

Russell Kelfer

It Is...I AM!

996-A

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Everyone was tired. They had come away for a rest and had, instead, been treated to one of the most exciting but exhausting experiences of their lives. It had been a long, long day; but it had not been at all the kind of day they had anticipated.

Peter, James and John, no doubt, had visions of sitting around a campfire, while the Master wove for them, once again, simple stories called parables, out of which came deep, rich, spiritual truths. Some of the others, perhaps, had been looking forward to a time when they could recount stories of their own experiences they had while traveling from town to town. They wanted to know how Jesus would have handled that uprising in the village, or that demonic conflict, or that doctrinal disagreement that arose along the way. There may have been still others who simply wanted to sit down under a tree with King Jesus and do nothing but pray. They just wanted to listen to Him as He opened His mouth to talk to the Father, which opened the heavens to a whole new level of communication as He did. All of these were reasonable requests. They had boarded that boat with Jesus, expecting to travel to the other side of the lake and there to have a retreat with the Creator of heaven and earth. They had visions of rest, relaxation, and spiritual enrichment. But, as you may remember, none of that happened.

For as they were going, others saw them and rushed to meet them, so that by the time they arrived on the other side of the shore, it looked like the Jerusalem-Cairo soccer match had just let out. People were everywhere. They were not intending to settle for a mere glimpse of Jesus either. They had walked for hours to hear Him speak and to find out if, indeed, He could heal the sick, cast out demons, and speak the kinds of truths man had never heard before. They were there for the duration. These disciples had seen it before; they knew what was about to happen. Their retreat was about to become a page in their spiritual diaries marked "Things We Almost Did With Jesus." And the Master was about to sit down on a rock somewhere and teach the multitudes about who God was, and talk to them about what the Kingdom of God was, and heal those who really needed healing. And sure enough, that is exactly what happened. The interesting footnote

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to this experience, however, was that just as this all-day Bible Conference was about to take a break, it dawned on the disciples that it was dinner time, and they had no way to feed this hungry mob.

Jesus asked Philip what to do. He was testing Philip. Phil responded with our kind of answer. He said, "Lord, there's nothing to do but send them to the city to get supper." Andrew interrupted, "Lord, I know it won't do any good, but here's a little boy with a bag lunch." The disciples had a committee meeting to examine the options, and they come up with a "committee kind of response." They said, "Lord, it's getting late, and we can't help these folks. We vote to send them back to the Holiday Inn in Bethsaida, and let them bed down and feed themselves at the local eateries around the town. We sure can't feed them, and we're liable to have a riot on our hands if we try with what we have.

Jesus said, "What do you have?" "Just five loaves and two fish, Lord," they nervously replied. "Bring them to me!" Jesus responded. They did, and God took what they had and made it not only suffice, but made it do exceeding abundantly above all that they could ask or think. God did what God does best. He took whatever man gave Him and multiplied it in such a way that no one could steal His Glory. It is there that our story resumes in today's lesson.

Our Scriptures are found in Matthew 14, Mark 6, and John 6.

SURELY THIS IS THE PROPHET

We concluded in the last lesson with the feeding of the five thousand, and we take up reading there now:

¹And those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

⁴Then those men, having seen the miraculous sign which Jesus wrought, kept saying, "This surely is the *Prophet* who is coming into the world." Jesus therefore, perceiving that they were ready to come and seize him to make him king, ²immediately constrained his disciples to board the boat to precede him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he should send the multitudes away.

(¹Matthew 14:21; ² Mark 6:45; ⁴ John 6:14,15 TLOCIS)¹

¹ The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Speak in Harmony;
by Johnston M. Cheney; © 1969 Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon

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The miracle of the loaves and fish did more than feed the multitudes. It fed the multitude's natural desire for fleshly miracles. They did not grasp another kingdom and Living Bread. They rather liked the idea of a grand society here on earth where a miracle-worker stood before a crowd and multiplied two fish until they ended the food shortage. That appealed to the natural man. What they wanted was more signs, more healings, more food, more resurrections. That made for bigger crowds, larger offerings, and a more palatable religion.

