

Jesus Walks on Water

John 6:16-21

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Introduction

Why did John write John's Gospel? Chapter 20:30-31 says, 'Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.'

This means that every story in John is the gospel. Every story tells us the good news that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to save sinners. And that includes our story for today, Jesus walking on water.

But this isn't a long and gentle gospel story. It's more like a punch to the face. It's very succinct but it's extremely powerful. It gets straight to the point. It's a short and sharp gospel message. No one else can walk on water so Jesus must be the Son of God. The disciples then willingly take him into the boat, so maybe we should do something similar. Then Jesus delivers his disciples from the storm; a wonderful demonstration of what's in store for those who trust him. And there we have the gospel in three steps: believe that Jesus is the Son of God, willingly receive him, then enjoy his deliverance.

The Story

We'll dive into that shortly but first let's remind ourselves of the story itself. So, if you have a Bible with you, it would be helpful to have it open at John 6.

Verses 16 and 17 tell us, "When evening came, [Jesus'] disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum.' And we find out in Mark's account of this story that Jesus is the one who sent them. Mark 6:45 says, 'Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him.'

The story then jumps ahead in time and it's now dark. It's now the middle of the night. The disciples are still on their own; Jesus' hasn't joined them yet. And to make matters worse, a storm is brewing. Verse 18 says, 'A strong wind was blowing, and the waters grew rough.' And verse 19 tells us they're 3 or 4 miles into the lake. So now they're on their own, in a boat, in the middle of a lake, in the middle of a storm, in the middle of the night. And they're tired from fighting against the wind. They've been rowing for hours from evening till now and they're only halfway across the lake. This is a dire situation.

But they've been placed in this situation to learn the same lesson we need to learn, that Jesus is far more powerful than they think he is. And so, verse 19 tells us, 'When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, *walking* on the water.'

Let's pause there to consider how incredible that is. Have you ever tried to walk on water? It's impossible! We know that our feet will go straight through the water. And Jesus didn't just take a couple of steps on the water. He walked on water for 3 or 4 miles. And Jesus walked 3 or 4 miles on water in a torrential storm. Where the disciples have been struggling for hours to cross this lake, Jesus approaches their boat as if he's walking on flat ground on a sunny day. He powerfully marches through the wind and waves to meet his disciples. This is an awe-inspiring act of God's power.

Whilst it is really awesome, it's also terrifying. Place yourself in the disciples' shoes: imagine rowing against the wind for hours, getting nowhere, and then a man appears out of the storm. He's walking on the water, not hampered by the storm, and he's heading for your boat. It's like a scene out of a horror movie. You'd think it was a ghost or some other supernatural entity. Of course you're frightened.

But Jesus recognises their fear and immediately responds to it. He says to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." Jesus essentially says, "It's me. You know me. You don't need to be afraid." He reassures them that he's not a ghost. It is him; it is Jesus the human teacher they've been following around, but he's displaying immense godly power like they've never seen before.

So now the disciples have a choice. Do they trust that this is the Jesus they know? Do they accept this "new" Jesus that has extreme power? Do they believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Because who else could he be now?

By God's grace, they not only believe all these things, but they do so willingly. Verse 21 says, 'Then they were willing to take him into the boat.' A few moments ago, they were more afraid of Jesus than they were of the storm. But with Jesus' reassurance, they come to see that this wave-walker is worth trusting.

And then Jesus performs a second miracle. Verse 21 continues, 'Immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.' Jesus could have expected the disciples to carry on rowing through the storm. But that doesn't sound like Jesus and that's not what he does. Instead, he delivers his disciples from this horrible situation by teleporting the boat to the shore. From struggling in the storm to safe at shore.

The Gospel in Three Steps

So, there's our wonderful short story. Yet despite its shortness, it quite clearly explains the gospel in three recognisable steps: believe that Jesus is the Son of God, willingly receive him, then enjoy his deliverance. So, let's consider those three steps for ourselves.

Step 1 – Believe that Jesus is the Son of God

What does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Simply, believing that Jesus is the Son of God means believing that God came to earth as a human being called

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And we have plenty of evidence to suggest that's true. Today's story is a great example. How else can we explain that a human being walked on water unless that human being was also God himself? How else do we explain Jesus' other miracles unless he had the power of God? As John wrote at the end of his Gospel, these stories were written down so that we might believe that Jesus was, and still is, the Son of God.

But what does that mean for us today? Because Jesus being the Son of God was relevant to the disciples, it's still relevant today, and it will be relevant for all time.

Let me illustrate why. Imagine you're driving along one day and a police car speeds past you with its sirens blaring. That's pretty normal. You drive along a little further and a second police car speeds past with its sirens blaring. Your interest is piqued now. You carry on driving and a third police car speeds past with its sirens blaring. Now you want to know what's going on. Three police cars have just sped past you; something serious must be happening.

And we should have the same reaction when the Bible says that God has come to earth. If God has left heaven and come down to earth, something serious must be happening.

Yes, something very serious but also incredibly wonderful happened when God came to earth. And it's best summed up by another very famous verse from John's Gospel. John 3:16 says, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'

Jesus didn't just come down to earth; he was sent. In fact, he wasn't just sent, he was given. God the Father sent the God the Son to earth to fulfil an extremely important mission: to give up his life so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

So, what does it mean to perish? That's a really intense phrase that we don't tend to use in everyday life. But the Bible uses strong language because it's explaining a really serious issue. To perish means to be separated from God like death separates us from life. And this separation isn't temporary. This is eternal separation just like death permanently separates us from life.

