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Watching, Working and Ready

“Then he saw them straining at rowing for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out...”

Mark 6:48-49

Jesus had just fed the 5,000 with some loaves and fishes, sent the disciples ahead by boat and climbed a nearby mountain to pray. During the night a storm threatened the progress of the little boat and the disciples were rowing as hard as they could and making no headway. Some estimate they had been on this journey for 9 hours or more when during the fourth watch, close to dawn, the Lord came walking by. The disciples were afraid. They thought they saw a ghost. When they cried out Jesus changed his plans. Mark tells us that Jesus was going to pass them by, but he stopped and joined them.

This is the famous occasion when Peter walks a few steps on the water. We want to consider another lesson besides the one about Peter from this episode on the Sea of Galilee. Why was Jesus planning to just pass them by? Didn't he see the difficulty they were having? Didn't he care that the winds were contrary that night?

Of course, Jesus saw their plight and he knew everything about their circumstances. If so, why didn't he pass by earlier? Why wait until the fourth watch of the night? Perhaps the disciples even thought within themselves, “Lord, where are you? When are you coming? Don't you care that we are in these difficulties?”

All of us may have times in our lives when we ask the same kinds of questions. First of all, we know that the Lord is not slack concerning any of his promises (2 Pet. 3:9). He wants to know if we are watching for him. Are we looking for him? Very often the Lord cannot help us until we look to him and ask for his help. When we watch for the Lord it is an evidence of our faith in him. “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching” (Lk. 12:37).

If watching is an evidence of our faith, then working is the evidence of our faith in action. In the parable of the Faithful Steward the Lord commends the servant who is not only watching for his return but is also working, “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes” (Lk. 12:43). We must keep rowing.

If we are watching and working, then we will be ready for the Lord when he comes, even if he waits until the fourth watch of the night. The lesson of the Wise Virgins is that we should be ready, “And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut” (Matt. 25:10). What are your ambitions, hopes, dreams, pursuits and plans? Be sure that you are watching, working and ready for the Lord's return.

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.” Matthew 25:13