

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL STORIES AND SIGNS

## JESUS THE MIRACLE WORKER

### *Jesus Walks on Water*

*Matthew 14:22-36, Mark 6:45-56, John 6:16-21*

In our modern world, we often see water rescues. Everything from people being lifted from the roofs of their homes into helicopters to children being pulled from an overturned car that has been trapped in a torrent of floodwater.

Even in Old Testament days water rescues were taking place. Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea so the nation of Israel could safely pass through the waters and walk on dry land. The next generation of Israelites experienced a similar ‘water miracle’ when their priests stepped into the Jordan River carrying the Ark of the Covenant and the waters stood still and rose into a heap so that the people once again could walk on dry land.

Now, in the New Testament, we find Jesus literally walking on water which displayed His power and supreme control over all nature. Jesus walked on water as evidence of His divinity. This miracle is recorded in three of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark and John) and occurred immediately after His miracle feeding of 5,000 men plus women and children. Even after the bread miracle, the disciples still did not ‘get it.’ It took a frightful night on the lake for them to personally understand the divinity of Christ.

The miracle occurred on the Sea of Galilee. This fresh water lake is approximately 150 feet deep not that deep when compared to Arkansas’ Greers Ferry Lake which is measured at 486 feet deep. However, this was certainly not just a little farm stock pond. The lake is fed partly by underground springs.

One of the more noteworthy aspects of this body of water is that it is greatly susceptible to sudden and extremely violent storms. It is surrounded by steep cliffs and sharply rising mountains. The steep mountainous terrain surrounding the lake often causes cool winds to rush down and stir up violent storms on the warm surface of the lake just as it did the day the disciples were in the boat with Jesus. Several of the disciples as experienced fishermen were used to the turbulence of the sea, but this particular storm was even more than they could handle.

Jesus is sovereign over our circumstances.

**Read Matthew 14:22-25 (ESV)** <sup>22</sup> *Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.* <sup>23</sup> *And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went*

*up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,<sup>24</sup> but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.<sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.*

As mentioned last week, Jesus knew that the crowd wanted to make Him their king, because they believed that He was the promised Messiah. They were under the yoke of Roman rule and they wanted a Messiah who would be a conqueror and assume political leadership releasing them from their Roman bondage. The crowd's desire was not Jesus' mission. After sending the disciples to cross the lake on their own, He slipped away alone to the mountains to pray. The disciples would be out of the physical presence of Jesus. It was during that time that they realized they were in trouble.

H.A. Ironside helped me to see past this one stormy night to the comforting 'pictures' we can find in this event. The disciples took their sea journey without thought to danger in a coming storm. This pictures the time after the death and resurrection when they would find themselves alone and longing for the presence of Jesus. He made a promise about not leaving them comfortless in **John 14:16 (ESV)**<sup>16</sup> *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.* True to His word, that promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. **Acts 2:3-4 (ESV)**<sup>3</sup> *And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.*<sup>4</sup> *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.* The Presence of that same Holy Spirit is still available to those who put their trust in Him today.

We see another 'picture' of Christ as He went on the mountain to pray. While He prayed on the mountaintop, His disciples in the boat came into trouble because of a severe storm that caused them to be tossed by the waves. As far as these experienced fishermen could see, they were about to lose their lives in a sinking boat. Still today, God's children are placed in similar stormy circumstances – sometimes physical sometimes spiritual. Although Jesus was not with His disciples, He still knew what was happening to them and came to help them. As His child, we can be confident that the Lord is always interceding for us. Even when we think we are forsaken and forgotten, He knows what we need and when we need it. As the physical Jesus prayed on the mountain, our risen Savior lives in heaven today making intercession for us. **Hebrews 7:25 (ESV)**<sup>25</sup> *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.* That is something to praise the Lord about!

Jesus calls us to courage and faith in the storm.

**Read Matthew 14:26-31 (ESV)**<sup>26</sup> *But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear.*<sup>27</sup> *But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."*<sup>28</sup> *And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."*<sup>29</sup> *He said, "Come."* *So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.*<sup>30</sup> *But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried*

out, “Lord, save me.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Like everything else about His earthly ministry, there are those who would like to discount the literal walking of Jesus on the water. For example:

1. In 2006 NBC News reported, “Rare conditions could have conspired to create hard-to-see ice on the Sea of Galilee that a person could have walked on back when Jesus is said to have walked on water, a scientist reported.”
2. Israeli researchers led by a professor from Tel Aviv University, reported in the Journal of Nautical Archaeology that they had uncovered a third-century B.C. mound of stones out in the Sea of Galilee. If they can date the stones they think they can prove Jesus did not walk on water but instead walked on stones.

As the old song says, “I believe in miracles because I believe in God.”

When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the lake, they did not recognize Jesus, they thought He was a ghost. Some might ask, “did the disciples believe in ghosts?” The Greek word used in the scripture is *phantasma*, a noun which means an ‘appearance’ or ‘apparition’. Some suggest that they thought they were seeing an appearance of the Lord similar to what occurred on Mt. Sinai in the days of Moses. They did not immediately connect the vision on the water with Jesus.

But still, we can’t help but wonder why did they did not recognize Jesus? Because in their fear they were not **expecting** Him. Fear and faith cannot co-exist in the same heart. Our fear can blind a person to the presence of the Lord even as He draws near in time of need.

Are we any different when Jesus appears in the midst of the storms of our lives? But, then the sweet voice of Jesus speaks to us: *Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.* Jesus said in **John 10:27 (ESV)**<sup>27</sup> *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* And Peter, impetuous Peter caught sight of the truth of God’s Presence and was willing to put his faith to the test!

I have heard it said, “no one ever walked on water but Jesus.” That is not quite true – Peter did! Let’s think of what literally happened for a moment. Jesus said: ‘Come’, so Peter put one leg over the side of the boat. Can you imagine it? Then he put the other leg over the side of the boat and stood up! Like a child, he took his first steps on this water. Peter was literally doing what we sing about – standing on the promises of God!

Then, suddenly Peter got scared. In the beginning Peter’s focus was on Jesus the Savior – the Water of Life standing on the water – not on a rock – not on ice. Just as those who piloted boats in his day looked

at the stars, Peter was looking at Jesus! But then he took his focus off Jesus and remembered the storm swirling around him. The moment he took his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink.

But, even then, Peter knew what to do. He cried – *"Lord, save me!"* Jesus did – immediately and then Jesus said: *You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"* There is no answer recorded – probably because any answer Peter would have given would have been “just an excuse.”

Jesus is worthy of worship as the powerful Son of God.

***Read Matthew 14:32-33 (ESV)*** <sup>32</sup> *And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.* <sup>33</sup> *And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

Jesus' mission of walking out on the water in the midst of the storm was accomplished – *those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."* In that moment, they understood who Jesus really was. Now, at this point they still did not have the complete picture of what was yet to come regarding Christ like we do today. We have the ‘whole story’ in God's Word from beginning to end. They were still in process of learning about Jesus. But, we too, in our walk with the Lord are still in the process learning more about Jesus or, at least, we should be! For me, the more I learn about Him and His Word – the more I realize how little I really know!

When the disciples find reason to praise God, they praised Him on the spot. This worship was not in their synagogue or the temple – it was out on the sea in the early morning hours after they had experienced a storm tossed night.

The Apostle Paul would later define worship this way: ***Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)*** <sup>1</sup> *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* <sup>2</sup> *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

When you find yourself sinking (because all of us do at times) remember this: ***Isaiah 43:2 (ESV)*** <sup>2</sup> *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* Jesus the miracle worker who worked miracles 2,000 years ago is still working miracles today!