

Jesus Walks on the Sea of Galilee

John 6:15-21

John 6:15-21 - *“Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.*

¹⁶ *Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. ¹⁸ Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. ¹⁹ So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. ²⁰ But He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹ Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.”*

Background Notes

A few background notes will help us set the stage for the teaching points of this section of Scripture. In John 20:30-31 the apostle John gives us his purpose for writing this Gospel: *“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”* John selected seven miracles to show that Jesus could be none other than the Son of God. These seven miracles are called “Sign Miracles” because they clearly point to the deity of Christ.

Two of these Sign Miracles are found in John 6: Sign Miracle #4, the miracle of the feeding of five thousand, and Sign Miracle #5, the miracle of Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee. From the accounts of the “Feeding of the Five Thousand” in all four Gospels, it appears that the miracle took place somewhere along the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus multiplied five small loaves of bread and two small fish so that thousands of hungry people were fed. Remember, it was five thousand men, and women and children besides – so maybe as many as 12,00 or more had as much as they wanted! What a great miracle! Certainly this was a sign of the deity of Christ.

Because of this great miracle, verse 15 says: *“when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.”* The people wanted to make Him their king - not because they recognized Him as the Savior and were ready to repent from their sins, but because they wanted a leader who would overthrow the Roman occupation. Rome ruled all of the Holy Land at this time. So Jesus *“departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.”* The “mountain” would have been one in the range of high hills northeast of the shores of the Sea of Galilee, known today as the Golan Heights.

Meanwhile, the disciples had started to cross the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly a strong wind arose! Because of the geographic situation of the Sea of Galilee, strong windstorms can build quite quickly. On some of our Holy Land study tours we have seen how the wind can come up very suddenly and dramatically. The disciples were in great danger on the troubled sea.

At this point our Lord came to them, walking on the water! Quite a miracle! Not only that, as soon as the Lord got into the boat, the winds stopped and they were immediately at their destination! This display of the Lord's power over natural law is certainly a clear sign of His deity.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The Lord's comforting presence is not always immediate.

In Psalm 23:4 we read: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."* The Lord has promised believers that He will be with us through all the experiences of life, and that He will comfort us. But our realization of the Lord's comforting presence is not always immediate. I think we see that point illustrated in this miracle.

While the disciples were straining at the oars, the Lord was alone on the mountain, praying. From the accounts in Matthew and Mark we know that the Lord saw them out there on the stormy lake, battered by the waves and straining at the oars, but the disciples didn't realize this at that point. For the disciples it was a dark and scary and dangerous time. They would have loved to have the Lord there in the boat with them. But the Lord was not there in the boat with them – in fact, He didn't come to them until the fourth watch of the night, somewhere between 3 and 6 AM.

This whole event is a picture of our present life as believers. It's a spiritual picture. As the Lord was on the mountain, praying, so He is now in heaven, making intercession on our behalf. Hebrews 7:25 says: *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."* Meanwhile, we are on the troubled "sea of life." How many of you would agree that there are troubled times on the sea of life? (OK - I didn't see all the hands go up. What's the deal here? You must have it easy!)

But you see, when we are facing trouble and adverse winds on the sea of life, the Lord knows - and the Lord cares. His eye is on us, even when we may not realize it. The Lord can come into any troubled situation and bring peace and calm. However, sometimes (as here in this miracle) we are confused and afraid, and we may not immediately be aware of the Lord's comforting presence.

For example, after my father's death the "sea of life" was very troubled for my mother. As a Christian, she was trusting in the Lord, and she knew that the Lord was caring for her, but her realization of His comforting presence was not as "immediate" as she had expected. The Lord permitted her to go through a period of troubled adjustments.

Maybe some of you have had a similar experience of the Lord “delaying” His comforting presence “until the fourth watch of the night.” This doesn’t mean that the Lord doesn’t love you, and it doesn’t mean that the Lord doesn’t care about your difficulties, or that He’s not interceding for you. And it doesn’t necessarily mean that you don’t have enough faith. The truth is, the Lord’s comforting presence is not always immediate.

