

CHAPTER 6

A great variety of observable passages we have, in this chapter, concerning our Lord Jesus, the substance of all which we had before in Matthew, but divers circumstances we have, which we did not there meet with. Here is,

I. Christ contemned by his countrymen, because he was one of them, and they knew, or thought they knew, his original (v. 1-6).

II. The just power he gave his apostles over unclean spirits, and an account given of their negotiation (v. 7-13).

III. A strange notion which Herod and others had of Christ, upon which occasion we have the story of the martyrdom of John Baptist (v. 14-29).

IV. Christ's retirement into a desert place with his disciples; the crowds that followed him thither to receive instruction from him; and his feeding five thousand of them with five loaves and two fishes (v. 30-44).

V. Christ's walking upon the sea to his disciples, and the abundance of cures he wrought on the other side of the water (v. 45-56).

MARK 6:1-6

THE CONTEMPT POURED ON CHRIST

Here,

I. Christ makes a visit to *his own country*, the place not of his birth, but of his education; that was *Nazareth*; where his relations were. He had been in danger of his life among them (~~409~~ Luke 4:29), and yet he came among them again; so strangely doth he wait to be gracious, and seek the salvation of his enemies. Whither he went, though it was into danger, *his disciples followed him* (v. 1); for they had left all, to follow him whithersoever he went.

II. There he *preached* in their *synagogue*, on the *sabbath day*, v. 2. It seems, there was not such flocking to him there as in other places, so that he had no opportunity of preaching till they came together on the sabbath day; and then he expounded a portion of scripture with great clearness. In religious assemblies, on sabbath days, the word of God is to be preached according to Christ's example. We *give glory* to God by receiving instruction from him.

III. They could not but own that which was very honourable concerning him.

1. That he spoke with great *wisdom*, and that this wisdom was *given to him*, for they knew he had no learned education.

2. That he did *mighty works*, did them with his own hands, for the confirming of the doctrine he taught. They acknowledged the two great proofs of the divine original of his gospel — the *divine wisdom* that appeared in the contrivance of it, and the *divine power* that was exerted for the ratifying and recommending of it; and yet, though they could not deny the premises, they would not admit the conclusion.

IV. They studied to disparage him, and to raise prejudices in the minds of people against him, notwithstanding. All this *wisdom*, and all these *mighty works*, shall be of no account, because he had a home-education, had never travelled, nor been at any university, or bred up at the feet of any of their doctors (v. 3); *Is not this the Carpenter?* In Matthew, they upbraid him with being the carpenter's son, his supposed father Joseph being of that trade. But, it seems, they could say further, *Is not this the Carpenter?* our Lord Jesus, it is probable, employing himself in that business with his father, before he entered upon his public ministry, at least, sometimes in journey-work.

1. He would thus *humble himself*, and make himself of no reputation, as one that had taken upon him the form of a servant, and came to minister. Thus low did our Redeemer stoop, when he came to redeem us out of our low estate.

2. He would thus teach us to *abhor idleness*, and to find *ourselves something to do* in this world; and rather to take up with mean and laborious employments, and such as no more is to be got by than a bare livelihood, than indulge ourselves in sloth. Nothing is more pernicious for

young people than to get a *habit of sauntering*. The Jews had a good rule for this — that their young men who were designed for scholars, were yet bred up to some trade, as Paul was a tent-maker, that they might have some business to fill up their time with, and, if need were, to get their bread with.

3. He would thus put an honour upon despised mechanics, and encourage those who eat the labour of their hands, though great men look upon them with contempt.

Another thing they upbraided him with, was, the meanness of his relations; “*He is the son of Mary; his brethren and sisters are here with us; we know his family and kindred;*” and therefore, though they were *astonished* at his doctrine (v. 2), yet they were *offended* at his person (v. 3), were prejudiced against him, and looked upon him with contempt; and for that reason would not receive his doctrine, though ever so well recommended. May we think that if they had not known his pedigree, but he had dropped among them from the clouds, without father, without mother, and without descent, they would have entertained him with any more respect? Truly, no; for in Judea, where this was not known, that was made an objection against him (~~John~~ John 9:29); *As for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.* Obstinate unbelief will never want excuses.

V. Let us see how Christ bore this contempt.

1. He partly *excused it*, as a common thing, and what might be expected, though not reasonably or justly (v. 4); *A prophet is not despised any where but in his own country.* Some exceptions there may be to this rule; doubtless many have got over this prejudice, but ordinarily it holds good, that ministers are seldom so acceptable and successful in their own country as among strangers; *familiarity* in the younger years breeds a contempt, the advancement of one that was an inferior begets *envy*, and men will hardly set those among the guides of their souls whose fathers they were ready to set with the dogs of their flock; in such a case therefore it must not be thought hard, it is common treatment, it was Christ's, and *wisdom is profitable to direct* to other soil.

