

Introduction

Last week I spoke with one of my instructors who lives in Nebraska. He had just been tested for COVID-19 and he was waiting on the test results. I kept calling him to see how he was doing and to see if he had received the test results. It took seven days for him to get the test results back. The COVID-19 test does not cure the coronavirus. The purpose of the test is to see if you have or do not have the coronavirus. My instructor tested positive and has been quarantined until all of his symptoms have cleared up. He did not have a severe case and was never hospitalized. He has been gradually getting better every day. His COVID-19 test revealed that he had the virus. That is what tests do. Tests reveal what you have or don't have. Tests reveal what you know or don't know. Tests reveal what you have learned or what you have not grasped yet. Our text today is about a test that the apostles were given by Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of their faith (Heb 12:2). Jesus had a number of reasons for testing the apostles, but it was important for them to know what they had learned so far.

I believe the key verse of this passage is verse 52. Mark records that the disciples had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. Here are some of the questions that I asked myself when studying the passage was, "What insight were they supposed to have gained from the insight of the loaves? What was it that they had not learned? Why had they not learned from the incident? What are we supposed to learn from this passage? What are the things that keep me from gaining insight? What are the things that harden or soften my heart?" You can see that I came into this passage with lots of questions. When I think of something with a lot of questions on it, I think of a test. The purpose of a test is to see if you have mastered the concepts and principles that have been covered. I believe that this incident is a test for the disciples, and I believe that they came to the understanding that they did not know all the material on the test. They had not mastered the material yet. This test revealed what they had learned and what they had not learned.

The apostles had returned from their apostolic mission and had given account to Jesus of all the things they did. He took them and withdrew to a city called Bethsaida, which means house of fish. Bethsaida is on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. In John 1:44 we find that Philip, Peter, and Andrew were all from this fishing village. Jesus took them there so that they could get some rest, but the crowds came from cities all over. There may have been as many as 25,000 or 30,000 people. So, Jesus began teaching them, and healed many of them. Toward evening, the disciples wanted to send them away so that the multitudes could buy their own dinners. Jesus told His disciples to feed them. They did not see how this was possible with only five loaves and two fish. Jesus had them sit in groups of fifties and hundreds and then miraculously fed all of them. This was the most widely experienced miracle that Jesus had performed.

(Luke 9:10-11) "When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. { 11 } But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He *began* speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing."

(John 1:43-44) "The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." { 44 } Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter."

After feeding the multitudes, Jesus perceived that the crowd wanted to take Him by force and make Him king. Jesus had just fed them and they were so moved by this that they wanted him to be their king. Jesus wanted nothing to do with this revolt. He is the Messianic King, but His kingdom was not of this earth or realm. Jesus was building a spiritual kingdom, not an earthly one. So, with a sense of urgency, Jesus immediately made His disciples get into the boat and then He sent away the multitudes. Then, Jesus went up to the mountain to pray. Prayer was a priority for Jesus, and He was not going to allow anything to prevent Him from spending time in prayer.

(John 6:14-15) "Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." {15} So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone."

(Mark 6:45-46) "Immediately 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. {46} After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray."

That brings us up to our text today, where Jesus tests His apostles. Most Bibles title the passage, "Jesus walks on water," but I believe the passage is really about testing the apostles. While the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in the night, a storm came up while they were in the middle of it. Jesus was on land, about two miles away, and He could see them straining at the oars. He began walking across the sea and when He approached them, they thought He was a ghost and were terrified. Jesus put them at ease by saying, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid." Then, Jesus got into the boat and the wind stopped. When the wind miraculously stopped, the disciples went from fear to astonishment. Mark records that they were astonished because they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, and that their hearts were hardened. Our text today is about the purpose of this storm. I have named it, Why Jesus Tested the Apostles.

Why Jesus Tested the Apostles

1. The Test Revealed What the Apostles Had Learned
2. The Test Revealed Jesus' Deity
3. The Test Strengthened Their Faith

(Mark 6:47-56) "When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. {48} Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. {49} But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; {50} for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." {51} Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, {52} for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. {53} When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. {54} When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, {55} and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. {56} Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured."

1. The Test Revealed What the Apostles Had Learned

James tells us to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance. He goes on to say that the perfect result of endurance is that we become perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James goes on to say that those who doubt and lack faith are like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. The disciples were being driven and tossed by the wind. They are in a storm and they lacked faith.

