

“On a Dark Wind-tossed Sea”

November 24, 2013

Text: John 6:16-21

We have been studying Jesus’ feeding of the 5000.

We’ve seen that it had been a spectacular day, in which a crowd of prob. 7000 people (including women/children) had followed Jesus to a meadow on the NE shore of Lake Galilee.

There He had healed their sick and had then taught the truths of God’s Kingdom.

Late that afternoon, Jesus had miraculously fed everyone present, then had His disciples gather up the food that was left over. They were prob. elated, having participated in X’s miracle, by distributing the bread/fish to hungry people.

Jesus had discerned that many in the crowd were acclaiming Him as the great Moses-like Prophet promised in Deut 18, & some were even making plans to seize Him, proclaim Him king, & present Him as such at the Passover Festival in Jerusalem.

Mt 14 makes a strange statement at this point=> *“Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away”* (14:22).

Matthew says Jesus *“made”* the disciples get into the boat, utilizing a word that means He coerced/compelled them to, possibly even against their will.

Mark’s account uses the same word at this point (6:45).

It seems that Jesus was being very forceful because knew His own disciples had a mistaken view of His Kingdom, & that they too would fall prey to this ill-conceived enthusiasm to make Him king immediately.

So Jesus pressured them to get back into the boat, & to get away from the crowd, before they joined w/ them in staging a coronation of Him against God's will.

From the disciples' p.o.v., it had indeed been a great day, but as sometimes happens in the lives of believers, it was going to be followed by an frightening/unsettling night, a night that was going to shake them to the core.

They would spend this dark night in that boat, far from shore, rowing frantically/unsuccessfully against a powerful headwind, sure their boat was going to capsize/sink & they were all going to die.

Worst of all, they would endure this terrifying ordeal w/o Jesus present, because He will spend this time apart from them, and alone, praying on the mountain, next to the beach where He'd fed the 5000.

This is a very important text for us to get into, because there are times when Xns feel they're about to drown in their troubles, & that Jesus isn't there for them either.

The disciples felt X's absence keenly whenever He wasn't w/ them.

*You see that after Jesus' death/burial, when they are in the Upper Room w/ the doors locked for fear of the Jews. It was as if, when Jesus wasn't there, they needed to barricade themselves in from the world.

*You see it even more clearly, when they're in the middle of Lake Galilee at night, in a crowded boat, the wind's resistance preventing them from reaching the opposite shore, & X isn't w/ them, but is up on that mountain, praying.

We too live in frightening times, when our government seems to be coming apart at the seams, even as it's reaching deeper/deeper into our personal lives in order to control them.

We too sail in troubled seas, when unwary women on the street are being knocked unconscious, by blows to the head, from strangers who are just playing a "knockout game."

Then there are also times of personal darkness w/i our own hearts/minds.

They may be caused by some private inner grief/struggle, or some vague sense of anxiety we don't understand, & whose source/cause we can't identify.

There may be no actual reason for our troubled feelings at all, but that doesn't make them any the less real.

There may be reasons for it all that we can't detect, because they involve a spiritual dynamic we cannot discern.

An insensitive believer says, "What's wrong with you? "You shouldn't give in to such feelings," but he has no idea of what's going on w/i our hearts.

He doesn't understand that we are going through a confusing time when our very spirits are drowning in darkness, & we can't help ourselves because even we don't understand what's going on within us.

We read Peter's words, "*casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you*" (I Pet 5:7), and we try to do that, but those cares come sneaking back into our minds, reminding us how imperfect our faith still is.

The good news in our text is that Jesus eventually comes out to His disciples on the lake, saves their lives, & gives them peace.

And if we are born again believers, He'll do that for us too.

The outline for today's text is simple=>

- 1) The beginning of the disciples' voyage.
- 2) The midpoint of their voyage.
- 3) The end of their voyage.

*** The Beginning of the Voyage**

Unlike the other 3 Gospels, Luke's account of the events that occurred on this night, is immediately followed by Jesus' asking His disciples, "*Who do you say that I am?*"

Luke says Peter answered=> *“The Christ of God”*
(Lk 9:20).

