was in the boat with them ... He is not now though ... for He is away on the mountainside! ... If Jesus had been there with them this time, He would have stilled the storm and calmed the waves like He did previously ... but He wasn't with them for He was somewhere up on the hills.

I wonder if any of them blamed Jesus for not being with them? After all, they did not want to board the boat, - *He* made them! ... They wanted to stay on the dry land, but it was Jesus Who **constrained his disciples to get into the ship (v.45)**. ... If Jesus had listened to *them*, they would be safe now ... not in danger of drowning. I wonder if they reckoned they knew better than the Lord?!

And v. 48 tells us something very significant too, **48 And he saw them toiling in rowing**; ... He *saw* them ... Where did He see them from? Remember, **46 he departed into a mountain to pray**. ... He was watching from a distance, from the mountain ... and even though there was a storm, He could still see them! ... And He saw them realising how powerless they were. The winds and the waves were defeating them ... Yes, *but* Jesus is watching, - continuous tense, - over the very people He had chosen to serve Him.

God's people are never out of His sight, - He never 'takes His eyes' off them. On another occasion, when He was calling His disciples, He said to one of them, **48 Before that Philip called thee [Nathanael], when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee**. ... Even though these disciples in the boat were adrift in the rough sea, Jesus *saw* them, and He knew exactly where they were and what was going on.

They were away out in the dark, in very deep waters ... and in danger! They could not see Him, but He could see them ... and they were not so far away as to be out of the sight of the Saviour! And notice also at the time, **48 the fourth watch of the night** ... The first watch of the night was six o'clock to nine

o'clock, the second watch was from nine to twelve, the third watch was from twelve to three ... so these disciples had been sailing from the early evening of the night before until sometime between three o'clock to six o'clock the next morning, - the fourth watch! ... What were they doing all that time?! It was only a short journey, - about four miles from where they set off from on the eastern side of the Sea to where they were supposed to be going on the northern shore! But they had gotten into some serious trouble and they became *lost in familiar surroundings!* ... And there is no excuse for that!

And they were ⁴⁸ *toiling in rowing* ... The sails must have broken, or else they had not taken sufficient care to raise them and use them properly ... after all, as far as they were concerned, it's only a short journey we have done many times before ... and why put ourselves to any bother! Or else, maybe they did have the sails up but the ferocity of the winds tore them down!

It ought to have been a relatively ordinary journey though. Instead, it was a time during which Jesus was testing their faith. They were *straining* themselves to row the boat. They were scared because they didn't actually know where they were, for it was dark and very stormy. ... And neither did they know if they would live or die. ... Everything Jesus said, and how He promised they would work for Him in His Kingdom ... was all that now in jeopardy? Did they have any doubts about the promises of Jesus? Were their circumstances beyond the control of God?!

And then here is another beautiful picture. He left the serenity of the higher ground of the mountainside where He had been praying and He walked down to the seashore, and into the wind. He faced the storm alone as He stepped out onto the water of the sea. He walked through the winds and the splashing waves. Some commentators reckon He was kept dry ... I think it was more likely He was soaked to the skin and blown but still He kept going towards His people ... *Is not that a picture of Calvary?!* We read about how He set His face to go towards Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51) ... Well, here He set His face to go out into the rough sea to save His disciples. He knew where every wave was so that it would be under His feet as He made His way through the storm. ... And He knew specifically where *that* ship was that He commanded His disciples to board ... Yes, the wind and the waves brought fear and confusion and destruction, but here in the early hours of the morning Jesus entered and brought *grace*.

So, out of the winds and the waves He walked on the water towards the boat and its frightened occupants, **48** *he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.* ... What does that mean? Does it mean He was going to pass on by, having no intention to save them? No, literally, He desired to come alongside them.

This was no coincidence Jesus was there, - it wasn't as if He was on the way to somewhere else. No, He was there because He loved His disciples and He had been watching them from the very moment they launched off from the shore ... and He had also been praying for them from the mountain, and He knew exactly what was happening. He knew where *that* ship was, and He knew the course it would take, and He knew exactly when He needed to arrive ... and He got there on time!

Look at their reaction, **49** *But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out.* They had been scared before, but they were absolutely petrified now! And the next thing they came out with was nonsense! ... Old superstitions made them think they were seeing a ghost (φάντασμα, phantom) ... and they cried out, - they shrieked, - with horror (ἀνακράζω ... κράζω was the word used to describe the noise startled ravens made)! Grown men, trembling and shivering wrecks! Not an ounce of courage in all them put together! **50** *For they all saw him, and were troubled [ταράσσω].*

Once again, though, the grace of God worked to remove their fear, for **50** immediately he [*Jesus*] talked with them, and saith unto them, *Be of good cheer [Take courage]: it is I; be not afraid.* Those are words very similar to the words of Ps. 46, **1** *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. ... 10 Be still, and know that I am God.*

Jesus came to them. He had not lost control for the disciples were being prepared for the service ahead. God only uses those who He makes fit for His work. If He didn't believe you would keep your hand on the plough, He would not let you anywhere near it! ... He had these disciples in the boat for a purpose, and the purpose was for them to be convinced of His power, and that is why He told them, *it is I; be not afraid.* ... I'm with you now; you have nothing to fear, and I will never leave you nor forsake you. ... **51** *And he [*Jesus*] went up unto them into the ship ... Do you notice that, he went up unto them ... In*

other words, He was lower than where they were for He was standing on the waves ... and that is why Mark records such a detail, *he went up unto them*.

