

Marks of a True Disciple

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 6:16-21
Preached on: Sunday, May 11, 2014

Will you take your Bibles and turn to John's gospel, John 6, as we continue to examine this great, great letter of good news. This morning I wish to speak to you about the topic of marks of a true disciple.

Before I read the text which will begin in verse 16 and go through verse 21, I wish to remind you that according to a 2012 statistic, the United States is 73% Christian, 73% of the United States identify themselves as Christian and that is down from 86% in 1990 and it's continuing to go down. In fact, I understand that about 2.1 billion people in the world consider themselves to be Christian. The United States has the largest Christian population in all of the world of 247 million people. Of course, the definition of what is a Christian is really the issue. The Lord Jesus reminds us, for example, in Matthew 7 that not everyone who calls him Lord will enter the kingdom. He reminds us there that there is a narrow gate that one must squeeze through to enter the kingdom. It is a gate of self-denial and repentance; a gate that requires an understanding of the truth; one that requires a willingness to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, to submit to his will and to his word. Unfortunately, as we look around the world today, we see many people who call themselves Christian but they know nothing of the narrow gate. They have entered in through the wide gate that Jesus says will lead to destruction.

So, today we want to examine this issue of marks of a true disciple. We've looked at this from a variety of different angles over the years and the text that we have before us helps us see just a little bit different perspective that I think will be a ministry to each of us here this morning. Let me read the text to you. John 6, beginning in verse 16,

“16 Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, 17 and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. 19 Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. 20 But He said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' 21 They were willing therefore to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.”

As we continue to examine the amazing sequence of events, both during and immediately after Jesus fed approximately 20,000 very zealous disciples ready to crown him king, we suddenly witness an unexpected and fascinating turn in the story. It's a bit of a pivot here, one that is filled with spiritual truths that we do not want to miss. Here we have a story

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that is symbol-laden, it is pregnant with meaning and I pray that you've prepared your heart to receive them this morning.

Let me bring you back up to speed as to where we're at here in this story: Jesus and his disciples are physically exhausted after a very intense season of ministry and they are also deeply saddened by the news of John the Baptist's death and the macabre presentation of his head on a platter at the request of two evil, immoral women. So, Jesus says to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest for a while." So, they board a small sailing/rowing vessel and they travel from Tiberias, which is on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, to a remote region on the western side that is today known as the Golan Heights; it would have been about a 5-6 mile trip. But the crowds watched them go, the crowds are fascinated with Jesus and the fastest ones in the crowd run around the north end of the lake which would have been about 8-9 miles where they meet Jesus and the disciples as they get off of their little boat and the rest of the masses are coming along at their own pace. Mark tells us in Mark 6:34, "And when he went ashore, he saw a great multitude." By the way, it was a great multitude even if it was just a few thousand that had made it but ultimately it will be about 15-20,000, maybe even more. Mark goes on to say, "and he," referring to Jesus, "felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd and he began to teach them many things." Eventually, they all arrive and Luke tells us that Jesus continues speaking to them about the kingdom of God. This is a message that they did not want but one they desperately needed. They didn't want a sermon, they wanted more miracles, they wanted a king to free them from Rome. They wanted physical, not spiritual blessings. They were convinced that they were okay spiritually which is the damning lie that flows from the poison well of every human heart. "We want a king that will make us happy because we are already holy. After all, we're the sons of Abraham. We keep the law. We're heirs of promise."

So, the vast majority of the crowd are nothing more than curious thrill-seekers in love with the sensational. Many of them are political activists looking for a king to lead them to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with white-hot nationalistic zealous fervor. But they didn't understand that the kingdom that Jesus described would not triumph by the sword but rather, by his rising from the dead. He must first be the Passover lamb before he could ascend to the throne as David's greater son. But Jesus understood their misguided enthusiasm; he knew all of this. Which, by the way, continues to animate seekers to this very day who foolishly believe the lies of prosperity predators that fill pulpits all across the globe. So, Jesus performs this astonishing miracle where he creates food right before their very eyes, not for the purpose of impressing them further though doubtless it did, but as a sign with far deeper meaning, a sign that signified something unimaginably more glorious, a sign they did not grasp: that he was the Son of God that had come to save them from their sin, that he was the bread of life, the true bread from heaven that offers spiritual and eternal life to all who would eat of him.