But according to Matthew, he actually said=> *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Mt 16:18).

Although Jesus prob. didn't really ask this question right after He rescued the disciples by walking on the water, Luke wanted us to understand that's what this was all about=> the disciples recognizing exactly who Jesus actually is.

In less than 24 hours, Jesus had exposed His disciples to a barrage of life-changing experiences=> feeding the 5000, sending the 12 into an extremely dangerous situation on Lake Galilee, walking out on the water to rescue them, and finally teaching that they—a/w/a all His other disciples—must eat His flesh & drink His blood spiritually (we'll hear Him say that at the end of this chapter).

Jesus did all this to make them understand who He was (and for that matter, still is).

Jesus had put His closest disciples through a mind-boggling head-spinning series of events to inexorably confront them w/ the reality that, even though He looked essentially like all the rest of them because He was 100% man, they needed to understand/accept the fact that He is God.

The disciples had an amazing ability to mentally sidestep that reality rather than assimilate it into their hearts/minds, even after Jesus proved it, w/ an avalanche of compelling evidence.

Thus, when He has walked out on the water, boarded their boat, and instantly stopped the wind that had been threatening their lives, we still read (in Mk 6)=>

*“They were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was **hardened**” (6:51f).*

In spite of all that Jesus had done earlier that day, they didn't get it, until He stopped the wind from blowing. That was the final shot that broke through the hardness of their spiritual ignorance/unbelief.

Then Peter finally understood, but only because the Father had revealed it to him that Jesus was the X, the Son of God.

It all began with Jesus putting the 12 into their boat, and sending them back across the lake to Capernaum.

[John 6:16-17]=> *“Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, / and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to **Capernaum**. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.”*

It seems most likely that the words, *“Jesus had not **yet** come to them,”* represent John's informing his readers about the timing of Jesus' walking on the water, out to the boat.

This was an event they were already aware of, having read about it in the other 3 Gospels.

Keep in mind, that John wrote his Gospel many years after Matthew/Mark/Luke were written, so his readers already knew how it had all ended.

He was simply telling them that Jesus' walking on water hadn't happened yet at this point in the story.

A footnote=> Mk 6:45 says, "*Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to [better, towards] Bethsaida [not Capernaum].*"

It seems X instructed the 12 to row north *towards*

Bethsaida (not *to* Bethsaida) hugging the shore, then to turn west & go straight across the lake into Capernaum on the northwest shore.

This then is the beginning of what turned out to be the disciples' frightening voyage across a windy sea, on a dark night—
w/o Jesus.

* **The Midpoint of the Voyage**

This is when everything seemed to go wrong, the disciples became terrified, & they thought they were all going to die.

[Verse 18]=> "*The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing.*"

The boat made it to the midpoint of the lake, but then stalled because the wind was blowing directly at/against it so strongly, that they could make no further progress.

According to 19th century pastor/scholar Wm. M. Thomson, who spent time in this area learning about it, the winds there usually blow from the E. & N.E., and are very powerful.

In *The Land and the Book*, Thomson wrote=> “Small as the lake is, and placid in general as a molten mirror, I have repeatedly seen it quiver, and leap, and boil like a cauldron, when driven by fierce winds.”

The winds that the Apostles faced were prob. coming from the West or Northwest, not the East.

The typical ancient fishing boat was 27’ long,

Their boat was stopped, because of fierce western winds, and Mk 6 says they were right in the middle of the lake (6:47)—late at night; in the dark.

Mt 14 adds, the boat was a long distance from land, & was being “*battered by the waves*” (14:24).

That last statement usually implies concern that the waves’ battering could pull the boat’s timbers apart.

Meanwhile, Jesus was still up on the mountain praying.

You would assume He was praying that the Father would spare His disciples’ lives.

Instead, He may have been praying for winds strong enough to break through the hardness of their hearts, so that when He rescued them, they’d realize w/o a doubt, exactly who He was=> the Son of God.

Mark tells us that Jesus, in His omniscience, could see them.

In Mk 6 we read=> *“When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. / Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night [3:00 AM to 6:00 AM] He came to them”* (6:47-48).

Jesus didn't see them w/ His eyes because it was dark, and they were 3-4 miles away.

