

# *The* **POWER** *of* **HIS** **PRESENCE**

A YEAR OF DEVOTIONS FROM THE  
WRITINGS OF RAY STEDMAN

**RAY C. STEDMAN**

*Compiled by Mark S. Mitchell*



**Discovery House Publishers**

*Books, music, and videos that feed the soul with the Word of God*

Box 256 Grand Rapids, MI 49501

*The Power of His Presence*  
© 2006 by Elaine Stedman  
All rights reserved.

Discovery House Publishers is affiliated with RBC Ministries,  
Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Discovery House books are distributed to the trade exclusively by Barbour  
Publishing, Inc., Uhrichsville, Ohio.

Requests for permission to quote from this book should be directed to: Permissions Department,  
Discovery House Publishers, P. O. Box 3566, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, *New International  
Version*®. *NIV*®. ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of  
Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stedman, Ray C.

The power of His presence : a year of devotions from the writings of Ray Stedman /  
Ray C. Stedman ; compiled by Mark Mitchell.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-57293-152-3

1. Bible—Devotional use. 2. Bible—Commentaries. 3. Devotional calendars.

I. Mitchell, Mark, 1956— II. Title.

BS617.8.S74 2006

242'.2—dc22

2005035778

*Printed in the United States of America*

06 07 08 09 10 // 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 9

*January* 11

MARK: The Servant Who Rules, and the Ruler Who Serves

*February* 45

ECCLESIASTES: The Things That Don't Work

*March* 75

EPHESIANS: Riches in Christ

*April* 109

GENESIS 1–11: Foundations for Living

*May* 141

1 JOHN: Life with Father

*June* 175

ABRAHAM: The Man of Faith

*July* 207

JOHN 13–17: Secrets of the Spirit

*August* 241

NEHEMIAH: Principles of Reconstruction

*September* 273

2 CORINTHIANS: Authentic Christianity

*October* 305

PSALMS: Folk Songs of Faith

*November* 337

1 AND 2 TIMOTHY: Letters to a Son

*December* 369

JOB: Let God Be God



January

## MARK

### *The Servant Who Rules, and the Ruler Who Serves*

The gospel of Mark is the most translated book of the Bible in all the world. No other book appears in as many languages. Almost all Wycliffe translators, after they have reduced a language to writing, begin their translation of the Scriptures with this gospel. I am sure that the fact that Mark is the shortest of the gospels has something to do with that decision! But it is also a fact that Mark is particularly suitable for introducing people of all backgrounds, classes, and tribes to the Scriptures. It is the one gospel of the four that is aimed at the Gentile ear.

A study of the gospel of Matthew reveals that it is written for the Jew, especially with its focus on the Old Testament and Jewish customs. But Mark was written for the Roman world, for the Gentile, for those who do not know the background of the Old Testament. Therefore, it is an instructive and helpful gospel to use in the initial approach.

Many scholars think that the gospel of Mark is the earliest New Testament Scripture we have. It was probably written sometime in the sixties of the first century, which would make it very early, going back to the beginnings of the Christian story. Scholars differ, however, as to whether Matthew or Mark wrote first, because it is hard to tell who borrowed from whom—Matthew from Mark, or Mark from Matthew.

We do know that this gospel was written by a young man named John Mark. His mother was named Mary, and she was a rather wealthy woman who had a big house in Jerusalem. In Acts 12, we are told that the early disciples held a large church prayer meeting in her house for Peter when he was imprisoned. We know that young John Mark was taken by Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, traveling with them to the island of Cyprus. But for some reason Mark refused to go with them when they went on to the mainland of what today is Turkey. Instead, he went back to his mother's house. Paul was upset about that and evidently felt that Mark was a quitter. When it came time for them to go out again, although Barnabas wanted to bring Mark, Paul would not let him come. So they separated. Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus, and Paul and Silas went back to the areas where they had gone before. Then Mark drops out of sight for a time.

