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Jesus Walks on the Water
Matthew 14:24-33; Mark 6:47-52; John 6:16-21

Jesus walks on water DIG: Why didn't Jesus go with the apostles in the boat? After a frustrating day, what new problem do the talmidim encounter on Lake Tiberias? Why were the Twelve terrified? What three things did Christ do to calm their fears? What did the apostles fail to understand in the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand that could have helped them in this experience? What was the Lord trying to teach them?

REFLECT: Courage is fear that has said its prayers. Why does God test our faith? In what ways has your faith been tested? How has Jesus responded to you in your test of faith? Why does Yeshua pass by those who are self-sufficient? In their moment of greatest fear, the Messiah calmed the talmidim with words of assurance. How does knowing the Lord help in times of testing? When testing comes, how can I remind myself that Jesus Christ is always there, even if I can't "see" Him?

After the feeding of the five thousand, our **Savior** needed some time alone. **He** sent **the apostles** ahead in **the boat** to their next stop. In **Christ's** day, traveling by **boat** was the fastest way to go. Most journeys had to be over land, but, whenever a route could include sailing the trip was often shorter. That is, unless storm **winds** began blowing.

When evening came, which was six o'clock in the evening, **Jesus' talmidim went down to Lake Tiberias**, sometimes called **the Sea of Galilee,** or **the Lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Gennesaret,** the fertile plain southwest of **Capernaum (John 6:16-17a).** With white sails spreading over tranquil waters, it seemed to be smooth sailing to the **Gennesaret**.

By then it was dark and Jesus had apparently stayed some hours **on a mountainside by Himself to pray** for **He** had **not joined them (Matthew**

14:23; Mark 6:46 and **John 6:17b). Messiah's** withdrawing alone **by Himself to pray** gives us a hint of the crisis to come. There are only six occasions in the Gospels in which **Yeshua** withdraws **to pray**, and each incident involves the temptation *not* to carry out **God's** mission for **Him** – a mission that would ultimately bring suffering, rejection, and death. These crises seem to increase in intensity and reach their climax in the agony of Gethsemane.[799]

The first time **He** went away **by Himself to pray** was when **the Master** was driven into the wilderness and tempted by the devil. There, **the Holy Spirit** was present with **Him** as **He** faced the ancient Serpent (**to see link click Bj – Jesus Tempted in the Wilderness**).

Secondly, **Jesus withdrew to pray alone** prior to **His** second major preaching tour (see **Cm – Jesus Traveled Throughout Galilee, Proclaiming the Good News**). **He** knew that the Adversary would be actively opposing **His** mission and **prayer** would be needed.

Thirdly, **the Lord prayed alone** after **His** first messianic miracle **(Luke 5:16)**. During the stage of observation, **He** knew that **He** would get the attention of the Sanhedrin because it was their responsibility to investigate any claim of messiahship. And so **He** did – as members of the Sanhedrin traveled all the way to Capernaum to hear **Him** preach. **Christ** knew it was going to be a turning point in **His** earthly ministry because **He** not only healed a paralytic that day (see **Co –Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man**), but more importantly, **Jesus** forgave **His** sins – claiming to be deity.

Fourthly, **Yeshua Ha'Mashiach went** to a quiet place **to pray** before choosing **His talmidim** who would carry on **His** ministry after **He** was gone (see **Cy – These are the Names of the Twelve Apostles**). These were important decisions and **He** needed to be **alone** by **Himself** and pray about it.

Fifthly, after feeding the five thousand, the people wanted to make **Him** king. Thus, **the Rabbi from Galilee** sent **His talmidim** back across **the Lake** to the **Gennesaret,** and dismissed the crowd before going **up on a mountainside by Himself to pray** (see **Fo – Jesus Rejects the Idea of a Political Messiah**)**. He** delayed going to **His apostles** long enough to save **them** from another storm. By **walking on the water**, **He** displayed **His** deity.

And sixthly, in the climax of **the Suffering Servant praying alone**, **He** was under

so much stress that **His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground** foreshadowing the cross in the morning (see **Lb – The Garden of Gethsemane**).

