

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JOHN 6:15 When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

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.

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

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.

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

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

NOTES

Jesus Walks on Water

Lesson Text: John 6:15-21

Related Scriptures: Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-51; Job 9:1-11

TIME: A.D. 29

PLACES: Sea of Galilee; Capernaum

GOLDEN TEXT—"But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid" (John 6:20).

Lesson Exposition

LEAVING WITHOUT JESUS— John 6:15-17

Jesus decides to depart (John 6:15). John has just recorded the fourth testifying miracle from Jesus that he includes in this Gospel—the feeding of the five thousand men, plus women and children. Jesus had put Philip to the test by asking where He could get enough food to feed the multitude of people following Him. Philip objected that all the money they had would be insufficient to buy that much food (vs. 7). Then Jesus took five barley loaves and two fish that happened to be on hand and fed the entire throng!

The response from some in that group was that Jesus was "that prophet that should come into the world" (vs. 14).

The multitude thought the predicted prophet would be a political and military leader and would help them get out from under the domination of Rome. Therefore, they began talking of making Jesus their king, thinking He must be that prophesied ruler. Jesus realized He needed to get away from the crowd in order to prevent this. Their intention was to use the vast numbers gathered there to force

Him to accept this kingship.

There were two problems with their intentions: Jesus had not come to be the military leader they imagined, and what He had come to do was not meant to be accomplished at that particular time. So Jesus left and went up a nearby mountain alone, where the crowds would not follow Him.

The disciples depart separately (John 6:16-17). John identifies the time of day as evening and getting close to dark. Both Matthew and Mark say that Jesus sent the disciples on their way toward Bethsaida across the Sea of Galilee while He sent the multitudes away (Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45). Whether or not He indicated that He would join them as soon as the crowds were dispersed, we are not told. Jesus was about to reveal Himself to them in a new manifestation of His power over nature.

The ultimate destination of the disciples was Capernaum, near Bethsaida of Galilee on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. As they proceeded in that direction, darkness fell and Jesus had not yet come to them.

DESPERATELY NEEDING JESUS— John 6:18-19

Towering waves (John 6:18). It was not unusual for rough seas to rise up rapidly on the Sea of Galilee. The small body of water is about seven hundred feet below sea level. The high hills and mountains of what is today known as the Golan Heights to the east of Galilee frequently engender sudden, violent storms when east winds meet the warmer air over the sea.

Such a windstorm arose as the disciples were making their way across the sea toward Capernaum. John describes it as “a great wind that blew,” meaning a violent wind; it was definitely no gentle breeze. The result would have been high, violent waves with the potential of sinking the boat. It was a life-threatening situation. The disciples desperately needed the Lord’s help!

Terrible fear (John 6:19). Whatever fear the disciples might have been experiencing, it suddenly increased. They had rowed “about five and twenty or thirty furlongs,” which was somewhere between three and four miles. According to Matthew, they were “now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves” (14:24), and it was now “the fourth watch of the night” (vs. 25). Mark adds that they were “toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them” (6:48). It was now between 3:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M.

Suddenly the disciples saw Jesus approaching, walking on top of the water. Mark indicates that He appeared to be passing them by (6:48) as if on His way to the farther shore. But when they saw Him, they became very afraid because they thought He was a ghost (vs. 49). It is obvious that they were not expecting Jesus to get to them and help in their situation. They were frantically involved in trying to accomplish what was needed for their

safety. John emphasizes how Jesus calmed their fears once they realized it was Him (cf. 6:20).

GLADLY ACCEPTING JESUS— John 6:20-21

Timely reassurance (John 6:20). Jesus came very early in the morning. “The sea that had impeded their movement was no obstacle to Christ, and all that they feared brought no fear to Him. Perhaps because of the fierceness of the storm or dimness of the light, they did not recognize Jesus. They thought He was a ghost. Those men who were expecting death thought that one had come from the world of the dead, perhaps to transport them to its recesses” (Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, Zondervan).

In spite of the fierceness of the storm all around them, they suddenly heard a voice above it: “It is I; be not afraid” (vs. 20). Matthew and Mark give a larger quote, which was probably the complete statement of Jesus rather than the abbreviation John uses: “Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid” (Matt. 14:27; Mark 6:50). This encouragement from Jesus has three statements.

The three statements are worth individual consideration. It is difficult for us to be cheerful during life’s stormy times, but it is possible because we are in God’s constant care. To the degree that we fully believe in God’s absolute and constant control of the circumstances of our lives, we are able to maintain a positive outlook. It behooves all of us to never stop endeavoring to grow closer in our walk with the Lord. This comes only through consistent time in God’s Word, earnest prayer, and works of love and compassion in His name.

