

Jesus Takes a Walk

Ignorance and Insight: Part 7

Mark 6:45-56 (Mt.14:22-36) 10/14/2018

Summary: The first misunderstanding of the loaves was failure to understand that Jesus is God (due to hardness of heart). So when the Disciples saw Him behave as God (treading on the waves) they were confused. That happens when we become distracted by the storm and let trouble occupy more of our attention than Christ.

Introduction: Why Have You Forsaken Me? 2

You're Dismissed.....	2
Sent Into a Storm 3	
Get Into the Boat	3
The Storm.....	4
Jesus Comes 4	
Jesus Sees.....	4
Jesus Appears.....	5
Jesus Speaks.....	6
Take Courage 6	
Amazement vs Faith 7	
Hard Heartedness	8
Guard Your Heart.....	9
Mass Healings 9	
Conclusion 10	

Mark 6:45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida,¹ while he dismissed the crowd. **46** After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. **47** When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. **48** he saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He wanted to pass by them, **49** but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, **50** because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." **51** Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, **52** for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. **53** When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. **54** As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. **55** They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. **56** And wherever he went--into villages, towns or countryside--they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

¹ This is difficult to reconcile with Luke's account, which says that they came to Bethsaida when they left the crowds for the day off, which would mean the feeding of the 5000 took place in the vicinity of Bethsaida.

Introduction: Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Have you ever noticed how many times in the Bible—especially in the Psalms God’s people feel like God has forsaken them?

Psalm 13:1 ... O LORD? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me?

Psalm 42:9 I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?

Psalm 43:2 You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me?

Psalm 44:23 Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep?

Psalm 77:9 Has God forgotten to be merciful?

Psalm 22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

You see language like that in the Psalms a lot because God’s people often feel that way. Sometimes it feels like you’re in the dark, God’s not responding to your prayers, and it seems like he must either be mad at you or he doesn’t even exist. Now, did the psalmists really believe that God was asleep or that he had rejected them or forsaken them? No. You can tell by reading the rest of what they said in the same psalm that they didn’t believe that. They were just crying out to God and expressing how they felt. Even Jesus quoted one of those psalms on the cross. Even Jesus knew what it was like to be in a moment that was so dark that it seemed like God had abandoned him. That is common to the Christian experience, and today Jesus is going to teach us how to find comfort in desperate times.

In today’s passage, the disciples find themselves in one of those times. It’s yet another catastrophe at sea. This time they find themselves fighting a storm all night long and after 10 hours of rowing, they are miles from shore, being blown out even further in the pitch dark, and Jesus isn’t with them. How did they get into this mess? Let’s back up 10 hours and see.

You’re Dismissed

We left off last time with the biggest crowd we ever see in the gospels laying back in the grass stuffed to the gills after Jesus fed them all with one little boy’s lunch. If you think Jesus was popular before, now his popularity is through the roof. A Messiah who can create unlimited free food? John tells us that the crowd got so excited they were trying to make Jesus king. That sounds good, right? It’s exactly what Jesus came to be—the king of his people. I’m sure this crowd would have carried Jesus and the 12 home on their shoulders if Jesus let them. So what does Jesus do? He doesn’t like this situation one bit.

Mark 6:45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida,² while he dismissed the crowd.

He wants his disciples out of there, he wants the crowd dispersed, and he wants to go be alone to pray. He’s not going to fall for the temptation to become king without suffering and dying on the cross.³

² This is difficult to reconcile with Luke’s account, which says that they came to Bethsaida when they left the crowds for the day off, which would mean the feeding of the 5000 took place in the vicinity of Bethsaida. Some believe there were two Bethsaida’s. That is possible, as “Bethsaida” means “fish house,” and the Sea of Galilee had a massive fishing industry. But archeologists have not discovered a second Bethsaida. Another possibility is that they were in an uninhabited area near Bethsaida, and Jesus told them to head in the direction of Bethsaida/Capernaum, which would reconcile this with Matthew’s account.

³ This is one of three times Jesus goes off by himself to pray in Mark, and all three times it’s the same kind of context. Remember when he tempted Jesus out in the wilderness? What did Satan offer him? All the kingdoms of the world. Satan offered to make Jesus king without the cross. “Jesus, you can bypass the cross, bypass the suffering, and take your rightful place as king of the world.” That’s how Satan tempted Jesus. And how did Jesus fight temptation?