(James 1:2-8) “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, {3} knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. {4} And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. {5} But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. {6} But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. {7} For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, {8} *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

This is not their first time in a storm in the boat. In Mark 4, they were in another storm, but Jesus was with them in the boat. He was asleep in the stern of the boat while they were afraid that they were perishing. They woke Jesus up and He immediately calmed the wind and the sea. Their hearts went from fear to astonishment, just as it did in our text today.

(Mark 4:37-41) “And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. {38} Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” {39} And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. {40} And He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” {41} They became very much afraid and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

The difference in our text today is that Jesus was not physically with them in the boat. Jesus was watching from land. Think about this. It is the middle of the night and it is pitch black. There are no electric lights from nearby cities lighting up the sky. There may be a little light from the stars or moon, but it is pretty dark. The disciples are not fifty feet away straining at the oars; they are two miles away. The Sea of Galilee is four miles wide where they were crossing and they were in the middle of it, so that makes them about two miles away in the dark. Jesus could see them straining at the oars. It is dark and they are at least two miles away. In the natural, a person could see someone in the day 2.9 miles away. This is based on the scientific formula below. A person could not see any details, like facial expressions, bodily strain, and whether people in a boat were straining at the oars, only that there was someone there. Jesus is seeing them in the Spirit. This is as much of a supernatural phenomenon as Jesus walking on the water, but it does not get the same attention as the walking on the water. I believe that Jesus went to His watch so that He could watch over the apostles. He knew He was going to bring the winds and the storm. He had some purposes in mind for this test, and He is watching over them in the test.

$\text{SquareRoot}(\text{height above surface} / 0.5736) = \text{distance to horizon}^1$

¹ <http://science.howstuffworks.com/question198.htm>

When He called Nathanael, He saw him under a fig tree. Jesus was not anywhere close to Philip and the fig tree. He was seeing in the Spirit. Nathanael responded by saying, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.” Jesus was not in the boat with them in this storm, but He was with them in the Spirit. He was watching them straining at the oars.

(John 1:48-50) “Nathanael *said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

{49} Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

{50} Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

What was Jesus doing? He had been praying. Mark records that He came to them in the fourth watch of the night, which begins at 3:00 a.m. The first watch is from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The second watch is from 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. The third watch is from 12:00 a.m. to 3:00 a.m. Jesus went up to the mountain to pray. He has been watching or praying for them. The term watch is another word for prayer. In Mark 14, Jesus is praying right before His arrest and crucifixion. He asked the disciples to pray with them. He went a little way from them and prayed. Then, He came back to them and found them sleeping. Jesus said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation...” Jesus has been keeping watch during the night and who has He been keeping watch over? He has been watching over the disciples. He may not have been in the boat physically, but He was with them in the Spirit. It is nice to know that when we are going through storms in our lives, and there will be storms, Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father and He is keeping watch over you. He is in the storm with you.

(Mark 14:37-38) “And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? {38} Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Jesus had an urgency to pray, and I believe that one of the things that was pressing on His mind was the test His disciples were going to go through that night. Jesus knew this ahead of time. He made sure He was at His watch station while they were going through the storm.

James goes on to say, “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” The disciples were going through a test or a trial. James makes a distinction between trials and temptations. God does not tempt anyone, but He does test us. There are some today who teach that God would never test us, or discipline us. The truth is that God does both. We find examples of this in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. He tested Abraham to see if he was going to hold back his son from Him. Abraham passed that test. God had not intention of putting Isaac to death; it was just a test. God tests us, but He never tempts us. God does allow us to go through some trials to test us and to produce endurance. God puts us through some trials to make us perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. God puts us in some trials to reveal the areas of our faith that need to be strengthened. Once we have learned to persevere under those trials, we get approved, or we pass that test, and receive the crown of life.

(James 1:12) “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Most tests have a time limit. When the time is up the instructor will pick up the test and grade the tests. At the end of this test, Jesus came walking to them on the water. They were terrified and He put them at ease, saying, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." Then He got into the boat and the wind stopped. The wind and storm stopped because the test was over. He graded their papers and wrote on the top of their papers that they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves. They had not grasped the material yet. I don't know about you, but I don't like to fail my tests. I like to study and do well on my tests. This had to hurt to get these results back.

