

MEN IN THE MAKING

Mark 6:1–56

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Men in the making—God leads us along. Scriptures are given that not only might we have an understanding of what has happened in the past, but that we might understand how Jesus leads us in the present. We do not look at the Scripture simply from the standpoint of finding out what happened in history. We want to know how the Lord works with us today.

Many of you have been studying the Scripture through the weeks. Again, I will not read it, but instead make continual reference to the sixth chapter as we share it together this morning. No one who ever proves to be a trustworthy disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ reaches trustworthy discipleship without going through struggle or without facing times when it seems as if there is no apparent hope to resolve a current conflict; or who has not known what it is to be burdened with a load which seems too heavy to carry; or has not wondered if the Lord really knows what He is doing after all.

Mark 6 shows us how Jesus is ministering to the disciples and they're learning from Him. In order to be worthy disciples, they pass through struggle and pressure. Indeed, it is the dark hours in our life which often have the greatest influence in shaping us for God.

Look with me today at the pressures that are placed upon the disciples as they travel with Jesus. The same pressures we face.

I. The first pressure they face is in Nazareth of Galilee, Jesus' hometown, a small village perhaps of not more than ten thousand people. There they face the pressure of unbelief.

The Gospel of Luke—Luke 4—tells us that when Jesus first began His ministry, He began it in Nazareth. At that time, evidently the disciples were not with Him, for He had called them after

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that event. He is alone in Nazareth and so great is His rejection at that time in Nazareth that the townspeople lead Him out to the edge of a precipice and would have pushed Him over the hill had He not walked out through their midst. Now with His disciples He chooses to return to that hometown setting; because He wants them to understand the basic truth about Himself which perhaps they had never seen in full force. The truth that even the Son of God can be limited.

That, in fact, He is limited in His working power by faithlessness.

He returns to Nazareth. In Nazareth, He is known by several appellations. To some, He is known as “the carpenter’s son.” To others, He is simply “the carpenter.” And to others, He is “the son of Mary.” Maybe that last term—son of Mary—tells us something very significant about the town in calling Him that, for when we turn to John 8 we find that when Jesus is in Jerusalem and at odds with the religious leaders, they very spitefully hurl back the words to Him, “We were not born of fornication.” The inference being that He was. If the story had traveled to Jerusalem, the possibility is of course most apparent that it had been the town gossip of Nazareth for a long, long time. Nazareth had never quite bought the story of the virgin birth. It had always regarded Jesus as the illegitimate child, the first child of Mary and Joseph. Son of Mary.

That town, as He grew up, had reached a certain idea of who He was. He had never done a miracle evidently in Nazareth and He had never taught in Nazareth until His ministry began after the temptation. When He returns to the city, for the first time in Luke 4 and again in Mark 6, the question the townspeople are asking is, “Where did this man get these things?” (Mark 6:1, NIV). That is to say, “Whence His works and whence His wisdom?” Jesus of course has been doing two things so far in the Gospel of Mark. He’s been teaching and He’s been acting. He’s been speaking and He’s been performing. The townspeople want to know. And since they don’t have

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an explanation for where His wisdom or His works come from, since they don't have an explanation, they choose to disbelieve.

The trouble at Nazareth is the trouble of persons who are unwilling to open their idea of Jesus which they had formed earlier on the basis of incomplete evidences. Now they have had a chance to see the evidence and still they are clinging to their set presuppositions.

This is always the problem—for each of us in this world—of presenting Jesus to the world.

Many of you have grown up in a church background. Others of you have grown up with no church background whatsoever. Many persons outside this room, not anywhere in the assembly of the church of God. For certain reasons, that they have grown up in the church or haven't grown up in the church and they've already reached a settled opinion of who Jesus is. No matter how much evidence confronts them of His reality, still it is there: unbelief.

Jesus wants the disciples to see the tragedy of unbelief. That when there is unbelief, there can be no mighty works. Indeed, it says that in Nazareth Jesus healed few people that were sick. The idea there with the word "sick" is persons who were weak and needed His strength. The kind of people being healed in Nazareth were not like, for example, the lepers, the paralytics, the blind people, but simply people that were weak and being helped, unable to do no mighty works.