Hebrews 5:7 During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears

But John says they were going to take Jesus by force. So what is Jesus going to do against an army of 5000 men? Look at the last four words of v.45.

45 ... he dismissed the crowd.

Five thousand men are going to take him by force and Jesus just says, “You’re dismissed,” and the crowd disperses. Up to this point the crowds have been a constant problem,⁴ from this point on they are never a problem again.⁵ Jesus finally, effortlessly, tames the unruly crowd just like he tamed the stormy sea.⁶

Sent Into a Storm

Get Into the Boat

45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

So after dismissing the crowd, Jesus wants to get alone up in the mountains to pray, but first he wants to get the 12 out of there, so it says he *made* them **get into the boat**. The implication of the wording is that they resisted. The disciples think this is a terrible idea. Maybe they sensed a storm was coming. Or maybe they were getting caught up in the excitement of this crowd. Or maybe they just didn’t want to go anywhere without Jesus. Whatever the reason, Jesus says, “Get in the boat.” “We don’t want

When he was tempted he got alone and cried out to the Father in prayer.

When Jesus didn’t give in to the temptations in the wilderness, it says Satan withdrew until a more opportune time. One of those times was right here. They want to make Jesus king—no cross. So what does Jesus do? He gets the disciples out of there so they won’t get caught up in the temptation, and then goes off by himself to pray.

What about the other two times Jesus went off by himself to pray in Mark? The first was back in ch.1, when Jesus’ popularity in Capernaum was skyrocketing. So Jesus got up early in the morning to pray, and then abruptly left that area.

The one other time Jesus goes off alone to pray was the night before the crucifixion, and was praying, “Father, if there is any way, let this cup pass from me.” He didn’t want to drink the cup of suffering, and so Satan tempted him to bypass that suffering, and whenever he did, Jesus got alone and prayed.

That’s a lesson for us. When you see temptation on the horizon, don’t be a fool and stand there and try to fight it. Run to the refuge of private prayer.

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

⁴ They prevented Jesus from entering a town for a while, they got in the way so people couldn’t get to Jesus, they almost crushed Jesus so that he had to escape by boat to keep from being harmed, and more than once they became so intrusive that Jesus and the 12 couldn’t even eat a meal because the crowd would flood right into the house. They are clamoring, chaotic, uncontrolled, uncontrollable, and the farther you get in the book, the worse they get until it reaches a peak at the beginning of ch.6. Jesus and the 12 can’t even eat. And in v.31 Mark describes them as **coming and going**. They’re not sitting in rows taking notes and raising their hand if they have a question. They are milling, they are coming and going, in and out—it’s total chaos. It’s like the uncontrollable, undulating waves of the sea, which the people at that time thought of as the ultimate example of uncontrollable chaos. Chaotic, out of control, and dangerous.

And now we’ve got the biggest crowd yet. What does he do? He tells them to all sit down in an ordered, structured formation of 100’s and 50’s and they do it. He’s got them all sitting in rank and file in an idyllic setting. Remember when Jesus drove the legion of demons out of maniac at Gadera and the people were astonished that the man was suddenly sane and in his right mind? What was it that tipped them off? It was because he was calmly sitting there at Jesus’ feet. Instead of running crazy, he was sitting. Jesus does the same thing to this crowd. People are never more insane than when they get into a crowd, but Jesus can bring sanity even to an unruly mob.

⁵ They flare up again at the crucifixion, worse than ever, but during Jesus’ ministry from here on out, they don’t cause any more problems. When he’s done somewhere he just dismisses them, and they go away.

⁶ If Jesus could do that, why did he allow the crowds to be such a problem before this? Because Jesus never used miraculous power just to make his life easier. He lived his life like we live ours so that he could be our sympathetic high priest, who has been through what we go through. But in this situation, he is showing his power to prove he has the ability to bring about the great Messianic Banquet at the end of the age. And part of that involves gathering all of God’s people. So Jesus shows that he doesn’t just have power over sickness and disease and demons and the sea; he also has power over the human heart and he is fully capable of gathering God’s people anywhere, anytime. It’s another awesome display of Jesus’ omnipotent power and supremacy.

to.” “Well, you don’t always get what you want. I need some time alone to pray, and you need to get in that boat and go—now.” And so off they go.

