



## Jesus: On The Water

In this fifth lesson in the series “When God Walked Among Us” we’ll take another look at Jesus in order to see who God is. Here we find Jesus performing a miracle that has inspired thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of sermons, countless songs, inspiring parables for our modern times, and which has stirred the hearts of many people when they’ve faced conflicts and difficulties in their lives.

It’s definitely an amazing thing that a human could defy gravity and walk on top of water without sinking. And it’s even more amazing that he could invite someone else to join him and they, too, could defy gravity.

We’ve all read these verses and talked about them, and we’ve heard the sermons about the trials of the world, but what else might this moment in Jesus’ life tell us? Let’s take a look at the scriptures to see what God may be showing us here.

**Mat 14:22** Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat, and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

**Mat 14:23** After he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain by himself to pray. When evening had come, he was there alone.

**Mat 14:24** But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, distressed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

**Mat 14:25** In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came to them, walking on the sea.

**Mat 14:26** When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It's a ghost!" and they cried out for fear.

**Mat 14:27** But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying "**Cheer up! It is I! Don't be afraid.**"

**Mat 14:28** Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters."

**Mat 14:29** He said, "**Come!**" Peter stepped down from the boat, and walked on the waters to come to Jesus.

**Mat 14:30** But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

**Mat 14:31** Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "**You of little faith, why did you doubt?**"

**Mat 14:32** When they got up into the boat, the wind ceased.

**Mat 14:33** Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him, saying, "You are truly the Son of God!"

Have you ever felt, for a short time, like you were really close to God, and Jesus was right there with you, and you were doing everything you knew to do, but then it was as if God sent you on your way by yourself and left you abandoned? So much of our language of faith is that you need to "walk with God". And since God's the leader, you're never supposed to walk in front of God or ahead of God. You're not supposed to leave God behind.

But here, we have an experience in the lives of the followers of Jesus Christ where they didn't leave God behind, they didn't forget that they were with God. They'd just had this incredible experience where they saw God feed the multitude with just a handful of food. Probably they had no motivation to go anywhere without Jesus, and it tells us, in fact, that Jesus **sent them** on ahead.

**Mat 14:22** Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat, and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

If you had just watched Jesus feed all those people, would you have wanted to go off on your own ahead of him? I don't think I would. When he told them to get into the boat and go to the other side ahead of him, I might have told him there wasn't any hurry; that I'd be quite happy to stay there until he was ready to go too. If he'd have told me he wanted to go up on the mountain and pray, I'd have probably told him that's fine, I'd wait right there, and I'd be quiet.

If you're a parent you probably understand that sometimes your kids just want to be with you. You just want to have time by yourself, but your kids just want to hang with you? They say, "I'll be real quiet." And maybe you did the same thing when you were a kid. When you love someone and you have a sense of safety and security in their strength, you don't want to leave them.

But Jesus makes them get into the boat and go on without him. Have you ever had that moment when you felt that God did that to you? You were more than willing to stick around just a few minutes before. In fact, if you've ever had an incredible God moment, if you've ever had a sense of God's intimacy, or if you've ever stepped into that wonderful place where it seems like God is really answering your prayers, and he's so connected to you and you're so connected to him that you're just so afraid to take any further steps without him directing you; where you might end up where he won't be like that anymore, you probably found that you just didn't want to move even a muscle, much less go off any distance from where he was at that very moment.

I know that in my own life I've felt that way many times. Relating just one particular incident is hard to do because I've needed his intervention so many times, but when he's stepped in and made things right, I've repeatedly wished my whole life could be like those moments when I felt God was really close and active in my life.

What's really strange is that so many of those times, when I've felt I really needed his help, have been some of the most insignificant moments in my life. It's like I can handle the big moments where things all around me are falling apart. I can rise to the occasion then, like recently when my entire back yard collapsed into the creek behind our house. But when I'm on a job I don't like, or somebody says something to me that hurts my feelings, it's like the entire universe has turned against me, and I start crying out to God, "Why? Why? What have I done to deserve this?"

There are moments when you feel that Jesus has sent you on ahead without him. And then everything starts to become turbulent, and difficult. The language of this passage lets us know that this was no small moment. Remember, these guys, most of them, were professional fishermen. They knew what it was like to be on the sea in the midst of torrents and storms. And the scriptures tell us, in verse 24, that the boat was already a considerable distance from the land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Now, that word "buffeted", may not be the best word to use in this description of what was taking place with the boat the disciples were in. Buffet means to rock or pound, and even batter, but the word used in the Greek, "basanidzo", actually means torture, tormented, pain, or vex. To me that paints an entirely different picture of what was going on with the men in the boat. It says that the sea was tormenting them, causing them pain, and even torturing them! This was not a time when they were being just tossed or buffeted.

