

STILL THE STORM?

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

Introduction

1. Last week we were considering the feeding of the five thousand. I suggested that the miracle was primarily a test for the disciples, a test, by the way, that they failed. Essentially the test was to teach **two lessons** – first that **Jesus is God**, and second, that **we can trust Him**. So when faced with impossible situations and inadequate resources we must remember that He is God and we can trust Him.
2. A skilled teacher gives tests not merely to provide a grade or even to check the cognitive level of the students regarding the material, but to weave into the fabric of those students' lives, truth that will change them forever. And when the students fail the test, the teacher doesn't give up. Rather the tests are repackaged a little differently and given again and again and again until the truth is finally grasped and applied. In a phrase, good teachers teach to change lives. That was certainly true of Jesus.
3. The same two lessons that we saw in the feeding of the five thousand are being pursued here: Jesus is God and He is to be trusted. The setting has changed but the lesson is essentially the same.
4. Almost everyone has some familiarity with the account of Jesus walking on water. Along with John, Matthew and Mark also record the story. It is interesting what John includes and what he leaves out. Only Matthew speaks of **Peter** walking on water. When the storm ceased, Matthew says that the disciples **"worshiped him saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"** John just says, **"They were glad."** (I don't doubt it)! Mark says, **"They were utterly astonished."** (I get that too)! All of those responses

happened. They were glad and they were astonished and they worshiped Jesus! It is also interesting that this miracle is not referred to after it happens. The people who ate the loaves didn't know about it. Jesus didn't talk about it. The disciples don't talk about it. It happened because the disciples needed the test. It's recorded because we need the lesson.

5. Some, I think, wonder about the placement of this walking on water miracle. It seems to separate the **illustration** of Jesus as the Bread of Life as He multiplied the loaves, and the **discourse** He gave declaring Himself to be the Bread of life. In other words, the set-up illustration is not immediately followed by the discourse. Is there an editing issue here? I don't think so. Though John does not explicitly connect the two miracles, Mark seems to when he writes at the conclusion of the walking on water/stilling the storm miracle, ***"for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened."*** I think that connects these two miracles and supports the case I'm trying to make that this is the test revisited. The disciples watched Jesus function as God as he miraculously fed the multitudes. It was impressive. They were even given a token reminder of the miracle as each disciple carried a basket of bread and fish with them. That was proof that He is God and He can be trusted. The lesson was observed but not applied. Unapplied truth may swell our heads, but it has a way of hardening our hearts. So it is test retake time.
6. Kids, have you had to take tests yet? If so, did you ever really do badly? Did the teacher give you an opportunity to retake the test? Did you do better the second time? Hopefully you did. It seems to me that the test Jesus gave to the disciples involved **three issues** in their lives if they were really to understand that Jesus is God and then actually learn to trust Him. The three areas Jesus would test are mentioned in the three main points (**obedience**, **endurance**, and **faith**). Listen carefully and you should have no trouble. The first one comes quite quickly.
7. Let the test begin! Jesus would be...

I. TESTING OBEDIENCE IN THE DARK – Do you realize...?

A. He made them go

1. I need to set this up. Both Matthew and Mark communicate the point that Jesus made the disciples get into the boat. He got them out of there, dismissed the crowd and then went up into the mountain to pray.

2. John says in verse 16 that it was **evening** when they started this journey and soon into the journey it was **dark**. The feeding of the 5000 took place in **Bethsaida**, which is on the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. They were heading toward **Capernaum**, which is on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee – probably a trip of 6-7 miles. At least four of these guys were seasoned fishermen. They had spent many nights on this lake. Whether they wanted to go or not, they did obey. It is not always easy to obey when we are in the dark – the darkness for us might be literal or it might be a mental fog. Will we obey when we really can't see ahead? That's part of the test. It was for them. It is for us. (He's the giver of the tests of life)!

B. He knew what they would encounter

1. Jesus knew the storm was coming. I would go so far as to say that He specifically sent the storm. Why would He do that? He did it because the disciples needed to learn to obey in difficult circumstances!
2. The multiplication of the loaves and the fish was not enough. Jesus is God. He always knows what is coming because He controls what is coming. When He sends us into a storm, He does that on purpose ultimately for our good.
3. John says, ***"It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them."*** He knew where they were. He was watching over them. He already had planned what He would do. They were in no real danger – but they didn't know that. Would they obey Him in the dark? So the first part of this test is about **obedience**. They did what He told them to do. But sometimes it's hard to obey – it's hard to keep obeying when a whole lot of things are working against us. So, in part two of the test Jesus was...

II. TESTING ENDURANCE AGAINST THE WIND

A. Strong winds – all three accounts make reference to the wind

1. The Sea of Galilee is 600 plus feet below sea level. Hills surround the lake. The wind comes in from the southeast and hits the warm water, stirring up quite a violent squall. John says, ***"The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing."***
2. John doesn't give us the time frame, but Mark and Matthew let us know it was in the middle of the night. Phrases like, ***"a long way from land"*** and ***"beaten by the***

waves” and **“the wind was against them”** and **“they were making headway painfully”** provide a clear picture of what was happening to the disciples.

Strong winds were testing their endurance.

