

The Gospel of John (38); Jesus Walking on the Sea

Introduction:

Let us turn in our Bibles to read **John 6:15-22**, in which is an account of our Lord Jesus walking upon the Sea of Galilee, coming to His disciples who were in a boat crossing the sea in a great storm.

¹⁵Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

¹⁶Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. ¹⁸Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. ¹⁹So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. ²⁰But He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.

²²On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone— ²³however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks— ²⁴when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You come here?”

When we gave our attention to the miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000, we stated that it is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels (except for the resurrection). This miracle of Jesus walking upon the sea, which is before us today, is recorded in three of the four Gospels. It is here in John’s Gospel, but it is also recorded in the gospels of Matthew (14:22-33) and Mark (6:45-52).

The parallel account in **Mark 6:45-52** is quite similar to John’s account. See if you can detect the similarities and the differences between the accounts. It reads this way:

⁴⁵Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. ⁴⁶And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. ⁴⁸Then 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. ⁴⁹And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; ⁵⁰for 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.” ⁵¹Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. ⁵²For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

But then there is the account in **Matthew 14:22-33**, which gives additional details, differing somewhat from the account in both John and Mark. Matthew’s Gospel alone records on this occasion Peter walking upon the sea after the Lord had granted his request to come unto Him.

²²Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. ²³And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain

by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. ²⁴But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

²⁵Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

²⁹So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

³¹And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

³³Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

There are some differences in detail between these three accounts of this miracle of Jesus, but there is also somewhat a different point of view of these Gospel writers. Whereas John relayed the event primarily from the perspective of the disciples, Matthew and Mark followed Jesus Himself. The account is told with the focus on what Jesus saw and did, rather than what the disciples saw and experienced. Consider the subject and verbs of **Mark's account** in which the Lord Jesus is the main actor. There we read:

- Immediately, **He** made His disciples get into the boat...
- while **He** sent the multitude away...
- And when **He** had sent them away,
- **He** departed to the mountain to pray.
- **He** was alone on the land.
- 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.
- But immediately **He** talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."
- Then **He** went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased.

And so, in John's account, it is as though the narrator is watching the disciples directly and what they are doing and experiencing. But in Mark and Matthew's account the narrator is hovering above Jesus, watching, listening, and following Him as He goes to rescue His disciples from the danger that threatened them.

This miracle story we just read is sometimes confused with another account of our Lord calming the waves of Galilee, when the boat in which His disciples were traveling, came to the point of capsizing. This other miracle is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels but it is not in the Gospel according to John. Here are the records of this other miracle:

Matt. 8:23-27

²³Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. ²⁴And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. ²⁵Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

²⁶But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Mark 4:35-41

³⁵On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side."
³⁶Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. ³⁷And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. ³⁸But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

³⁹Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" ⁴¹And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Luke 8:22-25

²²Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. ²³But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. ²⁴And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"

Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵But He said to them, "Where is your faith?"

And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"

And so, in all four Gospels there are a total of six accounts of Jesus calming the sea in which a great storm had arisen and threatened the lives of His disciples. Five of the six accounts have Jesus causing the stormy sea to become calm. The second miracle records that the sea is calmed because of His direct command. Two of the Gospels that record the first miracle describe the sea becoming calm when Jesus got into the boat. Actually John's Gospel does not record the sea becoming calm, rather, it tells of the boat immediately arriving to the shore after Jesus had stepped into the boat.

But that there are two separate miraculous events is clear. In the one, Jesus is walking on the sea, coming to His disciples who were in their distress. In the other event, Jesus is initially asleep and in the boat when the disciples awakened Him with their concern. In five of the six accounts, the episodes conclude with a statement of the disciples. In the second event, the disciples express a rhetorical question that speaks to His deity on display. The disciples said to themselves, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!" In one of the accounts, there is the declaration among the disciples, saying to Jesus, "Truly You are the Son of God" (Matt. 14:23). However in our account of John's Gospel, the disciples are not said to be afraid of the storm; they were frightened of Jesus when they saw Him walking upon the sea but had not recognized His identity. In John's Gospel alone we read of what occurred the next morning when Jesus and His disciples arrived on the sea shore. There the people expressed amazement and puzzlement that Jesus was in the boat, for they had seen the disciples get into the boat the evening before and Jesus was not with them. But no, here He was! They asked, "Rabbi, when did You come here?"

