

Courage in the Saviour

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[0 : 00] Would you please turn with me in the Word of God to Mark 6, the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 6.

As we do so, let us pray and call on the Lord for illumination. O Lord, our God, we are so thankful that you have given us your Word, that you have not left us dependent upon the imaginations of our minds, the idols of our hearts, but that you have revealed yourself to us, that you have spoken clearly and beautifully of hope for sinners, of confidence in you.

We pray that the Spirit will now open our hearts and our ears so that we may hear and receive your words, the words of your law and your Gospel, even as you have promised.

We ask all this, gracious Father, in the name of Jesus. Amen. Mark, Chapter 6. Our verse tonight is particularly verse 50.

Take heart or take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid. But we'll pick up the story at verse 30 and read down to verse 52.

[1 : 25] So Mark 6, verse 30. Let us hear God's own Word. The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.

And he said to them, come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while. For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, this is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.

But he answered them, you give them something to eat. And they said to him, shall we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?

[2 : 33] And he said to them, how many loaves do you have? Go and see. And when they had found out, they said, five and two fish. Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass.

So they sat down in groups by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people.

And he divided the two fish among them all, and they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up 12 baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish, and those who ate the loaves were 5,000 men.

Immediately, he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.

[3 : 39] And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.

But immediately he spoke to them and said, Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

So far, the reading of God's word. It seems to me that from reports in the media, from world events, geopolitics, things unfolding all around us, many people today are afraid.

I think we live in an age of fear and of growing alarm. We're certainly concerned with the destruction of war, great hardships that have come already from that and that seem likely to come.

We face difficulties on the economic front. We look around and see what seems to be a radical revolution in the culture's understanding of seemingly everything under the sun.

[4 : 59] And I think many of us are anxious about the world in which our children or our grandchildren are growing up. The world, if you're younger, the world in which you're coming of age that seems so unstable in our time.

I think our instincts are either to be fearful or angry or proud, to think that in our time of crisis, we need somehow to redouble our efforts to create stability for ourselves, to build the right kind of relationship, to find the right solution to world politics that will work, to have sufficient resources, to fund our pensions, things that are good and worth pursuing but are not ultimate.

But it seems that it is a moment of great instability. For many people, this has been and continues to be a time of a great deal of stress and a great deal of distress, a time of a great many questions.

And when the things that surround us, that we enjoy, that we so often take for granted, are removed or threatened or challenged, it seems that we often fall prey to that great temptation to put our confidence in the creation, in the things that we build and do to try to find some stability.

But that's why we as Christians are so privileged to know that our confidence, our foundation, our security rests not in anything created, but in the Creator.

[6 : 36] Not in our efforts or our policies or our disciplines. That's part of the wonderful heritage that we have from the Reformation. Before the Reformation, I think many Christians, perhaps most Christians, were dominated by a fearful outlook on the world.

They feared a world full of demons and all sorts of superstitions. They sometimes feared the church and its inquisition. They feared themselves and their own propensity to sin.

And they feared God. Perhaps not a proper fear of God that drives one to seek mercy, but because God was most presented only as a righteous judge who would in any case send them to hell.

So Christianity was often characterized by a fearfulness that I think was encouraged, that too much confidence, too much assurance, too much peace with God will make people indifferent, will make people sinful.

But when the Reformation came and when people like Luther and Calvin began to recover a sense of the power of God's Word, they were profoundly moved by verses like our text tonight.

[7 : 49] The words of Jesus, Take heart. Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid. The message of the Gospel, you see, the message of our Savior, Jesus Christ, is indeed good news.

It's good news that is designed to bring peace and hope and an ultimate heavenly stability into the hearts of his people. It is the remedy, the antidote to fear.

It is the firm foundation on which we ought to rest as God's people. And one of the great fruits, it seems to me, of the Reformation is a confident and courageous kind of Christianity.

Not a kind of Christianity that never faces a fear or never has a problem or is triumphalist, but a kind of Christianity that in the face of problems and fears turns with confidence to God.

And from that confidence in God derives a remarkable level of courage to face the realities, the difficulties of this life.

[9 : 00] So I would like to preach to you tonight about that courage, that confidence that ought to be ours, that call of the Savior who says to us, even now, as he said to his disciples long ago, take heart.

Take courage. Be courageous. Don't be afraid. Well, how is it that we can be courageous? From where does that courage come from?

I think in this text, this text particularly of our Lord coming to his disciples as they struggle in the sea, in the midst of a storm, this story illustrates for us in a variety of ways how we can have courage, how Christ would have us to take courage.

And the first thing that this story says to us is that we are to take courage from his presence. From his glorious presence. We see this story.

