

John 6:17b-22

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[0 : 00] Good morning. The bullpen has been called and therefore I am back.! So you're not our typical teacher, preacher, Nathan, this morning.

! Just me, Colson, a fellow church member. So today we will be continuing our study of the Gospel of John, looking at 617b-22.

So we're not exactly following the ESV subheadings. Those are not inspired, so that is totally okay. If that makes you uncomfortable, you'll be okay.

So if you were here last week, don't worry. There's plenty more to glean out of this text. God's Word is an abundant source of wisdom for us, is a gracious gift that we have it so readily available to us.

This story is familiar in our culture. I've heard people say, you would have thought that he was walking on water when they're talking about somebody awe-inspiring somebody else.

[1 : 00] There have been many gadgets, gimmicks, video editing tricks to make people look like they're walking on water. A story in our family actually has a similar thing where my grandfather recruited my dad and his brother to help him repair some fence posts in the middle of his pond in Florida.

Kind of more of a muddy cesspool, but that's okay. Their goal, or their idea rather, was to screw some plywood boards onto the bottom of some old boots and walk out onto this muddy water.

As the story goes, my uncle made it a couple steps through the mud part and was fine. And whenever things got a little more viscous, those planks created something of a vacuum, and he was not really able to lift his feet anymore and started to sink and fall.

Humans were not made to walk on water. This is a, very clearly, this is an idea that sticks in our minds as something that is supernatural. But people who know this story, people that know this story know very little about the gospel and don't know the reason why Jesus walked on the water.

So to cut through this familiarity, we will take an in-depth look at this story today and understand that this was not a party trick to impress Jesus' friends. This was an obvious demonstration and declaration of Jesus' deity.

[2 : 25] Join me before we pray. Join me as we pray before reading this text. Dear Lord, thank you so much for this chance for us to gather together to worship you through prayer, worship you through song, and worship you as we read your word to us.

Help us to have clear ears and eyes to receive your wisdom and clear minds to focus today. Thank you for how much you love us. Help us to love and revere you well as we gather this morning and as we go through this week.

Please speak to us this morning through your word. It's in Jesus' name that I pray. Amen. So let's read John 16, 17b, starting with, It was now dark, through the end of verse 22.

It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them, the disciples. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened.

But he said to them, It is I. Do not be afraid. Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

[3 : 37] On the next day, the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone.

At a couple different times this morning, I will make some comparing and contrasting points with the other accounts of Jesus walking in the water that we have in Matthew and Mark.

So I think it would be helpful for us to kind of have those fresh in mind so we don't necessarily have to be flipping back and forth. So I'm going to read through those now. This is a good bit of reading, so if you want to go there with me, we'll start in Matthew 14 in verse 22 through 33, the end of that section, and then after that we'll go to Mark 6 to read Mark's account.

So a good bit of reading. Buckle in. It's God's precious word to us, so it's great to hear. So starting first in Matthew 14, verse 22. Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side while he dismissed the crowds.

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

[4 : 49] And in the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. 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. But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.

And Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. He said, come. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me. Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him saying, oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt?

And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased and those in the boat worshipped him saying, truly you are the son of God. Okay, quickly now, let's go to Mark 6, starting in verse 45.

So Mark's account of the same story. Immediately, he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side to Bethsaida while he dismissed the crowd.

[5 : 49] And after he had taken leave of them, he went up onto the mountain to pray. And when the evening came, the boat was out on the sea and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully for the wind was against them.

And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.

But immediately he spoke to them and said, take heart in his eye, do not be afraid. And he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Careful observers will note some differences here, but these three accounts certainly agree on the central details. Each author has kind of turned this diamond a little bit differently to drive home particular points.

So today we'll focus on the distinctives of John's account and that ought to make us investigate further what John is up to. What is he emphasizing in his account by looking at and turning things this particular way?

[6 : 50] As we go through our text, I'll flag some of those particular distinctives and we'll talk about the revealed emphasis for each and maybe a little bit of contrasting about how that compares to Matthew or Mark. So now that we know our text for this morning and have some extra context from Matthew and Mark, let's consider our text this morning in three-ish points.

The sea, the disciples, and the Lord Jesus. So starting with point number one, the sea. So this is verse 17b through 18. It was now dark and Jesus had not yet come to them.

The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. So John writes this entire passage in a way that reminds me of three different camera focal lengths, different levels of zoom and focus.

So here in this verse, we have the widest angle, so to speak. Picture this with me for a second. We have Jesus on the shore, on the eastern side of the shore. We also know that the disciples are out here in the middle of the sea and we know the storm is over all of them and everything is dark.

So we have this really wide amounts of information that John is giving us for this. And then let's look now at verse 17, in particular verse B, or part B.

[8 : 08] from verse 15, as well as the other accounts of this pair of vents, Jesus feeding the 5,000, as Nathan covered last week, and now Jesus walking on water.

We know that Jesus had withdrawn himself from the crowds and the disciples to pray. But John includes a unique detail about this retreat by telling us in verse 15, that's what he says in verse 15, perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

So he includes this detail that the crowds wanted to take Jesus by force and make him king or leader of their rebellion. Jesus had taken hours by this point to be in solitude with God.

And if I was to employ a bit of sanctified imagination, as Nathan likes to call it, I would suppose that Jesus would have been redoubling his focus on his perfect obedience to the Father and his will, submitting this temptation that was brought to him, that these people would force him to be this rebellious king apart from his mission and submitting this temptation to the Father.

