

Jesus Walking On the Sea

HN 31/10/04 pm / SS 7/11/04 am

Reading: Isaiah 43:1-13, Matthew 14:1-36

Study: John 6:15-21

Psalms: 46:1-5, 124, 93, 46:6, 10, 11

I have never been out to sea in a boat or ship and really have no desire to do so. Almost every week it seems there is a report of some fisherman or sailor being rescued at sea – which is not encouraging. Remember how the yachts in the Sydney to Hobart race were caught up in a sudden violent storm some years ago. How frightening it must have been for those sailors. Those enormous waves which they had no control over – and in the dark of night also.

We have in the Scriptures, right from the time of Noah, the image of the sea as being dangerous and destructive. Jonah was caught in a violent storm at sea and Paul was shipwrecked. In Scripture the sea is often symbolic of chaos and disorder, of the forces of evil. It claims many lives. In the end the sea will give up the dead that are in it (Revelation 20:13).

Only God can control the sea. It was he who parted the sea for Moses, he who calms the wind and the waves that threaten men as they sail upon the sea. Jesus came walking on the sea. Not only was this a supernatural act but also a symbolic act.

In your life as a believer, in your personal journey you will encounter many difficulties and dangers, many ups and downs along the way. It will not always be smooth sailing as they say. Storms will come down upon you. Trials and tribulations from sickness, rejection, persecution, loss, grief, or whatever will threaten to overwhelm you. Maybe you are in troubled waters at present. Then this passage of Scripture will be a great comfort to you.

The Church of Jesus Christ has experienced many ups and downs throughout history – and it will continue to do so. The New Testament church itself suffered great persecution. *Beloved do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you* (I Peter 4:12). Think of the church during the Reformation. What trials it went through. Think of the church in China that once flourished and then was crushed under Communism. This passage of Scripture has been of great comfort to the Church and still is today. *I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it* (Matthew 16:18).

Disciples without Jesus

Jesus fed the 5000 with five loaves and two small fish there on the grassy slopes by the lake. His disciples were engaged in this miracle witnessing the love and the creative power of Jesus. They must have been left wondering at what had just happened before their eyes.

The crowd dispersed and as darkness fell Jesus saw the disciples set off in their boat to return to Capernaum. Jesus himself went up into the hills alone to pray. They had come there for rest but it turned out to be a most busy and blessed day. Did Jesus go to give thanks to God, to pray for the 5000, to pray for his disciples? In the upper room he said *I pray for them* meaning his disciples, the ones that the Father had given to him.

The disciples were out on the lake rowing away when a squall suddenly came down upon the lake. Gale force winds blew against them and whipped up the waves. The Sea of Galilee is about 200 metres below Sea Level so strong winds often came down from the hills. They were straining at the oars and making little progress. Some were experienced fishermen but still it was a struggle, a difficult time after a tiring day and being night and all.

Is that how you feel at times? Life is a struggle. You feel that you are getting nowhere. Some have even concluded 'life was not meant to be easy'. Are you trying to get ahead, working harder and harder in the hope that more money will make life easier. Of course too many resort to gambling in this vain hope.

The disciples were in the boat being tossed about by the storm, making little progress. Note that Jesus was not in the boat with them. Where was he? He was in the hills, alone, praying to his heavenly Father. But he had not forgotten them. He knew what they were going through. *He saw them straining at rowing* even before he came to them (Mark 6:48).

Jesus knows the troubles you are going through. He knows the difficulties you are facing. He knows and he sympathises, for he has been through the same suffering – and more. *He was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin*

Disciples and Unknown Jesus

In the early hours of the morning (3-6am) Jesus came near the boat walking on the sea. He was not walking on the land nearby – how would they have seen him in the dark and why would they have been afraid if this was true? No this was a miracle. This was Jesus the Son of God revealing his power over the so called 'laws of nature' – actually laws that he made for order in his creation.

The disciples were afraid for like us they had not seen the laws of creation overruled in this way before. They had of course just witnessed the miracle of the loaves being multiplied. But Jesus was not with them in the boat. They saw a figure coming towards them walking on the water and thought it was a ghost. They were terrified. *It's a ghost they said* crying out in fear.

Immediately Jesus spoke saying 'It is I do not be afraid'. Can you identify with the experience of the disciples at this time? Do you know the fear that they felt as they witnessed this miracle. Do you believe in Jesus who can walk on the water and that in the midst of a storm?

How tragic it is that some do not believe in miracles. They do not believe in a Jesus who can walk on water. They want to explain away this miracle – Oh he was walking on the shore nearby they say. But the Scriptures in three gospels say he was walking on the sea. If we cannot believe what is written here than why should we believe anything that is written. Disbelief is very dangerous. How many are there today who call themselves Christians, even leaders in churches, that do not believe the miracles.

We must believe in Jesus who is the Son of God. The disciples *worshipped him saying 'Truly you are the Son of God'* when he got into the boat (Matthew 14:33). We must share in the fear of these disciples. We must cry out in fear and awe before the powerful and holy God who comes to us. Do not fear man but God. *Do not fear those who kill the body but..rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell* (Matthew 10:28).

At Pentecost the people were amazed at hearing a rushing mighty wind and then the apostle's speaking in tongues. After hearing Peter preach the gospel they cried out what shall we do? The Philippian jailer heard Paul and Silas singing and praying before he felt the earthquake that set them free. He cried out what must I do to be saved? Let us proclaim Jesus Christ who walked upon the Sea of Galilee, fed the multitude – and rose from the dead victorious over death and the grave.

Disciples with Jesus in the Boat

Jesus would have passed them by we read in Mark's account. They cried out and Jesus spoke to them. Their fear turned to joy at the sound of his voice. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him. *They willingly received him into the boat.*

Only John uses this word *willingly* – they willed or desired to take him in. What a beautiful picture of salvation. Jesus came into their boat because that was their will. Jesus graciously got into the boat and what happened? The wind ceased immediately. The raging storm stopped immediately.

There was peace not only on the lake but in their hearts. Their fears turned to cheers. *Be of good cheer*, said Jesus. How glad they were to have Jesus in their boat. They marvelled and worshipped him.

Their struggle was over when Jesus stepped aboard. Is that what you have found when you are going through struggles in your life. When you cry to him, have you found he comes to you and gives you peace in your heart? That is what he promises – Matthew 11:28!!! *My peace I give to you*, says Jesus. Open the Bible and read his promises. Pray in the Spirit. He will give you peace that passes all understanding.

And immediately the boat was at the land where they were going. Is this another miracle – translating the boat to shore? With Jesus in your heart you have already reached your destination. Whom he predestined he called and these he justified and *these he also glorified* (Romans 8:30). Already glorified – the tenses are all the same. You have eternal

life in Jesus Christ. You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:3).

Let us go on from today with Jesus in the boat, with Jesus in our life, with Jesus being our life. Follow his precepts and his example. Let us not fear things in this world. Jesus has all power over the creation – he can multiply loaves, he can walk on the sea. He has even conquered death. *Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (I Corinthians 15:57).

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