2. He did *some good* among them, notwithstanding the slights they put upon him, for he is kind even to the evil and unthankful; *He laid his hands upon a few sick folks, and healed them.* Note, It is generous, and becoming

the followers of Christ, to content themselves with the pleasure and satisfaction of doing good, though they be unjustly denied the praise of it.

3. Yet he *could there do* no such mighty works, at least not so many, as in other places, because of the unbelief that prevailed among the people, by reason of the prejudices which their leaders instilled into them against Christ, v. 5. It is a strange expression, as if unbelief tied the hands of omnipotence itself; he *would have done* as many miracles there as he had done elsewhere, but he could not, because people would not make application to him, nor sue for his favours; he could have wrought them, but they forfeited the honour of having them wrought for them. Note, By unbelief and contempt of Christ men stop the current of his favours to them, and put a bar in their own door.

4. He *marvelled because of their unbelief*, v. 6. We never find Christ wondering but at the *faith* of the Gentiles that were strangers, as the *centurion* (~~4080~~ Matthew 8:10), and the woman of Samaria, and at the unbelief of Jews that were his own countrymen. Note, The unbelief of those that enjoy the means of grace, is a most amazing thing.

5. He *went round about the village, teaching*. If we cannot do good where we would, we must do it where we can, and be glad if we may have any opportunity, though but in the villages, of serving Christ and souls. Sometimes the gospel of Christ finds better entertainment in the country villages, where there is less wealth, and pomp, and mirth, and subtlety, than in the populous cities.

~~4080~~ MARK 6:7-13

THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION

Here is,

I. The commission given to the twelve apostles, to preach and work miracles; it is the same which we had more largely, Matthew 10. Mark doth not name them here, as Matthew doth, because he had named them before, when they were first called into fellowship with him, ~~4080~~ Matthew 3:16-19. Hitherto they had been conversant with Christ, and had set at his feet, had heard his doctrine, and seen his miracles; and now he determines

to make some use of them; they had *received*, that they might *give*, had *learned*, that they might *teach*; and therefore now he *began to send them forth*. They must not always be studying in the academy, to get knowledge, but they must preach in the country, to do good with the knowledge they have got. Though they were not as yet so well accomplished as they were to be, yet, according to their present ability and capacity, they must be set to work, and make further improvements afterward. Now observe here,

- 1.** That Christ sent them forth *by two and two*; this Mark takes notice of. They went two and two to a place, that out of the mouth of two witnesses every word might be established; and that they might be company for one another when they were among strangers, and might strengthen the hands, and encourage the hearts, one of another; might help one another if any thing should be amiss, and keep one another in countenance. Every common soldier has his comrade; and it is an approved maxim, *Two are better than one*. Christ would thus teach his ministers to associate, and both lend and borrow help.
- 2.** That he *gave them power over unclean spirits*. He commissioned them to attack the devil's kingdom, and empowered them, as a specimen of their breaking his interest in the souls of men by their doctrine, to cast him out of the bodies of those that were possessed. Dr. Lightfoot suggests, that they cured diseases, and cast out devils, by the Spirit, but preached that only which they had learned from the mouth of Christ.
- 3.** That he *commanded them* not to take provisions along with them, neither *victuals* nor *money*, that they might appear, wherever they came, to be poor men, men not of this world, and therefore might with the better grace call people off from it to another world. When afterward he bid them *take purse and scrip* (⁴⁰²⁶Luke 22:36), that did not intimate (as Dr. Lightfoot observes) that his care of them was abated from what it had been; but that they should meet with worse times and worse entertainment than they met with at their first mission. In Matthew and Luke they are forbidden to *take staves* with them, that is, fighting staves; but here in Mark they are bid to take nothing save a *staff only*, that is, a walking staff, such as pilgrims carried. They must not put on *shoes*, but *sandals* only, which were only the soles of shoes tied under their feet, or like pumps, or slippers; they must go in the readiest plainest dress they could, and must not so much as have *two coats*; for their stay abroad would be short, they

must return before winter, and what they wanted, those they preached to would cheerfully accommodate them with.

4. He directed them, whatever city they came to, to make that house their head-quarters, which happened to be their first quarters (v. 10); “*There abide, till ye depart from that place. And since ye know ye come on an errand sufficient to make you welcome, have such charity for your friends that first invited you, as to believe they do not think you burthensome.*”

5. He pronounces a very heavy doom upon those that rejected the gospel they preached (v. 11); “*Whosoever shall not receive you, or will not so much as hear you, depart thence (if one will not, another will), and shake off the dust under your feet, for a testimony against them.* Let them know that they have had a fair offer of life and happiness made them, witness that dust; but that, since they have refused it, they cannot expect ever to have another; let them take up with their own dust, for so shall their doom be.” That dust, like the dust of Egypt (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 9:9), shall turn into a plague to them; and their condemnation in the great day, will be more intolerable than *that of Sodom*: for the angels were sent to Sodom, and were abused there; yet that would not bring on so great a guilt and so great a ruin as the contempt and abuse of the apostles of Christ, who bring with them the offers of gospel grace.