Why? Because He was being rebutted with unbelief.

What is true about the relationship of Nazareth with Jesus is true about all human relationships and about relationships between ourselves and God; that unbelief is sure to kill any relationship.

Take what Johnny Wooten said this week about UCLA. In the middle of the week, he said, "This team, which I have now, is not the greatest team which I have coached. It is a good team but it tends to fold in the clutch. It does not have the stamina of other teams that I have had."

Result: Friday night and Saturday afternoon UCLA fulfilled Johnny Wooten's unbelief. I

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wonder...I'm not trying to play amateur psychologist, but I just wonder if Johnny Wooten had said, "This is the greatest team I've ever coached, the longest winning streak we've ever had, our defeat was a fluke and this team, when it comes to the clutch, has got it. We've got the greatest players in the world." I wonder if that team would have played differently this weekend.

Unbelief kills even UCLA. It could do no mighty work.

What about children in our home, whom it is so easy to down and say negative things to and discouraging things to? Where there's far more rebuke and blame than there is praise. And what about our relationship with our husbands or wives or with other people? Where it's always easier to be filled with unbelief and the result is no mighty works. What about a student sometimes sitting in a classroom of a teacher who we feel is not exactly coming through to our standard? So we put our heads down, as I have done a number of times in the past, and pay no attention and kind of doze away. In the long-run, our unbelief is making that teacher a poorer teacher.

Whereas, if we were wide awake with a pencil, ready to write on paper as if every word that dropped from the teacher was some choice gem of wisdom or truth, gradually our faith in that person would tend to do more to make him effective than any other thing.

Belief is important. Even the Son of God was limited and could do no mighty works because of unbelief. The disciples must get used to the pressure of unbelief. Simply because there are some people who do not believe in them, not assuming that everyone else does not believe in Jesus.

They are to go on. As Jesus found, He went to other villages and these villages had faith in Him. And again, His mighty works were being done. The pressure of unbelief is faced by the disciples. Life always comes apart at the seams when it is lived with a negative reference point.

II. But there is another pressure that is brought on the disciples in Mark 6. That is the pressure of assignments.

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Jesus wants to transform men who are followers into leaders. When they first begin coming after Jesus, they are called disciples. But it isn't very long until they are called apostles. The word "disciple" means "one who follows". The word "apostle" means "one who is sent out". It's far easier to stay around Jesus and watch Him do the work than to be thrust out of the nest and be involved in work themselves. It's far easier to be a Christian today and to simply watch or hear what other people are doing than to be involved in tasks of ministry ourselves. But Jesus gives assignments to His people to do. He does this with us as well.

There are limitations, which He places upon the assignments He gives. Because Jesus understands human nature He doesn't give us things to do we can't do. If He's calling you to do something, you can do it with His help.

A. Look at some of the limitations Jesus placed on the disciples when they went out on their first assignment to go preaching two by two in the villages of Galilee. He knew that their theology had not all been worked out. He knew that they had the limitation of not knowing everything about Him. They hadn't even confessed Him yet as the Christ, the Messiah. That will come in Matthew 8. They can simply go out and say, "There is someone whose works I can't explain, someone who is incredible." And that's about all they can say. They can say what happened to them but they didn't have their theology all spelled out. They didn't have the doctrine of the Trinity down. They didn't have the relation between predestination and freewill worked out. They didn't have the prophetic pattern all worked out, either. So lacking were they in knowledge that they were told that when someone didn't receive them, they should shake the dust off their feet. Which is a simple way of saying, "Don't get in an argument with anybody you won't win or you don't know enough. Tell what happened to you. If people won't receive that, move on."

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We often assume that witnessing is a very complicated thing...it involves stacking up a whole lot of knowledge and only the preacher and the deacons and the trained people can do it. But witnessing, as someone has described it, is simply one beggar telling another where to find bread; or simply telling what has happened to you to someone else. As you tell, you'll become capable of telling more and learning more. Jesus doesn't have the idea of education like a funnel like some people do, where you pour everything into their head, and, after you get done pouring for about four years, gradually they can go out and do something. But He pours as you go. You can't guide a bicycle standing still and Jesus puts the disciples in motion in order for them to learn.