It's a rather touching story in many ways. The apostles have been preaching. They come back exhausted, yet the needs of ministry continue. Jesus and the disciples are surrounded by needy people.

[10:11] They don't even have time to eat. Jesus says, we'd better get away so we can have some quiet for rest. They get in a boat thinking they can head off from the crowd, but the crowd filled with great need is so determined that they run ahead and gather others so that when the boat lands, there's a larger crowd there waiting.

And Jesus ministers to them. Perhaps you notice that the first great act of his ministry to them, as we read it in verse 34, is he began to teach them many things.

We must never disparage the critical nature of the church's teaching ministry to those in need. I think that there's nothing more foundational that we need to live the Christian life than the truth. And Jesus, in his exhaustion and in the exhaustion of his disciples, continues to teach. And then seeing the hunger, he feeds them, and a vast number, over 5,000 are there, and then still concerned about the disciples.

Jesus sends them on alone, thinking apparently that the crowd won't follow if he stays there with the crowd for a while, and the disciples are sent on.

[11:28] But then the disciples find themselves caught on the sea in difficulty. And Jesus comes to them walking on the water, a most remarkable event in and of itself.

We might be tempted to say, well, isn't that the glory of his presence, this display of his miraculous power, the amazing ability of our Lord to do what no human being could do on his own, to walk upon water, to walk upon stormy water, and come to the disciples.

But I think when we look a little closer at the text, the revelation of the glorious presence of Christ is much more profound than just that miracle, as important and significant as it is in itself.

But there are other things in the passage that point to the glorious character, the presence of God, of the presence of Jesus with his disciples. The first of these we see there in verse 48.

He saw the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea.

[12:40] He was about to pass by them. He was about to pass by them. Why about to pass by them? Isn't that sort of a waste of time and energy?

If he's just going to walk on by, why walk out in the first place? If we compare the word here to walk by with what we find in the Old Testament, we see that the same verb is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to describe when Moses had asked to see God's glory.

And God, as it is recorded for us in Exodus 33, had taken Moses and hidden him in the cleft of the rock and said, I will pass by. I will accommodate myself to your weakness.

And as I do so, you will see the glory that I show you, which is my goodness. My goodness. You will find good news as I pass by.

You will find the gospel as I pass by. That's the glory that I will show to you. And that seems to be what's on Mark's mind as he records this story and its meaning for us here in this text.

[13:51] How is the glory of Christ revealed? It's revealed not only in the fact that he can walk along the sea, but also that he is walking past them. He's taking the role of Yahweh himself and the revelation of his glory.

And he is saying to them, I am your God come in the flesh to be with you. I am not just a wonder worker who can walk on the sea, but I am God himself who comes to you and for you.

And I am here with you even now. I am that cleft in the rock. And I will hide you in my protection. My presence will give you the true stability that you're looking for.

But as so often in the gospel account and from this fact, I suppose we should take a lot of encouragement. The disciples are so often wrong.

They so often miss the point. It shows the great patience of our God. And the patience of our God is something that we should be reassured about often because we are so often wrong.

[14:55] They completely miss the point. They don't see the glory. They don't anticipate that this Jesus, whom they've seen multiply five loaves and two fish to feed over 5,000 people, they're surprised that he is glorious in this way.

And so they completely mistake what was happening. Verse 49, when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost.

Isn't that pathetic? They're still caught up in all kinds of superstitions. They can't believe their own eyes. Rather than believe that Jesus is the glorious God come to be with them and to help them and to reveal himself to them, they take refuge in some kind of superstition about ghosts on the water.

And they cry out and are terrified. So not only does the Savior perform this miracle of walking on the water, not only does he seek to reveal his own glory as he would pass them by, but then he speaks to them.

And here too we see something of the glory of his presence. He not only says take heart or take courage and don't be afraid, but also we read here that he says, it is I.

[16:19] It is I. Now that's not a bad translation of what we read in the Greek, but it misses the force of what Mark has intended for us to hear in the words of the Savior because the text literally says, take heart, I am, don't be afraid.

I am. Here again you see the Savior is identifying himself with the great Old Testament God, Yahweh, who revealed himself as the great I am whose very name Yahweh is rooted in the very notion of being.

Jesus is saying to them, like I told Moses long ago, I am. Or as we find him saying in the Gospel of John, before Abraham was, I am.