And the wind and the waves were against them, which literally means the wind was their adversary, their enemy pressing against them. These men, who knew how to handle the wind and the waves, were struggling in the boat, trying to make some kind of progress toward their destination. So, Jesus walked out toward them during the fourth watch of the night, somewhere between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning. Maybe they were trying to sleep, but they were unable to because of the storm; their condition was volatile and violent.

And Jesus went out to them, and he was walking on the lake. Many of the paintings I've seen of this incident are probably accurate. They show the waves crashing and the wind blowing very hard, which seems to be the case here. And when the disciples saw him walking on the lake they were terrified, and thought he was a ghost and cried out in fear.

**Mat 14:26** When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It's a ghost!" and they cried out for fear.

**Mat 14:27** But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying "**Cheer up! It is I! Don't be afraid.**"

Jesus didn't rebuke them, but just told them to not fear. I mean, they had just seen him feed the multitude, but they had no idea he could do this! So, when they saw him they came to all the right conclusions for humans; they thought he was a ghost. And I love how Jesus speaks courage into our fears.

You would think he would eventually get tired of our fear, but he doesn't seem to ever get impatient with us in that sense. So when we try to do things right, to make right decisions in our lives, and we struggle with things, and we try to do the things he invites us to do, he doesn't get angry when we become afraid. After all, fear is a very clear emotion that all of us have, but courage really is NOT an emotion, is it? Courage is a conviction, not an emotion. When you do something courageous, what you're probably still feeling is the emotion of fear. It's almost a rip-off; when we're afraid we feel fear, but when we're courageous, we **still** feel fear! Wouldn't it be great if when we were courageous we felt courage? At least we'd feel better about being cowards. So, when Jesus sees their fear, he speaks courage to them, and says, "Don't fear. It is I. Do not be afraid."

And I'm reminded time and again that Jesus does send us out, and he will send you out, and he will put you into a boat and send you to places where you'll feel that God has left you on your own. I think this is part of the problem with faith in our culture is that our language is such a protection, a security based faith, making us think that God will always lead the way and show us everything so clearly that you're the second line of offense, but you're **not**. Just like Jesus sent out his followers, he will send you out to places where it seems he has not yet gone and he'll follow behind.

You get to go by boat since you're not God, and he gets to walk on the water since he is. And he will meet you in the most unexpected moments, and in that moment you will discover that even how God meets you may be more shocking and more terrifying than the circumstances he's put you in. But in the midst of your fear, he will once again speak courage into your life.

God speaks courage into our fear, and he speaks faith into our doubts. We find, just a few moments later, when Jesus and Peter are having a conversation, that when Peter begins to doubt God, Jesus grabs him and speaks faith into his life again. But what I think is that sometimes this story is overlaid in the wrong places.

Everybody talks about what happens next. They see Jesus, and they're all terrified, and Peter speaks to Jesus.

**Mat 14:28** Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters."

**Mat 14:29** He said, "**Come!**" Peter stepped down from the boat, and walked on the waters to come to Jesus.

Then, of course, Peter sinks a few moments later. But I want to pause here for a moment, because if Jesus came walking toward you on the water, what kind of identification or proof positive, that he was God, would you look for? To me, this was the extraordinary moment! It's not that in a few moments Peter was going to walk on the water. Okay, impressive, given, alright? But, last time I checked, your ability to walk on water was fairly low. And best I know, this particular miracle has not been repeated very often.

So we can't replicate the walking on the water part, but there's something subtle here that you can replicate. Something more significant than what happened with him walking on the water. What kind of evidence do you look for to see that Jesus is actually the one leading the way, coming to you, or calling you out?

Today, if we'd see Jesus walking on the water, what we'd say to him is, "Jesus, if this is actually you, we'd like for you to answer these two or three doctrinal questions so we'll know it's really you."

What kind of security system do you have in your own soul to know that God is working in your life, that God is really there? In fact if you didn't ask him for some information, or take a little survey to see if he was really just a ghost, we'd want to know if he had some answers for us to verify who he really is. We might hand him a bible and show him a passage and ask him to explain it to us.

I mean, they're being tormented by the waves and the wind, wouldn't it make more sense for them to ask him to stop the storm if he's really who he says he is? That would make more sense, right? Calm the storm so we don't have to fight so hard to get where we're going. Wouldn't a lot of us just say to God that if he's really in this with us, we need a miracle? We'd tell God we need him to make the path smooth for us.

I've heard people say that they thought God was involved in what they were doing, but they discovered he wasn't so they quit. But how did they come to that conclusion? They say they know he wasn't in their effort because God didn't "open the door". What that really means is that he didn't make it easy. Isn't that how we interpret it? It's that little hallmark cliché, "When God closes a door he opens a window." It's so beautiful and nice, but so unbiblical. But you know what? We like stuff like that.

