

## THE GOSPEL OF

## JOHN

Jesus Walks  
on Water

## INTRODUCTION

John 6:16-21

A few years ago I was at a meeting in New York City — huge, overwhelmingly busy, and extremely confusing to someone not used to its eccentricities. Take the subway system, please. If you know where you're going, you can figure it out easily enough. If you're not sure, you may never escape the bowels of the city.

I was staying in a hotel on the border between SoHo and Chinatown, and had to make a relatively short subway ride to the Rector Street Station, just behind Trinity Episcopal Church on Wall Street and a block of two away from Ground Zero.

I knew which letters of the subway I could take to get there — N or R — and the direction to go. The signs outside the subway stop at the top of the stairs descending from the sidewalk assured me I was in the right place. But once I paid my fare and got to the waiting area, I realized that none of the signs there indicated that the train I wanted would be stopping there.

I panicked. I've found New Yorkers can be friendly enough to provide directions to hapless out-of-towners like me, and I have benefited from that generous tendency more than once. But this morning I was harried, anxious about the day's meetings, and feeling too insecure to ask. So I started wandering. Up and down stairways, along grimy tiled corridors, trying to find a subway sign that made some sense to me.

After some minutes of crawling around underground, I finally found what I thought was the right platform. Still feeling anxious and lost, surrounded by busy, unaware New Yorkers heading to work or wherever, I glanced behind me and saw a friend who I knew was heading to the same meeting I was.

Was I glad to see him! I greeted him warmly and told him that because he — a guy who was much more expert in the vagaries of the New York subway system — was here, I knew I was in the right place. That friend, in a small but not inconsequential sense, was Jesus to me in that moment.

**Jesus tends to pop up unexpectedly in places where we desperately need him, as he did to the disciples, fearing for their lives in a storm and then fearing for their sanity when they saw him walking toward them on the roiling surface of the angry lake to reassure them of his presence.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Reverend Peter M. Wallace, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jesus-unexpected-presence-meditation-on-john-6-16-21\\_b\\_1695030](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jesus-unexpected-presence-meditation-on-john-6-16-21_b_1695030)

## OPEN IT

1. What has been the scariest situation of your life so far? How was the situation resolved and your fears relieved?

## READ IT

John 6:15-21

## EXPLORE IT

2. Why was Jesus not with His disciples?
3. Where were the disciples going?
4. How far did the disciples row their boat?
5. What was the reaction of the disciples when they saw Jesus?
6. What did the disciples feel and then do when they realized it was Jesus?

# APPLY IT

## “The Story”

7. Read the Gospel accounts of Jesus walking on the water and take notes on the details:

**Matthew 14:22-33:**

**Mark 6:45-52:**

**John 6:15-21:**

**What are some common themes that show up in all 3 accounts?**

John (and Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52) follows the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 with the miracle of Jesus walking on the water, but he gives a compressed version of the story. For example, John doesn't tell us that Jesus compelled the disciples to get into the boat. He doesn't tell us that Jesus sent the multitude away or that He was praying on the mountain. He omits Mark's comment (6:48) that Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars or that He intended to pass them by when He came to them on the water. He doesn't say that the disciples thought that they were seeing a ghost (although he does say that they were frightened). He doesn't mention Peter's walking on the water (Matt. 14:28-31). He doesn't tell us that the storm was instantly stilled when Jesus got into the boat. And it's puzzling why John, who wants us to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, omits the disciples' worshipful response, "You are certainly God's Son!" (Matt. 14:33).

Also, John doesn't offer any comment on why he includes this story. He just gives it in this compressed form and then the following narrative goes back to the feeding of the 5,000, as Jesus expounds on His being the bread of life. So you have to ask, "Why did John include this sign in his Gospel? What does he want us to take away from meditating on it?"

One clue to these questions is what John told us back in 1:14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

**John reports this miracle so that we, too, will see Jesus' glory and trust Him in life's storms.<sup>2</sup>**

**8. The global pandemic that we face today is unprecedented as it pertains to the reaction of nearly every country in the world. What good has come from our nation's response to Covid-19?**

**9. We have heard it said by some government leaders that "the cure must not be worse than the disease." What are some storms that have erupted, (or are just on the horizon,) as a result of our leader's decisions to stop the spread of the corona virus and "flatten the curve"? How have some of these storms affected your life and the lives of people who are close to you?**

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<sup>2</sup> Steven J. Cole, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-32-growing-know-lord-who-he-john-614-21>

*“Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, everything I have learned, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness.”*

Malcolm Muggeridge (A Twentieth Century Testimony [Thomas Nelson], cited in Reader’s Digest, Jan. 1991, p. 158)

**10. Do you agree with the statement above? What was the experience and how did the Lord meet you in it?**

### **“Here Comes the Storm”**

Remember that John wrote his gospel some 30 or 40 years after the other gospels had been written, thus he did not feel it necessary to repeat many of the details that they had already given. This is one reason why his gospel is different from the other three; John expects us to supply many of the intimate details of these stories from the other gospels. For instance, Mark writes that the disciples did not want to leave Jesus when he told them to go to Capernaum, while John simply says that they got into the boat and started out for Capernaum. But Mark tells us that they did this very reluctantly. In fact, he says, Jesus had to use a little persuasion with them. He told the disciples to get in the boat and go back to Capernaum and leave him alone on the shore. They argued because they did not want to do that. Unquestionably he narrowed his eyes, his voice took on an edge, and he said more sharply, "Get in the boat!"

