



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Jesus Walks on Water

Hit Reset, John 6:16-21

Steve Lombardo | June 7, 2020



We've come to the story of Jesus walking on the water in John 6. Let me read verses 16 through 21:

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

There are a couple challenges as we start our study of this miracle of Jesus in which He walked on the water. The first challenge is that everyone seems to know the story. If you talk even to unchurched people, they know Jesus walked on the water. If you grew up in church, you heard it in Sunday School. So the tendency and temptation is to tune out during the story because you've heard it before. That's the first challenge, but I'm going to challenge you not to tune out this morning.

The second challenge is that because you know the story, you know the ending of the story. You read the story in John, as well as the other two accounts in Matthew and Mark, and you know the end before you get to it. That kind of softens the harsh edges of the story.

When they're in the storm, when the sea is raging and the wind is blowing, you're probably thinking, "That's okay; Jesus is on His way." When they see Jesus, they're frightened and scared for their lives and you know they're going to find out it's Jesus. When Peter is walking on the water but then falters and starts to sink, you think, "That's okay; Jesus is going to pull him out." We know the end already.

Here's my challenge to you: don't overlook what's going on. Don't overlook the feelings the characters in the story are dealing with and the emotions they're being filled with as this miraculous event takes place. Jesus walking on the water, then Jesus calming the storm.

The purpose of this miracle—and the purpose of all the miracles we're looking at in this sermon series called "Hit Reset"—is to help us see Jesus Christ so that we might believe in Him and have life in His name. We find that purpose clearly stated in John 20:30-31: "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*"

We are studying all these miracles, not just to see how awesome and unbelievable it is that Jesus would do something on the micro level, changing someone's personal circumstances, turning water into wine for the wedding, healing a man's son, healing a man waiting at the pool for years, or even feeding 5,000 people with a little boy's lunch. All these things were amazing. But the bigger picture, John says, is that these miracles were recorded—and we're studying them today—so we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed One of God, that we would believe in Him and by this we would have life in His name.

So we're encouraging our congregation and our own souls that when we find ourselves in dead ends, in places of darkness and struggle, that God is miraculously able to reach us with the ultimate purpose of bringing glory to Jesus Christ and revealing to us that He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Jesus actually said it this way in John 14. The disciples were scared for their lives. He had told them, "I'm going to leave you, but don't be troubled." In John 14:2-6 He told them, "*In my Father's house are many rooms...*" In the King James Version, it says "many mansions." "*If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.*"

Thomas responded, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Then Jesus said these famous words: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Then something amazing happens. Philip says in verse eight, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." He's saying, if we can see Him, then we'll believe.

Jesus replied, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" Then He said in John 14:11, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."

It was on account of the miracles He performed that Jesus expected His followers to believe in Who He actually was. So the reason why John recorded these miracles and the reason we're studying them is so that you might believe in Jesus. Maybe today will be the day when this miracle we're reading about will be what turns your heart toward Him.

In Job 9, we see that this is something God does. He created the universe. He created the land, the seas and the waves. He also is the One Who is able to walk on the waves (Job 9:8). In the story John tells, it was Jesus Who walked on the waves.

This past week I saw a reptile that ran across the water. Now in order for the average human to do that, he would have to go 67 miles per hour to travel over the top of the water. The fastest man on the planet we've ever seen run, Usain Bolt, goes about 28.5 miles per hour. He's not going to be walking across the water. This was truly a miraculous thing that Jesus did.

Take a look at this video, then we'll examine the story:

Video: When evening came, Jesus' disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat and went back across the lake toward Capernaum. Night came on and Jesus still had not come to them. By then, a strong wind was blowing and stirring up the water. The disciples had rowed about three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the water, coming near the boat, and they were terrified.

"Don't be afraid. It is I." Then they willingly took Him into the boat. Immediately the boat reached land at the place they were heading for.

Next day, the crowd, which had stayed on the other side of the lake, realized that there had only been one boat there. They knew Jesus had not gone in it with His disciples, but that they had left without Him. Other boats which were from Tiberius came to shore near the place where the crowd had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.

