**Jesus Walks on the Water**

**(Is My Heart Hardened?)**

June 7, 2020

Mark 6:45-56

Key Verse 6:52 “for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.”

At the center of Mark’s gospel is Jesus’ revealing his identity as the Son of God and the failure of the disciples to fully grasp that identity. The pattern repeats again and again. Jesus feeds the five thousand (6:30-44), but the disciples’ hearts were hardened. Next, Jesus feeds the four thousand (8:1-9), but the disciples still did not understand. Jesus’ healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26) occurs in two stages; When Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes the first time, the blind man could not see clearly. People looked like trees walking around. After Jesus put his hands on the eyes the second time, he saw everything clearly. It signifies a picture of these two cycles of events in chapters 6-8, and results in the disciples finally understanding who Jesus is: “You are the Messiah.” Jesus healed their blindness! But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. We will slowly learn the lesson. But remember this outline as we study next two chapters. Today Jesus reveals himself to be the Creator God by walking on the water. No human beings can walk on the water. But Jesus’ disciples were not yet spiritually woke.

Look at verse 45. “Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.” Here Jesus compelled his disciples forcefully to get into the boat because he sensed a crisis. According to John’s gospel, the crowd was very excited about the miracle that they wanted to make Jesus king by force. They were excited that finally the Messiah came and would solve all their bread problems. They did not understand the purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world. When Jesus came the first time, he had no political agenda. He had no social agenda. He had no moral agenda. He only had a spiritual agenda. He came to the earth in order to offer salvation. He would be a king, but he would be a spiritual King over the hearts of those who put their faith in Him. One day he will be the King of kings and Lord of lords. He will reign over the whole earth. But right now, his Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom. The people, however, wanted only physical things. They wanted only those things which were momentary and temporal. They were eager to receive his power over demons, disease, and death. His power to create food was even more attractive to them. They wanted him to solve all their problems. But Jesus saw the crowd for what the crowd was. He saw in the relentless and eager crowds no true worship, no true repentance, their own sense of self-righteousness. They wanted their religion, they loved their self-righteousness, they just wanted the things that Jesus could provide them. Furthermore, even his disciples did not understand the significance of Jesus’ miracle, but they were just excited about the prospect of Jesus becoming a king, and they would be cabinet members of his kingdom. They were swept away by the crowd’s excitement. That is why Jesus made his disciples get into the boat.

After sending off his disciples, Jesus dismissed the crowd and went up on a mountainside to pray. He must have prayed for his disciples to pass through their spiritual crisis by renewing humble dependence on him. He must have prayed for strength and wisdom to serve God’s mission. Jesus, the Son of God, showed us his example that he depended on God in prayer. So we have no excuse not to pray. Are we busy? Jesus was far more busy. Are we tired? Jesus must have been completely exhausted. Are we in a crisis? Jesus was in the midst of crisis. As prayer was essential to Jesus, it must be to us as well.

Look at verses 47-48a. “Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.” The disciples were in the middle of the lake and Jesus was alone on land. This separation lasted for some time. Evening probably began at 6:00 p.m. It lasted until before dawn. It means that the disciples struggled on the lake for 10 hours. The Lake Galilee is not so big that it would take only 2 hours to cross over to the other side of the lake. The disciples were fighting against the wind, and not making any progress. They must have done their best. They rowed hard until their muscles ached. They must have organized into teams and taken turns. But no matter how hard they struggled, they did not make any progress at all. They were still in the middle of the lake. They felt that they were going nowhere. Without Jesus, the disciples were going nowhere. They must have complained and despaired. However, Jesus did not abandon them. Jesus was watching the disciples from the mountain.

Let’s remember that Jesus told his disciples to go ahead of him to Bethsaida. They were trying to obey Jesus’ words. They were doing their best to follow Jesus’ direction. But they were going nowhere. This tells us that disciples of Jesus need more than human effort to complete their obedience to Jesus’ commands. With human effort, we can get to the middle of the lake, but not to the other side. Jesus helped his disciples learn this through experience. Have you experienced that no matter how much you try, you cannot make progress? It can be your homework, Ph.D. study, or raising disciples. It is very frustrating. For example, when Jesus said, “You give them something to eat,” we have begun to invite students to Bible study. However, we have met only rejections after rejections. Or we may have begun Bible study with someone, but that person does not seem to grow at all. Our Bible student is stuck, and so are we. After struggling, we become tired. We complain to Jesus, “Where are you, Jesus?” Jesus seemed to abandon us. Jesus seemed far away. But Jesus is watching over us.