Again it reminds us, **Heb. 1:9** we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Yes, the disciples were in a predicament ... but at least they were in a boat. Jesus, though, had walked through the roaring waves and stormy winds, - that was the sacrifice He made that early morning to be with them. And when He came and said to them, *it is I; be not afraid*, it was a call for them to believe ... just as He similarly comforted them on another occasion, **Jn. 16:33** *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

And the disciples had allowed the circumstances to get the better of them not because they had *no* faith, but because they had *little* faith, and Jesus sent them into that situation to *strengthen* their faith, as Mark explains, **52** *For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.* ... In other words, what Jesus did was good enough for me *then*, but I am not believing enough for it to be sufficient for me *now*.

So that is why Jesus went to the mountain and He sent the disciples off to the boat *on their own* ... to show them their need of greater faith. ... You cannot be a Christian without faith, - it is not possible. You need to believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved, otherwise you are not saved! And not only do you need to believe in Christ to be saved, you need to *keep* believing in Him. You don't stop when you have been a Christian for a certain amount of years, or reach a certain level of spirituality ... you always *continue* to believe in Him! There never comes a time when you can be a Christian without actively believing in and following Jesus ... and that is what the disciples were being taught. Even though He was away from them *physically*, - on the mountain, - they had to keep on believing in Him and trusting in His purpose and promises for their lives.

Yes, of course, the storms come and the waves threaten but God has an expectation for every one of His blood-bought children, **Jer. 29:11** *I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.* ... And what is that expected end? ... **Jn. 14:2** *In my Father's house are many mansions ... I go to prepare a place for you.* **3** *And ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.* ...

That is the sure destination for the true believer, as Paul wrote, [Rom. 6:8](#) we believe that we shall also live with him.

There was absolutely no *chance* whatsoever the boat would sink, - this boat into which Jesus had specifically sent His disciples, - because God had a plan for that very special ‘cargo’ of individual disciples, - even Judas Iscariot, - and nothing would deflect from God’s purposes. Nevertheless, He had those men out in the boat, in extremely difficult and frightening circumstances so they would encounter ‘hands on’ experience on how to trust in God!

I wonder if that is what the Lord is doing with you as an individual, and I also wonder if that is what the Lord is doing with us as a fellowship. Numbers are depleting, abilities are becoming restricted, it is so very easy to see how we could capitulate to the spirit of the age ... We are in the boat and the winds and the waves are threatening to overturn us ... but I feel very much that the Lord Jesus comes to us with the same message, [Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.](#) ... It is My work I have called you into and I’ll keep you in My will.

Sometimes the only way we learn is when we feel the force of the waves beating against us ... but we *must* learn ... and remember too how Jesus did not ever abandon His people to the storm for He brought them safely to their destination ... He brought the disobedient Jonah through the waves and onto the dry land ... He brought Paul on his way to Rome in the prison ship from out of the waves to dry land ... and He brought these disciples safely out of the storm also, [53 And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore.](#) ... The land of Genessesaret is where they were heading to in the first place, - their destination, - ... up beside Capernaum, and then they would complete the short distance to Bethsaida, as they were instructed in v.45. Yes, they eventually got there, - they ‘took the long way round’, but they *did* get there. How we often discover if we had gone God’s way from the beginning we would have arrived at the destination sooner, and without the trouble we had brought upon ourselves along the way.

... [54 And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him.](#) The crowds started it all over again, - they recognised Him and they wanted Him to do more miracles, [55 And \[the multitudes\] ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was.](#) [56 And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his](#)

garment [*cf. 5:27, the woman who touched the hem of His garment*]: and as many as touched him were made whole.

The *real* difference, though, was the change that had been wrought in His disciples. ... All the people who came to Jesus to be healed *were* healed ... but Jesus came to do more than heal people ... He came to save them from their sins! ... What are you holding on to Jesus for? Is it for something just for *you*, to suit your needs and desires, like these people who wanted nothing else from Him ... and who didn't want to make any commitment? Or, do you see how committed Jesus, the perfect and sinless Son of God, is to you ... and you want to be committed one hundred per cent to Him? ... He came 'through the storms' for you!

There's a chorus that says, "With Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm" ... There was no smiling at the storm in this vessel until Jesus entered, and that is when it calmed and He brought them to the shore. ... There is another chorus, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus, Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ; One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase, So bravely run the race till we see Christ." He is the prize, [Phil. 3:14](#) **I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**

It sounds strange but really, - when you study this passage, - these disciples were in the will of God ... in the midst of the storm ... and no matter how dangerous and threatening it had become, that was God's place for them to be.

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
And to take Him at His word;
Just to rest upon His promise,
And to know, Thus says the Lord!

*Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er;
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
O for grace to trust Him more!*

Amen.