

Jesus: The One Who Walks On Water And Heals The Hurting

Mark 6:45-56

Introduction: 1) In the conflict between supernaturalism and naturalism, between miracles and rationalism, few stories draw the “line in the sand” more clearly than Jesus walking on the water.

2) For example, you can go online and consult “Christian Biblical Errancy Debate” whose webpage states, “If you are tired of having Bible-quoting friends and relatives throw Scripture in your face and would like to have an avalanche of information to throw back at them, you have come to the right place....We provide a level playing field for Biblicists to defend the Bible’s absurdities, contradictions, fallacies and inconsistencies.”

3) Now, how do they handle the absurdity of the miracle of Jesus walking on water? They do not take the route of the Enlightenment skeptics who postulated “an optical illusion caused by Jesus walking along the shore, or a deception caused by his walking on a sand bar” (Edwards, 196). No, they take the more post-modern approach and consign it to the fanciful world of mythology, comparing Jesus to the Egyptian sun-god Horus who walked on mythical waters in another world. Their certain conclusion, “When it is conclusively proved that the Christian miracles are nothing more than a pagan mode of symbolic representation literalized, there is no longer any question of contravening, or breaking, or even challenging any well-known laws of nature. The discussion as to the probability or possibility of miracle on the old grounds of belief and doubt is closed forever.” In other words, “dead men don’t rise” and “men don’t walk on water.”

4) I hope you will not be surprised when I say I agree! Men don’t rise from the dead and they don’t walk on water! However, God can do both. Further, in 2 Peter 1:16, the apostle Peter himself reminds us, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you

the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” The early church was not ignorant of the mythical views of the Egyptians, Greeks or Romans. They knew of them and they rejected them. Instead, they followed and worshipped the one that, as 1 John 1:1 says, “We have heard, seen with our own eyes, looked upon and have touched with our hands...” Further, this story has none of the trapping of mythology. It speaks in terms that are physical, historical and specific. Once more it gives all the evidences of a real event told by an eyewitness (e.g. Peter). Finally, if Jesus was truly raised from the dead, we can really believe He walked on the water (6:45-52) and that He really healed the hurting (6:53-56).

Transition: Now, having dealt with the objections of the rationalist and skeptics, what is it that God would have us learn that we might not lack understanding and have a heart that is hardened? (v. 52). Just what does He want us to do in response to the “wonder on the water?”

I. Jesus is the one in whom we should have faith. 6:45-52

- Jesus has just fed the 20,000 (Mark 6:30-44). Messianic excitement is at a feverish pitch. The crowds would make Him King and do it now (John 6:14-15). However, it is neither the time nor the means whereby He would receive His kingdom. There is a throne that does await Him, but it is on a road that has a cross ahead of it.
- This “man for others” has business to which He must attend before He sits on the throne prepared for Him by His Father (2 Sam. 7:14-16; Ps. 2; Ps. 110). That business includes a revelation of His deity on the Sea of Galilee as He supernaturally strolls across the sea to save His disciples.
- This obedient Son will do God’s work God’s way and be glorified in it all, on the water or on the cross.

1) We are guided by His plans. 6:45

- Jesus takes charge in this politically charged situation and “immediately” makes the disciples “get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida.” This is the first mention of Bethsaida in Mark (cf. 8:22-26). It was located on the North shore of the Sea of Galilee, just east of the Jordan River. In Matt. 11:20-22 Jesus condemns it, along with Chorazin, for its lack of repentance in light of His mighty works done by Him in them.
- Jesus then “dismissed the crowd” sending them home. Thus the disciples are exactly where Jesus wants them to be. “He made them,” compelled and forced them to go. The implication is they did not want to, but still they obeyed.
- Spurgeon said, “their sailing was not merely under his sanction, but by his express command. They were in the right place and yet they met with a terrible storm” (“Good Cheer From Christ’s Real Presence, vol. 55, #3128). Jesus sent them into the storm. Jesus purposefully sent them into trouble!
- Jesus may indeed send us into troubles and difficulty but with a redemptive purpose. Why? It is there that our understanding of His providence and power is increased. It is there that our faith and dependence on Him and Him alone grows. His plans are not always easy or what we want, but they are always best. Believe! Don’t doubt.

2) We are encouraged by His prayers. 6:46

- Jesus leaves the crowd, goes up to an unspecified mountain (Mark does call it “the mountain”) and prays.
- It is interesting to note that Mark only records 3 prayers of Jesus.
 - 1) At the beginning of the Gospel when His ministry is being defined (1:35).

- 2) In the middle of the Gospel after He feeds the 5,000 (6:46).
- 3) Near the end of the Gospel and His ministry when He is in Gethsemane, just before He goes to the cross (14:32-42).

- What do we learn from this simple, single verse?
 - 1) Any time He faced a critical moment, Jesus prayed.
 - 2) When He prayed, He most often got away and prayed alone in private.
 - 3) In each instance when He prayed, overtones of spiritual conflict and warfare are in the air (cf. Eph. 6:18). Prayer for Jesus was intense. It was a battle. It was war. John Piper well says, “We do not know what prayer is for until we know life is war.” Jesus knew this better than any of us. He sought His Father in the heat of the battle raging about Him.
- No doubt He prayed for Himself. No doubt He prayed for the crowd for whom He had compassion. And, I suspect He prayed for His disciples who were in need of His prayers, and, His power.

