

## “DOING THE LORD’S WORK WITHOUT THE LORD”

John 6:16-21

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

### INTRODUCTION

As the disciples made their way down to the Sea of Galilee, they must have had mixed emotions. On the one hand, they had just witnessed the most amazing display of Jesus’ power over the natural creation. Jesus had fed well over 5,000 people with but five small loaves and two small fish. They must have been awe-struck. *So were the multitudes—so much so that they had wanted to make Jesus their earthly King—on their terms.*

However, on the other hand, the disciples must have been somewhat confused. Why had Jesus so abruptly cut off the meeting with the large crowd of followers? Why had He rebuffed their efforts to honor Him (and THEM also!) by making Him King? Why did He hurriedly rush them away and send them to the seashore with orders to leave and start toward the other side of Galilee? **This had been His (and their) chance at notoriety and fame and power, a chance for Jesus to claim His messianic dignity; a chance to leave behind the struggle, poverty, weariness of work, scorn of the religious elite, and relative obscurity of their Galilean ministry.** WHY WAS HE SENDING HIS LOYAL DISCIPLES AWAY AND SO ABRUPTLY DISMISSING SUCH AN ADORING MULTITUDE WHO WANTED TO “KING HIM”?

One thing they knew by now, they dare not question their Master’s instructions. They must do as He commanded them. So, off they went to the shore of the Sea of Galilee in order to find a boat to take them to the other side.

How confused they must have been—awestruck at the miracle, frustrated by the abrupt dismissal. It would have been interesting to listen to their conversation as they made their way across the Sea. They were working for the Master, *but hardly with a cheerful and willing heart.* They were doing what the Master had told them to do—**but in their own strength and without the presence of the Master to guide them and sustain them.**

Meanwhile, Jesus knew exactly the conflict the disciples were experiencing—both emotionally and physically. He knew what to do about it:

*First He prayed for them and for Himself—that He might perfectly fulfill the Father’s purpose for Himself, and that they might stand strong in His might and not their own.*

You say, how do I know that Jesus was praying? I know because of the parallel passages in Matthew 14:22-33 and Mark 6:45-52. Mark says that after Jesus dismissed them, “He departed to the mountain to pray.” Matthew says that “He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening He was there alone.”

**As interesting as it would have been to listen in on the disciples’ conversation in the boat, how much more interesting it would have been to listen to the prayers of Jesus there on the mountain alone. JESUS NEVER FACED A SERIOUS STRUGGLE NOR MADE A**

## **SIGNIFICANT DECISION WITHOUT FIRST SEEKING THE WISDOM AND POWER OF HIS HEAVENLY FATHER!**

Do you think that we could learn something from this?

Meanwhile the disciples are out on the Lake **working hard for the Master, but working without the Master**. How many believers there are, and church members, who are busy doing the Lord's work, but without the Lord! Their hearts struggle, they physically struggle, and the Lord is not in the boat with them. **But, He is "back on the shore up on the mountain" praying for them!**

### ***IT IS TIME THAT WE STOP DOING THE LORD'S WORK WITHOUT THE LORD!***

#### **I. WORKING FOR THE MASTER (6:16-19)**

Evening—that is the second of two evenings in Jewish reckoning—6-9 PM.

##### **A. Problems they Faced**

1. It had become dark (17)
2. Jesus had not yet come—training them to learn to get along without His visible presence. In the earlier storm, He was with them, sleeping in the boat. [Unlikely that this simply refers to the anticipated walking on the water—such could only apply to the readers' perspective, not that of the disciples who had no idea He would come to them in that way. More probably the expression presumes some kind of arrangement that had been made between Jesus and the disciple that they would look for Him at some point along the shore, but not wait for Him beyond a certain time. They should then proceed across the lake.]
3. A sudden storm arose with a strong wind [common on this lake].  
This wind was blowing against them—from the west—Mk. & Mt.  
John says that it was "a strong wind."
4. The waves of the lake were being stirred up and threatening both their success and their safety.

##### **B. Efforts they Put Forth**

1. They were "going across the Lake to Capernaum." (v. 17)  
The verb implies **continuous activity**, and can imply **an attempt that is not very successful**—they were "trying to cross the Lake."
2. They were rowing for 3-4 miles [25-30 stadia—about 607 feet or almost 1/8 of a mile. Thus, they had traveled about 3-4 miles.]  
They had made some significant progress (lake at this point was only about 5 miles across).  
But, the verb ("rowed") implies some real **struggle**—in other places the verb means "to drive"—as by wind or by demons etc. Their "rowing" was very laborious.