The four Gospels provide for us rich and varied details of events. But woven together, when considered side-by-side, they provide everything that is needful that we might know our Lord Jesus, as He manifested His glory, revealing Himself to His disciples.

I. The details of our account in John 6:15-25.

There are three periods of time set forth in John's account. First, there was the day on which Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000 (6:15). Second, there is that evening and night in which the disciples saw Jesus walking on the sea coming to them in the midst of the great storm on the sea (6:16-21). And then third, we read of the following day after they had arrived on the other side of the sea (6:22-25).

A. The day in which Jesus fed the 5,000 (6:15)

We read in **John 6:15**, “*Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.*” The Lord Jesus had fed the 5,000 men, plus the women and children. Their reaction and response was their desire to make Jesus their king, then and there. They had concluded that Jesus was the great Prophet, the one that Moses had prophesied would come. This Prophet would be the Messiah, whom they would regard as their promised King, the Son of King David. In other words, they had thought that the restoration of Israel had arrived and that through the leadership of their Messiah the rule of the Romans over Israel would end, and they would once again experience the blessing of God in the restored Davidic Kingdom that the Messiah would inaugurate.

But it is clear that Jesus did not come to establish that kind of kingdom. His kingdom was spiritual in nature, not physical. His kingdom was entered by the new birth, not by physical birth. His kingdom would be comprised of His disciples who had put their faith in Him, not comprised of Jewish people who viewed Him as a Messiah, who was a miracle worker and would alleviate their problems and make life easier and more pleasant for them.

Here in verse 15 we see our Lord Jesus in both His humility and His resolve to do His Father’s will. He would be a King as His Father had purposed for Him and in the time and manner His Father had ordained. It would be a rare thing for a man who, upon the popular praise and urgency to make him a king, to discourage the enthusiasts go to be alone in order to pray.

Matthew Henry set forth five reasons that Jesus declined the insistence and effort of these people to make Him their king on this occasion.

First, it was grounded upon a mistake concerning the nature of Christ’s kingdom, as if it were to be *of this world*, and He must appear with outward pomp, a crown on His head, and an army at His foot; such a king as this they would make Him, which was as great a disparagement to His glory as it would be to lacquer gold or paint a ruby. Right notions of Christ’s kingdom would keep us to right methods for advancing it.

Secondly, it was excited by the love of the flesh; they would make *Him* their king who could feed them so plentifully without their toil, and save them from the curse of *eating their bread in the sweat of their face*.

Thirdly, it was intended to carry on a *secular* design; they hoped this might be a fair opportunity of shaking off the Roman yoke, of which they were weary. If they had one to head them who could victual an army cheaper than another could provide for a family, they were sure of the sinews of the war, and could not fail of success, and the recovery of their ancient liberties. Thus is religion often prostituted to a secular interest, and Christ is served only to *serve a turn* (Rom. 16:18). “*Jesus is usually sought after for something else, not for His own sake.*” —Augustine.

Fourthly, it was a tumultuous, seditious attempt, and a disturbance of the public peace; it would make the country a seat of war, and expose it to the resentments of the Roman power.

Fifthly, it was contrary to the mind of our Lord Jesus Himself; for they would take *Him by force*, whether He would or no. Note, those who force honours upon Christ which He has not required at their hands displease Him, and do Him the greatest dishonour. Those that say *I am of Christ*, in opposition to those that are of Apollos and Cephas (so making Christ the head of a party), take Him by force, to make Him a king, contrary to His own mind.¹

Interestingly, dispensationalists teach that when Jesus came to Israel and ministered for those three years on earth, that He was offering the Jews the very kind of kingdom over which they wanted to make Him King on this occasion. Jesus declined to become the kind of king that dispensationalists claim He was offering them. Dispensationalists teach that God through Jesus was offering them an earthly political

¹ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 940.

