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Jesus Walks on Water and Softens His Disciples' Hearts

Mark 6:45-56

This is one of the most famous accounts of Jesus in the gospels. The concept of one who “walks on water” is well-known in our culture, usually spoken of sarcastically of someone who is arrogant and needs to be brought down a few pegs ... “He thinks he walks on water!”

But when it comes to Jesus, the exact opposite dynamic is at work. We all think TOO LOWLY of Jesus, not too highly. We underestimate his greatness, his power, his love, his wisdom, his saving work. The miracle accounts in all four gospels are written to establish and develop saving faith in us.

Yes... establish and develop faith! There is an initial faith in Jesus... but like a growing plant, it has to develop. We Christians are all like the disciples in this account, with hardened hearts and little faith. We DO NOT UNDERSTAND the Bible like we should, and we do not BELIEVE like we should because sin has hardened our hearts. We need to MOVE from point A to point B.

And this miracle story is really one of **spiritual transportation**... of moving from one place to another.

Now we citizens of the 21st century are so proud of our means of transportation in this modern world. I have personally been on some amazing forms of transportation in my life – like the magnetic levitation bullet train in Japan called the “Skinkansen” ... able to travel almost 200 miles per hour and arrive precisely within tenths of second to its scheduled destination. And like most of you, I have been on massive

superjets like the Boeing 747 which weighs over 400,000 pounds... a size which would stun Orville and Wilbur Wright. We are a people used to forms of transportation that would be considered miraculous two centuries ago.

But none of these forms of transportation are as significant as the transportation on display in this account.

Certainly the transportation in this account was physical, as Jesus walked from the shore to the boat on top of the waves. That was physical transportation – moving from one place to another – by supernatural power. So also, the account Mark omitted of Peter getting out of the boat and walking on the water to Jesus is one of physical transportation – moving from one place to another – by supernatural power. And in John's Gospel, the boat itself moves instantly from the middle of the sea of Galilee to its final destination. That is also one of physical transportation by supernatural power. Moving from point A to point B.

But the real transportation in this story is spiritual, not physical... the movement of the hardened, fearful, unbelieving hearts of these disciples to faith-filled worship, acclaiming Jesus to be the Son of God with a depth and a breadth they had never known before. No, their spiritual journey was not perfected after this occasion. They would relapse into unbelief again and again. But they never forgot this moment, and their hearts were never the same again.

This account has the power to enable all of us to make the same internal spiritual journey. It has the power to soften our hardened, fear-filled, unbelieving hearts and to **transport** us ahead by a quantum leap to a whole new dimension of faith if the Spirit chooses to use it fully in all of us.

MAY HE NOW DO SO!!

I. The Disciples' Hardened Hearts

A. The Statement Clearly Made

Mark 6:52 they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened

1. What does this mean?
2. A “hardened heart” in the scripture means **spiritual resistance**, being unyielding to the influences of God
3. God is pulling your heart in a direction, but your heart is dragging its feet, not moving in the direction it should go, **RESISTING**
4. So, this refers to the condition of the disciples... they had not understood about the **LOAVES**... their hearts were hard

B. Missing the Lesson of the Loaves

1. What was the lesson of the loaves that they did not understand?
2. Well, it was the most recent miracle; it occurred that same day!
3. Jesus had fed five thousand men, plus women and children with five loaves and two fish
4. The disciples had been directly involved in that process; they had seen the bread multiplied over and over again until there was enough for maybe as many as 20,000 people or more to **GORGE** themselves
5. They had been personally involved in gathering up all the broken pieces that were left over, and had twelve baskets filled with fragments, clear evidence of the creation of matter by the supernatural power of Jesus
6. Okay, they lived through all that, saw it happen... **BUT THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE LESSON** of the loaves
7. And what is that? **Jesus is the Son of God, and there is nothing too difficult for him to do... therefore, they should trust him**
8. **BUT** their hearts were hard, and they hadn't understood the lesson of loaves, or of the stilling of the storm, or of the driving out of the Legion of demons or of the raising of Jairus's daughter from the

dead, or of the thousands of other miracles they had seen with their own eyes

9. Their hearts were hard; God still had to draw their souls through faith to the Savior

C. The Context

1. We have already said it... the feeding of the 5000
2. But remember what happened before that... they had finished their own initial mission trip, sent out by Jesus with power to do miracles and drive out demons and to preach the gospel; and they had also just found out the tragic news of the murder of John the Baptist, beheaded by King Herod after a girl danced a lusty dance
3. Jesus had wanted to be alone, and he wanted his disciples to be alone...

