

God Gets the Glory

"Follow Me on Mission" Series, November 23 & 24, 2024 | Mark 6:45-52

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Do you ever focus on the wrong spot?

"Where's Waldo?" was fun because it kept your focus on the wrong spot.

Where's Waldo started as a series of books filled with pictures that included a tiny "Waldo."

Here's Waldo, a guy with brown hair, blue pants, a red and white shirt, and a red and white cap.

You had to find Waldo in a picture that looked like this: (slide)

These pictures were there to test your ability to focus.

There are lots of things that look a little bit like Waldo.

There are funny little things all over. In this picture, there's a forklift lifting a giant fork. And a biplane piloted by a flying ace, but it's the Ace of Spades from a deck of cards.

Where's Waldo intentionally tries to keep your focus on the wrong spot.

Having our focus on the wrong spot can be costly.

Having our focus on the wrong task prevents us from getting the most important thing done.

Having our focus on the wrong thing can lead to a bad decision.

Having our focus on the wrong thing when choosing a spouse can lead to a bad marriage.

Having our focus distracted while we're driving can lead to mistakes, wrecks, and worse.

Having our focus on the wrong spot can be costly.

Sometimes we focus on the wrong spot with God.

We can focus on a single aspect of who God is and get a distorted picture of God, or focus on ourselves instead of on God.

When we focus on the wrong spot with God, we can miss the true nature of God, we can miss out on God's bigger plan, and we can miss God's goodness to us.

In our Scripture reading today, we find an example of focusing on the wrong spot, but we also find Jesus focusing our attention on the right spot.

The disciples were focused on the wind and rowing.

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and leave.

Just prior to this passage, Jesus had fed a huge crowd miraculously with very little.

Now look again at **Mark 6:45**:

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

The word "immediately" points out that Jesus was urgent about sending the disciples away.

Then see that Mark said that Jesus “made” his disciples get into the boat. The word in Greek is much stronger. It’s like He compelled them to get into the boat. He almost pushed them into the boat. Why? (See John 6:15.)

When Jesus fed the crowd in the wilderness, there were people in the crowd who mistook what Jesus was doing. They thought that Jesus was gathering an army and starting a rebellion.

That wasn’t what Jesus wanted. The crowds misunderstood who He was and what He was about, but so did the disciples. Jesus wanted to get the disciples in the boat and out of the way so that they wouldn’t be more contaminated by those kinds of thoughts themselves.

Because the disciples still didn’t get who Jesus was.

So, Jesus put them in a boat and told them to row.

Despite being experts on the lake, the disciples were getting nowhere.

A wind came up on the Sea of Galilee.

Some of the disciples were fishermen, and they were used to the water, used to the weather conditions, and accustomed to hard work.

But the wind was so strong that they were getting nowhere. The sun went down. Hours passed.

In the middle of the night, the disciples thought they saw a ghost.

It was somewhere between three and six o’clock in the morning.

The wind was howling, they were rowing, and they were tired.

Suddenly, the disciples spotted something or someone out on the waves. Whoever it was walked on the water and didn’t seem to sink. They assumed it was a ghost!

They cried out and were afraid.

The disciples were focused on the problem and the pain.

If you remember, they were tired already after a mission trip, after ministering to crowds when they returned from their mission trip, and after a long day of working with another crowd.

After being tired, they got back into a boat to row for miles.

They had been rowing against the wind for hours, getting nowhere fast.

It was late, and they still had not slept.

Then they thought they saw a ghost on the water.

In this moment, they were focused on the problem and the pain.

Do you ever focus on the problems and pain in your life?

Problems and pain in life are real. Don’t hear me saying anything that denies the reality of problems and pain. Problems and pain in life also matter!

But, in this moment, the disciples were focused on problems and pain.

It’s an easy thing to do. Problems and pain take up a lot of space!

I woke up in the middle of the night with a headache; my head was throbbing. It was all I could think about, and I had a tough time getting back to sleep.

When we face problems and pain, they can easily become our focus. They can easily consume our focus. And when we are focused solely on our problems and our pain, we can miss something else. Something important. Something transformative.

Jesus was the real focus.

Jesus had watched the scene develop from shore.

After Jesus dismissed the crowd, he did the most important thing. He went up a mountain or hill to a place where He could be alone and pray.

Then Jesus was watching the disciples from shore. I find this to be incredibly comforting. Sometimes when we face problems and pain, we wonder if God is even aware. Here we find Jesus watching what's happening from shore, a reminder that God always knows.