The next we hear of him, he is an associate of the apostle Peter, who speaks affectionately of this young man, calling him “my son Mark” in his first letter (1 Peter 5:13). Early church tradition tells us that Mark became the companion of Peter. Eusebius, a church father writing in the third century, says that the early Christians were so entranced with all the things Peter told them that they asked Mark to write them down. Perhaps that is how we got the Gospel According to Mark, for it reflects much of Peter’s memories and experiences with Jesus.

Mark is fascinated with two qualities of Jesus that he gives to us in the first words of this gospel: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). Jesus of Nazareth, a carpenter, the human Jesus—but also the Son of God, the divine one. Mark seems to be fascinated by that combination: the Ruler who manifests His ability to serve, and the Servant who knows how to rule.

That, by the way, is how the book is organized. Mark is easy to outline, because the author gives us certain natural divisions, as we will see as we go along. It falls readily into two halves.

- The first, chapter 1 through chapter 8:26, is “The Servant Who Rules: The Authority of the Servant.”
- The second, from chapter 8:27 to the end is “The Ruler Who Serves.”

## THE PLACE TO BEGIN

READ: Mark 1:1–8

*And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4).*

John announced this great word: that repentance is the way people come to God, and the result is the forgiveness of sins. The greatest blessing people can experience is to have their sins forgiven. This is what the people who streamed out of Jerusalem to listen to John were looking for, and this is what they found. They found forgiveness of sins, and it came by way of repentance.

That is why the prophet Isaiah said John's message would be like a great bulldozer, building a highway in the desert for God to reach the isolated stranger in the midst of the wilderness. Without a road you cannot drive out into the desert in order to help somebody. You must have a road, a highway in the desert. John was God's bulldozer to build that highway. You know how roads are built—exactly as Isaiah describes in chapter 40: "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain" (v. 4). That is what repentance does. It brings down all the high peaks of pride that we stand on and refuse to admit are wrong. It takes the depressed areas of our life, where we beat and torture and punish ourselves, and lifts them up. It takes the crooked places, where we have lied and deceived, and straightens them out. And it makes the rough places plain. Then God is there at that instance of repentance.

John brought people to Christ the only way they can come—through acknowl-

edgment of guilt. When people come this way, God meets them, cleanses them, and forgives them. John demonstrated that by the baptism he performed. But there is a greater baptism—that of the Holy Spirit. And on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God came, Peter stood up and offered people two things: forgiveness of sins and the promise of the Spirit. From that time on, God has made these things available to any man or woman who will begin at the beginning—the place of repentance.

Have you ever repented? Have you ever changed your mind, stopped defending yourself and trying to blame everything on others, and said, "No, Lord, no one else is to blame, only I. This is the way I am—and I need help"? That is where God will meet you. He always meets humans at that point, washes away guilt, cleanses, forgives. That is where you will find forgiveness of sins. If you have never repented before, I urge you to do so now. God will meet you right there. In the quiet of your own heart, where God alone hears, you can say to Him, "Lord, I repent. Lord, send me the Holy Spirit through Jesus." And He will.

*Lord, thank You that You promise to meet me in this place of repentance. I come to You now on that basis.*

## LIKE A DOVE

READ: Mark 1:9–15

*As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove (Mark 1:10).*

There is no greater need that we have as individuals than to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is by the Holy Spirit that we are able to live as we long to live and are able to overcome the power of sin and guilt and fear within us. Therefore, the primary, elementary, most fundamental need of guilty people is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, when Jesus began to take our place, there was immediately given to Him the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is not the first time Jesus *had* the Spirit. It is recorded of John the Baptist that he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. And certainly if that was true of John, it was also true of Jesus. He lived by the Spirit during those quiet years in Nazareth. He submitted Himself to His parents, grew up in a carpenter's shop, and learned the trade. And through those uneventful days, Jesus lived by the power of the Spirit in His life.

