

## “The Incarnate I AM”

*Series: Jesus and His Gospel: Studies in Mark – Part 20*

*Mark 6:45-56*

**Introduction:** Take your Bibles and turn to Mark 6, Mark chapter 6.

It is great to be back with you. It was a great trip to South America and I can't wait to tell you all about it tonight during our evening service. I do just want to reassure you that we got our money's worth out of the trip. I am pretty sure we paid for the silver edition of missionary experience. You know, this is the package that includes things like – being convinced that you are the only English speaker in a very crowded international airport, and listening in on conversations where people presume that you know what they are talking about, but you actually have no idea what they are saying . . . and having your translator say – well, I'm not sure what it is called in English, but it is really good, you should try it . . . and taking a shower in a bus stop bathroom . . . and travelling overnight on a bus and overnight on a plane, on consecutive days . . . and sitting through a church service where you have no idea what is going on . . . and being confronted with levels of poverty that you were previously unable to imagine – you see, all of those things were included in the silver package of missionary experience, and I got the chance to taste them all. But I also wanted you to know that even though we paid for the silver package I am pretty sure I got the platinum package. So, the weeklong sickness that came after I got home definitely pushed it from the silver to the platinum package! So, I just wanted to assure you that we got our money's worth! In all seriousness though, I do not say any of that to make you feel sorry for me. I am really excited to share with you tonight how overwhelmed I was by the sacrifice our missionaries willingly give for the sake of the Gospel! We have the privilege of supporting some of God's choicest servants!

On another note, I haven't preached for 3 weeks . . . there, you have been warned! Alright, you are in Mark chapter 6, and the text we are considering this morning tells us of the very familiar account of Jesus walking on the water. To set the stage of Mark 6 consider the words of Job in Job 9. Job is in the midst of intense suffering and he and his friends are trying to make sense of it. In Job 9 he is simply responding to one of his friends who basically told him to just admit all that he has done wrong and God will end the suffering. As Job tries to make sense of his suffering, he presents a poignant description of the complete transcendence of God. Transcendence is just a big word for the vast difference between God and us. He is completely unlike us. His power and majesty and might are far different from the human experience. Job says it this way:

<sup>4</sup> He is wise in heart and mighty in strength-- who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded?--

<sup>5</sup> he who removes mountains, and they know it not, when he overturns them in his anger,  
<sup>6</sup> who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble;  
<sup>7</sup> who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars;  
<sup>8</sup> who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea;  
<sup>9</sup> who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south;  
<sup>10</sup> who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number.  
<sup>11</sup> Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him.  
<sup>12</sup> Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back? Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?' (Job 9:4-12 ESV)

Job's description of God is found all throughout the Old Testament. He is majestic, powerful, unknowable, and entirely different than mankind. With the coming of Jesus this transcendent God is brought near to man. The second person of the Triune God takes upon himself human flesh. He who is fully God humbles himself and becomes fully man. And in so doing, in this God-man Jesus Christ, we see expressions of the power and majesty and might of the transcendent God break through onto the scene of normal human life. That is what is happening on every page of the Gospels. Jesus, the man, is evidencing the other-worldly power of God in the context of normal human life. He heals people with a word. He exercises dominion over demons, he calms the storm with an act of his will and the utterance of his voice, and the list goes on. Here in Mark 6 we have seen him miraculously and supernaturally turn a meal big enough for a family of five into a meal that feeds 5000 families. What man can do this? Only one – the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth. It is obvious from the text that the crowd did not miss the significance of this matter. In fact, John tells us in his Gospel account that in the face of such a miraculous work the crowd was stirred into a Messianic fury. They understood that only the Messiah could do such a work as this and so they were stirring to make Jesus king. But they misunderstood the Messiah. They thought that being the Messiah was about power and majesty and political overthrow and triumph over Israel's enemies. But being the Messiah is about pain, suffering, sacrifice, humility, patience, redemption, self-sacrificing love, being the Sacrificial Lamb for the sins of others, and then it is about salvation, honor, power, triumph, and glory for ever and ever. The crowd missed the first part. They wanted the triumph and power and political salvation now. And so, in response to the Messianic fervor of the crowd Jesus immediately and intentionally breaks up the party. And this breaking up of the party puts the disciples out on the Sea of Galilee by themselves, and this brings them to a crisis of faith which puts on display their lack of faith in Jesus. And all of this culminates with Jesus appearing to them on the lake as we see one of the clearest expressions in all of the Gospels of this Transcendent God who is so different from us but who is brought near to mankind in the person and work of Jesus. Let's read Mark 6:45-56.