Because in **a** normal trip across the northern end of **the Sea of Galilee the boat** would not have traveled more than a mile or two from shore at any point, **the storm** had obviously carried **it** several miles to the south, **in the middle of the lake.** When **Jesus saw the talmidim straining at the oars they** were **already a considerable distance from the land.** The little craft was being battered by a **strong headwind and the waters grew rough (Mattityahu 14:24; Mark 6:47-48a; John 6:18),** pushing **them** farther and farther away from **their** destination and closer and closer to calamity.

I have some good news for you friend. ***The Lord saw them straining at the oars*** *and* ***He*** *sees you* ***straining at the oars*** *of your life.* ***He*** *knows your problems. You don't have to send up a flare to let* ***Him*** *know.* ***He*** *already knows, and more than that . . .* ***He*** *cares. Have* ***faith*** *in* ***Him*** *no matter what the outcome in the midst of* ***the*** *dark* ***night****.*

The apostles were still **straining at the oars during the fourth watch of the night (Mt 14:25a). The night** was divided into four **watches**, or shifts. The first was from six p.m. to nine p.m., the second from nine p.m. to twelve, the third from twelve to three a.m. and **the fourth** from three a.m. to six a.m., or just before dawn. So, **they had** only **rowed three or four miles** in six to nine hours! They were basically making no progress and were totally exhausted and hopeless **(Mt 14:25; Jn 6:19a)**. Long enough for more than one **talmid** to think, "Where is **Jesus**? **We** are worn out. **He** knows we are in **the boat**. It was **His** idea in the first place!"

But, **Yeshua** knew of their situation long before it happened. **He** waited for many hours before **He came to them**, just as **He** waited until Lazarus had been dead for three days before coming to Bethany. In both instances **He** could have come much earlier than **He** did, and in both **He** could have prevented Lazarus from dying or the storm from rising. But, to fulfill **His** divine purposes, **He** allowed Mary and Martha at Bethany and **the talmidim** on **the lake** to get to the end of themselves before acting. **He** left them for a while in the midst of their affliction to prepare them for the victory of their **faith** after **His** resurrection and for the years of ministry ahead.[800]

The Twelve should have been rejoicing with David that **if I climb up to heaven,**

you are there; if I lie down in Sh'ol, you are there. If I fly away with the wings of dawn and land beyond the sea, even there Your hand would hold me fast (Psalm 139:8-10 CJB). The apostles should have remembered that **ADONAI is a stronghold for the oppressed, a tower of strength in times of trouble (Psalm 9:9 CJB),** that **ADONAI is my Rock, my fortress and deliverer, my God, my Rock, in whom I find shelter, my shield, the power that saves me, my stronghold (Psalm 18:2 CJB),** and that **He** would keep them safe as they walked **through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4).**

The talmidim had forgotten **Messiah's** own words or assurance that **their heavenly Father** knew all **their** needs before **they** asked **Him (Mattityahu 6:32)** and that not even a single sparrow **will fall to the ground apart from your Father,** and that **the very hairs on your head are numbered (Matthew 10:29-30).** All **they** could think about was **their** own danger and all **they** could feel was **their** own fear.



But, **Yeshua** had not forgotten **the apostles**. Then **they saw Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:25; Mark 6:48b; John 6:19b).** The word **on** is *epi* which, when used with the genitive case (as it is here) signifies contact. Our **Lord's** sandals had actual contact with **the water**. **He** walked on the surface of the water as we would walk on hard pavement. This is the fifth of **the Lord's** seven miracles in **John's** book **(John 2:1-11; 4:43-54; 5:1-15; 6:1-15; 9:1-34; 11:1-44)**.

They needed to call on **Him** for help. **He was about to pass them by when the apostles saw Him and were terrified (John 6:19c).** Unlike the earlier storm that **Jesus** stilled, this one merely stirred up winds and waves that resisted **their** progress. **The talmidim** were working hard for nine hours. Absorbed in **their** own efforts, they apparently almost missed **Yeshua** walking by on **the water**.