II. The apostles' conduct in pursuance of their commission. Though they were conscious to themselves of great weakness, and expected no secular advantage by it, yet, in obedience to their Master's order, and in dependence upon his strength, they *went out* as Abraham, not knowing whither they went. Observe here,

1. The doctrine they preached; *They preached that men should repent* (v. 12); that they should change their minds, and reform their lives, in consideration of the near approach of the kingdom of the Messiah. Note, The great design of the gospel preachers, and the great tendency of gospel preaching, should be, to bring people to repentance, to a *new heart* and a *new way*. They did not amuse people with curious speculations, but told them that they must repent of their sins, and turn to God.

2. The miracles they wrought. The power Christ gave them *over unclean spirits*, was not ineffectual, nor did they receive it in vain, but used it, for they *cast out many devils* (v. 13); and they *anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them*. Some think this oil was used *medicinally*,

according to the custom of the Jews; but I rather think it was used as a *sign of miraculous healing*, by the appointment of Christ, though not mentioned; and it was afterward used by those *elders of the church*, to whom *by the Spirit* was given the *gift of healing*, ⁵⁰⁸⁴James 5:14. It is certain here, and therefore probable there, that *anointing the sick with oil*, is appropriated to that extraordinary power which has long ceased, and therefore that sign must cease with it.

MARK 6:14-29

THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Here is,

I. The wild notions that the people had concerning our Lord Jesus, v. 15. His own countrymen could believe nothing great concerning him, because they knew his poor kindred; but others that were not under the power of that prejudice against him, were yet willing to believe any thing rather than the truth — that he was the Son of God, and the true Messias: they said, He is Elias, whom they expected; or, *He is a prophet*, one of the Old-Testament prophets raised to life, and returned to this world; or *as one of the prophets*, a prophet now newly raised up, equal to those under the Old Testament.

II. The opinion of Herod concerning him. He heard of *his name* and fame, of what he said and what he did; and he said, “It is certainly John Baptist, v. 14. As sure as we are here, *It is John, whom I beheaded*, v. 16. He is *risen from the dead*; and though while he was with us *he did no miracle*, yet, having removed for awhile to another world, he is come again with greater power, and *now mighty works do show forth themselves in him.*”

Note,

1. Where there is an *idle faith*, there is commonly a *working fancy*. The people said, It is a prophet risen from the dead; Herod said, It is *John Baptist risen from the dead*. It seems by this, that the *rising of a prophet from the dead*, to do *mighty works*, was a thing expected, and was thought neither impossible nor improbable, and it was now readily suspected when it was *not true*; but afterward, when *it was true* concerning Christ, and a

truth undeniably evidenced, yet then it was obstinately gainsaid and denied. Those who most wilfully disbelieve the truth, are commonly most credulous of errors and fancies.

2. They who fight against the cause of God, will find themselves baffled, even when they think themselves conquerors; they cannot gain their point, for the word of the Lord endures for ever. They who rejoiced when the witnesses were slain, fretted as much, when in three or four days they *rose again* in their successors, ^{<4110>}Revelation 11:10, 11. The impenitent unrepented sinner, that escapeth the sword of Jehu, shall Elisha slay.

3. A guilty conscience needs no accuser or tormentor but itself. Herod charges himself with the murder of John, which perhaps no one else dare charge him with; *I beheaded him*; and the terror of it made him imagine that Christ was John risen. He feared John while he lived, and now, when he thought he had got clear of him, fears him ten times worse when he is dead. One might as well be haunted with ghosts and furies, as with the horrors of an accusing conscience; those therefore who would keep an undisturbed peace, must keep an undefiled conscience, ^{<4216>}Acts 24:16.

4. There may be the terrors of strong conviction, where there is not the truth of a saving conversion. This Herod, who had this notion concerning Christ, afterward sought to kill him (^{<2131>}Luke 13:31), and did set him at nought (^{<2211>}Luke 23:11); so that he will not be persuaded, though it be *by one risen from the dead*; no, not by a John the Baptist risen from the dead.

III. A narrative of Herod's putting John Baptist to death, which is brought in upon this occasion, as it was in Matthew. And here we may observe,

1. The great value and veneration which Herod had some time had for John Baptist, which is related only by this evangelist, v. 20. Here we see what a great way a man may go toward grace and glory, and yet come short of both, and perish eternally.

(1.) He *feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and a holy*. It is possible that a man may have a great reverence for good men, and especially for good ministers, yea, and for that in them that is good, and yet himself be a bad man. Observe,

[1.] John was a *just man, and a holy*; to make a complete good man, both justice and holiness are necessary; holiness toward God, and justice

toward men. John was mortified to this world, and so was a good friend both to justice and holiness.

