

3.3

WALKING ON WATER

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God is greater than the storms in life.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will seek God to be with me at all times.



FOCUS VERSE: John 6:19

So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

LESSON TEXT: John 6:16-21



BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: John 6:16-21

John's version of Jesus walking on the water has many similarities when compared to its Synoptic counterparts in Matthew 14:22-33 and Mark 6:45-52. (The story is not recorded in Luke.) In all three versions, this miracle immediately follows Jesus miraculously feeding a crowd and then ascending a mountain to pray. In all three versions, the disciples went out on the water while it was dark, Jesus approached the boat walking on the water, and the disciples were afraid. In all three versions, Jesus called out to identify Himself and to encourage them to "be not afraid."

However, some notable differences can be seen between these three versions as well. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus commanded the disciples to go to the other side while He dismissed the crowds. In John, the disciples seemed to simply leave without Him. Their response in each Gospel is nuanced as well: Matthew records the disciples worshiped Jesus, John records they were glad (ESV) to receive Him, and Mark simply records they were amazed. Only Matthew adds the additional story of Peter stepping out of the boat and walking on the water to meet Jesus.

The most notable difference in John's version is the conclusion of the story. While the storm immediately stopped in Matthew and Mark, the storm is not recorded as stopping in John. Instead, the boat is immediately transported to their destination. This outcome is certainly no less of a miracle, being almost like teleportation. The boat was probably far off course and their location impossible to discern because of the darkness and the storm.

When compared with the other versions of this story, the message is the same and just as powerful. Jesus is the Creator of the universe and is not bound by the laws of nature or physics. He does not abandon us to face the storms of life on our own. He may stop the storm or He may lead us through the storm. Either way we will be safe as long as He is with us in the storm.

WHILE THE STORM IMMEDIATELY STOPPED
IN MATTHEW AND MARK, THE STORM IS
NOT RECORDED AS STOPPING IN JOHN.

DAY 1

John 6:16-17

¹⁶ And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea,

¹⁷ And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

Biblical Insight

When the disciples entered the ship, Jesus was still in solitude in the mountains. While it may seem curious for the disciples to leave Jesus behind, most likely the disciples were following directions from Jesus that had already been discussed beforehand, as is mentioned in the Synoptic versions of this story (Matthew 14:22; Mark 6:45). Many of the twelve disciples were fishermen, so a journey across the water, even at night, would not have been intimidating or uncommon for them.

Daily Devotion

In the winter of AD 203 outside Carthage in North Africa, Roman soldiers arrested a group of new Christian believers for gathering for worship, which was considered a crime. Among them was twenty-two-year-old Vibia Perpetua. She kept a journal recounting the pressure to renounce Christ and the overwhelming darkness of the prisons, feeling the darkness more terrifying than being fed to animals because darkness disorients. By focusing on what she believed in, Perpetua found her bearings in the darkness and her faith grew to the point she met her martyrdom “cheerfully” in a gladiatorial ring.

Like Perpetua and the apostles on the sea, darkness can disorient us. Remember, even in the darkest seasons of the soul, Jesus is with you. If you are feeling lost, uncertain, or overwhelmed during a time of darkness, fix your mind on Jesus. In doing so, you will find your bearings.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

John 6:18

And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.

Biblical Insight

Fierce storms and subsequent deliverance from those storms are a common motif in Scripture. Jesus intervened in at least two storms—in one He was already in the boat (Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:36–41; Luke 8:22–25) and in another He walked out on the water to the disciples (Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52; John 6:16–21). Matthew’s version of the second story is the only one that includes Peter also walking on the water.

Daily Devotion

Hurricanes are known for their destructive power. Between 1980 and 2021, hurricanes resulted in an estimated 6,697 deaths and over \$1.1 trillion in damage. To reduce the monetary cost and the cost of human life, the United States government developed Project Cirrus and Project Stormfury to manipulate hurricanes. They flew aircraft into hurricanes in Project Stormfury and dropped dry ice from aircraft in Project Cirrus.

While their efforts ultimately failed, scientists discovered hurricanes are necessary to bring balance to Earth’s weather and ecosystems. Without hurricanes the poles would be too cold, the equator would be too hot, barrier islands would diminish, bacteria would overgrow, and inland droughts would last longer.

When we think about storms in life, we tend to think of the negative—tears, confusion, sorrow, and loss. While this response is understandable, it is important we allow storms to help us mature spiritually. Reflect on spiritual storms you have experienced. How have they helped you grow spiritually?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

John 6:19

So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

Biblical Insight

Twenty or thirty furlongs is approximately three miles (*Apostolic Study Bible*, note for John 6:18–19). The fact the disciples had rowed any distance in the storm is impressive and a testament to the fishermen on board who were accustomed to stormy weather. However, despite their seafaring résumés, none of them had ever seen someone walk on the water, which is why they instinctively responded with fear.

Daily Devotion

It was a beautiful warm spring day. While his mother was cleaning the kitchen, one-year-old Chase was looking out the window. He was fascinated by the birds flying between the trees. Suddenly, Chase began screaming in terror.

His mother dropped everything and ran to her son, expecting to find blood. Why else would her son be screaming? Instead, she found her son screaming while pointing out the window at a squirrel. In his short life, Chase had never seen a squirrel. When faced with something new, his first response was fear.

When you encounter or experience something new, what is your initial response? Do certain opportunities or expectations evoke a fear response more than a faith response?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

John 6:20

But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.

Biblical Insight

Jesus' calmness stood in stark contrast to the disciples' fear. Moreover, their reason not to fear was rooted in Jesus' identity. They had no reason to be afraid, either by the storm or by Jesus' unusual manner of appearance, simply because of who Jesus was. He was the Creator of the universe in human flesh. Therefore, the disciples had nothing to fear from creation itself.

Daily Devotion

On a stormy night, a businessman was sitting between a middle-aged woman and a little girl on a flight. About an hour into the flight, the plane experienced extreme turbulence. The pilot spoke over the PA system and told the passengers to fasten their seatbelts. For the next half hour, the plane shook and made dips and turns. Some passengers cried, others prayed, but not the little girl.

When the turbulence ended, the businessman said to the little girl, "You are the bravest person I have met. How did you remain so calm?" The little girl looked him in the eyes and said, "My father is the pilot, and he's taking me home."

If your life feels turbulent and uncertain, do not give in to fear. Remember our heavenly Father is the pilot, and He's taking us home.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

John 6:21

Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

Biblical Insight

The conclusion of this story provides the most notable difference between the Synoptic versions and John's version. While the storm immediately ceased in Matthew 14:32 and Mark 6:51, John's version does not record the storm stopping supernaturally. Instead, Jesus and the disciples were immediately transported to their destination.

Regardless of the mode of the miracle, the message is the same: if Jesus is with us, we need not be afraid. Whether Jesus stops the storm or brings us safely through the storm while it rages, He will be faithful and keep us as long as we stay close to Him.

Daily Devotion

While enjoying a family picnic at the beach, Louisa Stead's husband saw a young boy drowning. Mr. Stead charged into the water to rescue the boy. In terror, the boy pulled Mr. Stead under the water with him. Tragically, both Mr. Stead and the boy drowned while Louisa and her daughter watched.

After her husband's death, Louisa and her daughter were left in dire poverty. Life was a struggle. Louisa asked God, "Why?"

One day, with no food in the house or money to buy food, Louisa opened the front door to discover food and money. That same day Louisa sat down and wrote the hymn: "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus." The words Louisa wrote to encourage her heart have become an encouraging reminder to countless people.

We may never know why things happen, but we can rest on God's promises. He is with us. We can trust Him.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*
