

95-07-16bMark

Father, we thank you once again for the great privilege that you have given us to assemble, to worship, to study your Word, to go forth from this place equipped and thoroughly furnished for every good work. We pray that our study this evening will contribute toward that purpose and that goal in your plan. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Turn with me to Mark chapter 6. We will finish 1 Samuel next week, but we have an opportunity to take advantage of the momentum that we gained this morning in getting this boat through the water and safely to the shore. There is a very interesting little section at the end of chapter 6 that we want to take a look at tonight.

This begins in chapter 6, verse 53, and extends through verse 56. We saw the episode on the lake, the disciples rowing manfully, tormented at the oars, Jesus coming to them. You notice in verse 49 that when they saw Him walking on the sea, remember they were in the boat rowing, facing the stern, rowing to the west, facing to the east, Jesus walking out and following the course of the boat coming up on them from the stern.

When they saw Him, it's not clear whether He got close enough that the light from the lamps on the boat may have illuminated His figure or there might have been some moonlight. It doesn't say there was a storm, there was just a very stiff wind into which they were rowing. But at some point, here they are, they've been rowing for hours, and suddenly they see this form on the water.

How many of you have ever gotten to the point of fatigue and then have gone beyond fatigue? You've gone way past, Dr. Wright has, I have. Not always in the best of endeavors in my case, but I remember one time very distinctly when I was stationed at Fort Sill and I went to Claremore to visit my folks, was unmarried at the time, and I stayed very late on Sunday night. I had to teach a class and give a test at 7 o'clock the following morning on Monday.

But I stayed, it was so enjoyable, it was a great time with my parents, and I didn't leave until very, very late, maybe 1.30 or 2 to get back to Fort Sill. This was foolish on my part, I will freely admit. I was very tired because I didn't sleep much that weekend, and as I went down the turnpike and got just outside Oklahoma City, went through the toll gate, went through Oklahoma City, and got on that last stretch of turnpike that goes down to Lawton, not a car to be seen going either direction, the truckers had all pulled over and gone to sleep, and for miles you would never pass another set of headlights.

And I was bone weary, tired, and the strangest thing happened to me, I saw up at the edge of my headlights a semi-tractor trailer turned over in the road. I could count the wheels, I could see the drive shaft, it was as clear as day, and I slammed on the brakes, skidded over onto the shoulder, and looked again and it was not there. And I thought, my, my, my.

I pulled back on the road and I went a few more miles, and believe me, there was a truck there. I

could see the grease stains, I could see the under, the brake lines, it was vividly there turned over in the middle of the road, right at the edge of my headlights. I slammed on my brakes, all of my adrenaline went pumping, skidded off the road, I looked again and it wasn't there.

It was at that point in my young life that I concluded that it is a dangerous thing to get too tired, because you can actually hallucinate. I would not have believed it if it had not happened to me. But, they were there and then they weren't.

And I think the disciples at this point may have been prepared for a similar experience. Rowing is not easy. Against the wind it's much more difficult, and doing it for nine hours in the darkness is also difficult.

And by that time, when they glanced up and saw this apparition, just at the outward edge of the illumination, it absolutely startled the daylights out of them. They were greatly afraid. They supposed it was a ghost and they cried out.

And Jesus hastens to reassure them and He says, Be of good cheer, it is I, do not be afraid. There's an interesting study that you've probably run across, but there are nine or ten cases I think in the Bible where this phrase, be of good cheer, occurs. And with one exception, it is always from the lips of Jesus Christ.

And even in that tenth case, it's the case where the blind man on the edge of the road has been told that Jesus has called for him to come and be healed. And the crowd says, be of good cheer, the Master is calling for you. So that be of good cheer is always associated with the presence of Jesus Christ.

And it's a wonderful thing, that's what He says here. And it's the first thing, it's so characteristic of Him and it's the very thing that would reassure them that it was actually Him. And He went up into the boat to them and the wind ceased.

They were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure and marveled. Of course, not since ancient times had anything floated on the water that shouldn't have. The most that had happened in the Old Testament was, I can't remember if it was Elijah or Elisha, I think it was Elisha that made the axe head float for the workman that lost it.

