

GOOD CHEER FROM CHRIST'S REAL PRESENCE

NO. 3128

A SERMON
 PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 1909
 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“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.
 And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.
 And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.
 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. But when they saw him walking upon the sea,
 they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: 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.
 And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased:
 and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.
 For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.”*
Mark 6:45-52

WE have here a word of comfort given to a shipload of believers *who were where their Lord had sent them*. They had been unwilling to put out to sea, though it was probably calm enough at the time, but they did not wish to leave the Lord Jesus. He constrained them to go and thus their sailing was not merely under His sanction, but by His express command.

They were in their right place and yet they met with a terrible storm. The little inland sea upon which they sailed lies in a deep hollow and from the shore there pours a sudden downdraft of tremendous wind for which it is not possible to be prepared. By one of these whirlwinds the whole sea was stirred up to boiling, as only those little lakes can be.

So, though they were where Jesus bade them go, they were in desperate peril, and you, dear friends, must not think that you are in a wrong position because you are in trouble. Do not consider that adverse circumstances are a proof that you have missed your road, for they may even be an evidence that you are in the good old way, since the path of believers is seldom without trial.

You did well to embark and to leave the shore, but remember, though your Lord has insured the vessel and guaranteed that you shall reach your haven, He has not promised that you shall sail over a sea of glass. On the contrary, He has told you that “in the world you shall have tribulation”—and you may all the more confidently believe in Him because you find His warning to be true.

Their Lord had bidden His disciples make for the other side, and therefore they did their best and continued rowing all night, but making no progress whatever because the wind was dead against them. It was with difficulty that they could keep what little way they had made and not be blown back again to the starting place.

Probably you have heard it said that if a Christian does not go forward, he goes backward—that is not altogether true, for there are times of spiritual trial when, if a man does not go backward, he is really going forward. “Stand fast” is a precept, which, when well kept, may involve as much virtue as “Press forward.”

A master of a steam vessel will put on all steam and drive right into the teeth of a hurricane, and remain perfectly satisfied if the good ship can only keep from being driven on shore. The apostolic crew rowed, and rowed, and rowed—and it was no fault of theirs that they made no progress, “for the wind was contrary unto them.”

The Christian man may make little or no headway and yet it may be no fault of his, for the wind is contrary. Our good Lord will take the will for the deed and reckon our progress, not by our apparent advance, but by the hearty intent with which we tug at the oars.

Often, when a believer groans in prayer, and cannot pray, he has offered the best prayer. And when he tries to win men's hearts and does not win them, his zeal is as acceptable as if it convinced a nation—and when he would do good and finds evil present with him—there is good in the desire. If he threw up the oars and drifted with the wind, that would be another thing, but if our Lord sees him, “toiling in rowing,” albeit no progress is made, He has never a word to say against His servant, but He will bid him, “be of good cheer.”

It does not appear, from the narrative, that the disciples had any fear about the storm, except such as might naturally arise even in the minds of fishermen when they were dreadfully tossed upon the sea. They probably said to one another, “Did not our Master constrain us to set forth on this voyage? Though we met with this storm, we are not to be blamed.”

Certain believers who have lately been brought to know the Lord, have been great losers in temporal things by becoming Christians. What then? Let them not be terrified by this fact—even Christ's ship is tossed with tempest. Let them row on against the wind and even if the storm increases in fury, let them not lose heart.

One who knew the seas right well exclaimed, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” And in so doing he glorified God and ere long found himself in a great calm. Does Jesus bid us make for the shore? Then let us row on, even if we cannot make headway, for Jesus knows all about it and orders all things well.

Why, then, did our Savior, when He came to this shipload of apostles who had been toiling and rowing, say to them, “Be of good cheer”? They were bold, brave men, and were not at all afraid of the sea. What, then, did they fear? He would not have so spoken unless they had been afraid of something—and on looking at the text, we see, to our astonishment, that *they were afraid of Jesus Himself*. They were not afraid of wind and storms and waves and tempests, but they were afraid of their best Friend. That is the point which He aimed at by saying, “Be of good cheer: it is I, be not afraid.”

We will first think over *the cause of their fear*. Then secondly, we will meditate upon *the method by which Jesus cheered them*. And thirdly, we will reflect upon *the times when we shall need just such a good word as this*.

