

Our Trustworthy Jesus Mark 6:45–52

Introduction

There are countless suggestions that we could recall as to how and why many pastors fail to make disciples. They forget their mission. They lack godly character. Their families fall apart. They fail morally. They fail to cultivate their own relationships with God. They are overwhelmed with grief by the failures of others within the church.

Sometimes we trust in ourselves to make disciples, leading to frustration, especially in the midst of difficulty. I want to encourage us today that, while we are certainly responsible to carry out the work of making disciples, our trust is not in us, but in Christ who sends us and works through us as we go and make disciples. (Note: biblical text is underlined in the notes below.)

1. Private Prayer: A Must for Those Who Make Disciples (6:45–46)

- a. Jesus, in the villages near Nazareth (cf. 6:1, 6), but then away at a desolate place on the SW side of the sea (6:32), had taken leave of them (them, i.e., the crowd and the disciples), and now sends his disciples before Him to the NE by boat to Bethsaida (6:45). He would eventually go as well (cf. 6:48). Jesus had previously attempted such privacy with the disciples for the purpose of resting after being sent to preach and cast out demons (cf. 6:7–12, 30–31).
- b. He had to make (*anagkazō*) or compel them to go (cf. Luke 14:23 – wedding guests were compelled to come in), likely because the crowds and perhaps even disciples wanted to force His kingship (cf. John 6:14–15). He dismissed the crowd Himself (6:45) and then returned to the mountain to pray (6:46; cf. John 6:3).
- c. In Mark, Jesus prays in contexts where He is misunderstood: (1) 1:35–39, He is sought for healing, not preaching; (2) 6:45–46, He must compel the king-seekers to leave; (3) 14:35–39, the inner three sleep before Jesus' betrayal. We can only guess as to Jesus' prayers—strength for Himself, understanding for His disciples, the crowds to truly hear and believe.
- d. Assuming that evening (6:47) begins at 6 PM and Jesus came to the disciples between 3 and 6 AM about the fourth watch of the night (6:48), Jesus had apparently been praying for several hours. Whatever the exact content and cause of His prayers may have been, Jesus' example shows us that *busy ministries and all we do in making disciples must be fueled and guided by prayer.*

2. Five Truths about Jesus That Motivate Us to Make Disciples (6:47–51a).

Now in the evening, there is distance between the 12 on the sea and Jesus alone on the land (6:47). Previously the disciples were ignorant or distressed without Jesus (4:10–12, 34, 35–51). We, too, can find ourselves in similar conditions when we fail to look to Jesus in our trials, whether related to the making of disciples or anything else.

a. Jesus saw them from the mountain (6:48a).

That Jesus saw (*eidon*) them is astounding. To see (*eidon*) is “to perceive by sight of the eye, *see, perceive*” (BDAG, s.v., εἶδον). This same word previously described visual sight in 6:33 and 6:38. That Jesus saw them (6:48), out on the sea (6:47), roughly five miles away (somewhere in the middle; cf. 6:45 with 6:53 – they landed at Gennesaret on the W, not Bethsaida in the NE, suggesting a change in course due to the storm), between 3AM and 6AM, in the middle of a violent storm, is something that God alone could do. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and God (cf. 1:1; 4:41).

b. Jesus walked on the sea (6:48b–50a).

- i. The disciples’ making headway due to wind was described as taking place painfully (*basknizō*), a word that can describe torment (5:7) or agony in birth (Rev 12:2).
- ii. Jesus walked on the sea about the fourth watch of the night, between 3 AM and 6 AM, intending to pass by (6:48). That he walked to them at night in the midst of this storm was amazing in and of itself, let alone the more amazing fact that He actually walked on water.
- iii. Several OT texts picture God as walking on or through the waters: God “trampled the waves of the sea” (Job 9:8); “Have you...walked in the recesses of the deep?” (Job 38:16); it is God “who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters” (Isa 43:16); “Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters, yet your footprints were unseen” (Ps 77:19).

c. Jesus meant to pass by them (6:48b).