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Now, as a footnote, I want you to remember that John is recording this now about 50 years after all of this has happened, 50 years after Jesus' ministry. He wrote this gospel somewhere between 80-90 AD. So, he could look back now with 20/20 vision over history and see the tragic consequences of misguided enthusiasm for Jesus and ultimately, unbelief. The same Jesus they wanted to make their king became the one that they despised and rejected and crucified. This is the same Jesus who would eventually rise from the dead and ascend back to heaven. He saw all of that. This is the one who became the head of that new mystical organism, the church. John would have witnessed the growth of the early church. He would have witnessed the siege and the sacking of Jerusalem in AD 70 that Jesus had predicted. He saw the tragic destruction of the Second Temple. No doubt he mourned the slaughter of 1.1 million of his countrymen that were killed during that terrible atrocity. No doubt he had many of his friends, perhaps his family, who were part of the 97,000 who were captured and enslaved. Bottom line, dear friends: John can look back at what he witnessed and what he witnessed was the wrath of God poured out upon unbelieving Israel. Which, by the way, is a preview of an infinitely greater judgment that will come upon Israel and the world in the pre-kingdom judgments that he describes in great detail in the book of Revelation. So, with this in his heart and his mind, he can look back with this unassailable passion and write his gospel. Why? So that people may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, they might have life in his name.

With this background, let's go back to the Golan Heights. It's getting dark. There is no hotel; there is no place to eat. The disciples are exhausted. Jesus teaches and then he miraculously feeds the 20,000+ people. Think about it: Jesus has them eating out of the palms of his hands literally. This is every televangelist's dream. This is every seeker-sensitive pastor's dream. Every religious entrepreneur that fills a pulpit would crave this kind of fervor, this size of a crowd. But what does Jesus do? Does he give them more of what they want? Or does he give them what they need? Is his purpose to make them happy or to make them holy? Well, he chooses the latter and in so doing, he ends up offending almost all of them and they forsake him and as we examine what happens next, we are going to see a stark contrast between the true disciple and the false disciple. And I pray that these characteristics will encourage and edify those of you that truly know Christ and expose those of you who do not that you might repent and embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. So what happens next really sets the stage of Jesus' discourse on the bread of life, a sermon that will ultimately describe the high cost but infinite value of following Jesus and as we will see vividly, portray the difference between the true and the false.

So, let's look at this issue of the marks of a true disciple. Beginning in verse 15, "So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him

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king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.” Jesus knew the importance of communing with his Father, especially when his soul was troubled. Was not the crowd's zeal to make him king similar to that temptation that he experienced in the wilderness when Satan came to him? Was not his physical body, once again, aching with exhaustion? Moreover, is he not deeply concerned about the 12 of whom Mark records in 6:52, “They had not gained any insight from the incidence of the loaves but their heart was hardened.”

Give all of this, Jesus ascends further up onto the mountain to be alone with his Father, a pattern we would all do well to emulate. Like the Old Testament priests who would go before the Lord in solitary intercession on behalf of the people, the Lord Jesus goes alone in the darkness to attend to his high priestly role of intercession. A ministry, by the way, he continues in heaven on our behalf this very day. Notice, verse 16, “Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum.” Folks, this is curious: what's going on here? Why is Jesus doing this? Matthew adds more light on this in 14:22, it says, “And immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side while he sent the multitudes away.” And Mark says in 6:45, “He made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side to Bethsaida, while he himself was sending the multitudes away.” The verb translated “he made” literally means “to compel” or “to force” someone to do something they do not want to do. What is that? We will see in a moment. Also according to Mark, their initial destination was just up the shore, maybe a couple of miles to Bethsaida where they were evidently supposed to meet up with Jesus and then proceed from there across to Capernaum on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee.

