

How to Walk With a Tender Heart

Our study this morning is in Mark 6:45-52. We usually think the passage is about Jesus walking on the water. That is the title usually given to this passage, but the primary reason the event is recorded was not to teach us that Jesus could actually walk on the water! When we come to any passage of Scripture, we should always ask, “Why did the Holy Spirit include this in the Bible? What is the purpose of the passage? What nuggets are here?” 2 Timothy 3:16 reminds us,

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-16 (NASB)

That is, God the Holy Spirit wrote everything for a reason. Even what we think is not interesting has been given for our spiritual growth. Usually, we are preoccupied with the facts of Mark 6:45-52 and miss the message of the passage! We miss the ways of God.

FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND.

Before we dig into our passage, I want to draw your attention

to the event that occurred just before the one we are going to study. The passage is Mark 6:33-44. We call it the feeding of the five thousand. I am sure that you remember that Jesus felt compassion for a crowd of people because they were like sheep without a shepherd and so He taught them many things. He taught so long that when He finished it was late in the day. The

people were hungry and verses 35-36 say,

When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, “This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” Mark 6:35-36 (NASB)

Here we are told that Jesus and the disciples were concerned about the people because they were hungry and was late in the day. Verse 38 says one of the disciples announced that he had found a boy with five loaves of bread and two fish, but this seemed to be a ridiculous suggestion. But Jesus told the disciples to have everyone sit down in groups of hundreds and fifties. So, the people sat down and Jesus began breaking off pieces of food and filling baskets. Verse 44 reveals that there were five

thousand men present. But most likely there were as many as twenty-five thousand men, women and children there. I have always imagined the little boy who had the loaves of bread and fish sitting nearby with his eyes fixed on Jesus breaking

off pieces of bread or fish and putting them into baskets. I imagine he wanted to know what was happening to the food he brought. If I had been that boy, I think I would have become extremely excited as I watched Jesus breaking off pieces of bread and saw that the loaves of bread did not decrease in size as fast as Jesus was filling the baskets. Eventually, after every-



one had finished eating, verses 42- 44 say,

They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves. Mark 6:42-44 (NASB)

Some important facts about this miracle are that there was more food left over than when Jesus started multiplying the food. They started with five loaves of bread and two fish, but ended with twelve baskets full of food. Now someone could try to explain this miracle away by claiming that the crowd had just nibbled on the edges of the bread and passed it around and everyone took turns licking pieces of the fish! But we are told they ended up with twelve baskets of food and the people ate also. Now how can someone explain this miracle? Even more importantly, why did the Holy Spirit include this event in the gospels? This miracle was so fantastic that it is the only one that is included in all four gospels and each gospel records that twelve baskets were left afterward. Now those are the facts, but what is the message?

John 6:14 tells us that when the people saw the miracle they believed Jesus was a prophet and wanted to make Him king.

Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." John 6:14 (NASB)

The gospel of John tells us that later Jesus rebuked the people because they wanted to make Jesus king only because they wanted food. Listen to John 6:26.

Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled." John 6:26 (NASB)

You see, the people saw the facts but missed the message.

Mark 6:45-46 says that immediately Jesus ordered the disciples to get into a boat and row to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida, which was near Capernaum on the west side of the sea.

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray. When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Mark 6:45-47 (NASB)

Now why did Jesus send the disciples away before He sent the crowds away? It appears that the last thing Jesus wanted was to have His disciples join the crowds in wanting to make Him king at that moment in His ministry. So, sending the disciples away could have made it easier to send the crowds away, if the disciples thought the crowd had a good idea. Whatever the reason, He sent them away, then sent the crowds away and escaped to a mountain to pray.

JESUS WALKS ON WATER. So, the crowds were gone, the disciples were on the sea headed for Bethsaida, according to Mark, or Capernaum, according to John. Jesus had successfully escaped to a mountain to pray. Then Mark 6:45-47 tells us,

When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Mark 6:47 (NASB)

Verse 47 zooms forward in time and tells us the disciples were in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. John 6:19 adds that the disciples are about three to four miles away from shore. He says,

Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles . . . John 6:19 (NASB)

Since the distance of the Sea of Galilee from the east side to the west where Capernaum and Bethsaida existed is about six to eight miles across, this agrees with Mark's statement that they were in the middle of the sea.

Next John 6:17-18 says,

It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. John 6:17-18 (NASB)

Mark 6:49-51 (NASB)

The Greek tenses are pluperfects. A Greek pluperfect refers to completed action in the past. This means that it had been dark for a long time. Verse 18 says then the Sea of Galilee literally began to waken. That is, the waves began to toss and the winds started blowing. Matthew 14:24 says the boat was being battered by the waves, and the wind was contrary. It was blowing against them.

