

Jesus Walks on Water

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus revealed His power over nature, proving He is worthy of His followers' faith and worship.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Matthew 14

“Keep your eye on the ball.” This is common and worthwhile advice in baseball. It is a refrain I heard from my dad, who doubled as my little-league baseball coach, time and time again. My dad, along with thousands of baseball coaches like him, knew that taking my eye off the ball during an at-bat was a recipe for a strikeout.

For Peter, taking his eye off of the “ball” led to more severe consequences. His focus on his circumstance instead of Jesus led not to striking out but sinking under. In faith, Peter stepped off the boat to imitate Jesus’ miraculous move of walking on water. But Peter’s faith was frail, and his doubt became an anvil as he began to sink.



What sorts of circumstances serve to distract us from focusing on Jesus?

Group Time

Point 1: Jesus is sovereign over life's circumstances (Matt. 14:22-24).

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ After dismissing the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Well into the night, he was there alone.

²⁴ Meanwhile, the boat was already some distance from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them.

This scene begins with Jesus sending His disciples away in a boat as He went to pray alone. In these verses we learn **three things** about the setting in which the subsequent miracle took place:

- **First**, the passage tells us that the events on the water took place during nighttime. Most Bible scholars suggest sometime between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m.
- **Second**, the disciples were well out in the water. The Gospel of John informs us that the disciples were three or four miles from shore (John 6:19).
- **Third**, there was tumultuous weather during this boat ride, for the disciples were battered by the wind and waves.

It must be noted that Jesus purposely removed Himself from the crowds in order to pray. Twice in Matthew 14, Jesus retreated from the crowds to pray in isolation (vv. 13,23). What can we learn from this pattern in Jesus' life? **First, if our goal is to look and act like Jesus, then spending time in solitude with the Father in prayer must be a priority in our lives. And second, the Christian life is to be lived both in crowds and alone.**



How does prayer reflect one's faith in Jesus' sovereignty over life's circumstances?

Point 2: Jesus calls us to have courage and faith in life's circumstances (Matt. 14:25-31).

²⁵ Jesus came toward them walking on the sea very early in the morning. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ Immediately Jesus spoke to them. "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter answered him, "command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Just imagine how truly terrifying this scene must have been. The disciples, worn from fighting against a storm, are now scared at the sight of Someone walking on the water, and who wouldn't be? But the One they thought was a ghost is God the Son, and the wind and the waves belong to Him. God alone treads the seas in authority over them (Job 9:8). So this miracle was a display of Jesus' **divinity**, and because Jesus is God, His disciples can have courage and faith in the face of all life's circumstances.

God Is Omnipotent: God is all-powerful. God has power and

_____ over the universe He _____,
from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is _____, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

In light of the true Gospel narratives, this miracle is not surprising. What is surprising, however, is Peter having courage, asking and obeying in faith, stepping out of the boat, and walking on water himself. But then Peter made one wrong move, followed by a right one. Peter's mistake was **taking his eyes off of Jesus and placing them on his obstacles**. His correction was **calling out to Jesus: "Lord, save me!"**




What are some ways our struggle with sin compares to Peter's struggle with the sea?

Point 3: Jesus deserves worship as the powerful Son of God (Matt. 14:32-36).


³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ Then those in the boat worshiped him and said, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

³⁴ When they had crossed over, they came to shore at Gennesaret. ³⁵ When the men of that place recognized him, they alerted the whole vicinity and brought to him all who were sick. ³⁶ They begged him that they might only touch the end of his robe, and as many as touched it were healed.

All that has taken place to this point in the story—Jesus’ walking on water, Peter’s attempt at joining Him, Peter’s doubt, Jesus’ rescuing of Peter, and the wind stopping—led to an important result: the disciples worshiped Jesus. Their confession that Jesus truly is the Son of God is the same confession of the church yesterday, today, and forevermore. Whether or not we make this confession in our own lives is the most important thing about us. We, like the disciples, must confess that Jesus truly is the Son of God and give our days to loving and treasuring Him and His purposes.

 Which miracle of Jesus is your favorite, and how has it encouraged your faith in Jesus as the Son of God?

After they landed in the region of Gennesaret, all of the sick were brought to Jesus, for they knew that He had the power to heal. The powerful Son of God can walk on the waves and heal broken bodies. In response to who Jesus is, we must worship and, like the men of the region, we must tell others. For we have come to know Jesus not only as the One who heals the physically sick but also as the One who, through His life, death, and resurrection, can heal the spiritually sick, including ourselves.

 How have you experienced the power of Jesus so that you can share His good news with others?

Voices from Church History

“Trials therefore are medicines, which our gracious and wise Physician prescribes, because we need them; and he proportions the frequency and the weight of them to what the case requires ... But any, or all of these crosses, are mercies, if the Lord works by them to prevent us from cleaving to the world, from backsliding in heart or life, and to keep us nearer to himself. Let us trust our Physician, and he will surely do us good.”¹

—John Newton (1725-1807)

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Matthew 14:1-12

The beheading of John the Baptist might seem like a random historical detail to note at this point in his Gospel, but there is rhyme and reason to Matthew's inclusion of this side story. Jesus and John had more in common than merely being cousins; they were both prophets (and certainly Jesus was *more than* a prophet). Not only were both of these men prophets, they were prophets who faced rejection and persecution. In Matthew 13:54-58, we see Jesus rejected by those in His own hometown. In Matthew 14:1-12, we read that John was imprisoned for his rebuke of Herod's sexual immorality, only later to be executed in a trivial manner.