Sometimes Jesus will send you where you don’t want to go. And it will feel like you’re on your own—he’s not with you. Especially when you run into trouble, and that’s exactly what happens here.

The Storm

47 When evening came,⁷ the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land.⁸

So they are literally sailing off into the sunset. But by v.48, they run into trouble.

48 he saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.

Instead of traveling along fairly close to the north shore line like they would normally do, they find themselves blown out toward the middle of the sea. John tells us they were 3.5 miles from shore at this point. And v.48 says Jesus saw them **straining at the oars** during **the 4th watch of the night**, which is between 3:00am and 6:00am. They had been fighting against this storm all night—somewhere between 7 and 10 hours of rowing, and they are just getting blown farther and farther out to sea.

Sometimes Jesus will send you directly into the jaws of a brutal storm. That’s a hard lesson for us, because we devote so much of our energy into avoiding storms. But the important thing in your life is not whether you’re in a storm or not. The important thing is if you are trusting Jesus Christ whatever your circumstances.

Jesus Comes

Jesus Sees

Meanwhile, where’s Jesus? He’s praying. Evidently he was praying all night, but then sometime between 3 and 6 am⁹ Jesus finally says, “Amen,” and... **48 he saw the disciples straining at the oars.** Jesus is inland, they are miles out to sea, and it’s night time. How did Jesus see them? “Maybe Jesus ate a lot of carrots.” No. This is more than Vitamin A. You can’t even see a little boat like this that far away in broad daylight. How did Jesus see them? It’s another miracle.

Jesus always sees us. Because of the way these miracles at sea are presented in the gospels, and the things Jesus says about them, the church through the ages has always understood that the troubles the disciples had in the boat symbolize the troubles we have as believers. And the way Jesus cares for them teaches us Jesus’ attitude toward his church in stormy times. I think that’s right on, and it’s what the gospel writers intended in the way they wrote these accounts. Even when you feel most alone and utterly lost at sea, Jesus sees you. His eyes are on you

Psalm 139:2 ...you perceive my thoughts from afar. ... 5 You hem me in-- behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. 7 ... Where can I flee from your presence? 8 ... if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 ... if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Jesus sees you—even when you can’t see. He sees that you’re struggling. He cares, and he’s coming.

⁷ The word for **evening** refers to sundown, and John 6:16 says it was already dark.

⁸ Mark is very intentional about making sure we understand Jesus was still back on land when they were in the middle of the lake. Some try to explain this miracle away with theories that seem to be the very ideas Mark was laboring to exclude by this wording.

⁹ Every time we see Jesus getting away for an extended time of prayer in Mark it’s always at night.

48 ...About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake.

The time for prayer had passed, and the time for action had come. So Jesus takes a walk ... *on the water*. Can you imagine Jesus filling out his profile online? Some people say, “I enjoy long walks on the beach,” Jesus says, “Sometimes I enjoy long walks on the sea.”

This is a classic flannelgraph moment. If you grew up in Sunday school, you can picture your Sunday school teacher putting the Jesus figure out there on the lake. We’ve heard this story so many times, it can feel like just another children’s story. I just want to remind you—this actually happened. Jesus walked on water. He walked 3.5 miles on the stormy sea. I don’t know exactly how it went. I don’t know if he caused the water to congeal under his feet, or if he just suspended the law of gravity, but somehow he walked all the way out to that boat. I heard of a magician who said, “Oh, I could do that trick.” Really? A hurricane hit Florida a few weeks ago. I wonder what would happen if they took that guy out in a helicopter 3.5 miles off the Florida coast, drop him in that storm, and see if he could walk home. That’s what Jesus did. He finished praying, gathered up his stuff, climbed down the mountain, went to the shore, stepped onto the water, stepped over the small waves, walked up and down the bigger waves, and started heading toward the boat. How did he navigate? How do you find a boat with no lights lost in the middle of the sea at night? Jesus knew right where it was. I don’t know how fast he was walking, but if he averaged 3.5 mph and took a straight line right to it, then it would have taken one hour of walking to get out there.

Very often in Scripture, trampling something under your feet is a sign of your supremacy over that thing. Nobody ever trampled the sea underfoot before. A lot of people have been swallowed up by it. We try to build boats that can survive it for a while as long as it doesn’t get too rough. But no one had ever put the sea under his feet before. And remember, the people of that time thought of the sea as the home of chaos and evil and malicious forces that not even the gods could tame. And not long before this, thousands of demons got dumped into this sea. But Jesus conquers those forces so easily that he treads them underfoot.

