

Reaching Capernaum

by Raymond Golsworthy

The sermon explores the miracle of Christ walking on the sea and its spiritual significance, emphasizing the importance of knowing God's plan, self-emptying, and receiving Christ in all His glory.

Scripture: John 6:15

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Raymond Golsworthy preaches on the miracle of Christ walking on water to rescue His troubled disciples, emphasizing the importance of apprehending the purpose for which we were apprehended by Christ. The sermon delves into the spiritual significance of the disciples' journey to Capernaum, facing opposition and exhaustion, and ultimately experiencing a new revelation of Christ's mastery over all things. Golsworthy highlights the need for believers to actively commit to God's plan, endure spiritual battles, and eagerly receive the fullness of Christ to reach their spiritual destination.

Transcript

John 6:15-21

"Apprehending that for which we were apprehended." See Phil. 3:12

"Grasping the purpose for which Christ grasped me." J.B. Phillips

The miracle of Christ walking on the sea to rescue His troubled and toiling disciples is the fifth of the eight sign-miracles described in John's Gospel. It is interesting to note that John never used the word 'dunamis' (act of power) in his record; it is consistently 'semeion' (i. e. sign), something that signifies or illustrates something else. It has its own hidden meaning and is intended not only as factual history, but also for interpretation as also are the parables. It is good to go through John's eight miracles with that in mind and seek to find the corresponding significance in each case.

The miracle we now have in mind is a beautiful example of that. Christ and His disciples had had a demanding day, including feeding the five thousand, and at its close Christ Himself "went up into a mountain to pray" (John 6:15; Mark 6:46). He wanted to be alone with God during the night hours. He briefly told His disciples to make their own way home by ship i.e. toward Capernaum (John 6:17). They started off, but soon came the terrible and violent storm and the great anguish and torment of the distressed disciples. But, high on the mountain, Christ had evidently been watching the storm, so He came

down and walked over the waves to show Himself to them and to rescue them. It was then they "willingly received Him into the ship and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went" (John 6:21). They had apprehended that for which they had been apprehended; they had reached the goal!

We suggest that that phrase "apprehending that for which we are apprehended" (Phil. 3:12) provides us with the key to the inner significance of the miracle, and we shall try now to trace it through. We believe it can show us how we can reach the goal, how we can grasp the purpose for which Christ grasped us. This was something that Paul greatly wanted, and for which he was prepared to "count all things but loss" (Phil. 3:8).

Perhaps we can now suggest a succession of stages in the miracle itself and we will seek to note the spiritual counterpart in each case.

First, then, we note that when the disciples got into the boat they knew where they were going. The Lord had said, "Capernaum", and Capernaum it would be. They knew the planned destination, and they were actively committed to it. The Lord's plan was to be their plan.

The same, we believe, must be true of us. We, too, must know, and accept at least the rudiments of the Lord's plan for His people and for His church, and we must be committed to it: We must set sail in that direction. It is important to ask ourselves, 'Do we know what the Lord has in mind for His blood-bought people?' We obviously cannot know all, but we do need to have at least the broad outline, and to be committed to it actively. We must set sail in that direction.

How we thank God that He has revealed these plans and purposes in His own precious Word, as much as it is good for us to know of them at present. The question is whether we have searched the Scriptures to find out those purposes! Perhaps we could give a few examples of what the Scriptures say. Here they are. God has plans to make His people accurate reflections of His Son (Rom. 8:29), to make us sharers of Christ's authority even now (Matt. 16:19; 18:18), to make Christians His own place of rest (2 Cor. 6:16; Isa. 66:1,2) and to have us love Christ as He does (John 17:26; Rom. 5:5).

These are only a few examples, but sufficient, perhaps, to make us get into the boat and set out for Capernaum, whatever it may cost.

We can, of course, thank God that all these things are also the inheritance of Christians from the moment of new birth; they already have all in Christ. What we are thinking of here however, is the experiential enjoyment of them right now, to the extent to which that is possible and intended. All that, of course, will be progressive and it is that progression which we are now considering. The first step in that progression is to be aware of the intended destination (Capernaum) and to be committed to it. Thank God, the disciples straightway "entered into the ship and went over the sea toward Capernaum" (John 6:17).

The next thing we notice in our story is what we can call, the arising of a great storm, or the emerging of great antagonism. We read: "And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew" (verse 18). It is interesting that both Matthew and Mark tell us that the wind was contrary; it was in sharp opposition to them, something quite significant. We also read that the ship itself was positively tossed with the waves (Matt. 14:24); certainly a most frightening situation.

Turning immediately to the spiritual parallel, we are reminded of such verses as Ephesians 6:12, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers against wicked spirits (margin) in

high places". As for the great wind, Ephesians 2:2 also tells us that Satan is the prince of the power of the air; hence, no doubt, the storm and the awful opposition to the disciples.

