

NCBC Youth Group
November 24, 2019

WALKING ON WATER
MARK 6:45-56

Introduction

Last time we met, we studied the account of Jesus feeding the five thousand. We noted that, in reality, there were more than five thousand people present. There were five thousand men, which means there were many more women and children (Matt. 14:21; Mark 6:44). The actual number of people is likely more than 15,000, and they only found five loaves and two fish for all those people. To feed them all, Jesus had to create food. This event demonstrates His great power and compassion on the people.

What's more miraculous is that He created just enough food for everyone present. It says in verse 42, "They all ate and were satisfied, [43] and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish." Jesus created enough food for everyone, and He created 12 baskets full extra for His 12 disciples. If you think about catering for even 200 people. How many times do people cook just enough food for the 200 with nothing leftover? Jesus did this for 15,000 people.

The Sending Away

Imagine the hysteria of the crowd. Jesus spent time with them that day teaching them, healing their sick, and now, feeding them. If Jesus wasn't already popular enough, the events this day made Him even more popular, and the crowd didn't want to leave Jesus. In fact, John's account (6:15) tells us that the crowd intended to make Jesus their king. Why? Well, they wanted Jesus to establish a welfare state. Free food, free healthcare, and let's also overthrow Herod and the Romans.

Jesus would not allow that, so He sends the crowd away. That's where our story begins: Verse 45 tells us that Jesus was sending the crowd away. But, the people in the crowd were not the only ones that didn't want to leave. Look at the beginning of verse 45, "Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, to Bethsaida." Jesus had to "make" His disciples get into the boat. The word means to compel or to force, implying that they didn't want to get into the boat and leave the place.¹

¹ Cleon Rodgers Jr. and Cleon Rodgers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 81.

We know why the crowd didn't want to leave—they wanted perpetual free food, free healthcare, and other free benefits. Why did the disciples not want to leave? I think they wanted to stay back and bask in the popularity, but Jesus wouldn't allow that to happen, so He compels them to get into the boat and leave. He was there alone in verses 45 and 46 sending the crowd away. Let's not overlook the fact that this, too, would have been a difficult task. He had to send away over 15,000 people, but this not a task too difficult for the Sovereign God. In fact, He did something similar earlier when He fed the 15,000: He commanded them to sit down, and they did so in groups of hundreds and fifties (Mark 6:39-40).

It must have been a long and tiring day for Jesus and His disciples, so after the crowd was dismissed, Jesus went to the mountain to pray, verse 46. Isn't it interesting that we are often too lazy to pray when we are tired, but Jesus goes to pray? Let that be our example.

Crossing the Sea

While Jesus was praying on the mountain, His disciples were in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee. Their destination is given in verse 45, "Bethsaida."² They were traveling west. As they were traveling, another storm arose. Storms are not uncommon on the Sea of Galilee, and they had encountered one in Mark 4:35-41 when they crossed over to the country of the Gerasenes. This time, however, Jesus was not in the boat with them, and their boat was in the middle of the sea (Mark 6:47). Matthew adds that they were a "long distance from the land" (Matt. 14:24), and John says they had traveled 3-4 miles (John 6:19).

They had rowed for hours, and they did not make much progress. Verse 48 tells us that they were "straining at the oars, for the wind was against them." Matthew 14:24 tells us that they were "battered by the waves," and John says the "sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing" (John 6:18). This paints a picture for us: The disciples were straining at the oars in the middle of the sea against strong winds and waves in turbulent conditions.

Keep in mind that Jesus is not in the boat, and is far off on land by Himself. However, even though He is not physically present with them, He is aware of what is happening, and He will physically come to deliver them. Verse 48, "Seeing them straining

² John 6:17 records a different destination: Capernaum. Is this some kind of contradiction? No, Bethsaida and Capernaum are in the same direction, so they were traveling west, in the direction of Bethsaida and Capernaum, Capernaum being the larger city.

at the oars.” The word “seeing” needs to be explained. This is a supernatural kind of seeing. There was quite some distance between Jesus and the boat. It would have been too far for Jesus to actually see what is going on. Remember, this is in the dark and the waters were stormy. So, what did Jesus see? This kind of seeing is a reference to the omniscience of Jesus. Jesus is all knowing. Proverbs 15:3 tells us, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place.” God sees everything without having to be physically present.

Could Jesus have delivered them from the storm without showing up? Of course He can, but He chose to go to them physically and deliver them. By the time Jesus shows up, they would have been rowing for hours. It says in verse 48 that Jesus goes to them “at about the fourth watch of the night.” This is between 3 to 6 a.m.³ If they left after feeding the crowd, they would have been traveling for at a minimum of 6 to 9 hours.

Walking on the Sea

Verse 48 continues, “At about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them.” Most people are familiar with this account of Jesus walking on the sea. Jesus walked on this stormy sea as if He were walking on cement. By the way, the translation says, “He intended to pass by them.” Some commentators point out that this is not the most accurate rendering of the word. The word could also mean “to come alongside,”⁴ and that’s perhaps a better translation. Jesus came aside them to help them.

But as Jesus was approaching the boat, the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost, verse 49. They responded by crying out in fear (49; *cf.* Matt. 14:26). This wasn’t a typical “crying out.” The word means a shriek of terror.⁵ They were exhausted, they were struggling, and in the midst of the confusion, they thought they were seeing a ghost. They were terrified, and they expressed their terror vocally (50). By the way, “it was believed that spirits of the night brought disaster,”⁶ which fueled their fears even more.