Jesus Appears

And then, what Jesus does next, at first glance, seems very strange.

48 ...He wanted to pass by them

That makes it sound like they were going too slow and Jesus wanted to get by them. A better translation would be *he wanted to pass in front of them*.¹⁰ The idea is that Jesus wanted to approach them and make a big enough arc to make sure every one of them witnessed him walking on the water. And the language Mark uses is the same term used to some of the famous appearances of God in the OT—like when the glory of God passed in front of Moses¹¹ and later Elijah.¹² It’s the language of God himself making an appearance. But of course, in the OT, they didn’t actually see God; they just saw the fringes of his glory.

Job 9:8 [God] alone ...treads on the waves of the sea. ... 11 When he passes me, I cannot see him.

God alone treads on the waves of the sea, but now God is doing it in human flesh, and he can be seen.

So what do the disciples think?

¹⁰ That word translated **pass by** can mean to approach or come into the vicinity of someone. It’s the word used in the account of the Gaderean demoniac when it says the man was so violent no one could pass that way. They couldn’t come into that vicinity.

¹¹ Exodus 33:19,22, 34:6.

¹² 1 Ki.19:11.

49 but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified.

A ghost? That's not part of Judaism. How is it that a group of Jewish men believed in ghosts? They didn't. But you can go from not believing in ghosts to believing in ghosts in a real hurry when you see someone strolling out toward your boat when you're miles out to sea.

They weren't close enough to make out his face, but it was definitely a person. When people see some vague, fuzzy image at sea that they can't make out, they might assume it's a sea monster or something, but they aren't going to assume it's a person unless it's absolutely obvious that it's a person. (Lots of people think they see the Loch Ness monster at sea, and lots of people think they saw Bigfoot on land, but no one ever thinks they might have seen Bigfoot at sea. You don't assume it's a person at sea unless it's very clear that it's a person.) Plus, it's not just one of them; it's all 12.

What if you had been there? Do you think you would have just said, "Oh, it's probably just Jesus stretching his legs"? Remember, Jesus had never done this before. No one had. No one had ever heard of walking on water. Put yourself in that boat for a minute. Your muscles are burning after hours of rowing, it's a losing battle with this wind and you're getting pushed farther and farther out to sea, and suddenly you see some form off in the distance. You ignore it. There have been plenty of times you've been out here and your eyes played tricks on you for a moment, so you don't think anything of it.

But then someone else points to that same spot and says, "Hey, what's that?" Now everyone sees it, and now that it's closer, it's definitely the shape of a man. "Do you see that?" "What is it?" "I don't know." "It looks like...oh man it's – it's walking!" It's getting closer!" And now you all have a surge of adrenalin and now you're rowing twice as fast. And this figure has to jog to catch up. It's going to overtake you. And you suddenly find yourself screaming.

49 ...They cried out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified.

The word **cried out** means *to shriek*. Most men are pretty self-conscious about screaming out loud in fear. We just don't do that—especially when we're around a bunch of other men. If you are standing around with 11 other guys and see something funny, you don't just start screaming, "It's a ghost!" But this isn't like anything you've ever seen before. You're there in the boat, this is the most terrified you've ever been in your life, and then right there, at the height of your panic, you hear that unmistakable voice:

Jesus Speaks

50 they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them

Immediately. He didn't toy around with them. He didn't string it out. The moment they cried out, Jesus spoke to them.

The Object of Your Fear Is Your Salvation

50 ... Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

The thing they were so afraid of turned out to be the best thing that could possibly happen to them. This terrifying threat ended up being the Lord himself. How many times have we seen some terrifying thing on the horizon of our life—it's coming toward you – it will be here next year/week/tomorrow, and you are racked with fear, and when it arrives it turns out to be none other than God himself bringing you his blessings? Sometimes we are the most afraid when we are in the least danger.

Take Courage

So Jesus sees their panic and immediately speaks. And look at what he says. Three short statements.

