



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 6: 45-56

Mark

"Ghost or God on the Water"

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning. We're continuing your studies in the Gospel of Mark, so turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 6 and we'll finish out the chapter, verses 45 through 56.

Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida. Now, let me make a comment here on that, because in Luke's account of this, the feeding of the 5,000 or the 15,000, depending on how you want to calculate it occurred just outside of Bethsaida, which is located on the northeastern rim of the Sea of Galilee. And so, it seems peculiar that He would send them off to the other side to Bethsaida, since they were already there, for the most part. So, many students of the Scriptures think that what this is a reference to is another town by the same name, this one located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee so that He was sending them to another location, another town called Bethsaida. So, He sends them to that destination, to the western shore. While He Himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding them farewell, He departed to the mountain to pray.

When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." Then He

got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.

If you remember the chapter before, the woman with the issue of blood was healed by just touching the hem of His garment. So evidently, word had spread of that miracle, and many were now seeking to just touch the hem of His garment. Those who were doing it, those who were doing it in faith, were being healed.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we begin with praise for You. Praise as our eternal God and our creator. And as we sang earlier, as our sustainer, one who does have a strong arm. And it is on that arm and not the arm of the flesh that we are to lean. And yet, we confess that so often, we do lean on the arm of the flesh. We trust in our own wisdom. We seek to go our own way. And, such a lack of faith on our part. Teach us, Father, to be strong, and to grow in our faith. We recognize, Lord, that to do that, we must be greater students of the Scripture, and so we pray that You would bless us to that end, that You would motivate us to read and to study, to know You better, to know Your Son better. We pray that as we begin this new year, that You would encourage us to do that and that we would take that encouragement and apply ourselves to the study of Scripture, apply ourselves to prayer and to fellowship, and see in this year growth in our lives and activity in our service for You. We commend that to You. We commend that, we commend ourselves to You individually and commend this church to You to that end. We praise You for Your care for us and Your patience with us. All that You give us, Father, all that we have, we have as a gift from You. All of the possessions that are ours, they come from

You. Our life itself, the life that is sustained within us comes from You. We thank You for it, and we thank You that we can not only come together and study the Scriptures, but we can also together as a church, as a people, redeemed by the blood of Christ, redeemed from the foundation of the world, we can exercise the great privilege of interceding for ourselves and for one another. We do that now, Lord.

We remember those who have physical, material needs, and we pray that You'd bless them. Provide for those who are in need of employment and give them encouragement. We pray that You'd provide mercy for those who are sick. We pray that You might give them healing, if that be within Your will. Certainly, Father, we pray that through the ordeal that they must pass, that You would bless them with a deeper appreciation of You, and be drawn into closer fellowship with You. The world is passing away, Father, and the lust thereof. All of the things that we see are coming to an end. Help us to number our days and to remember that the difficulties that we go through are temporary.

But, what we have from You, the invisible things, they are eternal. Help us to live for them. We pray, Father, for ourselves as a body, that You would build us up in the faith. We pray for our particular members, and parts of the church. We pray for the elders and pray that You'd give wisdom to them as they seek to give guidance and leadership under Your direction to this church. We pray for the deacons, that You would continue to give them diligence, and we thank You for the great service that they have performed and continue to perform. We thank You for the Sunday school teachers, and the secretaries, and those who do a service in so many ways, for You and for us. We pray You'd continue to bless them with strength and encouragement, and growth in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray for ourselves, that we might be a witness and effective, testimony within this community and throughout the world. We pray that wherever men from this assembly travel in this nation or internationally, that they would be a good witness for Christ.

We pray for our nation, too, and we pray You'd bless it. Bless our leaders with wisdom. We pray that as administrations change in the next few weeks, we pray that You would bless the new administration with wisdom, bless President Elect Clinton and Vice President Elect Gore with special wisdom; those new members of Congress, the old as well, with a desire to do that which is right and correct, and to serve You. Put that within their heart, we pray, and move upon the hearts of so many

within this land. Bring many to faith in Christ, that service might be performed for You and we might prosper, prosper spiritually. Bless our time now, Father, as we look into the Scriptures. Instruct us, bless us as we sing our final hymn, that we would be prepared for our time of study together. Prepare us. Prepare our hearts for the week to come, that we would serve You well. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] One of the greatest frustrations of the Christian life, I suppose, is that of protracted conflicts. Ongoing difficulties. You have a problem, and there seems to be no end to it. A prayer doesn't seem to change things. The difficulty goes on, and you can't help but wonder why. Well, sometimes it's because we are praying contrary to God's will. James tells us in James chapter 4 that you ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives. Sometimes difficulties occur because of discipline. Sin in our lives, and God deals with that sin, deals with it in discipline. He brings difficulties into our lives for that reason.

