Faith in Uncertain Times - Part 2

# Fragments

## (Mark 6:35-52)

Welcome to all of you, thank you for joining us this morning as we continue in part two of Faith in Uncertain Times. If you would like to follow along in your Bible, turn to Mark’s gospel, and chapter number six. We’re going to begin at verse number 46, as we consider the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. Not hoping like the world, not wishing something would happen, but a biblical hope, a godly hope, hope that is like an anchor, anticipating something promised. And so, if you’ve found your place in Mark chapter 6, verse 46, it reads this way.

“After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them” (Mark 6:46-48).

I want to talk to you today about Fragments, because you and I today, often find ourselves struggling and straining through life. We are really not that far removed from the challenges facing the disciples. Our circumstances may be different, our situation may be different, and while we may be removed from the context of a boat in a storm; we need to understand that this text doesn’t stand in isolation to the incidents that surround it.

In other words, if we back up to verse 34, we discover Jesus surrounded by multitudes of people. And as is often the case with Jesus this was just a spontaneous revival, and not the result of planning, or days and weeks of preparation. Because wherever Jesus went something was always going on, it wasn’t about having a schedule, but wherever Jesus went things just kind of happened.

Jesus would just be walking through town, walking past a funeral possession, and suddenly decide to raise up a dead man. So, the disciples had to react at a moment’s notice, because stuff just happened, it wasn’t on the schedule. That’s the context of this passage, they had come to shore in a solitary place, but the crowds got there ahead of them. And so, they came there anticipating some rest and relaxation, when suddenly they find themselves facing this big crowd, this rally with 5,000 men, plus women and children.

Now, it was the end of the day, Jesus had been teaching so long that the crowd was about to faint with hunger. The disciples had been there serving since early in the morning, like some of you on the A/V team, the worship team, in children’s ministry, or the security team, and you were here before I got here. That’s the context, it had been a long day, “it was late in the day,” and verse 35 says,

His disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place and it's already very late” (Mark 6:35).

In other words, this was ministry, this is the job of a disciple, serving the people, making it happen, doing what they had to do, working long hours, but they were done. And so, they came to Jesus because they were far from town, the people had run out of food, and many were growing faint. And so, they came to Jesus because they had a problem. They said,

“Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat” (Mark 6:36).

But Jesus said, “They don’t need to go away,”

“You give them something to eat" “How many loaves do you have?" he asked... They said, "Five — and two fish” (Mark 6:37-38).

Once again, the disciples find themselves trying to keep up with Jesus like when they were at a wedding party when he turned water into wine. It wasn’t something that they planned for or prepared for, but it just happened. Like it had with the woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years, it wasn’t on their itinerary, it just happened. And so, they just got through a tough day of serving with Jesus and he directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass.

“So, they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.” Then Jesus, “took the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves” (Mark 6:39-41).

Suddenly, there was a spontaneous miracle and the disciples had to react without warning, without preparation, because as miracles often do, it just happened. Jesus took the two fish and five loaves and started blessing it and breaking it.

“Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.” 5,000 men, plus women and children, “ate and were satisfied” (Mark 6:41-42).

Now, it had been a really, really long day, the disciples had served all these people, and now Jesus tells them to gather up all the leftovers. And so, they are exhausted, drained emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and physically, but they gathered some baskets from the people.

“And the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand” (Mark 6:43-44).

Those of you who have done any catering or serving large gatherings know the amount of work it took to serve all those people. You can imagine the amount of work it would be to gather up the fragments, the leftovers from over 5,000 people eating this meal. And now the disciples are worn out, and so they are wondering why Jesus wants it. You know, why don’t we just leave it for the birds, because it’s over, it’s done?

I’m so thankful that Jesus places great value on the fragments, the broken, the battered and torn pieces. When he looked at me, he didn’t just step over me, but he valued me enough to pick me up in my brokenness, to restore me, to help me up, and to prepare a place for me.

Aren’t you thankful that you don’t have to be whole, you don’t have to have it all together, but Jesus wants to gather all the fragments to himself? And so, you can be broken and battered, torn and abused, just fragments of who you used to be, but Jesus is not going to leave you behind. Instead, he takes are pieces and gives them purpose. He takes are broken spirit and gives it hope. He takes our destiny and reshapes it. Because though we were unworthy, he considered us worthwhile.

After the disciples finished picking up the fragments that looked worthless to the world. After they gathered up all the leftovers, the scraps and pieces, testimonies to the greatness of this miracle. The Bible says,

“Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd” (Mark 6:45).

Jesus didn’t tell them how long he would be, or even how he was going to get over to them, but he tells them to get into the boat and go ahead of him. After dismissing the crowd, verse 46 says,

“He went up on a mountainside to pray” (Mark 6:46).

Meanwhile, the disciples had set sail, relaxing, thankful that the day was over.

