

Take Courage, It Is I!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 November 2020

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Again with me this morning for a short while to Mark chapter 6 and verse 50. Mark chapter 6 and verse 50.

What our Lord says to his disciples, take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. There are really few verses so precious to the Christian as this verse.

This verse where Jesus having walked on the water to his troubled disciples says to them, take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.

Over the last few Sunday mornings I've shared with you some of the verses which were sent to me by Crosswalk under the heading. Ten verses about fear and anxiety to remind us that God is in control.

And so we've considered together Psalm 23 verse 4. Even when I walk to the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil for you are with me.

[1 : 09] Your rod and staff, they comfort me. And we thought through Psalm 94 verse 19. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.

And we began with the benefit of Isaiah 41 verse 10. Do not be afraid for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God.

I will strengthen you. I will uphold you. I will help you with my righteous right hand. Now today we want to conclude our survey in some of these verses that Crosswalk sent to me with Mark 6 verse 50.

The last of the list of 10. The words of Jesus. Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. In this unsettled COVID November, my aim has been to encourage you with the promises of the gospel.

Those promises all being yes and faithful in Christ Jesus. My aim is to cap it all off by this wonderful verse from the mouth of our Lord.

[2 : 17] God is in control. Take heart. Do not be afraid.

For even in the storm, Jesus is walking on the water to you. I want us to consider three things this morning from the text. Jesus in the storm.

Jesus in the center. And Jesus in the spine. As I say, my aim for all of us this morning is to hear the voice of God in Scripture.

Inviting you to find gospel composure in the Jesus who speaks into your heart this morning. And says, take heart. It is I.

Do not be afraid. First of all then, Jesus and the storm. Jesus and the storm. I can't really say that I'm addicted to it.

[3 : 18] But many people love the reality TV show, The Deadliest Catch. Following Alaskan fishermen catching crabs in the Bering Sea.

I'm told that one of the reasons people love The Deadliest Catch is because it makes them feel warm, safe and snug in their own homes. While they're watching these strong men in fishing trawlers battling against gigantic waves in a freezing cold sea.

Now, when we think of the Middle East, we tend to think about deserts, pyramids and blistering heat. Let me tell you, I was brought up on the east coast of Cyprus.

Roughly 150 miles or so from the Sea of Galilee, where the events of Mark 6 are located. And in Cyprus, the winter could be wild, cold and very stormy.

As a teenager, I remember thunderstorms, which didn't just shake our house, but pull pictures off the wall. And plates crashed to the floor.

[4 : 33] And the rain was painful when it hit you. And the hailstones were so big, they dented cars. What makes the weather around the Sea of Galilee even worse is that it's located in a great geographic depression.

It is actually below sea level. And the wind would swirl around that sea in a cyclonic type pattern and whip up the sea to dangerous levels.

But then, you know the disciples of Jesus were kind of used to that kind of sea. They'd all grown up there. Most of them were fishermen. They'd seen rough nights on the sea before.

This night was no different. From nowhere, a storm blew up as they were sailing from one side to the other side of the lake. We read in verse 48, They were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.

The original text behind verse 48 is quite difficult to translate, but includes the words, Driven and tortuous. I think they get the general idea.

[5 : 42] These disciples were experienced sailors, but they were really struggling. A journey which should have taken them barely a couple of hours was taking them forever.

And Jesus came to them in the fourth watch of the night, between three o'clock and six o'clock in the morning. So they've been struggling against this wind all night, rowing feverishly and bailing out the water even faster.

They were caught in a storm, They were caught in a storm, none of their own making, and they were struggling. After all, what can you do if you're out on a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and the wind is against you?

Flap your hands, flap your hands, hoping the wind direction will change? But that's exactly the way it is for many Christians who struggle with fear and anxiety, especially over these strange COVID-filled months.

The weather during the first lockdown may have been the best in living memory. It really was. But the news was grim.

[6 : 56] For many of us, one day merged into the next, separated only by a couple of hours of restless tossing and turning in bed. We were left with our only links to the outside world being the television and the internet, both of which were entirely fixated with COVID fear.