They did so, and started across to the other shore. But a problem arose. John suggests that they expected to pick Jesus up somewhere along the road. The disciples were on the eastern shore of the northern part of the Sea of Galilee (where the miracle of feeding the five thousand took place), thus to row back to Capernaum was merely to parallel the northern shore all the way back. They rowed across the northern tip of the lake and would never have been very far from shore as they went directly across. John indicates that they expected Jesus to meet them somewhere along the way before dark settled in. But he tells us that it had already grown dark and "Jesus had not yet come."

The disciples were facing a problem. It was now so dark they could not see the shore. To make matters worse, "a strong wind was blowing." In that section of the country the wind almost invariably blows from the north, out of the mountains of Lebanon and Mt. Hermon, down the valley and across the lake toward the south. As darkness settled in, the disciples were rowing to try to get across to Capernaum, but the wind was driving them farther and farther south, so that they lost sight of the shore and all possibility of picking up Jesus. Yet, faithful to his command they were toiling and rowing, trying to get across the lake. Matthew confirms what we have suggested here, saying at three o'clock in the morning the disciples found themselves right in the middle of the lake, far south of their intended course.<sup>3</sup>

**11. The disciples were doing what Jesus asked them to do and yet things were not going well for them. Why do some Christians think that if they do God’s will, they will not face the storms of life? Why doesn’t the Lord protect those who are seeking to serve Him from difficult trials?**

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<sup>3</sup> Ray Stedman, <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/john/the-new-resource>

**12. Since it is not always God’s will to deliver us from trials, is it wrong to pray for deliverance? What else should we pray for?**

### **“Here Comes the Son”**

*When they had rowed about three or four miles,<sup>2</sup> they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. <sup>20</sup>But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” <sup>21</sup>Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going. (John 6:19-21, ESV)*

*Some commentators try to explain this by saying Jesus was not actually walking on the water, but standing on the seashore. They draw upon the fact that as the disciples were taking their planned course they would never have been more than perhaps 50 or 100 yards from shore, thus they saw Jesus simply standing beside the sea, so close to the water that it looked as though he was standing on it. The problem with that solution, of course, is it does not explain why the disciples were afraid when they saw Jesus, or how he could appear to be walking on the billowing sea if he was standing secure on solid ground.*

*As in most of these facile explanations there is something left out that is not explained by them. The only possible explanation for the disciples' fear was that they were indeed in the middle of the lake, far from the shore; darkness had fallen, a storm was blowing, and yet to their amazement they saw Jesus not far away from the boat, walking on the water. They were frightened. You would have been, too! They thought it was a spirit, or a ghost, Matthew tells us, and fear clutched at their hearts. I know many people who claim they do not believe in ghosts, but I have noticed that they stay out of graveyards in the evening!<sup>4</sup>*

**13. The English theologian and historian Thomas Fuller appears to be the first person to commit the notion that 'the darkest hour is just before the dawn' to print. His religious travelogue “A Pisgah-Sight Of Palestine And The Confines Thereof, 1650,” contains this view: It is always darkest just before the Day dawneth. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?**

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<sup>4</sup> Ray Stedman, <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/john/the-new-resource>

- 14. The disciples did not recognize that the help that they desired was right in front of them. Why did the disciples have a hard time figuring out this was Jesus? Who are some people that God has placed around you who are Jesus Christ's representatives to you during the storms of life?**

### **"It's Me"**

Jesus immediately answers the disciples' fear with these words, "It is I; do not be afraid." If you think about those words for a moment you can see what amazing reassurance is to be found in them. What Jesus is saying is, "That which scares the living daylights out of you, this strange form appearing in the midst of the sea, doing what is absolutely impossible for men to do, that is I! The very things that oppose you, the boisterous sea, the buffeting winds, I already have under my feet. I am in control of these events; therefore, there is no need to fear." Matthew tells us that this was the time when Peter saw the Lord, and called out to him, "Lord, if it is you, bid me to come to you on the water," (Matthew 14:28 RSV). Jesus immediately replied, "Come." Peter crawled out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward the Lord. Many think that Jesus was the only one who walked on water, but that is not true, Peter did too. He started out boldly and confidently, as was his natural personality, but as he looked at the waves, and felt the wind, his confidence failed, and he began to sink into the water. I think Jesus let him go until he began to bubble, and then Peter prayed the shortest prayer in the Bible: "Help!" Jesus reached out to him, took his hand, and said, "Oh, you of little faith. Why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31).<sup>5</sup>

- 15. Peter walked on the water! But the storm continued to rage around him and he "doubted." What did Peter doubt?**

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<sup>5</sup> Ray Stedman, <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/john/the-new-resource>

### ***Footprints in the Sand***

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed  
he was walking along the beach with the LORD.  
Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.  
For each scene he noticed two sets of  
footprints in the sand: one belonging  
to him, and the other to the LORD.  
When the last scene of his life flashed before him,  
he looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
He noticed that many times along the path of  
his life there was only one set of footprints.  
He also noticed that it happened at the very  
lowest and saddest times in his life.  
This really bothered him and he  
questioned the LORD about it:  
"LORD, you said that once I decided to follow  
you, you'd walk with me all the way.  
But I have noticed that during the most  
troublesome times in my life,  
there is only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why when  
I needed you most you would leave me."  
The LORD replied:  
"My son, my precious child,  
I love you and I would never leave you.  
During your times of trial and suffering,  
when you see only one set of footprints,  
it was then that I carried you."

Author: Carolyn Joyce Carty

**16. Much of what the disciples experienced and learned happened during the difficulties of life - a life even lived with Jesus! As you look back on the storms of your life, are there places where you now know that Jesus carried you?**

**17. How can we grow to experience God's presence with us in all situations? How would this affect our behavior and emotions? What are some specific things we can do to practice the presence of God in our lives?**