

July 20, 2025

“HE HAS MADE HIM KNOWN”  
Mark 6:45-56  
*(14 of 22 in a series through Mark 1-9)*

The chapters of Exodus 14-16 are quite remarkable in a painful kind of way. In Exodus 14 we read about the crossing of the Red Sea. Of all the miracles in the Old Testament, this one is perhaps most fascinating. Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt after a number of plagues, culminating with the death of the Egyptians’ firstborn sons, only to come to a place where it looks like they’re trapped. The Red Sea is in front of them, the Egyptian armies are coming up behind them, and it looks like the end of the Israelites. And then the Lord does something remarkable. He has Moses stretch out his hand over the sea, and as he does so, the Lord causes a strong wind to come so that the waters are divided and Israel is able to pass through on dry land. Then, when the Egyptians try to come after them, the waters converge again, drowning Israel’s former captors. It’s amazing, one of the greatest demonstrations of God’s might and power shown in the Old Testament.

Then, we get to chapter 15—one chapter later—and in the middle of it, we’re told that after three days of wandering in the wilderness, Israel begins grumbling about having no water. Now, we might respond, “Okay, but that’s a pretty desperate situation. So, even though it’s right after the Red Sea miracle, maybe it’s not utterly ridiculous.” Well, okay, hold that thought. The Lord provides water for them, miraculously turning bitter water into sweet, drinkable water.

Then, chapter 16 begins, and guess what, more grumbling. They’re hungry this time, and their grumbling rises to a ridiculous level. Here’s what they say: “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill the whole assembly with hunger” (Exod 16:3). And, yes, once more, the Lord miraculously provides, raining bread down from heaven each day so that they might eat and be full.

Actually, I could keep this going, as Israel grumbles again in chapter 17, but we’ll stop there because the point is made. Isn’t it remarkable that people could walk through the Red Sea on dry ground and three days later start grumbling that the Lord isn’t caring for them and a few days after that declare they wish they’d never experienced the Lord’s deliverance but just died in captivity? I mean, what’s going on?

What’s going on is something we all struggle with, don’t we? We can watch the Lord provide one moment only to become anxious over our needs being met the next. We can see clearly who he is as our gracious and merciful God one moment only to think he’s unwilling to care for us or love us in another. And, yet, as much as this might be common, it doesn’t mean that these reactions are acceptable. They certainly aren’t. But the good news is this struggle isn’t new to us. We’ve already seen it with the Israelites, and we also see it with the disciples of Jesus in Mark 6:45-56, the text we’re looking at this morning. And the reason I say that’s good news is because I think

we can be helped as we recognize what took place with them in this moment, notice what the root of their issue was, and what they should have done. That is, we have an opportunity to learn from their error.

But the text doesn't simply focus on the disciples but on Jesus himself, and that's where we'll start. I want to show us who Jesus is, why the disciples failed to recognize this, and what they should have done. So, let's start with who this text shows us Jesus is. Mark makes clear in these verses that Jesus is God (the Son).

### **Jesus is God (the Son)**

The text picks up immediately after the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. In fact, the first word in our text is "immediately," as Mark tells us that "Immediately [Jesus] made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd" (v. 45). John's account of the feeding of the 5,000 notes that Jesus saw that the crowd wanted to make him king by force after being fed (John 6:15), no doubt thinking he could lead a revolution against Rome if he could pull off a spectacular miracle like he'd just done. But Mark doesn't mention this detail, perhaps wanting us to keep our focus on other details in the story. And so we'll try to see what it is that Mark wants us to see, which I think is that Jesus is divine. We'll see this as we continue on in the story.

After sending the disciples away on the boat, we're told that Jesus went up on the mountain to pray (v. 46). Now, I won't dwell on this too long, but the mere fact that Jesus as a perfect human being takes time away from things to pray to his Father highlights just how much you and I—who are far from perfect human beings—need this in our lives. And I'll add that we need to build this as *planned* prayer in our lives. The idea that we'll simply pray when the opportune time hits will lead to inconsistent prayer at best that will only become regular during times of intense difficulties in life, and at worst it will lead to a life of prayerlessness. So, let's build a planned schedule of prayer into our lives, and we won't regret it. But now let's get back to the story.

As Jesus is praying, the disciples find themselves once again struggling at the sea. Mark tells us that they were only able to make headway slightly and painfully, as the wind was against them. However brief this trip was supposed to be, it was taking a long time and might lead to them being on the sea all night. We know that because Mark gives us a time indicator in verse 48 as he mentions the next action by Jesus taking place "about the fourth watch of the night" which is a reference to the time period between 3:00 and 6:00 AM. And with it being quite unreasonable to think the disciples set out after midnight, it may well have been that they've already been about this for hours and are no doubt growing weary. Maybe they're ready to give up. But that's when the main event happens.

