

THE CALMING OF THE SEA
(John 6:15-21)

Text: John 6:15-21 (With reference also to Matthew 14:22-32 and Mark 6:45-53)

When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship, and went over the sea towards Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

John 6:15-21

Jesus had just finished a long day of preaching and healing all manner of sickness. And he sat thousands of people down on the grass and fed them from two fishes and five loaves of bread. And the disciples were quite sure that Jesus was in fact the Christ. They had seen his ministry and they had heard him preach and his ministry and his words were confirmed by great and undeniable miracles. You see, God the Father attended the ministry of Jesus with great miracles so that no one in his right mind could deny that this man Jesus was sent from God.

By now, Jesus was world famous. People came from all over the countryside to see Jesus. And he was world famous because he spoke as one having authority and he was a miracle worker. Everywhere he went he healed this one and that one, one here and one there. And he did it openly for all to see. And the disciples had a front row seat for this miraculous display which Jesus performed day after day. And now it is the end of another long day and you will notice in Matthew 14:22 that,

Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship

Now this word constrained carries with it the idea that they did not want to go. But Jesus constrained them. He made it a command. When they were hesitant to leave him alone with the multitude, Jesus exerted his authority and he constrained them to go. We see in John's gospel (John 6:15) that Jesus was in some peril by the multitude and they would have taken him by force and made him king. But Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship. And though the disciples did not want to go and leave Jesus with the crowd, yet, they had learned to obey Him. So, they boarded the ship and they set out for the other side according to the command of Jesus.

Then, Jesus sent the multitude away. This in itself may have been a miraculous sending away, since the people were stirred up in their hearts to make Him king. And yet, after they were fed they all went away. Now we are going to see in a few moments that Jesus calmed the wind and the sea. But, Jesus is just as capable of calming the hearts of the multitude. And it says, Jesus sent them away and the amazing thing is that they went without incident. Such is the great power of Jesus over the hearts of men. If there is trouble brewing in the hearts of men, Jesus is able to lay the winds down. And he sent them away.

And Jesus went up into a mountain alone

He departed again into a mountain himself alone.

John 6:15

1. Jesus went alone into a mountain.

This is instructive. Though Jesus could have stayed and ministered to the multitudes all night, he sent them away so that he could be alone. I have noticed throughout the gospels that Jesus took much time to be alone. He would engage in ministry for a few days and then he would retire and be alone. Often, as here, he went into the mountains to be alone. In Matthew 5:1, Jesus saw the multitudes and he took his disciples into the mountain. It was hard for the multitudes to follow into the mountains, so Jesus often went there to be alone.

Jesus had friends and followers in various places and often he would retire to their homes to be alone for a few days. Jesus also found refuge in other places. He often went to the Garden at Gethsemane to be alone and to pray.

Jesus gave us a very good example here. Being alone is not to be despised. But it is to be cherished at times. When you are alone there is no one but you and God.

Example: Now unfortunately, most of the time these days when you are alone it is you and God and the TV set, isn't it. And so rarely are we ever really alone.

But if we can get away at times and be alone, it is a time to reflect. It is a time to reflect inward and a time to reflect upward. Now many people don't like to be alone at all. They resist it at all costs. Have you ever seen anyone like that? They are never happy unless they are in a crowd. And perhaps this is because they are afraid to look inward. They are afraid to open themselves up and look inside. They know there is no good thing inside and the thought of being alone is a terrifying thing to them. They don't want to confront themselves at all. And, they are equally terrified of being alone with God because they have nothing to do with Him.

But it seems that Jesus coveted time alone. It was a time of rest, a time of reflection and a time of prayer for Jesus. I would say don't fear these times of being alone, but covet them as times to be alone with yourself and with God. To be a Christian is to be much engaged in self-reflection. After all we are in a process of growing and becoming more like Christ. We are weeding out the old and weaving in the new.

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me.

Psalm 139:23, 24

Not only do we ask God to search our hearts, but we must search our own hearts. And when we search our heart, we will find evidence of our old nature. There are some dark corners yet that have not been illuminated by the light of Christ. There is some old leaven that has not been swept out of the house. And it is good to be alone to search and if necessary to grieve over those dark places in our hearts.

The Bible says,

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

I John 1:9

But how can we confess our sins if we never retire to be alone and to search our own heart. Some people stay very busy so that they will never have to reflect inwardly. Jesus who had no sin yet retired often to be alone, and so should we.

2. Jesus went to the mountain specifically to pray.

And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray.