But all of this must have been terribly confusing to the disciples who just finished witnessing and being a part of this created miracle. No doubt they were also caught up in the same misguided enthusiasm of the crowd. No doubt they're saying, “Look what our Messiah can do! Isn't this incredible? The long-awaited earthly kingdom has come. Let's go to Jerusalem. Let's bring Rome to her knees because of Jesus. All of our dreams have finally come true!” You see, for the crowd and even at some level the disciples, following Jesus was all about fulfilled selfish desires, seeking personal gain, experiencing material blessing. In fact, even up until Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples are fighting amongst each other to determine who's going to be first in the kingdom. Ah, like us, they all had a lot to learn. Instead of falling down before him in reverent worship, in absolute obedience to his Lordship, they are filled with self-will and what Jesus can do for them to somehow meet their physical needs.

So, naturally they would be thinking to themselves, “What? Get in the boat? Are you kidding me? Send the crowds away? Head to Bethsaida and then to Capernaum without you? It doesn't make any sense.” Now, you must also understand that most of these men were fishermen. They were very familiar with the Sea of Galilee, especially at night this

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time of year. The wind is beginning to pick up a bit. We must understand the geography here: the Sea of Galilee is 700 feet below sea level and if you go there, you will see that the mountains rise 2,000 feet above sea level and so what happens is that the cool air will come in, many times in the evening, and it will swoop down the mountainsides from the west and meet the warm air on the surface of the water which will then replace the warm air and cause the sea to become exceedingly rough very, very quickly. Suddenly, the sea can become violent and treacherous. Well, they knew that so they knew this could be a very dangerous trip and then add to that, they're already exhausted. So, don't you know they were thinking in their mind, "You know, this doesn't make any sense. Why lose all of this momentum? I mean, Jesus, why can't we just spend the night here with you and all the crowds and in the morning you can make breakfast for us and let's go to Rome? Let's get on with it. Jesus, why put us in harm's way? You know the dangers here." Don't you know they would have said maybe amongst themselves, "Why doesn't he explain to us why he's doing all this? This just isn't right. This is not what we expected. Plus, we don't want to be separated from our blessed Lord. What is he up to?"

All of this, I believe, would have gone through their mind and it's for this reason Jesus had to make them, make them get in the boat and they did. They did. They obeyed. Beloved, the first mark of a true disciple is this: he obeys even when it doesn't fit his agenda. He obeys even when it doesn't fit his agenda. You know, like all of us, the disciples are struggling with what's going on. We all tend to have our own agenda, how things ought to work in our life to make us happy, to make life work, to fulfill our dreams but isn't it true that often our agenda isn't quite consistent with God's agenda? So, the question is: what will you do? I mean, let's face it, life's tough, isn't it? "Sorrows like sea billows roll," we sing. We sing that because we experience that. Many times we are frustrated and confused and weary and angry and we get depressed and it's at that point, dear friends, that we have to ask the question: will I trust the Lord, will I be obedient to those things that I know he has asked me to do or will I ignore him and go my own way?

I've seen this countless times, here's how it works, it's a bit of a progression: a believer's plans aren't coming together; their purposes are not seeming to come to fruition so the first thing they tend to do – I shouldn't say "they," I should add myself there – the thing we tend to do is to throw a pity party, get all self-absorbed. We find the largest victim's badge we can possibly find and we put it on where everybody can see it and we shine it up. We whine and we pout and we withdraw and then we move to the second stage which is: the blame game. We look to blame someone: maybe it's God, maybe it's other people. We've got to blame someone for our misfortune, for our frustration. It's so much easier to look at others than to look at ourselves and then our blame turns to anger. We get angry with God; we get angry with others. Then the anger turns to disobedience. "Count it all joy in trials" – that's out. "Rejoicing in all things" – that's out. "Being content in whatever circumstance you find yourself" – that's out. Private prayer, private worship – that's out.

