



Rev. Frank Wang
Mark 6:45-56

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English Standard Version

Stuck In Our Own Way

The 17th Sermon in a Series on The Gospel of Mark entitled

“The King and His Cross”

1. Welcome

- a. Good morning! Welcome to Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church! I’m Frank Wang, and I’m one of the pastors here. If you’re new, I’m so glad you’re here. I hope that you’ll stick around long enough after the service for me to greet you.
- b. And now let us turn our attention to God’s Word. Open your Bibles to Mark 6:45-56. When you get there, you’ll see that we’ve got the famous passage about Jesus walking on the water this morning...and you’ll see that we have the completely non-famous passage about Jesus healing the sick in Gennesaret. But, if you stick with me, we’ll hopefully see that it’s that non-famous passage that speaks loudly about God’s faithfulness, graciousness, and mercy.¹

2. Read Scripture

⁴⁵Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” ⁵¹And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵²for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him ⁵⁵and ran

¹ The background and exposition of this text is adapted from the commentaries Mark by R. Kent Hughes, pp. 151-157; John by R. Kent Hughes, pp. 197-204, Mark by R.C. Sproul, pp. 145-151.

about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

3. Pray

4. Introduction – “Go Left!” A Lesson in Perspective

- a. So, I was watching the most recent installment of *Mission: Impossible*, and there’s this one scene I want to share with you this morning.
- b. So the scene starts with a shootout that lets the bad guy get away, but not before one of Tom Cruise’s team puts a tracking chip in him. And so, after the shootout inevitably ends in Tom’s favor, he goes to chase down the bad guy.
- c. So you’ve got Tom sprinting through buildings while being chased by bad guy reinforcements, and his team is following in the van anxiously directing him via digital map on an iPad. And then we get to one of the funniest scenes in the movie. Tom is dashing through an office filled with confused workers when Benji, the teammate directing him, shouts, “Go Left!” Tom skids to a stop, and says, “Go left?” “Yes!” “Right now?” “Yes!”
- d. Tom is wildly confused. You see, there’s no road there. There’s no alleyway. There’s nothing but a window, a several story drop, and a rooftop stretching out in front of him. So he does the natural Tom Cruise thing to do. He grabs an office chair, shatters the window with it, and climbs onto the windowsill...where he hesitates. And Benji, who’s watching the bad guys get away, shouts, “What are you waiting for?!”. And Tom shouts, “I’m jumping out a window!” “What?!” “I’m...jumping...out...a...window!”
- e. The camera cuts to Benji, who realizes that he’s been watching the chase in 2d, and he switches it to 3d to see the several story drop that Tom is pumping himself up to do. “Oh. Good luck?”
- f. Now this is funny because of the differences in perspective between Tom and Benji.
 - i. Tom can’t see where he is supposed to be going, while Benji can’t see the real-life situation that Tom is faced with because he’s stuck in 2d mode on his iPad.
 - ii. But it’s even funnier to try to imagine what it would have been like for one of the anonymous office workers. You’ve got a guy you’ve never seen sprint through your office, only to stop dead in his track for no reason. Then he starts talking loudly to himself or to someone that you can’t see. Then he grabs a chair, shatters the window, and proceeds to gear up to jump.
- g. But this is instructive because understanding doesn’t come until someone outside of your perspective changes your perspective. In a way, they’re stuck in their own paradigm, their own way of seeing the world. And because they’re stuck, they can miss big, important things. The scene is only funny because, as the audience, we get to see all the different perspectives, and we because know what it’s like to try to understand something when you don’t have all the pieces.
- h. And that’s exactly what we will see here at the end of Mark 6.

5. Roadmap

- a. This morning, we’re going to be focusing on verses 45-52, but we’re going to find that the second half, verses 53-56, is where we find our hope and comfort. In verses

45-52, we're going to structure our time by looking at the 3 big groups of characters and their perspectives or paradigms in this passage. First, we're going to look at the crowd. Then we're going to look at the disciples. And finally, we're going to look at Jesus. And really, we could really group the crowd and the disciples into folks that get stuck in earthly paradigms, and Jesus who has a heavenly perspective.

