

Discipleship According to Mark

Walking on the Sea (Mark 6:45-56)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on April 12, 2026

Introduction

- ❖ **Up to this point in Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been consistently defying expectations.** He amazes people with his teaching, with his miracles, with his authority over demons and even death itself. Which leads to crowds of people flocking after him. Traveling from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other. Wherever Jesus goes, the masses follow.
 - ▶ **And what the majority of them are looking for is a Messiah—a Savior sent by God—who will meet their physical needs and relieve their earthly suffering.** They looked at Jesus as that long-awaited King to be sent by God to deliver them from oppression, be it from evil spirits or foreign oppressors.
 - But every time the crowd thinks they have him figured out, Jesus goes on to defy their expectations. He's not who they think he is. He's so much more.

- ❖ Take the latest miracle for example. **Prior to our passage, Jesus just fed the five thousand.** That's a count of five thousand men. Add in women and children and we're talking about ten to twenty thousand people. **And after they witnessed Jesus multiply the loaves and fishes, this massive crowd is convinced that he is a Prophet like Moses and a King like David.** He's going to lead them to the Promised Land and defeat all their enemies.
 - ▶ In John's account of the same feeding of the five thousand, he tells us what the crowd is thinking. Listen to **John 6:14**, *"¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'"*
 - That's a reference to **Deuteronomy 18:15** where the elderly Moses promises that one day the LORD will raise up a prophet like him. With that prophecy in mind, the crowd is thinking: Moses miraculously fed our ancestors with manna; Jesus just miraculously fed us with bread. **It's not a stretch to conclude that—just as Moses delivered our ancestors from the Egyptians—surely Jesus will deliver us from the Romans.** Let's make him our king!
 - So we read in John 6:15, *"¹⁵Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."*

- ❖ Jesus perceived the motive of the masses. **He knew they were ready to take him by force and make him their king.** They expected him to lead an insurrection against Roman rule. **But once again, he's going to defy their expectations.** He's going to disappoint them and send them all home. **He's not going to be the Messiah they want him to be. He's going to be so much more.** They just don't see it yet.
 - ▶ And, let's face it, the same could be said of us. **Many of us are seeking Jesus out of a deep longing for him to satisfy our needs.** We're hoping he'll bring healing—for ourself or for a loved one. We're praying for peace in the midst of chaos—in our life or in our home. We're looking for relief from some struggle. We want freedom from the bondage of some sin. **And he is a Messiah capable of accomplishing these things and meeting those needs. But he's so much more!**

- ❖ **And until we see Jesus for who he truly is—and not just who we hope for him to be—we’ll never be satisfied.** Out of that massive crowd miraculously fed that day, you can be sure that a hundred percent of them were hungry the next day, looking for more bread. Every sick person healed at the end of our text—that touched the fringe of his garment and was made well—every one of them eventually got sick again. Your Messiah might deliver you from this oppressor today—but what about tomorrow and the next one to come? The book of Judges is proof enough that you don’t need God to simply send another deliverer.
 - ▶ **You’ll never escape the never-ending cycle until God sends himself.** But that’s the point of this morning’s passage. **Here we see Jesus revealing his true identity as God Incarnate.** The Son of God made man to be the Messiah we need. In this text, I want you to see (1) The loving King who sends you into storms, (2) The mighty King who walks all over the sea, and (3) The good King who gets into your boat.

The Loving King Who Sends You Into Storms

- ❖ I want to start by introducing you to the loving King who sends his disciples into storms. I know that sounds like a contradiction. **You would think that if Jesus loves you then he would direct you away from storms.** He wouldn’t direct you smack dab into one. But that’s what we see in our text. How is this so and what does it mean?
- ❖ Before we tackle that, let’s set the context. In v45, it says that immediately after feeding the five thousand, Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, to the town of Bethsaida. **That language of making them get into the boat suggests that it took some urging.** They didn’t want to leave, and they definitely didn’t want to leave Jesus behind. But he insisted that they go.
 - ▶ It’s probably because he doesn’t want his disciples getting caught up in all this misguided messianic fervor. He doesn’t want them to be influenced by the crowd. The very crowd he’s about to disappoint as he dismisses them to all go home.
- ❖ But Jesus sends away his disciples because he also plans to retreat away up a mountain to spend some private time in prayer with the Father. **There are three instances in Mark where Jesus is recorded as praying.** In each he’s at a critical juncture in his earthly ministry.
 - ▶ The first is at the start of his ministry, back in chapter 1:35, where he’s pressured to focus his time and attention on healing and ministering to the needs of the large crowds in Capernum. But that time of prayer reinforces his commitment to move on from town to town preaching the gospel. That begins to define his primary mission.
 - The third instance is in Gethsemane, in Mark 14:35, where he has to face the horrifying realities of the cross. Will he drink the bitter cup of God’s wrath on behalf of God’s people? Or will he let it pass him by and escape such horrors? He wrestles with that decision in mournful prayer in that garden.
- ❖ **And here in Mark 6:46, this is the second instance, and here Jesus is faced with another critical moment that will define his earthly ministry.** Will he let the crowds have their way? Will he lead their revolution? Or will he humble himself and be that servant who came to give his life as a ransom for many? (10:45)