50 "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

The first and the third are similar—**take courage** and **don't be afraid**. **Take courage** means to be strong and be encouraged. Then he tells them **don't be afraid**. When you're scared to death, does it usually help for someone to just say, "Don't be scared"? Not usually. But it works here because of that middle statement. What does Jesus say in between **take courage** and **don't be afraid**? **It is I.**¹³ They didn't have to be afraid because Jesus was with them now. They see Jesus, they start screaming, and immediately, "Hey, hey, guys, guys, it's me."

When my kids were little, and they would come in crying because of a nightmare, I didn't give them a big, long discourse on the illusory nature of dreams ("You need to understand that the various eventualities in your dream are products of your imagination and have no correspondence to reality...") No. I just said, "It's ok. Don't be afraid. Daddy's here. Daddy's right here. I've got you."

Don't underestimate the power of simple encouragements. If someone is afraid and you don't know what to say to them, if it's a believer, just remind them of the Lord's presence. "It's ok. He's here. He's right here." And if it's you who's afraid, and if there's no one around to remind you, remind yourself—like David did.

Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me.

When you're afraid of something, you're in the storm, whether it be the loss of a loved one, or the difficulties of old age, or just a really exasperating day, remind yourself, *I'm not alone*. The Lord has walked out into this storm and he's here with me." Jesus Christ is our refuge and protector, he preserves our life, he comes to us in our trouble, he treads upon the very waves that we're so afraid of and uses them as a pathway to come to us. Even though he seems miles away, he's watching you. And at the right time, he will come to you. We talk a lot about coming to Jesus, but far more often it's Jesus who comes to you.

Amazement vs Faith

51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind stopped.

Once again Jesus just turns the storm off—another miracle. So how are the disciples going to respond?

51 ... They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves;¹⁴ their hearts were hardened.¹⁵

Once again, amazement at Christ is not a good thing. It's a sign of lack of understanding and a hard heart. Why is amazement such a bad thing? Because it stops short of faith. There is a huge difference between this kind of amazement and faith. Amazement is when you can't reconcile what you're seeing with what you know to be true. Faith is when you adjust your conception of what is true.

¹³ When Jesus says, "It is I" the Greek phrase is *ego eimi*, which is the exact phrase used in the OT when God calls Himself "I AM." So *ego eimi* can mean "It is I" or it can be the name of God. In a context of walking on the water and other "appearance of God"—type language, I think the implication is that Jesus is using the divine name here. He's saying, "Take courage, I AM. Don't be afraid." The last time they were in a storm and Jesus stopped it with a word, they asked, "**Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!**" (4:41). Here's the answer. Who gives orders to the wind and the waves? Who treads upon seas? I AM.

¹⁴ This is the first of three times someone fails to understand the feeding of the 5000.

¹⁵ One thing that's remarkable about their confusion here is they are acting as though this is the first time Jesus has ever shown his power and compassion in a time of difficulty. How can that be? They saw him feed a multitude, raise a girl from the dead, heal a 12-year illness, still another storm with a word, drive out thousands of demons, and countless other miracles. Do they have Alzheimer's? Yes, they had a severe case of spiritual Alzheimer's disease.

We all do. What do we do when trouble comes into our lives? How often do we panic like Jesus has never carried us through a storm before? 10,000 times he has been a shepherd to us and had compassion on us and supplied our needs and protected us and delivered us. But we get spiritual Alzheimer's and act like we don't even him, and he's never taken care of us before.

When you're amazed, you say, "This is what I know to be reality, but that doesn't fit. So I'm confused"¹⁶. Faith says, "This is what I thought was reality, but now I know that thing is reality. I'm not confused; I just have a more accurate grasp of reality now." If I see a magician do some amazing trick—maybe he makes himself float up into the air, I'll walk away amazed, but I won't change my beliefs. I'll say, "Wow, that was amazing," but I won't adjust my belief in gravity or the laws of physics or anything else. Being amazed doesn't change you. It amuses you, intrigues you, makes you wonder; but it doesn't change you. Faith changes you. Your identity is defined in large measure by what you believe to be true, and where you place your trust and confidence.

You can be amazed at the Word of God and still not be living by faith. You can be amazed at the stories about Jesus and not be living by faith. You can be amazed at the church, or amazed by some great worship music, you can be amazed at God's answers to prayer, you can be amazed by anything and not live by faith. Faith goes beyond saying, "Wow, that blows my mind," and says, "That defines how I'm going to live."

