

# Lord of the Storm

Matthew 14:21-36

The miracles Jesus performs in the gospels are never raw feats of strength to prove His divinity. If we read the gospels closely, the works always reveal who God is, and often who we are in Him. This is not to say that the physical effects are not important. When Jesus made good wine toward the end of the wedding feast of Cana, it had to be good wine to communicate accurately about the new covenant. If Jesus is Lord of land and sea, the God who redeems and leads His people out, He better be able to walk on water. This episode in the boat is two parts, each with six verses concluding with a statement about who Christ is, first by Jesus and then by Peter.

## The Storm

Having just fed the 5000, Jesus immediately puts the disciples on a boat to go to the other side while He heads up the mountain by Himself to pray (v. 22). Matthew confirms that by evening the multitudes are away, Jesus is alone, and by that time the boat is in the middle of the sea being tossed by the wind, three to four miles from shore (vv. 23-24; cf. Jn. 6:19). Not until the fourth watch of the night, between 3am and 6am, does Jesus come to them, walking on the sea (v. 25). The storm physically exhausts all the disciples and probably made some of them sick, and the first sight of Jesus make them cry out in fear (v. 26). He doesn't even calm the waves right away but tells them not to be afraid (v. 27). The disciples learned that they could feed the crowds with Jesus there, but now He wants them to face the storm without Him. The storm did not arise because they were not trusting God, and Jesus put them out to sea knowing they would face peril. Faith is like a muscle that must be exercised in order to get stronger. It's essential to grow during pleasant and prosperous times, like Joseph storing grain in the years of abundance, so you can withstand the storms and challenging times that inevitably come. While it's possible to discipline yourself in ascetically unproductive ways, like Simeon Stylites who lived on a pillar by himself for 37 years (cf. Col. 2:23), it's also possible to prepare yourself to trust the Lord come what may (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27), like John Chrysostom who stood up for two years and memorized the Bible. Jesus doesn't leave for very long, but He trains His disciples for what will come, to not forget in the dark what they knew in the light.

## It Is I

Jesus could have come to them any number of ways, but He chooses to walk on water the way Yahweh is described as doing: "He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8). Yahweh "commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea....And He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven (Ps. 107:23, 28-30). In Psalm 77:19, God's "way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known" refers to bringing Israel through the Red in exodus. He delivered Israel in the "morning watch" (Ex. 14:24), the same time Jesus comes, and in Isaiah's prophecy about a new and greater exodus redemption, Yahweh says "I am He" (Is. 43:10, 11-21). When Jesus calms their fears, saying "It is I; do not be afraid" (v. 27), He is claiming to be the Lord of the storm, the one who parted the Sea so Israel could walk through on dry ground and brought the waves down upon Pharaoh's army and chariots. When said the same thing to the Jews, "Before Abraham was, 'I am'" (*Ego eimi*), they took up stones to throw at Him because it was blasphemous for a man to call himself God (Jn. 8:58-59).

Command Me

# Lord of the Storm

Matthew 14:21-36

Peter does nothing by halves, whether he's professing Jesus is the Christ, saying he'll die for Jesus, denying Him three times, or here recognizing that tread on the waves if Jesus commands him (v. 28). Once we are walking on water, we can criticize Peter. This passage tells us nothing about what it felt like, what he was thinking, how the disciples reacted as they watched Peter get up because these things are not the point. Peter sees what Jesus does and knows that to follow Jesus means to imitate Him in every way possible. He knows through Christ he can feed multitudes. Why can't he walk on water? There are a lot of situations where Christians need to stop asking "How can we?" with the assumption that it's impossible, and instead ask "Why couldn't we?" knowing that with God all things are possible. Jesus says "Come" and Peter puts one foot in front of the other on the waves until he looks at the wind and begins to sink (vv. 29-30). Augustine said, "Command what you and give what you command." We can start with God's commands—what He explicitly already tells us to do. Peter had to ask if Jesus wanted Him to walk on water, *and He did*. What does He want you to ask Him to command you to do?

## Little Faith

"And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased" (vv. 31-32). Peter knew he could walk because Jesus had commanded him, but he can't stay up unless he keeps his eyes on Christ. Jesus told them who He was in verse 27, and once in the boat they confess "Truly You are the Son of God" (v. 33). This is not simply because He walked on water. Prophets usually do signs and wonders. What prophets don't do is command others to walk on water, and they don't claim to be Yahweh. The men of Gennesaret recognize Jesus and bring everyone out to be healed, and all they have to do is touch the hem of His garment (vv. 34-36). The little faith of Peter, the apostles, and the people is growing. We don't have to wonder what great faith looks like because the book of Acts shows us. Today there are many storms that need stilling, and more than enough Christians to hear Christ's commands, keep our eyes on Him, and see Him work.