Mark 6:31 Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

4. When they had landed and saw the huge crowd, Jesus had compassion on them and met every one of their needs
 - a. He taught them many truths of the Kingdom of God
 - b. He healed all their diseases
 - c. He fed their empty stomachs
5. Now, it was time to send them away... to MAKE them go!

Mark 6:45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

6. The crowd was carnal and faithless, as is proven by the subsequent account in John 6... at the end of that chapter most of them abandoned Jesus and no longer followed him
 - a. Their understanding of his kingdom was purely carnal... meeting their physical needs

- b. They did not want the **spiritual kingdom** he came to establish by his word and by his blood shed on the cross
- 7. So he IMMEDIATELY made the disciples get in the boat to cross back over, and he IMMEDIATELY dismissed this faithless crowd
- 8. Then, finally, the time came for Jesus to pray, alone, on a mountain

II. Jesus' Powerful Ministry for His Disciples

There are actually six different miracles in the cumulative accounts of Jesus walking on the water... SIX MIRACLES! Not just one!

We will see Jesus' supernatural vision of his disciples' danger; Jesus' supernatural power over the laws of nature – walking on water; Jesus' supernatural power in Peter's life, enabling him to walk on water too; Jesus' supernatural power to save Peter from sinking; Jesus' supernatural power over the storm – quieting it down instantly; Jesus' supernatural power over distance and time... instantly moving the boat from the center of the sea to the destination

An amazing display of an array of powers by Jesus, not just one!!

BUT the one is amazing enough! People just don't WALK ON WATER! We'll get to that in due time!

But I want to couch all of this in the context of Jesus' ministry to his disciples... to their immediate physical needs, but more significantly, to their long-term spiritual needs. He is our Good Shepherd, caring for both body and soul in every way imaginable... protecting us from physical danger and from spiritual danger as well

So, let's organize this in terms of Jesus' multifaceted and powerful ministry for these weak disciples... moving them from hardened hearts of faithless fear to faith-filled adoration of Jesus

Jesus prayed for his disciples... then saw his disciple's danger... then walked out to save them... in so doing he displayed his power over the sea... Jesus then calmed his disciples faithless fears...

then, in Matthew's Gospel, the account of Peter walking on the water... and Jesus' activity in its beginning, middle, and end... then Jesus getting in the boat with the disciples and the storm miraculously and instantly calming... and then the boat instantly crossing over to the shore at Gennesaret

It begins with Jesus' prayer life

A. Jesus Prayed for His Disciples

Mark 6:45-47 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. ⁴⁷ When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land.

1. Jesus prayed for his own reasons, to strengthen himself... he loved to go to solitary places to pray, to commune with his Father and get the renewed strength he himself needed
2. Undoubtedly, he poured out his grief over the death of John the Baptist, his cousin, his forerunner, his prophet... so cruelly and frivolously beheaded by the wicked King Herod
3. Undoubtedly, he listened to his Father to get his own marching orders, because he didn't do anything except by the will of his Father
4. But we must imagine the centerpiece of his prayer time was the heart condition of his disciples
5. He must have been asking God to soften their hardened hearts, to draw them from their lack of understanding and their unbelief to a strong faith in him as the Son of God
6. Jesus is our Great High Priest:

Hebrews 7:24-25 Jesus ... has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

“O heavenly Father, WORK in these men! Work in them! Their hearts are hardened!! They have seen all these miracles and they have a little faith. But it is not enough! Make their faith GROW! Show them who I am, so I can show them who you are!”

B. Jesus Saw His Disciples Danger

1. The plight of the disciples

Mark 6:47-48 *When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.*

2. Jesus is far, far away from them... miles away

3. It is dark... indeed, it is the middle of the night

4. Jesus is way up on the mountain, alone, praying

5. But they are in the middle of the Sea of Galilee

6. Once again, there is a storm on the Sea... not as bad as that hurricane that he stilled, but bad enough

7. The wind is powerfully against them; they can't use the sails and are trying to row to land, but they are miles off course

8. The power of the wind and waves and currents on the sea are far too great for them

9. And this time, Jesus is not in the boat with them!

10. These Twelve Apostles basically represent the fruit of Jesus' labors up till this point... they ARE the Kingdom of God on earth, and they are in grave physical danger

11. Most significantly, in verse 48, the text tells us that Jesus SAW them straining at their oars because the wind was against them

12. HOW??? How could he SEE their peril? Well, I think we must understand this as an exercise of his supernatural knowledge...

