

Storm at Sea

BOB HEERSPINK

Sharing the meaning of discipleship with someone can be a challenging experience. Have you ever tried to gloss over the tough stuff when talking to someone about what it really means to follow Christ? What can we learn about discipleship, both for ourselves but also for the way we share the challenge of discipleship? What can we learn from watching Jesus still the storm at sea? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink. Dave, when I was serving in parish ministry, I would often have the opportunity to disciple new believers; and you know, I always struggled with how much I could really give them at one time about what it meant to really follow Jesus. You know, I wanted to share the faith in such a way that I would nurture them, but I didn't want to turn them off; and there is some really tough stuff in the Bible about what it means to follow Christ; and sometimes I really wondered if I erred on the side of not challenging them enough with the cost of discipleship.

DAVE BAST

Well, we have a tendency to sort of become salesmen with respect to Jesus, don't we? Especially as pastors, you know, we are so eager to convince people to become Christians – to believe – to commit their life...

BOB HEERSPINK

We want to build the Church. We want to see positive numbers.

DAVE BAST

And it is good for them. I want everyone in the world to become a follower of Christ. So, the temptation is to sort of water down the standards and say it doesn't take that much... I can remember many conversations, especially with young people, about coming to confess their faith and join the church. I maybe did the same sort of thing. I sort of downplayed the tough parts and the cost, and emphasized the benefits and how easy it was.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think even today as we talk about who Jesus is, the tendency is to talk about Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord; and a lot of people, when they talk about who Jesus is to them, will say: Jesus is my best friend! Well, that is true, but that is not getting to the tough stuff of what it really means to give up your own self for the sake of following Jesus.

DAVE BAST

It is instructive to look at how Jesus himself dealt with some would-be followers. We see stories of that throughout the Gospels, but we are in the middle of Matthew 8, in this series of *Groundwork* programs, and we are kind of following through this description of the ministry of Jesus; and here are a couple of would-be disciples, a good example of this.

¹⁸When Jesus saw the crowd, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake (that is the Sea of Galilee),
¹⁹and then a teacher of the Law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” Wow, what a great offer, huh? Here is a professional scribe, a religious leader, and he says: I am going to be your follower, Jesus; and Jesus says to him: Hey great! Come on along. No, not exactly. ²⁰Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” ²¹Another disciple said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father,” but Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.”

BOB HEERSPINK

So Jesus is really up front with these potential disciples...

DAVE BAST

In very different ways.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

One he kind of puts off and the other he says: No, you can't...

BOB HEERSPINK

But, you know, I think you highlighted the difference between the two. The first disciple comes – would-be disciple – and says: Hey, it is your lucky day, Jesus. You have *me* now as a follower. It is someone coming up at church and saying: I came to this church the first time. Hey, I just want to join. I don't really know much about what this means, but hey, I'm on board, so you can't go wrong.

DAVE BAST

And look what a great catch I am...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

You know, I'm a teacher of the Law; I'm a professional religious leader. I know the Bible inside and out, backwards and forwards; and I have decided to bestow my company upon you, Jesus, and your disciples.

BOB HEERSPINK

And Jesus really pushes back. He says: Look at what you are getting into. I don't have a place to lay my head. You go home to a nice, comfortable place, but I am like, what... he says: Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests; I don't even have that kind of a dwelling place, and that is what you are going to get into if you follow me.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; in other words, do you know what you are in for if you truly become one of my followers? I know you have read the new biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Eric Metaxas. I am reading it right now; a tremendous biography of this great, towering figure, Bonhoeffer, martyr to the faith under Hitler, and he was most famous for his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*; that is what Jesus is getting at; there is a price to pay – there is a cost, and he says it again and again throughout the Gospels. We see him telling people – he does it in parables, you know – the king who doesn't know how strong his army is relative to his enemy; the man who starts to build a tower and doesn't know what it takes to finish; do you know what it really costs to follow me?