Matthew 14:23

Not only is it good for us to have inward reflection, it is most important to have upward reflection. And Jesus went up into a mountain alone to pray. Now there is a time and place for public prayer and a time for family prayer and a time for giving thanks around our tables, but the most earnest prayers that you will ever offer unto God are those prayers when you are alone with God. And listen to the words of Jesus himself:

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Mt.6:6

You see, the best prayer is private prayer. When Jesus said “enter into thy closet” he meant go where you are alone. And furthermore, he said, “Shut thy door.” Prayer is a private and intimate time of being alone with God and on this occasion Jesus went up into the mountains where he could be alone with God in his prayers.

If you remember, on the night of his betrayal, he left his disciples behind and he went a little farther where he could be alone in the garden and he fell on his face and it says he prayed more earnestly. You see, when you are alone with God you can pray more earnestly. You can pray with tears when you are alone and only God sees. When you pray in private you can name your sins to God without airing them to the world. And you can take your weaknesses to Him and you can beg him for mercy. And you can pray for others with deepest sincerity when you are alone with God. And when you are alone with Him your prayers take on more earnestness. And so, Jesus went up into the mountain to be alone.

The distress which came upon the disciples

And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.

John 6:18

Now remember that Jesus had constrained them to enter the ship. And Jesus told them to set sail and go to the other side. And, apparently it was fair weather when they departed, but when the storm arose, they were in the middle of the sea. And that is where the storm seems always to arise, isn't it? The car doesn't break down in your driveway, but it usually breaks down when you are on the highway, halfway between home and your destination. And the storm doesn't often come when you begin your Christian walk, but it comes some time after you have made a firm commitment and when you are in the middle of your walk with Him. The storms of life never seem to come when it is convenient, but when it is most inconvenient.

In your Christian walk, you may have clear sailing for a while when you set out on your voyage. But when you are in the middle of the sea, you can expect that there will be storms. And God sends these storms to try your faith and to show you your need to rely on Him and to strengthen you.

Notice that the disciples were exactly where Jesus sent them. He sent them into the ship and He sent them to the middle of the sea. And then the storm came. Now had they been resisting his will or fleeing his will, they might have well been terrified.

Example: Remember Jonah, when God said to go to Ninevah, he went the other direction. And the storm came and Jonah was quite right to be terrified because the storm was a judgment upon his disobedience.

But here, the disciples were merely obeying Christ and they found themselves in the middle of the sea when the storm arose.

Do you ever feel like you are where you are supposed to be, doing what you are supposed to be doing, obeying as best you can the commands and the will of Christ, and yet you find yourself in distress? Every one of us has met with trouble from time to time in serving Him. And let me say, this has always been the experience of God's people, whether it is earthly Israel in the Old Testament or God's spiritual people in the New Testament, they have always come under storms. So don't think it a strange thing when you come into difficulties. You may not know now why the storm is raging around you, but you will know soon. And you will see Christ manifest himself in your troubles and He will deliver you in the end. And, the storm arose when the disciples were in the middle of the sea.

Now these disciples had a similar disturbance on a previous occasion. Remember, in Matthew 8:24, the storm arose and Jesus was asleep in the boat. And they thought they were about to perish and they woke Him up and he calmed the storm and they were safe. And so, they were well acquainted with the power of Jesus to calm the storm. But now, their faith is tested even more, because this time, Jesus is not in the boat. Were he in the boat they would have summoned him to calm the storm again. But he was not in the boat this time.

You see how the test of their faith is even more severe this time. Now they must trust Jesus though he is not even in the boat! And here is something to think about. It seems that Jesus educates us in degrees, doesn't it? A little lesson here, a bigger lesson there, and we learn by increments to trust Him.

You see, when Jesus first called his disciples and said, "Follow me," it is unlikely that they had learned much about trusting Him in troubles. And they needed little lessons along the way. And so, the disciples found themselves in the midst of the sea and tossed with waves.

So we have seen the distress of the disciples. Now we see that,

Christ came to them in their distress

So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

John 6:19

And the lesson here will be that Christ will never fail to come to you in your trouble. Now in the next verse we are going to see the vigilance of Christ, the goodness of Christ to his people and the great power of Christ to help in time of trouble. And so we consider,

1. The vigilance of Christ.

And he saw them toiling in rowing.

Mark 6:48

When it comes to his people, Jesus is never looking the other way. He is ever vigilant. And even though he was in the mountain and they were in the middle of the sea, he kept his eye on them. And if He loves you, then he keeps his eyes on you always.

Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

Psalm 121:4

How many times have you been in trouble in your life and he never closed his eyes. He never turned his back on you. He never shut you out. When you were in deep distress you might have taken your eyes off of him, but he watched over you. And so he did for the disciples.

When Jesus was praying in the mountain, he prayed, if you will, with his eyes wide open, and he watched over the disciples whom he loved.

You see, the disciples were never really in danger, because they were watched over continually by the all-seeing eyes of Jesus. So, Jesus in his omniscience saw them in their distress. But notice also,

2. The goodness of Christ.

He didn't simply watch them sink to the bottom of the sea. But he went to them.

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

Matthew 14:25

It seems that Jesus delights to come to us when we are under great distress. When Moses led the people out of Egypt, they came to the Red Sea and it appeared that they were sealed in and they had nowhere to run and they would have been devoured by the Egyptian army. But in the last moment, God came to them with a great deliverance. Many times in the Old Testament, God waited to the last moment when it seemed there was no hope, and then he came and delivered Israel with a great deliverance. And Jesus went to the disciples in the fourth watch of the night. (v.25)

The Jews divided the night into four watches. The first watch was from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The second was from 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight. The third was from midnight to 3:00 a.m. And the fourth watch was from 3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. Jesus went to the disciples in the fourth watch. So it was in the wee hours of the morning. Perhaps it was just before dawn. And likely it was just before the disciples perished. And Jesus came to them in the last moment.

Why do you think Jesus seems to come in the last moment of our distress? Perhaps it is because of his goodness. He uses the opportunity to teach us to always have faith in him. He could have warned the disciples about the storm, but he let them be tossed about for a while, and then in the fourth watch he came in order to pour out his goodness on them and to teach them to trust him.

But we see here also,

3. The great power of Christ.

Now when he was in the mountain, Jesus saw them by his omniscience. But he came to them by his omnipotence. It says,

He went unto them, walking on the sea.

Matthew 14:25

My, My. What kind of man is this? He came walking on the water. How can anyone who believes the Scriptures possibly deny that Jesus was God. Here Jesus shows his dominion over all things –

whether it be creatures or created things. Jesus, in his divinity, has all things under his feet and at his command. And all things obey Him. There is nothing too great for Him. If He so chooses he makes the waters congeal under his feet so that he walks easily on the water. If he so chooses he suspends the force of gravity so that his body does not sink. He made the waters of the Red Sea to wall up so that Israel could walk across. And here he made the waters a personal walkway that he might come to the disciples.

You may remember that in 2 Kings 6:6 he made an iron axe head to float in the water and here he walks on top of the water in the midst of the sea and it is nothing to him.

We should learn from this never to doubt the great power of God to redeem us out of trouble. He is able to overcome great obstacles. He can change the very course of nature if necessary. There is no limit to his power to save you. He can save your sinful heart by his great power. And he can deliver you from any trouble. Whatever your circumstances are, Jesus has the power to redeem you. I don't know what your particular trouble may be, but never doubt his great power to help you.

We have seen the great vigilance of Christ who ever watched over his disciples. And we have seen the goodness of Christ in coming to rescue them. And we have seen the power of Christ in walking of the sea and coming to the disciples.

Now we will see,

The interaction between Christ and the disciples

1. The disciples were afraid.

Now the disciples were afraid already. They were afraid of the wind which was tossing the ship. They were afraid of the sea which would have swallowed them up. But now, they see a man walking on the sea. And this is contrary to the laws of nature. And they supposed that they saw a ghost.

And when they saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

Matthew 14:26

Now they were afraid they were about to die in the storm. But when they thought they saw a ghost, they cried out with fear.

Example: Now if you were lying in your bed at night and you saw a ghost come through the wall and float across your room you might have the same reaction.

It says, *They cried out with fear.*

2. Jesus comforted them.

But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid.

Matthew 14:27

Notice that Jesus calmed their fears by making himself known to them. They thought this perhaps was an evil spirit walking on the water. But how their hearts must have rejoiced when Jesus said, "It is I."

He didn't say, It is Jesus of Nazareth. He didn't say it is the Christ. He simply said, "It is I." And immediately they knew it was Jesus. This was their good friend whom they knew by his voice. Jesus once said,

My sheep hear my voice.

John 10:27

And the disciples were so glad to hear the voice of their shepherd. They were sheep without a shepherd on a ship, but the shepherd came walking on the water and he said, "It is I" and they knew his voice.

Jesus said, "Be of good cheer."

