

THE DISCIPLES LEARN A LESSON – WILL WE???

The Gospels give us three accounts of one particular incident that took place between Jesus and His disciples which, I think, is a very important lesson for each of us to

really get a hold of in this hour. This incident takes place after the feeding of the 5000 people on the shores of northern Galilee.

If we look in the Gospel of Matthew, Mark and John, we see this particular account in the life of Jesus as He was with His disciples. We know that Jesus was teaching and great crowds would gather to hear Him speak. After, this particular time of teaching, it was getting late and the disciples had mentioned to Jesus that He needed to send the people on their way so that they could go into a town or village to get something to eat.

Jesus told the disciples that “they should feed them.” We all know the story. They only had 5 loaves and 2 fish but Jesus told them to have the people sit in an orderly fashion and that they, the disciples, would then feed them. As we know the disciples were not really up to this but they obeyed Jesus and sat the people down in groups of 50’s. He then prayed over the bread and fish and divided it up among the disciples to give to the people. Lo and behold, as we all know, they had enough to feed the 5000 and had 12 baskets full of bread left over.

This was done just after the disciples came back from their first “missionary journey” which was very successful for them. We do not know what took place for them but we know that it went well. Jesus then tried to take them away to get some rest and also, I believe, He wanted to teach them as to what actually just took place when He sent them out. Again. this was just prior to the feeding of the 5000.

Now, here they all were in the midst of over 5000 people. As we know, Jesus prayed over the bread and the fish but then He gave it to the disciples to pass out to the people. We see that it was the disciples who actually had the bread and fish **multiply in their hands** and then gave it to the people. Wow!!! What a miraculous thing that just took place through the hands of the disciples. At least that is what they must have been thinking.

After the people were finished eating, we see Jesus do something that was a little strange and different than what He had always done previously. After feeding the 5000 and taking up the 12 baskets of left overs, Jesus tells the disciples something very strange. He tells them that they were to get in the boat, leave and go before Him to the next place and that He would catch up to them. He would take care of getting the people on their way home.

That may not seem strange to you but it gets my attention. In actuality, who was the primary person in the group of Jesus and the disciples? Well, obviously, it is Jesus. Jesus, who is the Rabbi, the leader of the group tells His disciples, the ones who are in the process of learning the proper aspects of being a child of God, to go on ahead of Him. That to me was a little strange. The stranger part was that the disciples just left Him there, alone, to take care of the people – by Himself.

Now, you may not think much on this but to me it makes me get a little bit more of a picture of what was starting to take place within Jesus' entourage of disciples. They were starting to think about all "they had done" and quite possibly they could have been getting a little bit "big headed." Yes, we can say that they simply obeyed Jesus and left. However, couldn't at least one of them think that maybe they should stay back and help their master, their rabbi, their leader get the people on their way. Hmmm.....

That got me to thinking and praying on this. We know that after Jesus sent the people on their way, He then went into the mountain to pray and spend time with the Father. However, as He was doing this, something was happening on the lake with His disciples. Let's see....

If we take this account looking in the Gospel of Matthew 14:14-33 and if we read it carefully, I believe we can all learn from what takes place. It is important to take note of the timing of everything that takes place in the account.

The first thing that we must take into account is the timing that we are given in the Gospel accounts and to understand what they mean. To do this let us first take a look at and understand the way that the Jewish people kept time, especially in the night time hours. Remember, their

day actually begins at 6:00pm. From 6:00pm to around 8:00pm is what they refer to as the “first of the evening.” This would be from when the sun was going down, twilight, to when it turns to complete darkness. We see in our text that this is when Jesus told the disciples to leave. (Matthew 14:22)

Then we read in Matthew 14:23, that when Jesus finished sending the people on their way, He went up to the mountainside to pray. It tells us that this was “evening.” However, this was considered the “second evening.” This is after it just gets dark. In Jewish time in those days, they would refer to the night time hours, immediately after it gets totally dark from the sun setting through the night time hours until the rising of the sun, as “watches.”