kingdom, an earthly millennium dominated by Israel over the Gentile nations, ruled over by the promised Son of David. When we read in John 6:15 that the Jewish people “were about to come and take Him by force to make Him King”, they were attempting to establish the kind of kingdom that dispensationalists claim that Jesus was actually offering them, one that they will one day experience, according to dispensationalists, at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But here we see that when they were to force Him to be this kind of King, that “*He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.*” The fact is that Jesus had no intention to establish the kind of kingdom they desired, the kind of kingdom that dispensationalists claim will be established on earth at the Second Coming. These Jews failed completely to understand the true nature of the promised Davidic Kingdom, and in the same way today, dispensationalists fail completely to understand the true nature of the Davidic Kingdom that God promised Israel. Jesus Christ did indeed establish the promised Kingdom of David. When Jesus was crucified, buried, and then raised from the dead to ascend into heaven, He sat down on David’s throne. He brought into history the promised millennium of the Old Testament, when He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and as the Son of David sat down on His Father’s throne ruling over the realized Kingdom of God (heaven).²

Jesus departed from these would-be king-makers to be alone with His Father. The parallel account in Mark reveals that Jesus sent His disciples away in their boat, and then sent the crowds away from Him, and then He “He departed to the mountain to pray” (Mark 4:46).

Why did Jesus separate Himself from His disciples, sending them away while He went up a mountain to pray? This is how a well-known 19th century London preacher, **Alexander Maclaren** (1826-1910), expressed this matter:

The haste and urgency with which the disciples were sent away, against their will, after the feeding of the five thousand, is explained in John’s Account. The crowd had been excited to a dangerous enthusiasm by a miracle so level to their tastes. A prophet who could feed them was something like prophet. So they determine to make Him a king. Our Lord, fearing the outburst, resolves to withdraw into the lonely hills, that the fickle blaze may die down. If the disciples had remained with Him, He could not have so easily stolen away, and they might have caught the popular fervor. To divide would distract the crowd, and make it easier for Him to disperse them, while many of them, as really happened, would be likely to set off by land for Capernaum, when they saw the boat had gone.³

B. The evening and night in which the disciples saw Jesus walking on the sea coming to them in the midst of the great storm on the sea. (6:16-21)

We then read of this event in which the Lord Jesus walks upon the sea, coming to His disciples. In **verses 16 and 17** the disciples are described as alone when Jesus was not present with them,

¹⁶Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. ¹⁸Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing.

They were alone and it was dark. And it was then that the sea raised up against them. In the ancient world this would have been regarded as one of the worst possible situations to find oneself. Darkness was itself foreboding. The sea was viewed as a chaotic place. It was regarded as a place of death. It was a watery grave. The pagan Canaanite peoples viewed the god of death, Mot, to be the god of the ocean or sea.

In **verse 19** we read of Jesus coming to them, walking on the water, which initially caused them to fear greatly.

² Cf. Rev. 5:5; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rom. 1:3; Acts 15:16; Acts 2:25ff; 2:34ff.

³ Alexander Maclaren, **Expositions of Holy Scripture. St. Matthew, Chapters IX to XXVIII** (Baker Book House, n.d.), p. 299.

¹⁹So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid.

Here we read of Jesus, seemingly calm and unconcerned, walking upon the water. To see Jesus walking upon the surface of the sea was quite unsettling to the disciples, some of whom were seasoned fishermen on that lake. We see the Lord Jesus as wholly undisturbed and unhindered by the sea, that which was tossing the disciples about wildly.

We read in **Psalm 89:5-9** that God in His almighty power controls even the seas.

And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD;
Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints.
⁶For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD?
Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD?
⁷God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints,
And to be held in reverence by all those around Him.
⁸O LORD God of hosts,
Who is mighty like You, O LORD?
Your faithfulness also surrounds You.
⁹***You rule the raging of the sea;
When its waves rise, You still them.***

This same idea of the great power of God is conveyed in **Job 38:8-11**, in which God is said to have set the boundaries for the “uncontrollable” ocean.