Of course, that's small potatoes to walking several miles across the lake. So it's understandable that they would be amazed in themselves beyond measure and marvel. But then it tells us why in verse 52, for they had not understood about the loaves because their heart was hardened.

We'll take up this issue of the loaves next week in detail. But here's the thing to think about. Here's what Mark, I think, is trying to get across to us in this section.

In fact, if it were me, I would not have started chapter 7 where it starts. It should either start right

after verse 44 of chapter 6 or it should not start until verse 14 of chapter 7. But this is a very unfortunate chapter break, in my opinion, because it interrupts something that is designed to hold together. And that is the reaction to Jesus teaching and the reaction to his ministry.

Jesus has just done an extraordinary thing. He has fed 5000 men and their families with five loaves and two fish. That's extraordinary by anyone's reckoning.

But Jesus wasn't just doing that as a stunt. It wasn't just to demonstrate his power. It wasn't just a demonstration of his compassion.

There was a purpose in it. The loaves mean something. And that's what we'll look at next week.

But people should have come away from that experience impressed by the power of God, impressed by the fact that to accomplish his purposes, God will act in a supernatural way and to be prepared to call on that power in their own case. Now, the disciples have just returned from that missionary trip, and that's what they did. They saw situations of need.

This was an opportunity to preach the gospel of the kingdom. They went out and preached it. And in so doing, they cast out demons and they healed the sick.

The power of God was invoked by the disciples, and they saw this for many days. Now they're back in a more normal part of their life. That was an extraordinary mission.

Now they're back in their normal life. And the loaves should have told them something. We've had dozens of crowds, perhaps hundreds of crowds in a year and a half or two years that Jesus and the disciples have been ministering.

And yet in this ordinary situation, something extraordinary has happened. The power of God has come in and met a need. As the disciples get into this boat and seek to fulfill Jesus' instruction to go to the other side, it still hasn't impressed them that they can call on God for the ordinary things, that the supernatural power of God is there.

God is waiting to make a difference. And they get out on the lake and they encounter a problem. It's a headwind.

The sails won't work. They furl the sails and they go to oars. It's a classic picture of human energy to meet the problem.

We're not making any headway. Let's work harder. And so they break out the oars.

And the first few oars don't work. Perhaps they got more disciples and more oars and rode more energetically and more manfully towards the goal. Apparently, never once stopping to think that just a few days before, they had seen someone who had control over the wind and had control over the waves.

Someone with whom they are acquainted, that they travel with on a daily basis. Someone who has a relationship with God the Father. Someone who prays to God.

Before he broke the loaves and fed them, he lifted them up and gave thanks to God. God is in his heaven. It apparently hasn't slipped over from the realm of the extraordinary to the realm of the ordinary that God is there.

That God is available. The power of God is there to accomplish the plan. And so rather than calling on God, saying, God, we're trying to follow Jesus' instruction to be at Bethsaida and we're encountering this headwind.

Instead, the solution is let's get more oars. Let's row for all we're worth. After three quarters of a night's worth of rowing, they haven't made it, but about halfway.

So Jesus comes and without saying a word, reinforces that very lesson. He walks across the water. There was a need to get to the boat.

God provided the means. Jesus Christ has authority over wind and over waves. As soon as he gets into the boat, the wind ceases.

Why is that? Why didn't the wind cease when Jesus was up on the mountain and saw the distress of the disciples? He could have stopped the wind at that point. Why does the wind not cease? See, these are all good questions to ask. There is a reason for everything that we see in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

There's a reason for every detail of his ministry, every detail in the Bible, every jot and every tittle is there to instruct us. And we can ask ourselves why. Why did the wind not stop until he got into the boat? It didn't even stop while Peter was walking on the waves.

We don't have that account in this book. But notice the wind is still blowing when Peter says, if that's you, Lord, bid me come to you. And he gets out and starts to sink and says, Lord, save me.

The classic prayer of every believer at one time or another, two word prayer, Lord, save. It's our instinctive response as children of God. But the wind doesn't stop until Jesus gets in the boat.

And there's significance in that. There's significance in the presence of Jesus Christ. There is significance in the power of God activated by faith.

Jesus Christ dwells in our hearts. How? By faith. What brings the presence of God into our life? It's not our work.

It's not our ruling. It's faith. And I'll start my familiar litany, faith as an object.