To simplify lets think of it in this way:

1. First Watch (Evening Watch): It is the time immediately following sunset until 9:00pm.
2. Second Watch (Midnight Watch): This watch covered the period from 9:00 PM to midnight.
3. Third Watch (Cockcrow Watch): Spanning from midnight to 3:00 AM, this would be the time when the priests would arise and begin their chores in the Temple
4. Fourth Watch (Morning Watch): This final watch lasted from 3:00 AM to 6:00 AM. The sun would then be rising in the east.

The four “watches” of the night, as described in the Bible, serve as a framework for understanding the importance of spiritual alertness and readiness. They serve as a call to all true believers to remain steadfast in faith, continually seeking the Lord and anticipating His return in all the watches of the night. Jesus tells us that He will come as a “thief” who would come in the night time hours. We don’t know which “watch” He will come. We just need to be ready and to keep watch for His return.

We must remember that in Jewish life 6:00pm was actually the start of their day. It was the start of their day and not the ending of their day. This is so very important for us to remember. It always tells us in the scriptures that we are to “watch” because we do not know which “watch” that Jesus will come in. However, using Jewish time, what seems to be the “darkest hours”

seem to be the time when the Son of God will come. Jesus is going to come when it may seem the darkest – spiritually speaking. Hmmm.....

Getting back to our Bible account we see that it tells us that the disciples were having a difficult time getting across the lake to the where they were to go. Remember, it was only to be no more than an hour from where the 5000 were fed and where they left Jesus. However, now we see in Matthew 14:25 that it was now the “fourth watch.” They have been out there for at least 9-10 hours or possibly even longer.

The wind rose and the waves came. Remember, they were in a small boat and they were now toiling for over 10 hours. The disciples were struggling trying to get to shore. Suddenly, they see something on the water. It tells us that at first, they thought that they were seeing a spiritual being, a ghost. They had no idea if it was an angel or a force of darkness. Either way the scripture tells us that they were **in fear**.

What???! I thought these were the mighty men of God who went out and told everyone about Jesus and salvation in and through Him. Weren't they the ones who fed the 5000? Weren't they the ones who thought that they were the ones who worked so hard that they were to be privileged and leave Jesus, their master, behind to take care of the people because they did so much work and because now they were being “used by God?” Ultimately, I think they were a little puffed up and Jesus wanted them to get their heads back on straight.

Yes, Matthew 14:25 tell us that this was the “fourth watch” – in other words be ready!!! The disciples were toiling in the sea for over 8-10 hours. It was to be an hour trip They were going around in circles being tossed – they traveled over 9-10 miles in a circle. It didn't get easier. Rather it got more difficult.

But Jesus... We see in Matthew 14:27 that Jesus came. In some accounts, it tells us that he looked as if He would just pass them right by. Why? Could it be that Jesus was teaching them a lesson. It was like He was telling them that if they thought that it was all them who did the miracle of the loaves and fed the 5000 then this should not be too difficult for them to get out

of this mess. Yet, there they were. On the water, working diligently for over 10 hours and ... getting no where.

They cried out but they were crying out in fear. Things were not going to well. Jesus finally stopped and simply said, *“Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.”* Here, we see Jesus walking on water during the **fourth watch** of the night, the darkest time of the day, demonstrating His power over the forces of nature even when they are turbulent – He is there!!! And notice... the wind and the waves were still going strong but they were not affecting Him.

We then see Peter who blatantly asks Jesus to bid him to come out into the water. Without saying anything else, Jesus simply says, *“Come.”* I don’t really believe that Peter was ready for it. But, Peter being Peter couldn’t let his fear get in the way which we should ever allow ourselves to walk in fear. However, I really think it was more of his pride that actually made him get out of the boat. He was not ready for this but his pride pushed him on. He dared Jesus to tell him to come. Jesus called his bluff and simply said, *“Come.”*

Again, Peter fails. Jesus asks him to come out **“while the sea was still in a storm... Peter began to sink.”** This was Peter’s **“motise operandi.”** He was always trying to be the best. But, in himself, he could never be his best. It was only after Jesus rose from the grave and ministered to Peter that his heart and his thinking finally and truly changed. It was only when Peter realized he could do nothing in his own strength and ability that it became possible for him to do more than he ever thought he could or would do.