[2.] Herod knew this, not only by common fame, but by personal acquaintance with him. Those that have but little justice and holiness themselves, may yet discern it with respect in others. And,

[3.] He therefore *feared* him, he honoured him. Holiness and justice command veneration, and many that are not good themselves, have respect for those that are.

(2.) He *observed* him; he sheltered him from the malice of his enemies (so some understand it); or, rather, he had a regard to his exemplary conversation, and took notice of that in him that was praiseworthy, and commended it in the hearing of those about him; he made it appear that he observed what John said and did.

(3.) He *heard him* preach; which was great condescension, considering how mean John's appearance was. To hear Christ himself preach in our streets will be but a poor plea in the great day, ⁴¹³³Luke 13:26.

(4.) He *did many of those things* which John in his preaching taught him. He was not only a *hearer of the word*, but in part a *doer of the work*. Some sins which John in his preaching reprov'd, he forsook, and some duties he bound himself to; but it will not suffice to do *many* things, unless we have *respect to all* the commandments.

(5.) He *heard him gladly*. He did not hear him with terror as Felix heard Paul, but heard him with pleasure. There is a flashy joy, which a hypocrite may have in hearing the word; Ezekiel was to his hearers as a *lovely song* (⁴¹³²Ezekiel 33:32); and the *stony ground received the word with joy*, ⁴¹⁸³Luke 8:13.

2. John's faithfulness to Herod, in telling him of his faults. Herod had married his brother Philip's wife, v. 17. All the country, no doubt, cried shame on him for it, and reproach'd him for it; but John *reprov'd* him, told him plainly, *It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife*. This was Herod's own iniquity, which he could not leave, when he did many things that John taught him; and therefore John tells him of this particularly. Though he were a king, he would not spare him, any more than Elijah did Ahab, when he said, *Hast thou killed and also taken possession?* Though John had an interest in him, and he might fear this

plain-dealing would destroy his interest, yet he reproved him; for *faithful are the wounds of a friend* (²⁰⁰⁶Proverbs 27:6); and though there are some swine that will *turn again, and rend* those that *cast pearls* before them, yet, ordinarily, *he that rebuketh a man* (if the person reproved has any thing of the understanding of a man), *afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with his tongue*, ²⁰⁰³Proverbs 28:23. Though it was dangerous to offend Herod, and much more to offend Herodias, yet John would run the hazard rather than be wanting in his duty. Note, Those ministers that would be found faithful in the work of God, must not be afraid of the face of man. If we seek to please men, further than is for their spiritual good, we are not the servants of Christ.

3. The malice which Herodias bore to John for this (v. 19); She *had a quarrel with him, and would have killed him*; but when she could not obtain that, she got him committed to prison, v. 17. Herod respected him, till he touched him in his Herodias. Many that pretend to honour prophesying, are for smooth things only, and love good preaching, if it keep far enough from their beloved sin; but if that be touched, they cannot bear it. No marvel if the world hate those who testify of it that its works are evil. But it is better that sinners persecute ministers now for their faithfulness, than curse them eternally for their unfaithfulness.

4. The plot laid to take off John's head. I am apt to think that Herod was himself in the plot, notwithstanding his pretences to be displeased and surprised, and that the thing was concerted between him and Herodias; for it is said to be *when a convenient day was come* (v. 21), fit for such a purpose.

(1.) There must be a ball at court, upon the king's birth-day, and a supper prepared for *his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee*.

(2.) To grace the solemnity, the daughter of Herodias must *dance* publicly, and Herod must take on him to be wonderfully charmed with her dancing; and if he be, they that *sit with him* cannot but, in compliment to him, be so too.

(3.) The king hereupon must make her an extravagant promise, to give her *whatever she would ask*, even to the *half of the kingdom*; and yet, that, if rightly understood, would not have reached the end designed, for John Baptist's head was worth more than his *whole kingdom*. This promise is bound with an oath, that no room might be left to fly off from it; *He sware*

unto her, *Whatsoever thou shalt ask, I will give.* I can scarcely think he would have made such an unlimited promise, but that he knew what she would ask.

(4.) She, being instructed by Herodias her mother, asked the *head of John Baptist*; and she must have it brought her *in a charger*, as a pretty thing for her to play with (v. 24, 25); and there must be no delay, no time lost, she must have it *by and by*.

(5.) Herod granted it, and the execution was done immediately while the company were together, which we can scarcely think the king would have done, if he had not determined the matter before. But he takes on him,

[1.] To be very backward to it, and that he would not for all the world have done it, if he had not been surprised into such a promise; The *king was exceeding sorry*, that is, he seemed to be so, he said he was so, he looked as if he had been so; but it was all sham and grimace, he was really pleased that he had found a pretence to get John out of the way. *Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare — The man who cannot dissemble, knows not how to reign.* And yet he was not without sorrow for it; he could not do it but with great regret and reluctancy; natural conscience will not suffer men to sin easily; the very commission of it is vexatious; what then will the reflection upon it be?