The object is the Word of God. To have faith, you have to know the Word of God. To know the

Word of God, you have to hear it taught consistently, faithfully, regularly.

Wisdom personified in Proverbs says, blessed is the man who watches daily at my gates. It's a priority. Faith activates the power of God in our life.

Why? It's not just a mechanical thing, because faith brings the presence of Jesus Christ to life in our ordinary experience. Not just our crises, not just our charge of the elephant experiences, but in our daily life. What some have called the charge of the mosquito.

The small pressures, the small problems, those things that nag and endure and go on for day after day and week after week. It's the presence in our life of Jesus Christ that sustains us in those pressures or delivers us out of them as God wills. So now we come to verse 53.

These things have happened. They have gotten to the point where Jesus is in the boat. And when they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there.

Gennesaret is a valley on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. It's about a mile wide and three miles long. It's very fertile.

It is a fertile. It's one great agricultural field there. And in Jesus' day, crops of every description grew there.

They grew fruit trees. They grew all kinds of grains. Every square inch of the vale of Gennesaret was cultivated and brought forth richly and abundantly.

It was a breadbasket for the whole Galilee area. And this is where they have gone. They've come to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there.

When he came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him. And we saw this once before, before the crowd followed him around and we had the teaching and the feeding of the 5,000. Once again, the people see him and they recognize him.

What did they do in verse 55? They ran through that whole surrounding region and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard he was. Wherever he entered into villages, cities or in the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might just touch the hem of his garment. And as many as touched him were made well.

Why do you suppose they were begging to touch the hem of his garment? Why would they think that the hem of his garment would be a good place to touch? The woman with the issue of blood? Of course, she sort of came up with that on her own. Apparently, in the press of the crowd, she was able to reach out and touch one of those symbolic tassels on the Lord's outer garment. Jesus' reputation has preceded him, hasn't it? They've heard this story.

They know what happened to the woman with the issue of blood. She touched the hem of his

garment. She touched the tassel and she was healed.

Please let me touch the tassel so that I can be healed also. And so there's this great movement to bring all of the sick in the area to Jesus. Wherever he entered, villages, cities, in the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, hoping that they could touch.

And as many as touched him were made well. Now, normally we look at this and we say, I don't know what we say. We look at it and we realize that for the people who were sick, this was a wonderful thing.

To be blind and be able to see, to be lame and be able to walk. It's hard to say that there's anything wrong with being healed. But if we slow down a little bit and meditate on this just for a moment, what is the point that Jesus is trying to get across to Israel? What's the point that he's getting across to his disciples? Is it I am the great band-aid? I am the great physician.

I am here to heal your physical ills. Is that the reason that he came? Is that the message that he preaches? Is that the message that he had the disciples preach? Is that what he wants Israel to change their minds about? That yes, God has the power to heal. Is that the point? That is a by-product of Jesus' ministry, isn't it? It's a sign.

It is designed to take a visible reality and argue from that to an invisible reality. If God can do this with bodies, think what he can do with our souls. If Jesus Christ can resuscitate someone from the dead and they can live, surely he can give life to our mortal bodies and we will in fact live in the resurrection.

It is a starting point to teach invisible truths. And Jesus wants people to get past the sign and get to the principle. Remember the quote that we had from... I can't even remember who said it now... talked about the difference between seeing and believing a sign and seeing and believing a reality.

I think it was Thomas Aquinas that said that. And this is what Jesus is trying to argue past. This is what he's trying to get the disciples to see.

Don't be constantly focusing on the wind and the waves. Think about who you are in the plan of God and the relationship that you have. Wake up and smell the spiritual coffee.

There is a new reality. There are new opportunities because of your relationship with God in your ordinary life. So don't look at life the old way.

Don't look at superficialities. Don't just try to fix a visible problem. Think a little further and think in terms of the plan of God.

In that light, when we look at this passage, did the people here get the message? Are these people flocking to Jesus Christ saying, Lord, we have come to you, you have the words of life.

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. If we depart from you, to whom will we go? As Peter will later say to Jesus.

That's not what they're saying, are they? Here's a guy that can fix Uncle Uriah's broken leg. Here's a man that can cause Cousin Dorcas to get her sight back. Or here's someone that can help my daughter or my son or my relative to get well.

