

# Jesus Walks on Water

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** Jesus is present and powerful in the midst of testing and trial.

The word *sovereign* carries the idea of someone having complete authority and control. It is not easy to accept the doctrine of someone, even God, being sovereign over us. However, if we humble ourselves and admit our need for salvation, we will see that our sovereign Savior is greater than we are. We will also see that He can sustain us through any circumstance that life brings.

## Voices from the Church

“Faith in Jesus needs to be generated by who Jesus is. And who is he? ‘The Son of God.’”<sup>1</sup>

—Vern S. Poythress

 What human forms of authority do we see in the world?

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 Why might we have such a difficult time accepting someone else’s authority in these circumstances?

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In the Christian life we face various struggles and circumstances that test us. However, because we are Christians, we know we don’t face them alone. Jesus—the Son of God—is sovereign over all things, and He calls us to a place of deep comfort and courage as we face struggles in this life. He is sovereign even over the wind and the waves, so we can worship Him no matter what and call others to do the same.

## 1. Jesus is sovereign over our circumstances (Matt. 14:22-25).

*<sup>22</sup> Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.*

It's crucial we see Jesus during this season of life engaged in ministry on a full-time basis. *Full-time*, not in the sense that He was on staff at a church. Rather, He was fully dedicated to the mission God sent Him to fulfill. Jesus ministered to others with all of His heart, mind, soul, and strength. Therefore, to ensure physical endurance to complete the mission, He carved out the needed space to be alone with the Heavenly Father.

This is something that all believers can learn from. Every Christian is on mission (Matt. 28:16-20). In the Great Commission, Jesus commands the church to go and make disciples of people from every ethnicity. Making disciples not only entails sharing the gospel and calling people to believe but also calling them into an ongoing relationship with God and with the body of Christ.

Disciple-making is a process, and it takes other Christians to raise a disciple. In this sense, every Christian is called to ministry. Again, full-time ministry is not defined by receiving a paycheck from a church; rather, it is dedicating the whole of one's life to the mission God has sent us on. So Jesus is the perfect example of what we should do when we grow weary physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In these times we must retreat with God the Father.

### Voices from the Church

"If the sight of Jesus bowing his head into that ultimate storm [the cross] is burned into the core of your being, you will never say, 'God, don't you care?' And if you know that he did not abandon you in that ultimate storm, what makes you think he would abandon you in the much smaller storms you're experiencing right now? And, someday, of course, he will return and still all storms for eternity."<sup>2</sup>

—Timothy Keller



How does prayer reflect our understanding of God's sovereignty over our circumstances?

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What are the benefits of prayer alone with God as you have experienced them?

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In verses 23-24, we see that it was evening and the disciples were out in open water. While Jesus was with the Father enjoying time for rejuvenation, the world kept turning, and His disciples found themselves in the midst of a storm.

Jesus saw the disciples struggling in the midst of the storm. Still, He did not deliver them immediately—it is possible that the disciples were struggling in the storm for nearly 12 hours!—but He saw them, and He came to them walking on the waves.

This comforting truth is even more powerful to consider now that Jesus has ascended to the Father. While Jesus dwells in heaven and is omniscient, He is also immanently with us through the Holy Spirit. His eyes are on us and He is with us always and He is always in control.

The disciples rowed through the storm with all their might, unaware of Jesus' care and coming. They fought against the wind and waves because they didn't want to die at sea. They endured in fear. But their struggle had a purpose—it was an opportunity for Jesus to display His compassion and power for the benefit of His disciples and an opportunity for them to worship Him rightly.

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 27. *The Goodness of Creation*

In Genesis 1, God repeatedly affirmed that all of His creation was good, even “very good” (1:31). It is good, in God’s judgment, because He created it for a purpose that it fulfilled—to reflect and display the good character of the Creator. Therefore, sin and evil should not be seen as a foundational part of the creation but rather as a corruption of it. While the creation has been marred and distorted as a result of sin, it is still good in the hands of God and serves His purpose of proclaiming His glory in the world. God’s people should affirm and seek to preserve the goodness of God’s creation (Gen. 2:15).

Knowing that Jesus is sovereign over our circumstances and that He uses struggles in our lives to help us grow, we can endure in faith. No matter what circumstances or situations arise in this life, followers of Jesus Christ must remain obedient to the mission God has given. We find strength for endurance in Jesus' compassion and in His power.



When have you had to endure the tension of a struggle in your life that God did not immediately resolve? How were you challenged to grow in your faith through that struggle?

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## 2. Jesus calls us to courage and faith in the storm (Matt. 14:26-31).

*<sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."*

When Jesus showed up, the disciples were not expecting Him. In fact, the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost! We have to remember that the last time they saw Jesus, He was standing on the shore. Even more so, there is no way any of them expected to see Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. So, Jesus comforted the disciples by assuring them of His identity. He then invited them to exchange their fear for courage. It would be good for us to remember this truth: When Jesus is near, there is no reason to fear. And we can rest assured Jesus is always near and will never leave us (Heb. 13:5).

Although physical storms come and go, mental storms seem to remain, but regardless of the kind of storm we may be experiencing, knowing Jesus provides us with peace in the storm. The gospel reminds us that because of our relationship with Jesus, we have peace *with* God as well as access to the peace *of* God.

Peace with God was achieved by the finished work of Jesus because now we have been adopted into His family (Rom. 5:1). Having peace with God supplies us with the peace of God (Rom. 16:20; Phil. 4:7). The peace of God is a calm resolution that we can have with every step that we take in life (Eph. 6:15). If Jesus is sovereign over all of our circumstances, He will lead us in the way of God’s will, and no matter what hardships we encounter, we can take courage knowing Jesus will never leave us in the middle of the struggle. He’s building us to endure so we can finish our race!