When Jesus identified Himself, He was reassuring the disciples of His awareness of their situation and His willingness to help them during such a time. When Peter wrote about suffering and persecution, he gave these encour-

aging words: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (I Pet. 5:6-7). Even though to the disciples the situation seemed terrifying, Jesus cared about them and comforted and helped them in their peril.

They did not need to be afraid. That truth applies to us when we know Jesus as Saviour and Lord. There is nothing we go through without His knowledge and concern.

God gave His people this timeless promise: "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. 43:1-2).

Thankful reception (John 6:21).

As soon as they recognized Him, they "willingly received him into the ship." Their willingness was no doubt accompanied by a great sense of relief and joy because they knew He was now in control. Matthew records the incident of Peter also walking on the water in connection with this event (14:28-31). Both Matthew and Mark mention that the wind subsided immediately as Jesus boarded the boat. John reports that the boat immediately arrived at the shore.

The feeding of the five thousand prior to this miraculous appearance of Jesus revealed how He can provide for people's needs. This incident reveals that He also has authority over all natural laws and is the protector of those who trust in Him. Testimony has been given of incidents when God steered storms away from people in answer to prayer. One such story involved a church choir giving an outdoor concert. They prayed earnestly when the clouds began to

gather; then they saw the storm split and go around them on either side!

It is helpful to remember that the miracle of walking on the water was never repeated; Jesus did it only once. This reminds us that He did not do miracles for show but for what they can teach us about the nature of God and His love for us.

The fact that Jesus walked on water is an encouraging reminder that He can arrive to help us in any situation. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

—Keith E. Eggert.

QUESTIONS

1. What miracle had Jesus performed just prior to our text?
2. What intention of the crowd led Jesus to send His disciples away?
3. Where did Jesus go after He sent His disciples away?
4. What sudden event caused hardship for the disciples?
5. Where were the disciples when the storm suddenly got worse?
6. What did the disciples see while they were rowing against the wind?
7. Why did this sight cause their fear to increase?
8. What word of encouragement did Jesus offer them?
9. What did the disciples do as soon as they recognized Jesus?
10. What suddenly occurred as Jesus entered their boat?

—Keith E. Eggert.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Like Jesus, we must not give in to public pressure but seek God's will and submit to it (John 6:15).
2. The Lord's timing is always perfect. We can remember this when waiting on Him (vss. 16-17).
3. The difficulties we face in life will test us to see where we turn for help (vs. 18).
4. We can look to Jesus for hope and courage as we face and endure the various trials that come our way (vss. 19-20).
5. Jesus is available to us through our trials, but we must turn to Him for help (vs. 21).

—Brandon Byler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How can we discern God's will for us when so many voices are urging us in one direction or another (John 6:15-17)?
2. What are some of the most challenging things you are experiencing? How are you responding, and what in your response needs to change (vs. 18)?
3. What is your greatest hope as you go through trials? What should your goal be?
4. Of what were the disciples afraid, and what calmed their fears? What lessons does this offer to us (vss. 19-20)?
5. Do you find it easy to trust God when you are in the midst of trials? Why or why not (vss. 20-21)?

—Brandon Byler.

Golden Text Illuminated

“But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid” (John 6:20).

Have you ever seen someone walk on water? Neither had the disciples, until the morning they saw Jesus doing so. Thinking they were witnessing a ghost, their immediate response was fear (cf. Mark 6:45-52). Many of us would have reacted the same way.

The first phrase of Jesus' response to the disciples' fear is “It is I.” Translated literally, Jesus declared to His disciples, “I am.” The statement points back to Exodus, where God revealed Himself to Moses as “I AM” (cf. 3:14). Jesus was conveying to His disciples that He is the same all-sufficient God who spoke to Moses.

In the following phrase, Jesus issues a word of command: “be not afraid.” It is imperative for believers to “be not afraid.”

The Lord comes to the disciples during their most frightening moment and says “It is I; be not afraid.” Fear is the antithesis of peace. Paul writes, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit . . . for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel” (cf. Eph. 6:18-19). Prayer, faith, and Bible reading diminishes fear.

So the next time you are confronted with fear, take it from the words of the Apostle Paul: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (cf. II Tim. 1:7). Jesus Christ can walk on the threatening waters of your life.

—Kenneth E. Ware.