He saw them w/ His divine omniscience, just as He had seen Nathaniel in Jn 1:48.

[Verse 19]=> *“Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened.”*

The lake is 6 miles wide, & they'd gone 3-4 miles across it.

Mark tells us they all saw Jesus, & were all so terrified (6:50), that they cried out (6:49), thinking in the dark that He was a ghost.

Even the fishermen, who'd spent much of their lives earning their living on this unpredictable lake, were now terrified.

They were already unnerved by this dangerous situation they found themselves in.

But when they saw what seemed to be a ghost, knowing they couldn't get away from it, because they couldn't get anywhere, rowing against that impossible wind, they all became terrified.

This night had turned into a nightmare.

More/more so, as the “ghost” drew nearer to the boat.

They were undoubtedly tired from lugging all that food to the crowd earlier that day, and some were probably hoping for a nice calm boat ride in which they could get a little sleep.

But they certainly couldn't relax right now.

If they weren't pulling on the oars w/ all their strength, they were bailing as fast as possible.

Nature, & all the natural forces of this world such as the wind/sea can be frightening, but at least they are understandable.

However, a close brush with the supernatural, which cannot be understood/controlled, is absolutely terrifying.

When that happens in the dark, it's doubly terrifying.

And here was a human form walking toward them as quickly/easily on the water, as you/I could walk on a sidewalk.

Mt 14 says that, because the disciples thought it was a ghost, they cried out in fear.

In verse 19, John says the disciples "*saw Jesus walking on the sea,*" & the word he uses for "saw" is *theoreo*, which means to watch w/ arrested/absorbed interest.

With wide-opened eyes, they thought they were watching a ghost coming closer/closer to them.

In reality, this was the same Jesus who just a few hours earlier had healed people, then fed a multitude w/ 5 pieces of bread & 2 fish.

It was Jesus proving once again that He is the Monarch of all nature—its Creator/Controller.

In one sense, that didn't eliminate the cause of the disciples' fear, which was ultimately xenophobia. Xenophobia is fear/hatred of foreigners.

Jesus was proving by His walking on water that He was not only a foreigner—He was an alien, unlike any other man, and not from this world.

He could make Himself exempt from the laws of nature, because He had established those laws, when He created the universe.

Anyone with that kind of power is frightening to such weak/vulnerable creatures as all the rest of us are.

*** The End of the Voyage**

Jesus responded tenderly to His disciples' fears & calmed them, by identifying Himself to them.

They prob. couldn't see Him well in the dark, but they could undoubtedly recognize His voice, even over the wind's howling, & His words must have brought them relief and calmed their hearts.

[Verse 20]=> *“But He said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’”*

If you were in the grip of an absolutely terrifying situation; & if you had a deep/sincere love for Jesus, & if you heard His voice gently saying to you, “It is I, don't be afraid,” your fears would melt away just as the disciples' did.

The truth is, He does say that to us in His Word, & that very fact should calm/comfort us.

Not only did Jesus say that to His disciples here, He also said it again to His disciples Peter/James/John at His transfiguration in Mt 17:7, & to some of His women disciples in Mt 28:10, after His resurrection.

X always/only says that to His disciples, so if you are one of His disciples, He says that to you, just as He said it to these rugged/rough-cut fishermen/outdoorsmen. If He is your Savior, you have nothing to fear, so don't be afraid.

He doesn't say, "It is I, so toughen up & stop your crying."

No, He says very tenderly, "*It is I. Don't be afraid.*"

Jesus' words did indeed relieve His disciples' fears.

[Verse 21]=> "*So they were willing [wanting] to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.*"

Matthew says that when X got on board the boat, the wind suddenly ceased (Mt 14:32).

This was the miracle that finally broke through their unbelief.

Matthew also informs us that Peter, unwilling to wait for Jesus to get into the boat, had gotten out of it & started to walk on the water to Him (Mt 14:28-31).

One additional fact that Matthew gives us is that, when X stopped the wind, the disciples said, “*You are the Son of God,*” and they worshiped Him (14:33), prob. meaning they bowed/fell down before Him.

