

The King of the Sea

John 6:15-21

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on May 13, 2012

Introduction

- ❖ *Does God want you to be rich?* Personally I would think few would answer “yes”. I’ve never met anyone who blatantly says God wants them to be filthy rich. No one is that crass, right?
 - Imagine my surprise, when I read in a national survey that 46% of self-professed Christians in America either mostly agree or completely agree that “*God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith*”.¹ Sadly this perception of God is more common than we might think.

- ❖ But all it takes to shatter this perception is for you to take one trip to a third-world country and make one visit on a Sunday morning to a gospel-preaching church made up of malnourished, dirt-poor Christians jumping and singing for joy to Jesus.
 - Our brothers and sisters in the Global South have done us Christians in the West a great service. Their abundant joy and vibrant faith in the midst of their extreme poverty has helped expose the error of the prosperity gospel.

- ❖ The theological term for the kind of error is called an “**over-realized eschatology**”. Eschatology is the study of the “*eschaton*”, that is, the last-things, the age to come. That would include all our beliefs about what the New Heaven and New Earth will be like when Jesus returns to make all things new.
 - So for our eschatology to be over-realized means we mistakenly presume that certain realities that are reserved for the age to come in the New Earth can be expected or realized in this present age.

- ❖ So, yes, Scripture does promise that in the age to come there will be no more pain (Rev. 21:4), but we would be over-realizing to presume the abundant life that Jesus came to bring *right now* is a life free from pain or sickness. If that’s the case, then I guess the Apostle Paul never lived the abundant life since he presumably had that thorn in his flesh till the day he died (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-9).
 - As well, the Bible promises a glorious future where we will feast on rich food and where the wine never runs dry, but we are over-realizing to expect this to be God’s best for the Christian life today. If so, then I guess many of our brothers and sisters in the Global South are not experiencing God’s best since they often go hungry living on a dollar a day.

- ❖ **Friends, this is a fundamental misunderstanding of who Jesus is and what kind of life he has come to bring.** In this morning’s passage, we read of a similar misunderstanding by the crowds in Jesus’ day. My goal in studying this text is for us to form a biblical and a rightly-realized expectation of who Jesus is and what he provides for us today – as distinct from that in the age to come.

¹ http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Orphan_Migrated_Content/pentecostals-topline-06.pdf, pg. 144.

A King Who Defies Expectations

- ❖ I've taken the liberty to divide our passage into three sections. In the first, we encounter **1) a king who defies expectations**. Look with me at v15. Prior to our passage, Jesus performed his fourth sign in the Gospel of John. With just five loaves and two fish, Jesus miraculously fed five thousand men, not counting women and children.
 - We've already seen that in John, a miraculous sign is not just a demonstration of power but a pointer, a sign, that reveals something about the identity and mission of Jesus. **And to this crowd, the sign revealed Jesus to be a king, the long-awaited Messiah!** *“Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”*

- ❖ In v14 we're told the crowd senses that Jesus is *“the Prophet who is to come into the world”*. That is a reference to Deuteronomy 18 where the elderly Moses promises the Israelites that one day the LORD will raise up a prophet like me from among you (18:15). So the crowd sees Jesus perform miraculous signs in the likes of Moses and connects the dots.
 - Moses miraculously fed our ancestors with manna. Jesus miraculously fed us with bread. Moses delivered our ancestors from foreign powers, then surely this Jesus will deliver us from the Romans. Let's make him our king!

- ❖ Jesus perceived the motives of the masses and was not beholden to them. He had his own mission from his Father. We are told in Matthew and Mark's account that he made his disciples get into their boat and head on to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He planned to dismiss the crowd and go up the mountain by himself to pray (cf. Mt. 12:22; Mk. 6:45). That explains why, in our text, the disciples take off without him.

- ❖ **Now let's consider the crowd's desire to make Jesus their king.** At first glance, it seems commendable. They understood what Jesus' signs were pointing to, that he is the Christ, the Anointed King, the Son of David. But their problem was an over-realized eschatology.
 - They knew what the Old Testament said about the Christ and the glorious messianic age he would usher in. Like we said earlier, in those days we're going to be eating and drinking well. **Isaiah 25:6** taught that one day, *“On this mountain (Mt. Zion) the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.”*

- ❖ So the crowds in Jesus' day were right to believe that God's Messiah, that this King, would provide a rich feast that would fill their bellies with the richest of food. **But they were over-realizing to presume Jesus was going to bring about these realities in their day.**
 - Yes, in the *eschaton*, in the age to come, every belly will be filled, every tear wiped, all pain removed, all sickness and death eradicated. But on that day on the shores of Galilee, in his first visitation, King Jesus had another mission in mind with a different end.

- ❖ The crowds didn't understand. To them, Jesus was a great source of material prosperity. "*Follow Jesus and never go hungry again.*" But Jesus does not entrust himself to such people, so he withdrew from the overzealous crowd.
 - He is the King. But he defied their expectations of who a king would be and what a king would do, much to their disappointment.