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Serving others for the glory of Christ – no, that's out. Fulfilling the one and others of Scripture – no, out. Faithful attendance and being part of your church family – out. Pursuing the things that make for peace and the building up of one another – out. Seeking wise counsel – out. Walking by the Spirit so I will not carry out the desires – that's out. An appetite for the word of God – out. And on and on and on it goes.

Then, folks, here's what happens: although we have at that point grieved and quenched the Holy Spirit so egregiously, we wonder why we feel as though God has abandoned us, why our church family has forsaken us and we blame everyone but ourselves in an effort to somehow justify our attitudes and action. Then we look for every opportunity to solicit the sympathy of others so they can join in with our protest. I've been in ministry most of my adult life and I've seen that pattern enacted literally thousands of times. Let me be clear, beloved: this betrays not only our deficient faith, it betrays our pride, self-deceit, discontent, ingratitude, revenge. My friend, if this is your heart attitude, let me tell you what's going to happen: you will soon hate anyone that doesn't join in your march and God will chasten you. Instead of killing your lusts and starving your flesh, you'll seek to satisfy it. Instead of perfecting holiness in the fear of God, instead of growing in grace every day, instead of renewing your mind, your inward man day-by-day, you'll neglect those things. You will justify your wickedness and it will gain victory over your life. And when you look at the word of God, you will see that it will break the bones of your soul; it will make you weak and sick and ready to die. Your sin will overtake you in such a way as that you'll not even be able to look up, the Psalmist tells us, and your heart will be ready to fail and then you will become so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin that you will forfeit earthly blessing and heavenly reward. Oh, child of God, pray for the Holy Spirit to help you see your sin that you will kill it for without him, you will not prevail.

But regardless of the temptation, regardless of the difficulty of life – sometimes, by the way, it's because of something we have done; we may not want to see it but we're reaping what we've sown. But other times, it's just living in a fallen world and we can't fully explain what God is up to. But regardless of the storm, learn to obey God even when it doesn't fit your agenda. He does not owe you an explanation and you owe him a debt you can never repay. And often, as in the case of the bewildered, exhausted but obedient disciples who manned that boat in the darkness you, like they, will understand it by and by. It's like that old gospel song,

“Farther along we'll know more about it.
Farther along we'll understand why;
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine,
We'll understand it all by and by.”

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Now, let's see what our loving Savior was up to in their life: unbeknown to them, by the way, verse 17, "and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them." Evidently, they had arrived at their original destination of Bethsaida. Up the coast just a little ways, they had waited for Jesus but then, disappointed and wanting to go ahead and get on home before the seas got any worse, they get back into the boat without him. Now, if you know the geography there, you could see that they would have wanted to hug the coastline just around the northern end to get over to Capernaum but notice what happens in verse 18, "The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing." Beloved, here the lesson of faith begins where you would expect it, in the darkness of night as the storm winds begin to howl, as the waves begin to break over the bow of the ship, as the disciples experience life at that moment apart from the ever-present Jesus. You know, we've all been there, haven't we? We've all been there. In the weakness of our faith, we think we're all alone; we think that the Lord is not watching and if he is, he's indifferent to our plight. Our flesh can cause us to believe all of these things. Sometimes bad doctrine will help you believe that. But as we will see, Jesus is not only watching this whole scenario, he is actually praying on their behalf and he has a plan and he has a purpose.

