

A Gracious Saviour Who Walks on Water

Mark 6:45-52

Halifax: 13 October 2019

Introduction

Today we will continue our sermon series in Mark's Gospel picking up at Mark 6:45.

- This passage is tied to the feeding of the five thousand that we looked at last week in which Jesus presents Himself as our provision in the wilderness.
 - The wilderness is a place where we have no resources and must come to Him for strength to do His will.
 - He gave His disciples the task of feeding the five thousand in the wilderness, teaching them that they must look to Him to provide the food.
 - This is what all of you must learn too.
 - You do not have the resources within yourself to serve God—the task is completely beyond your ability...
 - You must continually cast yourself upon Him.
- It was essential for Jesus's disciples to understand this.
 - The time would soon come when Jesus would be returning to the Father in heaven and they would need to know that He was still their provision, still accessible to them.
 - As we shall see, this was a hard lesson for them to learn.
 - It is also a hard lesson for us to learn.

Listen as I read the passage to you: Mark 6:45-52.

- This is the Word of God.

Mark 6:45-52: 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. ⁴⁶ And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He *was* alone on the land. ⁴⁸ 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. ⁴⁹ And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; ⁵⁰ 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."⁵¹ Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. ⁵² For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading of His holy word.

When this passage opens, there seems to be some urgency in Jesus sending His disciples away and dismissing the five thousand after feeding them.

- Mark says: "**Immediately He made [constrained] His disciples get into the boat and go to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitudes away.**"
- There is clearly urgency here, but Mark has not revealed the reason for it in his gospel as John did in his... that the multitude wanted to make Him king.
 - Very likely, Jesus did not want to His disciples to be stirred up with similar desires—

- But whatever the reasons for the urgency, it is noteworthy for Mark's purposes that Jesus sends His disciples away from Him—
 - probably to a Bethsaida (means fishing-house) on the western shore of the Sea Galilee as they were near Bethsaida Julias on the northeastern shore.
 - He sends them away while He goes to a mountain alone to pray.
 - Presumably, He would come to them on land at a later time.

I. See here circumstances similar to ours: the Saviour praying alone while His disciples are sent off without Him.

A. Jesus has given them a situation which will soon be the norm.

1. Soon, the time would come (which still is) that Jesus would go to sit at the right hand of the Father while they would be left on the earth.
 - There He has been for nearly two thousand years, praying for us at His throne in glory—making intercession for us.
 - We can be confident that with such a Saviour, we are continually cleansed from our sins, for He is our faithful priest whose offering for our sins has been accepted by the Father...
 - As you know, He offered Himself to atone for our sin on the cross.
 - The Father showed that He accepted this offering by raising Him from the dead.
 - It is a splendid thing to have Him praying for us in heaven!
2. But while we are glad that He is interceding for us, it also means that He is no longer here with us, walking the earth with us.
 - There was a great deal of comfort in His physical presence for the disciples while He was here.
 - He was available to give them direct instructions, to answer critics, to heal and to cast out demons, and even to correct His disciples when they erred.
 - But now you have them out in their boat, crossing the Sea of Galilee apart from Him—not a difficult thing in itself—something they had done many times before they ever met Him—but they are separated.
 - This is illustrative of the permanent arrangement since He ascended.
 - It is a teaching opportunity that Jesus has provided for His disciples—
 - not just the twelve, but for all of us who follow Jesus today.
3. Mark especially draws our attention to their separation from Him.
 - Having already told us how Jesus sent them off in the boat as He went to pray, Mark adds in verse 47: **Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land.**
 - Clearly, he wants us to pay attention to the separation.

B. And look—although they are trying to do just what Jesus told them to do, they are unable to make progress.

1. There is no disobedience here on their part.
 - In fact, there is indication of full submission. As we saw in verse 45: **Jesus made them get into the boat**—suggesting they would rather not have.

