

Jesus demonstrates His power over nature as He does something that the disciples had not seen Him do before: walk on water. He then empowers Peter to do the same until Peter's faith falters and he begins to sink. Fortunately Jesus rescued Peter even in the weakness of his faith and when He does the same for us we can also worship Him as the Son of God as the disciples did.

**Verses 1-12:** Matthew records the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod, who had imprisoned John because he had preached against the fact that Herod had taken his brother's wife as his own. John's execution is also recorded in Mark 6:14-29.

**Verses 13-21:** These verses briefly cover Jesus feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. This miracle is also recorded in Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-13.

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<sup>22</sup> And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

**“And straightway [immediately]”** – After feeding the 5,000, Jesus apparently feels the need to be alone with His Father in prayer (v. 23) and so He wastes no time in sending everyone away (the disciples as well as the multitudes).

**“Jesus constrained [to compel; to force] his disciples to get into a ship”** – No doubt the disciples wanted to stay with Jesus but He insisted that they leave Him behind. Matthew doesn't say if Jesus explained to them the reason that He wanted to be alone.

**“and to go before him unto the other side”** – Evidently Jesus had declared His intentions of going to the other side of the Sea of Galilee but He sends the disciples ahead with the apparent promise that He would join them soon.

**“while he sent the multitudes away”** – Jesus remained behind to handle the task of sending the multitudes home. They have been fed and it would soon be night (v. 15). Jesus has sent away the disciples as well as the crowds so that He could be alone with His Father. Sometimes we have to do whatever it takes in order to be alone with God so we can pray.

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<sup>23</sup> And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

After the multitudes had left, Jesus went up into a mountain (as He frequently did) in order to be alone with His Father in prayer. We would do well to follow our Lord's example of frequently getting alone with God. When night fell, Jesus was there in the mountain praying alone.

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<sup>24</sup> But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

The scene changes to center on the ship that the disciples were using to cross the sea. They had apparently hoped that there would be a wind that would carry them across the sea overnight but instead a “great wind” (John 6:18) wind was blowing against them and causing the sea to become rough with waves. The disciples had resorted to rowing against the wind in order to get to their destination (Mark 6:48a, John 6:19a).

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<sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

The night was customarily divided into four watches, dividing a 12 hour period into four 3-hour periods. The “fourth watch” would be the period from 3:00 am to 6:00 am, indicating that the disciples had worked all night attempting to cross the sea. According to John 6:19, they had only gone about 25 or 30 furlongs (a furlong = 600 feet) or something like 3 or 4 miles. Depending on where they were cutting across the sea, they were likely less than halfway to their destination (Galilee is less than 10 miles across at its widest point). Interestingly, Matthew makes no explanation of why Jesus chose to walk on the sea to rejoin the disciples. Perhaps during His prayer time He discovered that it was His Father's will that He demonstrate His power once again in this manner.

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<sup>26</sup> And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

No doubt the disciples were expecting Jesus to rejoin them by using a ship to cross the sea and they had no idea that Jesus would or even could walk on water. So when they saw an unknown figure walking on the water in the dark during the early hours of the morning while the sea was windy and rough, they became “troubled” (agitated or anxious) and were in “fear” (terrified – Greek word is *phobos* from which we get the English word “phobia”). They thought they were seeing a ghostly apparition.

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<sup>27</sup> But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

The disciples must have been quite loud when they “cried out for fear” because Jesus was able to hear them above the sound of the wind and waves. Jesus quickly lets them know that they had nothing to fear because it was Him and not a ghost that they were seeing. They also do not have to fear the wind and waves because of His presence. We would do well to remember that we have nothing to fear when we realize that Jesus is with us. **Psalm 23:4** “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff [symbols of the shepherd's presence] they comfort me.*”

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<sup>28</sup> And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

Peter is often criticized for his doubt when he became afraid of the wind but, as some commentators point out, he was the only disciple with enough faith to get out of the boat in the first place. We can only guess what Peter's motivation was for asking Jesus to allow him to come to Him on the water. We know Peter often spoke or acted without thinking and perhaps this was another such occasion. Peter had already been given the power to heal and cast out demons, so perhaps he thought this was the next step in being a disciple of Jesus and he didn't want to miss out.

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<sup>29</sup> And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

Jesus tells Peter to come out on the water and Peter immediately obeys. He climbs out of the ship and begins walking on the water toward Jesus. Obviously Jesus knows that Peter's faith will falter but apparently He allows it because of the lesson that it will teach Peter, the disciples and the eventual readers of Matthew's gospel. Walking on water must have been an amazing experience for Peter but it does not last long.

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<sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

**“But when he saw the wind boisterous [strong; intense], he was afraid”** – While Peter was looking at Jesus walking on water was possible, but when he looked at the strength of the wind and the resulting waves he realized that walking on the water was something that was impossible naturally. He took his eyes off of Jesus, the One Who makes the impossible possible.

**“and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me”** – Faith is the conduit that God uses to deliver His power and blessings into our lives. An electrical appliance has a cord that, once you plug it in, delivers electrical power from the outlet into the appliance thereby giving it the power to do things that it could not do on its own. Likewise, if we don't utilize the conduit of our faith we will never be able to benefit from the power and blessings of God. Like the citizens of Nazareth, we will not be able to see God work in our lives as He wants (Matt. 13:58). As Peter's faith in Jesus began to be displaced by his fear of the wind and waves, his access to the power of God began to fade. However, despite his weakening faith, Peter understood Who was able to help Him and cries out to Jesus.

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<sup>31</sup> And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

**“And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him”** – Sometimes we think that the Lord is late when He doesn't intervene in our situation when we think He should, but in this case Jesus did not wait before rescuing Peter in his time of need. We should trust that Jesus will never wait longer than necessary to help us in our time of need.

**“and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”** – Jesus criticizes Peter by first calling him “thou of little faith.” Peter exhibited a certain amount of faith when he obeyed Jesus' command to walk on water but that faith wavered when he started looking at the circumstances instead of the Lord. Perhaps a large part of Peter's “faith” was his impulsiveness and it was his “faith as a grain of mustard seed” (Matt. 17:20) that enabled him to walk on the water. Then Jesus asked “Wherefore [for what reason] didst thou doubt?” If we were talking with Peter after he walked on water we might have asked “How did you muster up enough faith to walk on water?” However, Jesus did not commend Peter for having partial faith but instead asked what made Peter doubt at all. Our perspective would be one of amazement that Peter was able to take a single step on the water while Jesus was critical of Peter because he started sinking.

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<sup>32</sup> And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

Jesus helps Peter into the ship and then follows Himself. As He boards the ship, the wind ceases and the sea calms. God had apparently sent the wind in order to allow Jesus to further demonstrate His power and now that the wind had served its purpose and was no longer needed, it ceased. John's account describes another miracle, saying that they were immediately at their destination when Jesus came aboard the boat (John 6:21).

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<sup>33</sup> Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

After seeing four miracles (Jesus walking on the sea, Peter temporarily walking on the water, the calming of the wind, and immediately being at their destination) the disciples are again impressed with the greatness of Jesus. They respond to this latest exhibition of His power by worshiping Him and confessing that He was indeed the Son of God. If Jesus were not God then the disciples would have been guilty of idolatry and Jesus would have been guilty of blasphemy for accepting their worship. However, they were convinced of the truth that Jesus was the Son of God.