

"Water-Walking Wonder" - Mark 6:45-52

This morning, as we finish with Chapter 6 of Mark's account, Jesus is wrapping up His Great Galilean ministry. For two years, He has preached, healed, and performed many signs primarily in the province of Galilee. He had ventured up to Jerusalem for the major feasts, as was expected. And the Sanhedrin, or council comprised of the Jewish religious leaders at the Temple were well-aware of Him. (And wanted Him gone.) But His headquarters were in the fishing port of Capernaum and that was the center of His ministry.

At this point, He is at the absolute apex of His popularity. He, along with the twelve, cannot get away from the crowds. As we saw last week, the feeding of the 5,000, or the 25,000 as I like to think of it, was by far His greatest miracle to this point. It was certainly His greatest in scope. It was nothing less than an act of divine creation. People were absolutely blown away. In fact, the Apostle John tells us this:

*... they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king ...
(John 6:15)*

They were convinced He was the promised Messianic King who would throw off the yoke of Rome. But they didn't really want Jesus. They wanted what Jesus could give them. They looked at Him and saw the ultimate welfare state. If He were king, He could give them all the food they wanted. He could heal all their diseases. "Yeah, I want some of that! We're going to make Him king!"

It reminds me of the Word of Faith prosperity gospel. We want Jesus to give us what we want. In fact, we're going to demand it. We're going to demand that He gives us health, wealth and prosperity. But don't ask me to submit to His Lordship. I don't care what He wants. I only care what I want.

Well, Jesus will not be manipulated by the demands of a fallen people. He is the Good Shepherd and He will give you everything you need, but you must submit to Him. It is His will that matters, not your own. You need to let Him be the Lord of your life. You need to let Him call the shots.

The miracles are given to prove who He is, to authenticate His deity. You need to want Him. Only He has the words of eternal life.

This morning, we're going to be looking at one of our Lords' most famous signs. I think even the majority of unbelievers have heard of this miracle. Jokes are made about it. You'll find parallel accounts in Matthew and in John. We need to read all three accounts to get the full picture. So, as homework, I want you to read **Matthew 14:22-33 and John 6:15-21**. In fact, read all of John, chapter 6. I'll make a few references to those accounts, but you need to read them for yourself. Now, let's take a look at Mark's telling of these events.

Read Mark 6:45-52

Now, as I said before, after this massive crowd was fed with just a few loaves and fishes, John tells us that they were ready to take Jesus by force and make Him King. He would have none of that. That wasn't why He came. So, the Lord needed to take some steps to suppress a crisis.

Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. (Mark 6:45-46)

Three specific steps were taken by Jesus. He sent the twelve away by boat, He dispersed the crowd, and he went up into the mountain to pray. We'll talk about each of those, but first, I want to quickly address an apparent contradiction. (There are no true contradictions in God's word, only apparent ones.)

Mark tells us that Jesus sent them to the other side, to Bethsaida. Well, they were already in the region of Bethsaida. They were on the Northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. They weren't in the town proper; they were in a deserted place but Bethsaida wasn't far away. Some commentators believe that there was more than one Bethsaida, and it's possible. The word simply means "fish house". But I think the explanation is even simpler than that.

Matthew says they got in the boat to go to the other side, so he's no help. John tells us they went over the sea toward Capernaum. So which is it, Bethsaida or Capernaum?

I think the solution is really quite simple. Jesus sent them on their way and their intended ultimate destination was Capernaum but they were going to go by way of Bethsaida. That's all. If I were going to Missoula and decided to grab 93 just South of Whitefish, would I be lying if I told someone I was heading out to Whitefish? Of course not. Whitefish was a destination, just not the final destination.

Mark and John are not in conflict at all. They are just writing from different perspectives.

To diffuse the crisis, Jesus needed to get his disciples out of the way. He probably didn't want them to be unduly influenced by the clamor of the crowd. They didn't get it either. These are the same guys who were trying to position themselves for places of honor in Jesus' coming administration.

And then, He dismissed the crowds. They probably didn't want to be dismissed, but such is the authority of the eternal Son of God. He told them to break it up and they had no choice but to comply.

And finally, He needed some alone time with the Father. He went off by Himself to pray. It was His practice. We need to do the same thing. Corporate prayer is important, and special ... it is an act of worship. We must not neglect praying together as brothers and sisters in Christ, but you need alone time with the Lord every day.

Back to our story:

Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. (Mark 6:47)

I don't want you to miss this. Remember from last week? It was only about four miles to Capernaum by water, and they were planning to go by way of Bethsaida, along the coast. So, the fact that they were in the middle of the sea meant that things had not gone as planned. In John's account, we read that it was already dark.

Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. So when they had rowed about three or four miles ... (John 6:18-19)

They rowed about three or four miles, but they were way off course! The troops were in trouble! They were in the middle of the Sea of Galilee battling a fierce storm.

Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. (Mark 6:48)

Okay, there is a bunch of miraculous action here, but I want to make sure you fully understand the context. First of all, notice that it is the "fourth watch of the night. The

fourth watch is from 3:00 AM to 6:00 AM. They left right around dusk or shortly after and now it is sometime after 3 O'clock in the morning. It's been a long, strenuous, uncomfortable night. And they're still out in the middle.

Secondly, Jesus saw them straining. It was the middle of the night. It's dark and the storm would make the night even darker. Jesus was up on a mountain praying. How did He see them? Even if they had been displaying a lantern or two, he couldn't see that they were straining at the oars.

