

# JESUS WALKS ON THE WATER

Mark 6:45-56

Key Verse: 6:50b

*Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*

In today's passage, Jesus walks on the water to come to help his disciples who were in trouble. It wasn't a Hollywood style special effect for a movie. But his disciples were scared and thought he was a ghost. Jesus said to them, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Fear is a serious problem for many people. A fear of ghosts is called "spectrophobia." There are many other kinds of fear. Arachnophobia is a fear of spiders, acrophobia, a fear of heights, testophobia, a fear of taking tests, and hydrophobia is a fear of water. Ephebiphobia is a fear of teenagers, octophobia, a fear of number 8, chrometophobia, a fear of money, pentheraphobia, a fear of mother-in-law, and OJphobia is a fear of being murdered by your spouse. If we don't trust in God, we can easily be overwhelmed by many kinds of fear in the course of our life. Let us learn today how to overcome our fear.

## I. JESUS PRAYS ON A MOUNTAINSIDE (45-46)

Look at verse 45. *"Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd."* After feeding the crowd of 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, Jesus once again tried to take care of his own disciples. His previous attempts to have a quiet time with them had been frustrated by the demanding crowd. This was the fourth attempt. This time, Jesus had a strategy. He sent the disciples ahead of him, while he dismissed the crowd. When he saw the boat was already far away from the shore, he also left the crowd.

What did Jesus do after he dismissed the crowd? Did he lie down on the grass to get some rest after his exhausting day of teaching the crowd? No. Look at verse 46. *"After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray."* This short verse tells a lot about Jesus' personal relationship with God. Jesus went to God to pray. Prayer is a time to listen to God as well as to plead with God. Jesus is the Son of God. In order to obey God's will for world salvation, Jesus came to this world as a human being. As the Son of God, he had all the power to carry out his messianic ministry. But he did not do his mission in his own way. Jesus went to God to pray--to listen to him and to plead with him.

When we pray, we usually tell God what we want. Rather than listen to him for what he wants us to do, we try to persuade him to do what we want. But Jesus' prayer was different. For example, Mark 1:35 says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." After this particular prayer, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come" (1:38). Jesus was in the midst of a very successful medical ministry and his disciples were excited. But he

learned what God really wanted him to do through his early morning prayer. And he moved on to other villages to preach the word of God. Jesus also received the strength and courage to do God's will through his prayer. His prayer at Gethsemane is another example. After his intense struggle in prayer, he was ready for the upcoming suffering and crucifixion on a cross. Prayer was an essential part of Jesus' life and mission on earth.

What do you think his prayer topics were as he prayed on that mountainside? If we remember his words to his disciples, "You give them something to eat," from the previous passage, we realize that his prayer at this time was most likely about his disciples. Jesus had compassion on the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd (34). But his disciples were still more concerned with their own empty stomachs. So Jesus helped them to see what a shepherd could do for his sheep by faith in God. He showed them a shepherd's heart could work a miracle; he fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. Now, he prayed that his disciples might grow to be the responsible shepherds for his sheep in the future.

Prayer is also very important in our life of faith and mission; it is a life-line that maintains our personal relationship with God. The problem is that we often calculate this and that rather than pray. Such calculation usually increases anxiety and fear. On the other hand, when we pray we can experience the power of God. When we pray we can have the desire to live for the glory of God. So we must pray to God in times of prosperity as well as hardship. We must pray when we are in sin, to ask his forgiveness, or when we are in God's grace, to praise his name. Jesus has set a good example for us. Let's read verse 46. *"After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray."*

## II. JESUS TRAINS HIS DISCIPLES TO OVERCOME FEAR (47-52)

Look at verse 47. *"When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land."* The moonlight was shining upon them for a while. But suddenly the sky turned dark ominously and a strong wind was against the disciples. As we learned earlier, the Sea of Galilee often surprised even the seasoned fishermen by turning violent without warning. This time, they began to glide on the placid water early evening. Soon they reached the middle part of the lake. The lake is surrounded by steep cliffs and sharply rising mountains, except on the southern side. On the east these mountains rise to the Golan Heights as high as 2,700 feet. As a result of this formation, cool winds frequently rush down these slopes and unexpectedly stir up violent storms on the warm surface of the lake. Its surface is about 700 feet below sea level, and it is about 150 feet deep at its lowest point. The Jordan River flows through it, providing much of its water supply. The lake is about 13 miles long from north to south and 8 miles wide at Magdala, the point of its greatest width.

