

Astonished by Christ
Mark 6:45-56 (03/22/15)
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I started walking on water the summer after second grade. Well, actually I learned to slide across water on a pair of skis. People don't walk on water. I've seen magicians walk on water and it was pretty amazing, but then I watched magic secrets revealed, and they had this big deal set up just under the water and stooges in the water for distraction, and, well, human beings don't walk on water. There's a Jesus Lizard that makes it about 14 feet scampering across water. And of course those almost lighter than air spiders zip across the surface of the water.

But Jesus walked on water. However, most people don't believe He did. They consider the account a myth. And if not a myth, then the disciples saw Him over there on a sandbar, or just along the water's edge and it looked like He was walking on water. One guy who totally discounted Jesus walking on water thinks Jesus may have used certain ingredients in water that thickens to the point that you can actually walk across it. He claims Jesus had it all set up ahead of time because "this would surely amaze the crowds, especially if performed in the evening hours when the subtle details of the performance are less obvious." His assertions are ridiculous.

Let me review something for us, and then we'll get to our five astonishing points this morning. First, Jesus was God incarnate. He had just created possibly two and one-half tons of fish and bread for up to 20,000 people. Colossians 1:16 says He created everything visible and invisible. If He created gravity and water, He can walk on water. This is why evolution is so bad. It totally discounts Christ. Remember those four unanswerable questions facing evolution?

- How do you get something from nothing? You don't. Christ created something, indeed, everything – John 1:1-3.
- How do you get life from non-life? You don't. Christ created life. There's a world of difference between mud and mudfish.
- How do you get higher forms from lower forms? You don't. Christ created everything locked into a genetic code, according to its kind. Mudfish don't become elephants.
- How do you get man from animal? You don't. Christ made man in His own image, and no animal carries the image of God in itself. You'll never see cats and dogs and pigs and dolphins carrying cell phones or performing in an orchestra playing oboes and cellos and trumpets.
- Here's a fifth. How do you get a finely tuned universe tailor made for man from an explosion? You don't. Christ created all things out of His infinite power and wisdom.

So He created that water He walked on in the Sea of Galilee and to deny it is to blaspheme Him. As we'll see, the disciples were utterly and totally astonished when they saw Him walking on that water three or four miles out from the coast. Question: Did Darwin, or Carl Sagan, or Richard Dawkins walk on water? Of course not! I'm going to worship the God-Man who can actually walk on water.

Well, let's read this astonishing account in Mark 6:45-56 and then put together five astonishing principles to take home with us. Those disciples on the boat were blown away, astonished by Christ, and I want us to walk away this morning also astonished by Christ. Hopefully you'll be so gripped by Him you'll love and obey and worship Him above everything else for the rest of your life.

Mark 6:45-56: Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. 46 After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray. 47 When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. 48 Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. 49 But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and

said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." 51 Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, 52 for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. 53 When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. 54 When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, 55 and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. 56 Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.

Astonishing principle #1 – Christ's purpose is often different than yours.

Verse 45 - "He made them get into the boat."

Christ has just fed this huge crowd of people. He has given them more than they could eat by multiplying those two fish and five loaves. The people are fired up. They've seen enough; they are ready to establish Him as King. John 6 tells us they were planning to make Him King by force! The Messianic Kingdom of Israel has come! And the disciples are probably thinking, yeah! We're all about that! They still don't understand the cross.

So what does Jesus do? First, He makes or compels His men to get in the boat and head toward Bethsaida without Him. As they navigate their boat out onto the sea, they are sailing high after this day. After feeding all those people and twelve baskets left over, Wowza! That's a lotta fish and chips, baby! This is unbelievable! You can just hear them singing with gusto! To God be the Glory, Great Things He Has Done! It was smooth sailing into the beautiful sunset.

Then He sends all these fired up people away. "OK, people go back to your homes. We're done here." He knows they've missed the whole point of the miracle. And those twelve men sailing out into the sea? Everything is looking good right now. They have no idea what's in store for them within the next few hours.

Isn't that exactly the way it is with us? We may think God is going to do some really neat thing, but as it turns out, Christ has something completely different than yours! You don't know what God has for you for tomorrow, but when Jesus says, "Get into the boat and go," you better obey. He sent Abraham out from Ur, not knowing where he was going! Christ is in control of your life, and the best and wisest thing for you to do is to simply obey Him. You know two things: He's in control of whatever is coming, and He has purpose in whatever is coming tomorrow. It may not be easy, but He has His purpose! Just get in the boat.