B. Another limitation that He places on them is that, of course, not only is their theology lacking but they are not perfect either. Isn't it great that Jesus can use people who aren't perfect? Yes! The disciples were racially prejudiced. In another Gospel, it's recorded that Jesus told them they couldn't go to the Gentiles and Samaritans. There was a very good reason why they couldn't go to the Gentiles and Samaritans—they were too bigoted. They would have been burning Samaritans and killing Gentiles. So He says, "Don't go to them."

C. Another limitation which Jesus places on them is that when they are in a place they are to stay in the house that they go into when they first enter the town and they're not to leave the place which they go to. There's a very good reason for that. The disciples tended to be status jumpers. They wanted the great places in the kingdom. So Jesus said, "When you go into the town and you're invited in that home, you stay in the home until you leave the town" (see Mark 6:10). The very simple reason is that the disciples knew that probably the first home they got invited to wouldn't have all the modern conveniences. If they got in the town for a while and began looking good, somebody with hot and cold running water and an extra bedroom and rugs on the

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floor and all these kinds of wonderful things would invite them over and they'd begin looking for some spiritual reason why they could leave and go to the other house. Then, instead of people listening to the Gospel, they'd get confused with the appearance of prejudice which is being shown by the disciples leaping over the social barriers to go to somebody else's house when they should be staying in that house. People get their feelings hurt and they couldn't hear the Gospel. So Jesus said, "I know you guys aren't perfect so just stay in one house and be content." They couldn't jump around looking for a better place.

D. They also had the limitation in that they had some faith but they didn't have faith for every area of life. That is kind of a crazy thing, but I've noticed that in my own life. There are some things I have faith for and there are other things I have no faith for and I have to learn to have faith for.

The disciples had faith in some great areas. They had faith that, as they went, they would be laying hands on the sick and anointing with oil and they would be recovering. They had faith to exorcise. But Jesus evidently knew they had a problem with faith in regard to material needs. Here are the apostles, going out with dynamic spiritual ministry; all the while that's going on, they have a crisis of faith, wondering if God is going to supply their next meal or put them up somewhere the next night. It's the little things that eat away the life of faith. We can do the great things often, but those little, everyday needs for having faith is what Jesus is working at. So He simply says to them, "You can't take anything with you. That's an area where you need to develop in. As we've seen in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has a pretty good idea of the disciples' condition, for indeed their faith is weak. We'll see it again as we move through Mark 6. They needed to be built.

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The great thing is that, on their assignment, they go out and they come back. Christianity would have ended if they'd only gone out and not come back. But they came back. Jesus trusted them and believed that they would return to Him. In going, they obeyed, and in going, they learned. Each step of their training process became a plateau, a bridge, on which Jesus could place further training. As we're faithful to obey the Lord in things we need to do, we become capable of doing more in His name.

III. There is a third pressure on the disciples in Mark 6. Not only the pressure of unbelief and the pressure of assignments but there is the pressure of an uncertain political situation.

That can be very unnerving. Several years ago, when some false prophets indicated that an earthquake would come to California and that California was sliding into the ocean, I was a youth director at that time in a church. A couple of people took off for Arizona that weekend that it was supposed to happen, covering it with the excuse that they needed to go to Arizona that weekend. But the real reason was: they were wondering if that prophecy was going to come to pass. They were afraid of an uncertain situation. It could be political or environmental or whatever. These are really scary times in which to live if you think about it.

I've been reading a couple books recently entitled something like *The Coming World Depression*. It's enough to make the hair curl on your head, pull the five dollars you've got in the bank out and buy silver coins, which might not be a bad idea. I was reading yesterday in the February issue of *Fortune Magazine* where one of America's leading meteorologists, head of the meteorology department at the University of Wisconsin, was saying that the weather patterns are changing to the extent that there is a coming drought that will fall on the earth, and, within our generation, we will see a billion people die of starvation.