Well, He is God. God is omniscient. God sees everything. And even though Jesus voluntarily set aside some of the attributes of godhood, He still had access to all the information He needed through the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, he came to them, walking on the sea. That's not natural, folks! Have you ever tried to walk on water, water that isn't frozen? How did that work out for you? Not only is he walking on the sea, which is something nobody could do even if it was dead calm, He's strolling along during a storm, where the seas and winds would be buffeting everyone.

Finally, Mark says "He would have passed them by." At first glance, it sounds like Jesus wasn't paying attention, or just didn't care. "These guys are having a hard time, but I'll just truck on by and meet them on the other shore."

No, that's not it at all. Notice that Jesus came to them? He sought them out and He wanted them to notice, but He was waiting to be received by them. And they did. John writes that they "willingly received Him into the boat."

This is a really important point. God is sovereign. The Bible says He is working all things together according to the council of His will (Ephesians 1:11) and God exercises divine election, choosing who will be saved. But this does not by any means rule out the necessity of human action.

Jesus will reveal Himself to you. If you are listening, He is revealing Himself to you this morning. But you are awesomely and personally responsible for receiving Him or rejecting Him.

Jesus came into this world to save sinners. You're a sinner; so am I.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)

Sin is rebellion, cosmic rebellion against the Creator of the universe. And because God is awesomely, perfectly holy, every sin, no matter how inconsequential it seems to us, offends Him to the core of His being. He cannot stand to even be in the presence of sin. Because He is perfectly just, every sin must be punished.

For the wages of sin is death, (Romans 6:23)

Sin carries an eternal death penalty, but you never actually cease to exist. You spend eternity suffering your death throes. Dying, you will die. Jesus calls Hell a place where your worm never dies and your fire is never quenched.

Yes, we're all sinners, but God loves us anyway.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Jesus, the eternal Son of God came to Earth and lived a perfect human life. Then He sacrificed His life on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

He really died on that cross, but on the third day, He rose again and He lives right now, sitting at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us. Because He lives, you can have a living relationship with Him.

But you have to invite Him into your boat. Don't let Jesus walk on by. Confess to Him that you know you are a sinner. Ask Him to forgive you. Ask Him to be your Lord. Confess that you believe Him and ask Him to help your unbelief. Ask Him to help you live a life that honors Him.

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:29)

Just believe. Salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

Well, let's get back to our story.

And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." (Mark 6:49-50)

I find it striking how many times Jesus tells us not to be afraid. It is really easy to be troubled as we look around this dark and darkening world. The world goes not well! There are wars and rumors of wars. There are famines, pestilences, earthquakes, hurricanes and wild fires. Nations are rising against nations. Jesus says:

*And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. **See that you are not troubled**; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. (Matthew 24:6)*

*But when you hear of wars and commotions, **do not be terrified**; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately." (Luke 21:9)*

The world goes not well, but the kingdom comes! Be of good cheer! Jesus is here. Jesus is in control. Do not be afraid.

That's what He told the disciples. Look what happened next.

Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. (Mark 6:51)

These guys had already seen a ton of miracles. They had even seen Jesus calm the sea before. Why were they so amazed? Well, maybe John can help us out a little bit.

*Then they willingly received Him into the boat, **and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.** (John 6:21)*

These guys had been in the middle of the sea. They had been rowing all night, making negative progress. Jesus shows up, walking on the water, jumps into the boat. Not only does the storm go away, but it's like they are teleported to their destination in the blink of an eye.

Jesus had already demonstrated His power over disease. He demonstrated His power over demons. He demonstrated His power over death. He demonstrated His creative power by feeding around 25,000 folks on the Northeast shore of Galilee. He demonstrated

sovereignty over the laws of physics by walking on the water. And now He has demonstrated mastery over space-time!

They marveled ...

For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened. (Mark 6:52)

Jesus is God. Jesus is the Creator. Jesus is in complete control over the universe He made. Do not let your heart be hardened! Trust Him. Cast all your cares upon Him. He certainly is a water-walking Wonder!

The next four verses serve as a kind of summary of the Great Galilean ministry. This phase of Jesus' earth walk was coming to an end, but He continued to bless people. He continued to serve them, to heal them, even though He knew that most would eventually reject Him.

When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well. (Mark 6:53-56)

Jesus was still insanely popular, but He was about to change that with a discourse in the Synagogue in Capernaum. John tells us about it,

Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." (John 6:26-27)

Folks didn't get that. They just wanted the health, wealth and food prosperity gospel. They wanted to live their best life now. So, Jesus purposely gave them a lesson, using language that was designed to offend them.

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." (John 6:48-51)

The people said "Ew, gross!"

The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" (John 6:52)

Of course, we know Jesus was speaking figuratively. He was going to sacrifice His flesh on the cross and eating His flesh was an illustration of accepting His sacrifice on our behalf. But He didn't tell them that. He doubled-down!

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:53-54)

If you read the whole account in John, Chapter 6, you will find that Jesus presses the offending figure of speech over and over again. Eat my flesh, drink my blood. Eat my flesh, drink my blood. As a result ...

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. (John 6:66)

They weren't really interested in Jesus anyway. They wanted more stuff. They wanted more miracles.

Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:67-69)

You have to know that Peter and the boys were just as grossed out as everyone else. The concept of cannibalism was highly offensive to any practicing Jew with their rigorous dietary laws. But they had seen Jesus exert absolute mastery over His creation. They had seen Jesus manipulate space-time. They knew He was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Do you know it? Do you understand that only Jesus has the words of eternal life? Are you willing to hang with Jesus no matter what? I hope so. Jesus Christ is my Lord and my God. I pray that every one of you can make the same confession.