⁸“Or who shut in the sea with doors,
When it burst forth and issued from the womb;
⁹When I made the clouds its garment,
And thick darkness its swaddling band;
¹⁰When I fixed My limit for it,
And set bars and doors;
¹¹When I said,
***‘This far you may come, but no farther,
And here your proud waves must stop!’***

But more directly than these references, consider what the psalmist says of God in **Psalm 107**. Here He has ***God calming the storm that had violently whipped up the waves.***

²³Those who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business on great waters,
²⁴They see the works of the LORD,
And His wonders in the deep.
²⁵For He commands and raises the stormy wind,
Which lifts up the waves of the sea.
²⁶They mount up to the heavens,
They go down again to the depths;
Their soul melts because of trouble.
²⁷They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man,
And are at their wits’ end.
²⁸***Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble,
And He brings them out of their distresses.***
²⁹***He calms the storm,
So that its waves are still.***

³⁰***Then they are glad because they are quiet;
So He guides them to their desired haven.*** (Psa. 107:23-30)

We may couple this idea with what is also recorded in **Job 9:4-8**. Here we have God walking on the waves of the sea.

⁴God is wise in heart and mighty in strength.
Who has hardened himself against Him and prospered?
⁵He removes the mountains, and they do not know
When He overturns them in His anger;
⁶He shakes the earth out of its place,
And its pillars tremble;
⁷He commands the sun, and it does not rise;
He seals off the stars;
⁸***He alone spreads out the heavens,
And treads on the waves of the sea;***

And so, in Psalm 107:29 God is described as the One who calms the seas, and Job 9:8 describes God as the One who walks upon the seas. What we have in John 6:16-22 is Jesus Christ manifesting Himself quite overtly that He is eternal God, even as He was walking upon the sea.

He came to His disciples as they were rowing on the stormy lake, “walking on” the waters. He walked on them as easily as we walk on dry land. They bore Him as firmly as the pavement of the Temple, or the hills around Nazareth. That which is contrary to all reason was perfectly possible to Christ.⁴

But there is one more point of emphasis in our passage that may speak to our Lord’s deity on display before His disciples. We read our Lord’s words to them in **verse 20**. We will read both verses 19 and 20 once again:

¹⁹So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. ²⁰But He said to them, “***It is I; do not be afraid.***”

Now the common way to translate the first Greek clause, “***It is I.***” And most translations do so. Here are a few, in which they are all in agreement on John 6:20:

ESV “But he said to them, ‘***It is I;*** do not be afraid.’”
NAS “But He said to them, ‘***It is I;*** do not be afraid.’”
NIV “But he said to them, ‘***It is I;*** don’t be afraid.’”
NKJ “But He said to them, ‘***It is I;*** do not be afraid.’”
GREEK ὁ δὲ λέγει αὐτοῖς ***Ἐγώ εἰμι***, (*ego aīmee*) μὴ φοβεῖσθε.

But this phrase, ***Ἐγώ εἰμι***, is commonly found in John’s Gospel, and it is commonly translated as “I AM”, which Jesus used repeatedly of Himself. Some argue that by this expression, Jesus was identifying Himself as God. “I AM” is the name that God identified as His own to Moses at the Burning Bush. The account is in **Exodus 3:1-14**. There Moses asked God how he should respond to the Israelites when they ask for the name of this God who told Moses to deliver them from their bondage in Egypt. We read of this in verses 13 and 14.

⁴ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 339.

¹³Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?”

¹⁴And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

In John’s Gospel Jesus repeatedly refers to Himself as *Ἐγώ εἰμι* (*ego eimi*) (“I AM”). And these references are universally acknowledged to be Jesus’ claims to deity. God had identified Himself to Moses as “I Am”, which signifies God’s eternal nature and His everlasting commitment to see that His Word and His promises are fulfilled and that He was ever faithful to His covenant commitments to His people. When our Lord was speaking before a crowd, He identified Himself as the great “I AM”, or the Jehovah (or Yahweh) of the Old Testament. And the meaning of Yahweh or Jehovah translated into English is “I Am. We read in **John 8:51ff**,

⁵¹“Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”

⁵²Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ ⁵³Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?”

⁵⁴Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. ⁵⁵Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”

⁵⁷Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

⁵⁸Jesus said to them, “***Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.***”

⁵⁹Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (John 8:51-58)

This expression, “I AM”, coupled with the fact that Jesus is treading upon the sea (cf. Job 9:8), and that He calms the sea (cf. Psa. 89:9), reveals that this short episode is designed to show His disciples most clearly that He is eternal God manifest in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ.