[2.] He takes on him to be very sensible of the obligation of his oath; whereas if the damsel had asked but a fourth part of his kingdom, I doubt not but he would have found out a way to evade his oath. The promise was rashly made, and could not bind him to do an unrighteous thing. Sinful oaths must be repented of, and therefore not performed; for repentance is the undoing of what we have done amiss, as far as is in our power. When Theodosius the emperor was urged by a suitor with a *promise*, he answered, *I said it*, but did not *promise* it if it be unjust. If we may suppose that Herod knew nothing of the design when he made that rash promise, it is probable that he was hurried into the doing of it by those about him, only to carry on the humour; for he did it *for their sakes who sat with him*, whose company he was proud of, and therefore would do any thing to gratify them. Thus do princes make themselves slave to those whose respect they covet, and both value and secure themselves by. None of Herod's subjects stood in more awe of him than he did of *his lords, high captains, and chief estates*. The king sent an *executioner*, a soldier of his guard. Bloody tyrants have executioners ready to obey their most cruel and

unrighteous decrees. Thus Saul has a *Doeg* at hand, to *fall upon the priests of the Lord*, when his own footmen declined it.

5. The effect of this is,

(1.) That Herod's wicked court is *all in triumph*, because this prophet tormented them; the head is made a present of *to the damsel*, and by her to her *mother*, v. 28.

(2.) That John Baptist's sacred college is *all in tears*; the disciples of John little thought of this; but, when they *heard of it*, they came, and took up the neglected *corpse*, and *laid it in a tomb*; where Herod, if he had pleased, might have found it, when he frightened himself with the fancy that John Baptist was *risen from the dead*.

MARK 6:30-44

THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES AND FISHES

In these verses, we have,

I. The return to Christ of the apostles whom he had sent forth (v. 7), to preach, and work miracles. They had dispersed themselves into several quarters of the country for some time, but when they had made good their several appointments, by consent they *gathered themselves together*, to compare notes, and came to Jesus, the centre of their unity, to give him an account of what they had done pursuant to their commission: as the servant that was sent to invite to the feast, and had received answers from the guests, came, and *showed his Lord all those things*, so did the apostles here; they *told him all things*, both *what they had done*, and *what they had taught*. Ministers are accountable both for what they *do*, and for what they *teach*; and must both watch over their own souls, and watch for the souls of others, as those that must *give account*, ~~SEB~~ Hebrews 13:17. Let them not either *do* any thing, or *teach* any thing, but what they are willing should be related and repeated to the Lord Jesus. It is a comfort to faithful ministers, when they can appeal to Christ concerning their doctrine and manner of life, both which perhaps have been misrepresented by men; and he gives them leave to be free with him, and to lay open their case before him, to

tell him all things, what treatment they have met with, what success, and what disappointment.

II. The tender care Christ took for their repose, after the fatigue they had (v. 31); *He said unto them*, perceiving them to be almost spent, and out of breath, *Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile*. It should seem that John's disciples came to Christ with the mournful tidings of their master's death, much about the same time that his own disciples came to him with the report of their negotiation. Note, Christ takes cognizance of the *frights* of some, and the *toils* of others, of his disciples, and provides suitable relief for both, rest for those that are tired, and refuge for those that are terrified. With what kindness and compassion doth Christ say to them, *Come, and rest!* Note, The most active servants of Christ cannot be always upon the stretch of business, but have bodies that require some relaxation, some breathing-time; we shall not be able to serve God without ceasing, day and night, till we come to heaven, where they *never rest* from praising him, ~~Rev~~ Revelation 4:8. And the Lord is for the body, considers its frame, and not only allows it time for rest, but puts it in mind of resting. *Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers. Return to thy rest*. And those that work diligently and faithfully, may cheerfully retire to rest. *The sleep of the labouring man is sweet*. But observe,

1. Christ calls them to come *themselves apart*; for, if they had any body with them, they would have something to say, or something to do, for their good; if they must *rest*, they must be *alone*.

2. He invites them not to some pleasant country-seat, where there were fine buildings and fine gardens, but *into a desert place*, where the accommodations were very poor, and which was fitted by nature only, and not by art, for quietness and rest. But it was of a piece with all the other circumstances he was in; no wonder that he who had but a ship for his preaching place, had but a desert for his resting place.

3. He calls them only to rest *awhile*; they must not expect to rest *long*, only to *get breath*, and then to go to work again. There is no *remaining rest* for the people of God till they come to heaven.