While Jesus saw from shore what was happening, how the wind was blowing and the disciples were rowing and struggling and tired, Jesus let it all continue. There was a purpose at work!

But Jesus had no intention of leaving the disciples alone. In the early hours of morning, Jesus went out on the Sea of Galilee to His disciples.

Jesus walked on water; only God can do that.

There is no natural explanation for Jesus walking on water.

Jesus walked on water. You and I can't do that. More importantly, no one else can either.

In the Old Testament, walking on water is something only God can do. God walks on water.

Psalm 77:19 says:

***Your way was through the sea,
your path through the great waters;
yet your footprints were unseen.***

In **Job 9:8**, Job describes God who, among other things,

... alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea;...

The message is clear. Jesus is walking on water, something only God can do. Jesus is God!

Jesus planned to pass by; that too is a God-sized move

It's very similar to what happened to Moses when he asked God to show him God's glory. In **Exodus 33:19** God said,

... "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

God appears in His glory and then passes by without lingering.

Jesus intended to pass by His disciples without lingering, a sign that He is with them AND a sign again that He is God!

That's when the disciples saw Him on the water, mistook Him for a ghost, and cried out in fear.

Jesus identified Himself. He told them to take heart and not be afraid. That's compassion.

What happened next is truly amazing. Instead of passing by as He intended, Jesus got in the boat with His terrified disciples. Is that not amazing? God got in the boat!

Then Jesus calmed the sea; only God can do that.

Once again, nature answers the will and presence of God the Creator.

No one else can make the wind obey without even a word. Only God can do that.

Jesus was the real focus; God gets the glory.

Jesus dismissed the disciples. Jesus went up on the mountain to pray.

Jesus saw His disciples from the shore. Jesus went out to them.

Jesus walked on water. Jesus intended to pass by. Jesus called out words of encouragement.

Jesus got into the boat. Jesus stilled the winds.

Jesus is the subject of just about every verb in this passage.

Jesus is the real focus of this passage; it's all about Jesus. We want to see and focus on Jesus first, not first on the disciples.

Jesus is showing in way after way that He is God in the flesh. That's the focus.

Are we focused on Jesus?

One of the central questions in the Gospel according to Mark is, "Who is Jesus?"

That is the subject of the Gospel according to Mark since the very beginning. **Mark 1:1** begins:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He's telling us, "Who is Jesus? He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. Plus, He is the Son of God."

Mark keeps showing us that Jesus is the Savior and Son of God.

However, that's still the question that the disciples, the crowds, and everyone else keeps trying to answer for themselves, "Who is Jesus?"

The disciples still haven't successfully answered this question. **Mark 6:51-52** ends:

... And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

They don't yet know who Jesus is.

But Mark is hoping that we are answering this question for ourselves. Mark hopes that WE see that Jesus is the Savior and Son of God. Mark hopes that point will become abundantly clear by the end of the Gospel, and he hopes that WE will come to that conclusion and that it will change our lives.

Jesus' being in the boat recalibrated everything.

Just having Jesus in the boat with them changed everything.

Jesus didn't have to calm the winds and the waves to make that point. Calming the wind and the waves made the point clearer than ever. But that wasn't the point.

Just having Jesus in the boat changed everything. The disciples, whether they knew it or not, had the Savior and Son of God in the boat with them!

That's the point. That's the thing of highest value. That fixes the biggest problems of all!

Everything else is incidental and temporary.

Let's think this through. The disciples were focused on their pain and problems. They were rowing and needed to get to shore. They needed to get some rest. When Jesus calmed the winds, they did get to shore, they did get to rest. But at some point, there was more work to do, and they probably got tired again. So, getting to shore and getting the work done wasn't a final and forever fix to their problems and pain. Work came back. Tired came back. Jesus had something more important in mind.

That occurred to me earlier this fall when we looked at a passage in which Jesus healed a leper. I realized that Jesus healed the leper, and that leper was reintegrated into society. But at some point, the leper that Jesus healed became sick again and died. It happens to us all. That means that even healing us of a dreaded disease is a temporary fix at best.

We have much bigger problems!

Since the Fall, the world is infected with sin. That's why there is suffering and violence in the world. And until somebody does something about sin, there will always be suffering and violence. We have a bigger problem.

Since the Fall, WE are infected with sin. That's why we sin. That's why we get sick and suffer and die. More importantly, sin has separated us from God, which means that we are destined for eternity in Hell. We have a much bigger problem!