Mark tells us that "about the fourth watch of the night [Jesus] came to them, walking on the sea" (v. 48). That is to say, Jesus came to them, literally walking on top of the water. In other words, this was a miracle. But this is more than just Jesus showing off his power, revealing that he's not

only the one who can multiply food but also walk on top of water. He's revealing his identity as God the Son. He's showing them that he is divine. He is God.

Now, why do I say that? Well, for two reasons. First, the Old Testament shows that God alone is one who tramples upon the sea. In the call to worship we heard to start the service from Job 9, as Job is touting the Lord's exclusive abilities, he notes that God "alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8). That is, he's not simply saying that God created the heavens and rules over the sea, trampling over the waves. He's saying that God *alone* does this. And here you have Jesus, with that text in the background, trampling over the waves as he walks upon the sea. Again, Mark is showing us that Jesus is divine.

But there's also another detail that Mark throws into our story that shows this point even more clearly. Look back at verse 48 and notice this odd detail. Mark says, "And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. *He meant to pass them by . . .*"

It's that last point where Mark notes that Jesus meant to pass them by. That detail makes no sense in the story. Let me show you why. Mark gives us Jesus' motivation for walking on the sea. He says at the beginning of verse 48, "And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And . . . he came to them." That is, the motivation for Jesus walking across the sea was that he saw that they were struggling. Moreover, Mark adds that he came to them. He literally says, "And about the fourth watch of the night he *came to them*" (v. 48). So, you have the motivation (he saw them struggling) and the destination (he came to them). Now, why in the world then do we have the added element, "He meant to pass by them"? It'd be like me saying, "I saw that Pastor Aaron was having trouble lifting something, so I came over to him but meant to pass by him." Honestly, I'd probably do that because that's funny. Aaron would no doubt think that if I recognize his struggle and am walking his way, I was coming to help, and I'd pass him by. I'd probably even pat him on the back and say, "Keep up the good work" as I walked by. But I don't think Jesus was trying to be funny. So, why note this odd detail? I think I know why.

You see, this odd detail of Jesus intending to "pass by" is language you find in the Old Testament when God reveals himself to his people. For example, in Exodus 33:18-34:7, as Moses asked the Lord to reveal himself to him, showing Moses his glory, we find language of the Lord passing by Moses. The Lord declares, "I will make all my goodness pass before you . . . and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I cover you with my and until I have passed by" (v. 19, 22), and then we're told, "The LORD passed before him" (Exod 34:6).

Now, we might think that's coincidental, but it isn't. In 1 Kings 19, you may remember that Elijah has fled from Jezebel, and he thinks he's the only one left devoted to the Lord when the Lord reveals himself to Elijah, strengthening the prophet. And specifically we're told, "And behold the LORD passed by, and a great strong wind tore the mountains" (1 Kgs 19:11). Again, God reveals himself, and we're told he passed by. Then, in the Job text I referenced earlier where we're told that God alone tramples the waves, Job added three verses later, "Behold, he passes by me, and I

see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him” (Job 9:11). In other words, in the very text where the Old Testament tells us that God alone walks upon the sea, we’re told he passes by, which is the consistent language established throughout the Old Testament for how God reveals himself to his people.

And here we’re told a detail about Jesus walking on the water (something only God does) and intending to “pass by them,” a detail that makes no sense. Well, it makes no sense unless you’re familiar with what we’ve just seen, and then it makes perfect sense. Mark is telling us that Jesus is revealing himself to them as God in the same fashion that God reveals himself to his people in the Old Testament. Jesus is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity.

And in case we missed it, Mark continues the story, noting that the disciples see Jesus walking, are terrified, and think they’re seeing a ghost, when Jesus says to them, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid” (v. 50). But that phrase translated, “It is I” is exactly what you would write if you wanted to say, “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι), which are the very words that God used to reveal himself to Moses at the burning bush when Moses asked God to tell him his name. God answered, “I am” (Exod 3:14).

Therefore, if you are familiar with the Old Testament, you can see that everything about this scene is screaming to us that Jesus is revealing himself to be divine. He is himself God. This, of course, only continues as the winds cease as he gets into the boat. The last time Jesus had done such a thing, the disciples had asked, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41). Now, Jesus is answering that question by showing that he is no mere man. He’s the God-man. And this is only reinforced in verses 53-56 as we’re told that they arrive on land and the people began to bring their sick to him, and he touched them and made them well.