BOB HEERSPINK

So, to anyone who comes and says confidently to Jesus: This is a piece of cake for me, Jesus pushes back; but the *other* disciple – the other would-be follower...

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is interesting, too.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is a little different situation because he comes to Jesus and he says: I want to follow you, but I've got some other responsibilities I have to take care of first. First let me, he says, go and bury my father. Now, what that means... whether that means he literally had to go and do a burial or whether...

DAVE BAST

The funeral was tomorrow.

BOB HEERSPINK

Or whether he is saying...

DAVE BAST

As long as my father is living...

Bob Heerspink: Right; I have a responsibility to my parents and I have to take care of that first, and then I will come follow you. We really don't know, but the point is the same either way; namely, your priority if you are going to follow me, says Jesus, is first of all, me.

DAVE BAST

So, there is a double message here that he is giving to any would-be follower. On the one hand, you better tally up what this is going to take, and figure out if you are willing to pay that price. In other places – in Luke 14, especially, where he addresses this – he says the cost basically is everything.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is your entire self, your whole life, all that you have, all that you are; no other relationship can take priority; and I think that is the message to the second man: No other relationship can take priority. Jesus is not revoking the commandment to honor our parents here. He is not withdrawing that; he is just saying: Look, there is an urgency about this that has to transcend every other sort of commitment that you might have.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, and I think it is so interesting that the one he really encourages to be a disciple is the one who is struggling. It is not the first guy who says...

DAVE BAST

The over-confident guy.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, this is nothing for me to follow you, Jesus. I mean, you are just so fortunate to have me onboard. He doesn't say: Follow me. He just confronts him with the cost of his discipleship. The second one he says: I do want you to follow me.

DAVE BAST

I was thinking just the other day about our tendency to procrastinate when it comes to spiritual things, especially. You know, obedience, for example: Oh, maybe I'll tithe a little bit later when I am better off financially. I just need to get my house in order, and then I will start giving. Or holiness, St. Augustine's famous prayer: Lord, make me chaste, but not yet; and I think Jesus is addressing that here, saying there are some things you cannot wait for.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, this is so challenging, Dave, that if this is all of the message that Jesus is going to give us, we would say: Well, who can possibly be a disciple of Jesus? You know, Jesus does not minimize the demand, but as we go forward in this passage, what I do find him saying is: Let me encourage you wherever you are in your faith walk; and you know, this story really leads into a miracle – not a healing miracle unless you want to say a healing of creation – it leads into the story of the stilling of the storm; and I think we really need to get into that message, because it is not just about the power of Jesus, it is about what it means to be encouraged as disciples of Christ; and we will talk about that in just a minute when we come back.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*. There is a story here in Matthew 8, where Jesus is encountering two would-be followers wavering, sort of; one is eager and he warns him about the cost; the other is on the fence, and he says: You had better come now; and interestingly, Matthew sets this in a particular geographical spot, and that is really a cue for what is going to unfold in this whole passage. He says that Jesus gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake, or the Sea of Galilee; so they are no longer in the home territory around Capernaum; they are over on the wilderness side where this happens; and it is when they cross to go back that something very significant happens. I will read from Matthew 8, beginning at verse 23:

Then Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Suddenly, a furious storm came up on the lake so that the waves swept over the boat; but Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us. We are going to drown." ²⁶He replied, "You of little faith. Why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the waves, and it was completely calm. ²⁷The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him."

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, what a powerful story. And you know, it is not just about the power of Jesus, though. I really think this passage is saying a lot about discipleship, and that is why this miracle is set over against those two discipleship stories that Jesus just told. You know, when you go to the scriptures, there are times when the Church is described as a ship... a little boat... and that image of the boat out on the storm, or literally the word is *seismos* – an earthquake hits the lake – everything is just being turned upside down. That really is, I think, Dave, an image of what it is like to live an everyday life beset with the kinds of crises we go through.