2. The Lord's comforting presence is not always obvious.

When the Lord did come to the disciples, they were frightened. According to Matthew and Mark’s accounts, they thought He was a ghost. But then the Lord said to them, *“It is I; do not be afraid”* (v20).

By the way, the word “I” in this verse is the well known “I AM” – the name God calls Himself (Exodus 3:14). In John 8:58 the Lord Jesus said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”* That same expression is used here. The Lord used the same name for Himself when He said: *“It is I [I AM]; do not be afraid.”* The Lord’s use of the name of God for Himself is yet another claim to deity.

In the spiritual picture here, I think we see another lesson: the Lord’s comforting presence is not always obvious to us. The Lord was there, but at first they were afraid – they didn’t realize that He was with them.

Here’s an illustration from my own life. Just before I went into the Lord’s work fulltime, I had changed jobs, and we had moved to a different location. But things hadn’t worked out as I had thought. The job was not what I had been led to expect, and my boss was not a nice person to work with (and there’s a lot more I could say there! I’m sure some of you have had similar experiences). The “sea of life” was troubled at that time, and frankly, I was a bit afraid. In the midst of this adverse situation, little did I realize that the Lord was working behind the scenes in all of this! The Lord was using these events - our move, my negative experiences with the job and my boss - to show us the door He was opening for Christian ministry! That experience helped us to realize that the Lord really was there - but at first it wasn’t obvious to us! Maybe you have had a similar experience in your Christian life. When we’re in the midst of the troubled sea, the Lord’s comforting presence is not always obvious.

Practical Applications

1. How well do you handle popularity?

“When Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.” What would you have done in that situation? Chances are, if people wanted to make me a popular hero, a leader, a king, maybe I would let my arm be twisted? But the Lord knew that this was not part of the eternal plan of God for His earthly life, and He withdrew by Himself - alone - so that He could be in communion with the Father.

What about us? How well do we handle popularity and prestige? You might say, “Well, I don’t have to worry about that, because I’ll never be popular!” But you never know when you might unexpectedly be thrust into the spotlight, or into a leadership position, or become a hero for some good deed that you do. It happens to the most unlikely people at the most unlikely times. You might be put into a situation where, for some reason or another, people begin to sign your praises. Would you follow the pattern of our Lord here? Would you withdraw to be alone with God, and perceive HIS plan for your life? We need to do that.

When you are a hero, or if you are in a prosperous or popular position, you will be confronted with many pitfalls and temptations. The desire of our natural “self” for recognition, success, fame, and money is very strong. We need to get alone with the Lord to recognize and avoid the allure and snares of this world! How well do you handle popularity?

2. How well do you handle adversity?

The disciples were straining at the oars, desperately rowing against the strong and adverse winds. When the Lord first came to them, they were so frightened that they didn’t even recognize Him. But once they knew it was the Lord and they welcomed Him into the boat, there was peace - and their faith in the Lord was strengthened. We need to learn to handle adverse situation in the same way.

Some Christians don’t handle adversity well. They fail to recognize that the Lord really is with them, and that He really does have a plan for their lives, and He allows adversity for a particular reason. They remain confused and frightened. They insist on trying to out-row the storm in their own way and in their own strength. They don’t let the Lord bring peace to the situation. Yes, they believe in the Lord for salvation, but in their distress they just can’t seem to turn adverse situations over to the Lord, so He can provide His comfort and peace.

A Christian woman I know falls into this category. She’s a believer who is trusting in the Lord for salvation, but she doesn’t handle adversity very well. In fact, it seems that she even imagines more adversity than really exists! She can’t seem to recognize and acknowledge that any hard time that comes along our way may be situations that the Lord has **designed** and **allowed** for our eventual benefit, and an opportunity to us to grow in our faith and trust. She just doesn’t seem to be able to turn things over to Him.

What about you? Think about it. How well do **you** handle adversity?