A King Who Walks All Over the Sea

- ❖ *So then who is this King they call the Christ and what will he do?* Starting in v16 Jesus begins to answer that question but only to the Twelve and only on his terms. He will not be carried away by messianic hype. He will not cater to the demands of the masses.
 - This leads to our second point. When Jesus reveals himself on his own terms, he reveals himself to be **2) a king who walks all over the sea.** I'll explain what I mean, but first let's return to the story.
- ❖ Pick up in v16, "*When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.*"
 - The Sea of Galilee sits about six hundred feet below sea level and is surrounded by mountains. So the cold air coming from the mountains continually clashes with the warm moist air over the sea, churning up impressive storms quite suddenly.
- ❖ Now among the Twelve were experienced fishermen, yet even they could not navigate through the storm. They were tossed about in a wild and untamable sea. And if you think about it, it's safe to assume that Jesus knowingly sent them out into the middle of it. Why would he do that? What was he trying to teach them?
 - Keep reading in vv19-20, "*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. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."*"
- ❖ Jesus sent them off alone into the eye of the storm, so that he could join them again but in dramatic fashion *walking on the sea!* Remember, his signs were not magic tricks designed to impress. **Walking on the sea was designed to reveal something about Jesus, namely that he has authority over the sea. He walks all over it. Simply put, he's the King of the Sea.**
- ❖ To appreciate the significance, you need to understand that, **among ancient cultures, the sea was often used in their stories and legends to symbolize unmanageable chaos, uncontrollable power, or unstoppable destruction.**
 - In the polytheistic religions of the nations surrounding Israel, the sea was commonly deified as a god or goddess of chaos set over against a god of order. For example, the Canaanites worshiped a supreme god named *Baal* who was locked in a perpetual battle against the goddess of chaos named *Yam* (the Semitic word for "sea"). For the Canaanites, their god creates order and life by vanquishing a rival god.

- ❖ **But when we read the creation narrative of the Israelites, we encounter similar symbolism but under completely different circumstances.** In **Genesis 1**, there is only one God and he is the sole Creator of heaven and earth.
 - There is no rival god he has to battle. But we are told that, in the beginning, the earth was filled with chaos. It was covered with primordial waters. It was “*without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*” (Gen. 1:2)

- ❖ **The earth was filled with one big sea of chaos, but then God speaks into the chaos and order is formed.** Light suddenly shines. Dry land appears and God fashions it as he wills, pushing back the waters and gathering them together into seas. And now life of all kinds is able to flourish over all the earth.

- ❖ Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, **God is depicted as the only being powerful enough to do this – to manage the unmanageable, to control the uncontrollable.** Just listen to these passages that depict God conquering the waters and the sea.
 - **Job 38:8-11** – “*Who shut in **the sea** with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your **proud waves** be stayed’?*”
 - **Psalm 29:3, 10** – “*The voice of the LORD is over **the waters**; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over **many waters**. . . . The LORD sits enthroned over **the flood**; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.*”
 - **Psalm 65:5-7** – “*O God of our salvation ... the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; who stills the roaring of **the seas**, the roaring of their **waves**, the tumult of the peoples.*”
 - **Psalm 89:8-9** – “*O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you? You rule the raging of **the sea**; when its **waves** rise, you still them.*”

- ❖ Tim Keller tells the ancient story of a Danish king who was tired of his fawning courtiers who were constantly flattering him, paying excessive compliments trying to win his favor. So one day he had enough and the king asked them, “*Am I divine?*”
 - Then he walked over to the shore and said to the ocean waves, “*Stop*” and of course nothing happened. They just kept coming. His point was that only God can stop the sea, and he can’t because he is not God.

- ❖ But in our passage, the story ends differently. **Jesus proves he can stop the sea. He can walk all over it.** The disciples can’t believe their eyes. In these words “*walking on the sea*” there is an echo of **Job 9:8** where it says God “*trampled the waves of the sea*”. In the Greek translation of the OT, it actually uses the same word for “*walk*” found in our passage. The God of the OT *walked* on the waves of the sea. And now here is Jesus doing the same.

- ❖ And just as Moses, before the burning bush, was afraid because he realized he was standing before the presence of God (Ex. 3:6), the disciples were equally frightened because they realized who was before them.
 - But into their fear, Jesus speaks. *“It is I; do not be afraid.”* **The actual words for “It is I” are *ego eimi*, which can translated “I am”.** What is interesting is that both *ego* and *eimi* could stand alone in a sentence and express the same thing. They both mean “I am”. But when you pair them together, the expression literally translates into “I Am I Am”.

- ❖ Now on one hand, this is a perfectly normal way for a Greek speaker to say “*It is I*” (Jn. 9:9). There doesn’t *have* to be a deeper theological meaning. But out of the mouth of Jesus, read in the context of John’s Gospel, especially in light of his 7 *I Am* statements, we know Jesus’ reply is more than just saying “*Hey, it’s me.*” This is a self-disclosure of his true identity.

