

NCMI EQUIP South Africa 2013

Session 2



Getting to the Other Side

by Alan Parfitt

John 6: 16 - 21 (ESV)

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. 20 But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” 21 Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

When we look at this account and think of Tyrone's message of a fresh commissioning*, we understand that there's a fresh calling from God to “go” and in this account, Jesus told His disciples to go to the other side (also see Matthew 14: 22). If you've walked with the Lord for a while you'll notice there's a gap of water between where He says “go” and where He's told you to go to. But often that gap looks flat and calm when you set out but you soon discover that there are things you have to face. Fourteen years ago there was a sense of God saying to us as a family, “Go across to the other side.” As we've set out on what looked like nice flat water there's been many things to deal with.

Jesus knew that there would come a day when He wouldn't be going up a mountain to pray but He would ascend to heaven to pray. He knew that then they weren't going to just be sent across a section of water but into the nations of the world. So they had to learn some lessons while He was with them to equip them to face the things that were going to come across their path as they fulfilled the Great Commission.

I want to talk about this equipping. There are things between the "go" and getting there that need to be cemented in our hearts because there are harsh things we're going to encounter on the waters of this life, even though God Himself has sent us.

* See <http://ncmigauteng.co.za/a-fresh-commissioning/>

It's important to note that this miracle was not a public one. Unlike the feeding of the five thousand, which preceded this event, this was a private miracle that only the disciples witnessed. Jesus was equipping His disciples in this. God wants to teach us who love Him and want to serve Him with all our hearts that there are some things we need to learn to get to the place He has sent us. Let's look at these.

1. We will face challenges but Jesus is bigger

Though we set up in quiet waters, we need to realise that we will face challenges that are greater than us, even though we're doing what Jesus sent us to do. Sometimes we think that if we're obeying God and doing what He's called us to do, things will go well. But as these disciples set out and saw the waves and winds coming against them, they must have thought about those other more casual disciples on the banks of the shore and thought to themselves, "Lord, we are those few who have radically obeyed you. But we're the ones in trouble." Those that said, "Lord we will go as you have sent us" were the ones in the stew.

This needs to sit deeply within our hearts: While we go and obey God it's not unusual that we may face things that many others don't. A lot of what's taught in the name of the Gospel says you really know when you're obeying when everything is going smoothly and you're prospering. But we need to have a theology which states that though we're setting out to do what Jesus has sent us to do, we can expect to face troubles that are so huge that we might fear even of surviving.

Asaph was one of the Psalm writers and a leader in David's Levitical choirs. When you read Psalm 73, which he wrote during Solomon's reign, you see that he's a man who's seeking to keep worship pure and serve God with all of his heart. But yet he also writes words like this:

Psalm 73

- 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.
- 3 For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- 4 For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
- 5 They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
- 13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
- 14 For all the day long I have been stricken

and rebuked every morning.

In our walk with God we're going to face these same issues and we need a theology that will carry us through. As hard as it is to learn, we must know that we will face circumstances that don't just trouble us lightly but threaten us. These waves in the passage of John above were not in any way little waves, they were waves that made them fear their boat was going to be destroyed. If it was the disciples and their boat versus the wind and the waves, they were going to lose. But we need a theology that understands that Jesus is bigger.

AW Tozer writes:

"To accept the call of Christ changes the returning sinner indeed, but it does not change the world. The wind still blows toward hell and the man who is walking in the opposite direction will have the wind in his face."

When Jesus came to them He was walking *on* the water, not in or through the water. When we consider what that means, we need to understand that Jesus didn't come to them as one that was affected by the circumstances, but one that ruled over the circumstances. This is how Jesus will come to us. In other words, *we are not victims*. Though the circumstances are greater than we can think we can manage, Jesus is greater than them, He walks on them. We're never out of His reach.

Eph 1:22,23 says,

"22 And he put *all* things under his feet and gave him as head over *all* things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

We might not get relief from our circumstances in the timeframe we hope for, but He has overcome the world! Sometimes our hope is relief from the trouble, not Jesus Himself, but this saving them out of their trouble isn't what the disciples saw initially – what they saw was Jesus walking on the water.

Our hope is not in the fact that Jesus is going to relieve us from circumstances, but in the fact that Jesus rules over them. We will not lose, we will get to the other side, no matter what the circumstances are and what's done to us. We need this in our theology to get to the other side, where God has called us.

2. Jesus is never late

You may have real confidence in Jesus being bigger than your circumstances, and that He's watching over us and interceding for us, but we also need a theology that says Jesus is never late.

We need this to steady our hearts.