We had nowhere to turn to get any relief. It wasn't a storm of our own making. And though the weather outside was fine and many of us got suntans, the word tortuous and driven described well how many of us felt on the inside.

Some of you might wonder why during that initial lockdown, I did not preach directly on the topic of coronavirus. You may have been critical of me.

There were many reasons. It was a conscious decision. There were many reasons, but one of them was this. All you heard from Monday to Saturday was COVID, COVID, COVID.

And I wanted you to hear something different on Sunday. To have your minds taken off that storm for just a little while and get some perspective on the Jesus whose blessedness means that he is no longer subject to the vagaries of fear and anxiety.

[8 : 24] Here in Jesus is the rock to which we may anchor our troubled souls in the storms. When nothing else makes sense to us, he does.

He sympathizes with us. He sympathizes with us. And he walks in the water to us. Last week, as we thought through Psalm 23, verse 4 together, we noticed with amazement that it was in the valley of the shadow of death that David felt the presence of God most keenly.

But the greatest paradox of faith is that the God who is light and draws close to us when we're in the shadow of death.

That if there was one person you would not expect to find in the valley of the shadow of death, it would be the God who is enthroned in indescribable glory, an unspeakable light.

That's where he is in the valley of the shadow of death with us. And this week we note with amazement that it was on the stormy sea that the disciples experienced the glory of Jesus in a way they had not before.

[9 : 44] See here the great paradox of our faith once more. But the Son of God, who from eternity has dwelt in the infinite blessedness of heaven's throne and in his Father's serene embrace, draws close to us when we're making tortuous headway in a terrifying storm.

Well, I think I've spoken enough about the storm because focusing on our fear and anxiety isn't always helpful. It can make these things worse. We could describe the storm in detail.

We could point to the different ways in which COVID pandemic has tortured us. But what at the end of the day will that achieve other than to scare us and to drive us into a deeper maelstrom?

Looking out at the storm and looking in at how we feel, it's not always helpful. What we really need to do now in our sermon and in our lives, if we want to be assured that God is in control, is to look up at Jesus who walks on the water to us.

We need courage and heart and boldness. And we'll find it only in Jesus. Jesus in the storm.

[11 : 07] But then Jesus in the center, secondly. Jesus in the center. The disciples weren't so terrified by the storm. They'd seen storms like this before and they'd sailed in storms like this before.

Rather, they were terrified when they saw Jesus walking in the water toward them. They were, after all, superstitious men. They thought they were seeing a ghost.

We read in verse 49 and 50, when they saw him walking in the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. The glory of Jesus is greater than the power of the storm.

The goodness of Jesus exceeds the malevolence of the storm. If only we knew how good and glorious God really is, the fear of God would overcome and eclipse our fear of the storm.

But look at Jesus, who immediately said to them, Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid. You see three clauses in that reply.

[12 : 17] The first, take heart. The second, it is I. The third, do not be afraid. Look at the text with me. Clause 1 and clause 3 are set in an imperative voice.

They are commands from Jesus, but clause 2 is set in an altogether different voice. My wife's engagement ring consists of three stones in a line.

The central stone is a diamond, and it sparkles in the light. To the right of it and to the left of it are sapphires. The light, as it passes through these sapphires and strikes the central diamond, refracts into a thousand different tones, each one brighter than the one before.

The sapphires are positioned exactly where they are to bring out the beauty of the central diamond. And these two commands, take heart and do not be afraid, are positioned exactly where they are to bring out the beauty of that central statement, it is I.

Like two great floodlights pointing inward, they illuminate the it is I of Jesus. And like an even greater floodlight pointing outward, the it is I statement of Jesus gives depth and reason for the disciples to take heart and not to fear.

[13 : 40] But it is Jesus, the it is I, who is in the center. And it's his walking on the water to his disciples, which gives them courage and helps them overcome their fears.

And so in the first instance, I want to point to how if we want to take heart and if we want to overcome our fears and anxieties, we need to make sure that Jesus is in the center.

