

Mark 6:45-52
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I. Outline

- A. Jesus and the disciples go separate ways (45-47)
 - 1. Jesus' initial actions (45-46)
 - i. Urged disciples to enter the boat and dismissed the crowd (45)
 - ii. Went to the mountain to pray: εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι. (46)
 - 2. New locations (47)
 - i. Disciples in the middle of the sea (47)
 - ii. Jesus alone on the land (47)
- B. Sea encounter (48-51)
 - 1. Jesus sees them and walks to them (48)
 - 2. Disciples' ghost viewing: φάντασμα (49)
 - 3. Interaction (50)
 - 4. Jesus entered boat, Wind stopped (51)
- C. Commentary on reaction: ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδιά πεπωρωμένη (52)

II. Exegetical Issues

A. Boundaries, Placement, Function of the Passage in its Context

1. This passage is introduced by the word “immediately” (Καὶ εὐθὺς), which marks the transition from the prior section. The section before is the story of the feeding of the five thousand. The ending of that passage is a summary statement indicating that five thousand men had eaten (καὶ ἔφαγον οἱ φάγοντες τοὺς ἄρτους πεντακισχιλιοὶ ἄνδρες). The transition is a clear break between the two stories. The ending of this passage is a commentary statement on the lack of understanding by the disciples (ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδιά πεπωρωμένη). The sentence that follows begins the description of the next encounter in Gennesaret after they had crossed over (καὶ διαπερασάντες). The καὶ also marks the transition.

2. This passage is a continuation of a set of stories involving Jesus and his disciples crossing back and forth over the sea of Galilee and the ministry stories on each side. Other stories such as the death of John the baptizer are intertwined but the crossing pattern is present. Jesus got into a boat due to the large crowd in 4:1 (εἰς πλοῖον...ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ). Jesus requests to cross to the other side in Mk 4:35 (διελθωμεν εἰς τὸ πέραν) at the beginning of the sea-calming story and they arrive at the other side in Mk 5:1 (εἰς τὸ πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης). Jesus crosses again in Mk 5:21 (καὶ διαπερασάντος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ παλιν εἰς τὸ πέραν). This leads up to Mk 6:45 where Jesus urged the disciples to get into the boat (ἠνάγκασεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἐμβῆναι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον) and cross to the other side (καὶ προάγειν εἰς τὸ πέραν). Finally, the first verse in the next section Mk 6:53 (καὶ διαπερασάντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν) describes the arrival of Jesus and his disciples on land in Gennesaret. Overall, this passage is included in the series of stories of Jesus' teaching, preaching and healing ministry in Galilee starting in Mk 1:14 with the calling of Simon and Andrew to Mk 9:50 where the journey to Jerusalem is described in chapter 10.

3. This passage functions to show the common elements of unbelief between the disciples and the Pharisees in spite of the direct contact of the disciples with Jesus' signs and parable explanations. In particular, the explanation of the disciples not understanding

about the loaves but their heart was hardened (ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη) serves as the summary in this story. The heart is addressed in surrounding passages. Jesus is described as grieved at the Pharisees' hardness of heart (συλλυπουμενος επι τη πωρωσει της καρδιας) in Mk 3:5. Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah when he states that their "hearts are far from me" (δε καρδια αυτων πορρω απεχει απ' εμου) in Mk 7:6. In summary, the function of this passage is to show that the disciples' were in the same boat as the Pharisees.