Then Mark 6:48 gives us some incredible news!

Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. Mark 6:48 (NASB)

There are several important facts we do not want to miss! First, Mark says the time of the night was the fourth watch. The night hours were divided into four watches. The first watch was from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The second watch was from 9:00 p.m. to midnight. The third watch was from midnight to 3:00 a.m. The fourth watch was from 3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. This means the disciples had been rowing for a long time and they were only in the middle of the sea. They should have already rowed across the sea, but they were in the middle. An Olympic rower could have crossed the sea in about two hours.

The second important fact is that Jesus saw them from the mountain. We are told that Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars from three to four miles away in the dark of night with a storm battering the boat and blowing winds? Wow! What does that reveal? One thing we know is that Jesus did not have the modern military night vision goggles. He did not need them. He had divine vision!

Then Mark says Jesus came walking on the water. That is fact number three and miracle number two! The first miracle was the feeding of the five thousand. Mark 6:49-51 describes the miracle number three.

But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished . . ."

Now Mark ignores the fact that Peter walked on the water which Matthew 14:28-33 includes, and we will skip too. I want to remain with the account Mark gives us. Next, the gospel of Mark says the disciples were terrified when they saw Jesus. They thought that Jesus was a ghost. We should not condemn them. They were exhausted after struggling most of the night against fierce winds in an attempt to get to Bethsaida. The trip should only have taken them two hours or a little more. Then something comes walking on water. Since when is that a common event?

Immediately, Jesus comforted them with, "It is I, do not be afraid." That is the NASB translation. The literal Greek is "I AM." The Greek is *ego eimi*. "I AM." He uses the name that God gave to Moses in Exodus 3. Then Jesus got into the boat and immediately the wind stopped. That is miracle number four! John 6:21 says that instantly the boat moved from the middle of the sea, and across the sea to the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. That is miracle number five! Those are the facts. We refer to this event as "Jesus Walking On The Water." But that title sure misses so much!

Now I have a question. Since it could have taken only two hours or a little more for the disciples to row across the Sea of Galilee, we know they were tired and struggling to cross the sea. Why did Jesus wait so long to come to them? Why did He not come at the second watch or the third watch? The answer is that Jesus told them to leave and row across the Sea of Galilee. He had purpose. It was a test. It was an opportunity for them to learn a lesson they had missed already! God designs tests for us. That is the message of the book of Job and James 1:2-5.

Then Mark 6:51-52 adds a very disappointing statement. It says that every disciple in that boat was utterly astonished or utterly amazed by what had happened! Mark 6:51-52 says,

"Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened."
Mark 6:52 (NASB)

Why were the disciples utterly astonished? We are told they did not gain any insight from the incident of the loaves, the feeding of the five thousand. I have to admit that I am surprised the disciples saw the facts and also missed the message of loaves! They also missed the message of this test. Now, why did they not gain any insight? The answer is their hearts were hardened. They failed the test.

Now why were their hearts hardened? This is an important question because if Jesus' disciples had a hard heart after walking with Him, seeing Him do miracle after miracle and hearing Him teach repeatedly, we need to understand that we can react as they did! They had firsthand knowledge about Jesus, yet they had a hardened heart. Do you want a hard heart and miss the messages of Scripture, such as the feeding of the five thousand?

A HARDENED HEART IS INSENSITIVE TO GOD. So let's start by asking the question, "What is the meaning of a hardened heart in Mark 6:52?" In Scripture, the heart refers to our inner self. Mark 2:8 teaches that sometimes our heart symbolically refers to the place of reasoning or thinking. Jesus said,

Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Mark 2:8 (NASB)

So the heart is symbolically referred to as the place where we think, and Acts 5:3-4 reveals that the heart is sometimes referred to as the place of our will.

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart?" Acts 5:3-4 (NASB)

Here we are told that Ananias planned to lie. That involved his will. Matthew 5:28 speaks of the heart as the place of emotion when Jesus says,

... everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:28 (NASB)

In summary, the heart was used to refer to the place where we think, make decisions and have emotion. The heart represents our inner self. Your heart represents you! My heart represents me!

Therefore, what is a "hardened heart"? The Greek word that is translated as hardened is *poroo*. It literally means "to form a callus" such as a callus on a fractured bone or on the heel of our feet. It can refer to the formation of a stone, such as a gallbladder stone. This means the disciples in that boat had a callused heart, a stony heart or an insensitive heart. Their inner self was stony or cold to spiritual truth! That is, a hardened heart is insensitive to God.