This word means pick up your spirits. Don't be so down in the dumps. It has the force of, "Be courageous." I know the winds are blowing and the ship is tossing, but lift up your spirits and be strong for, "It is I."

There may be many of us who are distressed over certain circumstances of life. Some of you have shared with me some of your trials. And this passage says to you, "Be of good cheer." Lift up your hearts. Pick up your spirits for your redemption draweth nigh.

Now in just a moment, Jesus would board the ship and quiet the wind. He was going to redeem them from their present trouble. And he says, "Be of good cheer." But this is not the main reason he says, "Be of good cheer." He says "Be of good cheer" because, "It is I." Whatever your circumstances are that trouble you, the greatest comfort that you can have is Jesus with you. The Scriptures put it this way, "If he be for you, who can be against you?" If he comes aboard the ship, then let the winds blow if they will. Even if the ship sinks, we don't even fear death if he is with us.

In the end, your troubles will bring your Savior calling on you. It will be him that will come to your aid. It will be Him seeking you and not you seeking Him. He is watching over you and your trouble and he will soon come to quiet the storm. One of these days, he will say, "Be of good cheer, it is I."

The interaction between Peter and Christ

Now you know that tempestuous Peter. When he heard the voice of Jesus he was so very excited. And this was a very excellent grace in the heart of Peter.

So should we always be very excited to hear from Christ. There will be times when we will not hear so much from him, but then there will come a time when we will hear his voice clearly. And when we do, then it is our duty to go to Him.

You see, all Peter wanted to do was go to Jesus. Wherever Jesus was, Peter was going. Here was Jesus come to redeem them from the storm and so impressed was Peter with this redemption that his only desire was to come to Christ with all he had, no matter the peril. Oh how much Peter loved Jesus.

You will notice here that Peter is not so much interested in the marvel of walking on water. Rather his goal was to come to Christ.

Lord if it be thou, bid me come unto thee.

Matthew 14:28

If I must walk on water, so be it, but let me come unto thee. And I will say that when Jesus comes to redeem you whether it be from sin or from other trouble, you also will desire to come to Him. Your heart will race within you and you will see his deliverance and you will desire to jump out of the boat of worldly cares and into total dependence on Him.

But notice, Peter didn't just jump in rather, he asked if Christ would bid him to come.

Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee. (v.28)

What a fantastic prayer. If this is really you Lord, talking to me in the midst of my troubles, then bid me come. Call me Lord Jesus with an effectual call so that I might come to you. I am helpless O Lord to walk on water and come to you unless you call me and then my heart will come.

And so Peter said, "*Bid me come.*"

And when anyone with a sincere heart says, "Bid me come," then Jesus will not forbid the coming. The atonement that was offered by Jesus is sufficient for every type of man on this planet; red and yellow, black and white; Jew or Gentile. The sacrifice that he made is universally sufficient. But no one will leap off the ship of worldly care and self-righteousness unless he is effectually called by Jesus. Jesus must bid you come. And when he does, you will leap off the side of the ship and you will come to Him.

Now when Jesus bid him come, Peter came down out of the ship and he walked on water. Perhaps the water is a picture of the troubles of this world and the trials of this life. Peter took a leap of faith and for a time he walked above this world. He walked on water by his communion with Christ. Peter was quickened with him. He was crucified with Christ. He was raised up with him. He was made to sit with him in the heavenly places. And for a time he walked on water in total dependence and faith in Christ. But then Peter looked around and he saw great trouble.

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

Matthew 14:30

Though Peter had enough faith to leap into the water, his faith was yet too weak to continue. It takes many years of learning Christ to have a complete and tried faith. And the sea began to swallow him up. And he was afraid and he cried out, "Lord, Save me."

And immediately, Jesus stretched out his hand, and caught him.

Matthew 14:31

And this reminds me of that great verse,

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Phil.1:6)

You see, if Christ came walking on the water to save Peter, then he will save him when Peter jumps in the water. If Christ came to save Peter when he had no faith, then he will save him when he has but a little faith. If Christ came at first to save him, then he will be there at the last to save him.

Whatever your troubles may be today, Jesus has his eyes on you and he will deliver you. If you are in the bondage of sin, He will deliver you out of it. You are helpless to deliver yourself. But he is powerful to do it. If you are tossed about by the winds of this world and you are sinking, He will deliver you. You are helpless to deliver yourself, but he is powerful to do it. Whatever your trouble may be, would you trust him? Would you trust him enough to cast yourself into his care? He will deliver you.