Then what is happening now, when the Spirit comes upon Him like a dove? The answer is that He is given a new manifestation of the Spirit, especially in terms of power. To use the language of Scripture, Jesus was *anointed* by the Spirit at this point. In Old Testament times kings and priests were anointed by pouring oil upon their heads, committing them to the function and office in which they were to serve. This is the picture of what is now occurring in Jesus' life. He is being anointed by God through the Spirit with power—power to meet the

demands of the ministry upon which He is about to launch.

Do not think of this as something remote from us. All these things that happened to Jesus *can* happen and, indeed, *must* happen *to us*. That is the whole thrust of this teaching. He was taking our place; therefore, what happened to Him must happen to us. That is why Jesus, standing with His disciples after the resurrection, said to them, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). The Spirit of God must come upon us.

This is not so that we can perform dramatic acts, but, rather, so that we can have a new quality of life that is beautiful and resilient, yet quiet and gentle. Notice the symbol of the kind of power that is given here—it is a dove. Athletic teams sometimes use birds as emblems, signs of their power and ability. We have the Falcons and the Eagles—even the Ducks. But did you ever hear of a team called the Doves? No team would ever use a dove as a symbol of its power. A dove is a gentle, nonthreatening bird, one that does not fight back and yet is irresistible.

This is the power that Jesus is describing—the power of love, of course—love that can be beaten and battered down and put to death and yet can rise again, until it wins the day—that amazing love Jesus released. The greatest force in the world today, without a doubt, is love. And yet it is the kind of power that does not threaten or break apart or destroy; it gathers and heals. It is rejected, turned aside, and beaten down; yet it rises again and again. So the dove is an apt symbol of the new life our Lord came to teach.


*Lord, fill me with the Holy Spirit. May the Spirit manifest through me the power of love.*



## MEETING LIFE'S DEMANDS

READ: Mark 1:16–39

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed (Mark 1:35).*

fter this full day—and what a full day it was, what a heavy ministry our Lord had that day with all the healing He did in the evening!—Mark records that early in the morning, before it was daylight, Jesus went out on the mountainside, and there, by Himself, He prayed. But even there He was not safe. His disciples interrupted this communion, told Him that everyone was looking for Him. And Jesus reveals the heart and substance of His prayer in what He says in reply: “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also.” This is what He was praying about—that God would lead Him, doors would be opened, and hearts prepared in the cities to which He would go next.

Why did Jesus seek the Father’s face like this, in these hours of pressure? The only answer we can come to is that He wants to make clear that the authority He had was not coming from Him. This is what our Lord is trying to get across to us so continually in the Scriptures—that it was not His authority by which He acted; He had to receive it from the Father.

I do not know any more confusing doctrine in Christendom today—one that has robbed the Scriptures of their authority and power in the minds and hearts of countless people—than the idea that Jesus acted by virtue of the fact that He was the Son of God, that the authority and power He demonstrated were due to His own deity. Yet He Himself takes great pains to tell us

this is not the case. “The Son can do nothing by himself “ (John 5:19). Why do we ignore His explanation and insist that it is He, acting as the Son of God? He tells us that “it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work”(John 14:10). And all the power that Jesus manifested had to come to Him constantly from the one who dwelt within Him.

Jesus stresses this because this is what He wants us to learn. We are to operate on the same basis. Our response to the normal, ordinary demands of life and the power to cope with those demands must come from our reliance upon Him at work within us. This is the secret: All power to live the Christian life comes not from us, doing our dead-level best to serve God, but from Him, granted to us moment by moment as the demand is made upon us. Power is given to those who follow, who obey. The Father is at work in the Son; the Son is at work in us. As we learn this, then we are given power to meet the demands and the needs that are waiting for us in the ministry yet to come.

*Thank You, Father, that the same power is available to me today, making me ready to be your instrument in any and every situation in which demand is laid upon me.*

## IMPRESSIVE FAITH

READ: Mark 1:40–2:12

*Jesus saw their faith . . . (Mark 2:5a).*

The obvious thing Mark underscores for us here is the determined faith of these five men.