We get focused on the wind and the rowing; we get focused on the problems and the pain. Those things are real, and let's not dismiss or diminish them. But ultimately, those things are the wrong focus. Jesus needs to be our focus!

Keep your eyes on Jesus.

We want to get our heads wrapped around who Jesus is.

We want to focus on Jesus—His glory and power. Jesus is the Savior and Son of God. He has unmatched power; He is the One who walks on water and stills the winds with a thought. He is the One with unshakable purpose! He is in charge and trustworthy! He is the steady hand guiding history and creation toward its right end, and He is the steady hand guiding our lives. History has an end, a horizon in the distance. Jesus' glory is lighting the horizon of time like the sun dawning, promising to make all things right and all things new. That includes us.

We want to settle the eternally weighty questions. Do we belong to Jesus? Are we willing to let Jesus be our Savior? Are we willing to trust Jesus as the Son of God?

Keep your eyes on Jesus.

Are we focused on Jesus' mission?

Another big question in Mark is, "How do we follow Him?"

That's the question the disciples were wrestling with.

Back in Mark chapter one, Jesus started calling people to follow Him.

Still, in chapter six, the disciples are trying to figure out what it means to follow Jesus.

And as we study the Gospel according to Mark, that's a question we are wrestling with ourselves. How do we follow Jesus? We are learning along the way.

Jesus wants us on mission with Him.

Being on mission with Jesus is fundamental to being Jesus' disciple.

It's important that Jesus wanted His disciples rowing on the Sea of Galilee that night. There was something important for them to do and to learn. He had them rowing toward Bethsaida to the west. Very quickly, Jesus would put them back in the boat and have them row east because there was something for them to do there. Jesus had something for them to do.

When Jesus called disciples, He said that He would make His disciples fish for people.

We are on mission with Jesus; it's part of who we are.

What does it mean to be on mission with Jesus?

It means that we share the Gospel across the street. We share the Gospel of Jesus with people around us. That's why we call people to BLESS our neighbors; that's a strategy for living an on-mission life with the people around us.

It also means that we proclaim the Gospel around the world. We do that with and through our partners. That's why we pray, give, and go on mission.

Jesus wants us to be on mission with Him and to FOCUS on that mission.

Even on mission with Jesus, there are still days when there are significant challenges.

I remember when Tammi and I were young parents, the first year after our first child was born.

That's a wonderful but tough time for any young parents. We didn't know how to raise a child, but we were doing it anyway.

We were both working outside the home at the time. Tammi was teaching, and I was working at the Minister of Education and Administration at our home church. That was a frantic season.

But our oldest son was sick constantly the first year-and-a-half of his life.

He had a problem that meant he had constant infections in his nose, ears, and eyes. He frequently ran fevers, sometimes 105 degrees. We were in the doctor's office or emergency room constantly. We were up long hours. We both missed tons of work.

At one point, our oldest son had been sick so frequently that Tammi and I were both out of vacation and sick time, so we started parenting in shifts. I would stay home during the school day while Tammi worked; then she would come home, and I would go to work and stay until well after midnight. Then we would get up the next day and start again.

We were both exhausted. And we were both trying to serve God.

And there were days when we wondered in prayer to God, "Why? Why is it so hard? We're trying to do what You want us to do, and it's just hard!?"

There are still big challenges at times, even when we are on mission with Jesus.

I met one paraplegic church planter in North Africa whose legs did not work. So, he dragged himself door to door to share Jesus. When he was done in one town, he would pull himself up onto a horse to go to the next town. Talk about challenges!

And I'm sure that you face real challenges too. You may be facing real challenges even today and wondering, "Wait. I thought I signed up to be a disciple of Jesus. Why is this so hard? Why is the wind blowing? Why is it so late? And why am I still rowing?"

Keep rowing.

We're not the first people to have challenges as we try to follow Jesus and serve Him.

We see right here today that the disciples had their own challenges.

History is full of people who have followed Jesus, served Jesus, and faced challenges. The world today is covered with people following Jesus but still facing real challenges. The wind is blowing, the hour is late, muscles are tired, and people are still rowing. The Bible tells us over and over again, in one way after another, to keep rowing. Stay on mission. Stay faithful. Keep serving. Keep enduring. Keep hoping. Be obedient despite the challenges. Despite the costs.

But the Bible offers us hope that is extremely clear.

In **Galatians 6:9 (NIV)** Paul wrote:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

What is He saying? Keep rowing.

Jesus is with us.

There will be a harvest.