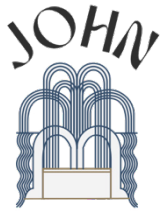


An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“THE LORD OF CREATION”

John 6:16-21

Theme: When life is hard, believers must trust God’s power and grace to sustain them.

Introduction: John 6 is a chapter that reveals both the provision of God and the person of Christ. It opens with the miraculous feeding of over 5,000—a powerful sign that Jesus is the compassionate Provider. But before Jesus explains the spiritual significance of that miracle in the Bread of Life discourse (vv. 22–59), John includes a striking scene: Jesus walking on the stormy Sea of Galilee.

Why is this miracle here? Because John wants us to see that Jesus is not only the One who provides bread—He is the One who rules the waves. He isn’t just a miracle-worker who meets physical needs, but the sovereign Lord of creation whose presence brings peace amid chaos.

This stormy episode bridges the crowd’s superficial hunger for signs and the more profound truths Jesus will soon declare. It moves us from signs that fill the stomach to truths that satisfy the soul. It reminds us that following Jesus may lead us into storms, but His grace and power are more than enough to sustain us. Before the crowd can grasp that He is the Bread of Life, they—and we—must first behold that He is the *I AM*: the One who walks on water, calms fears, and carries His own to safety.

It’s been said that a calm sea never made a skilled sailor. But the Christian life isn’t about controlling the storms on our own—it’s about trusting the One who commands the wind and the waves.

In John 6:16–21, we see a scene that is both awe-inspiring and frightening. The disciples, having just seen Jesus feed the crowds, are now faced with another challenge: a sudden storm during the dark of night. But this story isn’t mainly about storm dangers or their boat’s weakness — it’s about the presence and power of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Creation. The same One who multiplied bread now walks on the water. The One who controls nature also comforts hearts.

Obedience to Christ doesn’t always bring ease. However, we often jump to the conclusion that God has abandoned us when faced with adversity. This story helps us see that adversity is not a sign of abandonment by Christ. God’s sovereign power is often most evident during our times of greatest weakness and struggle.

This morning, we’ll walk through three movements in this account:

1. **The Example of Obedience** (vv. 16–17) – The disciples obey Jesus’ direction, even when it meant setting out into the night without Him.
2. **The Emergence of Adversity** (vv. 18–19a) – As they walked in obedience, the storm arose—reminding us that difficulty often comes in the path of faithfulness.
3. **The Exposure to Sovereign Power** (vv. 19b–21) – At the height of their fear, Jesus came—not from the shore, but from the sea—revealing His majesty, calming their hearts, and bringing them safely home.

As we study this miracle today, may we remember that the One who created the seas is also Master over them. And when your life feels like a battle against the wind, His power and grace are still sufficient to sustain you.

Let us now open our hearts to God’s Word—and behold *The Lord of Creation*.

The lesson is clear: *When life is hard, believers must trust God's power and grace to sustain them.*

I. The Example of Obedience – 6:16-17

A. The Reception of Instruction from the Lord – v. 16

1. Here, we find an account filled with details that provide a very practical lesson on the issue of obedience.
2. From what we learn in the other Gospels, prior to His *“withdrawal ... to the mountain by Himself alone,”* Jesus had instructed the disciples to depart and cross the Sea of Galilee, and to meet Him on the other side.
 - a) *There is a gap in time between v. 15 & v. 16 based on what happened in Mark 6:45.*
 - b) *Matthew corroborates this in Matthew 14:22.*
 - c) *Jesus' instructions seem to have been to “get into the boat and go ahead to the other side (to Capernaum), while I send the crowds away.”*
 - d) *However, Capernaum is the final destination, but their initial stop was Bethsaida, a few miles north of where they were, where they were to wait for Jesus to join them around evening.*
 - e) *Immediately, they got into the boats to sail to Bethsaida and arrived in the afternoon, prior to evening, and waited for Jesus.*
3. John now picks up the story in v. 16 – *“Now when evening came, the disciples went down to the sea.”*
4. It is possible that in His instructions, the Lord had indicated that they should wait for Him until dark – *“It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.”* – v. 17b.
5. Thinking they had misunderstood Jesus, or knowing their final destination was Capernaum, Jesus might have passed them by without them knowing so they decided to go down, get back in their boat and head to Capernaum.
6. Often when we receive instruction from the Lord, we attempt to improve on those instructions with our own innovations – but our love for Him is demonstrated most effectively by simple obedience – cf. John 14:15; 1 Samuel 15:22.

B. The Reasons for Instruction from the Lord – v. 17

1. *The first reason* the Lord sent the disciples ahead was to protect them from the situation, as the Jews were coming and wanting to make Him king forcibly – He knew how to direct them to prevent the dangers and heartaches of being entangled in that situation.