But what it implies is that it's really Jesus, he calms the storm, and stops us from being tormented, and makes things go more smoothly for us. He removes the adversary, whatever it or they may be, right? I've asked him for a lot of miracles in my life, and sometimes when they didn't happen I've been sorely disappointed. But is that really the right response to God's presence in your life?

Why didn't that come to Peter's mind. Why didn't he ask Jesus to make this easy? Because it never entered his brain that that would be God's job. But somehow **we've** come to that conclusion. Peter did not say, "Jesus to prove it's you I need you to fill out this survey to know it's the right information." And he didn't tell Jesus that to prove who he was he needed to perform a miracle to make Peter's path, his life, his journey and quest to become simple and easy. As a matter of fact what he did was so extraordinary that we should have an admiration for Peter that almost goes beyond any other human being.

What he said to Jesus was that if he was the God he had come to know, if you are the Christ, the Messiah I have chosen to follow, if that's really you then call me out because the pattern I see in you is that when I follow you I almost move to places I thought I

would never go. He basically said, “Jesus, I want you to do something in me that I cannot do alone. I want to go someplace with you that I cannot go alone. I want to become someone with you that I cannot become alone.” Do you realize that what Peter asked Jesus was to do something in his life, with him, to show that He has a transformational impact on his life. Where in the world did Peter get this idea, “Call me out. Tell me to walk on the water to you?” I wonder how many of us have been missing on God’s evidence that he is God, because we don’t beg him to call us out?

I can’t even imagine what must have gone through Jesus’ mind! It must have been this incredible moment for him. I mean, if we bring him pleasure, and the scriptures say we do, then this must have been like a festival for God! Because I think most of us would have just asked him to calm the waters or something like that. You know, have him get in the boat and travel the way we travel, instead of calling us out with him where he was at.

But when Peter heard, “Come”, he jumped out of the boat and began walking on the water. And in that moment, the proof for Peter was that he was going somewhere he could not go without God. He did something he could not do without God. He was becoming someone he could not become without God.

Is your life yet unexplainable to you? Are you becoming someone that even surprises you? Are we accomplishing things that you never thought possible? So many of us want God to keep us just the way we are but travel with us. We just accept the fact that because God accepts us, embraces us, and loves us as we are at the beginning point, that God has no interest, no motivation, or intention to change us to become someone else. And that is so far from the truth.

So Peter got down out of the boat and begins to walk on the water toward Jesus. I love the way that describes the real mystery of our faith, that when you or I move toward Jesus we become someone we were not. We live a life that we could not live without him. We accomplish things we could never have imagined without him.

Peter’s focus wasn’t just walking on the water. He was walking toward Jesus. That was his ambition. He said, “Lord if it is you, this is the proof I need. Tell me to come to you on the water.” Are YOU willing to pay any price, take any risk, venture any danger to move to the closest place with God for your life?

There are people who go to Africa, Asia, South America, and many other places around the world because they believe they want to serve God in that way. But if you go any place, even in your own home town, and you’re there without God, you’re probably more of a hindrance than a help. But the question is, if Jesus called you out to “Come” and he said that the place where you are going to walk on the water, where you’re going to do what you could not do without me, where you’re going to go where you could not go without me, where you’re going to become what you could not become without me, is to get on a plane and go to this other country, or move to this other city, or just change to a different job, would you do that today? Or, instead, are you trying to get God to join you in the boat instead of joining him on the water?

So, it says he got out of the boat, walked on the water (it says it so smoothly, doesn't it). And he moved toward Jesus, but when he was the wind he was afraid and began to sink, and he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Now, I've listened to this story being told in sermon after sermon for many years and in a multitude of congregational settings, and listened to lay people discuss it in church Sunday schools. Every time the question comes up about what it was that made Peter afraid, and caused him to take his eyes off Jesus, they all conclude it was the waves. Some say the wind and the waves, but have you noticed that is NOT what the bible says? It says he saw the wind! Even if you check the original Greek text, the word "waves" is NOT in that passage! For preachers and teachers to say that he was frightened by the waves is not true, but something added into the scripture so it makes sense to us, because we can't seem to understand what else may have happened to cause Peter to begin to sink. And it fits in nicely with the lessons we like to teach in relationship to this passage of scripture. But the bottom line is that the bible says he "**saw the wind**" and was afraid.

Here's the funny thing about it. Then, on the water, he saw the wind, but previously, while still in the boat, he saw the waves and felt the wind. Remember? The waves were pounding against the boat, and the waves and wind both were tormenting them. They were the adversary before Jesus even arrived, so it wasn't like, "Oh no! Waves!". I mean, they were on the water so of course there were waves. Do you really think he forgot about the waves? He saw the waves before he ever got out of the boat and he felt the strong wind, and neither of those stopped him from asking Jesus to call him out to walk on the water and go toward him.