Jesus saw that his disciples had had enough. So he decided to go out to them. Look at verse 48b. “Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them” No human being can walk on water. But Jesus walked on water. Jesus is God who created the heavens and the earth. Notice that Jesus was about to pass by them. It does not mean that He was going to ‘bypass’ them. He is trying to show that he is God Almighty in the sense of an Old Testament. There are at least two notable occurrences when God intentionally passed by individuals. On Mount Sinai, God passed by Moses. Exodus 33:22-23 says, “When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.” In this passage, God reveals himself to Moses— something of his nature and character is made known—by passing him by. In another instance God manifests himself before Elijah on Mount Horeb. 1 Kings 19:11-12 says, “The Lord said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.’ Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.” So Mark is intentionally linking this episode to those where God reveals himself to Moses and Elijah. By walking on the water, Jesus is showing himself to possess power and authority as the Creator. He is proclaiming that he is the God of Moses and Elijah.

How did they respond? Did they welcome Jesus, saying, “Wow! It’s Jesus! We are so glad to see you, Master.” No. They thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. When they were struggling with their own effort, they did not see Jesus as Jesus, but as a ghost. Even if Jesus were a ghost, they did not need to be terrified. They could have stood and ventured to do battle with the ghost as they had driven out demons in their fieldwork training. But they yelled in terror. Moreover, according to the Jewish myth, ghosts cannot walk on water. The Jewish and Roman readers of this gospel would have been dumbfounded by the disciples’ misunderstanding. The idea that someone walking on water was a ghost was a comically illogical mistake. It shows their irrational fear. It shows that they had no confidence in themselves or their past experience. Without Christ they were powerless and fearful. They did not cry out, “Save us Jesus.” But they cried out in fear. They had no faith, no courage, no strength. When we see the event from the disciples’ point of view, we can sympathize with them. They had a hard time. Moreover, as Mark tells it, Jesus deliberately let them reach their limit before intervening. Why did Jesus do this? Jesus is the expert disciple maker. Jesus tears down in order to build up. Jesus helps us realize our limits truly so that we can depend on him completely. It was Jesus’ one-sided grace to educate his disciples in this way.

Still, Jesus did not want the disciples to remain in their awful self-realization and fear any longer than necessary. The moment they came to the bottom of themselves, he helped them to see him. Look at verse 50b. “Immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’” As soon as they cried out, Jesus spoke to them immediately. When Jesus spoke to them, they began to recognize him. It was through his word that they could restore their love relationship with him. The phrase “Don’t be afraid” is used one hundred times from Genesis to Revelation, and it is typically spoken as a word of assurance. Don’t be afraid, Don’t be afraid, Don’t be afraid. The lesson in the training of the twelve is that if you belong to him, you never need to fear, no matter how terrifying the circumstances. If you are with Jesus, you have nothing to fear. He will be a present help in time of need. Isaiah 41:10 says, “Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.” (NLT)

Look at verses 51-52. “Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.” When it says that their hearts were hardened, what it is saying is that their hearts were hard to realize the implication of just who Jesus really is, in the miracle of Jesus’ feeding the 5000. For if they had realized it, then they would not have been surprised by him walking on water. For them, the prior miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000 was not enough for them to realize just how much power and authority he had. It is like Pharaoh, king of Egypt. When the staff of Moses became a snake, Pharaoh saw it as a simple magicians’ trick that his magicians could easily reproduce and so his heart remained hardened to realization of just who he was dealing with, and so he wouldn't let the Israelites go. His heart would not allow the truth about who he was dealing with to penetrate it. A hardened heart is one that is hard to be penetrated with truth or belief.

Hebrews 3:15 says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” As we choose not to hear God, as we choose not to listen to the voice of God, or if we want to follow our own way, we become hardened to the message. If one has a hard heart, there is no biblical growth in his life; He cannot hear the voice of God; He cannot see the work of God; There is no spiritual growth; No desire to please God; No desire to serve God. The disciples’ hearts were hardened because of their vain hope of becoming cabinet members of Jesus’ earthly Messianic kingdom. So even though they saw Jesus feeding the 5,000 and Jesus walking on the water, they could not make connections. They were not spiritually woke. Charles Spurgeon said, “The same sun which melts wax hardens clay. And the same Gospel which melts some persons to repentance hardens others in their sins.” But God is gracious, and we need to pray and ask God for a new heart, soft heart. We need to ask God to take away the stony heart. Ezekiel 36:26 says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Changing our stony hearts involves humility, repentance, obedience. May God give you a soft heart to be responsive to the word of God.

Look at verses 53-56. As soon as Jesus got into the boat, it reached the other side, landing at Gennesaret, just south of Capernaum. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. News spread like a wildfire through the whole region, and people ran to Jesus from everywhere. They carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. Perhaps they remembered the friends of the paralytic. Some may have carried their friends for a mile, others for five miles. Jesus went into villages, towns and throughout the countryside and wherever he went, people placed their sick in the marketplaces. They begged Jesus to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed. Many of them had learned “just touch” faith from the woman who had suffered from bleeding. The main point of this part is that Jesus expressed his love for all people by healing them. Jesus, the Almighty God who walks on water, used his power to heal many sick people.

In this passage we learned that the disciples’ hearts were hardened because they did not understand Jesus’ feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. We need to be very careful that our hearts do not become hardened but be responsive to God’s word.

Big Idea: Is my heart hardened?