4. The reason given for this, is, not so much because they had been in *constant work*, but because they now were in a *constant hurry*; so that they had not their work in any order; *for there were many coming and going*,

and they had no leisure so much as to eat. Let but proper time be set, and kept for every thing, and a great deal of work may be done with a great deal of ease; but if people be continually coming and going, and no rule or method be observed, a little work will not be done without a deal of trouble.

5. They withdrew, accordingly, *by ship*; not crossing the water, but making a coasting voyage to the desert of Bethsaida, v. 32. Going *by water* was much less toilsome than going *by land* would have been. They went away *privately*, that they might be by themselves. The most public persons cannot but wish to be private sometimes.

III. The diligence of the people to follow him. It was rude to do so, when he and his disciples were desirous, for such good reason, to *retire*; and yet they are not blamed for it, nor bid to go back, but bid welcome. Note, A failure in good manners will easily be excused in those who follow Christ, if it be but made up in a fulness of good affections. They followed him of their own accord, without being called upon. Here is no time set, no meeting appointed, no bell tolled; yet they thus fly like a cloud, and as the doves to their windows. They followed him *out of the cities*, quitted their houses and shops, their callings and affairs, to hear him preach. They followed him *afoot*, though he was gone by sea, and so, to try them, seemed to put a slight upon them, and to endeavour to shake them off; yet they stuck to him. They *ran* afoot, and made such haste, that they *out-went* the disciples, and *came together* to him with an appetite to the word of God. Nay they followed him, though it was into a *desert place*, despicable and inconvenient. The presence of Christ will turn a wilderness into a paradise.

IV. The entertainment Christ gave them (v. 34); *When he saw much people*, instead of being moved with displeasure, because they disturbed him when he desired to be private, as many a man, many a good man, would have been, he was *moved with compassion toward them*, and looked upon them with concern, because *they were as sheep having no shepherd*, they seemed to be well-inclined, and manageable as sheep, and willing to be taught, but they had *no shepherd*, none to lead and guide them in the right way, none to feed them with good doctrine: and therefore, in compassion to them, he not only *healed their sick*, as it is in Matthew, but he *taught them many things*, and we may be sure that they were all true and good, and fit for them to learn.

V. The provision he made for them all; all his hearers he generously made his guests, and treated them at a *splendid* entertainment: so it might truly be called, because a *miraculous* one.

1. The disciples moved that they should be *sent home*. When *the day was not far spent*, and night drew on, they said, *This is a desert place, and much time is now past; send them away to buy bread*, v. 35, 36. This the disciples suggested to Christ; but we do not find that the multitude themselves did. They did not say, *Send us away* (though they could not but be hungry), for they *esteemed the words of Christ's mouth more than their necessary food*, and forgot themselves when they were hearing him; but the disciples thought it would be a kindness to them to dismiss them. Note, Willing minds will do more, and hold out longer, in that which is good, than one would expect from them.

2. Christ ordered that they should all be fed (v. 37); *Give ye them to eat*. Though their crowding after him and his disciples hindered them from eating (v. 31), yet he would not *therefore*, to be even with them, send them away fasting, but, to teach us to be kind to those who are rude to us, he ordered provision to be made for them; that bread which Christ and his disciples took with them into the desert, that they might make a quiet meal of it for themselves, he will have them to partake of. Thus was he given to hospitality. They attended on the spiritual food of his word, and then he took care that they should not want corporal food. The way of duty, as it is the way of safety, so it is the way to supply. Let God alone to fill the pools with rain from heaven, and so to make a well even in the valley of Baca, for those that are going Zion-ward, from strength to strength, ^{<8806>}Psalm 84:6, 7. Providence, not *tempted*, but duly *trusted*, never yet failed any of God's faithful servants, but has refreshed many with seasonable and surprising relief. It has often been seen in the *mount of the Lord, Jehovah-jireh*, that *the Lord will provide* for those that wait on him.

3. The disciples objected against it as impracticable; *Shall we go, and buy two hundred penny-worth of bread, and give them to eat?* Thus, through the weakness of their faith, instead of waiting for directions from Christ, they perplex the cause with projects of their own. It was a question, whether they had two hundred pence with them, whether the country would of a sudden afford so much bread if they had, and whether that would suffice so great a company; but thus Moses objected (^{<04122>}Numbers 11:22), *Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them?* Christ would let

them see their folly in forecasting for themselves, that they might put the greater value upon his provision for them.

