

August 24, 2014  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 6:15-21.

1. What did Jesus desire for the disciples to learn in the test He gave on the water?
2. Recount a similar kind of test that King Jesus has brought into your life.
3. What did you learn in the test?
4. Have you had opportunity to encourage or challenge someone else with what King Jesus taught you?

### **THE KING IS IN CONTROL – STOP BEING AFRAID** **John 6:15-21**

Some of us get a bit discouraged with the reality that there are enough people in our nation who are hooked on government entitlements to swing any election toward the man or woman who promises to give them the most. It seems that these people are not interested in good and honest government, the protection of freedoms won at great cost, or even controls to keep our borders impenetrable. To hear the demands above the din, it sounds like they are saying, “Just give us free phones, free computers, free lunches, free food stamps, free health care, free housing, free education, freedom from work, and we will vote for you.” Reasonable people know that a culture like that doesn’t last long.

It is well said that folks are folks in any age. There were people in Jesus’ day who recognized that He was special. When He proved that He could give them a free education, free food, and free health care, the masses gathered around Him and tried to force Him to be their King. They did not know for what they were asking.

It is true that Jesus is the King of kings. Because He is the Creator of the universe, He is the only rightful governor of the universe. In particular, He is the only rightful King over us, His people. But that He is King does not mean that we are to look to Him for handouts. It means that we are to trust Him to be in control. Since He is God, He is in control. And since He is in control, I ought to trust Him and submit to Him. That is the essence of true worship. If we don’t trust Him, we don’t worship Him. So, do you worship the King?

### **King Jesus Controls People (vv.15-17a).**

The man from Nazareth was no pushover who tested the winds of public opinion in order to build a coalition that would carry Him to the throne. In fact, King Jesus rebuffed materialistic fans who followed Him for the wrong reasons. *Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself (v.15).* People who were driven by fleshly impulses desired to make Jesus king. They were quite impressed by the unique abilities of this man from Nazareth.

For one thing, this itinerant teacher taught with authority. Then He also healed the sick and even provided free food out of thin air for thousands of people at a time. To make Him the king was a no-brainer. No doubt that was overwhelmingly the popular opinion at the moment. It wasn’t as though the masses needed to elect representatives, hold counsel, debate the issue, and then offer an invitation to Jesus. And so the people were preparing to force Jesus to become king. This was bordering on a riot.

Jesus knew what the people were thinking and doing. Their actions and words had to be very obvious. But beyond the obvious, Jesus knew their hearts. The Greek wording behind the English translation indicates that Jesus fully perceived what they were doing.

The verb (*ginosko*) means to come to know, typically through experience. On one hand, Jesus, being omniscient, knew exactly what motivated these people and what their goal was. On the other hand, Jesus, being human, had observed this kind of emotional duplicity before. The people truly desired a king, but not the kind of King Jesus is and not for the reasons that Jesus must be king of our lives. This was not the time or the reason for Him to rule as the king of these people.

The King had more important things to do at the moment. *Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.* Jesus took control of the situation. First, He dismissed the crowds. John did not convey this idea clearly in his account. However, Matthew pointed out that Jesus authoritatively refused the overtures of the crowd and sent them home. He wrote, *And after he had dismissed the crowds . . . (Matt. 14:23a).* Jesus authoritatively dismissed the crowds. He didn't run away to hide. It was not that Jesus was afraid of the crowd or thought that 20,000 plus people, whipped into a frenzy, were going to get beyond His control. He is King and He is in control of all the circumstances that led to His crucifixion. Therefore, He calmly and authoritatively sent the people away. They needed to go away because Jesus had to do something more important than playing the role of the people's puppet king.

Having sent the people away, Jesus intentionally got alone to pray. *He went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone (Matt. 14:23b).* Jesus finding a secluded place to pray is a common scene in the Gospels. Mark wrote of such a case, *And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed (Mark 1:35).* In the verses that follow this simple statement, Mark drew an accurate picture of human shallowness. Jesus went to be alone while it was still dark in order to pray, and Peter and the other disciples went looking for Him. When they found Him they virtually said, "Hey everyone is looking for You. We have a lot of work to do here. This idea of your kingdom is really generating steam and we need to capitalize on it."

This picture of Jesus praying reveals that God the Son understood the importance of communicating with the Father. Purposeful prayer is not the same as sitting on Santa's lap spouting

off your wish list. Real prayer, worshipful prayer, is humbling ourselves before God in order to learn anew why His will is always best. The Son came to do the will of the Father and needed to communicate to the Father about that will regularly and deeply. That being true, we must wonder how is it that we think we need less serious and less lengthy communication to know the same Father God.

As Jesus prepared to get alone to pray, He also directed His followers to move toward the next lesson. *When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum (vv.16-17a).* Actually, the disciples got into a boat because the King told them to. Here in John's account, it looks like Jesus went to pray and the disciples got into a boat and headed west. Why would they do that? Why would they go to Capernaum without Jesus? Without the information the other Gospel writers provide, we would have to conclude that Jesus decided after He finished talking to the Father, or on the next morning, that He could walk the few miles over to Capernaum.