In the account of this story in Matthew 14:25 it says Jesus came out to them on the lake in “the fourth watch.” I looked up what this “watch” meant and discovered that each “watch of the night” was made up of three hours. The first watch was from 6pm until 9pm and was called “evening.” The second watch was from 9pm to 12am and it was called “midnight”. The third watch lasted from 12am to 3am and was called “cockcrow”. Then the fourth watch was from 3am to 6am. This was the “morning”.

Jesus came to them in the fourth watch. This makes sense of Mark 13:35 which says, “Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning...”

Sometimes we might feel that Jesus is late. There might come a time when we ask Jesus, much like the disciples did on another occasion when they were in a storm on a boat, “Don't you care that we perish?” I don't know if that's ever marked your prayer life? There you're alone with the Lord, crying out, asking Him, “Don't you care?”

It's a reality that sometimes we get to that place where our circumstances seem dire and we're crying out to God and feel we can't go another step. In those times we need to turn to this account and be steadied by the truth that Jesus is never late.

Sometimes it might even seem to us that the Lord hasn't come in time and the situation is irreversible. That was the case with Lazarus (John 11). If you read it, you'll remember how Mary and Martha were so disturbed that the Lord had not come earlier and their brother had died. In John 11: 21, Martha goes out when she hears that Jesus is coming, and says to Him, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died." It seemed to them that Jesus was late.

I find it interesting that Mary stayed at home (vs 20). You might recall that Mary was the one who loved being in the presence of Jesus (Luke 10) but she stays at home while Martha goes out. I believe the reason why she stayed at home was because she said something in her heart that was akin to, “Lord, I love your presence and trusted you with my life. But where were you when I needed you?”

Sometimes you might have felt like that and said, "Lord, I've served you, I've obeyed you, I've set out when you said go, and when I needed you most, where were you?"

Psalm 46 says:

- 1 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
- 3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah
- 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.

God is never late. At times, however, His help comes when we think He's too late. But He isn't.

There are times when we've prayed and found that God has answered our prayers quickly. We love to give testimonies about these times and write books on how to get success in our prayer life and so on as we've mastered this thing of the first watch.

Sometimes we've prayed and there's been a bit of time before we've seen answers and we've had to learn a bit about pressing through. Now we know a bit about waiting on God. This is the second watch.

Sometimes we've gone through all that and persevered and pushed through and it's been quite tough but eventually the breakthrough has come. And we've learned that sometimes God comes in the third watch.

But then there's the fourth watch – the morning watch, which we see here in Psalm 46: "God will help her when morning dawns." There are a few things about this fourth watch that I believe are important. We need to have a theology that can cope with the fact that God sometimes answers in the fourth watch, not before. The fourth watch is when we've tried the quick solutions, the five easy steps, the shallow counsel of, "Just trust God my friend", and all the clichés and yet the wind is still against us and the boat isn't moving one inch. It's when you've heard all of Job's friends' counsel and you've gone through everything in your life that they said must be wrong and you've tested it and you've sorted it out and repented of your sins and everyone else's but still the boat hasn't moved one inch.

This is hard to say but sometimes it's a reality: in the fourth watch, even the joy of the Lord and the comfort of His presence may not be found in our experience. They (the disciples) were in the storm and Jesus was nowhere to be seen. The sense of His presence was nowhere to be found. In fact, in

Mark's Gospel where Jesus did come out, they saw Him actually walking by! In this fourth watch you've done everything and tried everything, the boat is sinking, and you look out and it seems like Jesus is walking by, on His way to help someone else on the other side!

Tozer calls this "The Ministry of the Night" and he describes it as follows: "[This] is the time some disciples go through [some disciples, not all] where they find it possible to live in all good conscience before God and men and still feel nothing of the peace and joy you hear talked about so much by immature Christians."

In the fourth watch you've done all you can to keep your boat pointed in the direction you know to be God's will. You don't sense His presence and the joy of the Lord that's your strength. All you know is: He told us to go this way, so let's keep rowing; we're not moving but keep rowing. There are no answers, there are no quick fixes.

What carries us in this watch is that Jesus is never late. He knows why He takes some of His disciples through the Ministry of the Night and not others. He knows that He'll come to us even when we feel it's too late.

3. We must listen

The disciples were rowing, the wind was against them, and Jesus came to them walking on water. I don't think they had ever thought that Jesus was going to help them that way! In fact, you can read in the other Gospel accounts that they thought Jesus was a ghost! This is why it's essential that when we're going to the other side we stay attentive to His voice. We are a people that listen. Even though we might be asking, "Lord where are you? We long for you," and we pray and don't see an answer, we must never get to that place where we block our ears off.

