

John 6:16-21 (ESV)

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."

²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

If you have a linear view of time, there is a beginning, middle and an end. A circular view of time sees an endless cycle with no beginning and no end.

The Bible opens with the famous words, "In the beginning..." The Bible concludes with these words, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Somewhere between Genesis 1 and Revelation 22 the story of your life is told. It too has a beginning, a middle and an end. That is your journey.

You had no say about how and when your journey was to begin. God is the author of life. The how, when and where your journey is to end is also in His hands. Yet the final destination, is something you can know about now.

In our text the disciples set out on a journey. It was evening as they entered into a boat. They were to travel across the Sea of Galilee on their way to Capernaum. [picture]

I've been to Capernaum. It's a lovely coastal village on the North West side of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was the center of much of JESUS's ministry.

During a drought back in 1986 an ancient fishing boat from the 1st century was discovered in the mud not far from there. It is now in a museum in Tiberias. [picture] They call it the JESUS boat though there's no evidence connecting that particular boat with JESUS or the disciples.

It was in such a boat that the disciples set out to cross the Sea of Galilee that evening. JESUS stayed behind in order to pray.

That is a beautiful picture of how your journey is like that of the disciples. JESUS sent the disciples ahead while He went up on a mountain to pray.

Though not physically with the LORD, the disciples set out to a destination covered by the prayers of JESUS.

If I were one of the disciples, I would have preferred that JESUS step into the boat and make the trip with the rest of us. I would want JESUS physically with me in person, in the boat, seated right next to me.

There are numerous passages in the Bible that speak of the intercessory ministry of Christ at the right hand of God.

When JESUS intercedes for his disciples, He prays as our advocate. He pleads our case before the Father. JESUS prays for us in the same way. He prays:

- with the mind of God
- according to the will of God
- that all things would work for the glory of God.

As the disciples entered the boat and pushed off from shore, they started their journey. JESUS was up on a mountain looking down upon them. The disciples couldn't see Him, but He could see them.

JESUS is now at a higher vantage point than a mountain. We don't see Him, but He sees us. Your journey is well underway. You don't know what tomorrow may bring, but He does.

You have an idea of what direction you want to be heading, but who knows what obstacles or detours you'll be facing. He knows.

We don't like surprises, but nothing takes JESUS by surprise. We would rather avoid hindrances, interruptions or complications, but JESUS views them differently than we do.

It was JESUS who said that not a hair can fall from your head without the will of your Father in heaven. If the course of your life's journey is set from above, then what does JESUS pray for when He intercedes for you?

He doesn't pray that you avoid trials, because He ordains them. He doesn't pray that pain and suffering elude you, because He uses them to shape your character.

He doesn't pray that you only experience prosperity and success, for then pride would lead to your downfall.

His prayers are for your good, both for now in this life, and for the future, to prepare you for what is to come.

There's a portion in a wedding service that I pray for the bride and groom, just after they have taken their vows.

May you both have enough success to expand your opportunities for doing good, enough failure to keep your hands clenched in God's, enough tears to keep you tender, enough hurt to make you compassionate, enough joy to keep you radiant, and enough faith to ever look to tomorrow.

I would think that that prayer resonates in spirit with the kind of prayer that JESUS would pray when He intercedes for you.

He has a higher perspective than we do. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows what you need even before you ask Him for anything.

Your life is like this journey the disciples went on that evening in the Sea of Galilee. We measure our lives in time, they in nautical miles. We like they have a destination in mind, but what will take place in that voyage is yet to be seen.

JESUS was not physically with them, but they were being prayed for. We, like they, are under His watch. What difference does all of that make?

1. Nothing happens by chance.

2. There is a higher purpose than what you can see from where you're sitting.

3. You set sail, He directs the winds.

The Sea of Galilee is a big lake, but you can see across it. In a speedboat, you can get across it relatively quickly. But life is not lived in a speedboat.

The disciples were rowing across the lake, and that is slow going with a lot of effort. Plus nautical miles seem longer than land miles, which they are because they're based on the circumference of the earth.

The evening had turned to night, and the absence of JESUS was keenly felt. The disciples could no longer see their desired destination. They were out in deep water, and progress was painfully measured.

Those are the tough moments in your journey. Every day is like a solitary row from one of the oars. You're making progress, but you can't see it. By faith you know that JESUS is with you, but you can't see Him.

The uneventful times of your journey are not meaningless when you are being prayed for by the eternal Son of God.

- May you have the eyes of faith, to keep going even if you are weary with no end in sight.
- May you have enough awareness to notice how your efforts effect those in the same boat as you are.
- May you have enough hope to know that at the end of the day, you are that much closer to your ultimate goal.

Mark's Gospel gives us a little more insight about the disciples' journey that night.

Mark 6:47-48 (ESV)

And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and [JESUS] was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them...

