

He Who Walks on Water Mark chs 4 & 6

Let me begin with a question: If Jesus could calm a storm at sea with a simple command in Mark 4, why did He choose to *walk through* a storm at sea, at night in sandals in ch 6?

We'll come back to that but first another question asked by the disciples who were stunned by the first miracle. They'd already seen Jesus heal leprosy, disability and drive out demons, but now He demonstrates amazing authority over nature by telling the wind to cease and it does! In amazement the 12 ask each other, "Who *is* this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Now all of these men would have had some knowledge of their national history as recorded in the Hebrew scriptures, our 'Old Testament'. If they thought for a moment it wasn't hard to figure out who Jesus was. In Genesis it says the Lord God created the dry land of this planet 'out of the waters' and set a boundary for the seas. In Exodus, when the Lord God came to the rescue of His enslaved people in Egypt He led them to safety and the Promised Land by dividing the waters of the Red Sea so the people could walk through as on dry land. The people of Israel were not renowned as sea farers. Jacob and his family were herdsmen, Israel a country largely dependent on agriculture. True, Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee but they were a small minority. By and large Jewish people were not comfortable at sea. They often used the sea as a symbol of danger and chaos. Think of Ps 46:
"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall *into the heart of the sea*, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging"

God's people trusted their Lord to be with them and bring them safely through 'deep waters' of trouble and threat, safe to 'shore' and home.

The prophet Isaiah predicted tough times ahead for God's people in foreign exile. Their God would discipline Israel for their persistent disobedience and idolatry, yet His holiness and judgement are balanced by grace. Thus we find this promise in Isaiah 43 that even when He causes us to 'pass through the waters' our Saviour is with us to save and preserve.

So in Mark 4 a sudden and particularly severe storm on the Sea of Galilee has these experienced seamen fearing for their lives. But the carpenter from Nazareth is with them in the boat and saves them from death by calming the storm. *Who is this?* They can't quite figure out all the theological detail of it but there can be no doubt of this- somehow the Lord their God is with them, right there in their boat!

The next couple of chapters record more astounding acts by this Jesus from Nazareth. A man driven violently insane by demonic influence is restored to health, sanity and community. A woman suffering an embarrassing and socially excluding illness is cured and affirmed. Another couple experiencing the anguish of losing a child are blessed by Jesus' visit to their home and gentle bedside manner, lovingly and respectfully restoring their daughter to life. Then He feeds a large crowd in the open countryside. This too is reminiscent of God in the Old Testament bringing His people to freedom, new life and prosperity through the Red Sea and feeding them in the wilderness with 'manna', miracle bread from heaven!

What richness is here for those with eyes to see and hearts open to accept and obey! Let's not patronise Jesus with some lesser identity as just one of many notable religious leaders. Let's give Him the honour due to Him! Let's celebrate His uniqueness! He is *the Lord*!

But *why* does He walk on the water in Mark 6? Jesus has been on land praying. The disciples are struggling to row against the wind across the sea in the dark. (Note it was Jesus Who instructed them to make this journey. He must have known it would get stormy, that at 3 in the morning His friends would still be struggling to make any headway.)

But then He joins them by somehow walking over the surface of the sea.

Sure, it's another miracle. If Jesus is God He can act outside of the physical laws of the universe He created but still, *why do this?* The sea is rough. It's another storm. It's probably raining. It cannot be comfortable or pleasant walking through the choppy waves in sandals.

Why not just give another command and make all the unpleasantness go away?

As a young Christian I used to think this was just another example of Jesus doing cool stuff because He's God's Son. Now, with a little more experience of life I think there's something more here.

Jesus has nothing to prove in terms of power and authority. He has already shown Himself to be Lord over life and death, Provider of our daily bread and Master of the weather. He is demonstrating something else here. The all-powerful Lord is demonstrating a combination of humility, compassion for His friends and faith in the face of adversity.

The Lord, the Good Shepherd, *joins* His followers in their trial to teach them to trust, have courage and battle on, assured that He is never far away and His presence and comfort are all they (and we) need.

Sometimes the path of obedience and service to God may lead us through darkness and storm. Soon Jesus Himself would be taking the path to the cross. Salvation, forgiveness, peace and eternal life would come, but only at the cost of great suffering. To spread His Gospel worldwide these 12 and many disciples since have faced persecution and martyrdom.

We have to trust in God's wisdom and grace and plan even if it includes difficulty and heartbreak in the short term.

What does Jesus say to His followers in the storms of life?

He says, "Don't be afraid, I'm here". Don't let your natural fear overcome or paralyse you! Don't let discouragement rob you of the joy you've been given or stop you testifying for Him. He is with us to reassure, comfort, equip. He can use even our human vulnerability and suffering to multiply hope and goodness for many.

We Christians trust in One Who could calm a storm with a word, but was willing to battle through deep, troubled waters to be with us and show us by His own example faith in action.