4. Christ effected it, to universal satisfaction. They had brought with them *five loaves*, for the victualling of their ship, and *two fishes* perhaps they caught as they came along; and that is the bill of fare. This was but a little for Christ and his disciples, and yet this they must give away, as the widow her *two mites*, and as the church of Macedonia's *deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality*. We often find Christ entertained at other people's tables, dining with one friend, and supping with another: but here we have him supping a great many at his own charge, which shows that, when others *ministered to him of their substance*, it was not because he could not supply himself otherwise (if he was *hungry*, he needed not *tell them*); but it was a piece of humiliation, that he was pleased to submit to, nor was it agreeable to the intention of miracles, that he should work them for himself. Observe,

(1.) The provision was *ordinary*. Here were no rarities, no varieties, though Christ, if he had pleased, could have furnished his table with them; but thus he would teach us to be content with food convenient for us, and not to be desirous of dainties. If we have for necessity, it is no matter though we have not for delicacy and curiosity. God, in love, gives *meat for our hunger*; but, in wrath, gives *meat for our lusts*, ~~Job~~ Psalm 78:18. The promise to them that fear the Lord, is, that verily they shall be fed; he doth not say, They shall be *feasted*. If Christ and his disciples took up with mean things, surely we may.

(2.) The guests were *orderly*; for they *sat down by companies on the green grass* (v. 39), they *sat down in ranks by hundreds and by fifties* (v. 40), that the provision might the more easily and regularly be distributed among them; for God is the God of order, and not of confusion. Thus care was taken that every one should have enough, and none be over-looked, nor any have more than was fitting.

(3.) A blessing was craved upon the meat; *He looked up to heaven, and blessed*. Christ did not call one of his disciples to crave a blessing, but did it himself (v. 41); and by virtue of this blessing the bread strangely multiplied, and so did the fishes, for they did *all eat, and were filled*, though they were to the number of *five thousand*, v. 42, 44. This miracle was significant, and shows that Christ came into the world, to be the great feeder as well as the great healer; not only to restore, but to preserve and

nourish, spiritual life; and in him there is enough for all that come to him, enough to fill the soul, to fill the treasures; none are sent empty away from Christ, but those that come to him full of themselves.

(4.) Care was taken of the fragments that remained, with which they filled *twelve baskets*. Though Christ had bread enough at command, he would hereby teach us, not to make waste of any of God's good creatures; remembering how many there are that do want, and that we know not but we may some time or other want such fragments as we throw away.

MARK 6:45-56

CHRIST WALKING ON THE SEA

This passage of story we had ⁴¹²Matthew 14:22, etc., only what was there related concerning Peter, is omitted here. Here we have,

I. The dispersing of the assembly; Christ *constrained his disciples* to go before by ship to Bethsaida, intending to follow them, as they supposed, by land. The people were loth to scatter, so that it cost him some time and pains to send them away. For now that they had got a good supper, they were in no haste to leave him. But as long as we are here in this world, we have no continuing city, no not in communion with Christ. The everlasting feast is reserved for the future state.

II. Christ departed *into a mountain, to pray*. Observe,

1. He *prayed*; though he had so much preaching-work upon his hands, yet he was much in prayer; he prayed often, and prayed long, which is an encouragement to us to depend upon the intercession he is making for us at the right hand of the Father, that *continual* intercession.

2. He went *alone*, to pray; though he needed not to retire for the avoiding either of distraction or of ostentation, yet, to set us an example, and to encourage us in our *secret* addresses to God, he prayed *alone*, and, for want of a closet, went up into a mountain, to pray. A good man is never less alone than when alone with God.

III. The disciples were in distress at sea; *The wind was contrary* (v. 48), so that they *toiled in rowing*, and could not get forward. This was a

specimen of the hardships they were to expect, when hereafter he should send them abroad to preach the gospel; it would be like sending them to sea at this time with the *wind in their teeth*: they must expect to toil in rowing, they must work hard to strive against so strong a stream; they must likewise expect to be tossed with waves, to be persecuted by their enemies; and by exposing them now he intended to train them up for such difficulties, that they might learn to *endure hardness*. The church is often like a ship at sea, *tossed with tempests, and not comforted* we may have Christ for us, and yet wind and tide against us; but it is a comfort to Christ's disciples in a storm, that their Master is in the heavenly mount, interceding for them.

IV. Christ made them a kind visit upon the water. He could have checked the winds, where he was, or have sent an angel to their relief; but he chose to help them in the most endearing manner possible, and therefore came to them himself.

1. He did not come till the *fourth watch of the night*, not till after three o'clock in the morning; but then he came. Note, If Christ's visits to his people be deferred long, yet at length he will come; and their extremity is his opportunity to appear for them so much the more seasonably. Though the salvation tarry, yet we must wait for it; *at the end it shall speak*, in the fourth watch of the night, *and not lie*.

2. He came, walking upon the waters. The sea was now tossed with waves, and yet Christ came, walking upon it; for though the *floods lift up their voice, the Lord on high is mightier*, ^{498B}Psalm 93:3, 4. No difficulties can obstruct Christ's gracious appearances for his people, when the set time is come. He will either find, or force, a way through the most tempestuous sea, for their deliverance, ^{499E}Psalm 42:7, 8,

3. He *would have passed by them*, that is, he set his face and steered his course, as if he would have gone further, and took no notice of them; this he did, to awaken them to call to him. Note, Providence, when it is acting designedly and directly for the succour of God's people, yet sometimes seems as if it were *giving them the go-by*, and regarded not their case. They thought that *he would*, but we may be sure that he would not, *have passed by them*.