- ❖ Remember when Moses was at the burning bush, he asked God to reveal his name, and how did God identify himself? “*I AM WHO I AM.*” He calls himself the Great I AM. This is no coincidence.
 - The crowd was right. Jesus is the Prophet to come in the like of Moses. But now the disciples realize that Jesus is even greater than Moses. **He is not just a prophet for the Great I AM. Jesus is the Great I AM.**

- ❖ *Friends, do you see now what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples?* He sent them out in the midst of the storm surrounded by unmanageable chaos only to return to them in a spectacular demonstration of power with an equally spectacular revelation that he is the God of Creation. **He is the King of the Sea, the only One who can control the chaos in your life.**
 - Whether it’s financial chaos, marital chaos, chaos in your work, in your studies, in your health, in your family – Jesus is the King of kings who reigns over all of it. **No matter what troubles are vexing you now, Jesus has the power and dominion to trample all over it and to bring calm, order, and peace into your life.** That is what it means for Jesus to be the King of the Sea, the King over chaos.

A King Who Gets Into Your Boat

- ❖ But again he’s not the kind of king you might expect. **In fact, like with the crowds, Jesus often defies our expectations of who he will be and what he will do, much to our disappointment.** It’s common nowadays for people to say they tried Christianity. They tried Jesus, but it didn’t work for them. **They had certain expectations of how their lives would turn out but that never panned out.**
 - They thought becoming a Christian meant all their thorns would be removed. They thought it meant all their financial needs would be met, all their health problems would be fixed, all their relational conflicts would be resolved. **In other words, they thought Jesus would walk all over the chaos in their lives and make it all stop.**

- ❖ If you have friends who feel this way, it would *not* be helpful (nor biblical) to tell them they got Jesus all wrong – to tell them Jesus is only a spiritual king who meets spiritual needs, who only reigns in your heart.
 - If that were so, then all of our earthly needs and physical concerns would lie outside of Jesus' dominion, outside of his jurisdiction and control.
 - **But by walking on the sea – a symbol of the most uncontrollable power on earth – Jesus proves that his dominion has no limits.** He can meet any need. He can calm any storm and walk over any problem in your life. He could remove all of it with just a word.

- ❖ **Those who feel like Jesus has let them down should not be faulted for expecting King Jesus to have control over their earthly needs.** They should not be faulted for expecting King Jesus to care about these concerns. They should not be faulted for expecting King Jesus to rid this world of all chaos, to trample over all sickness and suffering and pain.
 - **But the problem is their expectations are over-realized.** The problem is thinking and expecting Jesus to do all of this NOW. But there is no promise that he will solve all your problems in this present age. That awaits the *eschaton*. That awaits the New Heaven and New Earth. To think any different is to buy into the prosperity gospel.

- ❖ *But what then can we expect of King Jesus in this present age?* What kind of King is he for us today? This leads to our third point. In this present age, Jesus does not promise to stop all the waves from crashing into your life, but **3) he does promise to get into your boat.**

- ❖ *What do I mean by that?* Just notice how John makes no mention of whether or not the winds actually died down or if the waves were actually calmed. We know that's what happened. Both Matthew and Mark tell us the winds ceased once Jesus got into the boat.
 - But John makes no mention of the winds or the waves. He doesn't focus on that. He just focuses on Jesus' self-disclosure of his true identity and the fact that he gets into the boat, and immediately they're at their destination, their desired haven.

- ❖ The point is this: **When chaos surrounds your life, when you have trouble crashing into your life, King Jesus comes to the rescue, and the good news is he gets into your boat.** When you become a Christian, Jesus enters your life. He draws near with his very presence.
 - That's the good news. Not that all the chaos ceases. Not that all your troubles go away. Now if Jesus does heal a body or heal a marriage, praise him for his mercy! Thank you Jesus when we have financial stability or a good job or a good education.

- ❖ **But then again, the chaos in your life might very well continue.** Your problems may not die down. They may continue to blow. But the point is that *now* Jesus is with you. If you're a believer, he is in your boat.
 - And by his mercy and grace, you'll reach your desired haven. He'll lead you to the shores of the New Heaven and New Earth no matter what kind of storms you have to go through to get there.

- ❖ **And, friends, the greatest storm that every one of us will have to face is still in the forecast.** It's still in the future, but it's menacing and a dark cloud looms over us now. **It's the storm of God's judgment set against our sin.**
 - In the Old Testament, we read of Moses delivering God's people by leading them through the chaotic waters of judgment. They crossed the sea safely while the waters engulfed God's enemies.

- ❖ **And now in the Gospel, we meet Jesus, the True and Better Moses, who will lead his people through the waters of God's final judgment.** If you trust in him, Jesus will deliver you safely through that storm by taking your sin upon himself, becoming an enemy of God in your place, and letting the waters of judgment engulf him.
 - Jesus died for our sins and was raised for our justification in order to bring us safely to the shores in the age to come – where every expectation will be fully met and every hope fully realized. Till that day, by faith, we sail on.

- ❖ *“Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. 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. 107:28-30)