 Which do you find more significant: physical storms or metaphorical “storms of life”? Why?

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 How are you encouraged by reading God’s Word, which says Jesus has the power to walk on the raging sea?

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### Voices from Church History

“Perhaps at this very moment, down in some cabin, or amidst the noise and tumult, and the raging of the ocean, when many are alarmed, there are Christians with calm faces, patiently waiting their Father’s will, whether it shall be to reach the port of Heaven, or to be spared to come again to land, into the midst of life’s trials and struggles once more. They feel that they are well-cared for. They know that the storm has a bit in its mouth, and that God holds it in, and nothing can hurt them—nothing can happen to them but what God permits.”<sup>3</sup>

—Charles H. Spurgeon  
(1834-1892)

When Jesus came to His disciples walking on the water, they were understandably frightened, thinking He was a ghost. Jesus responded by saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid” (v. 27). Jesus’ words “It is I” directly echo God’s revelation of Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14, when God revealed His name as “I AM.”

According to the Bible, there is no question that God sovereignly ordains trials in our lives at various points in order to reveal His character and nature to us in ways that we would never know apart from the storm (Jas. 1:1-4; 1 Pet. 4:12-16; cf. Rom. 8:28-30). And it is in the middle of the storm that the presence of Christ becomes all the more real.<sup>4</sup> Because Jesus is the great “I AM” and He is with us always, we can have courage and faith in the midst of our storms. But what if our faith falters?



*<sup>28</sup> And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”<sup>29</sup> He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.<sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”*

Jesus heard Peter’s request and told him to come out and meet Him in the middle of the water! This must have been an amazing event for all of the disciples to witness. Remember, Jesus had not yet calmed the storm, so the winds were still raging and the water was still churning. And still, we see Peter obeyed Jesus in coming to Him. However, on the water Peter began to focus on the strength of the wind, and his courage retreated. He once again embraced the fear that he once had and lost his focus on Jesus.

As soon as Peter cried out to Jesus to save him, Jesus did just that. Jesus then exposed Peter’s lack of faith and asked him why he doubted. Little faith? From my vantage point, Peter had more faith than I do because he was willing to step out of the boat, yet Jesus said Peter had little faith. Jesus’ rebuke meant Peter’s faith was weak and needed to be strengthened. This only comes with having greater dependency on Jesus. This is where we must understand two truths.

First, when we receive the courage of Jesus, we must continue to embrace it and employ it throughout life. Our spiritual walk cannot operate in the courage we received from Jesus for a few hours or a few days. We must continually, regularly, and persistently keep our eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:2) and leverage the courage He has supplied us with to live out our mission for the glory of God.

Second, the gospel comforts us in knowing that when we fail to walk in courage and instead turn back to holding on to fear, God's love for us still remains and He still provides salvation for us. A constant theme throughout Scripture is God calling His covenant people to remember His faithfulness. How many of us have had seasons of doubt and fear? How many of us in times of struggle have become consumed with worry? How many of us have felt desperate? Sometimes the storms of life bring us to the point, like Peter, where we cry out, "Lord, save me" (Matt. 14:30). The good news is when we are faithless, God is still faithful (2 Tim. 2:13).



What are some ways we can show courage and faith in Christ in the midst of our difficult life situations?

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### 3. Jesus is worthy of worship as the powerful Son of God (Matt. 14:32-33).

*<sup>32</sup> And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup> And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

Although Jesus' calming of the storm was a display of His supernatural power over creation, the key factor to this passage is found in verse 33 when the disciples worshiped Jesus! At that moment, the disciples confessed that Jesus is truly the Son of God. Their worship of Jesus, who was standing right before them, shows that they were fully convinced of His divine identity. The same can probably be said of us, that our worship of the Lord becomes more meaningful and sincere after we have seen Him do great work in our lives.

Reflecting on Jesus being sovereign over our circumstances as well as our supplier of courage will allow our hearts to have an attitude of worship rather than worry. Rather than worrying about the issues and cares of this life, we should commit our trust to God and communicate to Him in prayer (Phil. 4:6).



For what reasons in your life do you worship Jesus as the powerful Son of God?

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## Voices from the Church

“The climax of the story is not the stilling of the storm (v. 32) but the confession and worship of the disciples: ‘Truly you are the Son of God’ (v. 33).”<sup>5</sup>

—D. A. Carson

## Conclusion

Jesus is always in control, always present with us, and He alone is powerful enough to calm the raging sea. What else can we do but worship Him as the Son of God? But not only did He still the wind and the waves, He consumed the wrath of God against our sin on the cross. What else can we do but trust Him to preserve us through the storms of life?

Our security in this world is not based on the strength of our faith but on the object of our faith. Our faith may waver in the storm, but Christ is solid and will not move—the storm is His footstool, for He rides on “the clouds of heaven” (Dan. 7:13).

Our faith grows in strength when we reflect on the precious message of the gospel, which reminds us that Jesus alone is worthy of our worship because He alone is mighty to save. These truths serve to fuel our hearts and drive us toward living as faithful witnesses on mission for the Lord God, no matter what situations we find ourselves in.

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** What is most important about our faith is not its size but its object. Through His miracles, His teaching, and most clearly in His death and resurrection, Jesus proved Himself to be worthy of our faith. He alone is able to save.

# HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** God calls us to display before a watching world our trust in God's sovereignty and power in the midst of difficult circumstances.

1. What will trust in God's sovereignty and power look and sound like as we face a variety of life's circumstances?

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2. How can we grow in our courage and faith in the One who can walk upon the sea?

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3. Write a prayer expressing reasons Jesus, the powerful Son of God, is worthy of worship.

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