Now, Mark's gospel tells us that "the boat was in the midst of the sea and he," referring to Jesus, "was alone on the land." It goes on to tell us that he was "watching them straining at the oars." By the way, the term "straining" in the original language has to do with "being tormented," or "tortured" with fatigue. They are straining at the oars, Mark says, "for the wind was against them at about the fourth watch of the night." Folks, put yourself there in the boat. Imagine: you are exhausted; you are confused; you are cold; you are wet with that water spraying all over you; you might even be worried about those 12 baskets of leftovers that no doubt they had in the boat that they didn't want to lose. Worse yet: they're afraid they're going to die. What would it be like to go from euphoria to despair in a matter of hours?

According to what the gospels tell us, they left Jesus basically between 6-9 pm and then, according to Matthew and Mark, they are now battling these waves during the fourth watch which means it's between somewhere around 3 o'clock in the morning and 6 o'clock in the morning, that's the fourth watch. Matthew says, "the boat was already many stadia away from the land," that's about 3 ½ miles, "battered by the waves for the wind was contrary." So folks, they're now out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. I've been there, it's a big lake. But Jesus was not indifferent to their plight. In fact, he ordained it for their good, for his glory and though it's dark and he's miles away, his omniscient eye that never sleeps nor slumbers is watching everything that's going on. He's fully aware of their plight as he is yours right now today.

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Verse 19, “Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles,” let me pause here. The winds, again, have taken them now out into the middle of the sea far from the shore: they are helpless, they are overpowered by the storm; they are straining against the oars; they're having to go into the wind because that wind is coming over the mountains on the western side and they're going, basically, east or trying to. Beloved, don't miss the symbolism here: as we look at the word of God, we see that darkness is always a picture of this world that is ruled by Satan; a world bereft of spiritual life and spiritual light; a world in desperate need of Jesus who is the light of the world. A turbulent treacherous world of sin that deceives, that destroys and lures men into the outer darkness forever. A world that is always in opposition to believers. Do you ever feel like you're just always rowing into the wind? A world that tries our patience and tests our faith and fatigues and exhausts our bodies. Think what must have been going on in the minds of the disciples: their bodies are wracked with pain; they are fighting for their lives. But don't miss this: they never gave up. They were confused, they were exhausted. They never cursed Jesus for putting them in such a perilous situation. There is no record of them complaining or falling into that swamp of self-pity. They just kept on obeying what the Lord commanded them to do.

“Hey,” he said, “get in the boat and go to Capernaum and that's what we're going to do. We don't get it but we're going to do it.” They kept rowing, no doubt praying, trusting God in the time of their peril. Beloved, the second mark of a true disciple is this: he will persevere on the basis of God's character. He will persevere on the basis of God's character. Yes, life is hard, things don't go our way and many times we find ourselves in seas very similar to what we're seeing here. Deeply disturbing matters that bring us to our knees, that cause us to cry our eyes out in despair. And sometimes we can feel as though God has deserted us but it's at that point that we have a choice: we will either trust God and persevere in obedience rejoicing in his character knowing that he is a faithful, good, omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign God who will never leave us nor forsake us, who always has our best interest at heart, who is always working in us to conform us to the image of Christ or we will doubt God and desert him. We'll put our thumb in our mouth, so to speak, we'll get in a fetal position, crawl up on the couch and wallow in the mire of self-pity. But beloved, please understand: you must be confident that God's redemptive and sanctifying purposes are often concealed in calamity and suffering. And that's what we see going on here. In fact, perseverance is the opposite of self-pity which is our typical response.

The disciples in that boat could have easily fallen into that trap. They could have easily said, “Boy, this is great. Here we are disciples of Jesus, we've given up everything to follow him. We've done what he's asked and now look at us. We're exhausted. We're confused. We're stuck out here in the middle of the sea in a storm. It's dark. We're about to drown. Where has any of this gotten us? What benefit is there to following Christ?”

