

## **35 Mark 6:45-52**

### **A Lesson Not Learned**

#### **Text**

45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. 47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." 51 And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

#### **Introduction**

Jesus has been teaching for many hours about the kingdom of God. He is already a staggeringly popular figure. And now tens of thousands of people are gathered on the green hills of this uninhabited region listening to the True Shepherd of Israel preach. They have been nourished on the best teaching that anyone could every hope for.

He has called the twelve disciples on the mountain as the foundation of a new Israel. He leads them and their progeny out into the wilderness. This Jesus makes them to lie down in green pastures. He divides them up into groups of 50 and 100 reflecting how Moses divided the people of Israel into camps in the wilderness. The feeding of the 5000 is full of messianic implications. He is the Prophet greater than Moses, he is the anti type of Joshua, he is the servant of the Lord, the new David. The people begin to feel the significance of it. They don't yet understand the full import of his role here, but there is no doubt that something momentous is now afoot in the person of Jesus.

Jesus caps the day with this miracle of food. Think about his power. We get excited about superheroes that we see on TV. These beings, some of whom have the power to control the weather provoke a sense of awe in us. Some of them have the ability to walk through walls. We get excited about these kind of beings from a purely secularistic entertainment perspective. Can you imagine what these people felt. This was not TV! Here is a being who can cast out demons, even thousands of demons at a time! Here is a being who can cure any and all diseases! Here is a being who can feed thousands upon thousands with only a few loaves and a couple of fish! Here is a being who can even raise the dead! For a people who have been oppressed and have been misled, Jesus has just opened up a world of possibilities.

Once the people see and partake in this miraculous feeding they begin to stir. The crowd is beginning to be electrified. John records that "When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'" The previous section was

filled with questions about Jesus' true identity, but we can see here that the people are closing in on the truth. He is more than John the Baptist, he is more than Elijah. He is the Prophet. He is the Messiah! They are getting it, but still they misunderstand. John further records that Jesus perceived "that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king." Jesus senses this and:

*45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.*

He perceives their messianic misunderstandings and recognizes the potential danger and immediately makes his disciples get in the boat and head across the sea while he dismisses the crowd. Jesus for his part withdraws to the mountain.

## A Night of Prayer

And having thus escaped the crowds:

*46 And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.*

What do we find Jesus doing after a long day? Do we find that he retires early to get a good start on the next day? No! Again and again I am shamed by my Lord and the level of dedication that he shows. Again and again I am shamed by my Lord and the level of desperation he has for communing with the Father! Sleep is secondary, fellowship with the Father is primary. Oh what sweet communion when one's desire is to do His will. How refreshing must these times have been.

Martin Luther once said "I have so much to do (today) that I should spend the first three hours in prayer." He understood that a man can accomplish more in one hour when the Lord is pleased to bless it through prayer than in an entire week of working in one's own strength. Jesus retires to the mountain and prays for hours.

## A Night of Revelation

*47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.*

Jesus had been praying and the disciples had been rowing. There was a stiff wind that was preventing them from making much progress. In fact it seems to be blowing them off course, for they were initially headed fro Bethsaida but ended up landing at Gennesaret. Jesus sees them struggling to make progress and designs to go to them.

It was the fourth watch of the night which is a Roman time designation. It corresponds to the period between 3 and 6AM.

There have been many attempts to rework this text to explain the miracle. Some have suggested that Jesus was walking along the shore when the disciples saw him. But that kind of begs the question why the disciples should be afraid of someone walking on the shore. Others have suggested that Jesus was walking on a sandbar so it looked like he was walking on the sea. But this does not do justice to the experience of these fishermen or to the topology of the region. The text says that Jesus was *peripaton epi thalases* - walking on the sea.

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There are several things that we need to draw out here. Obviously Jesus saw the disciples struggling at sea and he came to help them. So it is strange to see that Jesus intended to walk past them. Again, many different interpretations have been offered to account for this. But I think there is something different here than just Jesus casually walking past the disciples. The first item of interest here is the phrase "pass by them."

Similar phrases were used in the OT to refer to an epiphany, and divine self-disclosure.

Exod 33:19–23 **19** And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. **20** But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." **21** And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, **22** and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. **23** Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

Ex 34:6 **6** The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 1 Kgs 19:11 **11** And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

These are dramatic moments when God reveals something of himself to his people. When the disciples see him they are terrified and they cry out in terror. They take Jesus to be a ghost. The term here is *phantasma* where we derive the word phantom. They took Jesus for some kind of water phantom and were terrified. But Jesus speaks a word of comfort to them. "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." We have here the pattern of people meeting with God. There is fear, and then God speaks a word of encouragement saying to them, "fear not" "do not be afraid." Finally, the phrase "it is I" deserves some attention. In the Greek the phrase is *ego eimi*. This is significant because this is the name of God which he reveals to Moses.