In the center of an important section of the Gospel, as Jesus is beginning to be noticed by friends and foes, Jesus takes the opportunity to make Himself known to His disciples and, therefore, to the readers through the Gospel’s witness. In what is a moment of both wonder and worship, the Gospel declares in God’s own words that identity of His Son. In this pericope, the reader of the Fourth Gospel is exhorted to encounter the “I AM,” the One of the unconsumed burning bush (Exod. 3) who alone can walk on the waves of the sea (Job 9:8).⁵

Now again, most commentators would argue that Jesus declaring *Ἐγώ εἰμι* in verse 20 should not be understood as a self-claim to deity, that it is Jesus simply saying to His frightened disciples who thought that they had seen a ghost, “It is I.” This is the position that **Donald Carson** argues quite convincingly, but then at the end of his comments he allows in a measure this idea of Jesus’ claim to deity to be present. Here are his words:

⁵ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 313. Also both Leon Morris and Edwyn Hoskyns agreed that Jesus was declaring Himself to be the “I AM”--God in the burning bush. Hoskyns wrote, “Their fear is, however, removed by the words *I am; be not afraid* prefaced in Mark 6:50; Matt. 14:27, by *Be of good cheer*). The mysterious statement *I am* (A.V., R.V. *It is I*) is repeated in 8:24, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6 and is reminiscent of Exodus 3:14, cf. Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4, 43:10, 25, 48:12; Rev. 1:8, 17.” In Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, **The Fourth Gospel** (Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), pp. 290f.

The Greek behind this expression is *ego eimi* (literally, ‘I am’). The expression is sometimes used with an explicit predicate (e.g. 6:35; 10:14; 15:1), sometimes with a predicate that is implicit in the context, and sometimes absolutely. But the expression bears no necessary theological baggage: it is the perfectly normal way to say ‘It is I’ – a point made clear when it appears on the lips of the man born blind, after he is healed (9:9). ‘If in the present passage there is any hint of the epiphany of a divine figure it is not because the words *ego eimi* are used but because in the gospel as a whole Jesus is a divine figure’ (Barrett, p. 281)... The words make perfectly good sense in Greek as a form of self-identification, simply ‘It is I’ – and doubtless that is how the disciples understood them. Thus, formally nothing is ‘heightened’... On the other hand, the thoughtful reader who has read through this Gospel two or three times ought to observe the number and varied forms of ‘I am’ sayings, and wonder if this occurrence in verse 20 may not be an anticipation of a clearer self-disclosure by Jesus...⁶

In other words, after Carson dismisses the idea that Jesus could have been saying “I AM” to connote His deity to His disciples, he nevertheless says that a reader could detect this idea through reading John’s words. It seems to me this acknowledgment makes it unreasonable to dismiss Jesus declaring Himself as “I AM” to His disciples to reveal to them His deity.

Others have taken issue with the interpretation that Jesus’ words should be translated as “I AM” rather than simply “It is I.” These include F. F. Bruce, and J. C. Ryle, both of whom I commonly quote in our study of John. These are important and impressive commentators, whose opinions should not be readily dismissed. **F. F. Bruce** wrote,

There are places in this Gospel where the words *ego eimi* have the nature of a divine designation (as we shall see on 8:24, 28), but here they simply mean ‘It is I’. How else would one say ‘It is I’ in Hellenistic Greek than with the words, *ego eimi*? The man cured of blindness uses the same words of himself in John 9:9.

J. C. Ryle also did not believe that Jesus’ self-identity was a direct claim to deity. He wrote,

“It has been thought by some that the words, ‘It is I,’ might be more literally rendered, ‘I am’ and that they are intended to refer to the name of God, so familiar to the Jews: ‘I am.’ But I doubt the correctness of the idea. It is a pious thought, but hardly in keeping with the context and the circumstances of the occurrence. Our Lord desired first to relieve the fears of His disciples by showing them who was they feared: and the Greek words for ‘It is I,’ are the only words that He could have well used.”⁷

Now, if we understand that through Jesus walking upon the sea and then by calming the sea He was revealing His deity, then it is by no means a strain for us to understand that when He identified Himself, “I AM”, that He was also setting forth His deity. And so, in this account we have a miracle once again serving as a sign, which reveals and displays the deity of our Lord Jesus.