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Think of all that we've gone through and all we experience is suffering and persecution. John has lost his head. No one sees. No one cares. Not even God himself." Well, they could have said that but they didn't. Instead, even though their strength was almost gone, they persevered in humble obedience. Beloved, does this describe you? Or do you crave relief more than blessing? Remember, "It is God who forms light and creates darkness causing well-being and creating calamity," Isaiah 45:11. None of this slips up on God. God is always in it. And we must also remember that often he withholds the presence of his countenance to strengthen our faith. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the confidence of things not seen." They couldn't see Jesus but isn't it true that the darker the night, the more glorious the dawn?

What happens next is utterly astonishing. Verse 19, "Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened." That's an understatement. We would have all been frightened. I mean, the most intrepid sailor would have been terrified at this. This is not something that they had ever seen. Certainly, this was not something they expected. In fact, Matthew and Mark tell us that they cried out in fear, "It's a ghost!" But think about it, beloved. Oh, had they only been looking for Christ, they would not have been so surprised. Had the full weight of the truth that they had been in the presence of God, that the Incarnate Christ was their captain, they would have been anticipating some glorious deliverance, not knowing what it might be.

Though they had witnessed many miracles including the mass feeding the day before, they failed to comprehend the full meaning of what they were experiencing, of what they saw. Again, this is why Mark says that they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves but their heart was hardened. In other words, they failed to realize what many times we fail to realize: that we serve the most high God; that we are always in his presence; he is always watching; he is always working; he is the Creator of heaven and earth. They witnessed his creative powers but how easy it is for self-interest to blind us from these truths. Therefore, our fears begin to cloud our vision and so for this reason, they're not expecting deliverance, they're worried about death, broken dreams. As we are prone to do, they were focused on the struggle they could see rather than the Savior they could not see. Beloved, the third mark of a true disciple is this: he will be ever-vigilant to look for Christ in the storm. Very simple: a true disciple will be ever-vigilant to look for Christ in the storm.

Some of you today are going through difficult things, I know that. I pray for you often, meet with many of you. The question is: are you looking to Christ? Are you constantly focusing on his glory? Are you being obedient in the areas that you know to be obedient? Are you serving? Are you communing? Are you worshipping? Or have you become filled with self-will and self-pity and as a result, you have become sour and sullen? I believe

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that this experience was part of what motivated Peter to later write in 1 Peter 1:5 when he admonishes all of us to rejoice in our salvation that is “protected by the power of God through faith.” And he went on to write this: “And greatly rejoice even though now for a little while if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials that the proof of your faith, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” And I love what he says here, “And though you have not seen him you love him. And though you do not see him now,” if I can add a parenthesis here, “(like we didn't see him when we were in the boat), even though you do not see him now but believe in him, you've greatly rejoiced with joy inexpressible and full of glory obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.” Oh, child of God, don't miss this, this is so important: often when we are tempted to believe that all hope is gone, the Lord will appear to us unexpectedly and he will startle us with his presence and then we will realize that he was there all along.

The disciples, I'm sure, began to realize more and more that during this whole thing, he was watching them, he was praying for them. Even as he is now ever present in us, living to make intercession for us. I ask you, dear Christian, are you ever vigilant to look for Christ to appear unexpectedly and prove himself powerful on your behalf wherever you're at right now in your life? Is that true of you? And I would remind you that many times the Lord delays his mighty hand of deliverance until he is certain that the last vestige of self-sufficiency has been exhausted in you because he knows that it is only then when we come to the end of ourselves, will we reach out to his almighty and outstretched hand that was extended all along. Beloved, divine omnipotence is never rushed. It is never in a hurry. It is never threatened by any circumstance because it will always accomplish its purpose. I ask you this morning: do you believe that? Are you waiting on the Lord right now in the midst of your great difficulty? Are you trusting him? Are you looking for the Savior not knowing how he might reveal himself in your time of need or are you so focused on your struggle that you find yourself wallowing in self-pity? Do you realize the infinite power and promises of your God? Do you realize who it is that you really serve and who lives within you? Are you trusting him to work in ways that you could never imagine?