The astonishment resulting from their hard-hearted unbelief had become transformed into recognition of who Jesus is, and heartfelt worship of Him, as their Lord.

What had brought about this transformation?

Fear for their lives, followed by a wonderful sense of relief, that Jesus had arrived, to save their lives, and He had the power to do it.

That’s why X had sent them out on the water alone on a windy night, & then waited before coming to them.

He had used adversity/trial to draw them closer to Himself.

Finally, Jesus performed one more astounding miracle=>

John=> “*Immediately the boat was **at the land** [run up on the beach].*”

How it happened w/o their all suffering whiplash, I don’t know.

But it’s not surprising that Someone who could instantly bring a boat to land, and bring a wind-tossed lake to heel, could prevent that.

The disciples who got out of that boat, were changed men.

All but 1 (Judas) were different men, from when they’d boarded, because of the events of that night-voyage.

Later that day, X would teach a large group of people who now considered themselves to be His disciples, that no one can come to Him unless it has been granted to a person by the Father.

Many of Jesus “disciples” will reject Him for saying that, and they’ll walk away.

But not those Twelve men, 11 of whom were not truly His disciples.

He will look at them & ask, “*You do not want to go away also, do you?*” (Jn 6:67).

Peter will answer for them all=> “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. / We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God*” (6:68-69).

I doubt they could have answered like that before they’d witnessed the powerful events of this day, including a traumatizing ride on a boat that seemed about to sink. They had fully embraced Jesus by faith, which made them different, from all of X’s false disciples. Not only had they eaten the miracle-bread along w/ the 5000, they’d taken the Bread of Life into their hearts. All of them that is, but one, Judas the son of perdition, who had chosen to harden his heart even more, in spite of it all.

This is such a powerful story, because of the many truths it illustrates, that we can so readily relate to our own lives.

1st, its not unusual for God's children to experience trials/trouble.

They don't happen because Jesus has forgotten about us.

X Himself put His disciples on that boat & sent them to sea, knowing a great wind was about to blow.

*“For those whom the Lord loves He **disciplines**, And He scourges every son whom He receives”* (Hb 12:6).

Someone=> “But I don't deserve the Lord's discipline and scourging. I haven't done anything wrong.”

That's what Jesus' disciples would have said, unaware of the hardness of their own hearts that had kept them from trusting in Him, as they should have.

Whether/not we deserve God's discipline is not so much the issue, as whether/not we need it.

None of the Saints in God's Word was w/o chastening/discipline.

Even the most godly among them were chastened, for the purpose of their sanctification, & to prove thru hardship they were who they seemed to be, including Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Daniel, Peter, John; & Paul who said (II Cor 12:7)=>

*“To keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a **thorn** in the flesh.”*

If you are a child of God, somewhere between here/heaven, you too can expect something like this boat ride;

And you can expect it to permanently change you, for the better.

He who began a good work w/i you, will perfect it (Phil 1:6), & you'll prob. feel some pain/pressure in the perfecting process.

2nd, the hardest part of chastening for a believer is the sense that he has lost the sweetness of X's fellowship.

Those who haven't known the peace/joy of such fellowship feel no such sorrow over the sense of Jesus' absence. But for those who have—true believers—it's as traumatic as feeling alone in the dark, on a wind-tossed sea.

Believers may appear to have strong faith in their Lord when things are going well—good health, reliable job.

But suddenly something in their lives goes drastically wrong & 90% of their faith disappears on them.

They pray, but X doesn't seem to be there for them.

They say, "He was in the boat on the voyage over, & it was great in the sunshine.

"But now it doesn't feel like He's still there, and it has gotten dark."

It seems as if His presence has been withdrawn.

Suddenly, we feel so alone, so helpless, so vulnerable, just like the Apostles did.

In fact, we feel a little like Jesus Himself, crying, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Mt 27:46).

3rd, even when Jesus seems absent from our lives, we still have His words in Scripture to rely on, & to comfort us.

They tell us that He has given us His Spirit, that “*He may be with [us] forever*” (Jn 14:17, 18).

He’s also said Himself, “*I will not leave you as orphans.*”

Someone: “Yes, but I don’t *feel* Him there with me or in me.”

