**Matthew 14:22-33**

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-14/matthew-1422-33/>

As night falls Jesus sends His disciples in a boat to the other side of the lake (Galilee) while He remains behind to pray. A fierce storm arises and strands the boat out on the sea for hours. As the disciples struggle to navigate their boat to shore Jesus appears walking on the water. The disciples are terrified, mistaking Him for a ghost until He identifies Himself. Peter then calls out to Jesus, and Jesus bids him to walk to Him on the water. Peter does until he doubts. Jesus saves Peter and calms the storm.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:15-21.

Once everyone was finished eating, Jesus immediately made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side of the lake. The expression, the other side, was a Galilean idiom meaning “the other shore” or “to cross the border” into another province . There were three provinces lining the Sea of Galilee: the province of Galilee surrounded the entire eastern half of the sea north to south; Gaulanitis bordered its northeastern shore; and the Decapolis, its southeastern shore.

Mark reports that the disciples were headed to the fishing village of Bethsaida, on the northeastern shore bordering the provinces of Gaulantis and Galilee when they went to the other side (Mark 6:45). Writing for a Greek audience John names the larger and more recognizable city of Capernaum just to the east of Bethsaida in Galilee as their destination (John 6:17). These things taken into account suggest that Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand in Gaulanitis along the northeastern shore of the sea.

Jesus stayed behind and sent the remaining crowds back to their homes. After He had done so, Jesus went up on the mountain by Himself, as He had intended to do earlier, in order to pray. Jesus was there alone. The evening was already dark when He finally had the moment of solitude that He sought with His Father after the death of John the Baptist (John 6:17). Against the dark skies, Herod’s palace in the town of Tiberias would have been an ominous beacon across the sea.

By the time Jesus had finished praying alone the boat was already a long distance from the land. And a terrible night storm had come up. Its waves battered the small vessel and its contrary winds kept it from making it to the safety of the shore. Mark adds the harrowing details that “the boat was in the middle of the sea” (Mark 6:47) with the disciples “straining at the oars” (Mark 6:48).

Several of the disciples were professional fishermen. John, who was one of those fishermen, specifies that they were three or four miles [out]” (John 6:19). The fact that even these experienced fishermen could not navigate their boat in the storm indicates the severity and danger of its winds and waves. The Sea of Galilee is about thirteen miles long and eight miles wide, so if they were in the middle of the lake, they were many miles from shore.

Matthew and Mark emphasize that Jesus came to them during the fourth watch of the night (Matthew 14:25; Mark 6:48). The fourth watch was the final designated time for the night watch where watchmen stood guard. It was the hours between 3:00 and 6:00am. Assuming the disciples left Jesus at around 9:00pm, the disciples would have been struggling for nearly six hours or more. They would have been physically and mentally exhausted by now. The fourth watch also has significance in Jewish history because it was during these hours that Pharaoh finally released the Israelites from bondage (Exodus 12:29-41). And it was the hour that God opened the sea for Israel’s deliverance (Exodus 12:14-27).

During this same hour, Jesus came to His disciples, miraculously walking on the sea. Interestingly, Mark added that “He intended to pass them by” (Mark 6:48). Perhaps He was testing their faith. The disciples were terrified, thinking that Jesus was a ghost when they saw Him walking on the sea. They cried in fear at this startling and ghastly sight. But Jesus immediately spoke to them. He identified Himself and told them not to fear. “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Unsure of what they were witnessing, Peter, the most outspoken of the disciples, shouted back to the figure walking on the stormy water. “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” Jesus responded “Come!” Peter believed that it was Jesus and he trusted his Lord. Initially, Peter showed bold faith and he got out of the boat, and he too walked on the water as he came toward Jesus. It was God’s power, not Peter’s faith that enabled him to walk on the water, but God rewarded Peter’s faith in His Son by giving him this opportunity.

But as Peter walked on the waves his focus turned from Jesus to the storm. The reality of the storm frightened him. Seeing the ferocious wind Peter doubted. He forgot the greater reality and power of Jesus, and he fell into the raging sea. Peter was plunged up and down in the turbulent water and was beginning to sink and drown. In desperation, Peter cried out, “Lord save me!”

In that instant Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of Peter. He had saved him from a watery death. Having nearly drown, now safe on top of the water, with the storm raging around them, Peter must have been awestruck in the secure grasp of Jesus. In that moment Jesus rhetorically asked Peter a powerful question. “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” This was not a stern rebuke. It was an encouraging reassurance. Peter could always trust Jesus. The Greek term for you of little faith is a single word: “Oligopisté.” It is a playful nickname, like a father would use for his very young child. Literally, it means “little-faith.” Like a toddler who falls down and needs to be lifted up by his father, Peter was a toddler in the faith, and needed to be lifted up when he fell.

When they got into the boat, the wind suddenly stopped. The storm was over. The disciples in the boat were as amazed as they were relieved. They worshipped Jesus. They were saying “You are certainly God’s Son!” Indeed He was. Jesus had shown, perhaps more demonstrably than ever before, His complete authority over nature. In the past few hours, He had miraculously fed thousands of hungry people. He had walked on water and tamed the wind. It is worth noting that the Bible considers worship to be an act of recognizing and acknowledging the reality of what is real and true. It was true that Jesus is God’s Son. And Jesus was not a ghost, He was real.

Not to be overlooked is another miracle. John testifies that as soon as Jesus got into the boat, they were “immediately at the land to which they were going” (John 6:21). Apparently, Jesus teleported them to their destination the instant He calmed the storm.

**Biblical Text**

**Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” Peter said to Him, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son!”**