**The Miracles of Christ (Week 5)**

This week I’d like us to look at two miracles in which Jesus demonstrates his lordship over the natural world. In both cases he uses the violent waters of the Sea of Galilee as the setting and his disciples as the receptors or witnesses of the glory of God.

**Jesus Walks on Water and Jesus Calms the Storm**

The miracle of Jesus walking on top of the water is captured in Matthew, Mark and John, the only miracle that is captured exclusively by these three gospels. Matthew’s account differs from the other two because it relates the adjunct of Peter leaving the boat to go to Jesus.

**Jesus Walks on the Water (Matthew 6: 22-32)**

22Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

25Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

27But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

28“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

29“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

31Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

32And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

The events recorded here follow directly on from feeding the five thousand, and it is understandable that after teaching, healing and feeding such a large crowd, Jesus wanted to be alone and to give thanks to his Father. He went up a mountain away from everybody where he remained until after dark.

Isaac Watts uses this scene in his hymn: My Dear Redeemer and My Lord

“Cold mountains, and the midnight air

Witnessed the fervour of thy prayer.”

It is likely that Christ sensed, after feeding the great crowd, that they wanted to take him with them as we see in John 6:15.

***15*** *Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*

Whatever concerns Jesus had, he dismissed the crowd and told his disciples to move over to the other side of the sea. It is possible that he knew at this point that he would have an opportunity to perform a miracle and thereby convince the disciples of his power and status as God’s son.

The disciples had moved off in the boat and were some distance from land. Their progress had been slow because of the head wind. This suggests the weather was stormy and the swell and waves were difficult. Not all the disciples were fishermen and some were probably anxious because of the weather.

After praying all night Jesus returns to his disciples. He does this by walking across the water to the boat. By so doing he demonstrates his lordship over nature, but not for himself but for the sake of convincing others; in this case the disciples. And what did they do when they saw this figure walking on the water? They became terrified. Understandably, I think. Being in an open boat in rough seas is not a pleasant experience and to see someone walking on the water towards one might justify greater terror.

Immediately Jesus talks to them saying: “take courage. It is I”. He didn’t wait to ease their fear, but consoled them immediately. Again we see Christ’s compassion foremost in his thoughts.

In Mark and John, Jesus, after calming them, goes up into the boat and the wind ceased. And as a result the disciples understood whom they have decided to follow.

In Mark 6:

*51Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.*

And John 6:

*Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.*

Matthew differs from the other two gospels and goes on to record the actions of Peter, whom Jesus later, after the resurrection, instructed three times to “feed (or tend) my sheep”. (John 21: 15-19). Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water towards Christ. This is an act of extraordinary courage. Being a fisherman Peter knew the power of the sea and the dangers of going overboard in a storm. Yet he trusted Jesus to the extent that he was willing to do the unthinkable to be with him. No wonder Christ built his Church on this man.

Spurgeon writes:

*You, who are wanting to get to Jesus, should make a desperate effort to get to him; even walk on the water to get to Jesus. Walking on the water might be an idle and evil exhibition; but to walk on the water to go to Jesus is another matter. Try it, and the Lord enable you to get to him!*

The lesson for us is obvious. We must look to Jesus to carry us above our troubles and fears. Peter waited for the command from Christ to “Come”. We too need to follow Christ’s commands and not hesitate. Even though the situation seems beyond salvage, Christ can lead us to safety. Faith is taking the next step.

Now Peter takes his eyes off Jesus and looks at the wind, and begins to sink. Don’t criticise Peter for a lack of faith, since he is demonstrating his humanity and enabling Jesus to reach out and catch him. This is, for some of us, perhaps the most important lesson. When we lose faith, and we will at some time, He is there to catch us and lift us up onto the boat where calmness prevails in his presence.

Jesus speaks to Peter as he catches him and saves him from drowning. “You of little faith. Why did you doubt?” The impression for me is that he speaks gently to Peter, not condemning him but encouraging him. He seems to be telling Peter that whatever faith he has, greater than most I think, is more than enough to be built on, to the extent that Peter’s faith after theresurrection is strong enough on which to found the Christian church.

Returning to John chapter 21 we see that Peter again jumps into the water from the boat to be with the Lord. (21:7-8).

*Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.*

We also know that Peter’s courage fails him after the crucifixion. In Peter we see the best and worst of us all.

When Jesus and Peter climb into the boat we note that the wind died. Again Spurgeon expresses this in helpful terms.

*“The Greek word implies that the wind was tired, weary, “done up,” as we say. It had had its boisterous time, and spent its force; and now it knew its Lord’s voice, and, like a tired child, fell asleep.”*

After seeing both Jesus walking to them over the water, and the sudden calming of the wind, those on the boat, the disciples, worshipped Jesus, understanding perhaps fully for the first time that he “is truly the Son of God”. (this suggests that feeding the 5 thousand the day before was not as significant for them). The demonstration of this miracle was clearly very personal for the disciples as it had been enacted to benefit (or maybe save) them. Personal encounters with Christ are what makes us truly believe. In order to believe in Him we need that up-close relationship, and without it knowledge alone will not save us.

The accounts of this miracle by Mark and John differ in a number of ways, but not in the fundamental love Christ showed the disciples by walking to them over the water.

John states that after Jesus entered the boat, “immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading”. Trusting in Christ gives immediate calm belief that we will reach the other side of our troubles when he is in the boat with us.

Mark states thus: “Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by.” But he turned to them after he heard them call out. He had walked over the sea to them, and would have passed them if he had not seen and heard their terror, at which point we again see his compassion for them, even knowing that their hearts were hardened.