Hard Heartedness

So why did they stop at amazement instead of fully trusting him? V.52 tells us.

51 ...They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.¹⁷

They were amazed and confused because they didn't learn what they should have learned from the feeding of the multitude; namely, that Jesus is almighty God and so he has omnipotent power and can do anything. That's what they should have learned when Jesus fed the multitude, but they didn't. Why? Was it an intellectual problem? An IQ problem? No. It was a heart problem.

52 ... their hearts were hardened.^{18,19,20}

¹⁶ When Jesus' family came to take Him when they thought he was out of his mind—this is the word that was used. It's not that they believed Jesus was amazed. They thought he was confused. Numerous times in Scripture it is used in a negative context of seeing something, and not knowing what to make of it when the person should have known what to make of it. For example, **Luke 24:22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 he said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!** It would be fine to be deeply impressed by the empty tomb, but they weren't just impressed; they were confused by it. They were at a total loss to know what to make of it, and they shouldn't have been. With all the prophecies and all the things Jesus said about rising on the third day—it's inexcusable for them to be scratching their heads searching for an explanation when the tomb was empty on the third day.

¹⁷ It was at this point that Peter got out of the boat and walked on water, then doubted and sank. But Jesus rescued him and brought him back to the boat. At that point the disciples worshipped Jesus.

¹⁸ If you think understanding is only a function of intellect, think again. If your heart isn't malleable, and it resists change, then you won't be able to understand anything that calls for the kinds of changes your heart is resisting. Some of the most brilliant intellects in the world can't understand the gospel. And there are 5-year-olds that can understand the gospel. If there is a bias in the heart against accepting something, then no matter how much explanation and evidence and proof someone gives you, it will just never compute in your mind. That's why some of your unbelieving friends – you tell them the gospel and they can repeat it back to you – it seems like they get it. Then the next time you talk to them they are right back to thinking that Christianity is all about trying your hardest to be good. It can't sink into their understanding because there isn't a willingness to believe it. And that's how the disciples were about the deity of Christ. Their hearts refused to embrace the idea. How could you watch Jesus feed tens of thousands of people with a little boy's lunch one day, and then next day he does a miracle and you have no idea what to make of it? That can only happen if you stop at amazement and don't let your heart's belief system be changed

¹⁹ How do we reconcile this with the signs of faith that the disciples showed prior to this (including trusting Jesus enough to leave everything to follow him)? This shows that faith is not an all-or-nothing reality. It can be weak, strong, small, great, and all kinds of stages in between. And it can come and go.

In the world of cinema and novels and storytelling there is a phenomenon known as suspended disbelief. It refers to the act of temporarily setting aside your disbelief so you can really get into the story. So when you watch Peter Pan, you don't say, "This is ridiculous. There's no way a boy could actually fly given the laws of physics..." If you do that, you won't be able to enjoy the

That's a word picture. A hard heart is a heart that's resistant to change. If you take a rock in your hand and squeeze it, what happens? Nothing. A hard heart is a heart that's not malleable—a heart that says, "No, I'm not going to adjust my belief system in that area."²¹ I'll be amazed, but I won't change my perception of reality." Doing that will destroy your heart.

Guard Your Heart

Be very, very careful with your heart. It is the most valuable thing you have. And it is easily ruined. All you have to do is hear truths from God's Word and fail to adjust your belief system to embrace them.

There are some things the Bible says that we just tend to resist because we think it's too hard. I can't do that; it's not my personality. I don't want to do that, I can't afford it. I don't have the time. Each time you resist, your heart crusts over a little bit. Eventually it will turn to stone, and then you'll be completely incapable of responding to God.

Mass Healings

53 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there.

They landed at Gennesaret. That's interesting. Where did Jesus tell them to go when they left?

45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida

Bethsaida and Gennesaret are on opposite sides of the lake. If Jesus told them to go to Bethsaida, isn't that where he wanted them to go? No, that's where he wanted them to *try* to go. Sometimes Jesus wants you to try something and fail, but the effort and failure will land you right where you need to be. That's exactly what happens here. He tells them to try to go to Bethsaida even though he wants them to end up in Gennesaret.²²

54 As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. 55 They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went--into villages, towns or countryside--they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.²³

movie. In your rational mind you don't believe it could actually happen, but for a couple hours you suspend that disbelief and pretend you do believe so you can enjoy the story. Some people do that in church. They don't really believe a man walked on water or fed a multitude with a couple fish burgers. But when they are in church they go along with it so they can enjoy the story.²⁰ This is one of those passages in Scripture that shows very clearly how truthful and honest the writers of Scripture were. How does Mark know their hearts were hardened? He wasn't there. And even if he were, how would he know what was in their hearts?