I. First, then, dear friends, consider with me THE CAUSE OF THEIR FEAR.

If we had not sailed over the same lake—I mean, if we had not suffered the same experience—it might have surprised us that they were afraid of their Lord. He was appearing for them and coming to their rescue. He was about to still the tempest for them, yet they were afraid *of Him*—of Him whom they loved and trusted.

So holden were their eyes, so hardened were their hearts, that they were afraid of their Lord, and afraid of Him when He was giving them the best reasons for trusting Him. Before their eyes He was displaying Himself as Lord over all—Master of wind and wave—and yet they were afraid of Him. The greatness of His power would have comforted them had they understood the truth—but they did not consider the miracle of the loaves and therefore they were in a state of perplexity and were sore afraid.

Meanwhile Jesus was acting in great gentleness to them. He was displaying His power, but it was not in a dazzling and overwhelming manner. Admire the sacred gentleness which made Him move as though He would have passed by them. If He had suddenly appeared in brilliant light in the middle of the boat, He might well have astounded them and driven them to fright. If, in a moment, He had shone forth just at the stern, or alighted from the heavens upon the deck, they would have been petrified with alarm.

But He began by showing Himself away there on the crest of the billow—and one cried to his fellow, “See you that strange light yonder?” They watch and Jesus comes nearer! They can discern a figure. They can see a man step from wave to wave with majestic tread. In tenderness He will not flash

upon them all at once. As when the morning breaks by slow increase of light, so Jesus came to His timid followers. Even then He moved as though He would pass by them, that they might not be alarmed by His appearing to bear down upon them as an adversary. Even thus He manifests Himself to us in the riches of His grace in all wisdom and prudence.

The fears of the trembling crew were sufficiently aroused by even seeing Him at a distance—they were so afraid that they cried out thinking that they saw a ghost. What would they have done had He not, in gentleness to their weakness, manifested Himself gradually to them and set Himself in a sidelight? Take what way the Master might, His disciples were still afraid—and we are not much wiser nor much more courageous than they were.

The manifestation of the Christ of God to us in all His glory will have to be by degrees as long as we are in this body, and perhaps, even in heaven, it may not be at the very first that we shall be able to endure the fullness of its joy. Even there He may have to lead us to fountains of water which at the first we did not discover, and guide us into more and more of that superlative knowledge which will utterly eclipse all acquaintance that we have of Him now, as the sunlight puts out the stars.

To return to our subject. The disciples were afraid of Jesus when He was revealing His power to help them, afraid of Him when He was acting in the gentlest possible manner toward them and treating them as a nurse does her child. Ah me, that we should be afraid of Jesus!

The Lord, after all, was doing nothing more than they knew He could do. Twenty-four hours had not passed since they had seen Him perform a work of creation, for He had taken bread and fish, and multiplied them so as to make a festival for five thousand men, beside the women and children, and to leave far more, when all had eaten, than had been in store when first the loaves and fishes had been counted.

After this miracle, they ought not to have been surprised that He should traverse the sea. To walk on the waters is to suspend a law, but to make loaves and fishes is to exercise the supreme power of creation, which must forever remain with God Himself. Knowing this, they ought not to have been astonished—not so soon, at any rate. The memory of that festival ought not to have vanished quite so quickly from the most forgetful minds. Yet when they saw Him, only doing what they knew He could do, only doing something not a jot more difficult than He was accustomed to do—they cried out for fear.

Was it not because *they dreaded contact with the spiritual, the mysterious, and the supernatural?* Although we are now talking about them, and perhaps half saying in our minds, “If we had been there, we should not have been afraid of Jesus and have cried out.” We do not know what we say—it takes very little of the supernatural to make a man's flesh creep, let the man be who he may.

When Belshazzar saw the handwriting upon the wall, he trembled most because of the mystery involved in a moving hand with which no visible body was connected. The unseen is the birthplace of fear. Imagination exaggerates and conscience whispers that some great ill will befall us. We are nearing the confines of the mysterious world where God and spirits dwell and hence we tremble.

Yet, beloved, the spirit-world is the last thing which Christians should tremble at, for there can be nothing in the supernatural world which we have cause to dread. If there be such a thing as a ghost walking the earth, I, for one, would like to meet it—either at dead of night or noon of day.