There was only one problem. That wasn't what the Kingdom of God was all about. The Kingdom of God was a kingdom of the heart. It was a kingdom of transformation—transformation that sometimes came about as a result of hunger, as a result of sickness, as a result of loneliness, as a result of despair. The Kingdom was the Mind of God as it was formed in man through the dust and dirt of planet earth. No small wonder the conflict began to heighten between those who wanted Jesus to be their King and those who wanted Jesus to be their Savior.

They saw the miracle of the five thousand and wanted more, not more of Jesus, more miracles. Not more peace and joy, more food. Not more patience and longsuffering, more razz-a-ma-tazz. Jesus would have none of it. And so as He began to perceive what was brewing in the hearts of these hearers who didn't have ears to hear. He began to make alternate plans to escape their clutches. They didn't want to crucify Him. Not yet. They wanted to exalt Him. They wanted to make Him King. They liked the idea of a leader who could snap His fingers and make food grow, who could speak a word and empty the hospitals. They just didn't understand...and, oh, dear God, how many there are like them today. They just didn't understand that He was feeding men, healing men and curing men for one reason; He wanted to get their attention so He could save them from their sins.

The Son of man did not come to feed those who were hungry, though that often happened. The Son of man did not come to heal those who were sick, though that often happened. The Son of man came to seek and to save those who were lost. That's why He came, and when fallen man began to take to the idea of a God who could deliver them out of their present problems at the expense of their future redemption, the Living God left town. He still does.

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First, He sent the disciples away. They didn't know why. You and I know, though, don't we? They would have probably jumped right on the bandwagon. Make Jesus King? "Neat Idea," Peter might have thought. "He deserves it," John might have thought. "I'll be in His cabinet," James might have thought. "No way," Jesus thought. So rather than tempt them to agree, Jesus sent them away. He put them on a boat, and said, "See you later, gang; I'll meet you half-way!"

It didn't seem to dawn on them that half-way was half-way across the lake, and speedboats hadn't been invented yet. That realization was yet to come. At any rate, Jesus sent the disciples away. Without them He could be free to send the multitudes home, which He promptly proceeded to do. We don't know what He said. We don't know what He did. They were shouting "Surely, this is the Prophet; let's make Him King." What they didn't know was that they couldn't possibly make Him King...He already was King.

This world, incidentally, is still willing to make Jesus King. And one day He will be King, and every knee will bow. But, Beloved, first they must meet Him as Saviour and Lord. Before the throne comes the Cross. So, don't be deceived, the Gospel is not about what Jesus can do for you. My friend, the Gospel is about what Jesus has done for you. And it all took place on Calvary's hill 2,000 years ago.

Jesus had sent the disciples away; then He sent the multitudes away. Now we read that penetrating statement:

²And when he had taken leave of ¹the crowds, he withdrew again up the mountain, by himself alone, ²to pray.

(¹Matthew 14:23; ²Mark 6:45,46 TLOCIS)

By Himself...alone. The Master of the Universe, Creator of heaven and earth, the one who spoke the worlds into being, the one by Whom and to Whom and through Whom all things exist needed to be alone. What a startling commentary on us. This statement gripped me as few others in Scripture have. It's a good verse to memorize. It's a good verse to review when the pressures of life seem to have us in a vice, and we think we're too busy to take time away. The God of Eternity, when he lived in human form, had to withdraw again and again to be by Himself...alone. Several things ought to stand out from this passage.

1- Look at why He had to be by Himself, alone. It says: "He

had to pray.” It clearly states why He went apart. Not to rest. Not to think. Not to reorganize for the next day. He may have done all of the above; but the reason He went apart was to be by Himself, alone to pray. If spending time alone with the Father was that crucial to God when He lived in a human body, then how crucial must it be to those of us in whom God now lives?