But what have we done to deserve that? Well, Romans 6:23 puts it this way, 'The wages of sin is death.' In other words, we deserve to perish because we sin. We disobey God. We walk away from God. We want to be separate from him and so God lets us. But then we have to face the consequences. In this case, that means being eternally separated from God and facing his wrath in hell.

But God the Father sent his Son so that we don't have to perish. God sent his Son as a substitute to perish in our place. And that's what the cross is all about. Jesus didn't just die a physical death on that cross, he also received all the punishment that should be

ours. Isaiah 53:4-5 says, 'Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.'

But Jesus' mission wasn't finished there. Jesus was dead for three days, but he didn't stay dead. This is the perfect Son of God. He didn't deserve to die. So, after paying the price for our sins, the Father brought his Son back to life. Jesus rose to life and conquered death providing eternal life for anyone who believes in him. As John wrote, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' And Romans 6:23 finishes, 'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

But we can only receive that gift if we believe in him. Believing that Jesus is the Son of God means believing in his vital mission. Believing in Jesus means believing that the Son of God came down to earth to save sinners like you and me.

This story of Jesus walking on water confronts us with the reality that Jesus is the Son of God and we can't ignore that God came down to earth with a purpose. The first and most crucial step of the gospel is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

Step 2 – Willingly Receive Him

Now, think back to the disciples in the boat. They've just seen Jesus walk across the lake towards them. They're understandably afraid. Then Jesus says, "It is I. Don't be afraid." They now have a choice. They could choose to carry on being afraid. They could say, "I liked Jesus' power when he was multiplying bread and fish, but this is too much. I don't want this Jesus in my life."

But they don't react this way. Instead, they willingly take Jesus into the boat. They willingly receive Jesus back into their lives.

And in this action, they set us an example. Because it's still very possible for someone to read these stories about Jesus and say, "Yes, I see how Jesus was the Son of God through all the miracles he performed, but I'm not interested in having him in my life."

So, the next step of the gospel is to willingly receive Jesus into our lives. And, as we've just considered, that begins by sincerely believing that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died on the cross to pay the price of our sins. When we receive Jesus into our lives by believing in him, then we receive all the blessings that come with believing. Our sins are forgiven, we're granted eternal life, and Jesus sends his Holy Spirit to guide us in this new life of trusting Jesus as our saviour.

But we can't stop there. We can't say "I'll receive Jesus enough to be saved but he's not allowed to touch the rest of my life." We have to receive him fully. Otherwise, we're not really receiving him. We're really trying to get out of him what we want.

So, receiving Jesus into your life is a bit like getting married. Before marriage, your life is your own to a degree. You make the decisions. You can do what you want, within reason. But, when you get married, now there's a second person involved in your life. You come to compromises for the benefit of one another. You sacrifice what you want to do because you want your spouse to be able to do what they want to do.

In a similar way, we have to be willing to let Jesus change our lives. We're no longer on our own, we always have to take him into account. We can't do what we want to do all the time because we should want to do what he wants us to do (which is to stop sinning). Our faith in Jesus should naturally affect our lifestyle and decisions.

This step isn't always easy. Sometimes we're reluctant to let Jesus in. But then we remember that Jesus *died* to pay for our sins. We give our lives over to Jesus willingly because he deserves them. We want to give our lives to Jesus because of who he is and what he's done.

Step 3 – Enjoy His Deliverance

And it's totally worth doing because then we get to enjoy his deliverance. After the disciples trust Jesus and take him into the boat, Jesus performs another incredible miracle by immediately taking them to shore. Think about where they've just been, in the middle of a storm, not making any progress towards their destination. But their belief in Jesus leads to them being delivered from their dire situation.

And the same is true today for all those who believe in Jesus. Those who follow Jesus get to enjoy his constant deliverance. And that begins, first and foremost, with the forgiveness of our sins. Colossians 1:13 says, 'For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.' We have been delivered from the fate of hell. We have been rescued from a life without the light of God. We have been delivered from God's wrath and brought into his love.

But then Jesus continues to deliver us. In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul is very honest about the difficulties he's facing. He says, 'We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.' (2 Cor. 1:8-9). But then he continues, 'But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.' (2 Cor. 1:9-10). After bringing us into his kingdom, God doesn't stop looking after us. Just as Jesus showed compassion on his frightened disciples, God shows compassion to us by delivering us from difficulties.

And then, one day, Jesus will deliver us permanently. Those who believe in him will enjoy eternal deliverance from all sin and evil in the joy of heaven, where 'there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' (Revelation 21:4).

Where the first two steps of the gospel are active, the third is beautifully passive. Once we believe in Jesus and receive him, we can enjoy his incredible deliverance. We can enjoy amazing freedom that we don't deserve. So, we should say, as Paul does, 'Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!' (Romans 7:25).

Conclusion

There's the gospel in 3 steps: believe that Jesus is the Son of God, willingly receive him, and enjoy his deliverance. I want to close by offering you three questions to reflect on. And I hope these questions will get both Christians and non-Christians thinking seriously about their relationship with Jesus. So here are my questions:

- Do you believe that Jesus came to earth to die for sinners?
- Have you willingly received Jesus into every part of your life?
- Are you enjoying his deliverance?

May this powerful short story of Jesus walking on water point us to the great Son of God who died to pay for our sins, and may God give us the faith to believe in him. Amen.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ. Thank you for this incredible miracle that confronts us with his awesome power. Thank you for this story that points us his wonderful character and vital mission. Thank you for sending your Son to earth to pay the price of our sins. Please give us the faith to believe that he is the Son of God. Please help us to receive him into every area of our lives. Thank you that we can enjoy deliverance from sin and death both now and forevermore in his name. Amen.