2. The Test Revealed Jesus' Deity

What was it that the disciples should have learned from the incident of the loaves? I think there were several things. First, He was teaching them to trust God and not in their own resources. I have had to learn that lesson many times. It seems like every time my finances get low, I start looking at my own resources rather than looking to God. He has proven Himself faithful to Karen and I over and over again. I have so many testimonies of how God has faithfully provided for our family.

But, I believe the incident of the loaves and the incident in the storm revealed the deity of Christ. There was a purpose of this test, and it was not just to reveal that they had not yet learned the lessons, but it was also to teach the apostles. It was to reveal to them that Jesus was God in the flesh. When Jesus fed 25,000 to 30,000 people, only God could do that. Jesus was not just a prophet. Jesus was not just a teacher. Jesus was not just someone anointed to heal the sick. Jesus was God in the flesh and nothing was impossible for Him. Feeding 25,000 people with five loaves and two fish is not much different than seeing Nathanael under the fig tree, seeing the disciples straining at the oars two miles away in the dark, walking on water, or causing the wind to stop. All these miracles were revealing the deity of Christ.

When Jesus told Nathanael in John 1:49 that He saw him under the fig, he responded by saying, "You are the Son of God." In Matthew's account of this incident, he records that Peter asked Jesus to command him to walk on the water. So, Jesus commanded Peter and he got out of the boat and began to walk on water. He took His eyes off of Jesus and began to sink. Jesus grabbed Peter's hand and they both got into the boat. When they got into the boat, the wind stopped and the disciples began to worship Jesus, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!" This may have been a test, but it was a test that the disciples learned from. They learned that Jesus is God, and they began to worship Him.

(Matt 14:32-33) "When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. {33} And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

There are two primary certifying bodies in the oil and gas industry, the International Association of Drilling Contractors or IADC, and the International Well Control Forum, or IWCF. The IWCF gives tests, but they do not let you see exactly what you missed. They don't give the instructors the ability to see what the students miss or explain why they missed it. Candidates walk away from the tests with a score, but without learning from their test. The IWCF believes that a test is only about seeing if candidates have mastered the material. We do not like this; we believe that tests should reveal what you know and don't know, but they should also be learning tools.

The other organization, the IADC, allows the instructors to go over the missed problems with the students so that they learn what they did wrong and then how to do it correctly. We do not want people missing the same things out in their daily operations. We want them to learn from the tests. I believe this is the heart of God. He does not test us just to show us what we don't know. He tests us so that we can grow and mature in our faith. This test that the disciples went through showed them that Jesus is truly the Son of God, and they worshiped Him.

There is a turning point in Jesus' ministry that takes place soon afterwards. In John 6, Jesus preaches that He is the Bread of Life. As a result of this many of the disciples fell away and stopped following Him. Jesus asked the twelve if they were also going to leave. But, they answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." The disciples had not learned from the incident of the loaves, but they learned in this test that Jesus was the Son of God. They learned that Jesus is the Holy One of God. They learned that Jesus was God and gave words of eternal life. They learned from this test.

(John 6:66-69) "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. {67} So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" {68} Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. {69} "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

3. The Test Strengthened Their Faith

When the multitudes were hungry, the disciples wanted to send them away so that they could go to the nearby towns and buy their own food. Jesus told the apostles to feed the crowd. He had the disciples gather the crowd into groups of fifties and hundreds. Then, Jesus broke the bread and fish and they fed the multitude and gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. Jesus was teaching them to have faith in God's provision. They had not learned that lesson.

When the disciples were in the boat, straining at the oars, and saw Jesus walking towards them, they were terrified. Jesus said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." The Greek word that is used for afraid is phobeo (Strong's G5399). There is a contrast between fear and faith. When Peter walked on the water and began to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him and said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

(Matt 14:30-31) "But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" {31} Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

I believe that Jesus was trying to increase and strengthen their faith. I believe one of the insights from the incident of the loaves was to increase their faith. I believe Jesus' walking on the water and Peter's walking on the water was to build their faith. Earlier I mentioned the purpose of trials in James 1 was to test and build our faith. Notice that James tells us to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance. The faith of the apostles was being tested. Jesus wanted to build and strengthen their faith.