We then read in **verse 21**, “*Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.*” The other Gospel accounts speak of Jesus calming the storm when Jesus had entered the boat. There is no word in John’s Gospel that Jesus had stilled the storm, but rather, after Jesus entered the boat, they immediately discovered themselves to have arrived at their destination.

C. The following day after they had arrived on the other side of the sea (6:22-25).

²²On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone— ²³however, other boats

⁶ Donald A. Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), pp. 275f.

⁷ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 345.

came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks—²⁴when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You come here?”

The point of this paragraph is to show that the crowd was uniformed as to His purpose and His presence. They did not know who He was, from where He came, or how He had arrived among them. They knew that He had been before them the day before, but how He now appeared among them they could not determine. It serves to show that they were incapable of understanding and therefore unqualified to force Him to become a king according to their own preferences.

The question that the “people” posed to Jesus sets the stage for the beginning of Jesus’ lengthy discourse of John 6:26 through 70. We will begin to address this discourse next Lord’s Day, Lord willing.

II. Several words of application for us

We may draw some conclusions and applications for ourselves from this account. In doing so, we acknowledge that we are seeing this miracle as metaphorical of the Christian experience. In other words, because the Holy Spirit moved these Gospel writers to record the events in the way that they did, the Lord has provided both a measure of insight and instruction for us when we read and apply what is before us. In this way the miracles recorded in John’s Gospel serve as narrative parables. There are no parables of Jesus recorded in John’s Gospel, but the miracles themselves are parabolic. They provide instruction for us. Here, again, is **Alexander Maclaren** who expressed the matter well:

There are none of our Lord’s parables recorded in this Gospel, but all the miracles which it narrates are parables. Moral and religious truth is communicated by the outward event, as in the parable it is communicated by the story. The mere visible fact becomes more than semi-transparent. The analogy between the spiritual and the natural world which men instinctively apprehend, of which the poet and the orator and the religious teacher have always made abundant use, and which it has sometimes been attempted, unsuccessfully as I think, to elevate to the rank of scientific truth, underlies the whole series of these miracles. It is the principal if not the only key to the meaning of this one before us.⁸

And so, what does the record of this miracle teach us, as it was recorded by John as the Holy Spirit directed him? *First, the Lord Jesus has great concern for His own and He watches over each and every one*, preserving him or her unto their heavenly destination.

To depart from John for a moment to call on Mark’s account, we read these words: “Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them.” If Jesus were but an ordinary man, He would have been helpless to have come to their aid. But He was their Master, even the promised Son of Man, their King, who would come to deliver them from whatever threatened them. If you are His disciple, He sees you in your difficulty, and He cares for you in your distress.

Second, Jesus was assuring His disciples that in the worst of conditions, they are not alone. He is with them and He is for them, and He will preserve them. He declared to them, “But He said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid’” (6:20).

But by saying this Jesus also describes His coming and appearance as a divine epiphany (i.e. appearance), and this occurs in a context –and that is where the emphasis lies in this self-revelation—that should convince them that, in virtue of the glory given Him by God, no darkness was too deep, waves too high, or sea too wide for Him to find them and be with them in the midst of that tumult.⁹

⁸ Alexander Maclaren, **Expositions of Holy Scripture. St. John, Chapters I to VIII** (Baker Book House, n.d.), p. 269.

⁹ Herman Ridderbos, **The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary** (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 217.

Of these disciples, it was said, “The solitary crew were not so solitary as they thought.”¹⁰ And just as the words of Jesus calmed His disciples on this occasion, so His words have calmed the fears of disciples throughout these last two thousand years. In countless situations the words of Jesus consoled the troubled soul, when they sensed His promise, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

Third, in addition to knowing that the Lord is with you, if you are one of his disciples, **He couples the idea of Him being present with His disciples with the assuring word and command, “It is I; do not be afraid.”**

The Greek construction of the command, “do not be afraid”, is quite explicit. Jesus was not simply telling them *not to become afraid*, He was commanding them to *stop being afraid*. The fact is that it is a common matter for true disciples of the Lord at times to be afraid. But they may be comforted and settled in heart when they know that the Lord is with them, even in the most dire of situations. We have numbers of instances in the Scriptures in which we are exhorted as Christians not to be afraid. And the primary reason for not being consumed by fear is that regardless of what befalls us, we know that God is both for us and He is with us.

