

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 6:45-56

Topic

Jesus walks on water in the fourth watch of the night
to rescue His disciples

Title

"I Go Out Walkin' After Midnight"

Introduction

Keep Calm & Carry On is the slogan that refuses to die.

In the year 2000 an old poster was discovered at Barter Books in England. It was a *Keep Calm and Carry On* motivational poster produced by the British government in 1939 in preparation for the Second World War. The poster was intended to raise the morale of the British public, threatened with widely predicted mass air attacks on major cities.

Although 2.45 million copies were printed, and although the air attacks did in fact take place, the poster was hardly ever publicly displayed.

Now it's everywhere as a slogan, as folks substitute almost anything for *Carry On*.

There are so many variations I won't give you examples, or we'd be here all day. It's likely someone near you is wearing a *Keep Calm* t-shirt.

I'm pretty sure Jesus wasn't wearing a *Keep Calm & Carry On* t-shirt, but it would have been appropriate for His walk on water to come to the aid of His disciples struggling in the storm.

Mark's account, undoubtedly given to him by eye-witness passenger Peter, stresses how absolutely freaked-out the disciples were. He says of them, "they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled" (6:51).

This wasn't a good kind of marveling, because you immediately read, in the very next verse, "for they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened" (6:52).

Am I sure that my heart isn't hardened? Do I understand about the loaves - and other spiritual things? Those are great questions to ask and answer.

I'll organize my thoughts around two other questions: #1 Has What You've Learned About Jesus Penetrated Your Heart?, and #2 Does What You've Learned About Jesus Preside Over Your Heart?

#1 Has What You've Learned About Jesus Penetrated Your Heart?

(v45-52)

It should stun you to hear said of the disciples, "their heart was hardened."

They had been with the Lord for quite some time, and had witnessed many miraculous things. They had, themselves, been empowered to perform miracles. Yet their hearts were somehow hardened.

Keep that in mind as we work through the verses, because, if *their* hearts were hardened, then so can *ours* be.

Mar 6:45 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away.

The other Gospels that record the aftermath of the feeding of the five thousand tell us that the people wanted to make Jesus their king, right there and then.

Instead, Jesus "made His disciples" leave, by boat; and He dismissed the crowd.

Shouldn't He ride this wave of popularity and establish Himself as a bonafide leader?

No. There was too much work yet to be done - mostly in His disciples. In just a few hours they would be screaming like little girls, thinking Jesus was a phantom. They were nowhere near ready to co-reign the kingdom of Heaven on the earth.

Neither were the people ready to be His subjects. They were there for physical and material prosperity - not to repent and receive spiritual wholeness from Jesus.

Besides that, the leaders of Israel would reject Jesus, leading to the postponement of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Mar 6:46 And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray.

Jesus had an incredible spiritual work ethic, if we can call it that. This chapter started with Him taking His disciples on a retreat to get some R&R. They'd been working so hard that they could not even find time to eat. But when they got to the retreat center, a deserted place, a huge crowd had gathered. Jesus and the twelve apostles personally ministered to their needs, culminating with bringing each person a meal.

More exhausted than when this all began, *Jesus thought the best refreshment would come from all-night spent awake talking to His Father in Heaven.*

We can't be sure exactly which "mountain" it was, but it involved some sort of ascent. He had to climb, contributing even more to His exhaustion.

If Jesus' work ethic seems extreme, we could take a look at the apostle Paul, and see the same fervor to serve.

If it's rest you think you need, and time away from serving God's people, you might consider spending it in prayer.

Mar 6:47 Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land.

This reads like a movie script, giving the actors their cues just before the director calls, "Action!" Besides Jesus on the mountain, and the disciples on the sea, we would say that the devil enters the scene, kicking up a violent windstorm to oppose the progress of the boat, and to threaten the lives of the twelve.

Commentators are almost unanimous in seeing this as a picture of the age in which we live:

- Jesus has ascended, not to a mountain top to pray, but to Heaven, where He ever lives to intercede in prayer for us.
- We are not in a ship, but we are in the church, sent out to minister to spiritually needy people everywhere.
- The world is in turmoil, partly on account of the devil, who is called the God of this world.

Mar 6:48 Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by.

I cannot emphasize enough how tired these guys must have been. They started out exhausted, then put in a full day, with overtime. Now we see that, at about 3am, they were rowing with all their might to try to get to the other side.

Ever feel like you're just spinning your oars? Worse than getting nowhere, you're actually in danger, too?

You can be there, and be right where God wants you. That is why it is so important to listen for, then follow, God's leading.

Whatever else they might have wondered, the disciples on that boat, in that storm, could be certain they were *exactly* where the Lord had sent them.

Mark says, "He saw them." It would seem that Jesus watched them for some time, struggling against the wind and waves. Moved as He always was with compassion, I'm sure Jesus wanted to give them immediate aid.

Don't you think He prayed for them? Don't you think He asked His Father to calm the storm? Of course He did; but still the Father waited.

Finally, "about the fourth watch," 3am, the Father sent Jesus to them. That is something in itself. Jesus, you'll remember, was also exhausted from the previous day's activities. He'd climbed a mountain. He'd been up all night.