#### I. The Intentional Separation – vs. 45-47

- a. It is obvious that the crowd knew who Jesus was. In light of his amazing miracle to feed 5000 men with a meal only big enough to feed a family of 5, these people

were ready to crown him king, right then and there. And it is obvious that Jesus' 12 apostles were complicit in this thought as well. We know this by the drastic actions of Jesus in verse 45 to break up the scene. He takes his disciples and places them on a boat and tells them to go to the other side of the lake without him. Had he left them there among the crowd they would have had the clout and ability as his inner circle to further stir the crowd into starting a political coup. And so Jesus quickly ushers them out of the situation, and then leaves it to himself to dismiss the crowd. Within a matter of moments Jesus has effectively diffused the volatile scene. Notice how intent Jesus is not just on being recognized as the Messiah, but also in fulfilling his role as the Messiah. It was not just enough that the crowds hailed him as king – Jesus was intent on being the obedient Son and the Sacrificial Lamb first!

- b. And so, as the crowd dissipates and the disciples begin their trek across the lake, verse 46 tells us that Jesus snuck up the mountain to spend time in prayer. In light of all that Jesus has just faced – the recent death of John the Baptist, the overwhelming crowd without a shepherd, a long day of teaching, and the miraculous feeding of the 5000 that stirred the crowd into a Messianic fervor – in light of all of this Jesus seeks out silence and solitude so that he can pray. He intentionally separated the disciples from the crowd to avoid the political coup, and now he intentionally separates himself from others so that he can pray. There are few things that fascinate me more about Jesus than his prayer life. I do not think I will ever get over the fact that Jesus – who is fully God – needed time talking to His Father in prayer. Oh the unsearchable depths of what it meant for God to become flesh! What mystery is here in the fact that Jesus needed to pray!
- c. We are told of three different times in the book of Mark that Jesus spent time in prayer. All three times are at critical points in Jesus' ministry – the first at the beginning of his ministry, the second is here in mark 6, and the third is in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion. All of the factors of the day had most certainly compiled on the heart of Jesus, but the most compelling factor was the Messianic fervor of the crowd which his own disciples proved susceptible to. How difficult it must have been for Jesus to do the right thing and keep the Cross before the Crown! And so, he intentionally separates himself from everyone and everything – goes up on the mountain and prays. So this intentional separation was for the good of the disciples, and for the good of our Lord.
- d. Verse 47 draws attention to the separation yet again by making it clear that Jesus is on land and the disciples are on the boat on the Sea of Galilee.

## II. The Test of Faith – vs. 48-50a

- a. And as we see in verses 48-50, this creates the perfect situation for a test of the disciples' faith. Every time the disciples are away from the Lord, they find themselves in a crisis, and this crisis provides the context for the Lord to test their faith. So, Jesus here seizes upon the opportunity of the disciples' physical

distress and he walks on the water towards them. Now remember, these men are simply doing what Jesus has told them to do. They are rowing to the other side of the lake, but their obedience is met with an obstacle – a strong wind. Obedience to Jesus is sure to bring obstacles across our path, and those obstacles prove and test our faith. These disciples should have been ready for this test because they had just experienced the power and miraculous might of Jesus to feed 5000. Most certainly, in the midst of the storm, they should have been expecting Jesus to somehow show up!