Jesus fed the 5,000 on the shore of the Sea of Galilee near Bethsaida located on the north-eastern side of the lake. Now the disciples were headed to Bethsaida. So it should not have taken them very long to get to the destination. But on the way, they met the strong head wind and had to struggle at oars. In fact, they were pushed into the middle of the lake and got stuck there. They were not moving at all. They frantically paddled, but they were only going around in a circle. Several hours passed, but they were still in the middle of the lake. They began to panic. Remember that they had no

modern communication means to call for help. They had no radio, no cell phone, and no coast guard to come to rescue. They were in the middle of the dark waters and they were exhausted after so much straining at the oars. There was no one to rescue them if the boat capsized. That's what they thought. But they were wrong.

**First, Jesus went out to them** (48). Look at verse 48. *He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.*



*About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them,...* Jesus knew what they were going through, even though he was on a mountainside praying. Jesus saw that they were in trouble and he came to rescue them. It was about the fourth watch of the night, meaning sometime between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. It was the darkest hour of the day, just before dawn. Jesus didn't have time to get another boat to row. He came to them walking on the lake. Sometimes when we are in the middle of intense struggle with our life problem, we feel as though no one understands our situation and no one cares. But that is not true. Jesus knows exactly what we are going through and he cares. Sometimes he allows us to struggle a little bit more so that we

become stronger. Sometimes he seems to be passing by us. But he comes to help us at the right time at the darkest hour of our life.

**Second, seeing Jesus as a ghost** (49-50a). When Jesus approached them, they should have been happy to see him. Help was right there for them. But they were terrified to see him. Why? Look at verses 49-50a. *... but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified.*

The disciples thought that Jesus was a ghost (49). It's understandable they didn't recognize Jesus immediately. It was dark and stormy. The visibility wasn't good. They were all exhausted after straining several hours at the oars. And they had never seen a man walking on the water before. But the real problem was that they were not expecting Jesus to come to rescue them. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified (50a). Among them, Peter, Andrew, James and John were former fishermen. But when they were overwhelmed by fear, everything looked like a ghost. Even they thought Jesus was a ghost. Perhaps they were thinking of a sea ghost as their situation seemed getting worse. They were paralyzed by fear that even Jesus appeared a ghost in their eyes.

**Third, "Take Courage! It is I"** (50b-51). Look at verse 50b. Jesus said to the fearful disciples, *"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."* Jesus told them that he was not a ghost. He told them that he had come to help them, that they did not have to be afraid and that they should take courage. To assure them, Jesus climbed into the boat with them. And as soon as he got into the boat, the wind died down. Clearly Jesus wanted

them to know who he really was through this miracle. Jesus also taught them that their fear had come from their lack of faith in the Son of God.

The fear of the disciples showed that they did not have enough faith. After witnessing all the wonderful things that Jesus did for them, they still didn't trust him enough. It didn't even occur to them that Jesus cared for them and would come to their rescue in a hurry. They needed some more training. Actually, it is interesting to read that Jesus was about to pass by them when they thought they saw a ghost. It seems as though Jesus wanted to see their reaction to his walking on the water. He wanted to see if they remembered that he is the Creator God who has control over the nature. The disciples failed the test. They were gripped with fear that they did not recognize the Lord. [By the way, a fear of storm is called "brontophobia."]

As disciples of Jesus, we must overcome our fear problem. Timothy was a spiritual son and faithful mission coworker for Paul. But Timothy apparently had a fear problem. Timothy was apparently little timid. So Paul urged him to be strong in God. He said to Timothy: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2Ti 1:7). Timothy learned Paul's courageous faith and served God's mission with Paul to the end.

