

## WHEN WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND

**Mk. 8:13** And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side. <sup>14</sup> Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. <sup>15</sup> And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. <sup>16</sup> And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. <sup>17</sup> And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? <sup>18</sup> Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? <sup>19</sup> When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. <sup>20</sup> And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. <sup>21</sup> And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?

Nat King Cole used to sing a song, “Smile though your heart is aching, Smile, even though it’s breaking, When there are clouds in the sky ... Smile what’s the use of crying, You’ll find that life is still worthwhile, If you just smile”.

It’s not always easy to smile though. Sometimes burdens seem so heavy, and you are not sure how you will cope. Even as Christians, as the hymn describes, “When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed, When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost” ... Is this how the Christian life ought to be?

Before they met Jesus, the disciples had been engaged in their daily activities, in their different backgrounds ... and then when Jesus called them, they left all behind them to follow Him. ... They witnessed Him teach and preach, always the same message, whether in a synagogue, or by the shore, or on the hills, in the villages, towns, and cities, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mk. 1:14,15).

They also watched Him heal the sick, raise the dead, drive out demons, resist the religious leaders as they berated Him. ... What great experiences the disciples had following Jesus! ... On one occasion, the crowds had been listening to Him speaking all day, and the disciples standing with Jesus could see the people’s faces, and how they were totally enthralled. ... They saw how Jesus overcame the problem of feeding the people at the end of the day. Originally, they feared the crowds would be so hungry as they made their way home, with nowhere to buy food. So, they reckoned it would be best to send them off before the darkness descended (Mk. 6:35,36).

To the disciples’ surprise, Jesus said to them, no, Give ye them to eat (v.37). ... Service for the Lord Jesus means for us to be involved, rather than leaving what we can do to someone else. However, realistically, where were the disciples going to find food for all those people? ... How could they afford it? With

perhaps a hint of sarcasm, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? (v.37) ... They believed Jesus' request was bordering on the ridiculous! ... Two hundred denarii equalled two hundred days wages!

Without causing a fuss, Jesus quietly and gently said to them, How many loaves have ye? (v.38) ... They did not know, and He knew they did not know. ... Why did they not know? Because they did not expect to be asked, for it was someone else's problem. But, no it wasn't because Jesus expected them to go and find out! ... And when they went to find out, they came back and told Him all they could find was five loaves and two small fishes. Nothing near what they needed!

Nevertheless, we give them credit for going and looking, and finding the loaves and fishes. We also give them credit for doing as Jesus commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties (v.39,40). ... Very orderly for, of course, it was Jesus' idea. The disciples would have sent the people home hungry which would not have been right, especially before nightfall. However, the Son of God, <sup>41</sup> when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. The disciples went along each of the rows, distributing the the Saviour's provision, <sup>42</sup> And they did all eat, and were filled *[including the disciples]*. <sup>3</sup> And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.

It is an amazing story. Every one of those people who had spent the day with Jesus went away having been filled, not only with the bread and the fish, but also with the spiritual food the Saviour had provided.

After the crowd had dispersed, Jesus told His disciples to enter the boat and sail the short distance across to Bethsaida (v.45). Meanwhile, He went up into the mountain to pray for what would have included the events of that day, and also for the next day (v.46).

As the disciples set sail without Jesus, they would have been weary, the darkness descended, and the wind began to blow in their faces ... not ferociously, but enough to make it difficult to row the relatively short distance towards Bethsaida (v. 48). And Jesus saw this, he saw them toiling in rowing. He knew their circumstances, - how they were sailing in the darkness *into* the wind. ... *He was watching*, "My Jesus knows when I am lonely, He knows each pain, He sees each tear; He understands each lonely heartache, He understands because He cares. My Jesus knows just what I need."

And it was about three/four o'clock in the morning (the fourth watch of the night). He has come down from the mountain where He had been praying, and He is standing on the shore ... the waves lapping at His feet, the stars high up in the dark sky, the wind blowing in His face too ... and He steps out into the water towards the disciples struggling in the boat and he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them (v.48).

It definitely wasn't a *storm* storm, violently rocking the boat from side to side, but it was serious enough for them to be anxious and for Jesus to notice their anxiety and for Him to come to their aid, <sup>49</sup> But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit *ἰφάντασμα*, and cried *I screamed!* out: <sup>50</sup> For they all saw him, and were troubled. ... In their trouble they were not expecting Jesus, and when they saw a figure coming towards them, it did not even 'cross their minds' it was Jesus. Their fear of the wind was made greater by their fear of the unknown. ... Long before Jesus had called them to be disciples, many of them had often been out on the rough sea ... but with the wind in their faces, in the darkness, and perhaps a real storm brewing, ... and yet their greatest fear was this figure on the waves approaching them, - they did not know what it was!