- b. And show up he did! The text tells us that those things that hindered the disciples were no hindrance to our Lord. The water did not stop him, the wind did not stop him, the lack of a boat did not stop him. He did not need a life vest, or a boat, or a sail, or even an oar. He was so entirely different from the 12 men in the boat. He wasn't hindered by physical realities that normally hinder all human beings. But rather, in this moment he transcended the physical laws of the universe he created and he walked on the water of the sea and caught up to the disciples in the middle of the lake. And as he came to them the text tells us at the end of verse 48 that he intended to pass by them. This is a difficult phrase to make sense of. Does this mean that if they had not seen him he would have walked ahead of them and met them at Bethsaida? But if this was the case, then why walk on the water at all? Why even bother going through the trouble of getting wet and wind-blown on the sea? Why not just miraculously appear in Bethsaida and await their arrival? The phrase before this gives us a clue about what is going on – it says that Jesus came to them and he intended to pass by them or to pass before them. So, he came to them intentionally on the lake because he was intent on confronting them with yet another expression of His deity. Notice that this phrase – pass by – is also used when we are told of Yahweh God's self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 3 and to Elijah in 1 Kings 19. God passed before each of those men and in so doing he revealed more about himself to them. That is the intent of Jesus here. By walking on the water in the midst of the storm he is putting on display his complete otherliness. He is unlike them. He is God and He is man. Therefore, he can walk on the water and make greater progress across the lake than they can in the boat with 12 men rowing.
- c. But rather than respond in faith in the moment, the disciples are terrified at the sight. The only logical explanation they could come up with in the heat of the moment was that it was a ghost, for certainly no flesh and blood human being could walk on water. Their shocked response here speaks to the reality of the man on the water. This was not some vision or mirage – they were convinced that there was really a man walking on the water coming towards them, but the only way they could make sense of that was to conclude that it must be a ghost. This shocked response also speaks to the reality of the body of Jesus. These disciples had spent every waking minute with Jesus. They knew the limitations he faced.

They knew that he was very much like them, and so when they saw him walking on the water they were convinced that it couldn't actually be him because he was flesh and blood just like them. They presumed him to be controlled by the same limitations they faced. And this was a failure of this test of faith. They had seen Jesus not be controlled by their limitations many times before, and most specifically on that very day when he fed the 5000. The only solution they could come up with was to go and buy 200 denarii of bread. They were controlled by their physical limitations. But Jesus wasn't. He took the 5 loaves and the 2 fish and exponentially increased it to feed 5000 men. And yet, during this fourth watch of the night, when Jesus walks toward them on water, their eyes of faith are dim and they are terrified.

III. The Transcendent God Brought Near – vs. 50b-56

- a. But though they are terrified and they have obviously failed to see Jesus through the eyes of faith like they were supposed to, Jesus does not rebuke them, but rather he consoles them. He speaks words of assurance telling them not to be afraid because it is him. The phrase for “it is I” is the phrase ego eimi. This is the same phrase found in the Septuagint where God calls himself “I AM that I AM.” In other words, this phrase Jesus uses is a statement beyond simply – it is I. These are words of a Theophany. God is here clearly appearing to the disciples in the person and work of Jesus walking on the water. I do not mean that God is showing up in this moment in Jesus, I am saying that Jesus is always God, but more often than not his humanity veils his deity. But on occasions like this, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in obedience to the will of the Father, the deity of Jesus breaks forth onto the canvas of normal human life for the purpose of making God known to the disciples. In other words, the Transcendent God – the God who “can do what humanity cannot do and can never conceive of doing,” the God whose wisdom is beyond compare, who moves mountains, shakes the earth, obscures the sun, arrays the heavens in splendor, and treads on the waves of the sea<sup>1</sup> – that God is here displaying His entirely and wholly otherliness for the disciples to see. This transcendent God is brought near in Jesus of Nazareth.
- b. But he is not just brought near through Jesus walking on the water and speaking words of self-revealing significance. We are also told that he got into the boat with them, and as soon as he did the wind ceased. John tells us the wind ceasing was accompanied by their instant arrival at their destination. These things don't happen when I get in a boat. Do they happen for you? The wind ceases and without any effort or time elapsing you arrive at your destination? No, these are signs of the transcendent God breaking through with power and majesty and might onto the canvas of normal human life. And this is not wasted on the disciples. They are clearly amazed by these things, but they still don't know what

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<sup>1</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, TPNTC.

to do with them. The text tells us that they were utterly astounded because they did not understand about the loaves. Their hearts were hardened by a lack of faith and by an inability to process all they had seen. They still hadn't made sense of all of what it meant that this teacher had multiplied a meal for a family of 5 and had made it last to feed 5000 families. And now they are confronted with this same teacher walking on water, getting into the boat and instantly stilling the storm and bringing them to their destination. These expressions of the Incarnate I AM utterly astounded their hearts. These things were far beyond what they could imagine or make sense of. They missed the full meaning of the loaves, and so they were unable to process by faith a whole new expression of Jesus' unique character and power.