2- Look at the occasion. He was being tempted by two things. First of all, He was being tempted by success. Jesus was being tempted to yield to the pressures of his ardent followers and be named King. His press reviews were at an all-time high. His press reviews were never better. At no time in His ministry was the Master more accepted and more acceptable to the masses. That’s a dangerous time in anyone’s ministry. It’s at times like that when you want to look in the mirror and say, “Hey, God you got a deal, when you got me, eh?” God answers, “Nah!” You say, “But wait a minute, that thought would never have entered Jesus’ mind.” I disagree. He was tempted in all points like as we are... yet without sin. He never entertained the thought until it became sin. One reason was when the accolades began to surround Him, the acclaim began to ring in His ears, and the applause began to deafen His followers as to why He was there, Jesus stopped...and He went up into a mountain to be by Himself, alone there to pray. What an incredible idea.

Why is it most of us only see the need to pray when the sky is falling? You know when churches need to pray the most? When the auditoriums are packed, and the pastor’s a hit, and the program is working, and lives are being changed. That’s time to set aside a day of prayer. When so many people are coming, you don’t know where to put them, most churches form new committees. I believe Jesus would have called time out to all the committees and sent them out to pray.

Jesus was being tempted, I believe, to a second thing. He was being tempted to bypass the Cross. The crowds were saying, “We want you for our King!” And that is why He had come! “Why be crucified?” Satan was whispering. “Pain-less salvation is yours for the taking...” No, Jesus didn’t entertain that thought, either. He couldn’t have. He never sinned. But the temptation was there. So, He drew nigh unto God, and God drew nigh unto Him. He resisted the devil, and the devil fled. There is no cross-less Christianity. Any group, any church, or any ministry that teaches a “God is love” philosophy that overlooks the fact that

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“God commendeth His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” is not preaching the love of God, but rather the love of men applied to God. One of the most famous preachers in the world today is espousing a gospel of love that calls on men to overlook the reality of sin. That is not *the* Gospel. It is *a-other* gospel. Yet Paul said, there is no other gospel. In Galatians he said:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8)

Those were the temptations Satan was throwing at Jesus that evening as the swelling crowds began chanting, “Make Him our King! Make Him our King!” Most of us would have been overwhelmed with pride and satisfaction. We would even have justified it on the basis that we were winning their approval, and one day we could win them over. Sad. Jesus knew better. Immediately, He sent the disciples in one direction, the crowds in another, and He retreated to pray. And so should we.

Jesus may have been praying for at least one more special reason. His team of often-confused, often-insensitive saints were on their own, and they had the incredible ability to get into trouble without Him. Jesus knew that. Still He sent them on their way, knowing full well what kind of storm awaited them. Let’s read what happened next,

⁴Then with evening come, his disciples went down to the sea and boarded the boat, and started to go across toward Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not come to them; and the sea was getting rough from a strong wind that blew.

²And he, ¹there alone, ²on the land, saw them hard-pressed in their rowing; ¹the boat was now out in the middle of the sea, being pounded by the waves, for the wind was contrary to them. So in the fourth quarter of the night, ⁴when they had rowed between three and four miles, ¹Jesus went toward them, walking on the sea.

²And he was making to come alongside of them, but ¹when the disciples saw him walking on the sea ⁴and drawing close to the boat, ¹they were alarmed, saying, “It is *a spirit!*” And they cried out for fear, ²for all saw him and were terrified. ¹Then immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “*Have courage!* It is I AM; do not fear.”

(¹Matthew 14:24-36; ²Mark 6:47-56; ⁴John 6:16-21 TLOCIS)

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Picture it in your mind. Jesus was seated high on the hillside overlooking the lake. He had been praying, probably for a long time. Time was incidental when the Son was talking to the Father. He looks up. There they are again, the Abbot and Costellos of the first century. They waited only so long, then hopped back in their ships and headed for Capernaum. The Master could see the winds as they blew against that little boat. The harder the winds blew, the harder the disciples tried to row. Sort of the one step forward, two steps back routine.