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Then we have uncertain political processes in our own country. We sometimes wonder how long this fragile framework of democracy can last and keep the powers of godlessness and anarchy at bay.

The disciples, in chapter 6, are coping also with an uncertain political situation. As they go out, they are going out in the territory of a man who had been responsible for one of the world's most brutal murders of a prophet. One of the most brutal murders ever accomplished. Herod, who can't really be topped in the annals of history. These, as they go out two by two with no armies guarding them, certainly have that specter of an uncertain political situation hanging over their heads. What if Herod decides to do to them what he did to John? What he'd done to John was a terrible thing. What a person is in his background often tells you what he's going to do in the present and in the future. Herod of Galilee was the son of Herod the Great, who had ordered the children of Bethlehem to be slain. Herod the Great had had about ten wives and numerous children by these wives. One of these boys happened to be a gentleman by the name of Herod Philip who didn't have a kingdom but lived as a very wealthy citizen in Rome. Herod Philip took a liking to one of his nieces by the name of Salome, who was the daughter of another of Herod the Great's brothers. So Herod Philip decided to marry Salome and, in doing so, he married his niece. One day, Herod the tetrarch of Galilee comes to Jerusalem to pay a call on the emperor and he's of course fraternizing with his bother, Herod Philip from Rome, sees his beautiful wife, Herodias, and decides he'd like to marry her. So he divorces his wife, who happened to be a princess, the daughter of an Arabian king, and he manages to steal Herod Philip's wife away from him, and in so doing, marries both his sister-in-law and his niece. Whereupon that woman's daughter, who is his niece now, becomes his grandniece and his stepdaughter... a complicated life.

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Herod, being the egotist that he is, has a great birthday party in Galilee, where the leading Roman generals that are in the area are invited—the leading soldiers of Herod are invited. And all the leading landed men of the states are invited. They're having a big birthday party. Instead of sending the slave girls in to do their lewd dancing on the occasion, Herodias sends her daughter, Salome, in to do the honors. And Herod loses his cool, as men do in an act of passion, and wills her half the kingdom; whereupon John the Baptist's head becomes the request. It was a gruesome thing, a terrible thing. It shows us the falling into sin, how utterly degenerative it is when it is continually practiced.

Do you understand now, by the way, when Jesus stood before Herod at his arraignment, when Jesus was brought before Herod from Pilate, why He wouldn't say a word to Herod? (Luke 23:9.) Herod had all the word from God he was going to get and until he acted on the word of John the Baptist. Jesus wasn't going to say a thing. He shamed him by His silence.

An uncertain political situation. Yet in the midst of whatever uncertainty exists, the disciples still have the responsibility of going out. They are not to dig holes in the ground and hide. They're not to find caves and disappear. They are to be present in the world no matter what the cost, what the danger.

IV. The disciples not only faced an uncertain political situation but, in the death of John the Baptist, they faced the pressure of theologically coming to grips with the God who sometimes does not prevent personal disasters.

Many of the disciples of Jesus had been disciples of John the Baptist. It must have grieved their hearts deeply and been an intolerable wound within for them to think that their beloved leader and man of righteousness had to be buried in a grave, and buried headless. That he had to end in that kind of way. That with all the miracles which Jesus was doing in Galilee, He had not acted

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to prevent the death of John the Baptist by Herod. Any disciple who follows the Lord begins to understand, over a period of time, that there are things which happen in discipleship for which there are no snap, easy, cliché answers. In fact, sometimes there aren't any answers at all.

But there is a basic reality undergirding all the problems which arise. The disciples were seeing continually the evidence of the Lord's working—as we see continually the evidence of the Lord working—so that they were able, while not understanding everything that happened, able nevertheless, to serve the Lord. And it is because of their willingness to serve the Lord, without having all the answers, that the word of the gospel becomes known in the court of King Herod. Mark 6:14, “King Herod heard about this [that is, he heard of the tour of the apostles], for Jesus' name had become well known” (NIV). Verse 30, “The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught” (NIV). Mark avoids giving us the statistics of this report... how many people were saved, how many were healed, how many miracles were done. The important thing from their ministry is that in Herod's palace Jesus' name had become known, and they were first and foremost concerned with that.