A HARDENED HEART IS A PERSONAL CHOICE. Another important passage is Mark 8:17-21. It reveals another important truth about a hardened heart. But before we read it, we need to know that just before this passage we are told in Mark 8:1-13 that Jesus had fed four thousand more people. This means that when we read Mark 8:17, Jesus has already fed at least five thousand people and also at least four thousand people. We are also told that another event had also occurred. Jesus had warned the disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees, or their teaching. Listen to Mark 8:15-16,

And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. Mark 8:15-16 (NASB)

Mark 8:17 reveals that the disciples once again missed another message! Listen to Jesus,

"Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?" Mark 8:17-21 (NASB)

Jesus asked them, “Do you have a hardened heart?” Then Jesus clearly implied they were responsible for their lack of understanding when He said, “HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR?” Then He asked if they remembered the feeding of the five thousand. He asked, “How many baskets were left?” They answered twelve. Then He asked if they remembered the feeding of the four thousand and how many baskets were left over? They answered seven! Then He rebuked them! This clearly implies they were responsible for not understanding when He says, “Do you not yet understand?”

Hebrews 3:7-10 also teaches us that we are responsible if our heart is hardened. The Holy Spirit is speaking about the Israelites. He refers to their hardened hearts.

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,
“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY
PROVOKED ME,
AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,
WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me,
AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.
“THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION,
AND SAID, “THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR
HEART,
AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS.” Hebrews 3:7-10
(NASB)

Now the Holy Spirit says a lot in this passage. In verse 8, He warns, “Do not harden your hearts!” That implies a personal choice. We are responsible. In verse 8 the Holy Spirit says they, “. . . saw my works for forty years.” That is, the Israelites saw an incredible number of miracles. They saw the ten plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, rocks gush out water, manna fall from heaven, and many more. Yet, that did not change their heart. You see, miracles do not change a hardened heart. But they do change a tender heart. A hardened heart finds excuses or ignores the facts. In verse 10 we are told “They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know my ways.” Notice that they only saw facts. This passage says

they had a heart problem.

Now let us return to Mark 8:17-21 where Jesus rebuked the disciples. This means the twelve disciples who saw Jesus’ miracles, heard His teachings, and had ministered for Him were responsible for their hardened hearts. That is why Jesus asked, “Do you have a hardened heart?” and then asked, “Do you not yet understand?”

We have learned two things about a hardened heart. A hardened heart is insensitive to God, His word, and spiritual things, and a hardened heart is a personal choice!

A HARDENED HEART IS THE RESULT OF SIN. Why were the disciples’ hearts hardened? Jesus tells us in John 14:21.

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. John 14:21 (NASB)

Now do not miss this verse! Notice that Jesus says, “He who has My commandments and keeps them.” Both the verbs “has” and “keeps” are present participles which refer to continuing, ongoing behavior. Now notice the last part of the verse. Jesus said He will disclose Himself to those who know and keep His commands.

Jesus said this to His disciples. They were in the upper room. He will die the next day, and He told them that to anyone actively keeping His commandments, He will reveal Himself. Let us make it simple. He will disclose Himself to those who are confessing their sins and striving to not sin.

Hebrews 3:13 connects a hardened heart with . . .

. . . the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13 (NASB)

R. Alan Cole in his commentary on Mark from the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries adds this helpful comment,

Smallness of faith and hardness of heart are two constant sins even of the disciples in Mark. Hardness of heart is that lack of spiritual perception, that lack of readiness to learn, for which we are ultimately blameworthy ourselves, and which, in the extreme case of the scribes, can lead at last to the sin against the Holy Spirit.

His point is that the disciples' sins prevented them from understanding the message of the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand—the Word of God. The first symptom of a hardened heart is an insensitivity to sin. The second symptom is difficulty in understanding it.

The same principle applies to us today. Do you remember that I started by saying that we should ask why the Holy Spirit includes certain verses and passages in the Bible? The miracles of the feeding of the five thousand, the feeding of the four thousand and Jesus walking on the water are included to motivate us to seek to discover that unconfessed sins hinder us from knowing spiritual truth and learning more about Jesus!

My Personal Experience. I have found that my own personal sins will hinder me from understanding Scripture and will keep me from learning the ways of God. More than once I have sat down to study Scripture and I could not understand it. I was not responding to what I was reading. Then I would stop and ask God to reveal any sins that I had not confessed and immediately He will bring one or more to my memory. Then I confess it and, “miracle of miracles,” I can understand Scripture and it is meaning.

