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From Mountain top to Valley- The Highs and Lows of Ministry.

Background

Example of 1 Kings 18-19, Elijah and the prophets of Baal

We read in these passages the struggle between God's prophet and the priests of the false God Baal. Elijah, after destroying their testimony and then ridding the land of their presence now, feels threatened by Jezebel, in response "Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. 4 Then he went on alone into the wilderness, travelling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died." (1 Kings 19:3- 4)

It may seem strange to us, why God's prophet moves so quickly from being at the peak of his service to God and demonstrating God's power and authority over the false God Baal (and thus Satan by default), to running from the threats of Queen Jezebel. It is, without a doubt, a human response, one in which he seems to have given his all and now has nothing left. This passage most clearly shows God's tenderness and care for one who has served Him faithfully; it also shows God giving a lesson to his prophet to show who Elijah is in regard to God's scheme.

We can like Elijah, get caught up in the high and lows of ministry in God's service, and we see this same see=saw effect upon the disciples of Jesus.

This passage is recorded in three Gospels, yet John gives a specific focus, skipping many important details and concentrating on others, in it, he concentrates as always as to who Jesus is, not on what he does.

The High's- The Spiritual Build up, and the tipping point of pride

The disciples having come from a successful mission. "So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent of their sins and turn to God. And they cast out many demons and healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil."- Mark 6:12-13

then

"The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. Then Jesus said, "Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile."- Mark 6:30-31

This time of reflection was interrupted by the people seeking Jesus; his response was to demonstrate his authority in feeding over 500 in the same manner that God had provided when Moses had led the people. Jesus gave the people bread in the wilderness. The crowd, seeking to crown Jesus king against his wishes, forces Jesus to retreat to a place of isolation, his disciples instructed to head home (recorded in the another gospel), they find them selves trapped by a storm and literally out of their depth.

The lows- Where fear threatens to overcome faith?

It is at this point that "fear threatens to overcome faith" we see that Jesus now enters the narrative, as he walks toward the boat, which is struggling in the centre of the lake.

It's worth stopping to now consider what message the Holy Spirit is using John the apostle to communicate to those who are first listening to this account as he has recorded. What were the early church, those in circa 80AD thinking, about the last surviving

apostle, their fears, and the future without John's direct testimony?

We who have committed to serving Jesus are all his disciples, how we grow in that calling is largely dependent upon our willingness to surrender ourselves to Jesus. Conversely, it may seem, especially to younger followers of Christ, that others seem so much more at peace, so fulfilled, it can aid and encourage, but sometimes it may confuse or challenge.

How did his audience view John, did they know the old Apostle, or had they come to understand the lessons he needed to learn to become the man he was.

John records in brutal honesty, the move from High, that of feeding the 500, to low, the fear of the waters, the lostness the disciples felt without Jesus by their side, the terror of being lost in the water.

Symbolically, to Jews, the water has always represented Chaos, and as such, the enemy, Satan. The writing is meant to convey the spiritual battle going on around the disciples.

Warren W. Wiersbe,- "As you read the Gospel records, note that our Lord was never impressed by the great crowds. He knew that their motives were not pure and that most of them followed Him to watch His miracles of healing. "Bread and circuses" was Rome's formula for keeping the people happy, and people today are satisfied with that kind of diet. Give them food and entertainment, and they are happy. Rome set aside ninety-three days each year for public games at government expense. It was cheaper to entertain the crowds than to fight them or jail them. We must never be deceived by the "popularity" of Jesus Christ among certain kinds of people today. Very few want Him as Saviour and Lord. Many want Him only as Healer or Provider, or the One who rescues them from problems they have made for

themselves. "And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40)."

"Bread and circuses", The Spiritual battle going on is enormous, will Jesus become a tool of the people and by default of Satan, or will He pass the test and continue to abide in the will of His Father?, further more, if Jesus cannot be dissuaded from the will of the Father, can his disciples be driven off course.

But there was another reason for that storm: the Lord has to balance our lives; otherwise we will become proud and then fall. The disciples had experienced great joy in being part of a thrilling miracle. Now they had to face a storm and learn to trust the Lord more. The feeding of the 5,000 was the lesson, but the storm was the examination after the lesson. (Warren W. Wiersbe)

We see that God is dealing with a potential issue, "Pride comes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall"- Proverbs 16:18

Which brings us back to the water, Carson says "On this view, the discourse that corresponds to the walking on the water, where Jesus makes himself known to his disciples on his terms, immediately after rejecting the groundswell of enthusiasm to crown him king (6:15)" "But it is important to see that the Evangelist has achieved this not by distorting the history but by subtly sharpening its foci so that the meditative reader will observe, once again, that he or she is privileged to grasp what the first disciples could not understand until later."

Jesus makes the almost amazing seem simple; he walks on water.

Ill- Magicians.(For Years magicians have sought to amaze by replicating this as an illusion)

Ill- Artists. I sometimes watch artists at work, and always am astounded by a result which I finally see, yet the artist has all along known. They in their superior view of things perceive not

just a medium to work in, but the result that can come about by a combination of these mediums, be they wood, colours or cloth.

Jesus, the creator, sees the world as His medium, He sees water not as wet or dangerous, but as one more thing to glorify His name and that of His Father.

He chooses to go out towards the struggling disciples and announces who He is, "It is I" This is literally (egō eimi) "I Am" (cf. 4:26; 8:24, 28, 54-59; 13:19; 18:5-6) which reflects the covenant name of God in the OT, YHWH of Exod. 3:12-15. Jesus is the visible "I Am," the full self-revelation of God, the incarnate Logos (word) of God, the true and only Son. "(Robert James Utley)

"Once reassured, the disciples were willing to take him into the boat, which immediately ... reached the shore where they were heading. If the language is taken strictly, this suggests another miracle, possibly with an allusion to Psalm 107:23-32 (especially v. 30, 'and he guided them to their desired haven'). This interpretation goes back at least as far as Origen. Those amongst John's readers who knew their Scriptures might well remember that the sea often stands for chaos and disorder, and it is God who controls it and stills it " (D. A. Carson)

"John has stopped numbering the 'signs' that Jesus performs, but this is the fifth. By it, Jesus shows that he is the Lord of the winds and waves. He enacts the words of a Psalm: They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven (Psalm 107:30)." (Andrew Knowles)

Jesus is adjusting the disciples to understand who he is, on his terms!

The takeaways

Jesus doesn't have a messiah complex!- Many in this world believe that they are indispensable, and that nothing can happen without them, it often affects their attitude to those around. Jesus, the real Messiah, never suffered from what is termed a "Messiah Complex", Jesus' identity was never focused on himself, but only on the will of His Father.

We are not so important that we cannot take the time to be with God- In this passage, Jesus demonstrates that time with God is never something that can be traded for practical ministry, without the first (Prayer), the second (Ministry) has no real value.

Do we see the disciples as they were and what they became? Both viewpoints can be useful for our growth if correctly used. We can empathise with the new disciples and what they went through, but we can also appreciate how their lives changed, and give us direction for how our lives should be looking

Who are we as disciples, and how do we grow in our knowledge and trust of God?- WE must come to understand the following Jesus is a choice not feeling. Highs and lows will come and go, but we must walk with "a long obedience in the same direction."

"There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness." - Eugene Peterson

"Don't come to Jesus intending to use faith for your purposes. Come to Jesus as a subject, willing to let Him rule in your heart."
(Lawrence O. Richards)

Highs and lows of ministry, remember "in the light learn how to deal with the darkness", "in the darkness remember what you learnt in the light."