John says that they were 3-4 miles out when the winds picked up and the disciples were terrified. The storms of life will make you long for the uneventful and boring days of the past. In a storm, you will notice at least three things:

1. You no longer have complete control over the direction of your life. There are forces bigger and stronger than you at work which are out of your hands.
2. You become acutely aware of just how vulnerable you are; not only for your physical safety, but also in your emotional and spiritual well-being.
3. Whatever insecurities you may have had in the past will rise to the surface and dominate your thoughts and emotions. The worst case scenario which might seem absurd under normal circumstance, will be seen all but certain to you in the midst of a storm.

The storms of life come in various forms. An unexpected prognosis from the doctor. The breakup of a relationship. The loss of a job. A crisis in the life of a family member.

What had been smooth sailing is now a tempest. What had been a peaceful voyage is now facing gale winds. The storms of life will put you in survival mode.

At such times you might simultaneously call out to God while you wonder if He is there in the first place. Why would He allow you to set out in the evening knowing full well what would take place that night?

The storms of life will test your deepest beliefs and your strongest convictions. You wonder what the disciples were thinking in that boat.

- *Is being a disciple of JESUS Christ all that it's cracked up to be?*
- *Does JESUS really have my best interest in mind?*
- *Wouldn't I be better off just being on my own rather than being teamed up with these guys who don't know what they're doing either?*

In the midst of a storm, you may experience similar thoughts. Christians follow a clear set of principles set forth in God's Word.

The assumption is that when we do our best to follow those principles, that God would be pleased and that our lives will be blessed.

When things don't turn out the way we expected them to, you begin to wonder. Maybe it doesn't matter how you live. Maybe you are on your own. Perhaps it's time to jump ship.

I've been involved in ministry now for close to 40 years. Even after all these years there are moments when the winds and the waves are so overpowering that this little life boat that I occupy seems all but doomed.

John 6:19-20 (ESV)

When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them,

“It is I; do not be afraid.”

A dear lady in this church, Sybil, told me that this quote from JESUS is her favorite passage in the Bible. **“It is I, do not be afraid.”**

When I am fearful; when I am hurting; when I am ready to abandon ship, those words mean everything. **“It is I, do not be afraid.”** Then look at verse 21.

John 6:21 (ESV)

Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

When you think of it, JESUS is the destination of our faith. No wonder they were glad to take Him into the boat. When you're with JESUS, time, place and location all fall into place.

When you are with JESUS, you are in the place where you ought to be. You don't think about the duration of time or where you need to be next.

The disciples had been rowing for hours and their bodies must have been racked with aches and pain. But their gladness of heart to have JESUS with them allowed them to put all of that aside.

What is the Gospel lesson from all of this? First, the destination or goal of your faith is not to arrive to the Promised Land by your own efforts, but by God's grace. In fact it's the only way that you'll get there.

The journey is long and hard. The storms are frightening. The destination will bring a welcomed relief from your labors. But it's not your labors that will get you there.

When you are struggling to make headway; when your body is worn out and your heart is aching, your focus is on how hard you're trying and how little progress you've made.

Your efforts are noble; your desires are good; but it is grace that will see you through to the other side.

The hymn writer put it this way: **Not the labors of my hands, can fulfill thy laws demands. Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow; all for sin could not atone; thou must save and thou alone.**

JESUS sent the disciples on this journey. JESUS prayed for them while they set out on this journey. JESUS came to them in the midst of the storm during this journey. JESUS is really the point of the journey.

If you're depending on anything else to get you safely across to the other side, it will fail you. Your navigational skills, your personal charm or charisma, they will get you only so far.

Even your own theological astuteness or your adherence to moral living, as important as all of that may be, won't be enough. **Thou must save, and thou alone.**

JESUS walked on water. It's hard to know what to do with that. If this was a post-resurrection appearance, it would be easier to understand.

But JESUS was not yet in His glorified body. He was still subject to gravity and the laws of nature. Yet JESUS supersedes those laws when chooses to do so.

He comes directly to your boat, your world, your family, your heart, and he says, **"It is I, don't be afraid."** I'm not here to condemn you, or to throw you overboard. I'm here to tell you that I will see you through.

JESUS can walk above the rough waters, but He's not aloof to them. JESUS can defy gravity but it still took nails to hold him to the cross.

When your world is topsy-turvy remember that JESUS endured the ultimate storm. He's not aloof to your fears, He entered into those fears.

There's an old adage "Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning." When a gale wind picks up, a sailor might say that **the sea is angry today.**

What is the greatest fear of any disciple? That we would be abandoned by our God. That His patience with us will run out, and that in His anger at our sin, He would leave or forsake us.

But wasn't it was JESUS who cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He endured the cross, so that you would never have to say those words.

When JESUS hung on the cross, He endured the just wrath of a holy God. Yes, God is angry with sin. He hates it. He will judge and punish every transgression. He would not be a holy and righteous God if He didn't.

The point of the Gospel is that even the darkest and deepest sin in our lives can't take us down. Not with JESUS in our boat.

John 6:21 (ESV)

Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

Your journey may have decades left before you reach your destination. But with Christ and in the perspective of eternity, you'll be there before you know it.