6. The Crowd's Paradigm

- a. So let's start with the crowd. Look with me first at verse 45.
 - i. *Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.*
- b. Now it's interesting the language that is used here. The word, "made", conveys the meaning "compel". So basically, after feeding the 5000, which immediately precedes this passage, Jesus forces his disciples to get into the boat. You can imagine Jesus herding his disciples into the boat and then giving it a shove off of the bank, charging them to go to Bethsaida. But why? Why does Jesus abruptly send the disciples away? I mean, they were in the midst of doing a vibrant, impactful ministry! The reason why they were feeding the 5000 in the first place was because Jesus was doing so much teaching that it ran into dinnertime. And what better time to do ministry than hot on the heels of a miracle!?
 - i. We find the reason if we turn to the parallel passage in John 6. There John records in verse 15, "*Perceiving then that they [meaning the crowd] were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*"
 - ii. We can see that Jesus is reacting to what the crowd is gearing up to do. They're seeking to make Jesus king, and Jesus wants no part of that, at least not this kind of king. He also doesn't want his disciples to be swept up in the nationalistic fervor of the crowd either. And so he removes them. But let's look a little more closely at what the crowd is thinking.
- c. Remember what happened in last week's passage? The crowd had just feasted on food that had miraculously been multiplied by Jesus. Their bellies were full, and they were pretty excited about this guy who did some crazy stuff. Again, if we look at John 6, we can see what they're thinking.
 - i. John 6:14 – *When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"* This is why they plan to force Jesus to be their king in just the next verse.
- d. They're thinking, "Finally, the Prophet that has been foretold is here!" And in their understanding, in their paradigm, they thought that the coming of the Prophet would mean that God would rise up and deliver them from their enemies, ala the Exodus or Judges or any of the myriad of other times that God had physically come to Israel's aid. This time, it'd be to destroy the hated Romans. In their mind they're hoping for a return to the glory days of the united monarchy under David and Solomon. It was then that great wealth and acclaim were lavished upon the Jews. In short, they expected God to put them **back on top** because they were **God's people**. They're looking to be delivered totally and finally from their ungodly oppressors.
- e. But they're not really looking to be **God's people**. They're looking for the **perks** of being God's people.

- i. They're looking for the material comfort, the reputation, and the power of being on top.
 - f. All this excitement isn't really even for the person of Jesus. John 6:25 says, "*Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.'*" In the end, their excitement is because they were full for maybe the first time in a long time. I mean, if someone feeds me a great meal, I tend to be pretty pleased with them.
 - g. And it's ironic that they move to make Jesus their political and military leader after the miraculous feeding. Because what was happening before that feeding? Jesus was teaching them! I'm sure that they were listening closely, learning much, and having their minds blown and paradigms shattered. But then they eat miraculously, and they easily and happily revert back to their old expectations and old paradigms.
 - h. That's the power of paradigms. They can really imprison us, refusing to let us see something radically different from our norms. And so, the crowd is stuck in their earthly ways, excited about earthly deliverance. And it's not like Jesus doesn't **want** to deliver his people. It's just that Jesus isn't **content** with **earthly** deliverance. He's concerned with our **cosmic** and **eternal** deliverance. The real enemy isn't the one that is before us, bullying or oppressing us. The real enemy isn't poverty or sickness or disease. The real enemy is death, which results from sin. **That** enemy wins 100% of the time, condemning us to an eternity of wrath. And so, Jesus doesn't give in. Jesus doesn't give them what they want, because if we were to jump over to Mark 8:36, we'd see Jesus sum it up this way. *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*
7. **Transition:** So the crowd can't see past their present circumstances. They can't get past their hope that their present lives could change "for the better". In short, they don't have a long-term perspective. They're playing the short game instead of the long one. But what about the disciples?
8. **The Disciples' Paradigm**
- a. We mostly find the disciples on the sea in this passage. They've been given a mission by their master, and they've labored long and hard in a commitment to accomplish that mission. They are obeying Jesus' command. And so, the task they're battling to complete should have been a constant reminder to have Jesus' perspective. Jesus is at the center of why they're in the situation that they are in.
 - b. So how's it going? Look at verse 48. *And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.*
 - i. Here were a band of believers, exhausted by the previous day's ministry and work, faithfully obeying Jesus' command to them. When we look at the Matthew's account, we see that the waves were battering the boat. John's account says that they had given up trying to sail due to the unfavorable wind and had brought out the oars. The disciples are tired, having never gotten that break that they were supposed to have had. And by the time Jesus comes down to them, it's the 4th watch of the night, which is between 3AM and 6AM. They had literally rowed all night. It was wet, cold, windy, and miserable in that boat.
 - c. What might be going through their heads? Were there silent doubts?