Terrified, rather than trusting. When they had left Jesus on the shore, they knew He was going up the mountain to pray. ... So, they ought to have known that among all the things He was praying for, He was praying for them. ... The writer to the Hebrews reminds us, <sup>Heb. 7:25</sup> he [*the Lord Jesus*] ever liveth to make intercession for *us!* Paul tells us how our Saviour is at the right hand of God making intercession for us (Rom. 8:34), and John describes Him as our Advocate with the Father (I Jn. 2:1).

Also, *Jesus* had sent them out in the boat, and He knew where they were. Because they went at His command, they would not perish for in His will, they would arrive where He sent them. He would not permit any obstacles to hinder them. ... And when He drew alongside, - they in the boat, and Him on the water, - immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer *ἰθαροεῖτε*, *be strong!* it is I; be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure *I completely astounded!*, and wondered *I amazed!* (v.50,51). And Mark concludes this account, <sup>52</sup> For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

Why did they not remember back to earlier when they witnessed how Jesus provided the food for the multitudes? ... or when He worked the miracles of healings for all the people who came to Him? ... If Jesus can provide for all

those strangers, why do I not believe He can do provide even greater things for me, and for us in this fellowship who are His?!

Like it was with those disciples ... we are ‘pushing out from the shore’, into the darkness, we’re tired, we feel we are on our own, as if ‘there is a wind blowing in our face’ ... we are ‘trying to row’ and we find it well-nigh impossible.

Like the disciples, we have been with Jesus, but no matter how much we have experienced in the past, we still find room to doubt Him. The hymn writer reminds us, “He is not a disappointment! ... And the more I get to know Him, So the more I find Him true.” The disciples had witnessed Jesus doing so much for them and for others, and *still* they hesitated in trusting Him,<sup>53</sup> And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. ... Jesus always brought them to where He promised.

In the meantime, certain Pharisees and scribes came down from Jerusalem to assess what Jesus was doing ... and it did not take them long until they found something they could complain about for His disciples were eating bread without ceremonially washing their hands (7:1). ... Afterwards Jesus went over to Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast (v.24-30), and then returned through Galilee and along to the Decapolis on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (v.31) As usual, He attracted a great following, great multitudes (v. 32-37). Once again, they needed to be fed ... and again, the disciples were as they had been previously,<sup>8:4</sup> from whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?<sup>5</sup> And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.<sup>6</sup> And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people.<sup>7</sup> And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.<sup>8</sup> So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.<sup>9</sup> And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away. ... Had the disciples learned this time? Were they getting the message?

After He had departed from the multitude, Jesus entered another boat with the disciples, they sailed across from the eastern shore to Dalmanutha on the western shore (8:10), only to be met by the obstreperous Pharisees. Not satisfied with having seen Jesus perform miracles, they wanted Him to do miracles involving signs in the sky (v.11). They were looking for more ‘ammunition’ to use against Him when they brought their report back to Jerusalem. Jesus, however, would not give them what they wanted, and left them (v.13)!

Entering the boat again, with His disciples He set sail for the eastern coast. However, the disciples had a *massive* problem, <sup>14</sup> the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf *It do the twelve of them plus Jesus!* They had not mentioned it to Him, but He knew they were talking about it among themselves. ... They had been with Him, had seen His miracles, and witnessed His feeding of the 5000+ and the 4000+ ... and now they were whinging about twelve of them being hungry, and having only one loaf of bread! The Saviour must often have been exasperated with these men?! ... <sup>17</sup> he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? <sup>18</sup> Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? <sup>19</sup> When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. <sup>20</sup> And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. <sup>21</sup> And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?

The question often comes to us too, How is it that ye do not understand? ... How many times has God answered our prayers, individually and as a fellowship? We have seen Him doing wonderful things, - not perhaps on the same scale as Mark describes, - but, as the psalmist wrote, **Ps. 126:3** The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. ... He has kept this church through good times and bad. He has remained with us, and He continues to provide for us even during these times. ... How then can we doubt His power and His faithfulness?

Look at the amount of times Jesus ‘carried’ His disciples, even in these passages we have looked at. On the mountain and by the shore, and on the boat in the dark hours of the early morning, Jesus came through the darkness. ... “Can I doubt His tender mercy, Who through life has been my guide ... Gives me grace for every trial” ... He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8)! “Oh, how sweet the glorious message, Simple faith may claim ... All may change, but Jesus never! Glory to His Name!” ... When we find it difficult to understand, Jesus appears out of the darkness.