We don't have to guess what precipitated the disciples' leaving because Matthew revealed a little more detail. He wrote, *Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side (Matt. 14:22).* The disciples got into the boat because Jesus made them get into the boat. Like us, they probably asked a lot of questions. Like us, they probably argued about who would row and who would steer the boat. Jesus implied that He would meet them on the other side a little later. But to what did the *other side* refer? It could mean Capernaum, the destination for which the disciples started according to John 6:17. Or it might refer to the village of Bethsaida. But wasn't that kind of where they were? Some scholars believe it is possible that there was another fishing village on the western shore by that name. Mark recorded that this village was the disciples' ultimate destination (Mark 6:45). Or was the other side to which Jesus sent them Gennserate, where they actually landed (Mark 6:53)?

Wherever the exact location was, according to the King's instruction, the disciples were supposed to go to the other side. All they knew for sure at this point is that they were to row the boat toward the other side of the lake, and they started for Capernaum,

which was about three miles away. In our mind, we watch them get into the boat. Probably they were chatting about the events of the day, or why Jesus wasn't going with them, or maybe even where they were supposed to be going. Nothing out of the norm here. Just another predictable event of life – or so they thought.

These men had no inkling of the terror they would face nor the lesson they would learn. But the King knows! And He knows where He is sending us and why. We embark on the sea of life in our little boat unaware that it could become chaotic. Do we even obey the Master who tells us to get into the boat and launch out? Or do we feel like we must be in control? We will walk across the land if that is our choice, or we will get in a different boat, or we will head south if that is what we want to do. We are just glad to have even an insignificant relationship with this wonderful teacher who gives away free food and free health care.

### **King Jesus Controls Nature (vv.17b-21).**

Jesus' followers were caught in fearful circumstances (vv.17b-19). It had to be obvious to them that the elements of nature were against them. What can we do about nature when it opposes us? For them it was dark and Jesus was not with them. John wrote, *It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them (v.17b)*. Mark added a bit more by writing, *And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land (Mark 6:47)*. So we see the little boat load of disciples out there on the lake rowing in the darkness. If there was no moon (which would be the case if a storm was approaching), they would have been in oppressive circumstances. They would have to watch for lights along the shore. Being men who grew up on that lake, they would be able to tell where they were.

But added to the physical darkness was the fact that Jesus was not with them. Regardless of the level of the disciples understanding about Christ at this point, His absence would be felt. His teaching revealed His wisdom; His miracles revealed His power. Would they not feel safer in His presence? Sometimes in our relationship with Christ, we are like independent adolescents who long to be free from the oversight of Mom and Dad. Sure we are glad to have the matter of eternal life settled. But that's a long way off. In normal, everyday

living, we begin to think that, not only do we not need the King's input every day, but we want to have freedom to make up our own mind. So we don't read His manual for life (the Bible), and we don't talk to Him about it (pray). But one day after embarking on that course in the sea of life, we sense that it is really dark and confusing and we are very alone. And sometimes that foreboding is but a harbinger of a coming storm which the King intends to use to teach us about Himself.

Without warning, the boatload of men who had been plodding along toward their destination was imperiled. A strong wind whipped the sea. *The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing (v.18)*. Suddenly the placid lake became a churning caldron. The wind and the waves were not a particular miracle or a God-kind of thing. People could easily explain these unfavorable circumstances of life by physics and geography. It is a known fact that the Sea of Galilee lies between 600 and 700 feet below sea level. The surrounding mountains on the north and east sides rose abruptly to 2,000 feet above sea level. That difference of over 2,500 feet can cause cool, moist winds to rush down the mountain sides, crash into the sea, and whip it into a frothy caldron.

In like manner, people often try to explain the trials of our lives in the same logical way. But why did the wind just happen to rush down the mountainside at that moment when the boat was in the midst of the lake? Someone might want to think that the King controlled the wind and sent it on purpose at that moment. And people might think that God allows certain testing in their lives for particular reasons.

These guys were a long way from shore and in big trouble. Matthew, who was probably in the boat at the time, described it, *But the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them (Matt. 14:24)*. Things looked rather bleak even for seasoned fisherman. Could a little boat sink and the sailors drown in such circumstances? They sure could! From the disciples' perspective, it was probably difficult for them to imagine worse circumstances. We are made of the same stuff. It is in times like these that the questions begin to flood our minds. Probably the disciples wondered, "Why are we in this boat on this lake at this time?" "Am I not in this situation because Jesus told me to do it?"

“Why didn’t I resist, why didn’t I choose to walk?” “Why did Jesus let me down?” “If He is so wise, he should have known that this could happen!” And so we errantly conclude that maybe following Him is not such a good idea after all.

This is exactly the way we humans doubt and question God in times of trial. We ask, “Where is God?” “Why did He let this happen to me?” “Doesn’t He care?” We try to justify ourselves by claiming “I have been trying to be a good Christian and look how He rewards me!” “I gave up a lot of potential opportunities to follow Christ; I yielded my will to Him in order to serve Him and now look!” And like the disciples, we fail to consider that Jesus brings us to the end of ourselves in order to show His power through us.