“When evening came,” Mark tells us, “the boat was in the middle of the lake” when his voice trails off into a mumble… (Mark 6:47).

Peter who is telling this to Mark pauses, his voice breaks, and he struggles maybe out of humility, maybe out of shame, but the others who were there fill in the blanks for us. “By now it was dark,” John tells us, “and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough” (John 6:17-18). And so, this wasn’t good, because this was a very large lake, often called a sea, and Matthew tells us,

“The boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it” (Matthew 14:24).

Jesus had gone up on the mountain by himself to pray and Satan thought, I’ve got them now, they’re separated from Jesus, and this mighty storm comes down on the lake.

This is so much like our spiritual enemy, because whenever Satan catches you without Jesus, he will always send some kind of storm into your life. Jesus had not yet joined them, they were far from shore, when a storm breaks out. Now, it’s one thing to deal with a storm when you are rested, but quite another when you are exhausted after a long day. And so, here they are, “The boat was in the middle of the lake,” the wind is blowing, lightning was flashing, thunder was rumbling, “and Jesus was alone on land. That’s the context when Mark tells us,

“He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them” (Mark 6:47-48).

Now, Jesus could have rebuked the storm from where he was, he doesn’t have to be in the place to perform a miracle in a place. And so, he could have rebuked the storm before he ever came down off the mountain, but he didn’t. In fact, John tells us, “They had rowed three or three and a half miles” …when Jesus saw them (John 6:19). In other words, he saw them far, far, away when he was alone on the mountain, he saw them straining at the oars, but he allowed them to continue struggling.

I wonder if there are any of you who are trying to hold it together, trying to hold on to Faith in Uncertain Times, because that is life, the struggles of life are unavoidable. In fact, God never promised a life without difficulty, without complications, without heart aches, and I know that doesn’t make you happy, but the Bible does promise that God is faithful.

“He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

And so, many times we find ourselves looking for that way out, but that doesn’t exempt us from the struggle, because there’s a certain amount of toiling and wrestling that is allowed by God.

Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars with the wind against them, but he left them straining, grunting, and sweating; exhausted in a storm in the middle of the lake. There may be some of you here who are struggling and trying to figure out how you are going to get through this storm. Maybe it’s a health storm, a financial storm, but you are already tired, you are already stressed, and now you’ve got to pay your taxes, reconcile a relationship, your children are acting out, and you just don’t think you can handle all of this at the same time.

The truth is that we all struggle with Faith in Uncertain Times. We don’t really like to talk about that, standing firm in the storm, struggling against the winds of life, but the Bible says that we shouldn’t be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12). In other words, nobody is excluded, life just does what life does.

And so, Peter says, there are some things that God will allow, painful trials that you have to go through, and everything that you are dealing with, whatever you are struggling with, doesn’t magically disappear just because you are fasting and praying in tongues. Sometimes you’ve got to deal with a storm, you’ve got to exercise faith in uncertain times, you’ve got to struggle with it and still believe. And so, you may have prayed over yourself, anointed yourself with oil, but you’re still struggling with your flesh because the storm keeps raging.

I knew I wouldn’t get many amens for that, but you need to know that even though the Lord may have allowed it, he is also cheering for you. He is praying for you, straining with you, because the Bible says,

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Romans 8:26).

Now, I know this some of you may find this frustrating, exasperating, imagining the Lord watching you struggle, because may be some well-intentioned soul told you if you got saved, you would be blessed, everything would fall in place, your back wouldn’t hurt anymore, and now all hell is breaking loose. But I want you to notice this, because even though the Bible says,

“Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars” (Mark 6:48).

He was looking, he was watching over them, because he cared for them, and he always puts things he values in boats. Noah found favor with God and so he said,

“Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation” (Genesis 7:1).

When Moses’ mother discovered that he’d gotten too big to be hidden any longer,

“She got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile” (Exodus 2:3).

When the apostle Paul was taken as a prisoner to Rome, aboard a ship, they encountered a nor’easter and everybody was getting ready to jump off of the boat, but Paul said to the soldiers,

“Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved" (Acts 27:31).

But even if the boat falls apart, stay with it, hold onto it, whether on planks or on pieces of the ship because the boat will get you to safety.

You see, anything God values, he puts in a boat, and following this great revival, Mark tells us,

“Jesus made his disciples get into the boat” (Mark 6:45).

He said, you go ahead to the other side, I’ll join you later, and he went up on the mountain to pray.

But the truth is, the everybody’s got a struggle, everybody’s got a battle, you can’t get through this world without a struggle. And the disciples were straining at the oars, because there’s no way to get to the other side without a struggle. Verse 48 says,

“About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified” (Mark 6:48-50).

“Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down” (Mark 6:50-51).

Now, some of you may have noticed that something was missing, there wasn’t any mention of Peter walking on water, and I want to remind you that this is Peter’s testimony. In other words, Peter was dictating the events as Mark was writing them down for us, which means that either Peter was too humble to mention it or just maybe he was too ashamed.

