

Commentary Notes

David Guzik https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Jhn/Jhn-6.cfm

Steve Cole <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-32-growing-know-lord-who-he-john-614-21>

Tony Merida [Exalting Jesus in John](#) (\$2.99 on Amazon)

A.W. Pink [The Gospel of John](#) (99¢ on Amazon)

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. Also, this miracle was private; only the disciples saw it. Thus it was for their training (and ours).

We're not reading too much into this story to say that the disciples were confused and disappointed with Jesus' response to the multitude after He fed them with the loaves and fish. (*R. C. Trench, Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord [Baker], p. 173, and G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to John [Revell], pp. 102-103, point this out.*) The crowd proclaimed Him to be the prophet of whom Moses spoke and they wanted to take Him by force and make Him king (John 6:14-15). **The disciples had placed all of their hopes in this Galilean carpenter-prophet as the promised Messiah-King, who would deliver His people. They had given up their livelihoods to follow Him. Jesus has sent them out on a mission to proclaim that the kingdom of God was at hand. They were expecting Him to establish that kingdom at any moment.**

And now, after Jesus has shown Himself to be the new Moses by providing bread for this crowd in the wilderness, the people want to make Him king. This was what the disciples had been waiting for!

But rather than capitalizing on the mood of the crowd and moving ahead with their desire to see Him enthroned, Jesus forced the disciples to get into the boat and head back toward Capernaum, while He sent the multitude away and went up on the mountain by Himself. What was He thinking? And then, to make matters worse, after Jesus forced them to get in the boat and put out on the lake without Him, a strong wind came up against them. They had already been in one storm on that lake when Jesus had been asleep in the boat with them. He woke up, rebuked the storm, and the sea was instantly calm. But now He wasn't even with them!

So it's reasonable to assume that the disciples were confused and disappointed as they were trying to row against this storm. Here they were, trying to help bring in God's promised kingdom and to help people see that Jesus is the promised Messiah-king. In obedience to Jesus, they had set out across the lake without Him. **But now, they were caught in this storm. In that setting, Jesus came to them walking on the water to teach them that even though He wasn't the kind of Messiah-king they may have hoped for, He still is the Lord of all creation. They needed to get to know Him as He is, not as they had hoped that He would be.** The lesson for us is:

Jesus does not want followers who use Him for their own purposes, but followers who grow to know Him and trust Him for who He is.

6:16-17 His disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat: Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus made His disciples get into the boat (Mark 6:45). They set off across the Sea of Galilee because Jesus told them to do it.

- “According to Mark 6:45, Jesus ‘compelled’ (anankazo) his disciples to embark and go back across the lake; perhaps he saw that they were being infected with the crowd’s excitement.” (Bruce)

6:17b *It was now dark:* Several of the disciples were fishermen, all accustomed to fishing on this very lake. When they got into the boat, the thought of rowing across the lake at night did not concern them.

6:17c *Jesus had not come to them:*

- This actually was the second time Jesus dealt with His disciples on a stormy Sea of Galilee. In the first storm (Matthew 8:24), Jesus was present with them in the boat and He rebuked and calmed the storm. In this storm Jesus asked His disciples to trust His unseen care and concern for them.
- I take it to mean that John anticipates the rest of the story: Jesus would shortly come, but He hadn’t yet come. So the disciples were on the lake in the dark in this storm, without Jesus

6:18 *The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing:*

- The wind alone was bad enough, but the wind also whipped up the waters, making for troublesome seas.
- A great wind was blowing: The Sea of Galilee was and is well known for its sudden, violent wind storms that quickly make the lake dangerous.
 - “The Sea of Galilee is six hundred feet below sea level, in a cuplike depression among the hills. When the sun sets, the air cools; and as the cooler air from the west rushes down over the hillside, the resultant wind churns the lake. Since the disciples were rowing toward Capernaum, they were heading into the wind; consequently, they made little progress.” (Tenney)
- This tested the faith and patience of the disciples. The longer they waited the worse things became. It looked as though Christ was neglectful of them. It seemed as though He had forgotten to be gracious. And similarly does God often test us today. Frequently our circumstances are dark, and conditions are all against us. We cry to the Lord, but He "does not come." But let us remind ourselves, that God is never in a hurry. However much the petulance of unbelief may seek to hasten His hand, He waits His own good time. Omnipotence can afford to wait, for it is always sure of success. And because omnipotence is combined with infinite wisdom and love, we may be certain that God not only does everything in the right way, but also at the best time: "And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him" (Isa. 30:18).