(James 1:2-4) “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, {3} knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. {4} And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

In Hebrews 12:2, we are told to keep our eyes fixed on the author and perfecter of our faith. Jesus wanted to perfect or mature their faith. The Greek word for perfecter is teleiotes (Strong’s G5051). The root word is telos (Strong’s 5056), which means an end, or a point in the distance. In James, the word perfect is teleios (Strong’s 5046), which means to have reached the end, to be complete, mature, or perfect. It is from the same root word. Jesus, wanted to perfect, mature, or complete the faith of the disciples. It was not perfect or complete. It was lacking some things, but Jesus, being the Author and Perfecter of their faith, tested them with the goal being to mature and perfect their faith.

(Heb 12:2) “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Our passage ends with Jesus and the disciples ministering at Gennesaret. Mark and Matthew say, “when they had crossed over to the land at Gennesaret, but in John’s account we find another miracle that happened. As soon as Peter and Jesus got into the boat, the boat was at land. They experienced another supernatural miracle. They were immediately transported two miles and when they got there, they moored the boat to the shore. The faith of the apostles had to have increased by the events that took place. I believe that God had some purposes for the test they were going through and the increase of their faith was one of those purposes.

(Mark 6:53) “When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore.”

(John 6:21) “So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.”

After getting out of the boat, the people recognized Jesus. In John’s account, the people wanted to know how Jesus got there. They saw Him send away the disciples and they did not see any other boats so they wanted to know how He got there. The people ran about and brought everybody that was sick to Jesus. Wherever He entered the villages or cities, they were bringing their sick to Him. As many as even touched the fringe of His cloak were being cured. It was not only the faith of the apostles that was strengthened; it was the faith of all those around.

(Mark 6:54-56) “When they got out of the boat, immediately *the people* recognized Him, {55} and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. {56} Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.”

Conclusion and Applications

Our passage today was about the testing of the disciples. They found out that they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves. The testing did more than reveal what they had or had not learned. The testing revealed to them who Jesus was. He is the Holy One of God. He is

God's Son. At the end of their test they worshiped Jesus. If Jesus was not God, He would not have allowed them to worship Him. Jesus was the fullness of deity in bodily form.

What about you? Have you come to the place that you know that Jesus is God? Have you received Jesus as your Lord? Have you come to the place where you worship Jesus? This morning, if you would like to receive Jesus you can do that right now, wherever you are. The Bible says that if we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and if we are willing to confess Jesus as Lord or Master, we can receive Him into our lives. Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died and was raised from the dead? Are you willing to confess Jesus as Lord? Are you willing to surrender your life and will to Jesus? If so, pray with me right now.

Jesus, I do believe that You are the Son of God and that You came and died for my sins. I believe that You were raised from the dead. I ask You to come into my life and forgive me of my sins. I ask You to be my Lord and to help me to live my life for you. I ask this in Jesus' name.

There may be others of you this morning who have already received Christ, and you are going through a test or trial. God wants you to know this morning that He sees you. There is no darkness that He cannot see in. There is no distance that He cannot see from. He sees you straining at the oars in this trial. Be comforted to know that He is watching you and He is there to help you. He does not want you to be afraid or discouraged. He wants you to be full of faith. He wants you to consider it all joy because He is bringing you to a greater place in your walk and faith. He is perfecting and maturing you. He is preparing you for greater things and these trials are there to help you learn to persevere and grow in your faith. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. This morning, be encouraged and strengthened.

Our passage today ended with Jesus ministering and healing those who were sick. There may be some here this morning that need to touch the hem of His garment. This morning, wherever you are, put your hands out and let Jesus touch you. Father God, we release Your healing to those who are reaching out to you. We thank You for healing and for all that You do for us. We bless You in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Introduction (Luke 9:10-11, John 1:43-44, John 6:14-15, Mark 6:45-56)

1. The Test Revealed What the Apostles Had Learned (James 1:2-8, Mark 4:37-41, John 1:48-50, Mark 14:37-38, James 1:12)

2. The Test Revealed Jesus' Deity (Matt 14:32-33, John 6:66-69)

3. The Test Strengthened Their Faith (Matt 14:30-31, James 1:2-4, Heb 12:2, Mark 6:53-56, John 6:21)

Conclusion and Applications