The Master, as always, cared that they were suffering. He watched them a while, as they suffered. to see what they were learning. Finally, when He thought they were operating totally in the flesh, He decided to reveal Himself. He walked toward them on top of the water. Now it isn't that Jesus couldn't swim. But swimming would have demonstrated His power as man, not as God. So Jesus had to do what man apart from God could not do. He walked on top of the water toward them.

Now I would have loved to have been a fly on one of those old wooden oars about this time. Here was a boatload of rugged fishermen, used to the sea, rowing and going for all they were worth. They were hot and sweaty; and they were beginning to panic, because the faster they rowed, the more they stayed in neutral. All they were doing was keeping from going backwards. Perhaps you can relate. They look out on that foggy horizon, and someone...or is it some thing...is coming toward them. At first, they probably were relieved that a rescue was on the way. Then reality set in. It was sort of like you and I with our car broken down on a deserted highway. Suddenly we see lights coming, and we're relieved. Then we look closer, and it looks like a space ship from Mars. The guys getting out have four ears and six horns, and we wish we had tennis shoes on so we could run. That is the kind of elation turned to panic they felt.

They were alarmed. They began yelling, "It's a ghost! It's a ghost!" The Scripture says they were unanimous in their panicking. It says all saw Him, and all were terrified. At least, they agreed on something. This is the state of mind you and I often get into. We get out there on the ocean of life and begin to row. We suppose, that being the King's Kids, as we are, it ought to be smooth sailing. Then, lo and behold, a contrary wind begins to blow. Maybe a kid with a problem. Maybe a bank account bathed in red. Maybe a job that was, but isn't. Maybe that picture-perfect

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marriage explodes into a million pieces. Anyway, the winds of adversity begin to beat against the ship, and you know what we do? We row harder. We say “Okay, Lord, if you’re going to let the winds blow, I’ll show you!” No, we don’t say that. We say all kinds of spiritual things; but we think that. So, at least in our spirits, we row harder.

About the time we realize there is no hope, we see someone in the distance. He is walking on top of the circumstances rather than being tossed about by the circumstances as we are. Slowly, He approaches us. Suddenly, a decision confronts us. Either God is moving in our direction to take control of the ship, or we’re going to sink. We panic. We call our friends. They panic. It is about that time, that a quiet voice speaks to us through the winds and the waves, and finally, we recognize who it is. It is God! He says: “It is I AM. Do not fear.”

Why did we panic? Why didn’t we expect Him to come? Why didn’t we recognize Him when he did come? I’ll tell you why. We weren’t looking for Him; we were looking at the storm. Try to see God through the storm and your eyes will be blurred. Try to see the storm through God, and the sun comes out. Now this would be an interesting enough story if it ended there. But it doesn’t. It goes on:

Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, bid me come to You on the water,” And He said, “Come.” So Peter climbed down from the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But seeing the turbulent wind he was frightened, and commencing to sink, he cried out. “Lord, save me!”

¹Jesus quickly stretched out his hand, caught him, and said to him “You Little-faith, what made you doubt?”

And when they came up into the boat, the wind ceased;

(Matthew 14:31,32 TLOCIS)

LORD, SAVE ME!

Peter was never one to be one-upped by anyone, even God. He missed the purpose of it all. God wasn’t putting on a side-show, playing His bag of magic tricks to entice the disciples to do the same. He was demonstrating who He was! He was I AM! Peter was more infatuated by the water show than he was by the God of Eternity; so He asked permission to do what God did. Men do that today. God said, “Okay, if that’s the only thing that will

make you happy, c'mon." Peter, with all his compadres looking on with envy, launched out into the deep. He entered the summer olympics with a decided edge.

The trouble is, halfway through Peter's water-walk, which was much more of a miracle than man's space walks, Peter looked down, then he looked around and said, "Lord, I'm gonna... glub..." As Pete came up for air on round two, he cried, "Lord, save me!" Then it reads...when Peter cried, "Lord, save me"... Jesus reached down and caught him, and pulled him out. Peter, no doubt, expected a purple heart. I mean, he had walked farther on top of water than any man who ever lived except for the Son of God. Jesus didn't pass out any medals. He said, "You 'little-faith'. You 'pretender'...what made you doubt?" God didn't base His accolades on Peter's performance versus anyone else's; but on Peter's performance versus what he had asked God to let him do. Remember that. It's sobering. It's called the law of responsibility.