The lesson for us here, then, must be very obvious. Anyone or any group that sets its heart on spiritual fullness will inevitably encounter satanic resistance and hellish rage. If we are quite content with mere beginnings we shall know little of this adversity. But, if our hearts are truly set on the divine purpose, the great wind will surely arise against us! And a contrary wind it surely will be; it will have nothing of the Divine plan. Our ship, too, will be tossed with the wind and we may even regret that we ever started such a voyage. How good, then, to have this pictorial warning from the Scriptures. In God's own love and wisdom, the deliverance may not be immediate! The Lord may have a few more lessons to teach us in the storm! He knows the way we take.

The next picture we have is of the disciples toiling and rowing, and what a toiling, what a rowing it must have been (Mark 6:48). Matthew tells us that the ship was tossed with the waves! The disciples were not strangers to the unique dangers on the Sea of Galilee (because of the topography of the district), so no doubt they again poured whatever strength they had into the battle. But all, it seems to no avail; they were totally spent!

It is interesting to note that the word translated 'toiling' in Mark 6:48 is the Greek word 'basanizo', a particularly pictorial word, related to the word 'basis' (foot), and here it would carry the idea of the disciples being drained to the feet, reaching rock bottom, nothing left, emptied out. Wrestling with those waves was certainly taking its toll!

The spiritual parallel to all this will be readily understood by Christians who are in the battle. The first reaction will be to pour all we have into the fight, and then to keep on doing so until we have gained the victory. That, however, is nature's way, and not God's way. We must know that He has very much to teach us before the deliverance comes. We must learn that we must be brought to our own 'zero' if we are to reach Capernaum. That is an unavoidable part of the way. How we should thank God for Jer. 29:11: "The Lord knows the thoughts that He thinks toward us, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give us an expected end. God, too, has our Capernaum in mind, but first there must be this self-emptying. Our crucifixion will lead on to resurrection. He knows the way we take (John 23:10).

It will help us now if we briefly recall the ground we have already covered. We have noted three main things about those disciples.

1. They knew the destination in view, and were actively committed to it.
2. They had encountered a tremendous opposition from the elements.
3. They had exhausted themselves in the battle, and were at 'zero'.

It is at that point, very significantly, that "they saw Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship, and they were afraid" (John 6:19). In those few words we now have what must constitute a section of its own. The wording in Matthew's Gospel is still more explicit. "The disciples saw Him walking on the sea, and they were troubled, saying it is a spirit; and they cried out for fear" (Matt. 14:26). We can truly say they were being given a new sight of Christ. It reminds us of the transfiguration, where we read, "His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:2). We suggest that it was probably in some similar form that the Lord appeared to His disciples on their way to Capernaum; shall we say, they

saw Him in His glory. Be that as it may, this new sight of Christ made them tremble, until they heard His familiar reassuring voice, "It is I; be not afraid" (John 6:19).

We believe that those disciples were, at that moment, being given a glimpse of Christ after the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:16). Till then they had only known Him after the flesh, veiled for a season in a mortal body; now a new sight of Christ was beginning to appear. That, we believe, is what we all need on our voyage to Capernaum.

Let us now note a few points about the Christ they were then seeing:

- 1) He was Master of what had been mastering them; the angry waves. Thank God, the same is true for us today.
- 2) He was Lord over that unseen enemy kingdom that was opposing them. He must have been walking quietly into that same contrary wind, but the prince of the power of the air had no hold on Him.
- 3) He was the light that shineth in the darkness! (John 1:5). He came over the sea in the darkness of the night (John 6:17). See also Psa. 139:12; John 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:6.
- 4) He was the eternal Son of God. He simply said to the disciples, "Be not afraid, I Am". See also Exod. 3:14; John 8:58.

And we should remember too, that this is the One who had gone up into the mountain to pray for them; prefiguring our great High Priest highly exalted and ever living to make intercession for us.

This, we say, is the great Christ who was revealed to those disciples on their way to Capernaum and Whom we need to see on our similar journey. If we are exhausted in rowing, this is what we need, a new seeing and knowing of Christ. It is not more zeal, or more dedication; it is more revelation. But this has to be asked for (Ezek. 36:37; Matt. 7:7) and sought for in the Scriptures. (See Psa. 119:18, 130). May the Lord help us to do that and may He shine in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6). We all need this new seeing of Christ.

The last verse in our story brings us to the fifth and final stage of this sign-miracle! We have been considering the need of a new seeing of Christ; now it is to be a new appropriating of the One we have seen. We read, right at the end, "They willingly received Him into the ship, and the ship was at the land whither they went" (John 6:21). They were at Capernaum; "they had apprehended that for which they had been apprehended" (Phil. 3:12). And all the glory was given to the Lord!

We believe that that step of willingly (eagerly) receiving the newly revealed Christ into our ship is all-important to us. Possibly it is years since we first received Him as Saviour, or as our Lord, but this is something more. Perhaps we have been brought to our zero, but here is the Divine replacement, the risen and ascended Lord, the great Conqueror in the spirit-world, God's new man in heaven, the Divine supply for all our need (Phil. 4:19). To receive Him as our All will be the accomplishing step.

It seems that some further remarkable miracle must have taken place once Christ boarded the ship, for we read that "immediately the ship was at the land whither they went". The details of that we do not know, but we do know that when Christ is truly all, we are experientially there!

And all the glory is His. But the revelation must be followed by appropriation of Him in all His glorious fullness. May the Lord help us.

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