Mark got his information from Peter, who was there. He was one of the men who failed to understand and had a hard heart. The only record we have of the Apostles is from their own writings and preaching. We know they had hard hearts because they reported that they had hard hearts. This is one of the reasons the experts are so convinced that the Apostles were reliable witnesses. Why else would they include details like this? If you were making up a story about how God became a man and chose you to be his spokesman, why throw in all kinds of details that make you look like such a knucklehead? Why tell the story of when he walked on water and stilled a storm, and then throw in a comment, "Oh, by the way, we didn't understand anything because our hearts were so hard"? It's so obvious that the writers of the NT were reliable, truthful witnesses who reported exactly what happened, even when it reflected poorly on them.

²¹ The disciples were **amazed** at the empty tomb (Luke 24:22), and Jesus later showed that it was because they were stubborn and **slow of heart to believe** (Luke 24:25).

²² This is even more poignant when you realize that, according to John 6:21, it was Jesus who took them to Gennesaret **John 6:21 Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.**

²³ This is another of Mark's periodic summary statements, where he gives a general overview of Jesus' ministry over a long period of time.

Last time Jesus was in this area a woman touched his clothes and was miraculously healed. Evidently word has gotten out—all you have to do is touch his clothes. You don't have to sit through a sermon, you don't have to talk to him or engage with him in any way. You can just get what you want and be on your way. It's kind of sad that these people aren't more interested in knowing Christ and following him and receiving forgiveness of sins and entering the kingdom of God. Jesus didn't come into this world just to give people temporary physical healings. He came to call people to repentance and faith. I don't fault people for wanting to be healed but anyone who just touches Jesus, gets what they want, then leaves without getting eternal life, is a fool.

But Jesus is compassionate, and he goes ahead and heals all these people anyway—every last one of them. Notice how extensive the language is here.

55 ... they carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went--into villages, towns or countryside--they placed the sick in the marketplaces. ... and all who touched him were healed.

And that's yet another awesome display of his power—both because of how extensive it was, and because all it took was a touch of his clothing. All it takes is the slightest brush with his power and any and every disease is instantly and completely healed.

Conclusion

What Jesus did out there on the lake that day was such a beautiful picture of his care for us, isn't it? The fact that he sees us in the darkness and storm, and that he comes to us, treading the very threats that frighten us under his feet, and when the time is right, he will put an end to the storm—all of that is such a great comfort. But we can miss it all if our hearts aren't soft.

If the Apostles can tell the whole world about how hard their hearts were, surely you and I can be honest with ourselves about our areas of unbelief and hard heartedness. When we have confusion in our hearts, sometimes it could be because of a lack of information or some bad teaching or low IQ—but many times it's not any of those. In many cases our confusion is due to a resistance in our heart to believe that God will behave like God, and that our Good Shepherd will behave like a Good Shepherd. Something inside us resists certain truths about what he is really like because we want to cling to self-pity. If we admit that he is a generous provider we would have to let go of our self-pity because there would be no reason for anyone to feel sorry for us. Or maybe we resist a certain truth about God because we are angry. We're angry over the fact that some hardship has come into our lives. Or maybe it's because we're clinging to pride—I don't want to admit my own inadequacy or failure. Sometimes it's laziness—I don't want to accept that truth because it will mean I'll have to do some hard things I don't feel like doing. Sometimes it's because my heart is in love with some earthly treasure. When a particular truth about God seems to threaten something we hold dear, and we're afraid of the implications and what they might mean about what we would have to give up, our soul resists that truth and the result is confusion.

And that confusion won't be isolated. It will mess up your understanding in other areas as well because all the truths of God's Word are connected and interdependent.

If there is anything hardening your heart against any truth in Scripture, let go of it. Let the Word of God override any conflicting ideas you have about reality, so that when Jesus comes to you in the storm, instead of seeing him as a terrifying ghost, you welcome him as he is: the almighty, omnipotent, caring Lord of all who comes to you in the storm, treading on the waves of the sea.