When the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they got into those boats and went to Capernaum, looking for Him.¹

Jesus walking on the water—a miraculous event, written and recorded for us so that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is the Messiah and that by believing in Him we may have life in His name.

Just a couple points on the story today, then at the end we'll draw some applications.

1. The disciples found themselves in a storm.

In our text, John just tells us the disciples "went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum." But in Matthew 14 and Mark 6—the other two places this story is told—we're informed that Jesus actually sent them on ahead. He told them to go across the sea and He would be with them later. So they got into the boat and went out into the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is 13 miles long and eight miles wide. It's about 150 feet at its deepest spot. The winds come down from the surrounding hills, which are 800 feet or so above sea level, into the basin where the Sea of Galilee is. The storms can come quickly and whip up the waves and this is what the disciples found themselves in.

Remember, it was also dark, according to John 6:17. In Matthew 14 we learn that when Jesus does appear to them, it was the fourth watch of the night which means it was between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. He had first sent them out in the boat the evening before, so they had been out on the sea basically all night.

I think it's important that John emphasizes how dark it was, because things always seem worse in the dark, don't they? I don't know about you, but for me, the night is always a tough time. I remember getting ear infections as a kid and the night times were always the worst. It seems as though the pain ratcheted up a few notches then and I couldn't sleep. It also seemed as though the shadows got bigger; maybe the boogie man really was in the closet or around the corner.

¹ <https://www.jesusfilm.org/watch.html>

Darkness has a way of making everything worse. Someone has said the greatest darkness comes just before the dawn. The disciples found themselves in a very dark place. They were in a storm, late at night and they were struggling against the wind. The Sea of Galilee can produce relatively large waves for its small size. It's nowhere near as large as Lake Michigan, Lake Superior or any ocean, but the storms could blow up quickly and they were frightening. If you look up the Sea of Galilee on YouTube, even on clear days, the waves on the shore are high. If you're in a small fishing boat, it can become really rough very quickly. As the waves began to crash into their boat in the darkness, the disciples were rowing hard to get to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. John tells us they had been rowing hard for three or four miles.

Not too long ago I had an opportunity to go whitewater rafting with my family. We were on the raft and were instructed to row whenever the leader on the raft told us to row. We might be told to go backwards, but the important thing was that we rowed together in unison. So what I thought was going to be an enjoyable excursion down the river, being thankful to God for His creation and to be with my family, turned out to be a lot of hard work. It was exhilarating, but it was not restful.

These disciples were working hard, not just to experience time together, but to preserve their very lives. And they were frightened. It was dark, and the waves were crashing into the boat. I don't know this from the text, but I can almost guarantee that the wind was not blowing with them. It was probably blowing straight into their faces. If you look at a map of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum is on the northwest side. So if they were going across from east to west, the wind can come whipping down from the west and be right in their faces. In any event, the disciples were struggling.

Isn't that the case when a storm comes in life? Usually, the wind doesn't assist us; it opposes us with one thing after another. I can't help but feel like we're in that kind of storm right now as a society. First it was COVID-19. Then it's the George Floyd murder followed by riots in the streets with other people being hurt and murdered. On top of all that, I just read there's a massive, gargantuan stadium-sized meteoroid on its way to earth this week. It's like things go bad, then they get worse.

2. The disciples saw Jesus.

Then they saw Jesus—and they were frightened. Matthew and Mark tell us the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost. They did not know what to make of what they saw. All they knew was that this apparition was coming near them. Matthew and Mark give added details about the scene from Jesus' perspective. Jesus saw the disciples struggling and rowing and being overtaken by the wind and waves. He had His eyes on them. Then in Matthew, we learn that Peter called out to Jesus, "If it's You, let me come out to You." You've got to love Peter. John doesn't include this part of the story, but Matthew says Peter stepped out of the boat and began to walk toward Jesus.