Truly, they were working for the Master—but with great difficulty, not much enjoyment, and not real success. **Their Christian ministry was drudgery.**

## HOW ABOUT YOU AND ME? OUR MINISTRY HERE AT BEREAN?

### II. WORKING WITH THE MASTER (19-21)

A. Jesus' Approach—*Look in the Right Direction*: “They are beholding Jesus”—the present tense shows the vividness of what they observe. For the time they take their focus off of their problems and the extreme difficulty of their labors.

B. Jesus' Power—*Acknowledge His Sufficiency*: “walking about on the sea”—neither the winds nor the waves had any impact on Him, and did not hinder His movement in any way. **He had complete mastery of the elements, and gravity had no hold on Him either!** Nor did space hinder Him—the space between the mountain and the boat.

Mark tells us that Jesus came to them during the fourth watch of the night—i.e. 3-6 AM. *Either He had been praying all of this time, or He had left earlier and took some time to walk to them on the sea. I prefer to think that He actually walked all the way to the boat—only 3-4 miles!* We seem to have no instances in the Gospels of Jesus actually bypassing the laws of space in order to move from place to place.

Moreover, this incident cannot be used to justify the interpretation that Jesus body and blood actually become present in the elements of communion. Nor, can we take this incident to show that Since Jesus can be found where least expected, He can then be found in the elements of the supper. The Scriptures never teach that Jesus' body is omnipresent! Verses 52, and 60 evidence a typical misunderstanding of Jesus' teachings—as v. 63 shows.

Notice that the crowds never saw Jesus walk on the water; this incident would not clarify Jesus' teachings in chapter 6. This incident was an encouragement to His disciples—it addresses their disappointment and weakness: **Jesus is currently King, even king over nature. But, He “won't be king on the basis of bread.”**

John doesn't use the word for “sign” here, and he makes no comments on this miracle. Also, Jesus could not have been walking along the shore here; such would imply that in their fear and terror that the disciples thought that He was walking on the water. The text makes such a view impossible; these men were not afraid until they saw Jesus! They would not have been afraid to see Him walk on the shore! [On the use of εἶπεν with the genitive instead of the accusative, see notes in Morris.]

C. Jesus' Presence—*Observe His concern*: “Drawing near to the boat.” [Mark tells us that He seemed as though He would pass by them (6:48).

D. Jesus' Comfort—*Overcome Fear*: “They became afraid.”

Jesus responded: “It is I; do not be afraid.”

**When we know Him correctly—as very present God—we can be confident**

**and be without fear.**

These words, found in all three gospel accounts, are extremely significant.

Literally they are: εγω ειμι, "I AM."

This is the exact Greek equivalent used in the LXX translation of the OT for the "I am" statements. **It is hardly coincidental that Jesus uses these words here.** (Compare John 8:58.)

Matthew tells us that Peter also walked on the water and then had to be rescued by Jesus when he became afraid and began to sink.

E. Jesus' Deliverance—*Enter into close Fellowship*: "They were willing therefore to receive Him into the boat." Mark specifically says that they took Him in. The idea is not that they wanted to, but did not get a chance because they were suddenly at the shore. Mark also tells us that **the wind stopped**.

F. Jesus' Direction to their Destination—*Rejoice in Victory*: "And immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going."

**This is a second miracle.** Mark took note that the incident took place "in the midst of the sea"; thus, they were not real close to the shore when this occurred. This verse does not simply say that they made a "speedy end to their voyage."

Here the same power over gravity and space occurs with the boat. [Surely this is not to show that the boat can be present in the Lord's supper!]

## CONCLUSION

This passage shows us clearly that in times of trouble, Jesus is near to His own. "His presence is their deliverance and protection" (Plummer).

He can support us without His visible presence; He is with His disciples though unseen. We also see that human response is needed; He wills such response. They received Him into the boat, and the wind stopped and they were at the shore.

We also see the folly of trying to do the Lord's work in our own strength. It is so easy to wear ourselves out—"get burned out" as we so often hear—in the Lord's work without the Lord even being in our boat! WE NEED HIM! WE CANNOT DO HIS WORK WITHOUT HIM. Yet, when today we cannot have His physical presence, we must make sure that we have His spiritual presence. He is with us even when we don't see Him. He intercedes for us. But we must consciously "**take Him into our boat.**"

We just cannot do His work effectively without Him.  
Are you attempting to live your life without Him?

**IT IS TIME THAT WE STOP DOING THE LORD'S WORK WITHOUT THE LORD!**