This is interesting because we have always honored Peter for getting out of the boat and walking on the water, like he was better than the others, that he had more faith than the others. But I wonder if that was not the case at all, that maybe Peter panicked and left the place where he had been instructed to stay, because God always puts what he values in a boat for safekeeping. And so, Peter asked Jesus for permission to come, to get off the boat, in spite of the fact that,

“Jesus made his disciples get into the boat” (Mark 6:45).

And so, maybe Peter doesn’t mention this whole walking on the water thing because he was ashamed that he jumped overboard, leaving the other disciples struggling, straining at the oars by themselves instead of trusting Jesus to calm the storm.

Maybe that’s why Peter doesn’t mention that the waters grew rough, that they were buffeted by the waves, because he didn’t want to mention the storm at all. And so, he just says,

“The disciples were straining at the oars, because the wind was against them” (Mark 6:48).

Because it was Jesus who told Peter to get into the boat. And yet, like Peter, we all have a tendency to want to jump out of the boat every time the going gets tough. You know, every time there’s a storm, and the wind and waves are rocking the boat. Every time someone hurts your feelings you want to walk away and find another church. And so, what did Peter do? Peter said,

“Lord, if it's you tell me to come to you on the water" (Matthew 14:28).

But what if Jesus wanted him to sit down and start pulling his weight, straining at the oars, fighting his way to the other side with everybody else. You see, sometimes we’ve got to stand firm, we’ve got to stop running away, and stay right there in the boat. Sometimes we have got to join in with the others straining against the oars, fighting the wind, so that we can get where God wants us to be.

But what does Peter do, he jumps out of the boat, walking towards Jesus, and the Bible says,

“When Peter saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:30-31).

And so, what I’m trying to get at, the point I’m trying to make, is that nowhere in Scripture is Peter honored for jumping out of the boat. In fact, it seems that he was ashamed of that, and so maybe we ought to honor the faith of the others who stayed in the boat?

We’ve been talking about faith in uncertain times, and so, why do we applaud Peter for jumping out of the boat, running from the fight, leaving the others, and putting himself in a position where Jesus had to save him, when Jesus himself said,

“Do not put the Lord your God to the test” (Luke 4:12).

I believe we would do well to stop running, to stand firm in the storm, and no matter how much you are straining, or how tired you are, to stop praying for miracles to get you out of the place that God sent you. You know, did you ever think that when Jesus said,

“You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31).

It wasn’t because Peter sank, that’s what gravity does, but it was because he bailed out, he was running from the storm, and he left the others straining at the oars. God’s word for some of you today is to stay in the boat, grab those oars, and press through the wind and the waves, because God sent you into this storm for a reason and he is still going to get you to the other side.

I believe the reason why Mark doesn’t mention Peter is because Peter doesn’t mention Peter, he doesn’t mention the fact that he ran from the storm. And yes, he ran to Jesus, but he ran because he doubted, and he left the others struggling in the boat by themselves. He seemed so courageous at times, saying things like,

“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (Matthew 26:35).

But he was developing this habit of running from a fight. And so, when they started questioning and abusing Jesus, he excused himself from the battle saying, “I’m not one of them. I’m not a disciple.” He denied Jesus and said,

“I don't know the man!" (Matthew 26:72).

And he ran away ashamed and disgraced, and he missed the opportunity to represent Jesus when Jesus needed him the most.

And so maybe, it could be possible, that Peter is not mentioned in the text, because he doesn’t want to mention the fact that he didn’t stay in the boat with the other eleven who had faith in uncertain times. And so, he talks about the boat, the disciples, the wind, the night, Jesus coming to them walking on the lake. And how they were all terrified, thinking he was a ghost, and then at the very last moment he says,

“They were completely amazed for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened” (Mark 6:51-52).

In other words, Peter redirects our attention to the loaves and the 12 baskets of fragments. And he helps us to understand that gathering up the pieces, the fragment, wasn’t about eating the leftovers. Because honestly, that wouldn’t have been very appetizing to eat the leftovers that had been touched and handled by so many and then picked up off the ground. But it was really about remembering what Jesus had done in the past, because he was creating a memory, drawing a picture in their minds, so that they could remember what he had brought them through before, but they didn’t understand about the loaves.

You see, Jesus knew that a storm was coming in their lives, he had already prepared them, and so he was just watching and waiting, because he had given them evidence that he had always been there when they needed him. And so, it wasn’t about jumping out of the boat, the loaves were about having faith in uncertain times. The 12 baskets of leftovers were a reminder that every time you’ve been in trouble, every time you had a need, that Jesus brought you through. And so, we’ve got to remember, wherever we go, whatever we do, the fragments are a testimony that if he did it before, he will do it again.

“Jesus climbed into the boat with them and the wind died down…” (Mark 6:51).

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