They were probably wondering why **He** hadn't accompanied **them** on **their** trip, yet **they** were surprised and even fearful when **He** suddenly appeared. When we are so wrapped up in the challenges of life, or even obeying **Christ's** direction, that we lose a sense of **His** presence, we have shifted our focus to the wrong thing. Tests often come to call our attention back to **Jesus**.[801]

No doubt **the storm** conditions and limited visibility contributed to the fears of even the seasoned Galilean fishermen on board. And, just as there was a specific purpose when **Yeshua** delayed **two more days** going to **His** sick friend Lazarus (see **Ia – The Resurrection of Lazarus: The First Sign of Jonah**); here, **the Lord** had a specific reason for **not** joining **the Twelve earlier (John 6:17a)** as they struggled **at the oars** when crossing the lake. **He** strategically used both delays to perform miracles that would elicit faith and trust from **His apostles**. **"It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear (Mt 14:26; Mark 6:48c-50a).** The term **ghost** is the Greek word *phantasma*, which means *an apparition, a creature of the imagination,* and is where we get the English word phantom and phantasm (or an illusion).

At this point **Jesus** comforts them. **But He immediately said to them: Take courage!** That was exactly what the terror-stricken **talmidim** needed to hear. **It is I. Don't be afraid (Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50b; John 6:20).** The modern Hebrew (*ani hu*) perhaps does not totally capture the force of **His** declaration. In Greek, it is the phrase **I AM** (*ego eimi*), which is used in **John's** Gospel as a statement of **Messiah's** divine nature. In classical Hebrew it would be a form of **YHVH**, the very name of **God**, which is the imperfect Hebrew tense of the verb *to be*. **ADONAI** is eternal and omnipotent, the great **I AM**. Since **Jesus** was attempting to assure **His apostles** that **He** had everything under control, this would have been the best possible way to say it. **They** immediately recognized **His** voice.

Since the days of Lucian of Antioch in the latter half of the second century this miracle has been ridiculed. Unbelievers, from the time of David Friedrich Strauss, have considered it to be a myth. Strauss found it especially difficult to believe that **Christ's** body really defied the law of gravity. Eighteenth century naturalism sought to explain it away by saying that **the boat** of **the apostles** kept close to the shore and that **Jesus** was not **walking on the water** but on the land.[802] Of course, the Bible looks at things differently. It declares that **without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6a).**

Christ did not **walk on the water** to teach **the Twelve** how to do it. **Peter** tried

and failed; and there is no record of any of the others trying at all. **As far as the apostles were concerned, Jesus was seeking to prepare them for His approaching death and resurrection. This miracle was a prophecy of the resurrection. The same body that had walked on the water would also pass through a door closed and locked without opening it (John 20:19-29).**

On a September morning in 2011, Frank Silecchia laced up his boots, put on his hat, and headed out the door of his New Jersey house. As a construction worker, he made a living making things. But, as a volunteer at the World Trade Center wreckage, he just tried to make some sense of it all. He hoped to find a live body. He didn't. He found 47 dead ones.

Amid the carnage, however, he stumbled upon a symbol – a twenty-foot-tall-steel-beam cross. The collapsed Tower One on Building Six created a crude chamber in the clutter. In the chamber, through the dusty sunrise, Frank spotted the cross . . .



A symbol in the shards. A cross in the crisis. "Where is **God** in all this? we asked. The discovery dared us to hope, "Right in the middle of it all."

Can the same be said of our tragedies? When the ambulance takes our child away or the disease takes our friend, when the economy takes our retirement or the two-timer takes our heart – can we, like Frank, find **Christ** in the midst of the crisis? The presence of trials doesn't surprise us. But, the perceived absence of **God** can crush us.

We can deal with the ambulance if **God** is in it.

We can stomach the ICU if **God** is in it.

We can face the empty house if **God** is in it.

From within **the storm** of our lives comes the unmistakable voice: **I AM.**[803]

In response, **Peter** came up with an amazing sign of confirmation. If the hazy figure in the shadows of the night was really Rabbi **Yeshua**, then **he** would ask for a miracle! **“Lord, if it’s You,” Kefa replied, “tell me to come to You on the water” (Matthew 14:28). Kefa** was not testing **Messiah**; **he** was pleading with **Him**. Stepping onto **a stormy sea** is not a move of logic; it’s a move of desperation. **Peter** grabbed the edge of **the boat**. Threw out a leg . . . and followed with another. **He** took several steps. It was like an invisible ridge of rocks ran beneath **his** feet. At the end of the ridge was the glowing face of a never-say-die **Friend**. We do the same thing don’t we? We come to **Christ** in an hour of deep need. We abandon the boat of good works. We realize . . . that human strength won’t save us. So we look to **ADONAI** in desperation. We realize . . . that all the good works in the world are nothing when laid before **the Lamb of God**.[804]



