

## JOHN 6:16-21—DO NOT FEAR

**INTRO:** Last week, in feeding of the 5000, we saw that Jesus takes care of our *physical* needs. That episode ended in **John 6:15** by saying: “**they wanted to make him king.**” That indicates after getting fed, the people realized that this Jesus has miraculous powers. So they wanted him as their *political* ruler: He could provide them with bread; throw off the Romans; make for more just social structures, etc. But although Jesus IS concerned about our phys. needs, he is not *only* concerned about our phys. needs. So **v.15** concluded by saying: **He withdrew again to the mountain by himself alone.”**

People are always looking primarily for short-term physical, political, socio-economic solutions to their problems. That was true 2000 years ago; it is true today. Look at almost every election: Look at 2008—whole country disgusted with the Bush admin. Along comes Obama, promising “Change you can believe in.” When he was inaugurated everyone who had supported him was ecstatic. His approval numbers were through the roof. Everyone who voted for him heard what they wanted to hear. Well, now we know what he really meant—and the result is that 3 weeks ago the Republicans won more House seats than in any election in the last 70 years. But lest you Republicans get too smug, remember this: (1) The Republican Party is not called the stupid party for nothing; (2) Remember the election of 2000: Republicans controlled both Houses of Congress and the White House—Did that usher in the Millennium? No—and the Republican majority in the House won’t either.

Physical, political, socio-economic problems do demand physical, political, socio-economic solutions. But as Jesus said: “**Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?**” (**Matt 6:25**) In other words, life and what makes life worth living goes far deeper than the phys., political, and the socio-economic. Psychologist Abraham Maslow expressed a similar idea many years ago with his “Hierarchy of Needs”: which after the necessary physiological and safety needs, everything else that makes life fulfilling and worth living are all relational and intangible—things like love and belonging; esteem; and self-actualization.

We all know that Jesus’ point abt. life being more than food is true. Think about it: No one in this room is starving; everyone in this room is clothed; and regardless of who is in office, it hasn’t been the end of the world. So physically, politically, and socio-economically, we’re all OK. *Yet everyone in this room either right now struggles with—or you have struggled with, or you will struggle with—such things as:* Fear; Loneliness; Work that is hard and unrewarding; Exhaustion—mentally, physically, spiritually. TRUE? (If you don’t think so, then: (A) You’re not paying attention; (B) You are amazingly shallow and unreflective; or (C) You’ve found the secret to a fulfilled life and you should be up here, not me, so that we can all have the benefit of your discovery.)

Just as in the feeding of the 5000 Jesus meets us in our physical needs, in today’s passage—**John 6:16-21**—we will see how he meets us in our struggles, our aloneness, and our fear. **READ John 6:16-21**

**ORG. SENTENCE:** Let’s look at the four movements of this story: the context; the crisis; the resolution; and then the implications and applications to us today.

### **I. CONTEXT**

**A. Background of Biblical narratives, or stories:** Biblical narratives like this one tend to be different than modern novels or even short stories. Modern novels and short stories tend to be very rich in details: what someone looked like; lots of details to paint an atmosphere; etc. Biblical narratives tend to be very “bare bones.” In a biblical narrative the characters, not the background details, and particularly any direct speech—i.e., what someone says—tend to be most important. Also, one writer may omit certain things found in other accounts, so as to emphasize some particular point: today’s story is also found in **Matt 14** and **Mark 6**, and both of those accounts contain certain details not present in **John’s** account. I will mention some of that, but I am going to concentrate on what John tells us here b/c he wants us to see certain things.

**B. Context (vv.15-17):** Jesus had just finished the miraculous feeding of 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Then **John 6:15** says: “**they wanted to make him king,**” so Jesus w/drew into the mountain by himself alone. **Vv.16-17**—evening came; it got dark; Jesus hadn’t come; so the disciples start rowing across the Sea of Galilee to the town of Capernaum.