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased, and the whole crowd began to worship Jesus. Because He was God? Nope. It says this:

²And inwardly they were filled with amazement and awe (for they understood not about the loaves, since their hearts were unreceptive) ¹but they came and made obeisance before him saying, "*Truly You are the Son of God!*"

(¹Matthew 14:33; ²Mark 6:51 TLOCIS)

They worshipped Him, but not because of who He was. They called Him who He was, because of what He did. Still, their faith was based on God's performance. This performance was brilliant. It deserved an Oscar award. But when He went to the Cross, they fled like rats. They figured He could no longer be God, if His behavior and the circumstances that surrounded His life no longer fit their concept of God. Pity. They missed the best part.

Don't laugh. Sailing across the oceans of Christendom today in a variety of vessels are men and women whose concept of God has not matured one iota from theirs. Still, they clamor for miracles. Still, they cry out for circumstantial evidence that God is who He claims to be. If He enables them to have some visible emotional experience, He is a good God. If He blesses their business or their marriage or their finances, He is a good God. If He rescues them dramatically from some impending storm, He is a great God. The more He gives them, the more gracious God

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is. The more He forgives them, the more merciful God is. Their whole concept of the nature of Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth, is gauged on a day-to-day basis by just how many tricks God does today. And if He visibly pounces on Satan, He's a hero.

Beloved, wait a minute. Haven't we learned anything? We do not worship God because of what He does. We worship God because of who He is. We do not determine who He is by what He is doing at the moment. We determine who He is by what His Word says He is!

So, even when He allows that loved one to die, He is perfect love. Worship Him. Even when He allows those finances to fail; He is perfect grace. Worship Him. Even when the wind blows against you and the waves beat against your life in torrent after torrent until you cannot seem to bear another blow, Beloved, He is Sovereign. Worship Him.

All you are seeing is a finite glimpse of His plan. Who are you to judge the Creator God by whether or not He lets you have a wreck? Or get a cold? Or lose a job? Or be misunderstood? Look at His Son! He adored Him. Yet, in order to magnify Himself through Him, He let Him suffer untold agony and pain, pain you and I cannot even describe, let alone feel.

I do not know the nature of the storms that are buffeting your life this moment. I do know one thing...if you look very, very, carefully...out in the distance...beyond the haze, someone is coming to comfort you. He is walking above the circumstances. The waves will not touch Him. He is getting closer; ever so much closer, day by day. Listen carefully. See if you do not hear His tender voice through the thunder and the rain. He is not saying, "I've come to deliver you," though well He may. He is saying, "Have courage. It is I AM. Do not fear."

Once again, He may or He may not still the storm. That's not the issue. He'll be no less God either way. When you learn to grasp that secret in all its power, when you learn to worship Him morning, noon, and night just because He Is...I AM; then, Beloved, you will have begun to practice the process of praise, at last!

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For Application

1- Can you reconstruct a similar situation in today's world, where success in the ministry would present the kinds of temptations this one did for Jesus? How can the church today equip itself to handle "success"? How did Jesus handle it?

2- If the church is to be true to New Testament principles, then what kind of priority ought it to give to setting aside times for its people to be alone with God, and to teaching them how to do it?

3- Is a "cross-less" Christianity popular today? What makes it so appealing? What makes it prosperous? Why is separating the "love of God" from the "judgment of God" such blasphemy? Why do you think the world buys the lie?

4- Why do you think Jesus allowed them to row so far before He went to them? Does He do that in our lives, as well?

5- What is the root issue of all real worship? Is it not whether or not we are worshiping God for who He is? How can we personally begin to break that habit in our own lives? How can we especially praise Him when there is nothing circumstantially to give us reason to praise? Can you find passages of Scripture that give you the basis for constant praise? Begin a list of such passages to keep with you.

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