B. Weary bodies

1. Rowing a boat is hard work – even with several involved. Rowing a boat in a storm is harder. Rowing a boat in a storm in the dark after having rowed already for three or four miles in the storm for several hours – you know they were weary.
2. When we are weary we are prone to give up. That’s often the situation in the Christian life! We are called by God to endure. But the only way we can measure endurance is in the midst of severe trials when everything in us is screaming, “Quit! Give up! You’ll never make it. It’s pointless.” Weariness tests our endurance.

C. No progress

1. When I’m working on something that is exhausting, but I’m making progress to the point that I can see the end of the tunnel, I’ll press a little harder to finish. But if I can’t see any progress, I am ready to give up.
2. The disciples were in the middle of the lake in the middle of a storm in the middle of the night utterly exhausted. They could have stopped rowing and tried to ride out the storm. Who knows where they would have ended up? Or they could have kept on rowing, kept on battling, praying for an end to the storm so they could finally reach their destination. What would they do? Lack of progress is a test of endurance. Now we are ready for part three of the storm. It is a test of faith.

III. TESTING FAITH IN THE STORM (In whom or on what is our trust placed?) We will never pass the test if we are not...

A. Recognizing who Jesus is (He is Jesus, Savior, Lord, God)

1. At some point in the struggle – now into the fourth watch of the night, sometime between 3 and 6 AM, Jesus comes down from the mountain, and walking on the water He heads toward their boat! Mark says, **“He meant to pass them by.”** Perhaps if they had not seen Him, He would have walked on by and waited for them on the other side when they finally made it across. It is unclear what Mark meant by this comment, but they did see Him and He did not walk on by!

2. Not surprising, these rough and tough fishermen were scared out of their minds! (Mark says they were **“terrified.”**). But Jesus (**“immediately”** – Matthew) said to them, **“It is I; do not be afraid.”** John says, **“They were glad.”** You better believe they were glad! They were glad because it was Jesus – and not a ghost. They were glad it was Jesus because they knew He could still the storm! They had seen that before. Maybe they had forgotten – but now I’m guessing they remembered!
3. How is it that we so often fail to realize that He is with us – even when it is dark and stormy and we are exhausted and making no progress? Our confidence in Him has been replaced by fear and despair. But remember: He’s God! We can trust Him! The storms of life test our obedience and our endurance and our faith. They show where we are in our walk with Him. So, where are we? We are not yet finished with the story. Recognizing who He is only a partial answer to this test question. Also, we must be...

B. Recognizing what He does (brings us home)

1. It appears that when the disciples left Bethsaida earlier in the evening their intended destination was Capernaum. Sometime after 3 AM when Jesus shows up, the disciples are still three to four miles from Capernaum and the storm is still raging.
2. There is no indication that He said anything (like, “Peace be still”), but when He stepped into the boat the storm was over. Just because Jesus is present does not always bring an end to the storm – but it certainly does bring hope concerning the outcome! But in this case, when He stepped into the boat, not only was the storm over, so was the journey.
3. Immediately the 3-4 mile distance was erased. They were right where they were supposed to be! This is icing on the cake of truth that He is God and we can trust Him.
4. John Piper writes the following: ***What John says is not: O look he has authority over wind and waves, what an all-providing king he would make! That’s true. He would, and he is. But what John says is: Jesus himself came to them. He identified himself, “It is I.” And they were glad—they desired—to take him into the boat. And with that, the story within the story is immediately over. They are at their***

desired haven. The point has been made. It's been made twice. I did a miracle for you on the land, and gave each of you a basket of bread. I showed you that I will be your personal bread—each one of you. If you have an overwhelming ministry in front of you—to feed 5 thousand—and you feel totally inadequate, not only will I give you resources to feed them, I will be there for you when it is all over. I will not just give you bread; I will be your bread. And now I have done another miracle for you. I have shown you that in the dark, in the storm, I will let nothing separate me from you. I will walk on water to be with you. And when you take me into your boat with joy, we will arrive at our desired haven. So whether the story is about being rescued from hunger by making bread, or being rescued from wind by walking on water, the point is: I don't just give bread; I am bread. I don't just make the wind stop; I get into the boat.

Conclusion

1. Did the disciples get it? Did they pass the test? Maybe. They would be tested again – actually many times. Some tests they would pass and some they would fail as they continued to grapple with the truth of Jesus' deity and the ramifications of that truth.
2. In the very next section of John's Gospel, Jesus would give a tough lecture, calling people to trust Him as the very Bread of Life. All of those eager people, many who had traveled considerable distances to hear Him, would leave disappointed, disillusioned. Would the twelve leave too? Jesus asked them that very question.
3. ***“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”*** He got it! They got it! But that would be tested again and those answers would not always be consistent.
4. They would fumble in the Upper Room. They would run away in the Garden. They would cower after His death. They would doubt His promised resurrection.
5. Mark was right. ***“For they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”*** Do we understand? Do we get it? He's God. We can trust Him. We can trust Him when it's **dark and stormy**. Our trust is demonstrated in our **obedience**. We

can trust Him when we are **exhausted**, desperate for rest but with no end in sight. Our trust is demonstrated in our **endurance**. Don't quit. Help is on the way. He knows exactly what you're dealing with. You are never outside of His vision or intercession. We can trust Him when we still have a **long way to go** and it's late in the game. He comes aboard and **brings us home!**

6. When the test is over we can be glad...or we can become hardened. It all depends on how we see Jesus. How do you see Jesus?