I serve the Lord Jesus Christ because He has answered the basic questions of life and He will, in time to come, answer every question I have. Most of my questions have already been answered in the here and now. Is God alive? Is Jesus Christ for real? Is eternal life possible? Did Jesus Christ rise from the dead? All of these questions I have very solid and very sure answers for. Yet there are questions for which one does not have answers for...”Why are some healed and others not? Why do some go through tragedy and others do not? Why do some disciples apparently carry heavier loads of responsibility and struggle and sorrow? And why is it that, as you look through both the Old and New Testament, you will generally see that those who draw closest to God carry the greatest struggles and have potentially the greatest setbacks?” It is

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because to these the understanding has come that, no matter what happens on earth, God's Word is fixed in heaven. And these things abide and remain.

V. There is another pressure on the disciples in Mark 6 and that is the pressure of physical fatigue.

Have you ever felt tired in serving Jesus? If you've never had that experience, you need to have it. I would urge you to get tired serving Jesus. It's one of the most joyful things that you can do. Not tired serving yourself, or tired doing things, but tired and pressed in serving Jesus.

The disciples have that experience. They've been out on this training mission and, day by day, they've been traveling. If you've ever traveled and changed locations about every night or every two days, and particularly when you're not allowed to have a hot shower every evening like the disciples weren't...they had to bathe, maybe in the stream, in cold water in the morning. Cold water we know just doesn't quite get the dirt off like hot water does. There they are, dead tired. They come back from maybe a month or two of traveling, and Jesus says, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place" (Mark 6:31, NIV). Everybody needs to rest once in a while. That's true. You need to rest once in a while. I need to rest once in a while. So, the disciples say, "Okay."

They get in the boat and go to the northern region of the Lake of Galilee. Then the crowds see them heading that way and they race around, on foot, and beat them—it must have been a slow boat. When they get there, the throngs are there. I can just see the reaction, "We were going to have a vacation and, can you believe? Five thousand men, plus women and children!" So they put up with the Lord teaching them for a day. Maybe they don't have to do too much while He is teaching. They can kind of sit and slumber while He teaches. Maybe they'd heard His sermon before. So they're there. They're tired. Then, when evening comes, they're concerned about their

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rest. They're saying to Jesus, "Send the people away. It's almost evening and they need some bread." Jesus says, "You give them something to eat." They look around at their resources and determine that they have about two hundred day's wages available—two hundred denari. It would take one man working about a year to feed that throng, and they said that's about how much money we have left in the apostolic treasury. The inference is, "Lord, if You want us to, we'll go to the grocery store and we'll get the bread and find some way to bring it out."

I like that about the disciples. I really do! I like their willingness that if the Lord requires them to go the extra mile to do something for people, they will do it. They weren't prima donnas that said, "Surely, Lord, You're not asking us to go to the grocery store and get bread for all these people? After all, we're the ones who have just been doing signs, miracles and wonders. Let's have some sub-apostle group to do this kind of work. This is beneath our dignity. We can't do anything like this." But they're willing, if necessary, to mop the floors for Jesus, to get the bread. They indicate their willingness to go.

Jesus only wanted their willingness. He takes five loaves and two fish and holds them before them. Then the disciples are given the task of being the waiters for this large crowd. That in itself must have been a tremendously exhausting assignment. Mark said that Jesus commanded them to sit down in companies. The word for "companies" in the original is the same word that's used for "flower beds." It's as if Peter, who stands behind the Gospel of Mark, can still see all those crowds sitting in groups like flower beds on the green grass. With all their clothes and beautiful color, sitting there like flowerbeds. Then these disciples have to go along and wait on all these people, feeding about ten to fifteen thousand people. A lot of walking, a lot of work and maybe even some little kids tripping them as they went along... a hard day's work. But, all the while, Jesus is taking the loaves and fishes and He's multiplying them. The one who is doing the loaves

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and the fishes is the same one who causes the rain to fall upon the earth, the seed to grow, the grain to mature, to be harvested and the ground to be made into bread. That's normally a four- or five-month process from seedtime to bread time. He simply is able to take those four or five months, collapse them with His supernatural power into a microscopic moment of time where He puts out loaves, and the same with fishes. He feeds the crowd. It's a good thing the crowd was seated. If they hadn't been seated in groups, they would probably have thronged in mass at Jesus just to see how He was doing it.