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- a) *We are not told how Jesus completely squelched the mob who was seeking to “take Him by force” – but it could have been an unrecorded display of His divine power – cp. [Luke 4:28-30](#); [John 10:39](#).*
 - b) *The instructions and commandments given to us by God are not provided by a cosmic “kill-joy” who imposes some “no-fun” agenda on us – but by a God who knows what the consequences of various choices and actions are and attempts to “warn us off.”*
2. *The second reason for the instructions of the Lord given to us in this text is found in the phrase: “**and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum.**”*
- a) *The Lord directed them straight into a test, whereby they were given an opportunity to demonstrate their faith in crisis and to confront their self-reliance and spiritual blindness as they encountered difficulty.*
 - b) *As we’ve already noticed, Jesus’ absence caused them to take matters into their own hands: “**It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.**”*
 - c) *The easy way of life is not always God’s way – at times, obedience to God’s will and word will take a believer straight into the jaws of a “storm.”*
3. *In such times, our spiritual negligence causes us to believe that we are alone, in the dark, and being victimized by our circumstances without God’s presence or attention – cp. [Isaiah 43:1-2](#).*

II. The Emergence of Adversity – 6:18-19a

A. The Intimidation in Adversity – v. 18

- 1. *The disciples, having left Bethsaida without Jesus, ran into difficulty as they sailed across the Sea of Galilee toward Capernaum.*
- 2. *“**The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing**” – a phenomenon that occurs due to the setting of the Sea of Galilee:*
 - a) *The Sea of Galilee sits 689 feet below sea level, the lowest freshwater lake on Earth (the Dead Sea, filled with salt is lower) – and is surrounded by ravines and mountains.*
 - b) *There are times when cooler air from the northern mountains and southeastern tablelands rushes down into the lake, displacing the warm, moist air in a “wind tunnel” effect, particularly from the Golan Heights to the east.*
 - c) *This wind colliding causes sudden squalls and choppy waters, often without much warning, and due to the relatively shallow depth of the Sea, (about 141 feet), wind-driven waves build rapidly and become violent,*

reaching 10 feet waves.¹

3. These violent storms are unpredictable and spontaneous, rising suddenly and instantaneously.
4. Originally, they would have sailed up the coast of the Sea, not far from land.
5. However, the storm drove them out into the middle of the Sea and they were overwhelmed by the violence of the storm, and even as professional fishermen, they couldn't even maneuver their boat - *Matthew 14:24, Mark 6:47.*
6. Yet, they couldn't know where they were because of the ferocity of the storm and the disorientation it caused.
7. Often, we find ourselves as though we are at the mercy of uncontrollable forces over which we have absolutely no control.

B. The Isolation in Adversity – v. 19a

1. In such times, we often feel as though we are facing situations alone – with no help.
2. Here, the disciples were making no headway as they were rowing – *“Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles”* - a very long way to have to row in the raging waters of one of these storms.
3. They were giving it their best shot,
4. but must have been getting discouraged and frustrated because they were in such straits – working from evening (between 6:00 – 9:00 PM) and the fourth watch of the night (3:00 – 6:00 AM).
5. Contrary to many of our perspectives when facing our own distressing situations, the Lord has not left us to fend for ourselves.
6. He was aware of their need through supernatural knowledge, but He delayed providing them with deliverance until He decided it was the right time – cp. *Mark 6:48.*
7. What were the factors that determined when He relieved their strain? Two come to mind:
 - a) *First, He waited until He did so to make His hand more evident – there are many times when He quickly alleviates our situations, and we don't even realize it.*
 - b) *Second, He waited until He did so that it might be more appreciated.*

¹ “The most violent storms ... one such storm in March 1992 sent waves ten feet (3 meters) high crashing into downtown Tiberias and caused significant damage to the city.” (Jerusalem perspective.com)

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8. The delay also provides us an orientation to our own limitations and humbles us – creating an environment whereby God’s grace is pursued and He Himself is honored.

III. The Exposure to Sovereign Power – 6:19b-21

A. The Purpose of the Exercise of God’s Power – vv. 19b-20

1. Mark informs us that Christ, seeing their toil, came to them – cp. Mark 6:48.
2. He made Himself available by coming near to them – through the miracle of walking on water: *“they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat ...”*
3. Their immediate response was that they were frightened – *“... and they were frightened”* [φοβέω] - could mean anything from apprehensive to terrified - cp. Matthew 14:26.
4. Amid their fear, Christ draws their attention to Himself by saying: *“It is I; do not be afraid.”*
5. It was dark, walking on water had never happened before, and they were already in a state of panic when someone came walking on the water – I, too, would be startled by it.
6. However, we are told that the reason they didn’t know Christ was that their hearts were hardened – cp. Mark 6:51-52.
7. We read in the other Gospels that this is the moment when Peter tries to walk on the water and sinks because he took his eyes off the Lord.
8. Therefore, the purpose of this miracle was to draw the disciples into a deeper understanding of who Christ truly is before the bread of life discourse – the same reason the Lord allows us to face hardships and then resolves them in His own way and timing according to His power to teach us valuable spiritual realities.

B. The Provision of the Exercise of God’s Power – v. 21

1. When they finally accepted that it was indeed the Lord and focused on Him, He then entered the boat – *“So they were willing to receive Him into the boat.”*
2. When they opened themselves to the Lord Jesus, He immediately calmed the sea – cp. Mark 6:51.
3. The cause of their toil and anxiety was quickly addressed by God's power

through the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. But in addition, we are told that *“immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going,”* where they could not get on their own.
5. The impact of this was an awe that provoked a confession of faith by the disciples – cp. *Matthew 14:33*.

So What?

1. How have I seen God’s presence evidenced in my circumstances when I have been “rowing against the wind?”
2. What is my anchor when in storms? (spouse, money, work, hobby, distractions, alcohol)
3. How does this account shape my perspective on Jesus’ involvement in my struggles?
4. What steps of faith should I take in adversity as I trust Jesus’ power and presence in my life?

Theme: When life is hard, believers must trust God’s power and grace to sustain them.