And so they carry them. And they see in it an immediate solution to a temporal, earthly, physical problem. And Jesus accomplishes that.

Jesus doesn't turn them away. Jesus doesn't say, oh, you missed the point. I'm not going to help you.

Jesus healed all who came to him. But I'm sure it was with sadness in his heart because these people have missed the point. The disciples haven't yet caught on to the point that tells us they didn't understand about the load.

It wasn't the issue of feeding the people. Jesus didn't come to be a great food supplier. He's not going to open up a chain of free restaurants in Israel.

He's not going to open up a healing clinic and tell the disciples, now I want you to staff this clinic after I'm gone and heal all who come. That's not His purpose and that's not His point. And so these folks, with all of the good that they perceive happening with these healings, have missed the point.

That very hem of the garment that they are begging to touch, it's become a mechanic. Well, I hear that a lady touched a hymn and it made her well. I'm going to touch the hymn.

It's ritual without reality. Someone touched the hymn and it worked, I'm going to touch the hymn. It isn't someone had faith in Christ, someone understood who He was and believed in Him.

It's a magical thing. He might as well be Aladdin's lamp. He might as well be the bronze serpent.

He's become an icon. He is a quick fix. Now, you might say, well, now, Sam, that seems awfully harsh on these folks, you don't know.

Maybe they were believing, maybe they really did respond and along with that were getting healed. Turn with me to John chapter 6. We referred to this a couple of times this morning. John chapter 6. John was there.

John was an eyewitness to these events. So it will be helpful for us to find out what John says about this same day, this same episode here in Gennesaret. In John chapter 6 verse 15 through 29, we have the account of Jesus walking on the water.

Actually, it starts there in verse 15 and ends in verse 21. In verse 22, we have the next day. This

is the day after the disciples rode all night.

This is the day after Jesus walked on the water. John 6 verse 22. On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there except one and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone.

What is this all talking about? These are the people who were at the foot of the mountain. These are the people that ate the five loaves and two fish. These are the ones that let Jesus go up and pray and they're waiting for Him to come back down so that they can make Him king.

He fed them bread. There is a passage in the Old Testament that talks about God providing bread in the wilderness and they say, this is the Messiah, let's make Him the king. Jesus knows their heart isn't right in this and He leaves.

And so these people are disappointed. So in verse 24, when the people saw that Jesus was not there nor His disciples, they also got into boats and they came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. Of course, by this time, the westerly wind had died down and they didn't have near the difficulty that the disciples did getting there.

When they found Him, in verse 25, on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, Rabbi, when did You come here? How did You get away from the mountain where we had You surrounded, where we wanted to carry You off and make You king? Jesus answered them and said, Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Remember what Aquinas said about the signs? The value of a sign is not the sign itself, but the principle behind it. Jesus says, you're not following Me because you saw the sign and you saw the principle behind it and you caught the truth.

You're following Me because you ate bread. You got a physical need satisfied and now you're all flocking to Me with your sick to get a physical need satisfied. Jesus sees into the very center of their hearts.

And He exhorts them in verse 27, Don't labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him. He says, don't pursue these earthly goals. We talked this morning about affliction and suffering and how easy it is when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances to pray and say, God, take this away.

This is wearing me down. This is beating me up. This is sapping my energy and my strength.

This difficulty that I'm facing is too much for me to take. Please take it away. And yet, we reviewed the words of the Apostle Paul, this momentary light affliction, that's the very thing that works for us an eternal weight of glory.

Jesus is exhorting the Israelites in this same area. He's saying, don't get caught up in these physical needs. Don't follow Me because you ate some bread and were filled.

Look past the sign through the principle. Look at the reality, the spiritual reality. Look to the One who can give you eternal bread, bread that will feed you in eternal life.

Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him. And right away, in the classic fashion that we saw so often in the Old Testament, these people head for the works arena. Jesus says, take on board the bread of life.

Hear the Word. Make the Word the object of your faith. Let that seed be planted in your soil.

But here they say to Him, what shall we do that we may work the works of God? Jesus says, I want you to be something. I want you to be nourished. I want you to be filled up with this bread of eternal life.

And they turn around and say, what shall we do that we may work the works of God? And Jesus answered and said, this is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He sent. The work of God is to stop working. The work of God is to stop running after it.

