

Ghost Strider

Mark 6:45-56 November 5, 2025

When is the last time you didn't recognize someone you should've known? It's never a good feeling and often leads to an uncomfortable conversation. But *sometimes*, once you get past the awkwardness, it can be a fun moment.

Recently, a lucky couple had their wedding in New Zealand, on the Shire set from the *Lord Of The Rings* films. In fact, they were married right outside the front door of Bag End. The ceremony was briefly interrupted when they suddenly heard the voice Frodo Baggins himself, Elijah Wood. He had, by chance, been visiting his old stomping grounds while in town for another event.

The newlyweds were finishing up the marriage paperwork as the wedding photographer ushered Elijah up the aisle for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The groom later said, "At first I thought, 'nah, that's not him.'" But then shock set in as he realized it really was Elijah Wood.¹

That moment of failed recognition ended with smiles and laughter and a meeting the couple will long remember.

Tonight text is about recognizing Jesus. Mark gives us a sharp contrast. The disciples *do not* recognize the Lord, the people of Gennesaret *do* recognize Him.

When Jesus comes walking on the water to where the 12 are rowing in place, they are horrified. The moment doesn't end in smiles and laughter, but in screams and fear.

While we understand they were under a lot of stress, the problem wasn't the setting. We're told they did not recognize Jesus because their hearts were hard. They did not *understand* Who Jesus really was. Like so many others, they had their own ideas of what the Messiah should be and what He should do. So, when Christ came, they weren't considering the theological truths that were revealed to them. And so, in *this* case, despite being disciples, the scene ends with them being described the same way the Scribes and Pharisees are in Mark 3, verse 5.

That is *not* a position any disciple wants to be in. Yet, it happened many times in the Gospels and it can happen to us. *We*, too, can fail to recognize Who Christ is and what He is doing in our midst if our hearts are hard.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of how God puts a new heart in His people. A heart that is soft and receptive to Him. Speaking of the Jews, the Lord said in Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 24:7a - I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD.

¹ <https://www.kare11.com/article/news/nation-world/elijah-wood-crashes-wedding/507-f6ef2b33-c1f7-4aac-a479-578dca00fc70>

That new heart, God said in Ezekiel, replaces the hard heart of stone within us.² Hearts that *know* the Lord, understand His ways, walk in them, and follow His leading. This is one of the themes of Psalm 119, particularly the second stanza, which speaks about how believers must keep God's word, treasure His word in our hearts, not *forget* His word, and rejoice in what the Lord has revealed to us. That's how we keep our hearts from hardening toward the Lord, which will also keep us from *missing* those moments of God's presence or work in our lives.

The 12 had hearts that were hard and therefore closed to the amazing things Jesus was revealing about Himself. So tonight, we want to see the Savior revealed. Because our understanding must not come from what *my* conception of Him is or what *I* think He should do in my life, but we must know Him as He has been revealed in the Word of God.

Mark 6:45 - ⁴⁵ Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

The crowd here is at least 10,000 people. John explains they were about to try to make Jesus King by force. He quickly does two things: He sends the disciples away and He settles the crowd.

Why send His helpers away? Well, Christ knows every thought in the heart of man. The 12 would've undoubtedly joined in with the rest to make Jesus a King in *their* way of thinking - one Who would attack Rome and give political power back to the Jews.³ But that's *not* what Jesus came to do.

Second, Jesus dismissed the crowd. And He had no trouble doing so. Jesus reveals many things about Himself in these verses. This moment of Jesus dismissing a frenzied crowd of 10,000 people shows He is **willful**. He was totally in command of the situation, and He would have His way. So, despite the intentions and demands of the crowd, they all turned and went their way - rather, they turned and went the way *He* sent them.

Mark 6:46 - ⁴⁶ After he said good-bye to them, he went away to the mountain to pray.

This action by Jesus reveals He is a Messiah Who is **worthy**. If 10,000 people said they were willing to make you their leader *and* you had ultimate power to do what you wanted, what would you do?

But Jesus *never* gave into temptation to bypass the plan of the Father. He never did His own thing to avoid the cross. He alone is **worthy**. He would not give in to the offers of Satan in the wilderness, nor would He give in to the offer of the spectators in *this* wilderness.

Mark 6:47-48 - ⁴⁷ Well into the night, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ He saw them straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Very early in the morning he came toward them walking on the sea and wanted to pass by them.

