

DISCIPLESHIP ON THE SEA OF GALILEE

Mark 6:44-56

Intro: Back in 1947 when I graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary (or I have been told that it is more proper to say that “I was graduated” from Dallas Theological Seminary), Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the President and Founder of the Seminary, as his custom was, had a special session with our graduating class. I remember many of the things that he told us, but one of the things that he said has stuck in my mind in a special way, and I have often been reminded of it through the years. We all felt that we had reached an important milestone in our lives, and we had. But he made us look ahead just hours before we were to receive our diplomas when he said, “Remember men, we call your graduation a commencement *because it is only the beginning!*” We were thinking about all of the work that was behind us, the Greek and Hebrew, the reading assignments, the papers we had written. He had complimented us on the completion of our work, but he wanted us to know that our training was just in its beginning stages. None of us knew what was ahead of us. But all of us had to realize that Dr. Chafer spoke the truth. There was a lot more for us to learn. The truths that we had been taught needed to be written more deeply in our hearts. I am sure that no two of us walked the same path. But we were to learn how we would be tested about and by the truth we believed. None of us escaped testings and trials. We all had to learn that we were not sufficient for the work that the Lord had called us to do. We had to learn that not everybody wanted to hear the message we had been taught that we were to preach. Like those early disciples we faced times when we failed the Lord, or moved ahead in different ways without waiting for His clear guidance. Some of us were married and we had children; others were to get married later. But marriage and family responsibilities held its great joys for us, but also brought us into situations where we learned more about prayer. We had to learn through all of the circumstances of our lives that God was not only graciously working through us, *but that preeminently He was working in us, changing us from what we were when He first saved us, working in us to make us more like our Savior.* Some of my classmates are in heaven. The training for the rest of us continues. And it will continue until the day that the Lord comes, or He calls each one of home. And what is true of those of us who have been to seminary, is true of every child of God. Our training never stops. Every experience we have, regardless of what it is, is ordered by the Lord for our growth in grace, and, hopefully, for our continued usefulness by the Holy Spirit.

Why am I saying all of this? I am saying this because my text for today gives us one of those circumstances in the lives of “the twelve” where we see the Lord continuing their training, showing them more about Himself, teaching them that they could always trust Him.

Who would ever have thought that a boat would become a place for the continued training of the disciples? But that is exactly what it was! A boat had been their classroom once before. We read about it in Mark 4: 35-41. And before that, in the first part of Mark 4, verses 1 and 2, we learned that the Lord taught from a boat while the people stood on the shore and listened to Him. So the disciples should have at least suspected that the Lord might have had another purpose for training them when He put them in a boat, while He remained behind to spend time in prayer. And even in doing that He was teaching them, teach the importance of prayer.

But I don’t want to get ahead of the story, this important event in the life of our Lord, but also of great importance in the lives of “the twelve.”

The account of this event is found also in the Gospels of Matthew (14:22-36) and the Gospel of John (6:15-21), but not in the Gospel according to Luke.

Matthew gives us the fullest account because he tells us that this was the time when Peter walked on the water. I can only guess as to why Mark did not include the part about Peter. It seems to be that Mark was more concerned about telling us how directly the Lord was involved with the disciples, and how the Lord’s involvement shows how thoroughly He was a part of all that happened to the disciples. And that is the part that makes it especially important for us today.

I have a **seven point outline** for you today. A homiletics professor, one who teaches how to prepare and deliver a sermon, might criticize me for having so many points. But they are very clearly stated by John Mark in the text, so it would be hard to build a case against this seven-point message. I am going to point them out to you, and then discuss each one briefly in the time that we have. Six of them deal with what the Lord did, and the seventh tells us what happened to the disciples through this very difficult trial.

The first point is in verse 45 where we read about our Lord that “He con-

strained His disciples to get into the ship.” **The second point** is in verse 46 where we read, again speaking about the Lord, “He departed into a mountain to pray.” **The third point** is in verse 48, “And He saw them toiling in rowing.” **The fourth point** is in also in verse 48, “He cometh to them.” **The fifth point** is in verse 50: “He talked with them.” **The sixth point** is in verse 51: “And He went up unto them into the ship.” Then **the seventh and last point** is in verse 53 which speaks of the disciples and the Lord, “They [the disciples and the Lord] came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew near to the shore.”