I have not the least particle of faith in rambling spirits. Those who are in heaven will not care to be wandering in these foggy regions. And those in hell cannot leave their dread abode. Whence, then, shall they come? Are they devils? Even so—and what then? A devil is no new personage. We have fought with devils full often and are prepared to resist them again, and make them fly. The Lord will tread Satan, who is the master of evil spirits, under our feet shortly.

Why, then, should we be afraid of his underlings? Nothing supernatural should cause any Christian the slightest alarm. We are expressly forbidden to fear the fear of the heathen and that is one of their greatest horrors—their dread of witchcraft, and necromancy, and other supposed manifestations of evil spirits. We who believe in Jesus are to be ashamed of such superstitions, lest a lie should have dominion over us.

If saintly spirits and holy angels can appear among men, what then? It would be a joy and a privilege to meet them. We are come to an innumerable company of angels—they bear us up in their hands lest we dash our feet against a stone.

Brethren, I am more afraid of the natural than of the supernatural, and far more fearful of the carnal than of the spiritual. Yet the disciples were afraid of Jesus because they were fearful of the supernatural—and when a person falls under that dread, he will be afraid of anything. We have known such persons to be frightened by cattle, alarmed by a cat, and distressed at the croak of a raven. Some foolish ones have even died with fear at the click of an insect in an old post, for they call it a “death watch.” Let us shake off all such childish folly, for if we once fall into it, we may even go the length of these apostles and be afraid of our Master Himself.

II. Let us consider, secondly, THE METHOD BY WHICH OUR MASTER CHEERED HIS FOLLOWERS WHEN THEY WERE AFRAID OF THE SUPERNATURAL.

First of all, *He assured them that He was not a disembodied spirit.* He said, “It is I,” and that, “I,” was a man who did eat and drink with them, a man of flesh and blood, whom they had seen and heard and touched. They were comforted when they knew that it was really no disembodied spirit, but a man in flesh and blood.

I beg you always to remember, dear friends, concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, that He is not to be regarded as an unclothed spirit, for He wears a body like our own. It would greatly detract from our comfort if we doubted the real personality of Christ and the truth of His resurrection. Our Lord has taken into heaven our human nature in its entirety—body as well as soul—and He ever lives not as a spirit, but as a man like ourselves, all sin excepted, and He lives there as the pledge that we shall be there too in the completeness of our manhood, when the trumpet of the resurrection sounds.

As a real man, Jesus reigns above. He is no phantom, no ghost, no spirit, but a risen man, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who pities us, and loves us, and feels for us. And in that capacity He speaks to us out of the glory of heaven and He says, “It is I; be not afraid.”

Another thought lies on the surface of the passage, *Jesus comforted them by the assurance that it was really Himself.* They were not looking upon a fiction, they were looking upon Christ Himself.

Friend, be sure of the reality of the Christ you trust in. It is very easy to use the name of Jesus, but not quite so easy to know His person. It is common to talk about what He did and not to feel that He lives just as truly as we do—and that He is a person to be loved, and to be trusted in, just as much as our own brother, or father, or friend.

We want a real, living, personal Christ! A phantom Christ will not cheer us in a storm—it is rather the cause of fright than hope. But a real Christ is a real consolation in a real tempest. May every one of you, my hearers, truly know the personal Savior to whom you can speak with as much certainty as if you could touch His hand!

The Christ of nineteen hundred years ago wrought out our salvation, but the Christ of today must apply it, or we are lost. Seeing that He ever lives, He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. Believe in His true manhood, and never allow your idea of Him to become thin and unsubstantial. Those are substantial Christians to whom Christ is substantial.

But the pith of the comfort lay in this—He said, “It is I; be not afraid,” which being interpreted means, *it is Jesus*, be not afraid. When our Lord met Paul on the road to Damascus, He said to him, “I am Jesus.” But when He spoke to those who knew His voice and were familiar with Him, He did not quote His name, but said, “It is I.”

They were sheep that had been long enough with the Shepherd to know His voice and they had only to hear Him speak, and without a name being mentioned they perceived that it was the Lord. To this conclusion they should have come at first. But as they blundered, and said, “It is a spirit,” the loving Master corrected them by saying, “It is I—it is Jesus.”