3) We are blessed by His power. 6:47-50

- V. 47: It is now late in the evening. Vs. 48 says it is about the 4th watch of the night, thus between 3 and 6 am. The boat is at sea and Jesus is alone on the land enjoying prayer communion with His Father.
- V. 48: He saw them (miraculously!) struggling on the sea, “Making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.” No doubt moved again with compassion (v. 34), He does something no one had ever done before or since, “He came to them walking on the sea.” Walking perhaps several miles (Matt 14:24 says, “the boat by this time was a long way from the land”) in pitch black

darkness, our Lord makes His way to those He has called, loves and cares for. He knows where they are and what they are going through.

- The phrase “He meant to pass by them” has troubled many and raised a number of possibilities as to its meaning.
- David Garland is very helpful here as he summarizes the more common interpretations:
 - 1) Jesus intends to overtake the disciples and playfully surprise them on the other side.
 - 2) Jesus wants to pass by but does not do so when he sees the disciple’s distress. However, he has already seen them in distress before he sets out on the sea.
 - 3) Jesus is trying to test their faith.
 - 4) The phrase should be translated “he was about to pass by them.” But this is an unlikely interpretation.
 - 5) The phrase refers to the disciples’ mistaken impression of Jesus’ intentions – they think he intends to pass by them.
 - 6) The phrase means he intends simply to go beside them.
 - 7) Jesus wants to be seen walking on the sea but wishes to remain unrecognized- something that supposedly fits the author’s theology of the messianic secret.
 - 8) Another view takes its cue from Amos 7:1-8:3 and interprets the phrase metaphorically: Jesus wanted to help the disciples in their difficulty (Garland, 262).

There is, however, a better understanding of this phrase rooted in the Old Testament understanding of a theophany, an appearance and manifestation of God Himself:

- Exodus 33:18-23, “Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” And he 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. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”
- 1 Kings 19:11, “And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.”

As the Lord “passed by” Moses at Sinai and Elijah at Horeb, so now the God of the Old Testament, who is Christ, passes by His disciples that they might see His glory and believe!

- Perhaps the 12 would think of Job 9:8, 10-11 which says of God, “who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea; who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number. Behold, he

passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him.” But, they should! Now the divine presence is seen in Jesus, “the Word made flesh” (John 1:14). Only God can walk on water, and Jesus is showing them beyond question that is who He is!

- V. 49: unfortunately the disciples still, “do not see” (cf. 8:17-18). Oh, they see someone walking on the sea and they conclude it is an evil “water spirit,” a “ghost” (Gr. *phantasma*). No surprise, they scream in terror.
- V. 50: “All saw him and were terrified.” I confess to some sympathy for them. I suspect all of us would have had the same reaction. A man, no a God walking on the sea is not something you see every day or night. It is a fairly rare occurrence.
- In Matthew 14:28-31 we are given the account of Peter stepping out of the boat, walking on the water, sinking in the water, and being rescued from the water. Why does Mark leave this out? I think the answer is this: only Mark has the phrase, “He meant to pass by them.” Mark is more interested in the One walking on the water than the ones in the boat. “The Bread of Life” (John 6:35) has just fed 5,000 men plus women and children. The One who gives us “living water” (John 7:38) from which we will never thirst has just walked on the water. He chooses to focus on Him and His power to save and deliver. But, He is not finished with his portrait of the deity of this divine Servant King!

4) We are blessed by His person.

6:50-51

- This miraculous event was not just about Jesus rescuing the disciples from their problem. It was much more than that. We saw His walking on the water was a

manifestation of His deity grounded in Old Testament imagery and theology.

Now, He adds His words.

- V. 50: seeking to calm the fears and terror of the 12, Jesus gently speaks to them saying, “Take heart” (*NASV*, “take courage”, *NKJV*, “Be of good cheer”). It is a present imperative of command calling them to be brave. They are in the place of obedience and Jesus is there.
- Next, He says, “it is I” (Gr. *ego eimi*). I will return to this in a moment.
- Thirdly he says, “do not be afraid,” a command (pre. imp. with a negative) that tells them to stop an action in progress. “Stop fearing” captures the sense of what He is saying.
- V. 51 brings the episode to its climatic conclusion: “He got into the boat with them and the wind ceased” (cf. 4:39). Their response? “Utter astonishment” (*NIV*, “completely amazed”; *The Message*, “They were stunned, shaking their heads, wondering what was going on”).
- But now, what of the statement, “It is I.” Literally in the Greek text it is simply “I am.” “Take heart,” Jesus says, “I am.” These are the words God spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:14 at the burning bush! As He did in John 8:58, so now our Savior declares Himself to be the great “I AM” who led the Hebrews out of Egypt and safely through the waters of the Red Sea. Jesus not only walks where only God can walk, He also bears God’s Name! The “I AM” has passed by both showing and declaring His deity. Once more deity is in the boat! They are overwhelmed, but, they still don’t get it, and they won’t until the cross and resurrection.

