

## The Lord walking on the water




### READINGS

#### [Mark 6:45-53](#)

45 And straightway He compels His disciples to enter<sup>o</sup> into the ship and to go before to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent away the crowd. 46 And when He had ordered them away, He departed into a mountain to pray. 47 And when evening had come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land. 48 And He saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them; and about the fourth watch of the night He comes to them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. 49 But<sup>o</sup> when they saw Him walking on the sea, they thought it to be a phantom, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him, and were troubled. And straightway He spoke with them, and says to them, Have confidence; I am; be not afraid. 51 And He went up to them into the ship; and the wind quieted; and they were exceedingly amazed in themselves, and marvelled; 52 for they understood not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened. 53 And when they had passed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore.


### Apocalypse Explained 419

[2] When the influx of the Divine is intensified, which occurs when the evil are to be cast out, then lower down in the spiritual world a wind springs up that blows strongly like a storm or tempest; this wind is what is called in the Word “the east wind”. The casting down of the evil is described also in the Word by violent and impetuous winds, by storms, and by tempests. “The wind of Jehovah” has a similar signification as “the spirit of Jehovah,” for the wind of respiration is meant, which is also called spirit (or breath). On this account in the Hebrew and many other languages spirit is expressed by the same word as wind.

[23] They that go down to the sea in ships, that do work in many waters. And He spake, and maketh the wind of the tempest to stand, and He raised up its waves on high. He made the tempest to stand still, that their waves might be hushed ([Ps. 107:23](#) , [25](#) , [29](#) ) .


This treats of temptations and of the deliverance from them. “The wind of the tempest,” and thus “the waves of the sea lifted up,” signify temptations; and as spiritual temptations come through falsities breaking into the thoughts, which is the source of remorse of conscience and grief of mind and spirit, these are signified by “the wind of the tempest stood, and He raised up its waves on high;” deliverance from them is signified by “He made the tempest to stand still, that the waves might be hushed.”

### SERMON

What we are dealing with here, as it relates to your spiritual life, or the life and activity of your mind, for this is what your spiritual life is, is the unfolding process of coming to see a little more clearly how the Word is the Lord in His Divine Human. Our appreciation of this truth is limited to the degree that we are caught up in the appearances of the senses, for while we might be able to acknowledge this truth from the intellect, because doctrine teaches it, it will never be felt as personally real for us until we experience its power in our life first-hand. Knowing something through reading or listening to a description of it and knowing something through experiencing it first-hand are two very different ways of knowing. Both have their place, for to know something experientially we first have to know that it exists and that it can be known in this way. Take the idea that “the kingdom of God is within you.” [Lk 17:21](#) . The Lord provides us with this truth, which we may have read or heard many times. Do we accept that this is a statement of truth? I think most of us would say yes, after all it’s a direct statement from the Word. So the question now is; how is it true for you? Or to push things further, how has this truth changed your life? How do you feel the reality of this truth in your life today? Such questions, which can be applied to any truth we say we believe to be true, gets to the real heart of the matter so far as our relationship to it is concerned. The answers we give to such questions as these will reveal whether the truth we claim we believe in, is merely something we give intellectual assent to or is something known experientially.

So the question is how do we come to feel, as a living experience, the reality of Divine truth in our life? There is really only one way to feel truth as something real; truth is only known through its practise. The struggle to come to feel the reality and power of truth in our experience is the essence of our story today.

We work from the principle that all that is found in the Word is true, this is our intellectual starting point, but accepting this principle intellectually as true doesn't remove the responsibility each of us has to work to implement truths from the Word into our life so that we might come to know it, as we are known by it. The Lord states that,

...if you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... [Jn 6:31-32](#) .

The word "know" (Gk. Ginosko) in this statement means to know through experience, as something felt. To come to feel the truth beyond an intellectual interest is what spiritual life is, it is a life of engaging with the Word through the practise of its truths as if our life depended on it, which it does. So let's return to our story to see how this coming to "know" or "feel" the reality of truth is illustrated.

Having just completed the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 we are told that the Lord...

**45** ...compels His disciples to enter<sup>o</sup> into the ship and to go before to the other side, to Bethsaida,...

The general principle expressed here is that when we experience the Word, or the power of Divine truth first-hand, as the disciples just had in the feeding of the 5000, we are compelled by that experience to respond in some way. We can't truly encounter the Lord as the Word and not be changed through that encounter. When we truly experience the reality of a statement like, "the kingdom of God is within you" then everything changes, we will never be the same again.

Every truth realised experientially demands a reorganisation of our understanding of things and so we read that the disciples are "compelled" or *constrained* (Gk word can be translated either way) "to enter into the ship." A ship, being a vessel, corresponds to the teachings we've pulled together that contain our sense of the Lord and spiritual life. Our ship is our doctrine. Our doctrine will be organised in accordance with what we believe, for it is our beliefs that serve as a filter through which we organise what comes into our awareness. Our beliefs govern how we understand what the Word teaches. For those whose understanding of the kingdom of heaven is of a place we go to after we die, everything said about heaven in the Word will all be framed to support the belief that heaven is a place. But when the truth of the idea that the Kingdom of God is a state of mind and not a place takes hold, everything changes, they begin to see that to enter heaven involves having their mind reorganised into a heavenly form which means a shift in their understanding of the Word to accommodate this new insight.