### **II. CRISIS (vv.18-19):**

**A. As they are rowing, a storm comes up.** John makes the point that it wasn’t just rain, but it was a wind storm: the sea was stirred up; the waves were crashing; it was a *strong wind* that was *blowing*. We can clearly infer that it was NOT a tailwind. They weren’t just cruising along, but they were having to fight. They were laboring hard and struggling. They had gone 3-4 miles, they are in the middle of nowhere, and they don’t seem to be making

any progress except they are getting more and more exhausted. **You ever felt like that?** It's like you're on a treadmill running hard just to stay in place. That can be physically, financially, relationally, or in all kinds of ways. That's what was going on here.

**B. Then things go from bad to worse.** They see something out on the sea. And it's coming toward them. Through the wind and the waves they can't tell what it is. But they know this: whatever it is, it's not supposed to be there. After all, they hadn't passed any other boats. And the only living creatures in the sea live below the surface. So think about it: here they are in the middle of nowhere, in a rowboat. They are alone. There is something coming right at them. They can't run. They can't hide. They can't even get out of the boat. They're trapped. They don't understand what is going on. They are completely helpless, with nowhere they can go and nothing they can defend themselves with. The only thing they can think of is that something dreadful is happening. **John** tells us they were frightened. So they do the only thing they could—probably what we would do in the circumstances—both **Matt.** and **Mark** tell us that they were so terrified that they cried out in fear.

#### **What's going to happen?**

If you grew up in the 60s, this would be the time when the announcer would say: "Are the fishers of men going to become food for the fishes? **Tune in tomorrow: same bat time, same bat channel.**" But life doesn't work that way. We have to face our problems as they exist, and don't have the luxury of realizing that it's just a TV show, or waking up to find that "it was just a bad dream." And neither could those men on the sea.

So that's where they are: they're helpless; they're alone; they're exhausted; and they are frightened to death.

### **III. RESOLUTION (vv.20-21):**

But then Jesus resolves things. He takes the initiative. And in *the only direct speech of the story*—so this is imp.—he says: "**It is I; do not be afraid.**"

So then it says "**they were willing to receive him into the boat.**" Then **John** adds: "**and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.**"

So what is this passage telling us:

**PROPOSITION:** *If we have Jesus, we have no reason to fear.*

Let's look at this and see why. When he says "**It is I; do not be afraid**" what does that imply? And how does it apply to our lives today?

### **IV. IMPLICATIONS/APPLICATIONS:**

I see 4 inter-related implications or applications of this narrative for us:

#### **(1) Jesus is sovereign—i.e., he is directing things.**

**A. We don't have to fear the circs. of our lives b/c Jesus is sovereign over our circs.** Whatever happens to us has 1<sup>st</sup> passed through his hands.

**B. Here is where Matt's and Mark's accounts of this incident give us some vital info. that John chose to exclude, namely: Mark 6:45-46—"Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while he himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding them farewell, he left for the mountain to pray."** Why is that important? What does that tell us? It tells us:

1. They weren't there by accident . . . and neither are we.
2. *Jesus knew in advance exactly what was going to happen to them.* He knew there was going to be a storm that would come up while they were in the middle of the sea . . . and he knows the same about us and about the circs. of our lives.
3. *Everything that was happening to them was part of an overall and greater plan or design of God . . . and the same is true of us.*

**Isa 14:24—"The LORD Almighty has sworn, 'Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.'"**

It was Jesus who SENT THEM OFF INTO THE STORM. *God sometimes sends storms into our lives.* It is not fun. We don't like it. Lots of bad things can and do happen to good people. Yet it is those storms that force us to cut through the delusion that we are somehow self-created, self-sufficient, independent creatures: "*I touch no one and no one touches me.*"

God is more concerned with our eternal state than with our present condition. Most of us know, and can draw comfort from **Rom 8:28**: “**We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.**” But in context that verse is actually the beginning of a paragraph (**Rom 8:28-30**) that is all about God’s sovereign action in our lives of knowing us in advance, predestining us, and working in our lives so that we will be “*conformed to the image of his son—Jesus Christ.*” These things are not accidents, however much they may look that way to us.