Now, instead of His Father letting Him calm the storm from a distance, or miraculously rapturing Him over to the boat, *He sends Him on foot.*

Down the mountain, to the shore, to the water... Then walking **on** the water, against the wind, up one wave and down the next, in the light of the Passover moon.

O, how He loved them. O, how He loves you and me, that He would walk, not just on water, but into and upon the storm.

The words "would have passed them by" are a poor translation and need explaining. D. Edmond Hiebert writes,

Would is more literally "wished" or "desired," while *have passed by* is "to come alongside of." As Jesus approached the boat, He deliberately changed His course so that He would come alongside the boat, following a parallel course with it. Obviously, His intention was that the disciples should recognize Him and ask Him to come into the boat with them.

Mar 6:49 And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out;

Jesus did not look at all like a ghost. Yet when they saw Him, their first thought was that it couldn't be Him; in fact, they reasoned it could not have been any living person. It must therefore be a ghost - a phantom of some kind.

It was too much for them to think that Jesus could walk on water.

Mar 6:50 for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

Not one among them held a contrary opinion. They all believed it was a ghost and "were troubled."

Jesus spoke to them - words of comfort, to alleviate their terror.

Mar 6:51 Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.

The indication is that, at once, the wind stopped, and the sea was like glass. Another Gospel reports that they immediately found themselves on the shore, at their landing site.

Something to note is that Mark omits the part where Peter asks to go out and join Jesus on the water, only to sink after a few steps. It's interesting because Peter is the person who gave Mark the material for this Gospel.

There's no use speculating as to why the story was omitted. We can note that the Holy Spirit is a good editor. He knows what He wants said, and what He does not want said.

It's an encouragement for us to trust Him to edit our telling or teaching of the Gospel, keeping to the facts most essential, getting to the point.

As I said earlier, the words "amazed," "beyond measure," and "marveled," add up to they were freaked-out. The next verse is a commentary on why they were so freaked-out.

Mar 6:52 For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

I got a kick out of the commentators I read this week discussing this verse. They all were quick to criticize the disciples for their lack of understanding about the loaves. *But the commentators go on to say that they don't know exactly what Mark meant, either.*

The place to start would be with "because their heart was hardened." Whatever that means, it is the reason why they misunderstood about the loaves.

I think we can dismiss the usual culprits for hardening their hearts, which are sin and stubborn disobedience. The disciples weren't in sin; and they were not disobeying the Lord.

No, they were obeying His every command. It's what got them out at sea, in the storm.

Another way of describing something as being hard is to say it is difficult to penetrate. I think that is the idea here. Spiritual things were not penetrating the disciples hearts.

Why not? One commentator described it as "a neglect to ponder and meditate on Jesus' glorious works."

Simply put, the disciples were not meditating upon, they were not pondering, what Jesus' works meant beyond their immediate effect.

I don't care for the word "mediate." It's a perfectly good word, but it has taken on occult connotations.

Ponder is OK, but it doesn't seem serious enough. Reflecting might be a better word. It indicates a thoughtful remembrance of things you've heard or experienced. It is a purposeful pause to put what you've learned or experienced into perspective.

Had they reflected, they might have been brought to a spiritual understanding that, if Jesus could do such a miracle as multiplying the loaves, it would be nothing for Him to get them through the storm. They may not have expected Him to come to them walking on water, but it would not have thrown them into terror.

Out in the middle of the sea, as the wind blew contrary and got ever stronger, and as the waves threatened to overwhelm them, it would not be too much to think that they could have remained calm, knowing that Jesus would do something to get them to their destination.

Let me give you an example of how reflecting upon the loaves might have penetrated their hearts. Before Jesus fed the multitude, Mark mentioned that He looked upon them as "sheep not having a shepherd" (v34). Clearly Mark intended for us to see Jesus as their shepherd.

BTW: Peter would later, in his letter, call Jesus the "Shepherd... of your souls" (First Peter 2:25). Apparently he had reflected upon experiences like the feeding of the five thousand and had seen their spiritual significance. When relating the story to Mark, he had him add this key insight.

Then Mark told us that Jesus had the people sit down "on the green grass" (v39). Mark is the only Gospel writer who supplies this fact.

It means that it was near Passover on the Jewish calendar. But, upon further reflection, something else emerges. If you put the people being told to sit down on green grass together with the idea of a shepherd and his sheep, what might that remind you of?

It reminds me of the twenty-third psalm, where it says of the shepherd,

Psa 23:1 The LORD is my **shepherd**; I shall not want.

Psa 23:2 He makes me to lie down **in green pastures**...

I'm not saying that this is the only thing the disciples could have understood, by reflecting. It's one example of how spiritual truth, upon reflection, could have penetrated their hearts.

To finish out this line of thought, that amazing, popular psalm - which all these Jewish boys would know by heart - goes on to say,

Psa 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the **valley** of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me...

I'm not a surfer or a sailor, so I had to look this up on an oceanography site. When describing waves, the wave crest is the highest part of the wave, and the wave trough is "the **valley** between wave crests."

