

November 6, 2011

NO REST FOR THE WEARY

Jeffery D. Woodhams

Mark 6:30–56

You'll notice today that we are still in Mark 6. Are you getting the idea that this is an important chapter? It starts with Jesus in His hometown, teaching; yet the people who should have known Him didn't know Him at all. They said to themselves, "Who is this? How does He teach with this kind of authority?" and then they chose to ignore the true answers to those questions in favor of what they thought they knew.

After that He sent His twelve disciples out to preach John's message of repentance with the added element of power—power to heal and power to rebuke unclean spirits. These men were untrained, but they were willing. If we are willing to do a work, God will take care of the resources and the training. God gives us "on the job" training. I think sometimes we get the idea, "Well, I could never minister; I could never teach a Sunday school class; I could never preach a sermon, because I don't have the training for it." I have heard it said, and I believe it to be true based on passages like this one, that God does not necessarily call the equipped; He equips the called!

The disciples went out and preached and had some success. Now, there is a word of caution here: we need to be careful to give God the glory for our successes, especially when we are new at something. Paul cautions us not to appoint neophytes to positions of leadership within the church in I Timothy 3:6: "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." I think the balance here is that we ought to be willing to do what God wants us to do, and do it; and in due season, when we have matured a bit, we can assume greater responsibility.

Here we are, with Jesus and the disciples. They are briefing Him about the outcome of their mission. Let's read Mark 6:30:

³⁰ *And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.*

³¹ *And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.*

³² *And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.*

It seems that Jesus' disciples are telling Him what they did, and what they taught—or at least, they're trying to tell Him. There are constant disruptions! In fact, they're so busy dealing with all the people who are coming to see Jesus that they don't even have a chance to eat. I think I would have been very annoyed if I were a disciple, don't you? Don't stand between me and a doughnut! It must have been very hard to have been constantly disrupted: disrupted when they were trying to talk to Jesus, disrupted when they were trying to eat, and very likely disrupted when they tried to sleep. It's to the point where there just seems to be no rest for the weary.

Now, Waverly Hall Baptist Church, I know that you all are rolling from one big thing to another. Those of you who have the strength to work in the church are being taxed heavily right at this moment. We've

been through the Pine Mountain Association meeting, a gospel singing, trunk or treat, all in the month of October. Those events each required a certain amount of planning, of cleaning, and every sort of preparation. We're moving now to Homecoming and then a cantata shortly thereafter. Besides these things, many of you have had committee meetings, quarterly business meetings, special meetings, and who knows what other kind of work, not to mention the weekly work of preparing Sunday school lessons, or Wednesday night lessons, or Friday morning lessons. You've been hard pressed.

On top of that, you have your personal business. Some of you have spent a great deal of time in the hospital or with injured friends and loved ones at home; some of you have had so many doctor visits yourself in the last two months that you couldn't even count them. And then, just when you maybe had a free day, you got a phone call, asking you to do one thing more.

Do you remember the story of Elijah's victory on Mt. Carmel? Do you remember how the prophets of Baal spent a whole day trying to call down fire from heaven, and could not? Elijah prayed a thirty-seven word prayer, and fire came down, destroying the sacrifice, the altar, and all the water around the altar. Do you remember that? Well, the very next part of the story reveals that Elijah, after this great victory, got a little letter from Queen Jezebel. She made a threat against him because he won that showdown. Do you remember what Elijah did? He ran! That's right—he ran away and asked God to just let him die because that mean old woman wanted to kill him. That might seem kind of silly to us, but I think the key to understanding that episode is to look at the whole picture. What you'll find is that Elijah had been extremely busy, running here, there and everywhere, right up to and immediately following that showdown. He was tired, folks. And when we are tired, it's easy to become discouraged.

Paul encourages us, "And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." I'm asking the same of you today. Please don't faint. Please don't quit. I'm sure we all need a chance to rest, a chance to catch our breath. For that reason, I would ask that we add no more to our church's holiday schedule than we already have, and that we try to take it easy in January. In the meanwhile, let's not allow our tiredness to lead to discouragement.

It is for this reason that Jesus said to His disciples, "We need some down time. We need to get away for a while." That was the plan, anyway. They left quietly, privately by ship.

The next few verses are just astounding to me. Would you read verses 33-34 in your Bibles as I read them aloud?

