

## Kingdom Advancement: Showing & Saving

Mark 6:45-56

I'm going to say a word this morning and I want you to make note of the first thing that comes to your mind and the first thing that happens in your gut. God.

Nearly every human culture has wrestled with this word and what it means. Who is God? What is he like? What does he do? Is he angry with me? Does he love me? Does he love everyone? What is God like?

The vast majority of people in the world believe in the divine, but our concepts of what God is like are vastly different. Why? Because there is something very mysterious about the idea of God. We look at creation and know that someone made all of this, but what is that someone like? We don't see him so how do we know him? Mankind's search for understanding God is a little bit like what I do groping down the hallway in the middle of the night searching for a light switch. And if our search for God's character is an expedition in the middle of the night, Christianity has some terrific news. John 1:1-5; 14.

This is what separates Christianity from other religions like Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. In Christianity, God is transcendent but we have a very real and tangible grasp of what he is like. We have seen the glory of God because we have seen Jesus Christ.

*"In Christ the Word, we exchange darkness for light as we think of God. For he perfectly shows us an unsurpassably desirable God, a kind God who is against all that is wrong, a God who thaws us. And only when we see that will we truly love him."* - Michael Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ*, p. 16

This is a good point to remind you that we are studying the book of Mark in order to know our God better. We want to see Him clearly, and the creator God, the one who is transcendent, is revealed to us in a man who fed 5,000 people. So, let's return to the unfolding drama of the story of Jesus in Mark and set our souls to know Him more.

Today we will see two actions of Jesus that increase our knowledge of God.

### 1. Jesus Shows (vv. 45-52)

Last time we saw Jesus feed the 5,000 people and provide as a good shepherd. Remember that the whole issue of the people needing food was because they were in the wilderness and the evening was quickly approaching so the opportunity to get food was quickly dissipating.

Think for a moment about the environment immediately following this incredible miracle. There's some indication that this group of people were looking to Jesus as a potentially powerful political leader who would challenge Roman rule in Israel. Now he's just provided food for them from virtually nothing and their imaginations may have been running wild as to what Jesus could be and do for their political aspirations. In light of that notice what Jesus does in verse 45.

Most likely he recognizes the revolutionary tendencies here and he wants to get his disciples out of there and send the crowd away. So, he puts the disciples in the same boat they used to get to this wilderness and sent them out on the Sea of Galilee toward Bethsaida. He dismisses the crowd and then notice what Jesus does in verse 46. We saw Jesus do this in chapter 1 and it's no surprise that regular communion with the Father is important to Him. So, what happens to the disciples? Look at verse 47 and the first part of verse 48.

They are crossing the Sea of Galilee during the night, which really shouldn't have taken that long. They are experienced fisherman and it's a relatively small lake. But the wind is pushing them back and they are essentially going nowhere. Notice what it says at the beginning of verse 48 that Jesus saw them. He is on a mountain on shore in the middle of the night and he is able to see what is happening to the disciples.

So, the disciples aren't in any immediate danger but are frustratingly stuck in the middle of the night in the middle of the lake. Jesus decides to take action. Look at the rest of verse 48. The fourth watch of the night would have been between 3am and 6am. They have been fighting the wind for a while. Jesus walks across the sea toward them.

This is obviously not just Jesus walking on a shallow sandbar and giving the appearance of walking on water. The disciples are in the middle of the lake. What does this tell us about Jesus? We have already seen Jesus speak to the storm and waves in Mark 4 and nature obeys. Now we see him walking on top of the water.

In the OT we see God with the authority over the sea, particularly in places like the exodus when he parted the Red Sea. But here we see something different than just authority. We see a man on top of the water as if it were dry land. Listen to a couple of passages from the OT. Psalm 77:16-20; Job 9:1-10.

So, clearly in the OT only God has the power and authority to control nature and walk on the sea. But in Mark 6 there is this interesting phrase that helps us to get to the heart of Jesus revealing God to us. Look at verse 48. As Jesus is walking on the water what does it say he does? Why in the world? Is Jesus really intended just to walk right on by the disciples on the water and wait for them on the other side?