² Ezekiel 36:26

³ William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

The disciples had a tough night. "Straining" is actually a word used for torture.⁴ At the same time, it does *not* say they were in imminent danger.⁵ Back in chapter 4, the boat was being swamped - they were actively sinking. There's *difficulty* in this passage, but not necessarily danger.

As He communed with the Father, Jesus still had His eyes on His disciples. He saw them straining. He is a Messiah who **watches** us. He sees you. He knows what's going on in your life. He's mindful of your struggles and the path ahead. He knows what you need and how He can lead you there.

This text also shows He is a Messiah Who will, at times allow us to go through storms. It's somewhere after 3am. They've been rowing for *hours* making little progress. The ordeal actually blows them off the original course. But the Lord allowed it. *Not* because He's unkind, but because there's always more going on than just *our* comfort or *our* ease.

Yes, they had to weather this storm. Yes, this was a hard night of rowing in place. But, had they been spiritually receptive, this situation could've been a profound, mind-blowing moment of revelation for them. Remember what we just saw play out? We saw a needy flock in the wilderness and Jesus providing the bread of heaven *Himself*. He was not just being nice, He was also showing that He was the ultimate Deliverer. Moses was the foreshadow, Christ was the finale.

In the book of Numbers, Moses spoke of how God's people needed a leader who would lead them out and bring them back in so that the Lord's flock "won't be like sheep without a shepherd."⁶ And in Ezekiel 34 we have a long passage where God talks about how He will gather the people of Israel from all over, out of their gloom, to the hills of Israel, to a green pasture, where He will bandage the injured, strengthen the weak, and be their Shepherd.⁷

A thoughtful, observant Jew could've seen what Jesus was doing at the feeding of the 5,000 and realized this was more than bread and fish. This was the revealing work of God in their midst.

And *if* the disciples had softened their hearts, this moment of Jesus walking on the water should have solved once-and-for-all Who He was. Because Job wrote *this* about God:

Job 9:8 - ⁸ He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.

Or consider Psalm 77:19:

Psalm 77:19 - ¹⁹ Your way went through the sea and your path through the vast water, but your footprints were unseen.

If they were thinking theologically, if they were meditating *not* on their own desires but on what the Lord was actually revealing day in and day out to them, they could've made these connections.

⁴ Robert Utley *The Gospel According To Peter: Mark And I & II Peter*

⁵ Morna Hooker *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*

⁶ Numbers 27:17

⁷ Ezekiel 34:11-18

This is why it so important for us to meditate on the word of God again and again throughout our lives. Once through is not enough.

Now, why does it say Jesus “wanted to pass them by?” It seems odd, doesn’t it? It does until we remember the conversation *Moses* had with God in Exodus 33. He says to God, “Teach me Your ways, and I will *know* You. How can we move forward if Your presence is not with us?”⁸ The talk culminates with Moses asking the Lord, “Please, show me Your glory.” The Lord says, “Ok, I’m going to *pass by* you in My glory, so that you know you’re *really* talking to God. You’re *really* following God’s plan.” So, did the disciples get the message?

Mark 6:49-50a - ⁴⁹ When they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified.

This verse reveals something important about our Messiah: He can **withstand** any opposition, any calamity, any foe. As one commentator notes, the raging of the sea is absolutely no hindrance to the Lord. He *walks* where the 12 couldn’t even row.⁹ But the moment wasn’t a comfort to the 12.

Sometimes I read a phrase like, “they cried out” and I don’t think much of it. But, they started *screaming*.¹⁰ They thought He was some sort of phantasm.¹¹

Sadly, instead of having this amazing moment of spiritual awe, the disciples were overcome with terror. They were truly afraid because they did not recognize the Lord as He approached.

Do you think that’s what the Lord wanted for them in this moment? Of course not! He is the God of all *comfort*. Their fear didn’t come from what He *did*, but from their incomprehension.

Mark 6:50b-51a - Immediately he spoke with them and said, “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” ⁵¹ Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.

Jesus *literally* said, “Don’t be afraid, *I AM*.”¹² In Exodus 33, as the Lord passed by Moses, He proclaimed His name to His servant. This is not just a crazy story, this is a clear revelation.

The Lord was trying to reveal to them Who He was. That He is God. That He is *the* Great Deliverer. That He is the Provider. That He will not fail them. And that when He is with them, everything will be ok. The *circumstances* might be difficult, but they can *rest* in the presence of the Savior King.