John 10:14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me"

13. Prophets just KNOW things supernaturally; remember when Elisha healed Naaman, the Syrian general, from leprosy; and this wealthy man tried to pay Elisha for his healing, but Elisha refused; but then Elisha's servant Gehazi was filled with greed and slipped away and chased after Naaman, and asked him for some money and clothing; When Gehazi returned, this was the conversation

2 Kings 5:25-27 "Where have you been, Gehazi?" Elisha asked. "Your servant didn't go anywhere," Gehazi answered. ²⁶ But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants? ²⁷ Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and he was leprous, as white as snow.

14. How did Elisha know where Gehazi had gone? What he had done? God showed it to him in supernatural vision.

15. Jesus is the King of all prophets... he just KNOWS things; but the text actually says Jesus SAW his disciples' situation, though they were miles away, in the dark, in the middle of the sea

16. If you are one of his sheep, Jesus sees you. JESUS SEES YOU!

17. He knows what you're going through. And he will not let you be destroyed. He will go out to you.

C. Jesus Went Out to His Disciples

Mark 6:48 About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake.

1. Jesus knows the incredible danger the disciples are in

2. They are in peril... more than the earlier time, because this time, he's not in the boat with them

3. So... he goes out to BE WITH THEM

God said to Isaac, “**I will be with you** and bless you”

God said to Jacob, “**I will be with you**” and sent him back to the land of his father

God said to Moses, “**I will be with you**” when he sent him to Pharaoh

After Moses died, God said to Joshua, “**I will be with you**” when he sent him across the Jordan to conquer Jericho

God said to Gideon, “**I will be with you**” and sent him to fight the Midianites without a sword in his hand

And God said to all of his children through all time,

Isaiah 43:2 **When you pass through the waters, I will be with you**

So he says to us now in the Great Commission

Matthew 28:20 “**And surely I will be with you always, to the end of the age.**”

4. So... Jesus left his prayer time on the mountain and went out to his disciples who were in great danger

D. Jesus Displayed His Power Over the Sea

Mark 6:48 **About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake.**

1. This is the astonishing miracle of miracles... occurring that amazing, stormy night at about the fourth watch (that’s a Roman designation... Mark was writing for a Roman audience... that means sometime between 3 and 6 am.)
2. No explanation for this other than the miraculous power of Jesus over all things
 - a. Some unbelievers have tried to explain it like there was some hidden sandbar, or a chunk of floating ice
 - b. This was in the middle of a sea that these apostles knew very well

- c. This was nothing but a miracle
3. To walk on water is physically impossible; we have all lived in the world long enough to know that
 4. Gravity pulls us downward in all cases; that includes when we are in water
 5. It is true that there is something called “flotation”... buoyancy... that enables boats to float and people to swim
 6. But this is not floating or swimming; this is Jesus putting one foot in front of the other, step after step, and not sinking AT ALL
 7. Now, God set up the universe with its physical laws; that includes the law of gravity and the laws of buoyancy
 8. The word “laws” just means the way things always work; but Christ is clearly above the laws, and can violate them whenever he chooses
 9. Now, the principle of SINKING is essential to many stories of the Bible; in John 21, Jesus told his disciples to throw their net on the right side of the boat... when they did, they caught 153 large fish; but they would have caught NOTHING if the nets hadn’t sunk down into the lake; as a matter of fact, sinking is essential to the story of Jonah and the whale, as well as the death of Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea... it swallowed them up; as Moses’ song celebrated

Exodus 15:5 The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.