DAVE BAST

Well, this really is a terrible storm, and maybe the earthquake cue is significant here, but I like to remember that most of those disciples were professional fishermen, or many of them, at least; presumably the ones handling the boat had done this all their lives; and this was home water to them. They knew every square inch of that lake, and yet they are completely terrified. Jesus is calmly sleeping in the back of the boat... Well, he is worn out...

BOB HEERSPINK

He is tired.

DAVE BAST

He is human; a beautiful picture of his humanity there asleep; and they shake him awake and say: What's the matter with you? Don't you know we are going down here? Do something! Help!

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; they are terrified, like we are terrified when we go through tough stuff in life. You know, I just think of the things that people have been going through during the last several years, losing jobs, finances just turned upside down. You know, so many people who I have talked to have said: My life will never be the same again after the kind of financial upheavals that they have gone through; and here their life is simply tossed out upon the sea and one of the questions we sometimes say is: Where is Jesus in this? Is he even aware of what is going on or is he just taking a nap?

DAVE BAST

Yes, just sleeping at the switch – what's the matter?

BOB HEERSPINK

Do we have to pray to him to wake him up, or is he even concerned about what we are going through?

DAVE BAST

In one of the other Gospels, what they say to him is: Don't you care? Lord, don't you care that we are perishing? Of course he cares; of course he is there. He rebukes them for their lack of faith: Oh, you little faith people.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, it reminds me of Little Faith in *Pilgrim's Progress*. He really looks out at his disciples and says: You are people of little faith; and then I think back to what Jesus expected earlier on to those two would-be followers: I expect great faith; and now he comes to his own disciples who have been following him, and says very honestly: You don't have much faith; and you know, I relate to that. I relate much more to these disciples in the boat who are scared stiff, who are struggling with whether they even have any faith at all than to say: Hey, look at me. I have all the faith I need to follow Jesus.

DAVE BAST

I love, though, just focusing on Jesus in the boat here, and what he does. It is true, I think, that this is a picture of us – of our lives when the storms hit, and our lack of faith, often our tendency to doubt: Is Jesus even with us; does he know; does he care? But, you know, here comes this utterly awesome moment when Jesus stands up, and Matthew says he rebuked the winds and the waves. Now, to do that, you either have to be God or you have to be crazy. In fact, there is an ancient story about a king who commanded the tide to stop coming in, and he did it in order to prove to his servants that he was merely a mortal after all, you know. They thought he was the be-all and end-all; so he had his throne carried and set into the sea, and he said: Stop, and of course...

BOB HEERSPINK

I am not God.

DAVE BAST

The waves come washing over... Well, when Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves, they shut up. In fact, that is literally what he said to them. Mark quotes his words: *siopao*, be still – shut up – lie down; and like a dog that knows its master, the wind and the waves suddenly go flat.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, and he is doing this for little faith people. You know, it is not as if Jesus looks at his disciples and says: Well, you know, your faith has to be bigger than *this* to get me moving. He looks at these disciples and he says: I need to encourage the faith that they have. You know, without faith we are terrified people. There is a link between faith and courage. The courage of these disciples had failed because their confidence was not as it should be in Jesus; and yet, Jesus says: I am still going to act for you. I am going to do big things for your sake even though you don't have that much faith in me.

DAVE BAST

Here is a point that I take away. The really important thing isn't how big or small my faith is or how strong or weak; the big thing is, am I in the right boat? Is my faith in Jesus? Because he will take over. You can have a weak faith in a mighty savior, and that is enough to save; not only to save you, but to get you through every trouble and trial. If you have a strong faith in a false savior, it is going to do you no good at all.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, so often we look at the strength of our faith as the issue when the real fact is, it is about Jesus; and that reliability of Christ, that is something we need to underscore and talk more about when we come back after this break.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And we were just talking about Jesus stilling the storm, and that wonderful moment when he commands the wind and the waves to be quiet, and how, even if our faith is small or weak, the key thing is, are we in the right boat? Are we with Jesus? Are we his disciples, and have we recognized the urgency of that and responded in faith to him?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, the key here is the reliability of Jesus; and you know, Jesus doesn't do this miracle merely to say: I am a wonderworker. I think you really have to go back into the Old Testament...