- ❖ Now the text goes on to say, in v47, that, “*when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.*”⁴⁸ *And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.*” What you have to understand is that the Sea of Galilee sits almost seven hundred feet below sea level and is surrounded by mountains. **So cold air coming from the mountains continually clashes with the warm moist air over the sea, churning up impressive windstorms.** Now even in poor conditions, the Sea of Galilee could be crossed in 6-8 hours. But this was an exceptionally strong windstorm.
 - ▶ It says the disciples were already out at sea when evening came, so let’s estimate 7:00pm. By the time Jesus approaches, we’re in the fourth watch of the night, which is 3:00-6:00am. **So the disciples have been rowing for over eight hours to no avail.** John’s account says that they had only managed rowing three to four miles (Jn 6:15).

- ❖ V48 says they were “*making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.*” The NIV says they were “*straining at the oars against an adverse wind.*” **The word for *painfully* (ESV) or *straining* (NIV) is related to the Greek word for torture or torment.** It’s used elsewhere in Scripture to describe the pain of childbirth (Rev 12:2) or even the torment of hell itself (Rev 14:10). **All of that to say that these disciples were suffering greatly as they strained against the wind.** I’m sure their muscles ached. You could even say it hurt like hell.
 - ▶ And my point is that Jesus knew this would happen. **By his divine foreknowledge, he knew when and where that windstorm would hit. So he knowingly sent his disciples smack dab into the heart of the storm.** That much is clear.

- ❖ Friends, we need to come to grips with that. **Jesus loves his disciples. And yet, he purposely points them in the direction of a coming storm.** Can you square that circle? Until you can reconcile those seemingly contradictory statements, you’re going to have a difficult time walking with Jesus by faith and not by sight.
 - ▶ **The fact is that sometimes obedience to Christ leads you into trouble.** Following his directions can result in pain and torment. Doing Jesus’s will might hurt like hell. That is a sobering reality that every disciple of Christ has to wrestle with, but it’s something we’ll have to accept. **If you’re going to live a life of obedience to Christ, sometimes he’ll send you into storms.** You’ll go through hardship. You’ll strain and suffer. You’ll be foiled and frustrated. You’ll feel stuck—like life is going nowhere.

- ❖ But take comfort in this—**Jesus loves you and he sees you in your pain.** Look back at v48. It says he “*saw*” them. He saw that they were stuck and making headway painfully. How he saw them at such a distance and in the middle of the night is hard to explain besides appealing to the fact that he’s God Incarnate. But the point is that he sees his disciples when we’re suffering and languishing in the storms of life. And in love, he comes *to us*.
 - ▶ That’s an observation *not* to be missed. **Jesus didn’t stick to dry land where it was safe.** He didn’t wait for them on the shore of whatever coastal town they’ll eventually be blown towards. No, Jesus went *to* them. And he lovingly met them in the midst of the storm. That’s the kind of Messiah who sends you into storms. The kind that meets you there. The kind that defies expectations. **Who proves that he can love you and send you in the direction of trouble—both at the same time.**

The Mighty King Who Walks All Over The Sea

- ❖ But I know you might still wrestle with the question of why. **If he loves me, then why send me into a storm? The answer is because Jesus wants you to see.** To see him for who he really is. To recognize him as the Mighty King of the Sea. **Who's so powerful that he walks all over it. He tramples over the sea.** I'll explain the significance of that, but first let's return to the story. Look back at v48. *“⁴⁸And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified.”*

- ❖ Jesus sent them off alone into the heart of the storm, so that he could join them again. But in dramatic fashion—*walking on the sea!* This wasn't just a magic trick designed to impress. **Walking on the sea was designed to reveal something about Jesus, namely that he has authority over the sea.** He walks all over it. He's the King of the Sea.
 - ▶ To appreciate the significance, you need to understand that, **in ancient cultures, the sea was often used in their stories and legends to symbolize unmanageable chaos, uncontrollable power, or unstoppable destruction.**
 - In the polytheistic nations around Israel, the sea was deified as a god or goddess of chaos set over against a god of order. **The Canaanites worshiped a god named *Baal* who was locked in perpetual battle against the goddess of chaos named *Yam*** (the Semitic word for “sea”). For the Canaanites, their god establishes order and creates life by vanquishing a rival god of the sea.