So, things SINKING is the normal way of this world

But Jesus can toggle off this normal force whenever he chooses; Jesus is the Lord of nature, and it obeys him; he is not forced to obey it

So it was also when Jesus ascended into heaven after his resurrection... the laws of gravity were suspended at that time

He ascended to heaven from the ground, from the Mount of Olives outside the city of Jerusalem, going higher and higher, defying gravity, until a cloud hid him from their sight

E. Jesus Calmed Their Faithless Fears

Mark 6:48-50 He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

1. I don't know why the text says Jesus was about to pass by them... clearly he is intending to be with them
2. Maybe it is just how it appeared to the disciples
3. In any case, they saw him walking on the water and they were instantly overwhelmed with terror
4. They know that human beings cannot walk on water... they resorted to a common myth of ghosts... spirit beings, apparitions... Jesus at his resurrection would have to prove to them that he was not a ghost at that key moment as well; he did so by saying "Touch me and see... a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have"
5. Here... He calls out to them... they recognize his face and his voice
6. He literally says "Take courage! I AM!!" Literally God's name, like he said to Moses from the burning bush; this is a clear claim to deity given the amazing circumstances
7. Now, in Mark's Gospel account, Jesus just gets in the boat at that point

Mark 6:51 Then he climbed into the boat with them

8. Oddly, Mark omits the amazing extra feature of Peter's walk on the water
9. I think this is because it seems Mark's primary human source of information for his gospel was the Apostle Peter... and Peter was

so humble by the end of his life that he did not want to call attention to himself at this point

10. But here's Matthew's account

F. Jesus Conveyed His Power to Peter

Matthew 14:28-31 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

This is an amazing sub-story in the midst of a larger account

It shows the how Jesus can transmit his power to us if he wills

The story with Peter has a faith-filled beginning... Peter asks Jesus to command him to come to him out on the water; that is humble... I will only come if you command me; then he begins well, walking on the water just as Jesus was; but then he wavers in unbelief, seeing the wind and the waves... he takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to sink; he cries out, LORD SAVE ME! Jesus instantly and powerfully reaches out his hand to save him; what power, to pull Peter up in such a manner

But then comes the rebuke: "You of little faith... Why did you doubt?"

This seems to be the whole work right now... in all the Apostles! They have the beginnings of saving faith, but their faith must mature. Their hearts have been hard up to this point. This incredible miracle has taken them a quantum leap forward to understanding who Jesus is

But there are still two more miracles to go!

G. Jesus Calmed the Storm Immediately

Mark 6:51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down.

Though Jesus doesn't say anything to the wind and the waves, the disciples must have understood that it was his power that had ended the storm at just that precise moment.

H. Jesus Conveyed the Boat Immediately

John 6:21 Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

The most natural way to read John's account is of an instantaneous and miraculous transportation to the far shore. A QUANTUM LEAP forward... supernatural transportation from the middle of the sea to the shore.

Remember that in Acts 8, the Holy Spirit instantly transported Philip from talking to the Ethiopian eunuch in the middle of the southern desert road to Azotus miles away.

Jesus has this kind of power over gravity, speed, distance, and time.

III. The Disciples Moved to Worship Jesus

A. Their Hearts Had Been Hard... But Now They Worshiped

Mark 6:51-52 They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

This phrase "completely amazed" means literally "beside themselves"

But Matthew tells us what they said:

Matthew 14:33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

All the miracles were given to bring people to this confession:

John 20:31 these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

B. Again... They Will Still Have Many More Moments of Unbelief

C. But the Very Next Day... They SHINED

Jesus taught the faithless, carnal crowd that was there for just another meal that they had to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Those people could not stand those words and abandoned Jesus, no longer following him

John 6:67-69 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

I can't help but think that this experience of Jesus walking on the water was essential to their faith.

IV. Jesus Resumes His Ministry to the Crowds

Mark 6:53-56 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went-- into villages, towns or countryside-- they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed

- A. In Order to Win Others... Jesus Continued His Ministry of Healing; verses 53-56 give a marvelous summary of many miracles Jesus did in Galilee, finishing up his two-year ministry in those 200 or so villages and towns
- B. Amazingly... They Now Followed the Pattern of the Bleeding Woman... who just touched the hem of Jesus' garment for healing

V. Lessons

- A. Is Your Heart Soft Toward Jesus? Or Hardened Through Unbelief?
- B. See Jesus' Amazing Ministry as our Great High Priest and our Good Shepherd
- C. Worship Jesus for These Amazing Signs!
- D. Confess What Peter Confessed:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

E. Step Out in Faith Like Peter Did... be bold in what you do for Christ!