B. Textual Problems

1. 6:45: Some mss omit εις το περαν after προαψειν (P^{45vid} W f¹ q sy^s). The full reading is consistent with other examples of the sea-crossing stories. The omission may point to a potential intentional change to notify the reader that this story has a different significance.
2. 6:47: The descriptive word παλαι (meaning "already", "for a long time", "just now"), is added in some mss (P⁴⁵ D f¹ 28. 2542 pc it vg^{mss}). This Matthew story includes ηδη and may have had a copy of Mark that included παλαι (Metzger, 92). The word serves to emphasize the location of the boat and the extent to which Jesus walked to catch up to them. Furthermore, the larger distance would have increased the degree of astonishment on the part of the disciples and would have accentuated their hardness of heart. The description of the boat being out on the sea conveys this already but this word would increase the degree of Jesus' action.
3. 6:48: Some mss add σφοδρα και after ην ψαρ ο ανεμος εναντιος αυτοις (P^{45vid} W Θ f¹³ 28. (565. 700) pc) while others only add και after the same set of words (A D f¹ ℳ lat sy^{p.h}). The text does not include either of these (ℵ B L Δ 892. 2427. l 2211 pc a aur b vg^s co). The addition of σφοδρα may be a scribal addition to match the description of the Paul's ship being pounded by the storm violently (σφοδρως δε χειμαζομενων ημων τη εζης) in Acts 27:18.
4. 6:52: Some mss add substitute ην γαρ for αλλ' ην (A D W f^{1.13} ℳ lat sy). The substitution may be a scribal substitution in order to provide a more focused explanation of the disciples not understanding about the loaves. Using "for" connects the two descriptions instead of keeping the contrast using "but". The text is supported by ℵ B L Δ Θ 33. 579. 892. 1241. 1424. 2427 al (b r¹ sy^{hmg} co).

C. Issues of Interpretation

1. 6:45 ευθυς is used throughout the Gospel of Mark as both a transition marker between stories and descriptions of characters' actions within stories. 6:45 is an example of a transition and 6:50 (ο δε ευθυς ελαλησεν) is an example within a story. Why is the term "immediately" throughout the gospel? How did the use of this impact the reader's understanding of Jesus' ministry? How could this term have an eschatological impact to the stories?
2. 6:46 και αποταξαμενος is one example of three successive beginning phrases that include και and a participle (6:46 αποταξαμενος, 6:47 γενομενης, 6:48 ιδων and βασιανιζομενους). How does the combination of και and a participles influence the pace and movement of this passage? What specific atmosphere is the author portraying by using this combination? Overall, do the use of participles in this manner have any additional meaning the description of the action?

3. 6:48 Jesus is described as seeing or perceiving the disciples being tormented by the drive of wind (καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτοὺς βασανιζομένους). The assumption is that Jesus was not able to physically look down from the mountain and see the boat. What is the significance of Jesus perceiving that they were being tormented? What other examples are given where Jesus perceives something that is not physically visible to him?

4. 6:48 The participle βασανιζομένους on the surface points to the physical aspect of the disciples' being harassed or tormented as they strained while rowing. The same word is used in Mk 5:7 where the unclean spirit named Legion said to Jesus "I adjure you by God, do not torment me" (ορκίζω σε τον θεον, μη με βασανισης). What is the relationship between the tormenting of the boat and the request from the unclean spirit for Jesus to not torment it? What other physical / spiritual examples does the author of the Gospel according to Mark utilize? What was tormenting the disciples? On the physical side, was there any rain or just a wind? How does this differ from other boat stories in the Gospels? On the spiritual side, was Jesus involved with the tormenting? Was Jesus praying for the tormenting to occur? Does this story have parallels with exorcism stories? What does this show about Jesus' authority, especially in combination with God the Father in prayer? How does this story differ from other accounts of Jesus leaving the disciples to pray? How is this similar?

5. 6:50 Jesus said to the disciples "Take courage! It is I, do not be afraid" (θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε). How is this similar to the other boat stories in the gospels? What is the significance of ἐγὼ εἰμι? Does ἐγὼ εἰμι refer directly to God? If so, what does this reveal about Jesus' authority? How does the physical / spiritual relationship further the author's proof of Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Mk 1:1)?

6. 6:51 Jesus, from the disciples' standpoint transitions from being a ghost to physically getting in the boat? What is the contrast between the disciples viewing Jesus as a ghost in Mk 6:49 (φάντασμα) and his boarding the boat (καὶ ἀνέβη πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ πλοῖον)? How does this foreshadow the post-resurrection encounters with the risen Jesus? Mk 16:6 describes the man dressed in a white robe telling Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome "Don't be alarmed" and Mk 16:7 includes "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you". How does the notion of going ahead (προαγεῖν) relate Mk 6:45 and Mk 16:7 in terms of the resurrection and belief in Jesus as physically being present?