- ❖ **But in the Genesis creation account, we encounter similar symbolism but under very different circumstances.** In Genesis 1, there is only one God, and he alone created the heavens and the earth. There is no rival god he has to battle. But we are told that, in the beginning, the earth was filled with chaos. It was covered with primordial waters. It was *“without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”* (Gen 1:2)
 - ▶ **So the earth was filled with one big sea of chaos. But then God speaks into the chaos and order is formed.** Light suddenly shines. Dry land appears. And God fashions it as he wills, pushing back the waters, and gathering them together into seas. And life is able to flourish over all the earth.

- ❖ And throughout the rest of the OT, **God is depicted as the only Being powerful enough to do this—to manage the unmanageable, to control the uncontrollable.** Listen to a handful of passages that depict God conquering the waters and walking all over the sea.
 - ▶ **Job 9:8** presents God as the One *“who alone stretched out the heavens and **trampled the waves of the sea.**”* **Psalm 65:5-7** says, *“O God of our salvation ... the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; who stills the roaring of **the seas**, the roaring of their **waves**, the tumult of the peoples.”*
 - In **Psalm 89:8-9**, we read, *“O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you? You rule the raging of **the sea**; when its **waves** rise, you still them.”*

- ❖ With all that OT imagery in mind, picture now Jesus walking on the sea. **This is more than a miracle. It's a disclosure. A revelation of his true identity as the God of the OT here before you in the flesh.** Now you might be wondering, "How do we know he intended to communicate all of this by walking on the sea?" Could we be reading too much into this?
 - ▶ No, Jesus knew what he was doing and what it communicated. Especially to people steeped in the OT. That's why Mark writes, at the end of v48, that Jesus "*meant to pass them by.*" **I know some just take that to mean he was trying to sneak past the disciples without them seeing him.** But then, "Oh too late. They saw me. Okay, I'll just go over and get in their boat."

- ❖ **No, that language of "passing them by" harkens back to those OT theophanies where God reveals himself and his glory to Moses (Ex 33:19,22) or Elijah (1 Kg 19:11) but only in passing.** He merely passes them by. In Moses's case, God hides him in the cleft of a rock and says, "*I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.*" (Ex 33:22-23)
 - ▶ This idea of failing to see the fullness of God even as he passes you by is reinforced in that Job 9 passage that I quoted earlier. After he extols God as the one who "*trampled the waves of the sea,*" Job goes on to say in v11, "*Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him.*"

- ❖ Friends, I think Jesus had all of that in mind when he "*meant to pass them by.*" **In the OT, when God passed by Moses or Elijah or Job, he remained largely unknowable and unapproachable.** But now everything is different. Because of the Incarnation. Because the Son of God has taken on flesh. **The once invisible God of the OT is now visible and approachable.** So Jesus meant to pass them by. But, at the same time, he meant for them to see him in all his fullness, and he meant to approach them in their boat.
 - ▶ Now the text goes on to say in v49, "*⁴⁹but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified.*" The disciples responded like Moses before the burning bush—who was equally terrified when he realized he was in the presence of God (Ex 3:6).
 - But into their fear, Jesus speaks. Look at v50, "*But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."*" **The Greek words for "it is I" are *ego eimi*, which could be translated *I am*.** What's interesting is that both *ego* and *eimi* could stand alone in a sentence and express the same thing. They both mean "*I am*." **So when you pair them together, the expression literally translates into "I AM I AM."**

- ❖ Now on one hand, *ego eimi* is a normal way for a Greek speaker to say "*It is I*" (c.f. Jn 9:9). There doesn't *have* to be a deeper theological meaning. But out of the mouth of Jesus, as he's walking on the sea, as he passes you by, it's clearly more than just Jesus's way of saying "*Hey guys, it's me.*" **This is clearly a self-disclosure of his identity as God.**

- ❖ **When Moses was before the burning bush, he asked God for his name, and how did the LORD identify himself? “I AM WHO I AM.”** He called himself the Great I AM. This is no coincidence. Jesus meant exactly what he said.
 - ▶ The massive crowd was right. Jesus is the Prophet to come in the likes of Moses. But he consistently defies our expectations. He’s so much more. So much greater than Moses. **He’s not just a prophet of the Great I AM. Jesus is the Great I AM.**