It is not possible for me to convey to you what richness of consolation lies in the thought that Jesus is Jesus, which is, being interpreted, a Savior. That one character and office is cheering, but the same is

true of all the names He wears. All the glorious titles and the blessed emblems under which He is set forth are rich in good cheer.

It is Jesus who walks the water of your trouble and comes to you—Jesus the Son of God, the Alpha and the Omega, the Head over all things to His church—the All in all of all His people.

When Jesus wished to encourage John, in the first chapter of the Revelation, the comfort He gave to him was, “I am the first and the last.” The comfort of the Lord’s people lies in the person and character of Jesus. Here is their solace, “IT IS I.”

But what a big “I” it is. Compound in one all that is conceivable of goodness, and mercy, and grace, and faithfulness, and love—add perfect humanity, and infinite Godhead, and all the sovereign rights, powers, and possessions of the Highest—and these are all contained in the one little letter “I” when Jesus says, “It is I; be not afraid.”

You have not reached the bottom of it yet. The Greek is “*I am.*” Literally rendered, the word which Jesus said was not, “It is I,” but “I am.” When He would cheer His ancient people, the Lord bade Moses comfort Israel by saying, “I AM has sent me unto you.” The self-existence of their God was to be the joy of the tribes. When Jesus said to those who came to take Him in the garden, “I am,” they fell backward, such was the power of that word—but when He said to these His cowering disciples, “I am,” they were drawn towards Him, and yet they lost not the awe which must ever go with that incommunicable name “I AM.”

Believer, Jesus says to you, “I am.” Is your wife dead? Is your child to be buried? Have your possessions failed? Is your health departing? Are your joys declining? Alas, it is a dying, fleeting world, but there is One who is always the same, for Jesus says to you, “I am; and because I live, you shall live also.” Be comforted—whatever else is gone, wherever else the arrows of death may fly, your Jesus still lives. “I am.” Blessed word of rich comfort to be heard amid the darkness of the night by weary mariners whose spirits had been sinking within them.

The glory of it all was brought out by the fact that “Jesus went up unto them into the ship.” And as He stood amid them, the stillness all around proved that the “I am” was there. Had He not moved upon the face of the deep, as once the Spirit moved there, and did there not come order out of the tempest’s chaos even as at the beginning? Where the great “I AM” is present, the winds and the waves perceive their Ruler and obey Him.

Then the disciples knew that Jesus was not only “I AM,” but “Immanuel, God with us.” “I AM” had come to their rescue and was in the ship with them. Here, dear friend, is *your* comfort and mine. We will not fear the supernatural, or the unseen, for we see Jesus, and in Him we see the Father—and therefore we are of good cheer.

III. Our third point for consideration is this—THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE SHALL BE LIKELY TO NEED SUCH COMFORT AS THIS.

Jesus spoke this message to believers tossed with tempest and we need it *when we are depressed by the surroundings of these evil times.* In seasons of depressed trade, great sickness, terrible wars, and public disasters, it is balm to the spirit to know that Jesus is still the same. Sin may abound yet more, the light of the Gospel may burn low, and the prince of darkness may widely sway his destroying sceptre, but nevertheless, this truth stands sure, that Jesus is the “I AM.”

At certain periods, diabolical influence seems paramount, the reins of nations appear to be taken out of the hand of the great Governor, and yet it is not so. Look through the darkness and you shall see your Lord amid the hurricane, walking the waters of politics, ruling national convulsions, governing, overruling, arranging all, making even the wrath of man to praise Him, and restraining it according to His wisdom.

Above the howling of the blast I hear His voice announcing, “It is I.” When men’s hearts sink for fear, and the rowers feel their oars ready to snap by the strain of useless toil, I hear that word which is the soul of music—“It is I; be not afraid. I am ruling all things. I am coming to the rescue of the barque, my church—she shall yet float on smooth waters and reach her desired haven.”

Another time of need will surely be *when we reach the swellings of Jordan*. As we shall get near the spirit-world and the soul will begin to strip off her material garment to enter on a new form of life, how shall we feel as we enter the unknown world? Shall we cry out, "It is a Spirit!" as we salute the first who meets us?