They had been fighting the waves and the wind all night so Peter was well aware of where he was and the circumstances he was in. But he was still insane enough to ask Jesus to call him out of the boat to step onto the waves. Yes! He knew he was on the waves, but he also figured Jesus was able to make him stand on them and walk on the water to come to him. It's not a case of all of a sudden, "Oh, I forgot! I'm on water!".

When I read this I see where Peter discovered that when you begin to step beyond your own capacity and you step into the presence of God where he begins to take you on a journey you cannot take without him, you begin to see the invisible. Peter saw the wind. It doesn't say he **felt** the strong wind and it worried him. He knew the waves. The wind he did not know.

I wonder how many of us, as we move with Jesus Christ, that what was once unperceivable to us, that which was once invisible to us, now becomes the visible reality of our life. "...when he **saw** the wind..."

What's really funny is that most of the time our complaint is that God's invisible; we can't see him. It's hard to follow him, but we can see each other; we can see stuff. So it's easy to walk away from God because he's invisible and the world is visible, right? But here you have the opposite. Jesus is visible and the wind was invisible, but it still

distracted Peter, and do you really think Jesus wasn't in charge of this particular moment? I think Jesus accelerated the moment and allowed Peter to see the wind moving, because look what happens next.

**Mat 14:31** Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

And what's the next line?

**Mat 14:32** When they got up into the boat, the wind ceased.

What a coincidence! God seems to allow the wind to become your adversary and torment you so you can move to a higher level of living; a higher level of believing. You see, if he speaks courage into our fears and faith into our doubts, then God also speaks challenges into our lives. Whatever is faith to you today is not counted as faith tomorrow. It's just everyday living. God will continue to press you and call you into new levels of living to honor him and exalt him.

Then we have the next verse.

**Mat 14:33** Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him, saying, "You are truly the Son of God!"

Honestly, that verse kind of irritates me. Big deal! So those in the boat worshipped him. It doesn't say Peter worshipped him. You know why? Because Peter worshipped him through his actions. The rest of them were worshipping him through their observation.

I think the fundamental problem with a lot of us is that we worship God "in the boat". You are there in your churches, and you are worshipping him with all your heart, and saying the right things, "Truly you are the Son Of God!" But when you leave the safety of the church building, and it's time to get out of the boat and into the water, into the waves, into the torment, to face the power of the adversary, to step into the invisible, to get to a place where you and Jesus are walking where no one else can go, what do you do? Most of us would say, "Well, that's okay. I'll just stay right here in the boat. After all, here in the boat I can worship him, and have right doctrine – 'Truly he is the Son of God'..."

You and I both have a choice to make. We can live our lives declaring Jesus as Lord from inside the boat, and worshipping him from inside the boat, or we can grow to realize God loves it when we call him out to call us out to come to him and be challenged to go where only he can take us, and do what only he can enable us to do, and be what only he can create us to be.

You might be thinking, "Well, I don't have a calling on my life. I haven't been given anything to do." Then when you're finished here, go someplace private and call God out! If you don't think you're living the life you should be living, or if you think someone else has a better life, if you are sick and tired of seeing everyone else bring people to Christ

and seem to walk closer to God, more intimately and more powerfully, and you're sick and tired of seeing other people's prayers answered then go somewhere and call God out. Let him know you're sick and tired of hearing stories about him, and you want to BE a story about him! Make sure he knows you're tired of being IN the boat because in the boat you still get sea sick. Tell him you're ready to get out of the boat, and walk on the waves. Tell him you want to be called out to meet him where HE is at, and that you want to go, do and be what is possible only through him! Take a risk. See if you're going to insult God by calling him out to call you out.

You may be reading this and not even be sure if what you're reading is true. Okay, that's fair. So speak up, and tell God, if he's really here, if Jesus is God, or if God even exists, tell him, "Go ahead, call me out." Take that risk and say, "Jesus, if you are God, and if you are real, then call me out." And see what might happen.

I think God is trying to shake us and shock us to that place of believing where we will just get out of the boat and walk on the water to go to him where he is at, to dare to take the challenges he has in mind for us. What God wants us to know is that when you call God out to call you out you begin to live in an invisible reality where that which no one else can hear, you hear, that which no one else can see, you see. You begin to live a life you cannot live without God, and to do that which you cannot do without God. You begin to go where you cannot go without God, and you begin to become the person you cannot become without God. And it all begins in that one moment when you say, "Jesus, if it's you, tell me to come."

So, go ahead and get out of the boat and walk toward Jesus. He really wants you to.