This is the overarching fact and implication of this passage from John 6. *And this is the truth that we have to hang onto when our circumstances not only look tough, but are tough—He’s sovereign; he’s in control; he’s directing things—and therefore we have no reason to fear.*

But this leads to the 2<sup>nd</sup> implication of this passage, which directly flows from the fact that Jesus is sovereign over and is directing the circs. of our lives.

**(2) Jesus is with us even when we do not sense his presence.**

**A.** Abt. 2 months ago when we were looking at John 3:16-21, I pointed out that, 3:20-21 indicate that: If a person is NOT connected with the Light, with Jesus Christ—he is alone in the universe. He will be judged, and everything you think, say, and do will be *exposed* for what it really is: self-centered, evil, and worthless. There is reason to fear. But if we are connected with Jesus Christ, we are NOT ALONE in the universe. He is working in us. So we can *look forward* to seeing him face-to-face in hope and anticipation. Even if we don’t see it now, everything he has been doing in us and through us will be MANIFESTED to the world for the good it really is. We have *nothing to fear*.

SO: We need to assess whether we are or are not connected with Jesus. **BUT:**

**B.** Even for those of us who are in a right relationship with Jesus—in other words, he IS our savior and our Lord—we can still get into problems when we do not sense or realize his presence with us. This is where we have to remember the truths—the *facts*—that are central to Christianity: (1) Jesus has been raised from the dead—he’s alive today! And he’s not just passive, out “there” somewhere leaving us to try to make it as best we can by ourselves. Rather, **Rom 8:34**: He “**is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.**” (2) When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord, the HS comes and lives inside of us. So we are not alone. (3) But he doesn’t come to us just to leave us again. Apostle Paul says in **Rom 8:39**: “**NOTHING will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” As Jesus said in **Heb 13:5-6**: “**I will never leave you nor forsake you—so that we confidently say: ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.’**”—You see: IF WE HAVE JESUS, WE HAVE NO REASON TO FEAR. (4) He didn’t just leave us with his spiritual, but unseen or unfelt presence. Rather, he also left us his BODY—other human beings; the church; the body of Christ; our brothers and sisters. Remember: according to **1 Tim 3:15** and other passages, *the church is a family—and FAMILY TAKES CARE OF EACH OTHER.* When we need help, whether physical, material, financial, emotional, or in other ways, these are the people whom Christ has commissioned to be here for us, to help us through the struggles of our lives, until we safely arrive at the other shore.

1. My dad was a pilot. He once told me “*there’s nothing worse than being on course and not knowing it.*” **Why?** Because when you don’t know you’re on course—but think you’re off course—every landmark you see you’ll think is something else—and then you will change your course to what you think is the way you should go, rather than staying on the true course.

2. It’s like that when we are struggling without finding meaning, or are alone, or are afraid, but have forgotten the objective facts of our faith and our relationship with Christ and what that means. When we forget, we try to cope through all the ways those who have no ultimate hope try to cope: we fall into despair; inner resignation (“I can’t hope for anything better”); workaholism; alcohol abuse; pornography; who knows what.

3. We need to hold onto those OBJECTIVE FACTS when our subjective fears, aloneness, and struggles threaten to overwhelm us like waves battering a small fishing boat in the middle of the sea. Life may be very hard at times. But we are never alone. And we have the one who is sovereign, and the one who himself overcame the worst this world has to give: poverty; betrayal; pain; hunger; aloneness; a hard life; and death itself. So he knows 1<sup>st</sup> hand what we are going through. And He is with us. And we have his people, our family. Draw on them.

Which leads to the 3<sup>rd</sup> implication of this passage:

**(3) Jesus comes to us.**

**A. Jesus always takes the initiative.** He came to his disciples in the storm out on the sea. He didn't leave them alone. He didn't even wait for them to cry out for him. . . . And he comes to us.

1. Look at the disciples: They were struggling, alone, and in fear—when he came to them and *identified himself*, Jesus' presence and self-identification comforted the disciples. He does the same for us. When we are struggling—alone and feeling lonely—in fear—he comforts us by his presence and self-identification.