They stand as an encouragement to us to exercise this kind of faith. There are three remarkable and beautiful aspects of it here.

These men *dared to do the difficult*. That is where faith always manifests itself. It was not easy to bring this man to the Lord. They had to carry him, perhaps a great distance, through the streets of the city. When they found the doorway blocked, they had to carry him up an outside stairway to the roof. We do not know how heavy he was, but it is not easy to carry a full-grown man up a flight of stairs. Yet these men managed this difficult task. They dared to do the difficult. What an illustration this gives us of bringing people to Christ!

Then, notice that they *dared to do the unorthodox*. They were not limited by the fact that it was not at all customary to break up a roof. When they found that the door was blocked, they did not sit down, as we probably would have done, and appoint a committee to research the various ways to get to Jesus. No, they just did what was necessary and risked the disapproval not only of the owner of the house but also of every person there by interrupting the meeting in order to get their friend to Jesus. The remarkable thing is that Jesus never rebuked them. He never does. There is never an incident recorded in which Jesus got upright or disturbed about an interruption by someone intent on receiving something from Him and pressing through to Him despite the disapproval of those around. These men dared to do the unorthodox.

Finally, they *dared to do the costly*. Somebody had to pay for that roof. Imagine the face of the owner, sitting there at the feet of Jesus, when he hears this scratching on the roof. He looks up, and, to his amazement, the tiles begin to move. Then daylight appears, and suddenly he has a large hole in his roof! I do not know what his thoughts were. He probably wondered if his homeowner's policy would cover it. Or maybe he was mentally adding up the bill to present to these men. But somebody had to pay that bill, somebody repaired that roof, and surely it was one, if not all, of these men. They dared to do the costly. That is faith! They laid it on the line—at cost to themselves. What a witness this is to what it takes to bring people to Christ!

*Lord, grant to me the faith to move out in ways that are difficult, unorthodox, and even costly to bring men and women to You, the only true healer of hurts.*

## THE SCANDAL MAKER

READ: Mark 2:13–3:6

*While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him (Mark 2:15).*

This evidently was a farewell dinner Matthew gave for his friends, his tax-collecting buddies. He was saying farewell to his work and friends and leaving to follow Jesus, the one who would travel from place to place. It was also an opportunity to introduce them to his newfound Lord.

What a collection of rascals must have been there that day! All the tax collectors of the city, all the sinners, all the despised social outcasts were sitting there. As the scribes of the Pharisees passed by, they saw that right in the midst of it all, among the “beer bottles” and the “poker chips,” sat Jesus. And they were absolutely scandalized! It was obvious that He was the friend of these men. He was not lecturing them. He was sitting among them and eating and drinking with them. The scribes were simply appalled at this and called the disciples aside: “Why does he do things like that? Doesn't he know who these people are?”

Jesus' answer is very revealing. He actually agrees with their remarks. He says, in effect, “You're right, these are sick, hurting, troubled men. Their style of life has damaged them deeply.

They don't see life rightly; they are covering up many evils; they are false in many ways. You're right, these are sick men. But where else would a doctor be?”

He says something to them that rightly focuses their attention and turns their gaze back toward themselves. He says, “I came

to call not the righteous, but sinners.” That is, those who think they are righteous, as these Pharisees did, are actually more needy than those they regard as social outcasts. These Pharisees were actually more deeply disturbed than the tax collectors and sinners, but they did not know it. But Jesus was saying to them, “To those who think they're righteous, I have absolutely nothing to say. But to these who know they're sick and are open for help, I am fully available as a minister to their souls.”

Our Lord made several things emphatically clear by this reply. First, He indicated strongly that when people think they have no need of help from God, they are in no position to be helped. There is nothing to say to them. But our Lord always put His efforts where men and women were open to help, where they were hurting so much they knew they needed help.

