

Job 9:1 – 11 **Mark 6:45-56**

Job 9 Then Job replied: ² 'Indeed, I know that this is true.

But how can mere mortals prove their innocence before God?

³ Though they wished to dispute with him,
they could not answer him once in a thousand times.

⁴ His wisdom is profound, his power is vast.
Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?

⁵ He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger.

⁶ He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble.

⁷ He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars.

⁸ He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.

⁹ He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the constellations of the south.

¹⁰ He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed,
miracles that cannot be counted.

¹¹ When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.

Mark 6 ⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

⁴⁷ Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the lake, **they thought he was a ghost**. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and **were terrified**. Immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; **their hearts were hardened**.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, **people recognised Jesus**. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried those who were ill on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went – into villages, towns or countryside – they placed those who were ill in the market-places. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Muhammed Ali, once when asked by an air-stewardess to put on his seat-belt, somewhat full of himself, said: "Superman don't need no seat belt." The stewardess quickly came back, "Superman don't need no airplane, either."

Listening to this story, we might think: *Jesus don't need no waterskis*. But is it true?

We all have times in our lives, when we feel swamped by waves, battered by the winds, unable to make any headway and wondering if we will even survive. And sometimes we wonder: *Where is God? I can't see him. Why has He left me alone. Why won't He come and rescue me – perhaps he can't.*

So what does this story have to tell us? Context: John the Baptist beheaded. Jesus tries to go to a solitary place but is pursued by the crowds. We're told Jesus *had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, so he began teaching them many things*.

Then we have the remarkable miracle of Jesus feeding of the 5000. When crowds go home, Jesus sends disciples ahead across the Sea of Galilee so he can have some time alone to pray – all night.

A squall blows up. The previous time this had happened in Mark 4, Jesus had been with them in the boat; this time, they were in the middle of a very dangerous sea and Jesus was miles away on the shore somewhere.

The disciples are struggling, making no headway at all against the wind. And the waves are threatening to capsize their boat. *Where on earth is Jesus ?*

The disciples might not have been able to see Jesus, but wonderfully Jesus could see them. He could see the storm, he could see the boat labouring in the waves, he would know how the disciples would be straining at the oars and making no headway against the wind. Even while the disciples were thinking:

Why did Jesus abandon us and send us across the lake on our own, Jesus was on his way.

The disciples don't recognise him. Fear does funny things to our perception: so just when the disciples think things cannot get any worse than this, they see a ghost! They are terrified – cry out in fear - they completely lose it.

We might wonder how Jesus can possibly walk on the water. It is the most spectacular miracle and maybe we are tempted to think that the disciples must have been mistaken or made the story up. Indeed back in the 19th century many rational theories were advanced: Jesus was walking along the shore-line, or through the waves in the shallows or on a reef of rocks. But none of these theories do justice to the story. The disciples were in the middle of the lake: they could have hardly spotted much less recognised Jesus several miles away in the middle of storm on the shore-line or in the shallows. And even if they did how did Jesus managed to get from there into the boat.

Indeed, the whole point of this story is the *failure* of the disciples to believe the evidence in front of their eyes. Mark even talks about their hardness of heart. And not just Mark. A couple of pages later, when the disciples are next in the boat with Jesus, he challenges the disciples and says to them in *Mark 8:17 – Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?*

As with the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples' problem was not that they were too *gullible* but that they were too *slow to believe and understand*.

The whole purpose of Mark's gospel is to enable us to see and understand that Jesus really is the *Messiah, the Son of God*. And at this point of the gospel this is also Jesus' purpose: that his disciples will finally see and understand just who he is.

And so in this chapter, we don't just see Jesus meeting the immediate needs of people, whether it was hunger or struggling at sea or in need of healing; we see Jesus doing the things God does when he comes to rescue his people. In the Old Testament God longs to be a shepherd to his people. When kings are anointed they are meant to be shepherds of Israel on God's behalf, but they constantly fail. Under King Ahab, the Lord's prophet Micaiah says: *'I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd*. And so God promises that He himself will come and be shepherd to his people and he himself will feed his sheep. As we heard in our OT reading, because God is the Creator *He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea*. Interestingly Job also said: *"When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him*.

In the great story of the Exodus, of God rescuing Israel from slavery in Egypt and bringing them into the promised land, what are the 2 outstanding miracles? God enables them to cross the Red Sea and He feeds them in the desert. This is what Jesus is doing in Mark chapter 6.

When Jesus fed the 5000, he was hoping that his disciples would realise what this meant: that Jesus was not just a great leader, or a prophet, or a miracle worker but God's anointed Messiah, the Saviour, the Son of the living God. However it seems the penny still hasn't dropped.

This is probably why Jesus needed to spend all night alone in prayer: *were these disciples really the ones that would proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah and continue the work of Jesus of bringing in the Kingdom of God?*

When Mark tells us that Jesus was about to pass them by, he may well have meant that in the way that in the Old Testament God would sometimes *pass by* his chosen ones in order to reveal his nature.

The disciples in their fear in the middle of the storm, do not recognise Jesus. Mark says it's actually because of their hardness of heart. Far from thinking he is the Son of God, they think he is a ghost and are terrified.

And what does Jesus say to them?

'Take courage – It is I' This is not Jesus saying *It is only me*, but = *ego eimi I AM* Just as in John's gospel, Jesus is giving to himself the name of God revealed by Him to Moses. And then with patient compassion He gets into the boat with them and the wind dies down.

It takes several more miracles and explanations from Jesus, but eventually in Mark ch.8 v.29 we get to that wonderful moment when Jesus asks the disciples *Who do you say that I am?* And Peter replies: *You are the Christ.*

So what does all this mean for you and me? As with the disciples, there are times when we feel overwhelmed by the storms of life, the wind and the waves. We are rowing as hard as we can and yet making no headway at all. Worse than that, we feel abandoned by God, that He is nowhere to be seen. At this point we have a choice: do we give in to those fears and doubts and end up being terrified? Or do we remember, remind ourselves *who Jesus is* ? The Christ, the Son of the living God, the one who has been watching over us all the time, even when we can't see him. The one who loves us with tender compassion, as a shepherd loves his sheep and who will never let us down, and never let us drown, but one way or another, in his time, will get us safely to the other side.

We have far less excuse than the disciples at this point for doubting, for that hardness of heart. For we live the other side of the resurrection. We know Jesus rose from the dead. And if he did that, then we know that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the one who made the mountains and the sea. And if Jesus is the Word, through whom all things were made, we can know without a shadow of a doubt, that even when we cannot see him, of course he will come to our rescue; of course He can walk on water to do it.