This is a claim of divinity. No Jew would have missed it. Mark doesn't want us to miss it. This is part of the glorious presence of the Savior. We are to know that Savior is indeed true man, but here the point of this text is that he is true God, come in the flesh to be with his people, to be present with them, to show his glory, that we might be encouraged, that we might be confident, that when we face distress, we can know that the great I am, the eternal almighty God, who made all that there is, is with us in the face of Jesus Christ, and that the Savior will come to us and will help us.

And that's the second point of this text, I think. It's not only his presence, the glorious presence of the Savior that's revealed, but also his power that is revealed to encourage us here.

[18:03] His power is displayed here for a gracious purpose, to help and to save. He saves them, doesn't he? They're straining at the oars.

They were not sure they could reach the shore because the wind was against them. Caught in a storm, they are afraid, and Jesus comes to them and speaks a word, and the storm is calm.

Here is power, power for a gracious purpose, to save, to provide. Once again, the disciples live up to their total inability to grasp what is going on, verse 51 and 52.

They were utterly astounded. They are completely amazed because they had not understood about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. It's as if Mark is saying, why should they have been so amazed?

But the reason they are so amazed at the miracle of the calming of the storm is because they had never understood the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. That's to say, they had never seen in Jesus Christ what they ought to have seen, what was clearly revealed to them by these actions.

[19:21] Look at verse 34 of Mark chapter 6. When he, Jesus, went ashore, he saw a great crowd and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

He had compassion on them because he was the good shepherd. His heart was filled with love for his people because he was fulfilling the duty and the privilege that the Father had given him and that he had freely undertaken, that he had come to be that good shepherd.

That savior of his people. The provider for those in need. The one who would exercise gracious power for them. He had shown that by taking time to teach them.

And he had shown that by providing bread and fish to nourish them. But they didn't get it. Why didn't they get it? They didn't get it because for them it was all about themselves.

It was all about what they could get out of Christ. When they had rushed ahead to get ahead of Jesus in the boat before the feeding of the 5,000, why had they rushed?

[20:34] Was it because they were so devoted to the Savior? Was it because they were so eager to be with him, to have fellowship with him? Was it because they had sensed his glorious presence and his gracious power?

No, they had rushed ahead so that they could get healed. So that they could get what they wanted. When they were hungry and he fed them, they didn't think about him but only about themselves and what they required.

So too, when the crowd, when he comes, when Christ comes and he saves the disciples as they're caught in the storm, do they think about him and who he is? No, they don't get it.

They don't get that this gracious power is revealing to them a Savior and a provider beyond what they could have hoped. One who will never let them go.

Who will never abandon them. Who will provide for them all that they need so that they can take courage and not be afraid. So that, as things so often seem, as the world crumbles around them, they can be sure of the permanence, of the reliability, of the stability that they have and the Savior, the great I am in Christ, that God's ultimate verdict is sure that nothing can thwart his purposes.

[22 : 03] You see, the disciples here as they so often do are trying to fit God into their story. They're always asking the question, how does God apply to my life?

How does God fit into what I want to do? How does God meet my needs? That's not the first question I think God would have us to ask, is it?

Our question ought to be, how has God brought me into his story? How have I been brought into the great history of redemption? Which goes back to Israel in the Old Testament, back to Abraham and the patriarchs, back to the promise in the garden, back to the eternal plan of the Father and the Son with the Spirit that Christ should be given a people that he will save and redeem, a kingdom that has no end?

You see, when we first know the character of our Savior, when we see how the Lord reveals his compassion and his love, his care and provision for us, it must melt our hearts if we are his people. It must enable us to say, whatever distress I face, whatever difficulty I know, I can take courage because I have such a Savior.

[23 : 24] And the Scriptures invite us to have that kind of courage even when Jesus does not come immediately to remove our distress as we would wish.

think of these words in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 32 where the author of the epistle to the Hebrews is trying to stir up in the people the kind of devotion and confidence that they have once had.

Hebrews 10 32 we read, Remember those earlier days when you had received the light and stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering?

Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution. At other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

So do not throw away your confidence. It will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God you will receive what he has promised.

[24 : 32] For in just a very little while he who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith and if he shrinks back I will not be pleased with him.

You see these were suffering people and they were prone sometimes to wonder where is God? Where is the promise of his coming? Where is the help that I need?

And Hebrews says even when that help does not come as quickly as we would wish as we would like it to see as we would like to see it we're told do not throw away your confidence for in just a very little while he who is coming will come and will not delay.

That's the promise. That's the promise that he's not far away that he is not late in coming that he knows our need and will use his gracious power to give us what we need to sustain us therefore take heart be courageous don't be afraid.

Our courage comes not only from his presence and from his power but also from the prayer of the Savior. we need always to remember that Jesus was a man of prayer.