We need to listen to His voice because God will sometimes come in a way we don't recognise or expect. It's only when they heard His voice, the scriptures say, that the disciples were glad to take Him into the boat. Sometimes in the midst of the storm we tend to invite any help that comes along into the boat. Sometimes we're so desperate we may end up with a pirate in the boat! I'm sure we've all come across situations like that, especially when it comes to relationships.

But note what Jesus said to them: "It is I, do not be afraid." Now when you look at these words "it is I" and see how they are translated in the Greek in other parts of the same Gospel of John, you'll find that you could translate it as "I AM." So you could translate the Scripture – without twisting it at all – to Jesus saying to His disciples, "I AM, do not be afraid."

Jesus didn't come and say, "Don't worry, I'll sort out the storm, so don't be afraid, I'm going to fix everything." All He said was, "I AM, do not be afraid." Jesus doesn't want us to rely on Him fixing

all our troubles and driving away all our fears. Rather, He wants us to rely on who He is. Because He is the I AM, the eternal unchanging, unmoving solid rock. When He says “I AM” we're not afraid. We must hold onto this because our circumstances will not always change when we think they're going to. We need a theology that holds onto the fact that Jesus is my, "I AM"; my rock.

Jesus revealed this to them *in* the storm. Consider this: If Jesus had sat them down on a nice sunny day with a fish braai and said, "It is I, do not be afraid," it wouldn't have had the same effect! They would have taken notes and said, “great teaching!”

But see, Jesus wants to reveal who He is in the midst of the storm. He wants us to know Him there in the troubles, where He says, "I AM, do not be afraid." Sometimes our hope is in all the things Jesus is going to do for us. He's going to fix my life; bring back this thing I lost; sort this out – and our hope is in all of that. But if that's the case we can become so tossed and turned by the storms. But if our hope is in the “I AM”, it will steady us no matter what storm comes and whether the storm relents or not. It keeps us going.

4. Stay obedient

If there's one lesson to hold onto as a disciple it's this: When you're not seeing the results, make sure you're aiming in a direction you know Jesus said you should, as best you can, and stay obedient. Eventually, some way or another - maybe a way you don't expect - Christ will step in. Sometimes after three miles of rowing, and rowing, you get to the place where you're thinking of making another plan because it isn't working.

We need a theology where, despite the fact that we don't seem to be getting anywhere, we look at what Jesus told us to do – we look at the revelations He's given us; the prophetic words over our lives; and we gather these – and keep rowing in that direction.

Sometimes our motives for obedience needs to be tested. I wonder what Jesus was praying on that mountain while the disciples were out there? Maybe He prayed, “Father, help my disciples.” But maybe He also prayed, “Father, send wind!” We're not told. But if that's the bottom line of our theology is that obedience equals blessing, then there comes a point when we chuck out obedience. That theology will let us down when things get rough. Our theology needs to be deeper than that. Obedience is what we do because it's our life to obey Him – whether it brings blessing or not.

Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me." (John 4:34.) What we feed on every day is to do what our Father has called us to do. It's our food – our life. I do believe that obedience does result in blessing, but that's not the bottom line, because sometimes it doesn't seem like it's happening that way and we need a theology that can carry us through those storms.

5. His Word will accomplish what it was sent to do

In **John 6:21** it says,

“21 Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.”

We need to know that it's ultimately not our rowing that gets us to the other side, it's His word and His power that will do it.

There's something about Jesus' very words. When He speaks, things happen. He doesn't just give instruction and practical advice. His words are actually the power to accomplish. When He spoke, “Let there be light!” He wasn't just giving instructions to something else to do it. His Word carried the power to fulfil what He said. When He says to the disciples, “Go across to the other side,” those were not just instructions but they carried the power of God. Ultimately, it wasn't their rowing that got them there. They had to row - that was their obedience, their devotion to Him. But He gets into the boat and immediately they're at the other side. Why? Because He said so.

This helps us in our faith and we must hold onto it. At the end of the day I must pray; I must seek the Lord; I must trust Him; I may need to fast; I must study His word; and do all such things, but when I get to the other side it'll *all* be Him – not my effort, not my rowing.

The people on the other side were amazed and wondered how they got there. Well, He said we must come, that's how we got here.

A deep work

It's great to hear the Great Commission and God saying, “Go” and in this God wants to encourage us and work deep things into us. Jesus is incredibly honest. He never promised us a smooth, flat ride. That's why you can trust Him. But He did promise He will get us to the other side.

Perhaps you've been in a place where you're in the fourth watch and are saying, “God, I don't even sense your presence but I've done everything I'm supposed to do.” Perhaps you're in a place where the wind and waves are of such great size that they threaten you. I really trust that as we look into His word we'll steady our hearts and know that Jesus is never late. His word will accomplish what He has told us to do.

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