But when Jesus starts doing something, I think the tiredness of the disciples must have lifted. They must have, all of a sudden, been singing because nothing like this had ever happened before. It's amazing. When you see the Lord at work, no matter how tired you are, it just gives you that extra to go on. All of us are so much like the disciples. When faced with the limitedness of our resources and the size of the crowd say, "Well, there's not too much we can do." Someone said there's three ways to be a failure on the basis of the feeding of the five thousand: look at the size of the job, look at the little you have, and leave the Lord out. You're bound to fail every time. But they reach out and the Lord begins to work. And the crowd is generous and tips them. Each of them winds up with a basket full of food left over.

Then their tiredness, their physical fatigue is seen again, when Jesus now sends them into a boat and tells them that they're to go to the other side. John's Gospel is critical to show us that Jesus was so insistent that they get into the boat. It says that He constrained them to get into the boat. The reason why He did was because—in John 6—we see that, after this feeding, the crowds wanted to make Jesus king. They were ready, right then and there, to make him king for life. He could make their bread for them. They wouldn't have to work anymore. That's all the experience the disciples needed to get behind Jesus and make Him king and each of them would have a

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throne and judge the Twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus said, “Nothing doing. You guys get in the boat.” So He constrained them.

They got in the boat, their political ambitions got in with them, and they started across the lake. Jesus goes off to pray. He’d have to pray in a circumstance like that. So He goes to pray. But then, that incredible text in the Gospel of Mark says that, as they were on the lake, they were distressed in rowing. And it was at about the fourth watch in the night that Jesus saw them distressed in rowing. They couldn’t see Jesus. We can’t either when we’re distressed in rowing, but He can always see us. They’re distressed in rowing. The fourth watch of the night is between three and six in the morning. They got into the boat around sunset. They had come off a long trip. They had sailed cross the lake; they had spent the day with the crowds, which is a tiring experience. They had fed the crowds, and that had worn them out. Now they were rowing for at least eight hours. They were distressed in rowing.

I think I dreamed about this last night. I could see them pulling and getting nowhere, pulling and getting nowhere. Have you ever had that feeling? Pulling and getting nowhere...distressed in rowing.

The Lord then appears, walking on the water. Mark says He intended to pass them by. I don’t know why Jesus intended to pass them by. Perhaps He wanted to get to the front of the boat where they could get a good view of Him and they wouldn’t be so frightened when they saw Him. Or perhaps He was passing them by in order that He might get some kind of invitation from them. Otherwise, He wouldn’t bother. But He came to pass them by, walking on the water. This is the second miracle of a storm at sea in the Gospel of Mark and it’s a very tremendous thing in what it shows. The Lord, often when we do not learn a lesson the first time, puts us through an experience which is like the first one, where we have to repeat the lesson we should

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have learned the first time around. In Mark 4, at the storm at sea, Jesus had said, “Let us go across to the other side,” and the disciples had forgotten His word, and therefore had become afraid and almost were lost in the storm. Then Jesus rebuked them and said they didn’t have faith. Now here they are again. He has constrained them to go to the other side and they’d forgotten again. Jesus puts them through the same lesson once more in order that they might learn something about faith.

They have difficulties like we do. They have the difficulty of transferring and understanding that because God has worked in a particular way in the past, He will also continue to work now. All of us have had experiences in our life as Christians where God has particularly provided for us in some kind of a way. But when you get in a new jam you forget, or it becomes a faint memory—what God has done in a previous day. The Lord comes to the disciples who are sitting on their basket full of miracles—they’ve all got the scraps from the feeding of the five thousand—but in the storm, they’ve forgotten that the previous miracle was on board. So Jesus appears and comes to them.