- They are in the pathway of obedience, but look at what happens:
2. The wind is contrary to them so that they are making no progress as the hours go on.
 - Verse 48 says: **Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them.**
 - They were straining against the wind.
 - The picture is not one of danger, as in the storm at sea, but one of frustration and inability to make progress.
 - As we are told that it was the fourth watch of the night, (which began at 3:00 AM), you can only imagine how weary they must have been.
 - Rowing a heavy boat against the wind is very hard work.
 3. There is a parallel and a contrast with the feeding miracle here.
 - In both cases, Jesus had given His disciples clear instructions—instructions which they were unable to fulfil.
 - In the wilderness, to feed the 5000 even though they had no resources.
 - In the present account, to row across the sea which was usually easy for them but which had become impossible because of contrary winds.
 - They are being taught the first lesson of discipleship...
 - That without Him, we can do nothing—even what we think we can do.
 - Clear instructions that we are unable to fulfil—welcome to discipleship!
- C. What a clear picture of the church: a little boat struggling against the wind to do the will of God.
1. Clear instructions that we are unable to fulfil—welcome to discipleship.
 - a. Moses was told to bring Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land... only God could break Pharaoh, only God could open the Red Sea, only God could feed and water the people in the wilderness, only God could give them victory over the fortified cities of Canaan.
 - b. He has told us to go and make disciples of all nations—but only He can change sinful hearts, only He can wash away sins, only He can open closed doors.
 - c. He has told us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; to love each other as He has loved us; to be holy as He is holy; to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect; to be anxious for nothing; to die to self and pour out our lives for Him and for others; for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church...
 2. Who is sufficient for these things?
 - We struggle. Sometimes we seem to make very little progress.
 - We are out in our little boat, apart from the Lord who is at the right hand of God the Father.
 - We become frustrated and ready to give up.

II. We are weak, but look at what is revealed about our Saviour here!

- A. First, that He sees us in our struggles.

- Look at again at verse 48: **Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them.**
- 1. You see that He saw them.
 - Some say there was no supernatural seeing involved here—but simply that He looked down from the mountain and saw them struggling to row.
 - It really doesn't matter whether in this case He saw them in a supernatural way or simply with His physical eyes...
 - The point is that even though He was not with them, He saw them struggling and He cared—as He sees us now from heaven.
- 2. There is tremendous comfort in knowing that from His place in glory, He always sees us... well, at least it ought to comfort us...
 - a. If we are walking in ways that are contrary to Him, it makes us uncomfortable to know that He sees us—but that is a good thing!
 - If you are living in rebellion and you are not uncomfortable, you are of all people most to be pitied—as you happily flit along on the road to hell.
 - b. Also, it may make you uncomfortable to know that He sees you if He doesn't do anything right away to relieve you.
 - Perhaps you are suffering and to hear that He sees you is all the more disturbing to you because it must mean that He doesn't care.
 - But you are not looking at it right... not at all.
 - He does not willingly afflict us—it is only when our suffering is necessary that He lets it go on for a while.
 - Sometimes it is necessary to humble us and teach us that we are not God and that we must depend on Him.
 - Sometimes it is given to us so that we can honour Him in our suffering and learn to be content with Him through faith in His promise, knowing that affliction is sent to deepen our hope and love for our Lord.
 - Let me remind you that your circumstances don't matter—what matters is that you honour God in your circumstances.
 - If He has put you in a palace, you may not like that, but He has put you there to glorify Him.
 - If He has deprived you of health or of companionship, you may not like that, but He has put you there to glorify Him.
 - If you are in a place where you are making little progress, you may not like that, but He has put you there to glorify Him and glorifying Him is what matters most... not gaining relief.
 - c. If you are thinking rightly, knowing that He sees you in your struggle is comforting because it assures you that He knows all about it...
 - And that He will only leave you to suffer as long as it is necessary—and then He will come to relieve you.
 - And that until then, He sympathises with you in your weakness and prays for you that you will glorify Him in your trial.