⁸ Exodus 33:13-22

⁹ Hooker

¹⁰ See ISV

¹¹ James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Vol. 23: Mark*

¹² Craig Keener *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Edition*

"Have courage!" Another way of translating that is, "be of good cheer," or, "take heart."¹³ *What heart?* The heart God wants to give you. This was a chance for the disciples to *really* believe in the revelation of God. To overcome their *natural* instincts¹⁴ and instead live out the *supernatural* insight God was giving them. Had they understood the *theological*, then there was no reason to fear.

Mark 6:51b-52 - They were completely astounded,⁵² because they had not understood about the loaves. Instead, their hearts were hardened.

The story about Elijah Wood at the wedding is interesting because the people getting married were *obviously* superfans. Wedding ceremonies in Hobbiton are very exclusive. Everyone there was in costume. And yet, *there's* Frodo, a few yards from them, and at first they didn't know him!

The fact that these 11 guys who believed Jesus and loved Him so much and spent so much time with Him *still* didn't recognize Him should give us pause. It should make us think soberly and seriously about the state of our hearts. Is it hardening or is it softening? Do we see Jesus for Who He really is? Are we able to receive the spiritual eyes God wants to give us so we can have a proper understanding of what He is doing in our lives? Or are we blind to it?

Here's an example: Most people saw Jesus as a miracle-worker. But that's *not* Who Jesus was. He *did* work miracles, but He didn't come to be a miracle worker. Mark is clear on that point. He came to reveal that He is God. That He is the Christ. That He is the Deliverer the world has been waiting for. That He is the Lamb of God. That He is the Alpha and the Omega. But when people only saw Him as a miracle-worker, they consistently missed out on what the Lord *really* wanted for them.

The climax of this Gospel is when Jesus says, "Who do you say that I am?" The mistakes made by the Scribes, by the crowds, even by the 12 are because they failed to answer *that* question correctly.

Now, at this point, someone might say, "Wait...didn't Peter *also* walk on the water in this story?" He did indeed. But Mark doesn't record that. I find that interesting because Mark's primary source for this book was Peter. I wonder why they decided to leave that aspect out.

Mark 6:53 -⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to shore at Gennesaret and anchored there.

The plan was to go to the northeast shore. They end up on the west side.¹⁵ That's ok. The Lord can still accomplish His work when things don't go exactly to plan. He's flexible. We should be, too.

Mark 6:54 -⁵⁴ As they got out of the boat, people immediately recognized him.

¹³ *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*

¹⁴ R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

¹⁵ Lane

This is an amazing contrast. Unlike the disciples, the people *immediately* recognized Jesus. And it should make us ask, "How could His friends, who loved Him so, and knew Him so well *not* recognize Him?" It was all a heart issue. Even a disciple can move into fear and confusion when our hearts are hard. And our hearts get hard when we start considering ourselves more than the Lord, more than the Word, more than what God is revealing to us. Human hearts harden when we stop taking in the revealed truth of God. What He has shown us about His attributes, His power, His nature.¹⁶

Mark 6:55-56 - ⁵⁵ They hurried throughout that region and began to carry the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ Wherever he went, into villages, towns, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch just the end of his robe. And everyone who touched it was healed.

Seeing Jesus, the disciples *screamed*. Seeing Jesus, the people of this region *scoured* the countryside for those who needed ministry. Now, their understanding was incomplete, but their faith and understanding was drawing them to Jesus. They *ran* to Him. They believed in His power to rescue.

For His part, Jesus shows what a **welcoming** Messiah He is. He did not turn *any* of them away. And it wasn't just about *physical* healing. Scholars point out that the word used for "healed" is often elsewhere translated "saved."¹⁷

Jesus Christ isn't here, bodily. But what has God revealed to be true? That He *is* with us. He *is* in our midst. He *does* dwell in our hearts. He *is* working in our lives. He *will* never leave us or forsake us. He has revealed that He is not only Savior, He is Master. And He is our Friend. And He is our ever-present help in time of need. What else has He revealed? So many things. *That's* why we go again and again to His word.

Now we *feel* certain ways. And we do human math and sometimes deceive ourselves into thinking we're all alone or we have to go our own way or that we can force certain things to happen in life. But its not *true*. What has been revealed? If we soften our hearts and take in God's revelation, not only of what He has said, but being sensitive to what He *is* revealing in our lives right now, then the result is comfort and understanding and wisdom and spiritual power. Peace in the storm. Wonder at His greatness. And an ability to share Him with those around us who are also in need.

May we recognize our Lord more and more Who continually shows the truth to us.

¹⁶ Romans 1:19-20

¹⁷ Brooks