But often, it's neither of those. It's because God is doing a work in us. Through difficulties, He is sanctifying us. Through difficulties, He is conforming us to the image of His Son, and He is teaching us things about Himself.

Job is the great example of that. God put him in a hard school of affliction in order to teach him a valuable truth about himself, teach him truth about man's relationship to him. But it took Job a long time to learn the lessons. Through so much of that book, as you know, he asks that question, "Why?" He asks the question of his friends, and they really don't give him any help, they don't give him any correct answer. He can see through the error of the answers that they give him. He cries out to God asking why. But for so long, he receives no answer until he's passed through a long period of difficulty.

Now, it wasn't chastening for any particular sin in Job's life. We know that from the outset of the book because chapter 1 and verse 8, the Lord tells the devil that Job was a blameless man, an upright man, fearing God. Those difficulties came into his life for instruction. They came in his life to produce growth. So that after the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and declared that He is the Almighty, that as God, He has a right to deal with His creation as He wills, and that no man can find fault with what He does, then Job responded, "Behold, I am insignificant."

Well, if righteous Job, if blameless Job was insignificant before God, what about the rest of us? Who are we to question the way the Almighty governs His creation and deals with His people whom He loves infinitely? And yet, we do just that. We question the way that He deals with us. Most of us, of course, don't suffer as Job did. But, we often are puzzled over our experiences as He was, and cry out to God as he did. "What have I done to Thee, O watcher of men? Why hast thou set me as Thy target?"

Well, as I said, Job found out that there was a reason for the difficulties that he experienced, and we can say that we as Christians, too, can see there are reasons for the difficulties that we also pass through. There are always reasons for what God brings into our life. There are always reasons as to why He puts us in hard places.

And I think we see the reason, or at least a reason. From the experience of the disciples in Mark 6, when the Sea of Galilee became their classroom on a stormy night. The Lord has fed a multitude with just five loaves and two fish. And Mark writes that all ate and were satisfied. But he records nothing of the crowd's response. Instead, the scene closes with the disciples making a hasty departure punctuated by Mark's favorite word, "immediately."

Verse 45. "And immediately, He made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away." Now, as we read that, we're left with a sense of urgency in their departure without any explanation for it. But fortunately, John's account fills out the picture for us, and he records that as a result of the miracle that the Lord had performed in feeding this multitude with just five loaves and two fish, that they wanted to make Him king. They wanted to impress Him into kingship, force Him into that office, really.

And, the excitement of the crowd was in danger of getting out of hand. In fact, it was in danger of becoming a revolt against the Roman authorities. And so, the Lord dismissed the crowds. It's not that He wasn't the king. It's not that He wasn't the Messiah. He is Israel's king, but not the king that they wanted. They were looking for a warrior messiah who would crush the Romans and replace their rule with Jewish empire and continue to provide them with that easy bread that He had just given them.

What they failed to realize was that the Lord, who will be a warrior Messiah in the future, first is a priestly Messiah who had to offer the sacrifice of Himself in the

place of sinners in order to reign over a righteous people, in order, as a holy God, to rule over a holy kingdom. He had to purchase that through the shedding of His blood.

Men stumble over that fact, stumble over the fact that they are sinners in need of a Savior, that forgiveness must come before there can be blessings. And in particular, with Israel, they stumbled over the fact that the cross had to come before the throne. They were just not interested in that kind of a Messiah, and a suffering Messiah. So, they were driven, really, by the same spirit that drives men today, that I suppose has driven men in every age, and that is the spirit, the desire for power and for ease.

There is nothing spiritual about their enthusiasm. There was great enthusiasm, and they had seized upon a truth, but it was something of a half-truth, and so their enthusiasm was empty of any real spiritual vitality and reality. The Lord could see that, and he knew that their enthusiasm was contagious. It could quickly spread throughout the region of Galilee and could even infect His own disciples. And so, He acted to defuse the situation by dismissing the crowds, and He did that alone. He did that without the help of the disciples, which is no small feat in itself when you've some 15,000 enthusiastic people who want to make Him king. But, He did it alone because He first sent His disciples away.