It may be so, but then a sweet voice will destroy death's terror, and end all our alarms, and this shall be its utterance, "It is I; be not afraid." This new world is not new to Jesus. Our pains and dying throes are not unknown to Him! The disembodied state, wherein the spirit sojourns for a while unclothed, He knows it all, for He died and entered into the spirit-land, and can sympathize with us in every step of the way.

In what sweet company shall we pass through the valley of death-shade! Surely its gloom will turn to brightness, as when a cavern, wrapped in blackness, is lit up with a hundred torches and myriads of gems sparkle from roof and walls. Passing through the sepulchre, its damp darkness shall flash and glow with unexpected joys and marvelous revelations of the Ever-blessed, because Jesus will be with us and "the Lamb is the light." If, in that dread hour, we shall feel the least trembling at our Lord as the Judge of all the earth, that dread shall vanish as He cries, "It is I."

This comfort may serve us *when we suffer great tribulation*. May you, my friend, be spared this trial if God so wills. But should it come, you will all the better understand me. They that "do business in great waters" know that our troubles are, at times, so pressing that we lose our heads and are not able to cope with our trials. Forebodings fill the air and our sinking spirits chill the very marrow of our life. We become like men distraught or as David put it, we reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at our wits end.

Then, ah then, the voices of our comrades in the ship are of little value—and even the echoes of former words from the Lord are of small account—nothing will serve but the present and sure consolations of the Lord Jesus. We must hear Him say, "It is I," or we shall faint outright. Then is the soul braced to breast the next billow, and while she cries, "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me," she is still able to add, "Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me." When Jesus is with a man, troubles have lost their power to trouble him.

We shall need this same word of comfort *whenever the Lord graciously reveals Himself to us*. His glory is such that we are not able to bear much of it. Its very sweetness overpowers the heart. Saints have had to ask for a staying of the intense delight which seemed to overbear their natural faculties. Those who have enjoyed those transporting manifestations can quite understand why John has written, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead."

An awful delight—or shall I say a delightful awe?—throws the man upon his face. John had lain in Jesus' bosom and yet, when he had a clear manifestation of his glorified Savior, He could not bear it till His tender Friend laid His hand upon Him and said, "Fear not." So will it be with each of us when we are favored with the visits of the Well-beloved—we shall greatly need that He should say to us, "It is I, your Brother, your Friend, your Savior, your Husband. Be not afraid. Great as I am, tremble not in My presence, for I am Jesus, the Lover of your soul."

Once more, there is a day coming *when the Son of man will be revealed in the clouds of heaven*. We know not when it will be, but we are solemnly warned that when men look not for Him, He will suddenly appear. He will come as a thief in the night to the mass of men. But as for believers, they are not in darkness that that day should come upon them as a thief—to them He comes as a long-expected friend.

When He comes, there will be seen tokens—signs in the heavens above and in the earth beneath—which we shall recognize. We may then, perhaps, be distressed by these supernatural portents and begin to tremble. What, then, will be our delight when we hear Him say, "It is I; be not afraid!" Lift up your heads, you saints, for the coming of the Lord draws nigh and to you it is not darkness, but day. To you it

is not judgment and condemnation, but honor and reward. What bliss it will be to catch the first glimpse of our Lord on the throne!

Sinners will wring their hands and weep and wail because of Him, but we shall know His voice and welcome His appearing. When the last trumpet rings out clear and loud, happy shall we be to hear that gladsome sound, "It is I; be not afraid!" Rolling earth and crumbling mountains, darkened sun and blackened moon, flames of fire and shocks of earthquake, gathering angels and chariots of God—none of these things shall amaze us while Jesus whispers to our soul, "I am," and yet again, "IT IS I; BE NOT AFRAID."

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 14:22-33

Verse 22. *And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

Straightway is a business word—Jesus loses no time. No sooner is the banquet over than He sends off the guests to their homes. While they are well-fed, He bids them make the best of their way home. He who made the multitude sit down was also able *to send the multitude away*, but they needed sending, for they were loath to go.

The sea must be crossed again or Jesus cannot find seclusion. How He must run the gauntlet to get a little rest! Before He starts again across the sea, He performs another act of self-denial, for He cannot leave till He sees the crowd happily dispersed. He attends to that business Himself, giving the disciples the opportunity to depart in peace. As the captain is the last to leave the boat, so is the Lord the last to leave the scene of labor.