- i. This stinks. If Jesus hadn't kicked us out of the party with the loaves, we might be sleeping in a comfortable bed in some hospitable crowd member's house.
 - ii. We've been rowing all night! Can't we just call it quits and go back to shore?
 - iii. What is Jesus doing? It feels like he abandoned us!
 - d. Or was there a quiet resolve to do everything in my power to accomplish what Jesus had set us out to do?
 - e. What we do know is that the disciples aren't expecting Jesus. This is why they don't recognize him in verses 49-50. They think he's a ghost. They can see him plainly, but verse 52 says that their hearts were hard. This means that they didn't have any room in their paradigm for him to be walking on the water. The truth about his divinity hadn't truly sunk in.
 - f. Their reaction of being utterly astounded isn't simply a wonder at Jesus' power, but one where there is surprise as well. R.C. Sproul describes their reaction as being dumbfounded. I mean, sure, you'd expect them to say, "Wow." Jesus calmed a storm without even a word after all. But you'd also sort of expect them to say by this point, "Well that's Jesus for you. He's God after all. It's definitely in line with who he is. This isn't out of character for him." Rather, they're surprised. Jesus's divinity after the fact is obvious. Matthew 14 records the disciples worshipping after Jesus gets into the boat.
 - g. But the disciples should have been expectant. They should have been ready. They probably should have been praying while they rowed, asking Jesus to help them in the midst of the storm. But they're not. Verse 52 makes that's clear. They don't understand about the loaves. They don't truly get Jesus's divinity is there for them, to provide for them, to care for them. They don't even get it when they see him walking on the water. Jesus isn't simply displaying his power by walking on the water. He's walking on the water to get to the disciples! He's coming to them to help them. Jesus is breaking out of their paradigm, and it's blowing their mind. Only it shouldn't have, which shows us that the disciples were stuck back in their earthly paradigms too.
 - h. We might be able to understand that the crowd doesn't get it. We might be able to chalk the crowd's backsliding into earthly perspectives and paradigms up to their lack of time with Jesus. But we can't do that with the disciples. They were with Him the whole time. They saw everything. All the miracles. All the healings. All the feedings. All the teaching. And yet they seem to be just as imprisoned as the crowd is. I mean, they don't get to use the line that we often use. "If only I were there to see the miracles, to see Jesus, I definitely would have a stronger faith. If only I could see." Well they could and did see! And they still don't seem to get it.
 - i. Well, what about Peter you might say? Didn't he get out of the boat in Matthew 14? Didn't he have faith, understanding, and a heavenly way of thinking? Well, yes. For a time. And then what did he do? He looked around and got caught up in the earthly wind and waves. He had it and then he lost it.
- i. No matter how you slice it, the disciples seem to be just as stuck as the crowd. They simply can't seem to wrap their brain around Jesus being the Son of God, the Messiah, God Incarnate.

- j. In some ways, the lack of faith and understanding in the disciples is worse than the crowd's. **Their** being stuck in earthly paradigms makes us wonder what hope there is for anyone. If they see everything and still don't get it, what chance do we have 2000 years later? Which brings us to Jesus.