³³ *And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him.*

³⁴ *And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.*

Jesus and his disciples went across the lake, a distance of maybe four or five miles; but the people ran around the lake to meet him on the other side—a distance of about ten miles! And they were waiting for Jesus when He arrived! I suspect that if you or I had been in that boat, we'd have been really annoyed by now; but Jesus is not annoyed. In fact, He sees that they are desperate for the truth. Was not Jesus the One who promised, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." Mark does not tell us what Jesus said to them that day; but Mark does tell us that Jesus was full of compassion for them. They needed the words of life. They needed to know that they had value.

The next part is a well-known story. We'll read it, starting in verse 35:

³⁵ *And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed:*

³⁶ *Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.*

³⁷ *He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?*

³⁸ *He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.*

³⁹ *And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.*

⁴⁰ *And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.*

⁴¹ *And 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.*

⁴² *And they did all eat, and were filled.*

⁴³ *And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.*

⁴⁴ *And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.*

Now, we know the story here.

We do not have time to go into this in any detail. I am sure you have studied this miracle and heard messages on it before. But I would simply like to point out three things about it. First, this was a deliberate action of our Lord. These people were not so hungry that he had to feed them. Later on, when he fed the four thousand, they had been without food for three days. But here it is questionable that they had been without food even for a full day. They had run around the lake and were very tired, perhaps, but not especially overly hungry.

Nevertheless, he chose to feed them, and he did so, second, in order to teach his disciples something. This was primarily for their benefit. What he did was designed to remind them of the feeding of the multitudes of Israel in the wilderness, when the manna came down from heaven. He was drawing a deliberate picture of who he was for these disciples. This is why John's Gospel records that he said to them, "I am the bread come down from heaven," (John 6:41). These disciples were expected to learn from this something of who it was they were following. But they seemed to miss the point.

There is a hint given here for them, third, that this event was related somehow to God's whole ministry to Israel. Mark says, "...they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces." Whenever the number twelve is used in these stories, it relates to the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus himself said he chose twelve disciples so that they might sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. In the previous section there was a dying girl who was twelve years old, and a woman who had had an issue of blood for twelve years. Now there are twelve baskets of food taken up. This is a reminder to these disciples that Jesus was the Promised One who was to come to Israel. He was the [Provider] sent by God. He had provided rest for his disciples, had

provided truth for the multitude waiting and had provided food for these people. But their eyes were shut.¹

Think about this, though: Jesus and the disciples had been working and working; and when they tried to get away from the crowds, there was yet more work to do. Somebody had to haul that food around! I'm sure they were all bone-weary. That leads us to the next part of this chapter. It's very short but there is a profound message here. Let's read the next few verses, starting in verse 45:

⁴⁵ *And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people.*

⁴⁶ *And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.*

⁴⁷ *And when even was 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 unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.*

⁴⁹ *But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out:*

⁵⁰ *For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*

⁵¹ *And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.*

⁵² *For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.*

I'm going to do this very briefly. Jesus sent the disciples away to rest, while He Himself dispersed the crowds. I'm sure He was telling the crowds that they needed some time to rest, and that He'd done all for them at the moment that He could do. While the disciples are at sea, toiling and rowing, Jesus is alone praying. I suspect that He was praying in large part for them. Of course, they didn't know that. All they knew is that they were alone on the sea, and the seas were getting rough. Last time they had been in trouble on the sea, Jesus had been there with them and had calmed the storm; but this time, He's nowhere to be seen! To them, it seems He has left them all alone; but the truth is, they were never, never outside of His mind or His power to save. They just needed a little test.

Jesus walks out there on the water, right past the ship; and they thought He was a ghost. In reality, He was the very One that they needed right at that moment. The thing they were afraid of was really the thing they needed most.

The last verse is where I need to draw your attention. Remember, the gospel of Mark is written largely, I believe, from Peter's point of view. It seems to me that this is Peter's admission that they failed the test: "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened." At the time of the test, these men just thought it seemed unfair. It didn't seem fair that Jesus should leave them alone; it didn't seem fair that He should give them such a fright; and in their state of self-pity, they forgot all about the good things that He had done. They did not give Him the benefit of the doubt that He was actually looking out for them, praying for them, watching over them.

A little self-pity is a dangerous thing. Friends, as far as I know, I'm preaching to myself more than to

¹ Ray Stedman, "Who Is This?" 19 January 1975. Available at <http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/who-is-this>.

anyone else in this room today. Yes, we are weary; yes, there is more to do just ahead; yes, there are very discouraging circumstances all around us. People say things and do things that hurt us just when we think we're doing a good job. Oh, that is discouraging! Can we work together a little longer, pray a little harder, love a little better, and remain in the very place where we can receive the blessings that God has in store for us?

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9).