**B. How does Jesus come to us today?** He comes to us in many ways: (1) *Visions and dreams*—credible reports from Muslim countries; (2) "*Still small voice*"—you know it's him; (3) *Scripture*—speaks to you in a very clear way; (4) *Prayer*—Prayer is communication with God. Communication is the life-blood of any relationship, and it is 2 ways: speaking to him, but also hearing from him. (5) *Another person*—the body of Christ is here on the earth, and we can manifest Christ to others; (6) **John 14:21**—"I WILL reveal myself to that person" So as we step out in faith and obedience, he will reveal himself to us.

**C. However he comes to us, he comes ON HIS OWN TERMS.** Unlike the people at the end of the feeding of the 5000 who wanted to "*take him by force to make him king.*" They wanted Jesus on their own terms. They wanted him essentially to do their bidding. B/c if they could by force make him king, then they could unmake him king. Jesus does not come to us like that. He comes to us on his terms. He is the Lord; we are not. But if we get that right, we find that he is not a harsh, vindictive, or joyless Lord. Instead, as Jesus said in **John 8:31-32: "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."** He calls us to truth; he calls us to freedom; he calls us to a new life; he calls us to himself.

Which leads to the 4<sup>th</sup> and final implication or application of this passage for us:

**(4) Our response to Jesus makes all the difference between a life of fear and ultimate meaninglessness or a life of meaning, direction, and purpose, and a lack of fear, even in fearful circumstances.**

**A. Are we willing to receive Jesus into the boat, like the disciples did? Here's the problem:** A lot of people are happy to say, "Yes, I'll receive Jesus into my boat—but as a DECK HAND."

1. Most people think, "I just need some help with this problem or that problem, or some assistance in overcoming this or that weakness." But if that's the mindset, then we are just like the people at the end of the feeding of the 5000 account: they wanted Jesus on their terms, not his.

2. We need to realize this—and this applies to those of you who have not yet received Jesus as your Lord, and also to many of us who have received Jesus as our Lord, but don't act like it when the storms come: we ARE on the sea; we ARE struggling. But we don't have to face it alone. In Jesus, in a way that is available nowhere else, we have comfort, help, and resources more than adeq. for every problem we face. And in Him we have someone who WANTS to give us "life abundant" and free from fear. Turn to him.

**B. What can we expect when we have Jesus? READ C.S. LEWIS QUOTE #1**

1. But remember this: *It was the DISCIPLES who received Jesus into the boat.* The DISCIPLES, NOT the people like the 5000 who were only interested in getting their physical and material needs met.

2. What is a disciple? A disciple is a student; a learner; someone who is committed to his master and wants to become like his master. Jesus is the perfect master: **READ C.S. LEWIS QUOTE #2**

**V. CONCLUSION: v. 21—When they received Jesus into the boat, then "Immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going."** You see, the disciples knew that JESUS WAS THEIR SAFE HAVEN. If we really have him—not as our deck hand, but as our captain, our Lord—the one who calls the shots—*then it doesn't matter where we are.* We're safe. If we have Jesus, we have no reason to fear. Because in him we are home. He's enough. ----- **TRUST HIM—He won't let you down.**

**LET'S PRAY.**

### **C. S. LEWIS QUOTES:**

**#1:** Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.

**#2:** ...Helper who will, in the long run, be satisfied with nothing less than absolute perfection, will also be delighted with the first feeble, stumbling effort you make tomorrow to do the simplest duty. . . . every father is pleased at the baby's first attempt to walk: no father would be satisfied with anything less than a firm, free, manly walk in a grown-up son. . . . The practical upshot is this. On the one hand, God's demand for perfection need not discourage you in the least in your present attempts to be good, or even in your present failures. Each time you fall He will pick you up again. And He knows perfectly well that your own efforts are never going to bring you anywhere near perfection. On the other hand, you must realise from the outset that the goal towards which He is beginning to guide you is absolute perfection. . . .The command "be ye perfect" is not idealistic gas. . . . He knows your own efforts are never going to bring you anywhere near perfection. He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.