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Encouragement In The Dark Days of Life - Part 4

Introduction

Matthew fourteen begins with the record of the death of John the Baptist and the burial of his headless body (Matt. 14:12). Upon hearing of the murder of His cousin John, and while we are not told why the Lord left that area, He did move away. In the murder of John Baptist Herod sought to silence the voice of God to his conscience, but his very “agitation” about who Jesus was and his own surmising, it is evident his conscience was still troubling him. Later, when Herod had the Lord sent to him, the Lord was silent. Herod silenced the voice of God and then the voice of God was silent to him.

- a) This is a very solemn truth for saved or unsaved. The individual never knows when the voice of God speaks to them for the last time while on this side of death. The conscience of the individual may have troubling thoughts but the voice of God will be silent. God has decreed, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man” (Gen. 6:3). No wonder the scriptures record how God called to Israel, “To day if ye will hear His voice, Harden not your hearts” (Heb. 3:7, 15; 4:7).

Moving from that region, the Lord goes to a desert place (Matt. 14:13). The people went out seeking the Lord and then we read how that Jesus “went forth” (Matt. 14:14) to where they were. The individuals who earnestly seek the Lord, He will come to where they are. The Lord came to seek the lost, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10). Therefore, in this section we have three occasions of the Lord coming to where people are, who either were seeking Him or those who were in dire straits without Him (Matt. 14:25). When Peter began to sink and called on the Lord, He “stretched forth His hand, and caught him” (Matt. 14:31).

In the wilderness the Lord, having compassion on those who were sick, healed them. As the day progressed the disciples suggested that the crowd of 5000 men besides women and children (Matt. 14:21) (so possibly over 15,000) be dispersed so they can go and get food in the surrounding villages. But Jesus intervened and fed the multitude with the five loaves and two fishes. Having fed the people, the Lord would not permit waste and told the disciples to gather the fragments which remained. Astoundingly, they gathered sufficient to fill twelve baskets. Marvelous reality, they ended up with more than they had at the beginning (Matt. 14:19, 20; Mk. 6:41, 43; Lk. 9:16, 17).

The Storm

Having fed the multitudes, the Lord as Commander sent two groups of people away. He sent the disciples away because they were, among other reasons, to learn several important truths. He then sent the people away for they wanted to make Him King but this was not the time, place or manner for Him to be King. The Lord then went up into a mountain alone to pray (Matt. 14:23).

- a) As the evening turned into night and then the early hours of the morning, the Lord left the mountain and began to walk on the sea to where the disciples were. A storm had arisen and little headway was being made since the storm was contrary to them. While never on a small boat with a wind against you, I know from experience of cycling that a strong headwind makes moving forward very difficult.
- b) There are a number of contrasts to another time when there was a storm on the sea. This time the Lord did not still the storm since this was not a storm from Satan using the elements. On this occasion the Lord walks on the sea and faces the contrary wind more severely than the disciples (Mk. 4:37-39). What a truth is in this. In the storms of life which the Lord causes us to face, that of sickness, financial loss or bereavement, the Lord has known more deeply what those experiences are like. In Hebrews the Lord is called our Captain, “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). The word “Captain” is the thought of being a Leader. In Africa when the men went out in the morning, the file leader went first. He got the soakings of the early dew, any dangers in the way he was there first. The followers had some experiences but not as his were. So the Lord in the experiences we face. He has known them but more fiercely than we ever have or will.

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- c) They were in the boat part way across the storm lashed sea and since this was in the fourth watch of the night (Matt. 14:25; Mk. 6:48), somewhere after 3:00 AM, they saw a figure walking on the sea. The natural reaction was, "it is a spirit" and in terror they cried out. Very calmly the Lord speaks, "Be of good cheer (comfort), it is I; be not afraid" (Matt. 14:27).

The Coming of The Lord to them on the sea

I am sure that if any of us had been on that boat and saw a figure walking on the water, it would have freaked us out. The children of Israel did not walk on water when crossing the Red Sea or the Jordan. It was dry land by a double miracle. This however was quite different and certainly not normal.

- a) Aware of their fears the Lord said, "It is I, be not afraid". This was all that was needed for quietening of the heart and mind. The Lord was with them in the storm. I am reminded of a flight when an adult was sitting beside a little child. During the flight it hit dreadful turbulences, yet the child sat contentedly drawing in her little book. The adult asked her, "Are you not afraid?" The child answered, "No, my daddy is the pilot". That was all that was needed, her daddy was there. Likewise with the disciples, the Lord was there. In the storms of life our blessed Lord is there saying, "Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid". The hymn writer put it so well, "The hands my many sins have pierced are now my guard and guide".

Peter Walking On The Sea

It is so easy to find fault with Peter when he saw the wind and waves, but I wonder how many of us would get out of a boat in a storm to walk on the water? When he began to look at the natural happenings and losing sight of the fact that the Creator was there before him, he began to sink. Jesus heard Peter's cry of fear, "Lord, save me" and immediately put out His hand and caught him (Matt. 14:30, 31). Thank God the Lord will not allow for our distress one minute longer than is needed for us to express in heart and desperation our need for His securing. What a stupendous truth is in this latter incident. It was the hand of Almighty God which was stretched forth to catch Peter and not Peter catching the hand of the Lord.

What was the purpose of the Lord sending the disciples ahead of Him?

- 1) Remember Jesus had directed the disciples to "go before Him unto the other side" (Matt. 14:22). When He told them this He automatically indicated He would follow, but they had not expected Him to follow in the way He did. In life, circumstances often prevent us from seeing the Lord. He comes to us in a way, or in circumstances, we had never known before. The disciples were brought into this situation at the command of the Lord so that they would learn a new truth about him that they could not have learnt any other way. They learnt that the man Jesus was master of the wind and waves. They could not have learnt that on the dry land and in so doing, they saw the wonder of who the Lord was.
- 2) The same to us who are children of the Lord. He directs us at times to, unbeknown to us, be delivered through the stormy situations of life. The Lord is as it were, pushing us out to strengthen our faith and learn by experience that no matter how dreadful the situation, He grants us peace when He says, "Be of good cheer (courage) it is I, be not afraid". It made all the difference when the Lord got into the ship having rescued Peter, and the wind ceased.

... Rowan Jennings