9. **Jesus's Paradigm**

- a. We see here that after Jesus dismissed the crowds, he withdrew to the top of the mountain to pray. It is here that I think we see how to transition from an earthly paradigm and perspective to a heavenly one. So why does Jesus withdraw to pray?
- b. Jesus prayed all the time, but we see he withdrawing to pray in times of particular stress or importance. Think about the Garden of Gethsemane as he prepares to receive all the wrath for every person, past, present, and future, that he is going to save. But why? Jesus never wavers and never forgets who he is and what his mission is. He's always got a heavenly perspective and a heavenly paradigm. So why does he need to pray?
- c. It's because Jesus doesn't say that the worldly cares that we have are nothing or insignificant. He recognizes that holding onto a heavenly perspective is hard. His whole mission is hard, and Jesus is **reminding** himself of that heavenly perspective by **communing** with his Father. Jesus is spending time with the Father so that he can be reminded and strengthened for what he is to do.
- d. It's important that we see this vital truth. Jesus heals people, feeds people, and weeps over the dead. The fact that he does all of that shows that this life that we're living, with all of its sufferings and hurts and worries, **it matters**...But it's not **everything**.

10. **Illustration:** Think about it this way. There's something big in your life that has just happened. Students, maybe you've just failed a big test. Young adults, maybe you just got into your first car accident, and it was your fault. Adults that own houses, maybe your water heater just died and started leaking everywhere, and now you don't have water until it gets replaced. Whatever happened really takes up a lot of thought space. It's always right there in your mind, and it's often really hard to focus on other things because what happened keeps popping up. Yes, what happened is **important**, and you'll definitely need to go through the appropriate steps to resolve it, but it's **not everything**.

- a. And that's what Jesus is taking time to remind himself of. Can you imagine being Jesus, with his heart of compassion and love for these people? The weight and urgency of their suffering and neediness must have been overwhelming and ever present in his daily life, just like how our issues are right there in our faces. And let's not forget the incredibly frustrating task it must be to deal with broken sinners that are stuck in their own ways. There would have been a very real pull for Jesus to focus on the present suffering. And yet, he needs to keep all of that in the proper perspective. Jesus needs to do the work of putting this present suffering in the context of eternity. When compared to an eternity of wrath, what is suffering in this time? Not nothing, but eternity certainly is more important. And this is hard work that Jesus has to do because it requires him to say "not yet and not that way" to the suffering and neediness around him. And so he manages that work by spending time in the presence of his Father.
- b. God's presence does wonders for perspective. Simply being in His presence puts everything and everyone in their place. It cuts through all the noise to deliver what

the truth is about every little thing. And so being on that side of the Cross, being with the Father reminds and steels Jesus for His mission.

11. Transition: So what does Jesus end up doing with these differences in perspectives?

Remember, the crowd and the disciples are still stuck in their earthly ways, paradigms, and perspectives. Remember when I asked what chance we have if the disciples can't get it? We still have that situation. And this is where we see the Gospel...in his faithful persistence in verses 53-56.

12. **A Savior who is faithful and patient**

- a. *When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.*
- b. I said way back at the beginning that we would find our hope and comfort here. And this is why.
 - i. The crowd and the disciples don't get it. They frustratingly don't get it. And Jesus could have left them behind, shook the dust off his sandals, and been done with them. But he **doesn't**. That right there is our hope and comfort.
 - ii. Jesus didn't leave the disciples to struggle on the sea alone. He came to them, showing off yet again who he is. And he doesn't leave the crowd either. He goes to them, those frustrating, fickle people, and he continues to give them himself, healing them and meeting them just where they are. The very fact that Jesus continues on a sort of non-descript healing spree points to his patience with those that he loves. He doesn't let go. He keeps showing up and revealing who he is. He keeps giving people that can't seem to get it more chances to see the glorious grace that's coming.
 - iii. What a comfort that is to us! We tend to go through our weeks consumed with the cares and worries of this world. We backslide with the best of them, and yet the Lord doesn't leave us alone. He comes after us, faithfully calling us to himself. And the Gospel doesn't just comfort and reassure us in our stuckness, in our bondage to earthly paradigms. It changes and reorients us too!
- c. Listen to 2 Corinthians 4 describe how the Gospel reorients our perspective, starting in verse 13.
 - i. *Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his **presence**. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