The disciples would have chosen to stay in His company and to enjoy the thanks of the people, but *He constrained them to get into a ship*. He could not get anyone to go away from Him at this time without sending and constraining. This loadstone has great attractions. He evidently promised His disciples that He would follow them, for the words are, "*to go before him unto the other side.*"

How He was to follow He did not say, but He could always find a way of keeping His appointments. How considerate of Him to wait amid the throng while the disciples sailed away in peace. He always takes the heavy end of the load Himself.

23. *And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

Now that the crowd is gone, He can take His rest and He finds it in prayer. *He went up into a mountain apart*—in a place where He might speak aloud, and not be overheard or disturbed, He communed with the Father *alone*. This was His refreshment and His delight.

He continued therein till the thickest shades of night had gathered and the day was gone. "*Alone,*" yet not alone, He drank in new strength as He communed with His Father. He must have revealed this private matter to the recording evangelist and surely it was with the intent that we should learn from His example.

We cannot afford to be always in company, since even our blessed Lord felt that He must be *alone*.

24. *But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.*

While Jesus was alone, they, in *the ship*, were in the same condition, but not occupied with the same spiritual exercise. When they first quitted the shore it was fair sailing in the cool of the evening, but a storm gathered hastily as night covered the sky. On the Lake of Galilee the wind rushes down from the gullies between the mountains and causes grievous peril to little boats—sometimes fairly lifting them out of the water and soon submerging them beneath the waves. That deep lake was peculiarly dangerous for small craft.

They were far from land, for they were “*in the midst of the sea,*” equally distant from either shore. The sea was furious and their ship was “*tossed with waves.*” The hurricane was terrible. “*The wind was contrary,*” and would not let them go anyplace which they sought. It was a whirlwind and they were whirled about by it, but could not use it for reaching either shore.

How much did their case resemble ours when we are in sore distress! We are tossed about and can do nothing—the blast is too furious for us to bear up against it or even to live while driven before it.

One happy fact remains—Jesus is pleading on the shore though we are struggling on the sea. It is also comfortable to know that we are where He *constrained* us to go (see verse 22), and He has promised to come to us in due time, and therefore all must be safe, though the tempest rages terribly.

25. *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

Jesus is sure to come. The night wears on and the darkness thickens. *The fourth watch of the night draws near*, but where is He? Faith says, “He must come.” Though He should stay away till almost break of day, He must come. Unbelief asks, “How can He come?” Ah, He will answer for Himself. He can make His own way.

“*Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*” He comes in the teeth of the wind and on the face of the wave. Never fear that He will fail to reach the storm-tossed barque. His love will find out the way. Whether it be to a single disciple, or to the church as a whole, Jesus will appear in His own chosen hour and His time is sure to be the most timely.

26. *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.* [See sermon #957, Jesus No Phantom]

Yes, *the disciples saw him*—saw Jesus, their Lord—and derived no comfort from the sight. Poor human nature’s sight is a blind thing compared with the vision of a spiritual faith. They saw, but knew not what they saw. What could it be but a phantom? How could a real man walk on those foaming billows? How could he stand in the teeth of such a hurricane? They were already at their wits’ end and the apparition put an end to their courage.

We seem to hear their shriek of alarm—“*they cried out for fear.*” We read not that “*they were troubled*” before. They were old sailors and had no dread of natural forces. But *a spirit*—ah, that was too much of a terror. They were at their worst now and yet, if they had known it, they were on the verge of their best.

It is noteworthy that the nearer Jesus was to them, the greater was their fear. Want of discernment blinds the soul to its richest consolations. Lord, be near, and let me know You! Let me not have to say with Jacob, “Surely God was in this place; and I knew it not!”

27. *But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

He did not keep them in suspense—“*Straightway Jesus spake unto them.*” How sweetly sounded that loving and majestic voice! Above the roar of waves and howling of winds, they heard the voice of the Lord. This was also His old word, “*Be of good cheer.*” The most conclusive reason for courage was His own presence. “*It is I; be not afraid.*”

If Jesus is near, if the Spirit of the storm be, after all, the Lord of love, all room for fear is gone. Can Jesus come to us through the storm? Then we shall weather it and come to Him. He who rules the tempest is not the devil, not chance, not a malicious enemy—but Jesus. This should end all fear.