6:19 *When they had rowed about three or four miles:* In the first storm upon the Sea of Galilee the disciples were terrified (Matthew 8:25-26). In the beginning of the second storm they were more frustrated than afraid. Jesus told them to row across the lake and despite their hard work, they seemed to make little progress.

- Matthew 14:25 this this happened in the fourth watch of the night, sometime between three and six in the morning. So, they rowed hard for perhaps six to eight hours, and had only come a little more than halfway across the lake (three or four miles).
- They were in this place of frustration at the will of Jesus, doing exactly what He told them to do. Additionally, Mark 6:48 says that Jesus watched the disciples as they rowed across the lake. His eye was on them all the time. They were in the will of Jesus and watched by Jesus, yet working hard in frustration all the time.
- They were probably exhausted and perhaps wondering whether they should turn around and let the wind blow them back to their starting point. At that point of great need, Jesus came to them, walking on the sea.
- Although such trials are never enjoyable at the moment, as the author of Hebrews tells us (12:11), “Yet to those who have been trained by it [the trials of God’s discipline], afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”
 - *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)*

- “He is on the mountain while we are on the sea. The stable eternity of the Heavens holds Him; we are tossed on the restless mutability of time, over which we toil at His command.” (Maclaren)
- Notice that the disciples did not give up in despair—they continued "rowing" (verse 19)! And ultimately the Lord came to their side and delivered them from the angry tempest. So, dear saint, whatever may be the path appointed by the Lord, however difficult and distasteful, continue therein, and in His own good time the Lord will deliver you.

6:19b *They saw Jesus walking on the sea... and they were afraid:* Mark 6:49-50 says the disciples were afraid because they thought Jesus, walking on the water, was a ghost or a spirit.

- Mark “adds the remarkable detail that Jesus ‘meant to pass-by them’ i.e. overtaking, as though He had wished that the mere vision of Himself should prove sufficient support and assurance to them.” (Trench)
- The disciples were not ready for any kind of supernatural help. They knew what Jesus commanded them to do and they set out to do it – but without any direct help from Jesus. So they were surprised and afraid to see supernatural help coming to them.
- Jesus also gave them reasons and reminders to trust His supernatural help. Undoubtedly, they took with them at least some of the twelve baskets of leftover bread (John 6:13), yet they were still shocked when the supernatural help came to them on the sea.
- When they see Jesus, they’re scared. They’re witnesses to deity. They’ve seen something that is far beyond what’s natural. They’re confronted with a being far more powerful than they can fathom. Here, in the midst of the storm, they don’t fear the storm. They fear the Maker of the storm. At this moment on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples were confronted with a power beyond their reckoning. They saw the power of God, and they were afraid. But what does Jesus say? “Don’t be afraid” (v. 20). There is a God with power our minds cannot fathom. He is just and will someday use his power to right all wrongs and judge all sin. Yet, through his Son, Jesus, he reaches out to each of us and says, “You don’t need to be afraid. If you believe in Jesus, if you receive him, there’s no need to fear.”
- Their fears had mastered them. They were not expecting deliverance. They had already forgotten that exercise of Divine grace and power which they had witnessed only a few short hours before. And how accurately (and tragically) do they portray us—so quickly do we forget the Lord’s mercies and deliverances in the past, so little do we really expect Him to answer our prayers of the present.

6:21 *But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”:* For Jesus, it was enough to announce His presence. He was with His disciples and would meet them in their frustration and fear.

- “There are places in this Gospel where the words ego eimi have the nature of a divine designation (as we shall see on Jhn 8:24, 28), but here they simply mean ‘It is I.’” (Bruce)
- Jesus came to bring supernatural help and comfort to His disciples. His presence gave them what they needed, even though He came in an unexpected way.
- When we experience Jesus’ presence in the middle of life’s storms, it calms our fears.
- “It is I” is literally, in Greek, “I am.” Some commentators say that this is the only way that a person could identify himself in Greek, so Jesus is not claiming to be Yahweh, who identified Himself to Moses as “I am” (Exod. 3:14). But perhaps John, in light of his overall purpose, wants his readers to at least see a hint of this here. It is obviously Jesus’ point in John 8:58, where He says, “Before Abraham was born, I am.” Because of who He is, Jesus’ presence with us gives us comfort.
- "It is I," He says. He first directs their gaze to Himself. "Be not afraid," was a word to calm their hearts. And this is His unchanging order. Our fears can only be dispelled by looking in faith to and having our hearts occupied with Him. Look around, and we shall be disheartened. Look within, and we shall be discouraged. But look unto Him, and our fears will vanish.