- d. Did you hear how the Gospel changes the way that we experience things? Do you see that we're not dismissing the here and now, but are looking to him who raises us? But it's not just that he raises us, but he brings us into his presence. I tell my youth group that the Gospel is 3 things. Christ's death, resurrection, and our union with him. Christ's death and resurrection are great and all, but it's not good news for me until I'm united with him. Being united to Christ changes everything. It changes everything about who we are. Now, we're not stuck in our earthly paradigms because we have died to them, and have been raised in Christ. He and I are one, and now I get to see as He does, to love the things that He loves in the order that He loves them. That's how the Gospel moves us from an earthly perspective to a heavenly one.

13. Transition: And so let's end our time by asking what this looks like in real life.

14. Conclusion: Being stuck and being redeemed

- a. So I want to talk to you about my week. Sermon weeks tend to be really interesting because the Lord usually makes you live through and in whatever you're preaching on. Dr. Silvernail told me at some point that he preached on adversity once, and it was the craziest week where everything seemed to go wrong. I don't think he's preached on adversity since.
- b. Well anyway, this week is all about perspective right? And so the Lord revealed to me how stuck I can get, and yet how freeing the Gospel is.
- c. And so Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, I didn't get much done on the sermon. Sarah was sick on Monday, an all-day presbytery meeting ate Tuesday with a late night attached due to the session prayer meeting we have every month, and Wednesday was prep for youth group. And so come Thursday, I'm freaking out a little bit because I've probably written and scrapped 6 introductions, and I still have zip for a sermon. Ironic isn't it that the sermon is on perspective, and the sermon was my biggest stumbling block to a heavenly perspective.
- d. But the sermon wasn't the only thing that seemed to pull my attention toward my circumstances. There were some unusual things that happened too. For instance, on Monday, I was in Wegmans, and I dropped my phone. As I stooped to pick it up, I managed to smash my face into the handle of the shopping cart. My face still hurts when I move my eyebrows. It definitely gave me a low-grade headache for a few days after that. Monday was also the day that my wrist started to hurt whenever I moved it.
- e. And then on Wednesday, youth group was a disaster for me. I wasn't teaching or communicating well. I was getting frustrated, and I was being a jerk because I simply wasn't performing my duties as a pastor well. Ironic and hypocritical again. And so on top of the pain in my face and the lack of progress on the sermon, we could add a generous dose of self-loathing and disappointment.
- f. And let's face it. This was 3 days that just didn't go the way I wanted. They weren't terrible days, just not ideal ones. And yet, there I was throwing a Frank-Stinks party Wednesday night after youth group. I knew that I was on tilt, and yet, I was stuck. I needed help.
- g. And so I called on of my best friends to set me straight, to call me back to the Gospel paradigm. And we talked through the passage. Talking about keeping our eyes fixed on Christ. Talking about having a heavenly perspective. Talking about what Jesus thought of me. He encouraged me to sit and meditate on what it means for me to be

found in Christ. Jesus doesn't think of me as a bumbling klutz who was a jerk and a terrible teacher. He delights in me. I am His beloved. I'm sure that I'm wildly frustrating, but just as He was faithful to the crowd and to the disciples, He is faithful to me too.

- h.** And something changed on Wednesday night. Sure, I still struggled on Thursday, but something had changed. The various pains and worries didn't stick anymore. Jesus had captured my attention, and I hope that we have focused on Him this morning. You see, Friday and Saturday, I was excited to tell you how the Lord had changed my perspective because of the Gospel. He reminded me that the words of my sermon wouldn't do the work of transformation. He would take care of that, and in some ways, He already has. He changed my worries, my stresses, and my cares into an expectant joy that celebrates and shares all that He has done for me in the Gospel.
- i.** We'll end with what I kept coming back to, the end of Romans 8. This is what we rest in. This is what we want to be ever present as our perspective.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's a Gospel perspective that helps me in the daily grind.
Let's pray.