Figuratively speaking, we all wear spectacles. It's just a question of what spectacles we choose to wear. However, the fearful and anxious Christian, and I speak very much from experience here, often wears the spectacles of this world's storms and through them sees the power and the glory of Jesus.

But the courageous and self-controlled Christian, and I speak from very limited experience here, regrettably, always wears the spectacles of Jesus' power and glory and through them sees the world's storms.

Mark 6, verse 50 is calling upon us to wear the latter type of spectacles, those of Jesus' power and glory through which we view the storms in their proper perspective.

[15 : 08] Let's remember the words of that hymn that we've sung since we were children, and I'd love to sing them. I've changed them slightly. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in his wonderful face, and the storms of life will go strangely calm in the light of his glory and grace. The alternative to that is unthinkable, but it's something we all do.

Turn your eyes to the storm. Look into the teeth of the gale, and the glory of Jesus will go strangely dim, and your spirit will darken and fail.

Jesus must be in the center lest we lose our minds and start flapping our arms about trying to make progress against a tortuous headwind. So let's ask ourselves an honest, rational question, question to which I'm sure we all know the answer.

Who has the greater power? Jesus or the storm? If only we ever concentrate on the storm, the answer will be the storm.

[16 : 24] But if we put Jesus at the center, which is what, as Christians, we're called to do, the answer will be Jesus.

Let me remind you of that twisted verse. Turn your eyes to the storm. Look into the teeth of the gale, and the glory of Jesus will grow strangely dim, and your spirit will darken and fail.

And then the proper version. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full at his wonderful face. The storms of life will go strangely calm in the light of his glory and grace.

Jesus, you see, he is speaking comfort into our traumatized hearts today, and he says, it is I. But there's so much more here in this central diamond.

These three short English words, it is I, translate two Greek words, words which should resonate with anyone who has any knowledge of the storyline of the Bible. The Greek words, ego, amy.

[17 : 37] Literally, I am. Ego, amy. This is the very name of God. The name God revealed to Moses all those thousands of years before on top of Mount Sinai.

Yahweh, I am who I am. Who is this walking in the water, coming close to his disciples, and calling out these words of comfort?

It is God himself, the God of Eden, and of Sinai, of Exodus, and the temple, the God of Abraham, and the God of David, the God who time and time again has assured his people, I've loved you always, and I always will.

The God who created the land and the seas, the mountains and the valleys, God who is awesome in his holiness and his purity and his beauty, the God who divided the Red Sea so that his people could walk across on dry ground to safety, and here he now is walking on that stormy water to rescue and deliver his people from the storm.

It's become somewhat of a catchphrase for me in recent months, but if anything fits, it's this. This is simply marvelous.

[19 : 04] don't you know that God himself in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, walks to you in the storm, whatever that storm may be.

Don't you know that this is how much he cares for you? That he won't stay on that mountain watching while you're struggling and are being tortured by the headwind, but he walks on the water to be with you.

In this unsettled COVID November with the dark nights drawing in, we have the brightest of all illuminations in this text before us. The light of the world draws close to us in our darkness and assures us of his presence.

It is I. Who is that I? I, it is God. The same God who said, nothing shall separate you from the love I have for you in Christ Jesus.

Not the wind, not the storm, not the waves, not the coronavirus, not your fears, not your anxieties.

[20 : 22] Nothing. Even now, can you see him walking on the water? To be with you. Jesus in the center.

And then lastly from this text, Jesus in the spine. Jesus in the spine. Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.

Like my wife's engagement ring, the central stone is a sparkling diamond, but it's bordered by two sapphires. The diamond being, it is I, Jesus in the center.

But the two sapphires being the two consequences or implications of Jesus being with us. Take heart. Do not be afraid.

His being with us in the center of our lives gives us a spine to deal with whatever storms may come our way.

[21 : 22] storm of the fear and anxiety brought on or increased by this COVID pandemic. Now, I want to deal with only the first of these sapphires because I think we've looked enough at the second.