And so Jesus clearly reveals himself as divine. He is God the Son. But it’s not just Jesus’ revelation of himself that we see in this text. We also see the disciples’ response, and when we see it, we see that it is our hardness of heart that keeps us from seeing Jesus for who he is.

### **It is our hardness of heart that keeps us from seeing Jesus for who he is**

After Jesus identified himself, telling them to take heart, we’re told he got in the boat with them, the wind ceased, and they were utterly astonished. Now, why were they utterly astonished? After all, all that Jesus has done to this point is cast out thousands of demons, heal multitudes, forgive sins, best every one of his opponents, grant his disciples power to heal and cast out demons, calm a storm, and multiply fish and bread to feed thousands. Surely by this point they’d not be astounded nor surprised in any way to see Jesus acting as God.

But the reality is that as confusing as their astonishment was, Mark doesn’t leave us in the dark as to *why* they’re astounded. He tells us, saying, “For they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened” (v. 52).

But now this raises another question. *What* didn't they understand about the loaves? What were they supposed to have seen, learned, and understood when Jesus fed the 5,000? The miracle of the loaves should have shown them Jesus' might as God and his care for his people as the Good Shepherd. They shouldn't have thought in the midst of their battle at sea that Jesus was somehow incapable or unwilling to come to them and show his care for them—as he'd already done before.

Perhaps it's easier to think of this in contemporary terms. Imagine you gathered with us last week as we reflected on the Lord as our Good Shepherd and his might, compassion, mercy, and grace to care for us in our weakness, provide all we need to walk in obedience to him, and love us as he does. And then this week a challenge came up in your life (maybe a health scare or financial burden) and in a panicked voice you cried, "I am hopeless!" Wouldn't we respond, "I don't think he understood about the loaves"? In other words, you didn't take to heart all that that event revealed to us about the might, mercy, and heart of Jesus toward his followers. Well, that's what we're seeing here with Jesus' disciples. They didn't understand about the loaves, Mark tells us.

But Mark also tells us why. He adds, "Their hearts were hardened." In other words, they didn't get the lesson from the loaves because of their own hardness of heart, not because anything was lacking in how Jesus had revealed himself to them in the miracle. It's why they could watch his miraculous provision and care in one moment and then be utterly astounded that he'd come to them, care for them and provide for them in the next. They had hard hearts. And, if we're honest, we can be the same way. We can find ourselves—just like the Israelites in Exodus 14-16 and the disciples here—gripped with anxiety only moments after our Lord has shown his provision and care toward us or utterly shocked when he shows it to us again. And it's because our hearts are apt to being hardened in unbelief, even when the Lord shows us clearly who he is.

What then do we do in order to break this cycle of hardness of heart setting in even moments after the Lord graciously reveals himself to be our Mighty God and Good Shepherd? I think the answer is that we need to give ourselves time to reflect on God and his gracious care for us.

### **We need to give ourselves time to reflect on God and his gracious care for us**

I think this is precisely what the disciples should have been doing when they got into the boat. Immediately they should have reflected on what the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 said about who Jesus is, and it should have built their hearts in faith and love toward their Lord. But they hadn't learned the lesson of the loaves, but instead hardened their hearts.

And we need to do the same. The last two weeks we've seen that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He exercises compassion, mercy, goodness, and love toward us. He cares for us. And we see in this text that he's the Mighty God. He is the one who sits in the heavens and does whatever he pleases. So, he is great and he is good. He is omnipotent and he loves us.

Don't harden your heart and miss these lessons about who our Lord is. Rather, take time to reflect on these realities and ask the Lord to sow them deep into your heart. So many times in the Old Testament the Lord tells his people to remember and not forget who he is and what he's done for them. It's why he institutes the Passover meal, it's why he warns them before going into the Promised Land not to forget all the Lord had done, and it's why the Israelites set up memorial stones when they passed through the Jordan River. They were a people who—like us—were prone to forget and miss what God was showing them about himself as he revealed his might and goodness again and again.

And when we get to the New Testament, things haven't changed. At the most fundamental level, Jesus makes clear that the Lord's Supper he institutes for the church to celebrate from now until his return is to remember. He explicitly says of the bread and the cup, "Do this . . . in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24-25).

Our problem is that we walk through a crisis, the Lord demonstrates his mercy, compassion, love, care, and provision for us, and then we move on, forgetting, acting as if nothing has happened so that our hearts are hardened, ready to be anxious and doubting at the next turn. But let's not harden our hearts. Let's take to heart what these last two texts have revealed to us about who our Lord is. He is God and he is good to his people. Do we need any clearer example than Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for us? There is no clearer example to take to heart of our Lord's greatness and goodness toward us than that. So let's remember it now and give thanks as we come to the table. Amen.