The second thing our Lord reveals is that people are more important than prejudice. Prejudices are preconceived notions formed before we have sufficient knowledge, usually mistaken or distorted ideas with which we have grown up. When prejudices are in opposition to the needs of people, they are to be swept aside without any hesitation. We Christians must learn to treat people like this—regardless of what their outward appearance may be. That is the way Jesus approached people everywhere.

*Father, thank You for Jesus' courage, which dared to challenge human traditions. Grant that I may see myself and others as You see us—sick people in need of a physician.*

## THE PERILS OF POPULARITY

READ: Mark 3:7–35

*Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon (Mark 3:7–8).*

We have difficulty grasping the size of this crowd. This was not just a few people, or even a few thousand. There were literally tens of thousands of people, undoubtedly, in this crowd. They came from all over this country and beyond. They flocked out from all the cities to hear this amazing prophet who had risen in Galilee and was saying such startling things.

You can see how Mark traces the emphasis upon the crowd throughout this division. In verse 20 he says, “and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.” Then, in verse 32: “a crowd was sitting around him.” And in chapter 4, verse 1: “Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake . . .” And then, in verse 36, Mark says, “Leaving the crowd,” they went across to the other side of the lake. In chapter 5, verse 21: “When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake.” And in verse 24: “A large crowd followed and pressed around him.” So this is the period when Jesus is pressed by the great masses of people, the period of His greatest popularity.

For many, this has been the measure of Jesus’ success, as it would often be in eval-

uating a successful person today. Anybody who can achieve a great crowd-following is regarded as a success. Today we call these people “stars”—there are star actors, star athletes, star singers, star politicians—various people who have attained what in our day is a mark of success. No wonder the title of one of today’s most popular musicals is *Jesus Christ, Superstar*. He is the one who drew all these great multitudes out from the cities of His day.

But as you read this account through, you see that Mark’s intention is to underscore the weakness of popularity; the empty, hollow worthlessness of being popular; and how much damage and danger popularity produced in our Lord’s ministry. One of the worst things that can happen to us, as this account makes clear, is to become caught up in a popular movement. False forces arise out of it. That is the whole thrust of this section. Mis-emphases easily spring into being and wrongful attitudes arise readily in a popular movement. Popularity, therefore, ought to be watched carefully. And when a movement is popular, as Christianity is popular in many places today, we must be careful that we are listening to the voice and the Spirit of God.

*Father, thank You for the truth as it is in Jesus.  
Help me to beware of the perils of popularity.*

## SEED THOUGHTS

READ: Mark 4:1–29

*He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how” (Mark 4:26–27).*

This is a secret of the kingdom of God, and to me it is one of the most encouraging of all the parables Jesus ever uttered. He is speaking of how this rule of God increases, how it grows in a life. He explains it as a coming to harvest by a patient expectation that God will work. The key of this whole passage is, “the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.” That is, there are forces at work that will be faithful to perform their work—whether a farmer stews and frets about it or not. Farmers do what they can do, what is expected of them. But then God must work. And God will work. And in the confidence of that, this farmer rests secure.

As Jesus draws the picture, this farmer goes out to sow. It is hard work as he sows the field, but this is what he can do. But then he goes home and goes to bed. He does not sit up all night biting his fingernails, wondering if the seed fell in the right places or whether it will take root. Nor does he rise the next morning and go out and dig it up to see whether or not it has sprouted yet. He rests secure in the fact that God is at work, that He has a part in this process, and He must do it; no one can do it for Him. But he will faithfully perform it. So the farmer rests secure, knowing that as the seed grows there are stages that are observable: “first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.” It is only as the grain is ripe that he is called into action again. When the harvest is ready, then he is to act once more.

This is exactly what Paul describes for us in that passage in 1 Corinthians 3:9a: “For we are God’s fellow workers.” This is the way we ought to expect Him to work. It involves a witness first, perhaps a word of teaching or exhortation to someone—or to ourselves. And then an inevitable process begins, one that takes time and patience and allows God to work. One of the most destructive forces at work in the church today is our insistent demand for instant results. We want to have immediate conversions, immediate responses every time we speak. We tend not to allow time for the Word to take root and grow and come to harvest.