Now, there are some people who deny the Bible as the infallible Word of God, and they say that Jesus didn’t really walk on the water. Jesus was walking on the land, following the boat. If that’s the case, there’s nothing supernatural is there? Anyone can

³ Romans divided time in four watches; Jews divided time in three watches. For the Romans, the four watches are: first watch is 6-9 pm, second watch is 9-12 pm, third watch is 12-3 am, and fourth watch is 3-6 am.

⁴ Cleon Rodgers Jr. and Cleon Rodgers III, 1998, 81; John MacArthur, *Mark 1-6 The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 330.

⁵ Cleon Rodgers Jr. and Cleon Rodgers III, 1998, 81.

⁶ *Ibid.*

walk on the land. But that assertion is completely ridiculous. The gospel writers were careful to give us enough details to dispense that stupid theory. The response of the disciples tells us that Jesus was walking on water and not on land. No one lets out a shriek of terror if there is a person walking on land. Even if this person was some kind of serial killer, they had no reason to be afraid. They were in the middle of the sea, and he is on land. No fear there. They were safe. However, by letting out a shriek of terror, it tells us that they saw something unnatural. First of all, no one can walk on water, so whoever walks on water has to be a supernatural being. That leaves us with two options: It was a ghost, or It was God.

Their fears were short-lived. Verse 50, “But immediately He spoke with them and said, ‘Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.’”⁷ At this point, Mark leaves out something that we are all familiar with, which is Peter walking on the water, but Matthew includes it in his account. Flip with me to Matthew 14:28-31. “Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ [29] And He said, ‘Come!’ And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. [30] But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ [31] Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’” Now, we don’t really know why Mark left it out, but most scholars believe Mark wrote his gospel account based on Peter’s testimony. Peter might have left it out on purpose, so as not to exalt himself.

Verse 51, “Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished.” John tells us that as Jesus got into the boat, “immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going” (John 6:21). Matthew and Mark record that the sea was calmed, again. They were utterly astonished. Why? They just saw Jesus walking on water, calming the sea, and they were immediately transported to the place where they were going.

Verse 52 says, “For they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.” Listen, they had seen a lot of supernatural miracles performed by Jesus. Hours before they saw Jesus walk on water, they saw Jesus feed over 15,000 people by creating food. They missed the significance of that event. They didn’t

⁷ “It is I” can be translated as “I AM” (Cleon Rodgers Jr. and Cleon Rodgers III, 1998, 81). I AM is the self-revelation of God in the Old Testament (Exodus 3:14). When Jesus said, “I AM,” He is equating Himself with God. He is God.

consider that the same Jesus who demonstrated divine power by creating food was the same Jesus that walked on water. Jesus had to send them into the storm to strengthen their faith. Now they see, and they responded properly in worshipping Jesus. They confessed that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt. 14:33).

In Gennesaret

Verses 53-56 is a summary of the works of Jesus. Gennesaret is southwest of Capernaum, very close to it. Some point out that contradiction that it said they were going to Bethsaida or Capernaum, but ended up in Gennesaret. This is not a contradiction. When we used to live in Grain Valley, Missouri, we would tell people we were going to Kansas City. It's the same direction, and it's in close proximity. Here again, in Gennesaret, we see the power and compassion of Jesus in healing the sick.

Conclusion

As we conclude this study, I want to draw your attention to a few things. First, Jesus sent His disciples into the sea, knowing that they will face great adversity. They obeyed Him. The disciples will soon be sent abroad to preach the gospel, and the mission field would be similar to the events on this sea. They will be persecuted. They will face adversity. At times, they will labor and see little to no results. They will row and make little headway. Yet, when Jesus sends us out, He will accomplish His purposes. We don't have to worry about making little headway—we obey His commands.

Ministry is kind of like that. Over the years, students have come to youth group and now are off to college or have graduated. How many people have been faithful to the Lord? I don't keep exact count, but I know it's few. Is that disappointing? I continue to teach you the Word as God commands (1 Tim. 4:2), and He will cause the growth (1 Cor. 3:6-7). At times, it feels like straining at the oars, but we also remember that it is God who gives the increase. And just because it is God giving the increase doesn't mean we should neglect our duty. First Corinthians 15:10 says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

We were talking to Jeffrey a few weeks back, and we talked about Charles Spurgeon, commonly known as the prince of preachers, who lived in England in the 1800s. He has a way with words, and on this passage, he says:

The apostolic crew rowed, and rowed, and rowed, and it was no fault of theirs that they made no progress, 'for the wind was contrary unto them.' The Christian man

may make little or no headway, and yet it may be no fault of his, for the wind is contrary. Our good Lord will take the will for the deed, and reckon our progress, not by our apparent advance, but by the hearty intent with which we tug at the oars.⁸

On the other hand, if we strain and strive without Christ, we would be striving and straining in vain. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh; Jonah ran away. He went his own way, and he made no progress. That is his fault. We're not faultless for every every lack of progress. I'll close with a stanza from Martin Luther's hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. Listen to this:

Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing
Were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus it is he;
Lord Sabaoth His name,
from age to age the same;
And He must win the battle.

⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Good Cheer from Christ's Real Presence* (Sermon No. 3128, Vol. 55, Mark 6:45-52, published 1909).