God does not give us fear. It is the devil that gives us fear and doubt. The devil planted doubt in Adam and Eve about the love of God and led them to disobey the word of God. It was a tragic moment in human history. Even today Satan tries very hard to plant fear and doubt in our hearts. He would say, "If you commit your life to Jesus, you will miss out on all the fun of the world." The devil is a liar and the father of lies (Jn 8:44b). The devil is the enemy of God. The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1Pe 5:8b). We must be aware that the evil one tries to plant fear and anxiety in our hearts. We must overcome fear by trusting in God.

We live in an age of anxiety. There are many things in life that make us fearful and anxious. Fear of losing a job in this downturn of the economy, fear of getting a terminal illness such as cancer, fear of failures in what we do and many other kinds of fear make us anxious. But we can overcome fear by trusting in the Almighty God. Franklin D. Roosevelt said that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." (Inaugural Address, 1933) [A fear of phobias is "phobophobia."] We can overcome any kind of fear when we have faith in Jesus. When we are with Jesus our Lord, there is nothing to fear. On the other hand, when we try to steer our boat on our own in the middle of night, the devil comes and plants all kinds of fear and anxiety in us.

**Fourth, a sense of God's history** (52). Look at verse 52. *"... for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened."* This is a very interesting commentary by the author Mark. He says that the disciples were fearful because they had no sense of history. It was only hours ago that Jesus fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. He revealed himself as the Almighty God. He showed them that he is the Creator of heaven and earth. He showed them that he is the compassionate God. But the disciples did not grasp the spiritual meaning of the miracle. Like the spectators of a Fourth-of-July firework, they only enjoyed the show and no more. As a result, they did not remember what God had done through Jesus. What is worse, they did not understand who Jesus really is.

It is very import for us to have a sense of history. If we don't have a sense of God's history, that is, if we don't remember what God has done for us, we are bound to repeat the same mistakes again and again. We easily become fearful if we don't have a sense of God's history.

When we studied the life of the Gerasene demoniac a while ago, some of us laughed at his eccentric ways of life. He took off his clothes and roamed around the cemetery screaming at the top of his voice. But spiritually speaking our past had not been much different from his until God saved us through the blood of Jesus. We were the slaves of sinful desires. We were the slaves of sorrow and fatalism. We roamed around the tombs of sins, tormenting our bodies because of our unholy desires. But God saved each of us through his Son Jesus Christ. When we remember this wonderful grace of Jesus, we can live each day with a joyful heart, serving the mission God has given us. But if we forget his grace, we can become fearful and anxious about many things in life.

St. Paul was great, not because he was a handsome, tall, blonde, but because he remembered the grace of God to the end. Actually I have the image of him as a short and physically unattractive person. But Paul always remembered how undeserving he was of the wonderful grace of Jesus. He even said that he felt he was abnormally born because of his past sins (1Co 15:8). When he remembered the grace of God, the Lord blessed his life abundantly. Paul testified in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect..."

It is easy to remember God when we are in trouble. But when things seem to go well, we often forget the grace of God, not because we intend to, but because the devil whispers to us, "Now you've got to worry about other things, right?" So Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:1, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is Christ Jesus." As long as we abide in the grace of our Lord Jesus, we can be courageous.

### III. JESUS CARES FOR THE SICK (53-56)

Jesus and his disciples crossed over the lake and landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. Finally the time came for them to eat and get some rest. This time, nobody could bother them, they thought. But they were wrong. People there recognized Jesus. They ran throughout the whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever Jesus was. And wherever he went--into villages, towns or countryside--they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged Jesus to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed. Here the phrase, "all who touched him were healed," indicates that Jesus took care of every one of them and all of them were healed. This event shows that God wants to save all peoples of all nations, excluding no one. Once again, Jesus took care of the people who were like sheep without a shepherd.

In this passage, we learn that Jesus wants us to overcome fear by faith. Satan tries to confuse us by planting fear in us. The devil wants us to see Jesus as a ghost. But Jesus wants us to see him as the Son of God and the Sovereign Ruler of history. Let's remember the grace of God upon each of us so that we may have a sense of history. Let's also remember that Jesus prayed to God in the midst of his busy life.