In fact, Mark writes, "made His disciples get into the boat." He compelled them to leave, which indicates that they were already being infected with this improper enthusiasm. They evidently wanted to stay, and He had to compel them to leave, which also suggests that the disciples are subject to the false influences, the false ideas of their age, just as we are. Now, the reason for that is: they were not clear in their thinking about the Lord's person and work. And so, they were vulnerable to the errors and the fashions of their own day.

As I say, that's something that we're all subject to. If the disciples, those who walked with the Lord, those who knew Him, those who listened to His teaching and saw Him perform miracles were subject to the false ideas of their day, that would indicate that we too are subject to the same kind of influences. So, to guard oneself from error, to guard oneself from the fashion of the day, we need to be a people who are well-grounded in the truth. Regardless of our age, we need to be well-grounded in the truth. Some of you are high school students. Some of you are college students, and you're faced with new ideas and new challenges, and you need to be well-

grounded in the truth. You need to be young men and young women who are studying the Scriptures. But of course, that doesn't end with youth. That's something that we must constantly be doing, continually studying, being grounded in the truth.

Now, the disciples, they had their moments of understanding, as when Peter made his great confession, according to Matthew 16. And he says to our Lord, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Great testimony of faith, but as you know, shortly after that, he then tried to dissuade our Lord from going to the cross. The Lord informed him that that great statement that he had made had not come from flesh and blood; it was not something that had originated from within himself or any of the other disciples. It had come from the Father in heaven. Then, when he made that statement that he surely would not go to the cross, the Lord informed him that that had come from the devil.

So, he had moved from the great extreme of being inspired of God, to the terrible extreme of being inspired by the devil. They had truth, but they also had a great deal of error. And only gradually did they come to a full understanding of our Lord and His mission. They had to grow in their knowledge. They had to develop in their maturity, just as we do. And often, that growth involves hard experiences in life, experiences that are designed to teach us, experiences that are wedded to the revelation of God's truth.

And to that end, to cause them to progress in their faith, to disabuse them of the false ideas that were influencing them, the Lord sent them out on the sea in the dark for some instruction while He withdrew to the mountain to pray. We don't have the content of His prayer, but it's likely that it was concerned with the crowd's attempt to make Him a king. It was a crisis that prompted Him to go to the Father in prayer, to seek from His father wisdom. And, He's also praying for the disciples for their understanding that they would not become subject to the same error as the crowd, and that they would be watched over and protected as they were about to enter into some difficulty and enter into some lessons.

Prayer. Very important. We know that. That goes without saying, but that's a point that's underscored from our Lord's own experience. It's the essence of the spiritual life, as someone has said, and the Lord is the great example of how important that is, and of what essence it is to us. He demonstrates that in this very passage. We would think if anyone did not need to pray, surely it was our Lord Jesus Christ, the

perfect Godman. And yet, He prayed. He prayed for some length of time. We don't know the time that He went up into the mountains to pray. But according to verse 48, it wasn't until the fourth watch that He came down.

Now, according to Roman reckoning, which Mark follows, there were four watches, and the fourth watch was from 3:00 to 6:00AM. So, if the Lord went up to pray sometime after sunset, say, 9:00 or 10:00 in the evening, then He prayed for some five or six hours. Now, that's an impressive fact in and of itself, but then you add to that, the fact that this is at the end of a long, tiring day. Then it's all the more impressive. We tend to come to the end of our days. We're tired, and we just don't have time to pray. We have to read the newspaper and get that out of the way, and then we have to maybe watch the news and then get to bed. And prayer just seems to find some other place in our activities, and usually doesn't find it in our activities.

Well, not so with our Lord. We see here the importance of prayer. And if it's important for Him, well, certainly it is for us. It's been said that prayer was Christ's very breath. And so, He prayed. He prayed for Himself, no doubt, and he prayed for His disciples, and I think particularly, for them. That's not explicitly stated in the text, but it's the clear indication from verse 47, which states that while the disciples were in the midst of the sea, He was alone on the land. This juxtaposition of scenes, the placing of them side by side, the disciples alone at their oars, the Lord alone in the mountain, seems designed to join His praying to their distress.