TRANS> And that brings us to the next thing that we see revealed about Him in our text...

B. Second, that He comes to us in our struggles.

- Look at again at verse 48: **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.**
 - He waited until 3:00 AM, but still He came. It was the proper time.
- 1. The great comfort here is to know that though He is at the right hand of the Father—to use the analogy, on the mountain praying for us—He is still quite able to come to us to help us.
 - Did He not tell us when He sent us to proclaim the gospel to the nations while He went to the Father that He would be with us until the end of the age? “Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the age.”
 - Did John not see a vision of Him in Revelation walking among His lampstands which were the churches?
- 2. Distance from Him does not mean that He cannot get to us to help us—in fact, now that He has gone to heaven, it means that He has even greater ability!
 - He said it was advantageous for us that He go away because then He would send His Spirit to us who would always be with us.
 - Yes, we look forward to His physical presence, but it is marvellous that He is always spiritually present with us...
 - Granted—sometimes His presence is not perceptible to us—but that does not change the fact.
- 3. Here, as you see in our text, He does make His presence known to His disciples.
 - Indeed, He comes to relieve them in their distress.
 - That is often what we mean, and what the scripture means, when we say that the Lord comes down to us...
 - We mean that He comes to act in a way by which He is perceived by us.

TRANS> Of course it would do little good if He saw us and came to us in our struggles but was impotent and unable to help once He got to us... but that is not so.

- We are shown something else that is marvellous about Him in our text...

C. Third, we are shown that He walks on the water.

- Look at again at verse 48: **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.**
- 1. Clearly, this walking on the sea was meant to be a revelation of His divine power!
 - a. He came to them, it would seem, as one walking up beside them as if to pass by them—as God often did when He appeared to His people in the OT.
 - The language is reflective of Job 9 which we read earlier where Job says of the LORD (starting with Job 9:7): **“He commands the sun, and it does not rise; He seals off the stars; ⁸ He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea; ⁹ He made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south; ¹⁰ He does great things past finding out, yes, wonders without number. ¹¹ If He goes by me, I do not see *Him*; if He moves past, I do**

not perceive Him; ¹² if He takes away, who can hinder Him? Who can say to Him, ‘What are You doing?’ ”

- b. Nothing can be too hard for One who walks on the sea, for He is God.
 - He is not bound by the laws of nature.
 - He is able to do whatever He pleases in heaven and on earth and in the sea.
2. Let us always remember this in our times of frustration and distress: we have a Saviour who is able to walk on water.
 - This was a something those who became martyrs often encouraged each other with in the persecutions of the early church—that our Saviour walks on the water.
 - They knew that He could do all things and that they did not need to be afraid. They were in the care of the One who is able to do what He wants.
 - Our prayers are weak and ineffective when we forget this about our Lord.
3. You will say to me, but what good was it for those that became martyrs? They died anyway.
 - Do you not know why it was good?
 - Their greatest prayer was not that they would be spared from death, but that when death came, that they would honour the LORD and bring glory to Him.
 - Those are the prayers that got answered.
 - Prayers for relief may get answered, but prayers for grace to glorify God in trials, prayed by those who know God as the LORD who walks on the water, are prayers that He will answer.

TRANS> But what a terrifying thing it would be to see the display of His unearthly power walking on water and not know that He is the God of grace.

- That brings us to the fourth way that He reveals Himself here...

D. Fourth, He reveals Himself as the One who is full of grace and favour toward us.

1. The disciples shrieked with terror when they saw Him because they thought He was a ghost or a phantom.
 - Verse 49 says: **And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; ⁵⁰ for they all saw Him and were troubled.**
 - Indeed, it would be terrifying to see this display of unearthly power and not know if He was for you or against you.
 - Think of the state of millions today who do not know how they stand with the Almighty.
 - They do not want to know or think about this One who walks on water.
 - There are many commentaries written by those who try to explain this account away, saying that Jesus was walking on the shore.
 - There are many who laugh at it as impossible because they have blindly embraced a worldview that excludes the living God.
 - They do not want the one their conscience tells them they must answer to have divine power like this.