Exo 3:13-14 Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (14) God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Jesus comforts his disciples by using this name of God.

## **Mark's Assessment**

*51 And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.*

This is the second sea miracle to which the disciples have been privy. The first one evoked a very similar reaction: fear. Ironically when Jesus stilled the storm they were very much afraid. The disciples asked one another, "Who is this that even the wind and sea obey him. They are still

amazed by Jesus in an ignorant kind of way. But after having been there for the feeding of the 5000 it is expected that they will have learned. There was so much significance in that event that they should have come to a new level of understanding of their master.

They have the same reaction this time around which begets a condemning commentary from Mark. "They did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hard." These are harsh words from Mark. He has utilized the insiders vs outsiders theme in his gospel with the disciples being on the inside. But this reference to the disciples having a hard heart is the same description that was used earlier with regard to the Pharisees on the outside.

Mar 3:5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

So what was the lesson they should have learned? Perhaps there were several, but the point was that they did not grow in their knowledge of Christ as they should have. The correlation that John makes with the feeding of the 5000 with Christ as the manna from heaven and the one who lead the people into the wilderness and dividing the people into groups, Jesus is the new Moses, the prophet greater than Moses. In light of Moses' concern for the people being as sheep without a shepherd Jesus steps into that role and in so doing shows that he is the true Joshua. As the great Shepherd of Israel who causes his people to lie down on green pastures Jesus shows that he is the new David, David's greater son! This is what the disciples missed.

When Jesus is truly known there will still be awe, there will still be wonder, there will still be amazement, but it will be a comforting kind of amazement. Jesus was the Great Shepherd and as such he will care for his people. He is terrifyingly powerful, but he is ever so gentle and approachable. A Young child may still be in awe of her father, but if he is a good father then his presence will always be a comfort.

The disciples have not learned this lesson. Their fear is still a negative kind of fear. It is not the comforting kind of awe that they should have had at this point. When previously they asked "who is this?" now they should have an answer.

The disciples knew about the miracle. They knew that Jesus broke the bread. But they missed the significance that Jesus as the bread of life is broken for us. They knew that the fish and the bread were multiplied. They knew that it was an uninhabited place and that there was green grass there. The disciples were aware of these raw facts. But they still missed the significance of the event. They missed the real meaning.

## **Application**

Too often we are guilty of the same kind of thinking. Part of this, perhaps, is attributable to how we were educated. We were taught fact and made to memorize facts and regurgitate facts for tests with not as much attention given to a deeper reflection on those facts. Let us apply this point in two ways:

First, we need to exercise this kind of thinking in our Bible study. The last few generations have been guilty of reading the Bible in a very flat way. We too often miss the multi layered three dimensional aspect of the text. We notice only the bare facts like the disciples and we miss the significance. We see the feeding of the 5000 only as a marvel to wonder at and not as a means of Christological revelation. But scripture is Christocentric. Now just a quick word of warning; we

need to be careful not to find supposed connections where none exist. Some in their zeal have made connections that are not legitimate.

We do need to guard against that kind of abuse but the majority problem is not seeing past the surface details like the disciples. When this happens we are forced into a different kind of abuse. Since we have seen no deeper meaning than the surface facts, then what do we do when it comes time to apply the passage? All too often it turns into an Aesop's fable. It becomes an event that we assign meaning to. We take stories like David and Goliath and all we see are a kid beating a giant and so we make up lessons about how little people can do big things or talk about the giants in your life. We need to come to the text and see what God has woven into the redemptive historical fabric and not invent our own lessons.

Second, let us begin to think providentially. God has infused all history with meaning and significance. Knowing this will help to our perspective in times of trouble. It will help guide our thoughts and actions at other times. Is there a reason that we have been assembled here in McCook at this time? What design might God have in mind by placing us across the street from a certain couple. Why are we working where we are working? Why has this day started off so poorly? We may not be able to give concrete answers to these questions, but know that God moves purposefully and His providence will help to keep our minds thinking biblical.

Just this week my wife gave me a gentle reminder during something that kind of annoyed me. She asked the question, how will the gospel look to people in the way we respond? It immediately put things into perspective. This kind of thinking needs to become second nature to us.