

Pastor Dan's Weekly Download: August 25, 2020

TAKE COURAGE

For most of 2020, we have found ourselves being tossed to and from on the stormy seas of a pandemic. Nothing seems nailed down or certain anymore. Most of us feel lost, disoriented, and adrift. Gale force winds have forced us to hunker down for months. Lives, schools, and businesses have been turned upside down, and we have no clue when the raging storm will begin to subside. The length and severity of it all has left us dazed, confused, and exhausted. Not unlike Jesus' disciples battling the storm-tossed sea.

We read about this episode in Mark 6:45-51, *"Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 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, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed."*

Jesus' disciples were ordinary people like you and me. What would have been our reaction if we were in that situation? If we found ourselves on a storm-raged sea, miles from shore, in the middle of the night, rowing like madmen but making no progress, while our little sailing vessel seems destined to break apart? We are literally fighting for our lives. Tired, exhausted, and at our wits end – having no idea when this storm will pass. Then through the flashes of lightning, we see a ghost-like figure out on the waves walking toward us. Is that the angel of death coming for us? Are we going down for good? No wonder the disciples cried out in terror. Anyone would, given those circumstances.

Permit me to take a few moments to walk through this passage more slowly and deliberately, drawing out insights to help us weather this storm called 2020. First, I want to call attention to what Jesus was doing while the storm raged. We read the He went up on a mountainside to pray. Instead of going across the Sea of Galilee by boat with His disciples, He went around the sea by land – taking time to be alone with His heavenly Father. We can assume that high above it all, Jesus was interceding for His storm-tossed followers below. He was praying for His tiny struggling church out there in the middle of the storm. It's great to know that this is exactly what Jesus is doing today – praying for us as we wage battle against this storm. Seated up high at the right hand of the Father, He is interceding on our behalf. "Father, give my followers an extra measure of strength, hope, and fortitude as their world has been turned upside down. Help them. Comfort them. Sustain them."

Another thing I want you to notice from this passage is that Jesus was the one who sent them out there in the first place. Vs. 45 says that Jesus *'made'* his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him." The word "made" indicates forceful pressure. Having heard the Lord's command and having obeyed it; they now found themselves in a life-threatening storm. Imagine if they had disobeyed. They could have been sleeping safe and sound in a warm bed in someone's

home – not battling for their lives. The point is that obedience to God doesn't necessarily bring ease and comfort. It may bring challenges and difficulties. Faithful obedience may make us uncomfortable – at least in the short term. But it is always the best choice in the long run.

I also want you to notice that while Jesus did come to rescue them, it was not immediately. We read that, "Shortly before dawn, he went out to them." In other words, Jesus allow his disciples to battle the storm for the entire night. We don't know why He waited until just before dawn to walk out and meet them. But we do know that God's timing is always perfect. All of us wish that God would intervene immediately to bring an end to this pandemic. But He hasn't so far. We know that He will eventually bring healing and relief, we just don't know when. That's because His ways are higher than our ways, and His timing is different than our timing. Meanwhile we are called to wait upon Him in faith and with hope.

So while the disciples are fighting for their lives, Jesus sees, knows, and is praying for them. Then at just the right time, He comes to them. Jesus personally enters the storm-tossed sea to be with them in it. In fact, He even enters their little sailing vessel as well. This is a picture of what Jesus is still doing today -- personally entering our struggles to be with us in them. After all, He is Immanuel – God with us. He draws close to the distressed and downcast as Matthew 12:20 tells us, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory." Take comfort that Jesus knows what you are going through right now and He is nearer to you than you know. He draws near to either calm the raging storm out there, or else to calm the raging storm within us. As the Psalmist says, "He is that very present help in times of trouble."

Finally, we see Jesus telling His followers to "Take Courage!" Courage is the ability to face danger, fear, or pain without backing down. Notice that courage is something we must purposely take hold of. In other words, it is something we receive and appropriate. So where does courage come from? Jesus identifies the source when He says, "It is I." In the face of great uncertainty, Jesus was not telling His disciples to maintain a stiff upper lip or to find courage in themselves. Instead, Jesus was exhorting them to appropriate His power and strength for themselves. By faith, we are to take hold of Him who has all power and authority – even over the storm we are presently enduring. We are to fill ourselves with His spiritual power -- receiving a courage and boldness greater than our own.

This passage from Mark 6 has encouraged me, and I hope it has encouraged you. As you continue to venture through the troubled waters of 2020, may Jesus be your strength and stay.