These seven points tell the whole story about this part of the training of “the twelve.” But each one of the seven has its application for us today. Let’s begin by looking at the first point.

I. “HE CONSTRAINED HIS DISCIPLES TO GET INTO THE SHIP (Mark 6:45).

A disciple is a learner and a follower. He is one who accepts the teaching of his teacher, and one who is to live according to that teaching. I hope we all understand that about ourselves as Christians. We accept the teaching of our Lord. We believe His Word is the truth. But we also seek to live in harmony with that teaching. A person who does not live according to God’s Word, who does not seek to obey the commandments of our Lord, has no right to call himself a Christian.

The Apostle John put it this way:

4 He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:4).

The Lord Jesus said it this way:

46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

We are to live the way the Lord wants us to live (and it is all spelled out for us in the Bible). We are to talk the way the Lord wants us to talk. We are even to think the way the Lord wants us to think. And all of this includes the negative side of things too – not doing what He doesn’t want us to do, not saying the things that He doesn’t want us to say, not thinking what He doesn’t want us to think, not going where He doesn’t want us to go. Obedience to the Lord includes every part of life.

But we all know that even as Christians we have not always obeyed the Lord. Sometimes we have done or said what we know was wrong in the

sight of the Lord. But we sometimes have to learn by some sad experience that the Lord is not going to put up with our disobedience, especially when it continues for some time.

Did you notice the word “constrained” in what Mark tells us about the disciples and the ship? “Constrained” in English means that the Lord had to compel, to force in some way, His disciples to get into that ship. Why they didn’t want to go, we can’t say for sure. Maybe it was because of the storm that they were in before. Maybe it was a commendable thing like not wanting to be separated from the Lord. Perhaps it was just that they did not want to leave the Lord with the task of getting rid of the people. Whatever it was, *they simply did not want to do what the Lord wanted them to do!* So the Lord had to force them into the ship. He did not bodily push them toward the ship. But He insisted very strongly that they, all twelve of them, get into the ship. I would say that it was probably a very unhappy time for the Lord and His disciples. It was twelve against One, but you can see Who prevailed. The Lord was teaching His disciples the importance of obeying Him even in the little matters of their lives.

It may be that this very day the Lord has been dealing with you about some rather little thing, and you have come to church with that matter still now settled. If we want the blessing of the Lord upon us, we need to be obedient in the little matters as well as in the big.

We have to be thankful that eventually they all got into the ship, even though some may not have been really happy about it.

What did the Lord do? Here is our second point:

II. “HE DEPARTED INTO A MOUNTAIN TO PRAY” (Mark 6:46).

This brings us to a very wonderful truth concerning what the Lord is doing for us in heaven as we meet together this morning. The teaching is found in Hebrews 7:25:

25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

The writer of Hebrews was talking about the Lord, and what he has been occupied with ever since He went back to heaven. He probably did it

before also, but this is what He is doing right now. Don't you imagine that when the Lord went into the mountain to pray on that day, though it was late in the day, that He prayed for "the twelve" first. He knew the hearts of the men He had chosen, but they had an opportunity to experience how quickly they could want to do something different from what the Lord wanted them to do.

The Lord prays for all of us. How would you like to listen to the Lord as He prays for you. I feel quite certain of one thing: I wouldn't be very happy about all of you listening to the way that the Lord prays for me! Maybe we each have a good idea this morning about how the Lord is praying for us right now. But what a comfort this ought to be for us. We may be having a controversy with the Lord about something today. He is praying for us, and His prayers give us one great reason why He is not going to give up on any of us.