A Woman's Personal Experience. Years ago I was baptizing a woman. We were in a pool of water and she was giving her testimony. Then I asked her how did she know that she was a Christian? She answered that before she was a Christian she could not understand the Bible, but she could after becoming a Christian. She was so happy! Her experience was just as 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 teaches us that we need the Spirit to understand Scripture. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon people. In the New Testament era He resides within believers as a promise.

The Disciples Had Unconfessed Sins. This helps us understand that the disciples' hardened hearts were due to sin. Their unconfessed sins hindered them from understanding the messages of the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. **The message of the feeding of the five thousand was not that they should have made Jesus king but that He was God.**

We have now learned three things about a hardened heart: 1) A hardened heart is insensitive to God, 2) a hardened heart

is a personal choice and 3) a hardened heart is the result of unconfessed sin and/or ongoing sin!

A HARDENED HEART CAN BECOME WORSE. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 teaches us another important truth about a believer's hardened heart. It can become worse.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (NASB)

Here in verse 2, Paul told the believers in the church at Corinth that he had to give them milk to drink and not solid food. Then he added the reason he could not give them solid food was he was “not able.” The Greek tense of the word “able” is in the imperfect tense. That means he had tried to give them solid food multiple times. They were in a continuing or ongoing situation where they could not understand Paul's teaching. The reason was that they were sinning. He named some of their sins, but not all of them. He said jealousy and strife. He called them fleshly. The result of continuing, unrepentant sin is a hardened heart which results in a greater difficulty to understand spiritual truths and to conviction of sins!

Once, I knew a woman who was always miserable. She said that she read the Bible, but it never seemed to change her. Then later she came for counseling and we talked about sins that she had never confessed. In fact, she had difficulty identifying her own sins. That is the deceitfulness of sin. It blinds us. Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart is deceitfully wicked.

I think we know that we can sit here in this nice large room, sing worship songs on Sunday morning and have a hard heart! I think we know that we can listen to the pastor preach a message and have a hard heart. I think we know that one can teach the Bible, myself included, and have a hard heart. Ezekiel 33:30-32 illustrates this point.

But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, 'Come now and hear what

the message is which comes forth from the LORD.' They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them. Ezekiel 33:30-32 (NASB)

This is a sobering passage for a pastor or one who teaches Scripture. God told the prophet Ezekiel that the faithful enjoy coming to church. God told the prophet that the people will say, "Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD." Let's go to church. They sit, listen, and love the message! God said, "You are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument." But when they leave, they are no different. Notice that God said, "Their heart goes after their gain." They are distracted and think about personal issues during the sermon. This is a common problem. It is a heart problem.

So, we have learned four things about a hardened heart: 1) A hardened heart is insensitive to God, 2) a hardened heart is a personal choice, 3) a hardened heart is the result of unconfessed sin and ongoing sin, and 4) a hardened heart can become worse!

A TENDER HEART RESULTS FROM CONFESSION OF SIN. So what is the solution to a hard heart? It is called confession of sin! 1 John 1:9 is a comforting verse. It says,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (NASB)

Here we are told that if we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins. We are to name our sins, not in a general way, but name them individually. The rest of the verse is a promise that God will then forgive all the sins you do not know about or have forgotten. This is a wonderful verse! If we confess those sins we know about, He will forgive the ones unknown to us.

We are also told in this verse that God is faithful and righteous to forgive us! The message is that God would be unfaithful if He did not forgive us when we confess our sins. This verse

also says that God would sin if He refused to forgive us when we confess our sins. Scripture tells us that it is impossible for God to sin. Is it not great to know that Scripture says our God is faithful and righteous? Those are facts about God and those are His ways! Because He is faithful and righteous, He forgives. It is rooted in who He is. Deuteronomy 32:4 says,

The Rock! His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He. Deuteronomy 32:4 (NASB)

If you worry that God will not forgive you after you have confessed your sins, then remember that 1 John 1:9 reminds us of the character of God. We will be forgiven because it is His character to forgive. That is one of the ways of God.

This means that we can avoid a hardened heart by confessing our sins as soon as we sin and then believe He will forgive us. Listen to these promises from our God.

As far as the East is from the West,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103:12 (NASB)

Though your sins are as scarlet,
They will be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They will be like wool. Isaiah 1:18 (NASB)

You have cast all my sins behind Your back. Isaiah 38:17 (NASB)

I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. Jeremiah 31:34 (NASB)

He will again have compassion on us;
He will tread our iniquities under foot.
Yes, You will cast all their sins
Into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:19 (NASB)

Let me encourage you to confess your sins daily, especially before you study the Word of God and before you come to

church. A clean heart will help you to better experience the joy of discovering Jesus our Lord.