Astonishing principle #2 - Christ sometimes sends you straight into trouble you didn't expect.

Verse 48 – The wind was against them.

After night had set in, that little boat sailed right into a fierce windstorm. Matthew 14:24 says they were battered by the waves. They are straining at the oars because the wind is against them! Every minute it seems to get worse, and it continues all the way to the middle of the night, even to 3 AM. Do you ever feel like you are straining at the oars and you're getting nowhere. It's terrible!

The amazing thing is that they are now in this fierce storm fighting for their lives because Jesus sent them. Is this what it means to follow Jesus? He must have made a mistake! If only He'd come with us! At least He was with us in the boat during our last storm. But now we're alone facing sure disaster, this boat is not going to survive, "Oy vey, oy vey, oy vey!"

This happens to us, and it happens often! When you obey Christ, you may well find yourself in trouble! Kelvin Cochran, who used to be the chief of the Atlanta fire department, simply wrote up a Bible study that included the truth of marriage between a man and a woman and that all other sexual behavior, including homosexuality, is wrong and a perversion! The mayor fired him. That's trouble he didn't see coming! He has filed a lawsuit based on freedom of speech and religion, so we'll see. Obeying God can

take us straight into trouble. More of this kind of trouble is coming as we obey our Lord. Gordon College is facing trouble right now over gender issues.

But for these disciples of Jesus, all was going swimmingly on that lovely evening until suddenly they find themselves in deep yogurt. How fast you can go from great blessing, maybe a Bible study or small group or worship service, your heart is glowing with Christ, you are singing your way along, when, wham! a storm, a tornado of trouble hits you! A phone call, a child, someone's been offended, the police show up, I mean you weren't expecting this! You were obeying Christ, doing the best you can, and someone attacks you. And sometimes you think you're all alone. Where is Jesus, anyway?

As so we see astonishing principle #2. Christ sometimes sends you straight into a storm you weren't expecting.

Astonishing principle #3 - Christ never has you out of His mind or His prayers.

Verses 46, 48 – He left for the mountain to pray.... Seeing them straining at the oars.

Where's Jesus at this time? He went up on a mountain to spend some time in prayer. He's had a big day. How would you feel if you spend the day creating several tons of food? He needed some TAWG time. Time Alone With God. We all need time alone with God. Like Caleb mentioned Sunday night, "Luther said, "I have so much to do today I have to spend at least three hours in prayer." Jesus is up there on the mountain talking to His Father about His mission, gaining strength like He did in the Garden to face the coming onslaught. He's going to be facing increasing opposition. He said in Luke 18:1, "Men ought always to pray, and not to lose heart!"

But I'm guessing He was also praying for those fellows out in that boat. "Father, keep these fellows. They sure aren't much. That Peter needs to be cut down a few notches, and Andrew needs encouragement. Strengthen them for what's coming because it won't be easy for them either. I see they are struggling out there. Don't let one of them perish. Don't let them drop into the sea and drown! Keep them, except for that Judas fellow. That will be hard, but I know your plan, Father, and I submit to it."

They were never out of Jesus' mind or His prayers. Neither are you! No one else may be thinking of you, praying for you. But He is. This is exactly what Hebrews 4:14-16 says! We have a High Priest who has passed through the heavens. He sits at the Father's right hand and knows exactly what we are facing and our struggles. He always has you and all of His people in his heart. We need to come boldly to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in just the nick of time! Jesus does that for us!

Back to Jesus' prayer – "I'm going to let them struggle in that storm a little longer, till 3 AM, till they really come to the end of themselves, till they realize without Me they are sunk." Literally!

I read about a really nasty atheist this week. He was a blasphemer and horribly immoral, taking advantage of helpless young girls. His mother had taught him some Scriptures as a youngster, but she died when he was seven. One night he too was in an awful storm. There were 12 hardened crewmen and they all believed the ship would sink and they'd all drown! This atheist blasphemer was working the pumps furiously when suddenly truth his mother taught him came powerfully to his mind, that God might exist after all, and that he was about to face God in judgment for his wicked life. It was March 10, 1748. This was the date John Newton believes God broke up his stony heart and gave him a heart of flesh to believe the gospel! No wonder he could write, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like men."

Jesus prays for you and sees you. Verse 48 says, "Seeing them straining at the oars!" Oh, how precious is that. That, my friends, is hope in the midst of severe trouble. Thou, God, seest me! (El-Roi). Did He see them from that prayer position on the mountain with his physical eyes, or was it because He is God and therefore sees everything with His omniscience? I don't know. He's up there and they are out there, separated by three or four miles straining with these oars, and He sees them.