Saint Augustine, fifteen centuries ago, said of this passage of Scripture, “Thus it goes, so long as the ages roll, tribulations increase, calamities increase, sorrows increase. All of these swell and mount up. Jesus passes, treading upon the waves. He waits to be called.”

Here you see the disciples being shaped by pressures to know that unbelief cannot take away their belief, to know that the political pressures cannot take away their need for ministry, to realize that unexplained theological problems must not diminish their service of the Lord and to know, as well, in the midst of physical fatigue, that the Lord will renew their spirit and give them added strength to go on.

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That's how Mark 6 closes. They come to Gennesaret, a plain which begins about a mile south of Capernaum. There at Gennesaret, Jesus begins—in the Gospel of Mark—to experience one of the greatest activities and releases of miraculous power that has been demonstrated thus far in the Gospel. “As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed” (Mark 6:54–56, NIV).

How do you live to see a day in which the Lord really works in unparalleled dimensions? By being faithful where you're at now. There are a number of times in Mark 6 where the disciples could have turned around in the midst of pressure and walked away from their responsibilities to the Lord. In Nazareth, in verse 6, they could have sided with the town of Nazareth in unbelief when they saw Him do no mighty works. In verse 11, when they were told that some cities would not receive Him, they could have gotten discouraged and walked away from the task. In verse 29, when John the Baptist had been beheaded, they could have walked away in sorrow and discouragement. In verse 48, when they were distressed in rowing, they could have just said, “What's the use? We might as well go the bottom.” In verse 31, they could have been critical and full of blame when the Lord had promised rest and they didn't get it. And in verse 53, when they had finally crossed over to the other side and thought that that maybe at last their rest might come, it proved only instead to be the busiest time of Jesus' ministry. But all of that willingness to stay under pressure, to stay with the Lord, means that a golden day, the day of unparalleled activity on the part of Jesus reached them.

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You need to be faithful to the Lord in the midst of pressure and trial. If you walk away, you will never see anything else He does. But as you are faithful and true to your responsibilities, you will see great things. It's the Lord's way of working. Romans puts it this way, "Suffering is meant to produce endurance, and endurance is meant to produce character, and character produces hope. And that does not disappoint us" (Romans 5:3-5).

Closing Prayer

There have been times, heavenly Father, when we've all wanted to walk away from a responsibility, when we wanted, like we did as children, to simply pick up our bat and go home. But through Your Word, Lord, we understand something very marvelous today. We understand something about commitment that is not based upon how we're feeling every moment of the road. There are times when we just don't feel anything. But the commitment has a deeper root, the root of giving to You, the root of joyful fulfillment of duty, regardless. I pray for persons here today who may have failed You by walking away from responsibilities You have given them to do. Because a moment of discouragement came on them, or a moment of disagreement, or a moment of pressure, there has been a failing. I pray, Lord, that we would see in this very moment what it is for You, the Good Shepherd, to restore our souls. That You would help us see today, Lord Jesus, that Your gospel is spread by those that have the will to be with You in thick and thin. Keep me true, Lord Jesus. Keep me true. There is a race that I must run. There are victories to be won. Every hour, give me power to keep me true. We join with the hymn writer in that song. We say it in our heart today. Father, for those who this day are like the disciples in the midst of an unbelieving situation at home or at work, or in the midst of terrible pressure, beating winds and violent force, when all things that can be shaken are being shaken, we thank You that we have a hope that is steadfast and sure. That on Christ, the solid Rock, we stand. Renew Your

MEN IN THE MAKING

Mark 6:1–56

people today through the ministry of Your Spirit, which comes as we understand Your Word.

Father, we pray to be true to our responsibilities to You and may we see the Gennesarets continually as we bear it out and tough it out through dangerous waters and situations. We thank You, Lord, and we bless Your name today. And we praise You through Jesus. Amen.