By including these details about John the Baptist and his faithfulness as a prophet to the point of death, Matthew esteems his place in God's story as the prophetic forerunner to the Messiah. The kingdom of God was at hand in Jesus' coming, and thus, John acted accordingly as a prophet among God's covenant people, even if faithfulness meant imprisonment and perhaps even death. Though John did not get to experience the miracles in the firsthand way that Jesus' first disciples did, he nonetheless saw Jesus as worthy of his total allegiance. Those of us on this side of the cross and empty tomb have no reason to hesitate in giving our all to Jesus in light of John's faithfulness unto death.



How have you faced rejection because of your allegiance to Jesus as the Messiah?

Day 2: Read Matthew 14:13-21

Foreshadowing Jesus' own eventual slaying at the hands of corrupt rulers, the sequence of events surrounding the end of John the Baptist's life invites us into Jesus' humanity. After learning the news about His departed cousin, Jesus sought seclusion from the crowds (vv. 12-13). In observing this willful practice of solitude in Jesus' life, we must come to grips with His profound and real humanity.

Even while remaining the immutable and transcendent Creator, the Son of God incarnate also experienced the highs and lows of life as a temporal creature, namely, as a human being. As He prepared to perform the most spectacular of miracles, Jesus prioritized prayer, displaying for us His immense practical wisdom that would serve us well to imitate. Though He was on a mission to save the world through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus still took time to find a quiet place and commune with the Father in isolation. It is thus impossible to overestimate the value of this practice in the Christian life.



What would your prayer life look like if you were able to overcome your biggest roadblocks on a regular basis?

Day 3: Read Matthew 14:22-24

The Book of Matthew often uses the word “immediately” (see 14:22,27,31). In verse 22, the word is used to describe the punctuality of Jesus' command and the disciples' quickness to obey. When it comes to our obedience to Jesus, “immediate” is a good and helpful word. Our obedience should not be delayed, and *every moment* calls for our obedience.

We often excuse or delay obedience until we reach a certain point or time in our lives. We lie to ourselves, saying, “I'll stop with this sin *when* I get over this thing,” or, “I'll confess and repent of this sin *when* my schedule is different.” However, the Christian life is not one of delayed obedience; it should be marked by “immediate” obedience.



What steps can you take today to pursue immediate obedience to Jesus?

Day 4: Read Matthew 14:25-31

After the disciples wrongly identified Jesus as a threatening ghost on the waters, He calmed them by saying: “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” There is an important lesson for us to notice in this exhortation—the presence of Jesus is cause for courage, not fear.

In the story, the revelation that it was Jesus and not a ghost was good news. This could only be good news if the disciples knew the presence of Jesus was for their benefit. We know from Paul’s letters that where the presence of the Lord is, there is freedom and joy (see 2 Cor. 3:17). Even amidst sorrow and tragedy, if the Lord is with us, His presence is inexplicably good news, though it may feel bittersweet at times.



At what points in life have you felt closest to the Lord? How has His presence brought you comfort and joy, especially during difficult times?

Day 5: Read Matthew 14:32-36

More often than not, the main point we should take away from a story within the Gospels occurs near the end of the passage. Such is the case with Jesus’ walking on water. After Jesus rebuked Peter for his lack of faith, the disciples in response to His power over creation worshiped Jesus and confessed Him to be the Son of God. We in turn should respond to Jesus in the same way as we read of His many good works collectively, which culminate in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

Additionally, we should take note of what takes place in the transitional details that follow in Matthew’s narrative (vv. 34-36). The recognition of Jesus spurs people into action, bringing to Him those who need Him. We should do the same with those in our vicinity. Once we recognize Jesus for who He is, it only makes sense that we should want others to meet Him in hope that they might place their faith in Him and be healed.



How are you involved with leading people in your vicinity to Jesus?

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Jesus was born to die—a jarring statement indeed, but one that is quite true.

Christmas and Easter are fused together, linked hand-in-hand in such a way that each is dependent on the other for its meaning. The theology of such a statement is solid but incomplete, for Jesus was not born to die immediately but rather some thirty years later. Jesus' life, then, was not utilitarian—existing just so it could be taken away and picked up again—it had greater meaning and purpose. What Jesus did during those thirty years of walking the earth mattered; He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father. He satisfied the demands of righteousness that we could not so He might take away our sin when we trust in Him and so His righteousness might be credited to us, making us fully pleasing to the Father (2 Cor. 5:21).

In this volume we delve deeper into the marvelous truth of the incarnation to see still further glimpses of Christ's glory on earth. His righteousness did not occur in a vacuum but rather among people, ordinary people like you and me. In each unit of this volume, we will look at Jesus' interactions with people as through a prism, making slight turns to see different yet equally brilliant perspectives of Jesus' works. In Unit 22, we will see Jesus' power to heal coupled with His deep compassion for people, even those who were marginalized in society. In Unit 23, we will see Jesus' riveting teachings empowered by His divine authority. And finally, in Unit 24, we will see Jesus' miraculous power over nature, revealing His identity as Creator God.

Each ray of light we will see points to the same truth: that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God given for our salvation. Jesus was indeed born to die, but He lived so that we too might live.

UNIT 22**SESSION 1**

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2. J. C. Ryle, "What It Costs to Be a True Christian," December 4, 2019, www.the-highway.com/cost_Ryle.html.

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2. John Onwuchekwa, *Prayer: How Praying Together Shapes the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 43.

SESSION 4

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