This phrase is important and once again we see this in the OT in key places. Think back to when Moses asked God to reveal His glory to Him. What does God do? Listen to Exodus 33:17-23. God's method of revealing Himself to Moses was to pass by Him. When Elijah is on the mountain and God sends the earthquake and the storm it says that God revealed Himself to Elijah by passing him by.

I think what is happening here is that Jesus is revealing Himself to the disciples in the same way that God revealed Himself in the OT. Think back to the feeding of the 5K. The disciples have been slow to trust Jesus and slow to recognize who He is. Jesus gives them a very real demonstration of who He is by doing something only God could do and in the same way God could do it. What is the response of the disciples? Look at verse 49 and the first part of verse 50. They are terrified.

This would be the appropriate response to the raw power of Deity without the compassion of Jesus Christ. But Jesus wants to teach them and bring them along so they grasp who He is, so look at the rest of verse 50.

He essentially says two things to them. Twice he tells them to take courage and to not be afraid. He's trying to calm them down because coming face to face with the power of God is unsettling. But notice what he says in the middle. Your Bible probably says, it is I. That is not what this says in Greek. In Greek it says, I Am.

Where have we heard those words before? Listen to Exodus 3:13-14. This brings us back to our 1<sup>st</sup> action of Jesus, that He shows. Jesus passes by and speaks the words I Am here because He reveals God to us. We would be lost in the darkness, but Jesus Christ comes and pierces the night like a floodlight revealing God to us.

He passes by, we see Him in Scripture, and we can know God through Him. All of our knowledge of God begins with Jesus Christ. He is the starting point. He opens up the knowledge of Deity to us like a key to a treasure chest. It's all accessible through Jesus.

But the disciples aren't quite there yet, look at verses 51-52. They are amazed but still failing to grasp. This is a helpful warning to us that knowledge of God is not our automatic right. It requires a right assessment of Jesus and unbending trust in who He is and what He does. If Jesus is the key to knowing God then our lives must be about becoming acquainted with Jesus.

Now, in verses 45-52 we have this very transcendent picture of Jesus as God who holds power over nature and walks on the water as you and I walk down a dirt path. But Jesus doesn't just show us that God is sovereign and powerful. He is the key to unlocking the kindness and grace of God. And this is the second actions of Jesus that increases our knowledge of God.

## **2. Jesus Saves (vv. 53-56)**

Look at verse 53. After Jesus gets back into the boat and they land at shore it's most likely early in the morning. Look what happens as they arrive in verse 54-56.

This sort of summary of the ministry of Jesus is something we have seen over and over again in the Gospel of Mark. The fact that this is common should tell us something about who Jesus is and therefore who God is.

Remember the whole point of Jesus walking on water and passing by and saying I Am is to reveal God to us. He is the one who shows us God. That is also true of Him in the midst of these summaries of his ministry. He has compassion and kindness and these miracles are intended to bring people to wholeness. These miracles are not the only and best thing Jesus can offer. They point us to the compassion of God and then point us beyond the miracles to a restored relationship with God. Listen to how one commentator put it,

*"The physical blessings of Jesus are not an end in themselves, but a fork in the road, one branch of which leads to Jesus' final saving purpose, the other to a false understanding of Jesus as simply a wonder worker."* – James Edwards

The compassion and kindness of Jesus here do teach us about the character of God. When we talked a few minutes ago about Jesus passing by the disciples on the lake in order to reveal God to them we read from Exodus 33 where Moses asks to see the glory of God. If you remember, God does reveal Himself to Moses and He tells Moses exactly what He is like in Exodus 34:6-7.

In this text you sort of have two seemingly competing qualities, forgiveness while at the same time holding people accountable for their sins. This is the sort of tension that is resolved in Jesus Christ. Jesus reveals to us the compassion of God and the justice of God in requiring punishment for sin. It's only through Him that we see how God can be both forgiving and just. It's through Jesus that we understand God's grace and truth.

So, while the world around us stumbles to make sense of life we have the truth and the very centerpiece of that truth, Jesus Christ. He makes sense of the world and our own experience. He reveals both the compassion and justice of God to us. And it's through Him that we know God, which is ultimately what we are here for in the first place.