- c. But this unique character and power found a whole new expression in verses 53-56. When they landed they ended up at Gennesaret instead of at Bethsaida. Obviously Jesus had plans for ministry in the region of Gennesaret. You will remember the last time Jesus was in Gennesaret. He wasn't there very long. Long enough to cast out the legion of demons from a man which proceeded to enter a herd of swine which then descended into the sea and drowned. The people of the land subsequently pleaded with Jesus to leave their land, and so he did, but not before instructing the man to go throughout all the region and tell everyone what Jesus had done for him. And so, in verses 53-56, Jesus returns to this region, and the word has obviously gotten out. The story of the cleansed demon-possessed man is more than enough to convince everyone of Jesus' power to heal.
- d. And so, in contrast to the disciples' hardened hearts and lack of faith, the people of Gennesaret were convinced that if the sick could just touch the fringe of His garment they would be made well. And so, as Jesus travelled throughout the region their infantile faith was met by His healing power. They certainly did not fully comprehend all that Jesus was or all that Jesus was here on earth to do, but they did realize that He had the power to save them from disease and so they asked to just touch the fringe of his garment so that they might be healed.
- e. And in this the disciples are confronted with another way in which the transcendent God is brought near to them. Who but God can do this? To whom shall we compare this Jesus? There is none like Him!
- f. And He has made this obvious to the disciples through the feeding of the 5000, the walking on water, the stilling of the wind, the instant arrival at their destination, and the mass healing of all of the sick who simply touched the hem of his garment. The disciples' weak faith has been confronted by the many evidences of the transcendent God brought near to them in Jesus Christ. Their following after Christ was not so much endangered by the wind, but by their own lack of faith. And this is true for all of Christ's followers. It is not the difficulties that will inevitably come our way as we follow Jesus that will be the greatest threat to our discipleship. Rather, it is our lack of faith in the face of those difficulties that is

our greatest danger. And so from this text, from the lives of these disciples we hear this clarion call – put your unwavering faith in the Incarnate I AM. Because the eternally self-existent One came near and passed before mankind in the person and work of Jesus Christ, we must place our faith in Him. Very specifically from this passage I want to call you to one particular way of ever increasing faith in our Lord.

Because Jesus is the Incarnate I AM we must place our faith in Him:

- Faith in His powerful presence in the face of our weakness.
  - We ought to have faith in his powerful presence in the face of our weakness. Being a disciple of Jesus means that we will often be confronted with our weakness. Often we will find ourselves in the middle of seeking to obey the command of our Lord, only to find that we are bucking a strong head wind. We will often find ourselves rowing across the Sea of Life only to have a storm preventing our progress. We will find ourselves completely unable to do the very things that are being asked of us as disciples of Jesus Christ. Let me break this down further into three categories of challenges to our discipleship. So, as we seek to follow Jesus and walk in obedience to Him, storms often arise in these three categories: A trial we are unable to bear, a temptation we are unable to break, and a responsibility too large for us to keep.
    - If I had the freedom and the time I could recount for you the many trials that are being faced by those sharing the pews with you this morning. From a chronic disease that continues to deteriorate health, to broken family relationships that plague the soul, to the constant pain of a loved one who has passed to glory, to the uncertainty of employment and the financial strain that this brings, to bills mounting for families who seemingly have no way to pay them down, and the list could go on. These are people who desire to follow their Lord. Their heart's goal is to bring honor and glory to Him as they ever grow into greater maturity in Christ. And yet, as they are rowing across the Sea they are bucking this strong head wind of a trial that seem unbearable to them. And in this you are confronted with your own weakness. You have rowed all night and you are barely halfway across. It feels as though you cannot pull another stroke. Your spiritual arms are weary and you are ready to give up.
    - Or maybe this morning you are facing a temptation to sin that you just cannot break. This sinful pattern has gained a foothold in your life, and you know that to be a disciple of Jesus, this thought, or attitude, or action should not be present in your life. And so you

find yourself fighting against this sin. You do all the things you have been taught – you look for the way of escape, you are careful to guard the gates of your life so as to prevent the temptation from attacking yet again, you memorize Scripture to help you in the moment of temptation – you don't do any of these things perfectly, and you see a decrease in this sin's frequency, but it is still there. It seems as though you are unable to break its attraction in your heart, and in this you are confronted with your weakness. Your heart is willing to follow Jesus in complete obedience, but your flesh is proving to be weak. And in this, you are confronted with your own weakness, your own inability, to follow Christ as you ought to.