Come, He said. Peter’s love for **the Savior** was imperfect and weak, but, it was real. As the other **apostles** watched in awe, **Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.** So long as **Kefa** kept his eyes on **the Lord**, **he** was able to duplicate the miracle of **Messiah** walking **on the water**. **Christ** allowed that miracle to occur for **Kefa’s** benefit. **But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and** took **his** eyes off **Yeshua, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me” (Matthew 14:29-30).**

True to **His** compassionate character, **Jesus immediately reached out His hand**

and caught him. In the process, **He** gently admonished **Peter** (and the others) when **He** said: **You of little faith, He said, why did you doubt (Matthew 14:31)? Faith** is only present tense; it does not build up like a bank account. **Kefa** went from much **faith** (getting out of the boat), to little **faith** (beginning to sink), in a matter of seconds.

But, **Peter's little faith** was better than no **faith**; and, as in the courtyard when **he** denied **the Lord**, at least **he** was there in the courtyard and not hiding somewhere under a bush like the rest of **talmidim**. At least **he** started toward **Yeshua**, and when **he** faltered, **Messiah** took **him** the rest of the way (see **Mn – Jesus Reinstates Peter**). **Kefa** would one day write: **In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Christ is revealed (First Peter 1:6-7).**[805]

And as if to confirm **Christ's** power over nature again, **Kefa and the Savior climbed into the boat, the wind suddenly died down.** The Greek verb **died down** is *kopazo*, which means *to cease from violence, cease raging.* The noun form means *beating, toil* or *weariness.* This is a beautiful and picturesque word. It was as if **the sea** sank to rest because it was exhausted by its own *raging*.[806] **Immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves** because **their hearts were hardened (Matthew 14:32; Mark 6:51-52; John 6:21).** This idiom didn't mean **they** were unkind or cruel (as it does in English). Rather, **their** reasoning and emotions resisted development. We would say **they** were "thick-headed." The lesson here for **the apostles** was that **they** needed to depend on **the Messiah** in any situation that **they** could not handle **themselves**. This, of course, was the lesson **they** should have learned earlier (see **Fn – Jesus Feeds the 5,000**).

Then those who were in the boat worshiped (Greek: *proskuneo*, meaning to kiss the face) **Him,** saying: **Truly you are the Son of God (Matthew 14:33).** After the storm, **the apostles worshiped Him**. As a group, **they** had never done that before. Never. Check it out. Open your Bible. Search for another time when all **Twelve worshiped Him**. You won't find it. You won't find them **worshiping** when **He** heals the leper. Forgives the adulteress. Or preaches to the masses. **They** were willing to follow. Willing to leave family. Willing to cast out demons. But, only after

the incident on **the Sea of Galilee** did **they worship Him**. Why? Simple. This time ***they*** were the ones who had been saved![807]

It is really unfortunate that **Peter** and the other **apostles** are many times portrayed as bumbling, weak men who were out of touch with **Jesus**. While it is true that they were mere mortals when **the Messiah** came to Isra'el, at least **Kefa** got out of **the boat**! That is especially praiseworthy when we consider the fact that the indwelling of **the Holy Spirit** would not start until the future day of Shavuot. It is noteworthy that **Peter** actually walked on **the water** until **he** took **his** eyes off **Yeshua**. Don't we all at some point fall prey to similar temptations and distractions when we turn away from our simple trust in **Christ**? Are we looking for the waves around us or at our **Meshiach** who created the waves?[808]

***Lord Jesus**, don't ever let me get so wrapped up in serving **You** that I stop watching for **You**. Remind me that resistance and hardship sometimes come to help me see that **Your** purposes have less to do with what I accomplish and more to do with what **You** accomplish in and through me. Help me trust that whatever **You** need to do to accomplish **Your** purposes in my life, **You** will do, and at the perfect moment. Teach me to look for **You** and not let **You pass by**. Amen. **He** is faithful.*[809]