Fear is a crippling thing, which can paralyze a person in inaction, even as he or she cowers in a corner, afraid to come forth. **Alexander Toplady** once gave a sermon entitled, *An Essay on the Various Fears to which God’s People are Liable*. He commented on the general fears of Christians, based on the Apostle Paul’s own testimony, in which he wrote of his own fears.

For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, *within were fears*. (2 Cor. 7:5)

Toplady wrote,

Unwillingly I return to earth, and withdrawing my mind from a contemplation of the glory that shall be revealed, descend to consider the various fears to which all God’s converted people, and myself among the rest, are subject, while imprisoned in a body of clay.

Within are fears. For that sorceress, whose name is fear, can transform herself into a multiplicity of shapes, though she is in reality, the same identical hag in all.¹¹

But *fourth*, it is clear that the Lord Jesus was controlling the sea, even when it had stirred itself into a great tempest. One major idea of Jesus being conveyed by Jesus walking upon the sea was that He was controlling the sea, even in its tempest being blown by the wind.

We have a revelation here of Christ as the Lord of the material universe, a kingdom wider in its range and profounder in its authority than that which that shouting crowd had sought to force upon Him.¹²

So it is, we should know that nothing comes into the lives of them, who know Him in a saving relationship, from which the Lord will bring ultimate benefit to them and glory to His name. That is not to say that everything that happens to us is good, but that God brings good out of everything that happens to us. And so, as **Alexander Maclaren** set forth:

The end of life is to make men; the meaning of all events is to mold character. Anything that makes me stronger is a blessing, anything that develops my *morale* is the highest good that can come to me. If

¹⁰ Maclaren, p. 273.

¹¹ Augustus Toplady, **The Works of Augustus Toplady**, vol. 3 (PDF version), p. 261. In addition to being a pastor, he was a hymn writer. He wrote, “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.” He was also a major Calvinist opposer to John Wesley’s Arminianism.

¹² Maclaren, p. 274.

therefore antagonism mold in me ‘the wrestling thews¹³ that throw the world,’ and give me good, strong muscles, and put tan and colour into my cheek, I need not mind the cold and the wet, nor care for the whistling of the wind in my face, nor the dash of the spray over the bows. Summer sailing in fair weather, amidst land-locked bays, in blue seas, and under calm skies, may be all very well for triflers, but ‘blown seas and stormy showers’ are better if the purpose of the voyage be to brace and call our powers.

And so, be thankful if, when the boat is crossing the mouth of some glen that opens upon the lake, a sudden gust smites the sheets and sends you to the helm, and takes all your effort to keep you from sinking. Do not murmur, or think that God’s Providence is strange, because many and many a time when it ‘it is dark, and Jesus is not yet come to us,’ the storm of wind comes down upon the lake and threatens to drive us from our course. Let us rather recognize Him as the Lord who, in love and kindness, send all the different kinds of weather which, according to the old proverb, make up the full-summed year.¹⁴

But remember, this is only true of those who are His disciples, or, those on whom the lord has purposed yet to save through His sovereign grace.

This chapter of John’s Gospel opens with well over 5,000 people fully enamored with Jesus, who followed Him quite some distance, which showed their enthusiasm for Him, They desired Him to be their king. But through the discourse that He gave to them on this day following His miracle of feeding them, He shows them that they were clueless about the true nature of Him as king and how they might enter His kingdom. He will hold forth their sinful condition, revealing to them their inability and unwillingness to come to Him in truth, that only by the sovereign grace of God could they come, and indeed, they would come to Him. He quite well whittles down the crowd through His doctrine. Only His somewhat confused and certainly disillusioned 12 disciples will be standing with Him by the end of the day.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)

¹³ Old English for “good qualities”

¹⁴ Maclaren, p. 272.