7. 6:52 The author completes this passage by referring back to how the disciples did not understand the loaves and then describing their hearts being hardened (ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδιά πεπωρωμένη). What is the relationship between the loaves and their hardened hearts? Why is description "their hearts were hardened" important? How does this relate to the unbelief of the disciples? How does this, in turn, relate to the unbelief of the Pharisees (see II A 3)? Is the author provoking the reader to test himself or herself in the area of unbelief? If so, how does this promote the author's proof of Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Mk 1:1)?

D. Use of Other Texts/Traditions

1. The mountain is viewed as a place of connecting with God in both the Old Testament texts and New Testament texts. In Mk 6:46, Jesus said farewell to the crowd and went away to the mountain to pray (ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι). How does this relate to Moses' interactions with God on Sinai/Horeb in Exodus 19? How does this relate to Elijah's interaction with God on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18 and God passing by him on

a mountain in 1 Kings 19:11-18? How do these accounts tie into Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 17 and Mark 9? What role does the mountain connection with God play in showing the Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Mk 1:1)?

2. The word βασανίζω that is used to describe the tormenting in the drive of wind also means to subject to punitive judicial procedure or to torture. This word was used by Thucides in V BC. In addition, Antiphon (the Orator) and Antiphon (the Sophist) used this word in terms of using torture on slaves in V BC (Bauer, 168).

E. Relation to Other NT Texts

1. The story of Jesus walking on the water is also located in Mt 14:22-33. The Matthew story includes the additional story of Peter answering Jesus and then walking on the water. What does this difference reveal in the goals of the writings of Gospel according to Matthew and the Gospel according to Mark? Assuming that Mark was written first, why was the story updated to include Peter's interaction with Jesus? Another major difference in the stories is that the disciples in Mt 15:33 worshiped Jesus saying, "Truly you are the Son of God" when entered the boat and the wind ceased. The Mark story does not include this act of worship. Instead, the disciples are portrayed as having hardened hearts. What does this reveal about differences in the themes and flow of the two gospels?

2. The use of 'going ahead' is also referenced in Mt 14:22 in the boat story as well as in Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial in 26:32 where he states that he will go ahead of the disciples into Galilee. The parallel of the latter is found in Mk 14:28. Mt 28:7 and Mk 16:7 both refer to post-resurrection instructions to go tell the disciples that Jesus was risen and was going ahead of them into Galilee. How does this use of 'going ahead' relate in the movement of the disciples toward faith in Jesus as the Son of God?

F. Historical Issues

1. The disciples are urged to go on ahead to Bethsaida. What are the specific customs and beliefs of the people in Bethsaida? Furthermore, what are the specific customs and beliefs of the people in each of the places that the Jesus and disciples encounter as they move back and forth across the Sea of Galilee.

III. Significance for Theology and Preaching

1. The commentary statement in Mk 6:52 showed that the disciples hearts were hardened despite Jesus' ministry in their midst. In what ways are people's hearts hardened like the disciples and the Pharisees?

2. Jesus called the twelve and he worked to develop their faith. How does the role of Jesus as a tormentor impact the life of the community of faith and individuals?

3. Do the two different endings in Matthew 14 and Mark 6 disturb the lessons of the passage and, more importantly, the gospels or does it enhance the lessons?

IV. Discussion Questions

1. What is the relationship between Legion's request of Jesus in Mk 5:7 and tormenting of the disciples in Mk 6:48?

2. Why does Jesus pray in Mk 6:46 and how does this differ from other examples of Jesus going to be alone to pray?

3. What is the relationship between the ghost / climbing into the boat model and the post-resurrection response to Jesus? How did writer of Mark use the idea of "going ahead" to relate these two models and is this an effective way to further the proof of Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Mk 1:1)?