

# *Signs of Glory*

Studies in John's Gospel

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Study 6

The Fifth Sign (John 6:16-21)

## *Jesus Walked on the Sea*

### Introduction

The feeding of the great crowd and then the walking on the Sea of Galilee are the two 'central' signs in John's book of signs, signifying the provision of the Father in His Kingdom and the absolute Lordship of His Son over all creation. Both address the issue of our Lord's oneness with His Father, His true deity. These two signs go to the heart of our walk of faith in this life. Will we trust in the faithful Creator and do we believe that Jesus Christ is Lord over all things for the glory of the Father and the peace and welfare of the Church. *And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church* (Ephesians 1:22). Hence these signs are followed by the clear warning of the gravity of rejecting Him to be the One the Father has sent (6:28-40).

John linked the two last signs with the words, *There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks* (6:23).

We recall that the crowd just fed wanted to 'make' Jesus King (Vs. 15). This had been a dangerous moment for all concerned. Jesus, the only one present who read the moment dispersed the crowd and sent the Disciples back across the Sea to Capernaum, some six to eight Kilometres. Not only was this a protective circuit breaker for the crowd and the Disciples, who may have been getting caught up in the popular cravings of the crowd to take Jesus to Jerusalem as 'king', but it also gave Jesus time to retreat into the mountains to pray. Had the evil one seized upon this event to open up old battle grounds seen at the Temptation? *And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish* (Luke 4:6). All the lusts of the flesh that come against us came against the man Jesus. The great glory seen is His readiness to fly to His Father, seeking not only His blessing but to walk in His way. His prayer was communion of will and heart with His Father, thus holding out to fearful and rebellious humanity the true mode of being human. It was the Father's business to 'make' Him King, nobody else's. However, if we see that communion as an uninterrupted walk of bliss because Jesus had powers we do not have by grace then we miss the whole import of His incarnation.

Undoubtedly the Lord was also aware of what was happening on the lake. Having sent His Disciples into the storm His prayers would have included their safety. When we are beyond rational prayer for whatever reason, it is a wonderful grace to know that Jesus Himself is praying for us. That grace is even greater when we realize that His prayers are linked directly with our need, for He Himself shares in our humanity; hence the writer to the Hebrews assures us,

*Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless*

*him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:14-18).*

### **The Disciples Battle the Sea**

It was evening when the Disciples started back to Capernaum by boat. Matthew said that Jesus actually sent them back by boat ahead of Him (Matthew 14:2). John, the poet and wordsmith, established the scene which would unfold by linking the absence of Jesus with the darkness. *It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them* (Vs. 17b). The drama that lay ahead was not due to their rebellion or indifference to Jesus but their obedience of His word.

Because the wind was against them they had to row. This lake was renown for sudden squalls. Warm air over the lake drew strong gully winds down across it, stirring up the water into a fury. The Disciples struggled against the storm until after three in the morning (the death hours), but only managed to get to the middle of the lake. Tired and fearful the Disciples were reduced to deathly weakness. Not expecting to see Jesus they were panic stricken when He appeared to be alongside them on the water. Young Mark thought Jesus was a ghost. Clearly their fear of the extraordinary event happening before them was now greater than their fear of the storm. As the figure got closer so their fears escalated. The presence of the unexpected Lord was terrifying.

John simply takes us straight to the comforting words of Jesus, *"It is I; do not be afraid"* (Vs. 20). The only command of Jesus John recorded was His command for them not to be afraid. A study of the times Jesus spoke words of peace to humanity begins to reveal the existential level of fear present in hearts which refuse to see the care and Lordship of His Father (see Luke 5:8-10; Matthew 17:1-7; Revelation 1;17, cf., Daniel 10:10-12). Peace came to the scene at every level (Often when the Lord answers the cry of our heart we are amazed at the wide reaching changes that He brings). The focus we have in our sufferings or trials is generally very narrow, caught up in the getting of relief. However, the Lord's rule over our lives has a whole person, eternal view.

When the Disciples were convinced it actually was Jesus they invited Him into their boat (Vs. 21). The hearts of the Disciples were brought to peace as was the sea. It also seems that the final miracle of this sign was their immediate arrival at the shore to which they had been toiling (Vs. 21). There does seem to be an allusion here to Psalm 107:23-32.

This was a striking revelation that Jesus as the Son of God had power not only over bread and fish, but wind and water. Now, embraced by Christ, they had been caught up to participate in His power and provision.

A note on the Lord's "I am" statement (Vs. 20): We know that later in John Jesus made several "I am" statements that were a direct claim as to His Divinity ("I am the bread of life", "I am the Good Shepherd", "I am the Door of the Sheepfold", "I am the resurrection and the life" etc.) These were all claims that He was the great *I am who I am* of Exodus 3:14. On the lake it may have been simply a greeting with no deeper revelatory significance. However, John does seem to be giving us a hint as to its later use by Jesus.

Matthew completed his account with the words, *“And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son!”*(Matthew 14:33).

### **The Storm Calmed – A Sign to be read**

As we have seen there were several miracles combined in this sign. Jesus walking on the lake, the calming of the wind and water and the immediate arrival at their destination. As the multiplication of the bread and fish had demonstrated the compassion and power of the Father to provide for His children, this sign too weds these two characteristics of Jesus. Were the Disciples in danger of losing their lives? Yes! The lake was indeed dangerous and they were at the end of themselves. However, the Lord did know of their struggle. He had commissioned them to go and was prayerfully aware of their straits.

The Lord’s presence with them on the lake completely changed their state of heart and their outlook. Fear has its own judgement (1 John 4:18). Jesus brought freedom from their fear of the wind and the water, their fear of death. Later that fear would be relieved fully and not just incident by incident. Not to fear the judgement of God means freedom to die and freedom to expect the glory of life within the Father’s home.

Our Lord’s power over what we call the natural realm was a direct claim to be the Creator and Sustainer of all things. This led them worship Him. We note that the alleviation of their fears did not result in an over familiar kind of sentimentality, but in falling at His feet in true worship. The revelation of true grace and provision of all our needs by the Lord fills the human heart with wonder fear (awe). Because of hardness and indwelling sin we may turn that into excuses to presume upon His love. But that in no way sullies the grace and power of God.

The Disciples could live at peace in the creation the Lord had given them. Surely they would not be immune from its seemingly dark side (storms and high seas), but they were commissioned by Him to be a part of it all with a view to His goal for them. They were never to see themselves as victims of a cold ‘mother nature’.

We note too that Scripture often equated the sea with all that is restless and chaotic in this world (Psalm 29:3-4, 65:5-7 etc). John in Revelation saw the throne of God situated on a sea of glass like crystal, i.e., in serene sovereignty (Revelation 4:6). The reference to their being no more ‘sea’ in glory may refer to no more restless chaos of sin. Sufficient to say that to calm the sea whose turmoil had proven to be far beyond the coping of the disciples pointed them, delivered them, directly to God.

### **Questions for discussion and further reflection**

1. Discuss how the glory of Christ was revealed to you as we considered this fifth sign.
2. Being caught up in suffering and trials can sometimes diminish our hope. How does this happen? Does it need to happen?
3. Reflect upon how your heart has been taken to worship through the Lord’s intervention at a time of great need.
4. Did Jesus send the Disciples into harms way? Discuss how our sentimentality often dictates the image we have of Jesus.
5. How could we apply this sign to the church today?