Now that's just good. Think about it. Does Jesus see you wherever you are? Psalm 139 asks, "Where can I go from your presence?" Is He totally aware of what you are struggling with? Does He see you? Does He pray for you? Storms can really shake you up! You aren't in control of most storms. They hit without warning. Does Jesus know what's going on? Will He keep you safe? Job was coasting along, life was good, when suddenly like a tornado at 2 AM his entire life was shredded in a few moments! Did God know? Did God see? Did Jesus pray for him? Count on it, you are always in His thoughts and in His prayers if you belong to Him.

Astonishing principle #4 – Christ does for you what you cannot possibly do for yourself.

Mark 6:49-51- They saw Him walking on the sea.... But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." 51 Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped.

He came to them at about the fourth watch – that's between 3 and 6 AM. Why didn't He come sooner? First, Christ is in charge here. Your storm will not destroy you. It may take you to heaven, but whether God relieves the pressure sooner or later, He is using it to teach us to trust Him and see Him in it! So here He is teaching and testing these fellows. They will find themselves in many storms as they go out from Pentecost to preach the gospel! He wants them to learn to trust Him. They are typical men. "We can do this." "No problem, we're tough, we're men. We've faced bigger dragons in our lives!" No, you're going down unless Jesus saves you. You are helpless to save yourself. You have nothing to keep you from God's judgment. You must have Christ or you will perish. These guys are definitely going down unless Christ does something.

This storm is deadly. And they are in a spiritual storm. Satan would love nothing more than to send this whole bunch straight to the bottom of this Sea. This is Christ's church, 12 guys in a boat about to sink. But it's not going to happen. Christ is faithful! He will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able, but will with the test provide a way to escape so we can bear it. He's not only sovereign over the elements, He's sovereign over souls and saves His elect, regardless of how awful their situation.

Look at verse 48. He sees them and desires to come beside them. He comes to them by walking on the water in the storm. He didn't intend to pass them by. He wanted them to see Him in the storm! This is beautiful. Christ wants us to see Him in our storms and troubles and as we are straining at our oars! Verse 49, they think they are seeing a water spirit, a superstitious belief that spirits in the night cause disasters in the water. And they scream and are terrified! One commentator described the scene, "They are screaming, 'It's a ghost! We're all going mad.'" And as some are scared skinny, others screaming, others are thinking about jumping into the sea, they hear a voice.

Verse 50, "Immediately He spoke to them." A sweeter voice these guys never heard! This is good. He doesn't first stop the trial. He wants us to see Him, to know Him, to trust Him and to calm down in the trial. Trials don't always go away. Some you live with. You're not going to ship out those wild Indians you're trying to raise. So He first gets their attention, gives them words of comfort, lets them know He is the great I AM of the Old Testament, that He is indeed deity and sovereign over all things, including their storm.

Here's where Peter, true to form, pipes up and says, "Command me and I can walk on water too!" And he does. For a few steps. You have to wonder if the boys on the boat are cheering him on or going, "Peter, you idiot. Just like you to put your foot where it doesn't belong!" But he goes down in history as the only other man who truly walked on water, no illusions, no props, no stoges.

Then Jesus and Peter get in the boat and the wind subsides immediately to rest, like it's exhausted.

Astonishing principle #5 Christ wants you to live every day of your life utterly astonished by Him.

Verse 51 – And they were utterly astonished.

Mark unleashes all his words for total and complete astonishment. They were being exceedingly astonished. The King James is good here, "They were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and

wondered!" They had just witnessed an amazing miracle. Matthew says they worshipped Him and confessed, "You are certainly God's Son." They are growing. They still have hardness in their hearts, and they still hadn't really got it from the loaves as to really who this is they are following! But they are growing. This is why Christ sent them into this storm, to be astonished beyond measure at Who He really is, the "I AM" of the Old Testament, Jehovah Himself!

After the wind stops, they make their way to the western shore of Galilee and the next day Christ heals all kinds of people. This is unbelievable.

We should be utterly astonished beyond measure by this Man, Jesus Christ. He can walk on water and still storms in a moment. But can He take care of you? Is He able to meet your needs? Can He save you from your sinful lifestyle, your sinful habits? Can He forgive you? Can He bring courage and calm into your heart when storms are blasting from outside, when a tornado rips into your heart? Does He astonish you? He should! He should astonish you so much that He sweeps you off your little ego platform right onto your face before Him. There is no one like Him. Give Him all your heart! He is worthy! Worship Him. Love Him with everything you have.