Now for the third point. As we come to this point it was getting dark, or probably already dark, and our Bibles tells us that

III. "HE SAW THEM TOILING IN ROWING" (Mark 6:48a).

At this point I can imagine that some of them were saying, at least in their hearts but not to one another, that they had been right, and the Lord had been wrong. Whatever may have been their reason for not wanting to get into that boat, it did seem like reason had been on their side. They were not just rowing, but they were "toiling in rowing." They were having a really hard time. And being late in the day, their strength would not have been what it was earlier in the day. It was torture to them, and undoubtedly they felt very much alone. The Lord was not with them as He had been when they were in trouble before. But a very precious truth is presented here by Mark. The Lord "saw" them. He saw through the night because the Lord can see just as well at night as He can in the daytime. We read in Psalm 139:11-12:

11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day : the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

Nothing escapes from the eyes of the Lord.. He knows what is going on in our lives twenty-four hours of every day. He knows the things that we have need of before we ask Him. Cf. Matt. 6:8. But Mark did not mention here that anybody in the ship was praying. Praying is usually

what we do last, isn't it?

The verbs in this account are wonderful, aren't they? The Lord went to pray after He put them in the ship. As the hours went by "He saw" that they were having a tough time. But then we have another wonderful verb.

IV. "HE COMETH TO THEM" (Mark 6:48b).

Maybe they were thinking, "Oh, if the Lord were only here!" But how would He get there? "The twelve" were being exposed to some wonderful truth concerning the Lord. Later Paul would write that the Lord was able "to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). Do you know that you can't go anyplace the Lord would not be able to get to you. When they could see Him in the back of the boat, as they had seen Him before, that was one thing. They knew then that the Lord was there. Wouldn't it be interesting to know if any of "the twelve" remembered Psalm 139:7-10:

7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

"The twelve" had no idea that the Lord could see them. And they were quite sure that He could not hear them, nor get to them. But at that moment He came to them. How? Walking upon the sea. But they did not recognize Him. They thought they were seeing a ghost! And they cried out in fear and terror. You see, one thing the Lord was doing to them, was teaching them how insufficient they were, and how much there was that they did not know. "And they were troubled."

But the Lord didn't leave them in fear. Let us look at the fifth point.

V. "HE TALKED WITH THEM" (Mark 6:50).

The Lord did not leave them in fear; "He talked with them." And it seems that while they did not recognize Him as He appeared to them, yet they did when He spoke to them. What did He say? "Be of good cheer: it

is I; be not afraid.”

The Lord doesn't speak to us as He spoke audibly to “the twelve,” but He speaks to us nevertheless. He speaks through His Word. And Psalm 119: 165 tells us, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” Nothing shall cause them to stumble. In times of trouble we are to learn that we need to turn to the Word. It is through the Word that the Lord dispels our fears, and gives us peace.

Two more points, and my message is over.

The Lord not only appeared to them, and spoke to them, but

VI. “HE WENT UP UNTO THEM INTO THE SHIP (Mark 6:51).

And when He did, “the wind ceased,” the storm was over. And “the twelve,” all of them, were filled with wonder and amazement, at the glory of their Lord. The Lord had ordained all that happened so that they would understand how weak and fearful and inadequate they were in themselves, and how gloriously sufficient the Lord was, and how wise He is in ordering the circumstances through which He causes us to pass.

The seventh point! I just have to mention it.

VII. “THEY CAME INTO THE LAND OF GENNESARET, AND DREW TO THE SHORE” (Mark 6:53).

Verse 48 tells us that it was at the fourth watch of the night that the Lord came to them. This means that it was between 3 and 6 a.m. It was a most difficult night, but the outcome was as the Lord had intended that it should be.

Concl: When they got out of the ship, the people recognized the Lord and began to bring the sick to Him. They hadn't had time to sleep, but they must have been so strengthened by what had happened that night that they could persevere in the work with renewed strength.

But there is a warning here for all of us. You have it in verse 52. They had failed to apply what they had seen in the feeding of the 5,000 to the need that they faced in the storm that night, and the Scriptures tell us that it was because their heart was hardened. When we come to new trials which the Lord brings us, we need to draw heavily upon what we have learned in the past to bring us peace in the present.