That may be what this is all about=> Learning to trust God’s Word, rather than your own feelings.

Though you can’t see Jesus right now, you can be sure that He sees/loves you, just as He could see His Apostles straining, as they pulled on their oar in their exhaustion/fear.

He’s teaching you to trust Him, not your own strength, even when you cannot see/feel Him.

And in that knowledge, it’s possible for you to find joy in loving Him.

Peter wrote=> “*Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, / obtaining as the outcome of your **faith** the salvation of your souls*” (I Pet 1:8).

4th, you can be confident that eventually the trouble will pass, and Jesus will come to you, just as he did to the Apostles when they were stranded on the lake.

Though He may wait for a while, knowing that's what your faith needs in order to grow, He will come to you.

Of this you may be sure=> X will never forsake His own people.

And when you sense His return, you will discover that you have a greater confidence in His faithfulness, and a greater sense of His power/goodness, than ever before.

The disciples would never have understood Jesus' power to calm storms, unless there had been a storm to calm.

Personal trials are necessary in order for us to learn to appreciate and rely on our Savior's strength/faithfulness.

5th, if you don't really know/trust/love Jesus (as Judas didn't), then you really are w/o X.

Tragically, it's not just a feeling, it's a reality.

The storms you face in this life w/o Him, are just an early warning of what you will face forever in eternity, w/o Him.

If that frightens you, you should.

If you are well-off, & life is good, & you feel you're just fine w/o Jesus, there is an endless/frightening night in eternity ahead, that you'll have to face all alone.

But it's not necessary that you do so.

Jesus calls you, saying=> "*Come unto Me, you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Mt 11:28).

And I would plead w/ you, to reach out to Jesus now by faith, & bring Him on board your life, while there's still time.

“On a Dark, Wind-tossed Sea”

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Text: John 6:16-21

1. There are times when Christians feel they are about to drown in their troubles and Jesus isn't there for them; the disciples felt Christ's [16 absence] keenly.

Mt 14:22; Mk 6:45; I Pet 5:7

2. The good news in our text is that Jesus eventually comes to His disciples, saves them, and gives them [12 peace].

The outline for today's text is simply...

*** The Beginning of the Voyage**

Lk 9:20; Mt 16:18

3. Jesus put His closest disciples through a head-spinning series of events to confront them with the reality that... He is [9 God].

Mk 6:51-52

4. It all began with Jesus putting the 12 into their boat and [16 sending] them back across the lake to Capernaum.

[John 6:16-17]

Mk 6:45

*** The Midpoint of the Voyage**

[Verse 18]

5. The boat made it to the midpoint of the lake, but then stalled because the [10 wind] was blowing directly against it.

Mk 6:47; Mt 14:24

6. Meanwhile, Jesus was still up on the mountain [16 praying].

Mk 6:47-48

[Verse 19]

7. They all saw Jesus and were so terrified that they cried out thinking He was a [12 ghost].

Mk 6:50, 49

8. This was Jesus, proving once again that He is the Monarch of all nature—its [16 Creator] and Controller.

*** The End of the Voyage**

[Verse 20]

Mt 17:7, 28:10

9. Jesus' words did indeed [16 relieve] His disciples' fears.

[Verse 21]

Mt 14:32; 28-31, 33

10. The disciples who got out of that boat were changed men; all but one were different men from when they had boarded [16 because] of the events of that night-voyage.

Jn 6:57; 6:68-69

This is a powerful story we can readily relate to our own lives...

*11. First, it's not unusual for God's children to experience [14 trials] and trouble.

Heb 12:6; II Cor 12:7; Phil 1:6

*12. Second, the hardest part of chastening for a believer is the sense that he has lost the sweetness of [18 Christ's] fellowship.

Mt 27:46

*13. Third, even when Jesus seems absent from our lives, we still have His words in Scripture to rely on and to [16 comfort] us.

Jn 14: 17, 18; I Pet 1:8

*14. Fourth, you can be confident that eventually the trouble will pass and Jesus will [10 come] to you.

*15. Fifth, if you don't really know, trust, and love Jesus (as Judas didn't), then you really are [16 without] Christ.