- i. It is curious that Jesus meant to pass by them (6:48). Why come all this way to walk by and seemingly do nothing? He apparently meant to provoke their trust by the mere sight of Him walking by, leading to trust and deliverance. However, their hearts were hardened, and they did not fully understand His Person and Power as they should have with when He created bread from the loaves (6:48, 53).
- ii. It seems Mark chose the verb pass by (*parerchomai*) to subtly make the point that they should have recognized Him and given Him their trust. The Greek translation of the OT uses this verb to describe how the LORD passed by Elijah (1 Kgs 19:11) and Moses (Exod 33:19; 34:6). As Elijah and Moses were to understand who God was then, so also the disciples should have understood Jesus when He passed by them here. They should have recognized and trusted Him as Healer, Creator, Storm-stiller, and the One to deliver them here.

- iii. They thought Jesus to be a ghost and cried out and were terrified (6:49–50a). “Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him” (Job 9:11). But the disciples should have perceived Him for who He was and trusted Him, the test He gave when he meant to pass by them (6:48b).

d. Jesus is the great I AM (6:50b).

- i. Seeing their distress, Jesus surrounded an amazing statement with two imperatives. He commanded them to take heart, positively commanding them to take courage in overcoming their terror (6:50b).
- ii. Jesus then grounds the command in who He is, the great I AM. While translations typically give It is I for *ego eimi*, Jesus boldly claimed I AM (*ego eimi*) to His Jewish opponents elsewhere (John 8:58; from Exod 3:14). It seems Mark has already given allusion to Exodus earlier, adding weight to the possibility of alluding to Exod 3:14 here. Jesus brings their focus to what they should have noticed before—here before them was the Christ, the Son of God, who can miraculously deliver His disciples as necessary. They need only trust in Him.
- iii. All fears vanish when trusting in Christ—do not be afraid (6:50b). A second command is given to take their eyes off the waves and look to Christ.
- iv. Matthew tells us that before Jesus got into the boat with them (6:51a), Peter wanted verification of Christ’s identity by walking on the water himself (Matt 14:28–31). Just as Peter’s little faith led to doubt (Matt 14:31), so also Mark implies the same of the twelve. Their hearts were hardened and led to doubt and fear (6:52).

e. Jesus made the wind cease (6:51a).

- i. Jesus then got into the boat, and the wind ceased (6:51). Whether with a word or not (cf. 4:39), what the psalmist said of the Lord’s redemption could be said of Jesus just the same: “He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven” (Ps 107:29–30; cf. 107:1–3).
- ii. The disciples were utterly astounded as a result (6:51b). Despite the previous feeding of the 5,000 with the loaves (cf. 6:30–44), they apparently did not have the faith to recognize and trust in Jesus to calm the storm but showed the hardness of their hearts (6:52).

3. An Explanation of How These Truths Motivate Us to Make Disciples (6:51b–52; John 15:16).

- a. We should be utterly astounded (6:51b) at the Person and power of the Son of God (6:52). Misunderstanding Him and His power leads to fear, doubt, and discouragement. Just as the disciples were to trust in Jesus' words then, true faith acts on God's Word today in the midst of difficulty, even when human solutions are lacking. Whatever the difficulty may be, whether in making disciples or anything else, trust Christ and follow His Word.
- b. Having been reminded that Jesus is the all-knowing, all-powerful Son of God and God the Son, if this same Jesus chose you and appointed you to bear fruit in the matter of being sent to make disciples, you can trust Him that you will be fruitful. Ask for fruit in Christ's name, and the Father will give it to you (John 15:16). He is with you for this very purpose (Matt 28:20).

Conclusion

From Mark 6:45–52, we have seen the importance of private prayer, even for the sinless Jesus. How much more should we ask for His help and grace in making disciples (cf. John 15:16)?

More to the point of Mark 6:45–52, we have seen Christ as the all-knowing, all-powerful I AM who commands our trust. Take heart. Have courage. Do not fear. In keeping with our day's theme of making disciples, if He is the One who chose, appointed, and sent you to do the work of making disciples (John 15:16), surely fruit will come as the Father rewards your labor.