Matthew 14:28-32: after this Peter asked Jesus if he could come out and walk on the water and Peter did walk on the water – for short time.

6:21 *Then they were glad to take him into the boat:* The implication was that Jesus would not come unless He was willingly received. Even walking on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus waited to be welcomed by His disciples.

- Christ does not force Himself upon us: He waits to be "received." It is the welcome of our hearts that He desires.

6:21b *immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going*: When they had willingly received Him into the boat, the miraculous happened. This was a remarkable miracle. The work that was so frustrating a few moments before suddenly was divinely accomplished.

- "From this detail given by John it is inferred that the ship seemed to move automatically, without sail or oar, in obedience to His will: so that without effort of the disciples or crew it quickly passed over the remaining distance (two miles or so) and came to shore." (Trench)
- One could say that Jesus rescued His disciples from frustration and futility. Jesus wants us to work hard; but He never wants us to work in futility. Their work had not been a waste, but it waited for the touch of divine power and presence.
- Such a remarkable miracle was helpful for the disciples, especially because Jesus had just refused an offer to be recognized as a King Messiah. This assured them that He was full of divine power even though He did not claim a throne according to popular expectation and opinion.
- "How far they were from the place at which they landed, when our Lord came to them, we know not. But the evangelist seems to speak of their sudden arrival there as extraordinary and miraculous." (Clarke)

With these two acts, Jesus identifies himself as one like Moses: he feeds the people and crosses the sea, both in ways that require divine help. Some who see him make the connection (v. 14). They don't call Jesus a prophet. They call him the Prophet. He's a particular prophet the nation of Israel has been anticipating. All the way back in Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses wrote, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." Jesus was making clear he was the prophet like Moses.

One result of this miracle was that through it, the disciples grew to know Jesus' person in a way that they never would have if they had not been in this storm. Jesus often sends us into storms so that we will grow in our understanding of who He is when He comes to us in a powerful way in the midst of the storm.

One of the main lessons of the Christian life is that God's purpose is not centered on me and my glory. It's about Jesus and His glory! God's purpose is to sum up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). To that end, He is working all things in our lives for His glory. Maybe you're thinking, "I thought he was working all things together for my good, as Romans 8:28 says." He is, but your greatest good is bound up with Jesus' glory. Your greatest good and your ultimate glory is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29-30). When we're perfectly conformed to His image in heaven, it will be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

Jesus had to know exactly where they were on the stormy sea to walk to them. They thought that they were alone, but they were really not alone. They learned that even though they didn't know it, Jesus was fully aware of their circumstances and He would come to them in His time. And, as the other gospels state, He was praying for them while He was on the mountain. But they didn't know that until later.

God's providence means that nothing happens to us apart from His sovereign, loving will. Jesus isn't asleep in heaven; He is there praying for us, even as He was praying for the disciples while they were fighting against this storm. In His perfect time, He will come to us. But we've got to trust Him when we can't see Him or figure out any reason for why we're in the storm.

The disciples had just seen Jesus create bread and fish to feed the large crowd. Now they saw Him as the Lord over His creation, as He walked on the water. Our trials cannot prevent Him from coming to us, even if we can't imagine how He will do it.

At the same time, it is not always His will to use His power to deliver us from trials. Here, He stilled the storm and the disciples got safely to the shore. But He didn't deliver John the Baptist from Herod's sword. He didn't call legions of angels to spare Himself from the cross. He later delivered Peter from prison, but not James. As Hebrews 11:33-37 shows, by faith many experienced powerful deliverances from their trials, but also by faith others were tortured and suffered martyr's deaths. But whether it's God's will to deliver us or to take us to glory through death, we should know and trust His mighty power in the trials He puts us through.