4. They were frightened at the sight of him, supposing him to have been an apparition; *They all saw him, and were troubled* (v. 50), thinking it had

been some daemon, or evil genius, that haunted them, and raised this storm. We often perplex and frighten ourselves with phantasms, the creatures of our own fancy and imagination.

5. He encouraged them, and silenced their fears, by making himself known to them; *he talked familiarly with them, saying, Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid.* Note,

(1.) We know not Christ till he is pleased to reveal himself to us. “*It is I; I your Master, I your friend, I your Redeemer and Saviour. It is I, that came to a troublesome earth, and now to a tempestuous sea, to look after you.*”

(2.) The knowledge of Christ, as he is in himself, and near to us, is enough to make the disciples of Christ cheerful even in a storm, and no longer fearful. *If it be so, why am I thus?* If it is Christ that is with thee, *be of good cheer, be not afraid.* Our fears are soon satisfied, if our mistakes be but rectified, especially our mistakes concerning Christ. See ^{<121B>}Genesis 21:19; ^{<105>}2 Kings 6:15-17. Christ's presence with us in a stormy day, is enough to make us of good cheer, though clouds and darkness be round about us. He said, *It is I.* He doth not tell them who he was (there was no occasion), they knew his voice, as the sheep know the voice of their own shepherd, ^{<304>}John 10:4. How readily doth the spouse say, once and again, *It is the voice of my beloved!* ^{<218>}Song of Solomon 2:8; 5:2. He said, *ego eimi* — *I am he;* or *I am;* it is God's name, when he comes to deliver Israel, ^{<104>}Exodus 3:14. So it is Christ's, now that he comes to deliver his disciples. When Christ said to those that came to apprehend him by force, *I am he,* they were struck down by it, ^{<336>}John 18:6. When he saith to those that come to apprehend him by faith, *I am he,* they are raised up by it, and comforted.

6. He *went up to them into the ship,* embarked in the same bottom with them, and so made them perfectly easy. Let them but have their Master with them, and all is well. And as soon as he was come into the ship, *the wind ceased.* In the former storm that they were in, it is said, *He arose, and rebuked the winds, and said to the sea, Peace, be still* (^{<103>}Mark 4:39); but here we read of no such formal command given, only the wind ceased all of a sudden. note, Our Lord Jesus will be sure to do his own work always effectually, though not always alike solemnly, and with observation. Though we hear not the command given, yet, if thus the wind cease, and we have the comfort of a calm, say, It is because Christ is in the ship, and his decree is gone forth *or ever we are aware,* ^{<102>}Song of

Solomon 6:12. When we come with Christ to heaven, the wind ceaseth presently; there are no storms in the upper region.

7. They were more surprised and astonished at this miracle than did become them, and there was that at the bottom of their astonishment, which was really culpable; *They were sore amazed in themselves*, were in a perfect ecstasy; as if it were a new and unaccountable thing, as if Christ had never done the like before, and they had no reason to expect he should do it now; they ought to admire the power of Christ, and to be confirmed hereby in their belief of his being the Son of God: but why all this confusion about it? It was because they *considered not the miracle of the loaves*; had they given that its due weight, they would not have been so much surprised at this; for his multiplying the bread was as great an instance of his power as his walking on the water. They were strangely stupid and unthinking, and their heart was hardened, or else they would not have thought it a thing incredible that Christ should command a calm. It is for want of a right understanding of Christ's former works, that we are transported at the thought of his present works, as if there never were the like before.

V. When they came to the land of Gennesaret, which lay between Bethsaida and Capernaum, the people bid them very welcome; *The men of that place presently knew Jesus* (v. 54), and knew what mighty works he did wherever he came, what a universal Healer he was; they knew likewise that he used to stay but a little while at a place, and therefore they were concerned to improve the opportunity of this kind visit which he made them; *They ran through that whole region round about*, with all possible expedition, and *began to carry about in beds those that were sick*, and not able to go themselves; there was no danger of their getting cold when they hoped to get a cure, v. 55. Let him go where he would, he was crowded with patients — in towns, in the cities, in the villages about the cities; they *laid the sick in the streets*, to be in his way, and begged leave for them to touch if it were but *the border of his garment*, as the woman with the bloody issue did, by whom, it should seem, this method of application was first brought in; *and as many as touched, were made whole*. We do not find that they were desirous to be taught by him, only to be healed. If ministers could not cure people's bodily diseases, what multitudes would attend them! But it is sad to think how much more concerned the most of men are about their bodies than about their souls.