3. Jesus took care of the disciples.

The disciples were struggling in the storm, they saw Jesus, then Jesus took care of the disciples. He came to them and got in the boat with them. Then somehow He brought them "immediately" to the other side, to the place where they were going (John 6:21). This is the miraculous story of Jesus walking on the water and Jesus calming the storm.

I felt a question being raised in my heart as I read this story: why is this here? Why did Jesus do this? I'm almost like a little kid who's always asking "Why?" You answer his why, then he asks, "Why? Why?" There are never-ending why questions. I felt that questioning in my spirit as I looked at this story.

Now, we know the purpose for John writing about these miracles was so we might believe in Jesus. I understand that. But why did Jesus send His disciples into harm's way and let them struggle for hours? They were trying to row out of it for three or four miles. He knew they were working hard and were being overcome. He knew they were afraid.

The more I asked why, the more I was reminded of the fact that sometimes we have to rid ourselves of some ideas we take for granted, of how we understand things. One of those things is the idea of comfortable Christianity, the idea that becoming a Christian makes everything better for us. This turns the gospel into personal good news for me. It's going to give me the promise of heaven, prosperity, comfort, peace and help in life's storms. But nowhere do we read in the Bible that this is what Christianity is. The Lord will actually send us into situations in life, letting us struggle in them for a time, because that's when He teaches us some things about Who He is and what He does. I believe we, like the disciples, learn valuable lessons when we allow Him to teach us in the storms of life.

We learn that Jesus is Lord over all creation.

The first thing the disciples learned—and we learn—is that Jesus is Lord over all creation. Five miracles take place in this story. I don't know if you caught all of them, so let me break them down to you.

- Miracle number one: Jesus walks on the water.
- Miracle number two: Peter also walks on the water.
- Miracle number three: the wind stops.
- Miracle number four: the sea becomes calm.
- Miracle number five: they get to the other side.

These five miracles display the reality that Jesus is Lord over creation. God allowed this to happen to the disciples so they would know that He was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He was the very One Who created the elements of this universe. He was the very One Who holds all things together, so by His power and by His word, He has authority over all.

In Colossians 1:15-17 we read that Jesus is *"the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."*

Jesus is the Son of the living God. This is the One Who speaks to you today and says, "Believe in Me." Jesus is Lord over all creation. These are the miracles He did to show that He could create something out of nothing. He turned water into wine. He could give the blind man sight by creating the cornea and retina, by creating his eyes.

Jesus is Lord over everything in creation and this is the lesson they learned.

We learn that Jesus is Lord over all circumstances.

Not only that, they learned—and hopefully we learn—that Jesus is Lord over all circumstances. When the disciples first saw Jesus and were afraid, He said, *"It is I; do not be afraid."* The way He's saying "It is I" is essentially saying, "I am." This expression indicates to us that He is the Son of God. As Jesus said to the Pharisees later in John 8:58, *"Before Abraham was, I am."* This was an intentional claim and He displayed His power to back up that claim. He not only had power over creation, but He had total control over the circumstances the disciples were in. Because of this, His instruction to them was, "Do not fear." God allows things to happen to us so we will depend on Him in the difficulties of life and so we will believe He is bigger than our circumstances. How much we need to hear that!

If all society crumbles around us, we need to realize Jesus is the King over all kings. He's the Lord of lords. He's the righteous and just Ruler Who is coming again. My hope, faith and trust are in Him. These things are written to you so you might believe in Him and have life in His name.

One of the things that really shook me to my core as I was growing up in my faith was the diagnosis that my sister Heather had inoperable brain cancer. As you begin to encounter life and death, you begin to ask questions that you would never ask when the sun was shining. But in the dark times, when the storm rages, you begin to ask. The morning we found her unresponsive, we called the ambulance, they took her to the hospital and eventually air-lifted her to a larger hospital to have brain surgery. They opened her brain to stop the bleeding that was happening in order to save her life. They said she had a 50-50 chance of getting through that surgery.

When they got the bleeding stopped, they realized that she had a tumor in a part of the brain that controlled her thinking, talking and reasoning. It was so intertwined with those cells that are critical for life that they just left it alone. They closed her back up and said, "Now that's she's lived through this, there's a 50-50 chance that she will be able to resume any normalcy of life. She might very well end up in a vegetative state."