Jesus command to his weary disciples, his exhausted and fearful disciples, take heart. The Greek word sitting behind this, tharsity, can be variously translated as cheer up, take courage, or perhaps even be hopeful.

The presence of Jesus puts a spine into your back. It gives you courage so that you can keep going even though the wind should be against you and the rain should continue to fall and the hillstone should dent your car.

The word is used in a variety of contexts throughout Scripture but to cast some light on its use here in chapter 6 verse 50 of Mark and the courage we can expect Jesus to give us by his presence with us, I want us to consider one other way in which Jesus being with us can give us courage, cheer, and hope.

Back in Exodus chapter 14, God's people are in a dangerous and anxious situation. Having been miraculously rescued from their slavery in Egypt, they are now making their way to the promised land of Canaan but had met an insurmountable obstacle, the Red Sea.

[23 : 01] How were they going to cross the Red Sea? To make matters worse, the Pharaoh of Egypt had changed his mind about his slave nation and decided to send his army after them.

So before them, the people of God had the vastness and the impossibility of the Red Sea and behind them, the people of God had the ferocity and the fierceness of the Egyptian army.

No wonder they shook in their sandals. There was no way out for them and Jewish mothers must have held their infants close in anxiety and fear and worry.

It was at this very point, according to Exodus 14, verse 13, that Moses, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, that same God who speaks here, said to his people, fear not, stand firm and see the salvation, the Lord your God will work for you.

It's translated in Exodus 14, 13 as fear not, but the Greek word tharsity, the same word used here in Mark 6, 50 is there also.

[24 : 19] Why should the people of God take heart when they're caught between a Pharaoh and the deep blue sea? Because God's going to do something amazing for them. God's going to divide the Red Sea to allow his people to pass through on dry land and at the same time he'll destroy the pursuing Egyptian army in a way none of them could ever have imagined, foreseen or foretold, God is going to save his people.

In 1953, an American fighter pilot named James Lovell was trying to find an aircraft carrier on which to land. His plane had been shot up and he had lost all navigational capabilities.

He didn't know where he was or how high up in the air he was. He was running out of fuel and facing the prospect of ditching in the sea and drowning. But then at the very last moment, as he looked down from his cockpit at night, Lovell saw a luminescent line of phytoplankton on the surface of the sea, a line which had been stirred up by the massive propellers of a United States aircraft carrier.

He just simply followed that luminous line back to the carrier and landed safely. Seventeen years later, same James Lovell was this time an astronaut whose ship had malfunctioned on its way to the moon.

It lacked the capability of returning to the earth. Apollo 13 was only a quarter of the way to the moon when it lost maneuverability.

[26 : 09] Again, he and his crew were stranded with nothing but the emptiness of space, their doom. But then, just when it seemed like all was lost, Houston Mission Control worked out a way to return them to earth using the slingshot effect from the moon.

Lovell, who's played in that movie, Apollo 13, by that wonderful actor, Tom Hanks, remarking on the amazing things that happened to him in life to save from being stranded in the sea of Japan and then from being lost in space, says, you just never know what's going to happen to get you home.

You just never know what's going to happen to get you home. Line of phytoplankton. Slingshot effect from the moon. Now, I don't know if Jim Lovell is a believer or not, but this I do know.

The use of this verb, tharsity, take heart, in the Bible has the same sense. you just never know what your heavenly father is going to do to get you home.

You just never know what your heavenly father is going to do to get you home. He's going to do something. If it's rescuing you from the storm, if it's rescuing you in the storm, or even giving you the wherewithal to keep going, take heart, stand firm, and see the salvation the Lord your God will work for you this day.

[27 : 40] He's going to do something. He will not, He cannot abandon His precious children tortured by the storm to their fear and to their anxiety.

The cross of His Son, Jesus, means way too much for Him and way too much for them for Him ever to do that. Jesus in the storm, Jesus in the center, Jesus in the spine.

Are you flagging in a storm of anxiety and fear at present, obsessing about everything and settled about nothing? Listen again to the words of the great I Am.

He walks in the waters to you. Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid.

Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

[29 : 05] Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.