- Or maybe in your discipleship you are especially aware of some area of responsibility in which you feel completely inadequate to fulfill your role. The task is simply proving too large for you. Maybe as a student you are facing a mountain of homework and projects and deadlines that is simply impossible for you to do as well as you would like. Maybe as the stay at home mom the daily routine of chores, and the unending demands of nurturing your family have brought you to the brink of exhaustion and a realization that you simply cannot do all that is necessary. Maybe as a husband, father, and provider you are facing the pain and discouragement of so many unfinished tasks. Every afternoon when you leave work you feel the disappointment of all that you didn't get done, only to walk in the door at home and be confronted with all of the things that demand your attention there. On top of that you are growing in your desire to spiritually lead your wife and disciple your children, but unless you only sleep 3 or 4 hours a night you simply are not sure how this is going to happen better. On top of that, you have been elected to some position of leadership here at church and you desire to fulfill that role well for the health of the body, but with your other responsibilities church stuff often gets put aside. You see, as a disciple of Jesus often we are overwhelmed by the responsibility of faithfulness. The responsibility is simply too large for us to actually keep. And it is here that we are confronted with our weakness and inability.
- Which stormy gale is blowing in the face of your discipleship this morning? Is it a trial that is too difficult to bear, or a sin that is seemingly too powerful to overcome, or is it a responsibility of

faithfulness that seems too large to keep? Or maybe it is some combination of all three!

- Can I point you to Jesus here? Can I carefully and lovingly speak the truth into my heart and into yours? Don't be like these disciples who were rowing hard, getting nowhere, and not looking for Jesus! Don't be overrun by your weakness to the point where you can only see yourself in the midst of the storm. Don't lack faith in our Lord to the point that if he showed up in a powerful way you would be frightened!
- You see, your weakness is prime real estate for Christ's strength. This is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12. Turn there with me. 2 Corinthians 12 verses 9-10. Paul had been taken by a vision to the third Heaven, and he tells us in verse 7 that God gave him a messenger of Satan to plague and harass him so that he would not become conceited by this experience. He pleaded with the Lord 3 times to take this thorn in the flesh away from him, but the Lord refused and God's reasoning for this is found in verse 9.
  - God's grace is sufficient for Paul. In the face of Paul's weakness and inability to overcome this trial on his own, God's response is to keep him in the trial and instruct his heart about grace. Paul – you are insufficient and weak and unable to be the disciple you ought to be in the face of this trial – but rest assured, my grace is sufficient. You are weak, but I am strong.
  - Not only that, but your weakness is where my strength is brought to fulfillment. Your weakness provides the perfect place for my strength to be shown. In other words, don't fret over your weakness because I am sufficient where you are insufficient, and your weakness puts you in the place of need for my strength.
- God's reasoning convinces Paul, and draws him to this conclusion: Since God's grace is sufficient and since his strength is given the opportunity to shine in my weakness, therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses. In other words, I will no longer look at my weaknesses the same. I will no longer think of them negatively as something to be avoided and extricated from my life. Rather, my weaknesses will bring me great excitement and joy. I will even boast in those weaknesses – not of my weakness but I will boast that in my weakness God has proven His grace to be sufficient, and His strength has been made known. And it is this that is the key to experiencing God's power in the face of our weakness, for Paul says “so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” His change of outlook brought on by God's clear reasoning brought Paul to glory in his weakness, and it was here that he opened the floodgates to God's power in his life.

- This is counterintuitive for us as humans. Weakness is never a good thing. Only the strong survive. If we are weak then we will get stampeded in the course of life. We can't even admit our own weaknesses because if we do that, then others will prey upon us and seize the opportunity our weakness provides for them to exercise dominance over us. But with God's truth reshaping our paradigm of suffering, we can glory in our weaknesses because God's grace is sufficient and because our weakness is the prime opportunity for His power to be brought to fulfillment in our lives. And so Paul reiterates in verse 10 that he is content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. Why? Because when he is weak, it is there that he is strong in Christ.

**Conclusion:** So, instead of the spirit of fear that the disciples had in the face of their weakness, they should have had the spirit of faith and trust. They should have entrusted themselves to the Lord's all-sufficient grace. And they should have gloried in their weakness because most certainly God was going to show His power. And this is the call to your heart from the text this morning. Are you glorying in your weakness, as you look for God to display His power? Or are you fighting God's sovereignty, fighting for independence of his ordained path, and struggling to exist in your own strength? I call you this morning to put your faith in the Incarnate I AM. His grace is sufficient, and his power is made perfect in your weakness.