And they were in distress. John tells us that they were some three or four miles out in the lake. Evidently, they had been blown off course, and were rowing into a stiff headwind, and as Mark says, straining at the oars, straining against this wind. The word that's translated "straining," or "toiling" in the King James version carries the idea of suffering pain. Even the idea of torture.

Now, it wasn't a storm like the one that's recorded back in chapter 4. You'll remember they were crossing the sea, and the Lord was asleep in the boat, and then this storm suddenly breaks upon the disciples and threatened to swamp the boat. This wasn't that kind of storm. It was evidently a strong headwind, a tiring, continuous headwind that demanded steady, backbreaking rowing. They'd been at it for some hours. Their arms were growing weak. Their backs were about to go out. They were physically straining at the oars, and no doubt they were also straining mentally under the anxiety of the moment, under the fear that that situation caused for them.



It was dark. The wind was howling. The waves were slapping against the boat, covering them with spray, slowing their progress. And they were alone. The Lord was on the dry land.

But putting those two scenes together, the disciples in danger and the Lord in prayer; in reality, there was no danger at all. On the surface, there was danger. But behind the scenes, the Lord was interceding for them. And so, the danger was gone. It wasn't a reality. Christ had given them instruction, they set out on the sea, He'd given them a destination, and He was praying for them, that they would arrive, and the Lord's prayers must always be answered. They cannot fail.

Well, it was then, during their distress, that the Lord came to them. Verse 48 states: "walking on the sea." Attempts have been made to give this event a naturalistic explanation. Vincent Taylor, a British commentator of some years ago, explains this as a homiletical and doctrinal embellishment of the original event, which he suggests really occurred near the shore. The Lord was waiting in the shallows at the edge of the shore which the disciples couldn't see because it was dark. And they mistook Him for walking on the water, when in reality, He was not doing that.

Now, there's nothing in the text to support that. And if that were the case, then it's doubtful that this account would've ever found its way into the Bible, because the Lord would've soon realized the mistake that they had made, and He would've cleared it up. William Barclay, a popular and late British scholar simply passes over the incident with the comment: "What happened, we do not know, and we'll never know."

Well, we do know what happened if we can take Mark at his word. He makes it very plain. Our Lord simply came to His disciples who were out in the middle of a storm-tossed sea. And He did it supernaturally. He did it by suspending the laws of nature and showing in so doing that He was not governed by those laws. He ruled over them. He was Lord of nature, and He controls the wind. He controls the waves. They are subject to Him, not He to them.

And again, as we've noted in the past, the real issue here is not: how can Jesus do a miracle such as that? But, who is Jesus? And if He is the Son of God, whom the gospels claim that He is, if He is that person of Genesis chapter 1, who created light and separated it from the darkness and created dry land by separating the waters that covered the earth, then He could certainly walk upon those waters. He is the creator of the sea. And walking on the sea was not a difficulty for Him. It was a supernatural

evidence to His disciples that He was that one of Genesis 1 that He is the creator, a supernatural proof of His identity, but also symbolical as well, because the water under His foot illustrates His authority over it. He had made the waves His footstool.

So, He is a king. But a far greater king than Israel realized, a far greater king than His disciples realized, and that's why He was walking out to them. Mark writes that He intended to pass by them. Now, he doesn't mean by that that the Lord was intending to walk on by them on His way to their common destination. What Mark is doing is explaining why He came out to them upon the sea. He came to pass by. He came in order to manifest Himself to His disciples and show them His glory, and show them His nature.

It was an appearance very much like one of the Old Testament theophanies, or visible manifestations of God, like the Lord's appearance to Moses on Mount Sinai. You remember how in Exodus 33, the Lord passed by Moses as Moses hid in the cleft of the rock so that He could see His goodness pass by. He could see His glory, get a glimpse of it. Or as with Elijah on Mount Horeb when God passed by Him in a gentle wind. In each case, the Lord was revealing Himself to His servants. And in each case, He was giving encouragement to them, instructing them, encouraging them. And that's the reason that the Lord came to pass by His disciples in the boat. That's the reason why He had sent them out into a hard place.

That seems a strange way to care for His disciples and to encourage His disciples to leave them, to strain against an unrelenting wind, seemingly alone, left to their own devices and skills, with everything hanging, it seems, on how long and how hard they could pull on their oars.