28. *And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

Peter must be the first to speak—he is impulsive, and besides, he was a sort of foreman in the company. The first speaker is not always the wisest man. Peter’s fears have gone—all but one “if”—but that “if” was working him no good, for it seemed to challenge his Master—“*Lord if it be thou.*”

What a test to suggest—“*Bid me come unto thee on the water!*” What did Peter want with walking the waters? His name might have suggested that like a stone he would go to the bottom. It was an imprudent request. It was the swing of the pendulum in Peter from despair to an injudicious venturing. Surely, he knew not what he said.

Yet we, too, have put our Lord to tests almost as improper. Have we not said, "If You have ever blessed me, give me this and that"? We, too, have had our water-walking and have ventured where nothing but special grace could uphold us. Lord, what is man?

29. *And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*

When good men are unwise and presumptuous, it may be for their lasting good to learn their folly by experience. "*He said, Come.*" Peter's Lord is about to teach him a practical lesson. He asked to be bidden to come. He may come. He does come. He leaves the boat, he treads the wave. He is on the way towards his Lord. We can do anything if we have divine authorization and courage enough to take the Lord at His word. Now there were two on the sea, two wonders! Which was the greater? The reader may not find it easy to reply. Let him consider.

30. *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.*

"*But*"—a sorrowful, "but" for poor Peter. His eye was off his Lord and on the raging of the wind—"He saw the wind boisterous." His heart failed him and then his feet failed him. Down he began to go—an awful moment is this "*beginning to sink,*" yet it was only a "beginning." He had time to cry to his Lord, who was not sinking. Peter *cried*, and was safe. His prayer was as full as it was short. He had brought his eye and his faith back to Jesus, for he cried, "*Lord!*" He had come into this danger through obedience and therefore he had an appeal in the word, "Lord."

Whether in danger or not, Jesus was still his Lord. He is a lost man and he feels it unless his Lord will *save* him—save him altogether, save him now. Blessed prayer—"Lord, save me." Reader, does it not suit you? Peter was nearer his Lord when he was sinking than when he was walking. In our low estate we are often nearer to Jesus than in our more glorious seasons.

31. *And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?* [See Sermons #246, Mr. Fearing Comforted; #1856, The History of Little-Faith; #2173, Little Faith and Great Faith; and #2925, Reasons For Doubting Christ]

Our Lord delays not when our peril is imminent and our cry is urgent—"Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand." He first "*caught him*" and then taught him. Jesus saves first and upbraids afterwards, when He must needs do so. When we are saved is the fit time for us to chasten ourselves for our unbelief. Let us learn from our Lord that we may not reprove others till we have first helped them out of their difficulties.

Our doubts are unreasonable—"Wherefore didst thou doubt?" If there be reason for little faith, there is evidently reason for great confidence. If it be right to trust Jesus at all, why not trust Him altogether? Trust was Peter's strength, doubt was his danger. It looked like great faith when Peter walked on the water, but a little wind soon proved it to be "*little faith.*" Till our faith is tried, we can form no reliable estimate of it.

After his Lord had taken him by the hand, Peter sank no further, but resumed the walk of faith. How easy to have faith when we are close to Jesus!

Lord, when our faith fails, come thou to us and we shall walk on the wave.

32. *And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.*

So that Peter's walk and his rescue had happened in the face of the tempest. He could walk the water well enough when his Lord held his hand—and so can we. What a sight! Jesus and Peter, hand in hand, walking upon the sea! The two made for the ship at once—miracles are never spun out to undue length.

Was not Peter glad to leave the tumultuous element, and at the same time to perceive that the gale was over? "*When they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.*" It is well to be safe in a storm, but more pleasant to find the calm return and the hurricane end. How gladly did the disciples welcome their Lord, and their brother, Peter, who though wet to the skin, was a wiser man for his adventure!

33. *Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.*

No wonder that Peter “*worshipped him,*” nor that His comrades did the same. The whole of the disciples who had been thus rescued by their Lord’s coming to them on the stormy sea were overwhelmingly convinced of His Godhead. Now they were doubly sure of it by unquestionable evidence—and in lowly reverence they expressed to Him their adoring faith, saying, “*Of a truth thou art the Son of God.*”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.