- ❖ Friends, do you see now what Jesus was trying to do? Why he sent them smack dab into a storm. He sent his disciples into trouble and let them suffer. Surrounded by unmanageable chaos. Only to return to them in a spectacular demonstration of power with an equally spectacular revelation that he is the God of all Creation. **He is the King of the Sea. The only One who can still the storm and control the chaos in your life.**
 - ▶ Whether you’re drowning under the waves of financial chaos, marital chaos, chaos in your workplace, chaos in your classes, chaos in your health, chaos in your home—Jesus is the King of kings who reigns over it all. **No matter what troubles are vexing you, Jesus has the power and authority to trample all over it and to bring peace into your life.** Because he’s the King of the Sea—the King over Chaos.

The Good King Who Gets Into Your Boat

- ❖ But again, I realize that might not be your expectation. This Jesus might not be the sort of king you were looking for. Maybe you were looking for a Savior who would remove all your thorns. Who would meet your financial needs. Who would fix your health problems. Who would resolve your relational conflicts. **In other words, you thought Jesus would walk all over the chaos in your life and make it stop.**
 - ▶ Now, on one hand, it would *not* be helpful (nor biblical) to tell you that you’ve got Jesus all wrong. That he didn’t come to deal with any of those earthly concerns. Let’s not give the impression that Jesus is just a spiritual King who only meets our spiritual needs. That implies our earthly needs lie outside of his jurisdiction and concern.
 - **No, by walking on the sea—a symbol of all the uncontrollable powers on earth—Jesus demonstrates that his authority and concern has no limits.** He can meet *any* need. He can calm *any* storm and walk over *any* problem in your life. And one day, he will. He promises to return to make all things new; to wipe every tear from our eyes; to put death to death and to put away all mourning, all crying, all pain forevermore (Rev 21:4-5).

- ❖ But that awaits the age to come. **The fact is that Jesus never promised, in this present age, to stop all the waves from crashing into your life.** But, and here’s our third point, he does promise to get into your boat. **He’s the good King who gets into your boat.** Look at v51, *“And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.”*
 - ▶ Here’s the point I’m trying to make: **When chaos surrounds you—when trouble is crashing into your life—King Jesus draws near. And he gets into your boat. He steps into your life.** That’s what makes the good news so good. Now, in their case, the wind did cease the very moment Jesus got in. And often that’s all we care about. We just want the peace to come. We want the chaos to cease and troubles to go away.

- ❖ And that would be good news. **But the greater news is that—even if that doesn't happen; if the chaos continues; if the problems remain; if they keep raging like a storm—Jesus is there, in that storm, with you.** If you're one of his disciples, he is in *your* boat. That's the good news of the gospel.
 - ▶ **Friends, it's important to stress that the fiercest storm out there that every sinner has to deal with is the storm of God's wrath—his waters of judgment dead set against our sin.** The best example of that in the OT was the Red Sea. Where Moses led God's people through those chaotic waters of judgment, which eventually engulfed their enemies.

- ❖ But now, in the Gospel story, Jesus (the True and Better Moses) leads us through the waters of God's judgment against our sin. **And when we get to the climax of the Gospel story—where you might expect Jesus to walk all over the sea again—this time, he took our sins upon himself; they weighed him down; and he went under. He let the waters of judgment engulf him.** At the cross, Jesus brought us peace with God. He calmed the ultimate storm of God's wrath for good. By dying in our place.

- ❖ **It's this aspect of Jesus's mission as the Messiah that continued to defy the expectations of his closest companions, his disciples.** Look back at v51, *“And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵²for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”*
 - ▶ After witnessing Jesus walk on water and calm the sea, the disciples were utterly astounded. Totally amazed (cf. 2:12; 5:42). **But astonishment is not the same thing as faith.** Because notice how the verse goes on to say that they still didn't understand and their hearts were still hardened.

- ❖ Friends, take that to heart. Jesus might do some amazing things in your life. He might move some mountains and calm some storms. He might walk all over the chaos in your life and put it all in order. And through it all, he might utterly astound you.
 - ▶ But you can experience all of that and still lack a saving faith in Christ. **Because faith is focused—not on the conditions of the sea around you—but on the identity of the Savior in your boat.** Is Jesus in *your* heart? **Is the Good King commandeering your vessel?** Is he leading *your* life? That's the big question we should all be asking.