- Truly, it would be terrifying—who could bear it?—to know such power and sense that He is not favourable toward you.
2. Ah, but one of the greatest things about our Lord Jesus Christ is that throughout the pages of Scripture He reveals His favour and grace to all who look to Him.
- a. Here in our text, you can see how He immediately reveals to them that it is He, their gracious Master, who is on the waters before them.
 - **Mark 6:50: 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.”** ⁵¹ **Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased.**
 - How glad they must have been to hear His voice...
 - And such words of cheer! **“Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”**
 - He was not there to harm them, but to rescue them.
 - There was no need to fear, for they knew Him—this One with divine powers.
 - He has come with mercy and grace—as you see, the wind ceases.
 - b. How much more has He revealed Himself to us as propitious—as favourable and as full of grace!
 - In His holy word, He tells us that He has come, not to destroy us, but to save us; not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved.
 - As sinners, we were already condemned, waiting till the day of judgment to receive the full measure of our final eternal penalty.
 - But when Christ came, He said, “I came to give my life a ransom for many,” and that is just what He did.
 - He, the Lord of glory, became flesh and went to the cross to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins—something we could not do.
 - c. And here you have it—this majestic One has come into the world with a very gracious intent.
 - He is here to exert His divine power to save all those whom the Father has given to Him.
 - We may have this salvation only if we will believe in Him as the mighty Lord of glory who has come to save.

TRANS> So let us tie all this revelation together.

- This one who is now at God’s right hand is the same one who sees each one of us.
 - He is the one who comes to us in our distress, for He is not far from any of us.
 - He is the One who is able to walk on water, for He is the almighty.
 - And He shows us that He is full of grace and favour if we will receive Him.

III. But you who are trusting in Him for everlasting life—do you also trust Him day by day? Sadly, this revelation of a gracious accessible Saviour who walks on water is often lost on us.

- A. The response of Jesus’ disciples shows that they did not yet understand.
 - Look at their response described from the middle of verse 51: **And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.**

- These words indicate that they were beside themselves—they were unable to cope with this revelation—they had no category to put it in.
1. This may seem like a good thing. They were impressed with Jesus.
 - But should they have been greatly amazed beyond measure after what they had seen of Him already?
 - They had seen Him raise the dead, cast out demons, feed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish.
 - Why should it seem strange that He would walk on water?
 - a. Children, what would you think if you picked up a Psalter and several people saw you, and all began to be astonished and to say,
 - “Look at that! Isn’t that amazing? Look at how he picked up that Psalter!”
 - Surely, you would be a little annoyed.
 - Did they think you were too small and weak to pick up a Psalter?
 - You could carry a whole stack of them!
 - b. Or you adults, what would you think if you told a friend that you would come to see them on Tuesday at 5:00 pm.
 - And so, at 5:00 you arrive, only to have them express great surprise and say, “I did not think you would really come. This is such a surprise. It is so very good of you to come. This is amazing.”
 - You would be insulted by their compliments—and you might ask:
 - “Why are you so surprised?”
 - “Am I that unreliable? Do I have a reputation of not coming when I said I would?”
 2. Verse 52 affirms that the disciples’ response was not right.
 - In fact, it speaks very negatively of their great amazement.
 - It says: **For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.**
 - a. They did not learn what they should have learned from the feeding of the five thousand.
 - Of course they knew that Jesus had multiplied the loaves and the fish, but they did not catch on to what this said about Jesus!
 - They did not grasp by this that He was the LORD of glory who had come to bring grace and salvation to His people.
 - They were impressed by the miracle, but they did not understand what it meant.
 - b. And then the reason for their not grasping this is even more disparaging of them... it was because their hearts were hardened!
 - Hardened hearts!
 - That’s how Jesus described the Jews who saw His miracles and rejected Him.
 - That’s what Isaiah and Paul said about those in Israel who did not believe—it was because of a hard heart...