- Once again we see the disciples being exposed for their lack of trust in Jesus. Will they, will we, ever learn? The miracle “about the loaves,” the feeding of the 5,000, did not make a lasting impression on them. Our text indicts them on two counts: 1) They did not understand. 2) Their hearts were hardened. They remain in ignorance and their hearts are becoming callous. Believe it or not, I find encouragement here! I see me in them! There is hope!
- Jesus could feed in excess of 20,000 persons. He had previously calmed the sea (4:35-41). Could He not protect them in this situation too? “Yes God, I know you can and have done _____, but my situation is unique, different. I know you can do the impossible but my situation is beyond impossible.” Not so with the God of Luke 1:37.
- Amazingly they receive no rebuke from their Master, the compassionate Shepherd (6:34). He knows they still have much to learn and endure. He will not give up on them. Praise God, He did not give up on me in my ignorance and hard-heartedness either. Is it the same with you? Yes! With all of us? Yes!

Transition: Jesus is the One in whom we should have faith. He has proved Himself over and over again.

II. Jesus is the one who we should come to when we hurt.

6:53-56

- Jesus has delivered the disciples from the storm on the sea. He now has more work to do. He always does.
- This is Mark’s 3rd summary report of Jesus’ Galilean ministry (1:35-39; 3:7-12). It marks the climax of His ministry in this region.

- No doubt this is a general summary of events which transpired over a period of time as the word “wherever” in verses 55 and 56 would indicate. Once more the “Compassionate Shepherd” will care for His sheep without hesitation or discrimination. They hurt and He heals. What a wonderful Savior He is.

1) Jesus can be sought by those in need. 6:53-55

- V. 53 the boat lands in the area of Gennesaret (not Bethsaida). The strong winds had sovereignly sent them to a different location but a familiar ministry. More hurting people are in need of a helping hand, a divine touch.
- V. 54 having landed the boat, they get out and “immediately” the people recognize him. Why are we not surprised?
- V. 55 the people enthusiastically run everywhere throughout “the whole region” to bring the sick to Him.

Greg Anderson, who works in the “Marketplace” focusing particularly on those who serve our country and states in the legislature and government beautifully describes what was happening, “Scenes such as those that greeted Jesus should be easily imagined....Desperate times require utilizing any available resources and space. Two thousand years ago, the resources would have included the beds on which the infirmed were brought to Jesus (probably more accurately envisioned as a mat or pallet which provided the rigidity necessary to support the person’s weight when being carried, sometimes the only earthly possession of the homeless and helpless). The best locations were deemed to be open-air marketplaces in cities large enough to have them and any open spaces in the villages and countryside where everyone gathered to buy, sell, trade and socialize. From the “big city” to the suburbs to the

country, the expectation was the same – with the needy all assembled in common areas where Jesus was likely to go, it was more likely they would experience the healing touch they sought. With the eager anticipation of a hospital patient and family members awaiting the physician’s rounds, those gathered in advance of Jesus’ arrival strained to see any indication of His imminent arrival. Many may very well have been long-time charity cases, suffering from their handicap for years. These, accustomed to begging to survive, were presumably the first to “implore Him.” (“Healing in Gennesaret,” 8-23-07; Capitol Ministries Idaho).

Jesus most certainly can be sought anywhere, anytime and by any one in need. Not a one will He turn away.

2) Jesus will bless those who believe in Him. 6:56 (cf. 5:27-29)

- Wherever He went, they brought the sick to Him and He healed them. Minimally they believed He could heal or they would not have come.
- The word translated “marketplaces: is *agora*. Men and women on mission for others brought people to the public square that they might meet and be healed by Jesus. Once there they “implored” continually (imperfect tense), “kept on pleading,” “begged” (*NKJV*), just to “touch even the fringe of his garment,” the tassels that the law required Hebrew men to wear as a reminder of the Lord’s commandments (Num 15:37-41; Deut 22:12).
- And they were not disappointed: “And as many as touched it were made well.” There was nothing magical about the tassels. It was all about having faith in the one inside that garment, deity in a 1st century Hebrew robe. God is often found in surprising places, isn’t He?

Conclusion: 1) J.I. Packer says, “The true God is great and terrible, just because He is always with me and His eye is always upon me. Living becomes an awesome business when you realize that you spend every moment of your life in the sight and company of an omniscient, omnipotent Creator.” (*Knowing God*, 1993, 86). **2)** Jesus knows you better than you know yourself. He loves you more than you love yourself (and that is a lot of lovin!). He is more compassionate than you could ever hope. He is more powerful than you could ever imagine. And, he knows your needs more perfectly than you or I could ever comprehend. This “Bread of Life” allowed His body to be broken that your soul might receive the spiritual nourishment it needed. He walked the stormy waters thru the dark night that led to the cross that He might rescue us and that we might never again be terrified or afraid. Through the wonderful touch of His bloody, redemptive hands, we can forever be healed of sin’s diseases and made well forever. He walked across the stormy waters of judgment in our place and He took on our sicknesses in His own body. “Take heart,” He says. Understand, “I AM!”