DAVE BAST

This isn't a stunt...

BOB HEERSPINK

No.

DAVE BAST

That he is pulling here. There is real biblical content that he is embodying and bringing up.

BOB HEERSPINK

The miracles are not just exhibits of power, they are signs; and I think you have to go back to the Psalms, and I am sure the disciples in the boat... as Jesus stands up and he rebukes the wind and waves, and all become calm, I think that they know their Old Testament well enough that they are saying...

DAVE BAST

Sure they did.

BOB HEERSPINK

Wow, this is amazing. Let me quote a couple of verses from scripture:

^{29:3}The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The Lord is enthroned over the flood – Psalm 29. Or Psalm 107: ²⁸Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress. ²⁹He made the storm quiet... ^{30b}and he brought them to their desired haven.

DAVE BAST

Those are great references. I am glad you dug those out, because the Hebrews were not seafaring people. They didn't like the water. They didn't like going out on the ocean. To them, the waters symbolized the forces of chaos and evil, and it was one of the real signs of God's sovereign power that he could control the raging of the sea – the raging of the storm. So when Jesus gets up and literally does that, it is very clear that he is drawing aside the veil of his humanity, which they saw earlier when he was asleep, and showing them his true deity – this is God. It has always impressed me about this story that the disciples were more scared after the storm was stilled than they were during it. You know, it says they were filled with awe and sort of fear, you know; and they just bowed before him. What sort of Man is this, they asked.

BOB HEERSPINK

They got it. They got it. Here is Jesus, and he is so human he can be taking a nap in the boat. He is so gracious that he says: You little faith disciples, I am still going to bless you; and then he stands up and it is God... It is God over the storm who calms the seas. You know, God in Christ not only heals our diseases, but he commands the cosmos, and it does his bidding.

DAVE BAST

And this is the Lord whom we serve. Well, it isn't easy, though, because sometimes the storms seem to go on and on, and sometimes he calms one and another one hits.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right. I just got back from Haiti and they go through, they said, a crisis every six months.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I remember seeing a poster of this vast expanse of water and a little sailboat in the middle of it, and the legend on it said: Lord, your sea is so great and my boat is so small. Sometimes it does feel like we are overwhelmed and our boat is pretty small.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, there is a verse in Isaiah where we are told: Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers they will not overwhelm you. You know, that passage doesn't say that there aren't going to be the waters – the storms – but that Jesus is with us, and he is with us in the boat; and that is the key; not just that everything becomes quiet, but who is in the boat with us?

DAVE BAST

I will be with you is the promise there, yes. I have often read that passage to people in distress or in tough circumstances.

You know, as I was preparing for this program and rereading this story again, the miracle, I happened to think of the words of the hymn: *Be Still My Soul*; you know, the Lord is on thy side. Be still... we sing it often to *Finlandia*, that beautiful tune... but it is one of the later verses that says: Be still my soul, thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake. The waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them while he dwelled below. It is a beautiful thought, isn't it? The forces of nature – the forces that threaten us – maybe the things that assault us – whether that is the economy, big things beyond our control, or disease or whatever it might be – fear itself; all these things are still subject to the authority of the Lord. They still know his voice.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; and when I have worked as a pastor with people who are going through tough times, even when people face death itself, God gives that sense of his presence with us even in what you could say the final storm, where we are looking into the face of death. The confidence of God's people who say: God is with me in this boat. He is going to see me through, and whatever storms I face now, there is going to be calm on the other side.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and I am not going to lie to you; I hope there is calm on this side, too. I want smooth sailing, don't you?

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

I don't want to face this storm. I don't want my faith tested. I know it is pretty small, probably; but more than that, I want to be with the Lord, you know; and I want to be faithful to him. I want to be willing to pay the cost of discipleship, whatever it is; I want to say to him: Lord, I want to follow you. Come what may, I will trust that you know best and you do best.

BOB HEERSPINK

We want to thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation; and don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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