Peter does the only wise thing that he did that whole night. He cried out to Jesus, *“Lord save me.”* He realized that he could not help himself. He realized that it truly is all about Jesus. He was learning that it is only God who gives us the strength and ability to do the works of the Kingdom. It is only God who gives us the strength and ability to bring forth his purposes. It has nothing to do with us. It is only through the power and infilling of the Holy Spirit. Yes, this was a learning process for all the disciples. Are we also learning? I pray we are.

Jesus puts it all in perspective. He tells Peter, point blank, “*O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*” For all that Peter and the other disciples had done, they were still lacking in the most important issue of all – faith. Their faith was in themselves and what they thought they were doing. Their faith was starting to be in themselves and not in the One who was actually doing the wonderful deeds. We must all learn from this!!!

The disciples were just vessels that God would ultimately use. We are also simply vessels for God to use. God does not need us but He desires to use us for His purposes. The disciples ultimately learned this but not until the ultimate test of faith. Would they believe in Jesus even when it looked like He was not going to be there – when He died on the cross?

But... then came His resurrection. Yes, He is always there. Jesus met with them on the evening of His resurrection. They believed and were saved. He then gave them, as well as all of us, the Holy Spirit. We must never, ever forget that it is only in the power and authority of HIS might and it is only to be for His GLORY!!! The Glory of the living God!!!

The trials are strong, difficult and life threatening. But Jesus...Jesus is always with us, ready to reach out and save us when we call upon him. The storms will be there – always – it will not be easy. We must remember, it is Jesus who calms the storms, not you or I. We are to simply be His “*...vessels unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*” It is only accomplished in and through the Name of Jesus, and for His purposes!!!

The “Fourth Watch” in the Bible represents a period of deep darkness and challenges, but also a time when they knew the day, the light, was coming and that it will be better. In these darkest hours, Jesus’ light and strength will shine the brightest. There will still be darkness. The enemy and all the spiritual forces of darkness will be getting worse – and they are.

But those who are in the Lord’s will; those who walk in His might and in His ability, will overcome every force of wickedness and darkness. We, through Jesus are now spiritually alive. Our souls are catching up and learning every day that one day, we will ultimately have a glorified body and we will be in our God’s presence forever and ever.

The term, “to *watch in the night*,” is a phrase that is often used to describe the act of staying awake or remaining vigilant during the night. It emphasizes the idea of being alert and attentive to God’s presence and guidance, especially during times of darkness or uncertainty in these days that we are living in. In general, “to *keep watch in the night*,” refers to maintaining a spiritual vigilance and connection with God, even in the midst of darkness and challenges.

In Matthew 24:42, in the first of Jesus’ last parables before He was put to death and died on that cross for our salvation, He declared, “**Watch** therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what **watch** the thief would come, **he would have watched**, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. **Therefore be ye also ready...**” He will come. Are we ready??? We must be watching and we must be always ready!!!

Jesus gives us a clear warning. Yes, it is a warning. We are to always be watching and be ready for His return. It is all about our God. It is all about Jesus. It is all about the Holy Spirit who helps us throughout our lives. It is not about any of us. Never think you can play games and then all of a sudden get yourself ready for His return. We must never get to the place where we start to think that it is all about us.

If a person would know when Jesus was coming back, they would get themselves ready for that time? We do not know when He is coming back? Therefore, Jesus is telling us that if we are truly His disciples, we must **always** be watching, we must **always** be ready and we must **always** be looking for His return – the return of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Notice, it was only when Jesus and Peter got back into the boat that the wind and the waves ceased. They then reached their ultimate destination – 10 hours later – but they reached it. It is only when Jesus is in the boat will we get anywhere. Did the disciples learn anything??? Will we learn??? Hmmm.....