It was in that moment, even though I was 21, I felt like a kid wrestling again with the why questions. I also felt a new kind of anger. The circumstances of our lives seemed to be against me and my family—and especially against my sister. This revealed some wrong thinking I had about what it means to follow Jesus and about comfortable Christianity.

Now, I had not been taught that. In a pastor's home, we had learned that Christianity was not comfortable, but still our life had been fairly comfortable—until this happened. We called out to God to heal my sister. I began to notice that in my heart I had a sense that God owed us somehow. "How could You allow this to happen, when we love You and are serving You and living for You? No, we're not perfect, but we're forgiven by You. We've done all these things and now here's the payback we receive." As if God is ever put into anybody's debt, that anyone can say, "God owes me."

As things were being stripped away from us in this storm, Jesus was teaching us that He is the Lord over all circumstances. He did eventually heal my sister Heather, completely and miraculously. She is still alive today—almost 20 years later. We thank Him for it and praise His name that His Lordship over creation was asserted in her life.

We learn that Jesus cares for us.

The third thing we learn is that Jesus cares for us. The disciples learned this too. Peter was the first one to experience it, because he actually participated in the miraculous. He said, “Jesus, if it’s You, call to me.” Jesus called, so Peter jumped out of the boat and actually began to walk on water himself. Jesus cared for Peter in such a miraculous way. Notice that he would never have experienced the miraculous if he had not taken that step out of the boat.

Sometimes we need to extend our faith, stepping out of the boat, in order to experience the miraculous and have faith in the Son of God. We need to take uncomfortable steps in order to see God’s miraculous power.

Not only did Jesus show His care for Peter—when Peter faltered and Jesus rescued him—He also cared for the rest of the disciples. They *“were glad to take him into the boat”* (verse 21). I think there’s a whole sermon there as well. We need to have Jesus in our boats. We’ve got to get in the boat with Jesus, getting on board with Him. He doesn’t come along on our ride; we go on the ride with Him. Jesus is the Lord of all creation. He is the Lord of all circumstances. And He’s the Lord, praise God, Who also loves and cares for us. He will take care of us, just as He took care of His disciples.

I want to close with another story of something that had an impact on me related to my sister being sick. Another person I knew fairly well who lived in our town also got sick with brain cancer. He had two operations to fight it, but it was one of the most aggressive forms of cancer there is. He slowly went downhill. During the year and a half or so before he died, I got to have conversations with him and became part of his life. I was privileged to baptize him as a follower of Jesus Christ. I got to see God work the miracle in him of saving his soul and using his testimony of faith in the lives of other people around him.

He had lived a life of rebellion before this time. He had spent some time in jail and lived a rough life. But through this storm, Jesus grabbed his soul and saved him for all eternity. I got to stand up at his funeral and declare, “On the basis of the authority of the King of kings and the Lord of lords, Brian is now in the presence of Jesus. Jesus died for him. He cleansed and saved him.” Jesus cared for Brian.

Obviously, we had prayed for him to be healed, but Jesus did not heal Brian the way we were seeking. That doesn’t mean Jesus didn’t care for him. He showed him the ultimate love, salvation and healing by bringing Brian into the very presence of God Almighty on that day.

This story in John is here so that you might believe in Jesus. By the very fact that you’re hearing my voice means you have hope. As long as you have breath in your lungs, you have the opportunity to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

This miracle was incredible for Peter. It was amazing for the disciples. They looked back on it and talked about it for years. “Remember when Jesus walked on the water!” But it wasn’t just for their edification. It wasn’t just for their reminiscing. It was for our salvation. It is here so you might believe in Jesus, the Man Who walked on the water, Who was more than a man because the sea and the wind obeyed Him. He has strength and power over creation and your circumstances—and He cares for you. Turn to Him. Believe in Him. He died on the cross of Calvary for your sin. He rose again from the dead and promises to give you eternal life if you will believe in His name—the mighty and matchless name of Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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