The work to believe in the work of faith is the means by which Jesus Christ is at home in our hearts. When Jesus said, behold, I stand at the door and knock, who was He talking to? A church of believers. It's not a salvation verse.

Jesus Christ stands at the door of the hearts of believers and knocks and says, if He will open the door, I will come into Him and fellowship with Him and be with Me. And what happens in the presence of Christ? Insufficient bread becomes sufficient bread. Insufficient strength becomes sufficient strength.

Insufficient resources become sufficient resources. Because Jesus Christ is there. And faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith in the word of God, puts us in the very center of God's plan and God's power operates in us and through us.

That's the point that Jesus is trying to get across. In the first case, the disciples missed it. They're with Jesus Christ, but they haven't made the connection.

The same power that they have invoked on behalf of others, they can ask for on behalf of themselves just to get across the lake. Why row for nine hours when the God of the universe is the one that told you to go? He's standing on the mountain watching and all it takes is turning to God and saying, Lord, how about this wind? And turning to God in faith to accomplish the mission is what Jesus is attempting to teach them. But after a nine hour test and they hadn't gotten it, Jesus said, okay, we've got a little more work to do in this area.

I'll come out, stop the test and we'll work on it some more. So the disciples fail to take advantage. Here's the crowd in Gennesaret, the crowd that ate the loaves and the fish.

And they have also missed the point, but in a different way. They are all too eager to ask for the power of God, but they miss its significance. They say, sure, if you can heal, great, heal me, heal my brother, heal my son, heal my father, heal my relatives.

We'll carry them there. We will truck them across the countryside. And sure, if you can heal, heal them.

We'll take advantage of the power of God. But are they any closer to the truth? Are they any closer to parting the veil and seeing the glory of God that is here in the person of Jesus Christ? They're not. And we're going to see the third episode next week, next Sunday, when the Pharisees come up and approach Jesus Christ.

And we're going to see yet another reaction to this ministry, this proposition that Jesus Christ has put before the nation of Israel. The disciples are eventually going to get there. And you know why? Because they stick with the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter how many times they fail, no matter how many times they embarrass themselves, they never leave the Lord Jesus' side, with the exception of the cross.

But that's why they went on to become apostles. That's why they went on to become pillars in the temple of the new Jerusalem, because they stayed with the Lord Jesus Christ. And they didn't let failure, they didn't let adversity deter them.

These people in the crowd, we don't know what happened to them. The Pharisees, we suspect what happened to them. But the issue lies before us, just as it did these people.

What is the Christian life all about? What is our purpose? What is our goal? As I said this morning, we've got to determine what that goal is. If it's the plan of God and the purpose of God, then we've got to understand it clearly and commit. Commit to it.

If it calls for us to row, we row. If it calls for us to rest, we rest. But we're informed by the Word of God.

We're sustained by the Spirit of God. We are encouraged by the example that's left for us in Scripture. We have so many resources, we have such a great opportunity, but it all begins with understanding.

We can't rush in, uninformed, unprepared, ill-furnished, ill-equipped, to do the work that God has for us. And many training programs begin by humbling their critics, like the academy, like the boot camp, like officer training programs. The first step is having demonstrated vividly to you how much you do not know, and admitting that and saying, I will stick this program out, I will learn, I will come out on the other side, committed to a goal and prepared to carry it out.

That's our calling. Be holy, for I am holy. How do we become holy? We don't have it in us.

There is none that do us righteousness. Certainly not in our own strength. It's created in us by God, and that comes through faith.

Let's close now in a word of prayer. Father, we thank You for recording these things for our benefit. We thank You for including us in Your plan, for giving us the opportunity in this life to learn and to grow.

We know that at salvation, You could have taken us home to be with Yourself immediately, and yet, in Your perfect plan, in the interim period between the giving of the promise and the fulfillment of the promise, You have left us here to be tested, to be afflicted, to undergo tribulation, to face challenges, and to accept and exploit opportunities. We pray that the things that we have learned from Your Word will thoroughly equip us for every good work. We pray that having learned these things, having made Your promises and Your character the object of our faith, that we will be prepared, we will be fit instruments in Your hands to accomplish Your purpose both now and in the eternal future.

We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.