- A hard heart is a heart that is closed and that refuses to respond to what God is revealing.
- B. If you know Jesus, you ought to expect Him to be powerful and gracious and available.
1. You ought to know that He sees us, that He comes to us, that He can walk on water and do whatever He pleases, and that He is full of grace toward us.
 - It is a shameful thing for you to go about acting as if you have no recourse, acting as if you do not have a gracious Saviour to call upon.
 - It is disrespectful to Him for you to suppose that you are detached from His care, and that He is a God far off rather than a God who is at hand...
 - It dishonours Him for you to treat Him as if He does not wish to be gracious to all who call upon Him—or as if He is weak and unable to help.
 - He is the LORD who comes to His people, walking on the water!
 2. If you are not expecting Him to be gracious and powerful in your life, it is because your heart has become hard—
 - You need to repent!
 - a. Perhaps you are resentful because He has not answered all of your prayers the way you wanted Him to.
 - Perhaps you prayed for relief instead of for grace to honour Him in your trials.
 - You are unwilling serve Him in sickness or in a hostile family or with financial hardship.
 - You don't value His powerful grace that can enable you to be full of hope and love and joy in your afflictions—you just want the afflictions to be taken away.
 - Perhaps you prayed for greatness when it was His will for you to serve Him as one who is not so great.
 - Maybe you want ability, wealth—perhaps to use for good...
 - Maybe you want talent, popularity, marriage, freedom from marriage, peace, success, health, health for your children, ease, peace...
 - And now because He did not give you these, you are bitter and do not call on Him.
 - b. Or maybe your lack of expectation that He would be powerful and gracious is due to your pride and self-sufficiency.
 - You are in your boat paddling away supposing that you can get there without His help—perhaps frustrated with your lack of progress.
 - You are self-made, you are strong, you are talented—you do not need God to work in you—you just want Him to change the things outside of you.
 - You will take care of yourself if He will take care of everything else.
- C. There are three ways you show that you don't expect God to be gracious and powerful in your life.
1. First, a lack of real gratitude.

- You may say formal prayers of thanksgiving, but you have little grasp of the enormity of God's benefits.
 - You have forgotten how He purged you from your sins.
2. A second evidence that you don't expect God to be gracious and powerful in your life is prayerlessness.
- You may pray formal, ritual prayers—I don't care if they are written or not—by formal I mean that they are not from the heart...
 - And you may pray very earnest prayers for the wrong things—not for grace to serve God, but only for an easy life...
 - But you do not pray for Him transform your life and enable you to know Him and honour Him with the expectation that He will do it.
 - No, in your mind power and grace will not be seen in that way, but only in delivering you from trouble and giving you what you want.
 - Your problem is a distorted sense of what is really good in life—to know God and to glorify Him.
3. Yet another evidence of hardness that does not expect God to be gracious and powerful is anxiety.
- You are always full of worry and fear about what might happen because you do not believe that Jesus Christ is with you and that He is full of grace and power.
 - You dread what will happen because you do not embrace the reality that there is a gracious Saviour who walks on water.
 - Let me say that even godly Job in all his sufferings weakened as his trials continued and increased.
 - When he wrote Job 9, testifying of the Lord who walks on water, he was not at all comforted by that—because God did not seem to be gracious or accessible.
 - But when the LORD revealed His glory to Job in the whirlwind,
 - Job repented of his hard thoughts of God—he repented in dust and ashes.
 - Then he was sure that the One who walks on water is also gracious to His people and he was greatly comforted.

Conclusion: I declare to you all that our Saviour walks on water, but is also full of grace.

- Expect Him to be gracious and powerful and you will find Him so.