

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 2 The Disciples Slow to Learn

Reading: Mark 6. 45-52

45 And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people.

46 And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.

47 And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.

48 And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

49 But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out:

50 For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

51 And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.

52 For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

Address

This is one of the well-known passages of the New Testament. Of course, on quite a number of occasions I have tried to speak from it to you. The Lord *constrained* them to get into the ship. It was clear leading. It could not have been clearer. Yet soon they were right in the midst of the storm. Did that mean they were wrong, or did it mean that they were right? He constrained them, and soon that dreadful storm that seemed to threaten their lives.

He went up into a mountain to pray. The Lord Jesus in the top of the mount; the ship in the midst of the sea. So it is with the church of God now. Christ gone up into heaven to intercede; we here on earth, sometimes tempest-tossed. "And He saw them." They could not see Him, but He saw them. Of course, it must have been more than natural sight. It must have been the exercise of His divine power. The little boat in the midst of the lake by itself being beaten and tempest tossed. "He saw them." We sometimes sing,

“Cheer up, ye travelling souls;
On Jesus’ aid rely;
He sees us when we see not Him,
And always hears our cry.”

“He saw them toiling in rowing: for the wind was contrary.” O these contrary winds! They are in the path of divine appointment. The Lord had constrained them. If the Lord constrains you, it will not save you from the contrary winds. It seems that they were not making any headway. When the Lord appeared to them, it would seem that they had been toiling in rowing on that lake for about eight or nine hours and they had only gone a mile or two. They were not making any headway at all. Some of you perhaps feel like that in the things of God because of your contrary winds. You are not making any headway, and then the wind blows you out of your course sometimes. I will tell you what they did not do and you will not do. They did not turn back with the wind behind them and go back to the shore. You will go on “toiling in rowing” even if you are not making any headway.

John puts it like this: “It was now dark, and Jesus was not come.” That is solemn. Some of us have known that. But He did come. He waited long, but He was not too late. He came to them in the fourth watch of the night. That would be between the hours of three and six in the morning, when the night was darkest, when they had waited long, when they had given up all hope. And He came right over that raging, stormy sea right where they were. And this is how He came: “Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.” Now that is the Lord’s word tonight for the afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted, that if the Lord has not yet come, and if it is now dark, He will come. And this is how He will come: “Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.” Now no doubt you have heard me say these things before. They bear repeating, don’t they? They are very precious. It is a precious portion, isn’t it? “When thou canst no deliverance see, yet still this Man thy Peace shall be.”

But the thing that has especially arrested me has been the comment that the Holy Ghost Himself gives at the end of the account. It is not what you and I would have expected. “They considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.” This is the Holy Ghost’s comment on the preceding verse, “the wind ceased.” A miracle took place. The Lord stilled the storm. The Lord brought them safely to land. “And they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.” I understand that in the original Greek these expressions are exceedingly strong, almost untranslatable. They were filled with

so much surprise, so much amazement. “They were sore amazed.” It was beyond measure. They wondered. It is very clear from the comment that it should not have been so. I often say that if your religion is real there will be wonder and amazement in it. Well, there will. But it seems this was beyond all bounds. They were surprised that the Lord had done this. They were surprised that He had remembered them. They were surprised that He had answered their prayers. They were surprised that He was able to do this. They were surprised that the wind and the sea should obey Him. This is the Holy Ghost’s comment: “They were sore amazed.” They should not have been.

“For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.” What is the Holy Ghost really saying? He is really saying this: that the people of God should learn from their experience, and it is a solemn thing if they do not. The disciples had just had an amazing experience. Just a few hours before, they had witnessed the Lord performing that amazing miracle in feeding that great multitude with the five loaves and the two fishes. Well, it was a clear evidence that He was the Son of God. It was a clear proof that He could do anything. He had clearly shown them that He could perform miracles. They should have known that the most impossible thing with Him was easy. It was an evidence that He always does supply His people’s needs. “Sooner all nature shall change, than one of God’s promises fail.

“They considered not the miracle of the loaves.” They had not understood it aright. They had not rightly discerned its significance. They had forgotten all about it. It did not seem to be of any real, lasting, spiritual profit to them at all. And these were the apostles! They were so slow to learn. “For their heart was hardened.” We often complain of hardness of heart, but this was hardness of heart in a different sense: not that people were callous and unfeeling, but rather that they were sluggish and sleepy.

There is some wonderful comfort here, yet a word of rebuke and warning: that when we come into a trial, may we not forget what the Lord has been, what He has done in time past, what He has done in His Word, what He has done in our lives. O may we not enter one trial as if we have never been brought safely through another, enter a trial as if we do not believe in the power and love and faithfulness of God, enter a trial as if the Lord had forgotten to be gracious. May it be this as we enter into our trials: to consider and remember what He has done in times past, to know that what He has been He still is, what He has done He will do again.

“His love in time past forbids me to think
He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.”

*This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Monday, 25th January, 1988*