To go to the "other side" means to go from a more internal state to a more external state, or to bring the more internal experience of truth into the more external aspects of our mental life. Bethsaida literally means "house of fish" and corresponds to that level of life where the appearances of the senses and bodily things is strong. This is the level of life in which the proprium is immersed and through which hellish influences are able to make themselves felt in our minds. It is the realm of sensual appearances. On the subject of fish we have this from the work *The Apocalypse Explained*...

"The creatures of the sea" (or fishes) signify knowledges, because the "sea" signifies the natural man, and thus "fishes in the sea" signify the knowledges themselves that are in the natural man. This signification of "fishes" is from correspondence, for the spirits that are not in spiritual truths, but only in natural truths, which are knowledges, appear in the spiritual world in seas, and when viewed by those who are above, as fishes; for the thoughts that spring from the knowledges with such present that appearance. For all the ideas of the thought of angels and spirits are turned into various representatives outside of them; **AE 513.2**

...a "fish" signifies the natural man which is without spiritual good. **AE 817.10**

At this level of life externals things appear more real than internal things and is represented in the story by the disciples being separated from the Lord. When we are drawn toward external life, internal things seem more remote and the way this is illustrated is for the Lord to depart into a high mountain to pray while the disciples are said to be on the sea in a ship “toiling” in an effort to get to the other side. Of course the reality is that the Lord is never separated from anyone but that it is our own state of mind, when caught up in the concerns of external life that produces the appearance of a separation. It is due to the value we place on external things for our life that the process of bringing truths into our life involves effort; it also means there will be times when we are going to feel like we are alone and working in the dark...

**47** And when evening had come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land.

To bring the truth we experience in those wonderful moments of insight, into external life; to make it something real and living for us so that it remains and is able to rule over the appearances of the senses and govern our perceptions, we have to make a conscious effort to examine the beliefs we are living from in its light. This is the disciples toiling away through the night in an effort to get to the other side. It describes the states of spiritual temptation that arise through the work of repentance. Spiritual, or inner work, involves learning to trust what the Word teaches over what our senses tell us is “true”. It involves having the appearances of the senses brought under the authority of what the Lord as the Word says is real. The nature of this struggle is captured in the Greek word translated as “toiling” which can just as readily be translated into English using the word “torture”. Yet the picture is not as bleak as it sounds for while it might be torture for the natural man to yield to the authority of the spiritual man, for the spiritual man this is the means by which the Kingdom (authority) of Heaven comes to be established in the earth or natural man.

The challenges involved in being set free from the fallacies of the senses through making an effort to live from the Word is the very means by which higher things can be established in our life. What is torture from the perspective of the the natural man is good, hard, productive work from the perspective of the spiritual man. Engaging in spiritual work builds a new will, and without the obstacles the natural man puts up and the difficulties involved in bringing truths into life it is impossible to have a new will established in us. This can be seen in the root word from which the word *torture* or *toiling* is derived. The word is *basanos* , and it means, a touchstone which is used to test the purity of gold. So in the spiritual life we can expect to experience times when we appear to be left to ourselves. In such times we are to compel ourselves to work spiritually, but recognise that our ability to do this is from the Lord or our understanding of the Word. Our willingness to hold and stay with the difficulties and challenges involved in temptations is the touchstone by which truths are tested and implanted into our life. As this occurs so the false ideas that bind us up are weakened and dispersed.

In the Word this process is often described by a tempest or wind, in particular an east wind. While it's not stated directly in the Word the direction the disciples were heading to cross the sea to Bethsaida suggests that the wind that worked against them was actually coming from the east. From our earlier reading we had...

When the influx of the Divine is intensified, which occurs when the evil are to be cast out, then lower down in the spiritual world a wind springs up that blows strongly like a storm or tempest; this wind is what is called in the Word “the east wind”. The casting down of the evil is described also in the Word by violent and impetuous winds, by storms, and by tempests. **AE 419 [2]**

Such processes are governed by the Lord. We see from the story that despite the intensity of the disciples struggle the Lord is fully aware and watching over every aspect of the process, as He does for us in our struggles. In His infinite Wisdom He allows things to run their necessary course so that what is of His Word in us might be established as our life. The timing of His interventions is always perfect, for seeing...

...them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them; and about the fourth watch of the night He comes to them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. **49** But<sup>o</sup> when they saw Him walking on the sea, they thought it to be a phantom, and cried out; **50** for they all saw Him, and were troubled.

Confronted with the immediacy of external life matters with all its pressing worries and anxieties the things of the Word look almost “phantom” like, a mere apparition lacking substance. What we often fail to see is that many of the emotional difficulties we suffer and falsely attribute to external causes only have power because we have neglected to give serious consideration to the things that belong to our inner life. Everyone is confront with difficulties in life, how we are affected by those difficulties, how they are viewed, how they impact on us, how we respond to them, will ultimately be a reflection of the strength of place spiritual principles have in our life. The question for all who have access to the Word is, have we taken the opportunities afforded to us in life to freely engage and work with the Lord’s Word? The Lord is ever present before us as the Word and if we would but call out to Him, that is, if we would toil to examine our life so that what opposes the life of heaven can be removed, He will respond and draw near to us, to strengthen us with His presence within the Word, for in the disciples crying out it is said that He...

**51** ...went up to them into the ship; and the wind quieted;

Amen