I have watched a boy in Peninsula Bible Church (PBC) growing up since grade school. I watched him come into adolescence and enter into a period of deep and bitter rebellion against God. I watched his parents, hurt and crushed by his attitudes, yet nevertheless praying for him—saying what they could to him—but above all holding him up in prayer. I watched the whole process as the seed that had been sown in his heart took root and began to grow. There were tiny observable signs of change occurring. Gradually he came back to the Lord. And as an adult young man, he asked me to fill out a reference for him to go to seminary. That is the Word growing secretly. The sower knows not how it happens but can rest secure in this.

Our Lord is teaching us the fantastic truth that God is at work. It does not all depend on us!

*Thank You, Lord, that I can trust that as I do my part and sow the seed of Your Word wherever I can, You will do the rest.*

## SECRETS REVEALED

READ: Mark 4:30–34

*With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand (Mark 4:33).*

This verse presents one great rule of revelation in the words “as much as they could understand.” Jesus teaches people only as they can take it. This is the rule upon which God works with us. He does not show us everything at once. If He did, He would destroy us.

One man who attended a pastors’ seminar held at Peninsula Bible Church was a great big man. He was drinking in all that was given to him, and at our closing meeting it was amusing to watch him. He was like a child around a Christmas tree, so turned on by all he had discovered that he was just glowing, going around hugging everyone he met. He told me, “Oh, this has been so great! I’d like to go home and take my Bible and get into it and find so much more of this.” Then he stopped himself and said, “But I suppose if I did, it would kill me! I just couldn’t handle it.” And he was right; he could not have handled it. It would have been too much. And God knows that and does not show you any more than you are able to handle.

That is the glory and the wonder of the Scriptures. They are put together in such an amazing way that it takes both the Word and the Spirit to understand the Bible. You can read the Word, and if you are not ready for them and open to them, those words will not say a thing to you. But if you are open, you will learn something from them. The next time you can come back, read the same words, and learn something more. Each time you will learn something more.

It never ceases to refresh your spirit and instruct your mind and to open and expand your capacity to receive from God. That is the way God teaches us truth—as we are able to bear it.

And this is true also of His revelation to us about ourselves. One of the things about Scripture is that it shows you who you are and who you have been all along. God is gracious to us that way. He does not just rip the veil off, and suddenly you see the whole ghastly thing. If He did, we would be wiped out. But He lifts it little by little. You shake and tremble and say, “Is that the way I’ve been?” You are aghast at the way you have been treating people, and you think, “Thank God that’s over!” The next week He lifts it a little higher. You shake and tremble and go through it again and say, “At last we got to the bottom!” Then God lifts it high enough for you to see more, and you are wiped out again. But you handle it, little by little. Because, along with the revelation of yourself, He also reveals Himself and His adequacy to handle your inadequacies.

Is it not wonderful that He understands us that way and deals with us like that? If He revealed the glories of heaven to us suddenly, every one of us would be running out to jump into the ocean, to get there as fast as possible. But He lifts the veil only a little at a time, as we are able to bear it.

*Open my eyes, Father, that I may see glimpses of truth you have for me. Help me to understand what I read and to search out what I do not understand.*

## NO FAITH

READ: Mark 4:35–5:20

*Do you still have no faith? (Mark 4:40c).*

This is why people become afraid—because they lose faith. Faith is the answer to fear. Faith is always the answer to our fears, regardless of what they are. Jesus put His finger right on it: “Do you still have no faith?”

Well, evidently they did not. They had forgotten all the things He said to them in the Sermon on the Mount about the extent of God’s care for them: “Are you not much more valuable than flowers and birds? God cares for them; will he not much more care for you, O you of little faith?” (cf. Matthew 6:30). Here Jesus was in the boat with them; their fate would be His fate; and yet they had forgotten this.