A little reflection and at least one of the guys on that boat might have made the application that Jesus - their Shepherd - would be with them, some way, somehow, in those "valleys of the shadow of death" at sea.

Hence the question for us, Has what **you've** learned about Jesus penetrated **your** heart?

Your heart, and my heart, can remain hardened, to a certain extent. Not necessarily by sin, or by stubborn disobedience, but by a lack of reflecting - a lack of interacting with the Word of God in such a way that I ask what it means to me.

Geno made an insightful comment at our Men's Fellowship this week. We're in the Book of Acts, in the chapter where the apostle Paul makes a Nazarite vow. Commentators have a field day with it, mostly criticizing the great apostle for somehow compromising.

Here is the comment: "Rather than ask, *Should Paul?*, we should ask, *Would I?*"

The Book of Acts wasn't written so we could criticize Paul, but so we could grow in the Lord, and we do that, at least in part, by reflecting.

#2 Does What You've Learned About Jesus Preside Over Your Heart?

(v53-56)

These verses may seem an afterthought, but they wouldn't if you were one of the people who were healed or delivered.

Mar 6:53 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there.

I have to say it. It's something every Bible teacher is almost obligated to point out. They "crossed *over*," they didn't cross *under*. No matter how contrary the winds, or how violent the waves, there was no way they were going to go under.

I also feel an obligation to point out that you can't always claim that promise. Some ships sink.

The apostle Paul was in a violent storm at sea. The Lord told him what was going to happen, and Paul related it to the crew and passengers. He said, "we must run aground on a certain island" (Acts 27:26).

That shipped was broken-up by the wind and waves, and the people on board floated on wreckage to Malta.

You might find yourself in a storm God will stop, or you might find yourself in one that destroys your ship. The Lord remains your Shepherd, and you need fear no evil.

Mar 6:54 And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him,

The prophet Isaiah says that the Messiah would be an ordinary looking Jew. There was nothing spectacular about Jesus. The people "recognized Him" because He had been there before, working among them.

Go about the work of serving others, in obscurity, and they will come to recognize Jesus in you. In their time of need, they will seek you out.

Mar 6:55 [the people] ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was.

Jesus was moving from place-to-place in the region. "Which way did He go?" must have been repeated many times that day, as folks tried to ascertain His location and destination.

Those too ill or infirm to get to Jesus on their own were graciously carried to Him, at great discomfort for the care-givers.

Mar 6:56 Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or 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.

Once before, a woman with a twelve-year bleeding problem had tried to sneak-up on Jesus, to touch the hem of His garment. When she did, she was completely healed, but the Lord knew what she had done.

In this visit to Gennesarat, this method of healing was used.

The Gospels record something like thirty-to-forty individual healings Jesus performed. He also did mass healings, like the ones recorded here.

There is no one method, or mechanism, for His healings. There's no divine formula. Jesus healed in a variety of ways, by touch and from a distance, precisely so we wouldn't be able to identify a pattern and think we could do the same.

Does God heal today? Absolutely. Does He always heal? No.

When Jesus was on the earth, it was a unique time. One of the evidences that He was the promised Messiah and Savior of the world was His ability to perform miracles of healing. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Messiah, Jesus said, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Luke 7:22).

A funny thing happened on the way to establishing the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Jesus was rejected by the leadership of Israel. The kingdom was postponed, and it awaits Jesus' Second Coming to the earth to establish it.

Mean time, in the church age, although the Lord *can* and *does* heal, He is glorified most often as people see His strength in our weakness.

His answer to our prayers for healing, for ourselves and others, is most often the answer He gave the apostle Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (Second Corinthians 12:9).

The gifts of God have not ceased. All of them - including healings - are for today. But it should be clear we are living in a very different dispensation than when Jesus was physically present on the earth.

I've recently been using the example of demonic possession to make the point that there are different dispensations. Indulge me if you've already heard this. People wonder why, today, we see so few cases of demonic possession. *As if that's a bad thing!* They conclude that we're not looking with the eyes of faith - that there **are** demons all around us, just waiting to be exorcized - some even (they argue) from believers.

Are we really that spiritually dull that we cannot see demonic activity? I don't think so.

There doesn't seem to be a single case of demonic possession in the entire Old Testament. Then, Jesus comes, and it seems there was a veritable invasion of demons - legions of them oppressing and possessing folks.

Could it be that was the devil's strategy to oppose the incarnation?

Today we see very little possession, and I say it's because the devil has adopted new, better, more effective strategies.

It is not a denial of spiritual gifts to recognize the nature and character of the times in which we live.

Mark showed us Jesus, moved with compassion, feed a multitude. He shows us Jesus, still moved with compassion, move among a multitude, healing them.

Does the compassion of Jesus preside over your heart? Is it a constant motivation for you - the desire to help others, especially by exposing them to the Gospel?

I think it is, but that we can have hard hearts for lack of effort in reflecting upon the Lord.

The Holy Spirit is here; we've got some time. Let's pause to reflect upon the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ.