

Jesus Walking on the Sea: Mark 6:45-56
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Picture yourself in a boat this morning. That's where we're going to be as we consider this story together. We're the folks in the boat. And the question is: what are we to make of this man, Jesus? It's the account of Jesus walking on the sea. It's an astonishing and memorable miracle of Jesus, and it's even much more than an astonishing and memorable miracle, as we're going to see. It is a revelation of who Jesus is. It is a vivid display, not only of His miraculous power, but of His divine identity. And it's also a picture of how Jesus cares for His church. The disciples in the boat are an image of the church. And that's why we should read this story from the vantage point of these disciples. As followers of Christ, we too are disciples. Therefore we're going to see ourselves in this story in various ways.

1) Jesus prays for His disciples

The first thing for us to observe in this text is that Jesus prays for His disciples. He sent His disciples away. He sent the crowds away. And He went up by Himself to pray on the mountain. Jesus communes with the Father. He loves the Father. He submits to the Father. He does all the Father's will. And He prays to the Father.

It doesn't say here what Jesus was praying about, but we can be sure that the disciples were a major focus of His prayers. Jesus prays for His disciples. That should be a great comfort to us. We're the ones in the boat. Jesus has sent us out onto the lake, and He is up on the mountain praying for us. Romans 8:34 says, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." What an awesome truth that is! Jesus died for us, and He rose from the dead, and He ascended to the Father where He sits at His right hand, and Jesus prays for us!

When we wonder if anyone cares about us, when we wonder if anyone ever prays for us, we can have confidence that there is always Someone who is passionately interceding on our behalf. Jesus, Himself, prays to the Father concerning His disciples.

What kinds of things does He pray for us? John 17 tells us. It is the high priestly prayer of Jesus, and in it He prays for all those whom the Father has given to Him. He prays, "keep them from the evil one." He prays, "sanctify them in the truth." He prays for unity, "that they may all be one." And He prays, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me

where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” We also see Jesus praying for Peter in Luke 22:32, “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” These are the things Jesus prays for His disciples. He wants us to be protected from the evil one. He wants us to be sanctified. He wants us to be unified. He wants us to see His glory. He wants our faith to be preserved and strengthened.

Surely these were many of the things Jesus was praying while He was on the mountain that night. He had sent His disciples out onto the lake, and He was on the mountain interceding for them. Oh, Father, keep them from the evil one. Sanctify them. Unify them. Establish their faith. Let them see my glory! And in a short time Jesus will manifest His glory to them in a most remarkable way.

2) Jesus sends His disciples into hardships

The second thing we see here is that Jesus sends His disciples into hardships. After the feeding of the five thousand, verse 45 says, “Immediately [Jesus] made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side.” Jesus *made* them go. He didn’t give them an option of staying or going. He told them to go, and they went. They obeyed. And what did they get for their obedience? Hardship. It was not an easy trip. It was not smooth sailing. It was not a peaceful row across a calm lake. The conditions were very difficult. The wind was beating against them, and therefore they could not make progress. It doesn’t sound like it was as bad as the storm they encountered in chapter 4, but this still would have been very frustrating. They weren’t fearing for their lives, but they were probably beginning to wonder if they were ever going to get to their destination.

Now, remember that we’re in the boat. We’re there among the disciples, and we regularly experience the hardships of obeying Jesus. Jesus tells us to do something, and we do it. And then we find out that the thing He told us to do is a lot harder than we thought it would be. It would be a lot easier, in fact, if we just stayed at home. As we walk in obedience to the Lord, the wind will often be against us. It will not be smooth sailing. This is a reality check that we need to face up to. If you’re a new believer, or not yet a believer, you need to understand that the Christian life is not easy. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a promise that you will live a pain-free, comfortable, affluent life. That is not in the Bible. Our Lord did not have an easy life, and neither will those who follow Him. We need to understand that. We need to be prepared for that. We need to embrace that as an essential component of discipleship.

1 Peter 4:12-13 says this: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you [note: trials are not strange, but normal]. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." As disciples of Christ, we are not to expect ease and comfort in this life. We are to expect suffering and trials in this life. But we can look forward to the glorious life we will have in heaven with Christ, and that hope will enable us to endure the hardships we face now. That's the Christian life. That's discipleship. We obey Him, knowing that obedience will often involve very hard things that will discourage us, frustrate us, and break our hearts. If this point is discouraging to you, the next point should be a great encouragement.

3) Jesus sees His disciples' hardships.

The next point is that Jesus sees His disciples' hardships. It is true that He sends His disciples into hardships, but He does not abandon them in their hardships. He sees them and has compassion on them and goes to them. Verse 47 says that "the boat was out on the sea [literally, "in the middle of the sea"], and [Jesus] was alone on the land." Then verse 48 says a remarkable thing that would be easy to pass over. It says that Jesus saw them. And we have to stop there to ask, how did He see them? If they were in the middle of the sea, they could have been 3 to 4 miles from where Jesus was on the mountain. And not only that, it was dark. It was night time. But Jesus was able to see them. Jesus is divine. He is God. And He shares in the divine attributes, one of them being omniscience. He is all-knowing, all-seeing.

The beauty of this scene is that Jesus sees His disciples in their distress. Even though they felt entirely alone, Jesus was intimately aware of what they were going through. It says, "[He] saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them." He knew exactly what their situation was. He saw the strain of their muscles pulling the oars. He saw the sweat on their faces. He saw the concern and frustration in their hearts.

It reminds us of the passage we studied last week, where it says that Jesus "saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (6:34). This is the way Jesus looked at the disciples. He came to them as their compassionate Shepherd.

I know that some of you are going through severe trials right now. Some of you have been through very difficult trials recently. Others will certainly encounter various hardships in the near future. What we need to know is that Jesus sees us in our difficult circumstances. He has sent us into these storms, and He

looks on us with compassion as the wind is against us. He sees that we are making headway painfully. I want to encourage you this morning with the truth of Jesus' sovereignty and omniscience. He is in control over your trials, and He sees and knows every detail of what you're going through. Therefore, have hope. As bleak as your circumstances may seem, Jesus has a good and gracious plan to build our faith and to glorify His Name.

4) Jesus manifests His glory

This leads us to the fourth point. Jesus manifests His glory. That's what this amazing miracle is about. Jesus sees His disciples in their distress, and He goes to them in order to show them His glory. It was about the fourth watch of the night, which is between 3am and 6am, and Jesus came to them, walking on the sea. It's an astonishing statement, said in such a matter-of-fact way. Surely as Peter shared his eye-witness accounts with Mark, and as Mark wrote these things down, they were amazed again at what had happened. Jesus was walking on the sea. How else could they say it? That's what happened.

People have tried to come up with all sorts of interpretations of this that remove the supernatural element of it. They'll say that "walking *on* the sea" should actually be translated "walking *beside* the sea." Maybe Jesus was walking along the shore, or walking in the shallow water near the shore, and to the disciples it looked like He was walking on the water. Or maybe He was walking on a sand bar that jutted out into the lake. But none of these suggestions account for what the text actually says. They all come to the text with the presupposition that supernatural events simply cannot happen.

The question, then, that confronts today's skeptic is the same question that confronted the disciples on the boat that night. Could this man really be who He says He is? Could it be that God's own Son came to earth and took on human flesh and proclaimed the Gospel and showed His authority over demons and disease and death? Could it be that He also demonstrated His authority over nature by calming a storm and even by walking on the water?

That is the only legitimate way of reading this text. The boat was out in the middle of the sea, and Jesus went out to them, walking *on* the sea. Jesus had been *on* the land at the end of verse 47, and now He is *on* the sea. It is a remarkable, supernatural, miraculous event.

The next phrase is very curious, and it's only found here in Mark. It doesn't show up in Matthew 14 or John 6 where this miracle is also recorded. But in Mark's account it says at the end of verse 48 that "He meant to pass by them." What does this

mean? On the surface, it sounds cold-hearted. Jesus sees the disciples in their distress, and then He goes all the way out there just to pass by them?! He's not going to help them? What's going on here?

Something very profound is going on here, and the significance of it starts to emerge when we look at the Old Testament background. In the Old Testament God, and God alone, walks on the sea. In Job 9 there's a reference to this. "[God] alone stretched out the heavens and trampled on the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8). And later in Job when the Lord answers Job out of the whirlwind He says, "Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep?" (Job 38:16).¹ Only God can do something like this. That's one piece of the Old Testament backdrop. Only God can trample on the waves of the sea. Jesus is trampling on the waves of the sea. Inescapable conclusion: Jesus is God.

The other striking Old Testament connection is in the word "passed by." In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, this same word is used in Exodus 33 where the Lord makes His goodness "pass before" Moses. The word is used four times in that context.² In response to Moses' request, "Please show me your glory," the Lord said, "I will make all my goodness *pass before* you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory *passes by* I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have *passed by*." (Exodus 33:19-22, ESV)

Jesus intended to pass by His disciples, not because He didn't care about them, but because He wanted them to see His glory. This was Jesus manifesting His glory for the disciples to see. He was causing His glory to pass by them. It was the answer to the question they posed after their last traumatic boat ride. When they thought they were going to die in the storm and Jesus calmed the wind and the sea, and they said, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41). Jesus is now responding to that question with an unforgettable declaration. I am God. I am the One who tramples on the waves of the sea. I am the One who is causing my glory to pass before you, so that you might see my glory and believe.

Jesus makes this declaration not only with His miraculous actions, but with His words as well. In verse 50 the disciples were

¹ Also see Psalm 77:19; Isaiah 43:16; Habakkuk 3:15.

² Exodus 33:19, 22 (2X); 34:6

terrified, but Jesus said to them, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” That little phrase in the middle, “it is I,” translates two Greek words, *egō eimi*—“I AM.” Thus, Jesus not only does something only God can do, He also speaks in a way only God can speak. He not only possesses God’s power, He also bears God’s Name. Jesus is the great I AM. In both word and deed Jesus manifests His glory to the disciples.

The sad thing is that the disciples still don’t fully get it. But there’s a lesson here for us. In the midst of the storms of life, be on the lookout for ways that Jesus will manifest His glory. The encouragement to us is that we should have our eyes wide open to see how Jesus is going to show us His goodness and His glory in the middle of the most difficult times of our lives. Let’s not miss it. Let’s not mistake it for something else. Instead, let’s be anticipating and expecting that Jesus is going to make Himself known to us in our trials, and let’s be watchful to see how that is going to happen.

The other encouragement here is to see our Lord Jesus treading on the very waves that are causing a hardship for His disciples. Those waves are no hindrance to Almighty, omnipotent Jesus. He controls those waves and can calm them at any moment. He is sovereign over everything that brings us trouble! He was in control of the wind and the waves that were keeping the disciples from making any headway. And He is in control of the wind and the waves that are plaguing your life today. The things that make you think, I’m not getting anywhere in life. I’m not making any progress. I’m getting absolutely nowhere. Jesus is bigger than all of those things. He tramples on them. And He can remove them at any moment. But He sends you into those storms in order that you might see Him and know Him in a way that is impossible otherwise.

5) The disciples are astounded

The fifth thing to observe here is that the disciples are astounded. And we have to give some thought here to what that actually means. What was going on in their hearts as Jesus revealed His glory to them? Well, they were first terrified. They thought He was a ghost. But then after He spoke to them, and after He got into the boat and the wind ceased, it says “they were utterly astounded.” They went from terrified to astounded. Now they know it’s not a ghost; it’s Jesus. And the reaction resembles their reaction after Jesus calmed the storm in chapter 4. They had been afraid of the storm outside the boat. But then they saw Jesus’ power, and “they were filled with a great fear” (Mark 4:41). They were fearful, astonished, perplexed. Now similar emotions were

again swirling around in the storm of their hearts. They were utterly astounded.

The question comes up, then, why were they astounded if they had experienced something similar already? And not just one similar thing, but many similar things. They had seen Jesus calm the storm, they had seen Jesus heal the sick and cast out demons, even raise the dead. Most recently, they had just seen Him feed thousands of people with just five loaves and two fish. By now wouldn't they just say, Wow, and He can walk on water, too! But they were surprised. They were completely astonished. They could hardly believe what they were seeing.

Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and with Peter's first-hand insights, tells us why the disciples were astounded. Verse 52 tells us, "for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." This is going to come up again in chapter 8. Even after Jesus feeds another massive crowd, the disciples are still hard hearted. They still don't grasp the extent of what's going on in their midst. Their hearts are a mixture of belief and unbelief, perception and confusion.

Matthew's account fills out the picture for us. If you're thinking that something is missing in this story, you're right. In Mark and in John, the part about Peter stepping out of the boat onto the water is not included. But Matthew records that. And the other thing that Matthew includes that Mark and John do not is the mention of the disciples worshipping Jesus after He got into the boat. Matthew 14:32-33 says, "And when they [meaning Jesus and Peter] got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."" That sounds pretty different from what Mark records. But I think this points to the mixture of belief and unbelief in the hearts of the disciples. They were amazed, astounded, and they even worshiped Jesus as the Son of God. But at the same time they were hard hearted and lacked understanding. They had some faith, a little faith, but were still far from fully comprehending Jesus' identity. They had not understood about the loaves when Jesus fed the five thousand, and they will not understand about the loaves again when Jesus feeds the four thousand.

Again, this is us in the boat with our fragmented hearts. We worship Jesus as the Son of God, but we are also so slow to understand. We, too, are hard hearted. We can easily miss the amazing things God is doing around us, because we lack understanding and have hard hearts. Let this be a reminder for us to be always on the lookout for how Jesus is providing and protecting and guiding and revealing. Jesus is doing miraculous things that attest to His identity and reveal His glory, if we have eyes to see.

6) Jesus continues to show His power

The sixth and last point is in verses 53-56 that Jesus continues to show His power. This is a summary report of healings that Jesus performed in various villages and cities and throughout the countryside. The four Gospels of the New Testament are not exhaustive accounts of everything Jesus did. John sums it up well at the end of his gospel. He writes, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). These verses at the end of Mark 6 point to the same thing. Jesus' power is unlimited, and the amazing miracles of His earthly ministry were innumerable. Everywhere He went, people were flocking to be near Him. And even those who touched the fringe of His garment were healed.

I think the encouraging thing to see as we think about Jesus' disciples, is to realize that Jesus still has the disciples with Him. He continues to show them His power. He doesn't leave the disciples to themselves. He doesn't say, I'm finished with you guys. If you haven't gotten it by now, you're a lost cause. If you didn't understand about the loaves, and if you were so surprised to see Me walking on the water, I don't think there's any hope for you.

Jesus does not abandon His disciples. He continues to shepherd them. He continues to show them His glory. He remains committed to them in spite of their hard hearts, in spite of their lack of understanding.

To conclude, let me ask you: Where are you today, as you picture yourself in the boat? What do you make of this man, Jesus? Are you terrified of Him, as though He were a ghost? Are you skeptical, doubting that this account is even true? Are you hard hearted? Do you lack understanding? Are you missing the miraculous things Jesus is doing right before your eyes? Or do you receive Him today as the great I AM, the One who tramples on the waves of the sea, as the One who shows us His glory in the midst of our struggles? In response to this we should cry out to Him in repentance and faith. We should cry out to Jesus like the man in Mark 9 who says, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). That's what we need Him to do, and that's what He will do for His disciples as He prays for us and sends us into hardships and sees us in our hardships and manifests His glory for us to see and as He continues to show us His power. This is our mighty Savior, our compassionate Shepherd, who will not leave us to ourselves. May we love Him and trust in Him today.