How would these men have acted, do you think, if they had faith? Suppose their faith had been strong—their faith in Him and in God’s care and love—what would they have done? One thing is certain: they would not have wakened Him; they would have let Him rest. He was tired and needed the rest badly. They would have done so because their faith would have reminded them of two great facts: First, the boat will not sink; it cannot sink when the Master of ocean and earth and sky is in it. Second, the storm will not last forever.

A good friend of mine, a handsome young evangelist from another country, told me about all the troubles he and his wife were going through. He was dejected. She was struggling with severe physical problems, ill health arising from asthma and bronchitis, which constantly kept her down. They had gone through years of struggle with this condition of hers already,

and it seemed to pull the bottom out of everything he attempted to do. Here they were planning to go back to their own country, and now she was sick again. He came to me discouraged.

I remember turning to this incident in Mark and reciting this story and saying to him, “Remember, the boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever. That is having faith—to remember those facts.” He thanked me, we prayed together, and he left. I did not see him for a couple of months; then we ran into each other. I said, “How are things going? How is your wife?” He said, “Oh, not much better. She’s still having terrible struggles. She can’t breathe and can’t take care of the children or the house, and we have a hard time. But I do remember two things: the boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever!” So I prayed with him again.

After a while I received a note from him. He and his family had gone back to their country, and there they had found the answer. A doctor discovered a minor deficiency in his wife’s diet that needed to be remedied. When that was done, the asthma and bronchitis disappeared, and she was in glorious, radiant health, and they were rejoicing together. At the bottom of the page he had written, “The boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever.”

*I thank You, Lord, that You are here with me to comfort and strengthen me, to reassure me, and to take me through whatever storms may come. I know You are not here to stop the storms from coming, but to take me through them.*

## SEEING THROUGH

READ: Mark 5:21–6:6

*He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village (Mark 6:5–6).*

We can gather up the meaning of this whole account in just a few words: Limited views mean limited lives. That is, if your view of life is so narrow and crabbed, so withered and shrunken as to include nothing but what you can see and feel and taste and smell and hear and reason, then your life is going to be horribly deprived and poverty stricken. This is how it was in Nazareth. Jesus had been in Nazareth the year before. They tried to kill Him on that occasion because He would not do what they wanted. Now He comes back again and teaches in the synagogue, and they are astonished. They ask the right questions: “Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to Him? What mighty works are wrought by His hands!”

But their answers to their own questions are horribly limited. “Who is this? Is this not the carpenter? Why, He made the table in our house. I remember when we used to feed Him tea and sandwiches for lunch when He came to help us build the house where I live! He was just a carpenter! And His brothers and sisters live here—we know the whole family! Why, He couldn’t be this powerful a man!” And they did the incredible—they took refuge in that final resort of all weak and small minds—they ridiculed Him. They took offense at Him and began to discount all He had done.

Therefore, Jesus pointed out to them that this is characteristic of fallen human nature. There was no recognition of His worth, no honor accorded Him in His own hometown. And as a result, there was no mighty work done there. He responded to the few who had faith, but there was nothing the town could boast of. And is it not amazing that through all these centuries, though Nazareth has never been forgotten as the town in which Jesus grew up, yet to this very day it is regarded in Palestine with some sense of embarrassment! They missed their great opportunity.

What is this all saying—this entire account of the healing of the woman, the raising of Jairus’s daughter, and the reception given him by the people of Nazareth? It is saying to us today, “Lift up your eyes and look beyond the visible to the realities of God. Live in the full dimensions of life, as God intended life to be.” Life can never be explained entirely in terms of the natural. We are left impoverished and despairing if all we have to depend on is our natural resources, natural power. But God is rich in grace, rich in power, rich in inward strength and sympathy, and His cry to us is, “No longer be unbelieving, but believe and have faith that I am at work, and I will enrich your life beyond your wildest dreams.”

*Teach me, Lord, to respond with the touch of faith—not the thronging of admiration, but the touch of faith—to this Blessed One who, now in our midst, is ready to meet our need.*