It seemed that way, but it wasn't that way at all. They couldn't see the Lord on the mountain, but He could see them, and He was kneeling in prayer for them. And then, when their strength was beginning to flag, when things seemed blackest, He came in an unexpected way. That's the way He often deals with us. He never forsakes us. He's always interceding for us. That scene of the Lord on the mountain praying for His disciples is a picture of what He's doing now and doing always on behalf of each and every one of His people. At this present moment, He is in God's mountain, so to speak, praying for you. Each and every one of you. He's our great high priest, and He's always interceding for us.

Now, you may not know why the Lord has put you in the particular situation He has you in at work, or why you are in the relationship you are in your marriage. The circumstances you are in may be confusing and they may seem to be unrelenting. But, you can be assured of this: that His intercession for you is also unrelenting. We're never alone, and our situation is never hopeless, and so we are to press on with that confidence. We are to keep rowing. We are to keep fighting the good fight.

And yet, we inevitably ask: why the hardships? Why the struggle? Why not instant sanctification? Why this long, arduous process? It would be so much easier if it was all just done in a moment. Well, I think we all ask that question at one time or another, but what we need to realize is that God's goal is not our ease and our happiness. It's our holiness, and that takes time. That involves a process of trials, a process of difficulties which ultimately do lead to our happiness, lead to the greatest happiness. Happiness and joy that we'd never experience apart from those experiences.

So, He brought that into their life, brought a long, hard struggle into their life. Had they not struggled, we might've asked: would they have learned the lessons as clearly as they learned them as effectively as they learned them? Would they have come to as clear a realization of their inability and of His complete sufficiency, of their complete dependence upon the Lord had they not strained at the oars for some period of time? Had they rode right across that lake with ease and met the Lord there on the other side, would they have seen Him as they did? Would they have appreciated His glory and His power to save? I think not. So, there was a reason for their straining at the oars. It was a means of advancing them in their understanding and preparing them for blessing. Then, at the right time, He came to them. He manifested Himself to them, and He did so in a supernatural way.

And when He came, what was their response? Well, just as you might expect, one of them looked out and he said, "Look, off the starboard bow, the Lord is coming." They all cheered, and they dropped their oars, and began to say, "I knew He was coming. I knew He was coming. Of course, we all knew He was coming." No, that's not what they said, if we look at verse 49. We see their true response: "Look, it's a ghost."

Saw Him coming and they were terrified. They thought a water spirit was coming to get them. But their response said far more about them than it did about

Him. It shows how little they really knew about our Lord, how little they really understood Him. And their lack of knowledge is what led to their confusion. It's what led to their fear. Which is a reminder that if we're not well-informed about Him, if we're not well-informed about His person, about His character, about His attributes, about His mission, about His ways, then we too will become confused in times of distress, overwhelmed by the circumstances.

One of the wiles of the devil, which Paul speaks of in Ephesians chapter 6, to my mind at least, is that of confusing our thinking, to fix our thoughts on circumstances and keep them off the Lord, convince us that everything is really against us, and that the Lord is really not working on our behalf. He's forgotten us. There's actually so many people to take care of, and we've sort of slipped through the cracks. He's really not involved in our life. That happens to the best of us.

We have an excellent example of that in one of the great persons of the Bible, in the life of Jacob. Much of his life was a struggle. It was filled with disappointments. He lost Joseph, his favorite son, and was led to believe that he had been killed. Then, Canaan suffered a severe famine which threatened his whole family with extinction. So, Jacob sent his sons down to Egypt to buy grain. But when they came back, in Genesis 42, they inform him that the prime minister of Egypt had accused them of being spies, and had kept his son Simeon as a hostage to force Jacob to send his youngest son Benjamin down to him in Egypt.

Well, thinking that he'd lost Simeon, in addition to Joseph, and now he was going to lose Benjamin, Jacob cried out in despair, and he said, "All these things are against me." Not knowing that Simeon was alive, the prime minister was actually his beloved son, Joseph, and all the events were leading to his family's deliverance and glorious reunion in Egypt.

God is for us. Things can't be against us. And we see that again here with the disciples. But, you can imagine the thoughts that must've been going through their minds as they were out there on the sea, fighting the wind, fighting the waves, fighting fatigue. They were despairing. They were confused. They couldn't see any good in straining at the oars and fighting the elements. They might've even questioned our Lord's wisdom. After all, He's the one who sent them out on the lake. They were just following His instructions. They were where He had told them to be and they were stuck.

Their strength was failing. The wind was against them. The waves were against them. All of those things were against them. No, they were really for them. God had sent the wind. He was behind the wind. But the problem was, they were looking at the wind and they were not looking at God. And so, they were surprised when God came to them, and they confused Him with a ghost.

Notice the way the Lord deals with them. This is a characteristic of our Lord. He's not harsh. He doesn't give them a harsh rebuke, but He deals with them with encouragement, with kindness, and affection. And He does so, Mark says, immediately. In other words, He quickly cleared up the confusion and He relieved them of their distress. Verse 50: "But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, 'Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.'" What a relief. It wasn't a ghost after all. It was Jesus, and what an encouragement that it was far more.

Let me translate it a little more literally and you'll get the sense of what the disciples heard when He spoke to them. He said, "Take courage; I am. Do not be afraid." Literally, He identifies Himself as "I am." *"Ego eimi."*

Now, what significance would that have had to the disciples? Well, they would've been very familiar with that expression. It was very prominent in the old testament in a very prominent place in the old testament. It was the very way that God identified Himself to Moses when He spoke to him out of the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. I am who I am. And Moses was to say to Israel, "I Am, has sent me to you." Those words were designed to give Moses and to give Israel confidence when Moses returned to deliver them from slavery in Egypt. It was the Lord's revelation of His name. And here, in calming His disciples' fears, Jesus was identifying Himself as the same person that had spoken to Moses out of that bush. The same one who had delivered Israel. The same one who was creator.

And evidently, it had the effect of relieving their fear and giving them confidence, because it is probably at this point that Peter made his famous walk on the water recorded by Matthew. The solution to fear, the preventative to confusion, the means to godly confidence that overcomes circumstances is a knowledge of God, an understanding of biblical doctrine in the principles that it sets forth, the teaching it gives us concerning our Lord, the direction that it gives us in terms of how we are to live and how we are to walk. It's in studying those things, in meditating upon them that we grow in our relationship with Christ.

As He Himself said, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Commenting on that statement, in his book, "Spiritual Depression," Dr. David Martyn Lloyd Jones said, "Free from doubts or fears, free from depression, free from things that get you down, it is the truth that frees. The truth about Him in his person, in His work, in His offices. Christ as He is." Now, that takes time. It takes labor. Have to read the Scriptures.

Are you doing that? Have you set out on your goal of reading the Bible this year? It takes time. But it has its rewards. That's how we grow. That's how we develop as a Christian. We read the Scriptures. We come to understand what is taught there. We come to a knowledge of the truth of God. And then, as we enter into difficult experiences, we are able to deal with them and to benefit from them, profit from them.

Let me illustrate the value of knowledge from a story that the Princeton theologian BB Warfield recorded in an article that he wrote on the Shorter Catechism in which he urged its use in the training of children. You'll remember that it begins with the question and answer: "What is the chief end of man?" "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

And so, to illustrate its usefulness in building Christian character, he tells an unusual story from an experience of an officer of the United States Army who, Warfield writes, was in a great western city during a time of civil unrest, a time of riots. The streets were overrun every day by a dangerous crowd. But one day, the officer saw a man approaching with an unusual combination of calmness and firmness whose very demeanor, he writes, inspired confidence. The officer was so impressed with his bearing while surrounded by the confusion that when this stranger passed by, he turned back to look at him, only to find that that stranger had done the same thing. Seeing the officer looking at him, he at once came back to him and, touching the man's chest with his forefinger, demanded, "What is the chief end of man?" To which the officer answered, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." "Ah," said he, "I knew you were a Shorter Catechism boy by your looks." "Why, that was just what I was thinking of you," replied the officer.

Warfield continues. It is worthwhile to be a Shorter Catechism boy. They grow to be men. Better than that, they are exceedingly apt to grow to be men of God.

So apt that we cannot afford to have them miss the chance of it. Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Well, I cite that story not so much to promote the catechism, as to illustrate the importance of doctrine, of right thinking about Christ. It strengthens faith. It prepares us for life's difficulties. It prepares us for all kinds of circumstances. We need to be people who are in the Scriptures, who are thinking about the things of God, who are coming to an understanding of the great doctrines of the Christian faith, to have that sanctifying influence upon us.