So, Jesus appears and they are terrified. Verse 20, “But He said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.'” How precious. How precious. Think about it: despite their weak faith, not withstanding the hardness of their heart, the Lord graciously comes to them. Aren't you thankful that he treats us that way, folks? Aren't you thankful for his tender mercies, his care for us? He sees our weaknesses but not only does he see them, he deliberately puts us in situations to expose them all the more so that we might see them so that he might bring us to the end of ourselves so that he can gloriously come to our aid and teach us what faith and endurance and perseverance is all about. I'm reminded of Psalm 103:10-11 where the Psalmist says, “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us

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according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.”

Let's get back in the boat for a moment: they see Jesus and suddenly their gaze is fixed upon the lover of their soul, suddenly his glory and grace consumes their heart and notice verse 21, “They were willing therefore to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.” Beloved, the fourth mark of a true disciple is this: when Christ appears, he responds with joy and receives him. When Christ appears – not if – but when Christ appears, he responds with joy and receives him. As we look at Scripture, we see that Christ never forces himself upon us but rather, he offers himself to us, he offers himself to be received by broken hearts, those in desperate need. Matthew tells us in Matthew 14, Peter was so excited he couldn't wait for Jesus to come any closer. Do you remember that great story? In verse 28 Peter said to him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” All of a sudden, his faith was strong, wasn't it? And Jesus said, “Come. And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'" Matthew and Mark indicate then that when Jesus got into the boat with Peter, the wind instantly stopped. Can you imagine that?

To be sure, only Jesus can calm a storm, right? Only Jesus can make order out of chaos. Beloved, it is God who controls the storms in your life. It is God who cares for you in the midst of that storm. It is God who delivers you from it. And it is only God that can calm it. What an incredible experience. What amazing lessons for us all. Actually, we have four miracles here: we've got Jesus and Peter walking on the water; you've got Jesus stopping the wind; and then Jesus instantly transporting them to the shore he originally intended. Beloved, remember when Jesus asks you to do something, he's got a reason for it. He's going to get you there, just be obedient. Perhaps in being instantly transported to the shore is an allusion to Psalm 107:29. There we read, “He caused the storm to be still, So that the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they were quiet, So He guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men!”

Beloved, these the marks of a true disciple: he obeys even when it doesn't fit his agenda; he will persevere on the basis of God's character; he will be ever-vigilant to look for Christ in the storm; and then when Christ appears, he will respond with joy and receive him. Oh, what a glorious Savior. Amen? What a glorious God we serve. I close with an expression of my heart that I put to poetry when I preached this particular text from Matthew's gospel in 2005. It goes like this,

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Marks of a True Disciple

By David Harrell

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“Life is filled with gale-force winds that cause the waves to roar,
And like the men of Galilee, we strain against the oar.
With billows high we cry aloud, 'Oh Lord, where have you gone?'
Then he whispers through the squall, 'I've been here all along.'

“Oh, we of little faith, why doubt? Why give our hearts to fear?
For when the tempest trials blow, tis then we must draw near.
For in the wind of every storm, a sovereign eye doth see,
The waning faith and broken hearts of those like you and me.

“And with his outstretched hand of love, he reaches down to save,
All who trust in him alone, for us his life he gave.
So when the tumults o'er us roll, let's thank him for the gale,
For in his love he caused the storm, twas he who set the sail.”

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for the glory of your grace, for your power. We thank you for sending us your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord Jesus, we worship you this morning. Spirit of God, help us to understand even more fully after we've examined this amazing passage of Scripture, that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, forever; that this same Jesus is our Lord, is our Savior. Lord, may we rest upon your power especially in the midst of the storm. May we be vigilant to look for you and may we be obedient come what may. And, Lord, if there be one here today that knows nothing of you, I pray that by the power of your grace you will bring such overwhelming conviction that today they will run to the foot of the cross and cry out for your mercy and experience the miracle of the new birth. Lord, we commit it all to you. Even so, Lord Jesus come quickly. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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