[26 : 01] He was a man of prayer not only to model for us the centrality of prayer the importance of prayer in the Christian life but also and above all because he was in constant fellowship and communication with the Father.

So we read in verse 46 of Mark chapter 6 verse 46 after he had taken leave of them that is the crowd to whom he had been ministering he went up on the mountain to pray and when evening came the boat was out on the sea and he was alone on the land and he saw that they were making headway painfully straining against the oars for the wind was against them.

Now did he see them in his prayers? Did he finish his prayers and then see them? I think the text is unclear but it does want to relate very carefully and very closely the prayers of the Savior to his seeing the needs of his people.

And we need to remember that that is still true of the Savior today. His priestly work you'll remember is twofold. First to offer himself as the sacrifice for sin.

That's the first great work of a priest to offer sacrifice. But the second work continues even to this day. The work of prayer. The priest first of all offers sacrifice for the people and then he intercedes

for them.

[27 : 30] He prays for them. And the scripture tells us over and over again that Jesus Christ is still praying for us. That he still knows our need.

That he still sees us in our difficulty. and he prays to the father for us that we would be guarded and protected. The Savior knows our weaknesses.

He knows our doubts. He knows our difficulties. He knows even our times of indifference to the things of God. But he tells us, doesn't he, draw near for I am with you and you will receive mercy and grace to help in times of need.

Again we read in Hebrews 6 and 7 that Jesus is our priest forever. That he always lives to make intercession for his people. And he says to us, I have come to you that you might flee to me for refuge, that you might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before you, the sure and steadfast anchor of your soul.

And that's a critical part of the work of our Savior. That he is always caring for us, that he is always guarding us, that he is always providing for us all that we need.

[28 : 50] Let us remember loved ones that we have such a Savior, that we have such a mediator who cares for us, who never forgets us. You see that's the reality that so moved our forebears in the faith with confidence in God.

Perhaps some of you have heard one of the great 16th century Reformation quotes from a Spanish soldier who said he would rather face a whole army than one Calvinist committed to doing the will of God.

That's a motivating confidence in God. It says, my God is with me in his presence, in his power, in his prayers, and in a world of difficulty and discouragement, of conflict and war, of political soundbites, of forces that would compete for our attention endlessly, that would jostle us like boats in a storm.

We need to be reminded that in our Savior, Jesus Christ, we receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and that we have even now a foretaste of all that we will have fully on the last day.

I was reminded of that this morning. That's why we come to church, isn't it? So that we can hear again and again, because we forget, we doubt, we're not always convinced it's true.

[30 : 18] We need to be reminded that God has made real promises to us with real words. We can see, as we did this morning, twice, real water to seal that promise to us in baptism, real bread and wine to nourish us in the supper.

We come so that we can hear and sing and pray God's word together, so that we might be a people together that knows our God and that has great confidence in him.

But then we read in Mark 6 that at the time, the disciples were amazed. They were astounded. That is, they were filled with wonder.

That is, they were impressed. Throughout the gospel accounts, we find people being impressed.

The trouble with being impressed is that it's what happens to those who go to the circus, to those who hang out with celebrities, politicians who can promise to do impressive things.

our Savior does not want us to be impressed. He wants us to believe. But what is it to believe? It is here revealed to us that believing is to see the glorious presence of Christ and not be afraid.

[31 : 42] To know that he is not a ghost, but he is alive and he is with us. It is to have faith, to know and trust that the gracious power of our Savior is exercised for us.

to know and trust that the guarding prayers of our mediator surround us at all times. To hear and believe when he says to us, take heart, take courage, be courageous, do not be afraid.

What difficulty that we face could ever stand against our Savior? May God grant to each one of us that courage that we find only in Christ.

Amen. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we thank you that we have such a Savior.

We pray that again and again that we might be renewed in our believing. We confess it is so easy for us, O Lord, to be overwhelmed by the things of this world.

[32 : 52] By very real and legitimate fears and struggles and to take our eyes off of the Savior so that we do not hear his gracious word. But, O Lord, we ask that word would ring in our hearts and minds that he is and that he is for us who are his people.

He is the mighty one whose kingdom cannot be toppled. By your spirit, we ask that we may embrace and hold fast to that blessed hope of eternal life which you have given us in Christ.

We pray that you would fill us with that faith, O Lord, and from that faith let courage flow as we live for you. Hear us, for we pray all of this in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Would you please stand with me as we sing together our final psalm, Psalm 121.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[34 : 06] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Speaker 3, 0 Spinning Em bumpy wind This is Awakening ■■ In Mississippi in mi my shoe 23, 0 That it is fire Wow.

Devil Inim