Following his word of self-revelation, the Lord got into the boat, and verse 51 states: "the wind stopped." Peace was restored with the result that the disciples were greatly astonished. Their amazement, however, was not a good thing. It was due to a failure to understand the previous lesson of the feeding of the 5,000.

As Mark explains in verse 52, their heart was hardened. They lacked spiritual perception. Their minds were dull to the truth. They realized that a miracle had taken place when He fed all of those people, but what they failed to grasp was what that miracle was saying, what it was teaching, what it was revealing about the one who'd performed it. He is the ruler of nature, that He is the creator of the world. And so, they were distressed in the storm, frightened at His appearance, and they were astonished by the calm.

When there's a lack of interest in learning, there will be dullness and hardness of heart, accompanied by a confusion and fear. If we want to be above confusion and fear, I'm not trying to paint an idealistic picture here, because even as we study and even as we grow, we go through periods of some confusion and fear. But if we don't want our lives ruled by that kind of condition. If we don't want our lives governed by the circumstances, then we've got to be a people that know the word, and we've got to be a people that study it. That was being impressed upon them. They were learning through all of this.

Fortunately, the Lord is patient, and He does give them further instruction. Because following this incident, they arrived at Gennesaret, south of Capernaum, on the west shore of the sea, whereas verses 53 through 56 state, Jesus performed His continuing ministry of healing.

The lesson, I think, is rather simple, and it is that we need to know Christ. We need to have a growing and increasingly clear perception of Him. It's only through

that that we can do as the Lord commands, and that is: take courage and not be afraid. And to teach us and lead us in our understanding, He allows us sometimes to pass through difficulties, through protracted struggles. He leaves us straining at the oars for a while. But, we should remember that even at times like that when we think we're alone, we're really not alone. He's praying for us. He's interceding for us. In fact, He is present within us.

And He's in control. The whole earth is His footstool. He providentially controls the elements and the affairs of men, the hearts of kings and bosses and husbands and wives. And we can be assured that the trials serve a purpose, and they will lead to blessing in our lives.

William Cowper was an 18th century English poet, famous in his own right as a poet, but known best to us for some of his great hymns. He was a man who had a miserable childhood. His mother died when he was only six years old, and he was immediately sent off to boarding school where, being small and of a sensitive nature, he was bullied and beaten by the older boys. Life was a great struggle for him. He was overwhelmed by terrible fits of depression. And on more than one occasion, his mind seemed to fail him. Twice, he tried to commit suicide, and finally was committed in 1756 to a mental institution.

There, he came under the care of a doctor named Cotton. Dr. Cotton was a devout old man who, through his treatment, brought Mr. Cowper out of his depression and introduced him to the gospel and the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Cowper then came under the influence of John Newton, who we know as the author of "Amazing Grace" and came under the influence of some other friends. And through their influence became a strong Calvinist, though he continued to struggle. Had struggles the rest of his life. To the day he died, he had great struggles of a mental kind.

But he also had new life, and new understand. And out of that new understanding, that new life that he possessed, he was able to praise God in his hymns. In one of his hymns, which we sang in our services, he wrote: "God moves in a mysterious way. His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head." That's true.



The more we understand Christ, the more we know Him. Through the great doctrines of the faith, the more that we will come to have that. Those blessings, as our experience.

Do you know Him as Savior? In the midst of difficulty, do you have the confidence that He is praying for you? The confidence that He is presently acting as your great high priest, right now, at this very moment? If not, then turn to Him. Believe in Him. Trust in Christ as your Savior, as your high priest who made the ultimate and final sacrifice at the cross. Believe in Him as the Son of God who died for you. Trust in Him. And lean on Him, and the strength that we have from Him. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we are reminded of some important truths from this passage. We're reminded of our weakness, because really, we're no different than the disciples. We so often fall into confusion, and fear, and circumstances rule over us. We will struggle with that all of our life because we're but flesh. We're dust and ashes, and we're a weak people. But, we have strength in You, and You promise never to forsake us, and promise to cause us to grow as we study Your word, and we reflect upon it, and we act in obedience to it, and so we pray that You would perform that work within us. Give us a disposition that loves the Word of God, in which we apply ourselves to it. We might come to know You better and serve You more faithfully. We pray these things in the name of Christ. Amen.