Paul learned that there was a time to quit asking for the trial to go away and start learning what God wants to do in the trial. *Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).*

Just when it seemed like things couldn’t get any worse for the disciples, they did. It appeared that even the spirit world was turned against them. Jesus came walking near them and His presence scared them. Seeing Jesus coming toward them under normal circumstances would not have caused them fear. But they were in the middle of the lake, wind was whipping the water, and the waves were about to sink the boat. *When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened (v.19).* Rowing three or four miles would normally have put them at their destination. But circumstances were not normal because the wind had blown them into the middle of the lake.

Now when they were as far from safety as possible, they saw Jesus! What a relief. No, this was not like the few settlers pinned down in the fort by savages seeing the cavalry riding toward them. Those few settlers would have been quite unsettled to see the cavalry riding across the water or flying through the air. So too, the disciples were terrorized to see what looked like a man walking on the water. And to make matters worse, he or it was coming toward them. I think they must have felt like of our son Michael did at times during his

seven year battle with Crohn’s disease. Each time there was a new development, a new pain, or a bad reaction to the medicine, Michael would go to the doctor, endure some more tests, only to hear the doctor say, “This is really odd. We have never seen this before.” That can get a bit discouraging. Surely the disciples wondered what else could possibly go wrong.

Logically, in human fashion, they thought Jesus was a ghost. *But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear (Matthew 14:26).* This is not the point to debate the reality or non-reality of ghosts. Obviously, the idea of ghosts was common and expected in that culture. And no where did Jesus say, “You silly boys. No one believes in ghosts!” What Jesus would say is, “Why did you doubt, you who have little faith?” The important point is not whether we believe or disbelieve human legends or stories or commonly held beliefs. The important point in all testing is, “Do you trust Jesus your King?”

We should because Jesus controlled the circumstances (vv.20-21). The King was well aware of all that the disciples experienced. And it was not that He just happened upon a stressful situation. He saw them from a distance. Mark told us, *He saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them (Mark 6:48).* While Jesus was on the mountainside praying, He also saw His beloved disciples caught up in a storm He allowed. Possibly He could physically see them. Or He could see them with His omnipresent eye. The comforting news is that while His followers toiled and feared, Jesus was them – even though He was physically absent. And we have the same promise: *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5-6).*

The King came to the fearful followers on the water and encouraged them. He told them to stop being afraid. *He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid” (v.20).* Notice that Jesus didn’t say, “Row harder,” or “Quit arguing,” or “Work more consistently.” He simply identified Himself. In the midst of our storm, we don’t need more accurate instructions or wacky ideas that someone else found helpful.

When we reach the end of the rope, we need to know that Jesus is here. Stop fearing!

The followers were astounded. Mark gives a little more detail about the disciples' response than John gave. He wrote, *And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded (Mark 6:51)*. Utterly astounded is a good way to describe how they felt. Try to imagine the sensory overload they were experiencing. They had been exhausted from being overworked in ministry with people. Jesus took them to the wilderness to get rest only to be besieged by a crowd of over 20,000 people. When they recommended that Jesus take charge and send the people home, Jesus instead feed them with more than enough – from five loaves and two fish. Now they were caught up in the perfect storm, approached by what they thought was a ghost, only to have Jesus step into the boat and instantly the lake was as smooth as glass on a beautiful spring evening.

It's a bit of an understatement for John to write that the followers were glad. *Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going (v.21)*. Sure they were glad that He wasn't a ghost, and they were glad that the sea calmed down and they were no longer in danger. It is good for us to rejoice and be happy when the trial is over. It is especially good when we have learned how powerful Jesus is. These men rejoiced because the storm was over, but what did they learn?

Their experience helps us remember that the trial in our lives will be over at some point. Either the Lord stops the testing, which brings glory to Him, or the Lord glorifies Himself exceedingly by taking us to Himself in eternity. But what do we learn? Often when the test comes to an end in this life, we still do not understand what it was all about. In similar fashion, Jesus' followers were confused when the test was over. *They did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:52)*. What does that mean? The men should have learned from the feeding miracle that Jesus of Nazareth is equal with God the Creator. If they would have learned that lesson, they could have expected Him to calm the boisterous sea. Their hearts (the seat of the intellect and reason) were in the process of being spiritually hardened.

A broken heart would have put them in a condition to better understand the King's work. Hiebert observed, "The two miracles just recorded were clearly intended by Jesus to be part of His training of the twelve. They were well suited to lead the disciples into a fuller and truer understanding of His own unique Person. His firm rejection of the desire of the crowd that afternoon to make Him king (John 6:15) must have deeply perplexed the twelve and been the object of serious discussion among themselves in the boat. It threatened to cloud their confidence in Him and aroused confusion in them concerning His intentions. The supernatural way in which Jesus revealed himself to them that night was obviously intended to bolster their faith." (D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark, a portrait of the Servant*, Chicago: The Moody Press, 1974, p.164).

We generally do not like the tests that God sends our way. Therefore, it is good for us to learn from the disciples' experience that the King who tests us is in complete control of the test. He always has a reason for the test and always a desired goal for us. The reason and the goal are always His glory.