Mark 6:45-52

45Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

47Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 49but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” 51Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

John 6: 16-21

16When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, 17where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. 18A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. 19When they had rowed about three or four miles,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+6&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26277b)] they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. 20But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.” 21Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

**Jesus Calms the Wind and Waves**

The second miracle that we are looking at is recorded in the synoptic gospels, but not in John. This is the occurrence when Jesus calms the waters when travelling in the boat with his disciples. The scene is again the Sea of Galilee.

I will use Mark’s version of events to help us understand more about this miracle.

**Mark 4: 35-41**

35On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” 36Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. 37And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. 38But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”

39Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace,[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+4&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-24363g)] be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. 40But He said to them, “Why are you so fearful? How*is it* that you have no faith?” 41And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

This miracle, which precedes feeding the 5 thousand and walking on the water, demonstrates Christs love for his disciples, not only in calming the sea but also using the circumstance to teach them.

JC Ryle makes the point that these disciples had been obediently following Jesus, wherever He went. *“They were daily attending on His ministry, and hearkening to His word. They were daily testifying to the world, that, whatever Scribes and Pharisees might think, they believed on Jesus, loved Jesus, and were not ashamed to give up all for His sake. Yet here we see these men in trouble, tossed up and down by a tempest, and in danger of being drowned.”*

We note that in this instance there were a number of craft that set off with the disciples’ boat. As Spurgeon puts it, thus creating a picture in our minds:

*Christ was Lord High Admiral of the Galilean lake that night, and he had quite a little fleet of vessels around his flagship.*

**And there arose a great storm of wind.**

Clearly the disciples were surprised by the suddenness and ferocity of this storm, as they would in all probability not have set sail had they seen the storm coming. At least four of them were fisherman and the Sea of Galilee was their home waters. The sea became so tempestuous that the boat started to fill with water. But Christ was asleep in the stern of the boat on a pillow. Perhaps the turbulent waters had the effect of rocking him to sleep. The elements were under God’s control so they would not have ever been a threat to Him. Not so the disciples who as yet did not understand the greatness of Jesus and his Lordship over all things.

But we should also note that Christ was as much a human being as he is God. His body would have been exhausted after preaching that day and little wonder that he needed to sleep.

**Carest thou not that we perish**

The disciples obviously felt that the storm was so bad that they were going to die. But credit them with turning to Christ to save them. They brought there problem to Him. Mary did the same when the wine ran out at the wedding in Cana. The disciples did not ask Him to take action but simply put the issue in front of him, just like Mary.

**And He arose, and rebuked the wind.**

No fuss, simply commanding the wind to lie down. And it obeyed its Master’s will. It is for all, believer and non-believer, to know that nature is not under the direction of any man. So seeing the wind obey Jesus must have impressed on the disciples the realisation that this man that they had chosen to follow was close to God. It took many more examples before they fully understood what this meant. And so for us who need constant reminding who we are serving.

But the greater lesson for us is that following Christ does not grant us untroubled waters. JC Ryle noted this in his commentary:

*Let us mark well this lesson. If we are true Christians, we must not expect everything smooth in our journey to heaven. We must count it no strange thing, if we have to endure sicknesses, losses, bereavements, and disappointments, just like other men. Free pardon and full forgiveness, grace along the way, and glory at the end--all this our Saviour has promised to give. But He has never promised that we shall have no affliction. He loves us too well to promise that. By affliction He teaches us many precious lessons, which without it we should never learn.*

**“Why are you so fearful? How*is it* that you have no faith?”**

The disciples were concerned for their lives, indicating they believed they were perishing. When times get really difficult we all shrink back into our basic mode of self-preservation. Our most primitive state of mind. They had forgotten all that Jesus had taught them before, being caught up in the critical situation in which they found themselves. Jesus asks about their faith, not to condemn them but to emphasise that they will need to grow in understanding before they can fulfil their task of delivering the gospel to the whole world. They will meet many challenges in their journeys, and will be able to meet them only by faith in Christ. They did not realise it at he time but they would be helped in this by God’s grace in sending them the Holy Spirit.

We as believers are no different. But. in addition to the Holy Spirit we have the Bible to guide us and point us to the right way of dealing with difficulties, as well as showing us the experiences of the disciples.

Having calmed the winds, Jesus now had to calm the disciples, who had apparently gone from fearing the violent sea to fearing the power of their Lord.

However, we know that the fear of the Lord is the start of true belief.

Acts 9:31 *“And walking in the fear of the lord and in the comfort of the holy spirit, they were multiplied.”*

Also 1 Peter 2:17: *Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*

Christ’s love for the disciples is shown in a number of instances. Much of his teaching was for them during his ministry and a number of the miracles were undertaken in their presence alone. In John 17: 6-19 Christ prays to God specifically for his disciples, and before he prays for us as believers. Verse 13 states:

*But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.*

In these two miracles that took place on the turbulent waters of the Sea of Galilee we see the compassion of Christ and his willingness to teach, not criticise. His command over nature demonstrates his authority and his deity. The humanity of the disciples should inspire us all, as their weakness is simply a reflection of our own.

Again I find clarity in the words of Ryle:

*The Lord Jesus is very empathetic and full of tender mercy. " He does not deal with believers according to their sins, nor reward them according to their iniquities. He sees their weakness. He is aware of their short-comings. He knows all the defects of their faith, and hope, and love, and courage. And yet He will not cast them off. He bears with them continually. He loves them even to the end. He raises them when they fall. He restores them when they err.* *His patience, like His love, is a patience that passes knowledge. When He sees a heart right, it is His glory to pass over many a short-coming.*

And a final word from Matthew Henry:

*How imperfect are the best of saints! Faith and fear take their turns while we are in this world; but ere long, fear will be overcome, and faith will be lost in sight.*



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