Let's look at verse 18. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. The disciples are undoubtedly exhausted by this point in the day. They had been with Jesus all day as he taught, as he healed, fed thousands of people that were there.

[9 : 27] The disciples gathered up all that leftover bread. And now after that long day of ministry under our Lord, I am sure they were hoping for nothing else than an easy sail across the sea to Capernaum.

However, Yahweh often uses difficult circumstances to sanctify us and glorify himself. The theme of dangerous waters is present throughout the Bible.

From the unordered, chaotic, lifeless waters in Genesis 1 that the spirit hovers over to the predatory hunting waters of the dragon pursuing the woman in Revelation 12.

But concurrent within that theme is the Lord preserving his people through the dangerous waters by bringing life into creation, preserving Noah and his family on the ark, delivering Israel to the Red Sea and the Jordan River, escorting Jonah back to his mission via the deep water and a fish.

The list goes on. These dangerous moments through scripture are opportunities God has made to exhibit his love, his faithfulness, and ultimately his glory.

[10:33] Here, John has in view Jesus on the shore, the disciples on the sea, the storm over them all. But now we're kind of going to zoom in a little bit for the second point. John changes focus to the boat.

So point number two, the disciples, looking at verse 19. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat. And they were frightened.

So we're now zoomed in from that kind of extreme wide shot that we started with to focus on the labor and reaction of the disciples to Jesus on the water. The way it is written is specific to say what the disciples saw.

If this was a video, I think we wouldn't necessarily see Jesus in this shot, but rather we would be looking at the disciples as they see Jesus. So let's, as they see him, and now let's observe what the disciples do.

So there's, John gives three verbs to describe the action of the disciples here in verse 19. So first, they had rowed. So they had rowed about three or four miles at this point, the shortest crossing from that eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee that they started out to Capernaum up on that northwest edge of it likely would have been five or six miles.

[11:44] So these tired men against the wind were about halfway to their destination and presumably slowing down. They saw Jesus as our second verb. According to Matthew and Mark, some of them thought that the figure they saw was a ghost, but no matter what they thought they saw, John gives us their third verb, they were frightened.

Certainly understandable. They're in the center of that large sea in the middle of a storm. If that was not enough to not expect to see Jesus, he was walking on the water. That's a frightening thing to see.

They definitely would not have expected to see him like that. So next, John zooms in further past the disciples in their boat and we get to our center frame at our third point, the Lord Jesus.

So here at the center point, John has been zooming in and in to get us here so we ought to pay close attention. So let's consider verse 20 in three parts.

First, but he said to them. The inclusion of the conjunction but connects this to what was previously said.

[12:51] It's answering something. So I would suggest to you that this is answering the disciples' frightenedness. Our second phrase, it is I, alternatively translated I am.

A little bit of awkward grammar in English for this to be translated I am, but it is certainly an appropriate translation. I think it's getting at a theological point for us to translate and understand this this way.

So here in our center frame, we get three phrases, but he said, I am, do not be afraid. And that center of the center is that Jesus is Yahweh, the I am.

This is not the only time in John's gospel that Jesus takes up this divine name which God revealed to Moses in Exodus. Another shiny example occurs in John 8, 58.

Jesus said to them, John tells us the group of Jews, truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. That third phrase of verse 20, do not be afraid.

[13:55] Even with the meaning, I believe Jesus and John intend with the declaration of Christ's identity, him identifying himself with God, Yahweh. this sentence or phrase, do not be afraid, does not seem to immediately follow in a worldly, strict sense.

What I mean is this, if Jesus was seeking merely to comfort his tired and frightened disciples, he could have said, it's me, Jesus, God the Son.

I will make the storm stop and bring you safely to the shore. Or, good job rowing this far, I'll take it from here. I'm sure the disciples would have loved to hear those words. And that would have given them a kind of temporary and shallow comfort.

Something that we often may want when we're going through our own trials. But Jesus said, I am, do not be afraid. He did not assure them that he would relieve their discomfort.

He did not promise them that their circumstances would change. He revealed to them that he is God and he is with them. And because he was with them, they did not need to be afraid.

[15 : 06] And this peace that Jesus called them to was not the first time that Yahweh had so encouraged his people. All through the Old Testament, we see a regular exhortation to not fear for the Lord is with you.

We will look briefly at two examples that are too beautiful for me not to read. But before I get to those in Isaiah, I will list some other references for you, though this is certainly not an exhaustive list. Joshua 1.9, 2 Chronicles 20.17, Jeremiah 30.10, and then from the worshiper's perspective, Psalm 23 and Psalm 118, verse 6.

So, let's look at our examples. So firstly, Isaiah 41, verse 10, says this, Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you.

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. And second, Isaiah 43, verse 1, through the first part of verse 3. But now, thus says Yahweh, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

[16 : 29] For I am Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Wow. Also, while we're in Isaiah 43, verse 16 says this, Thus says Yahweh, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters.

This awesome description of Yahweh in Isaiah is typologically fulfilled here by the Lord Jesus Christ. This makes it clearer than ever that this storm was not just for the disciples to have a hard time sailing back.

Rather, it was a red carpet for the king to declare and demonstrate his authority. Right before our passage today, in verse 15, John gave us that detail about the crowd's desire to force Jesus into being the head of this uprising.

Now, the people were certainly right to notice the kingliness of Jesus, but they missed the nature of his kingdom by a mile. Here, in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus shows that his disciples that he is a king unlike any other.

Unlike Caesar, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Ahab, Hezekiah, Solomon, and David, Jesus makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, just like Yahweh.

[17 : 51] Although Jesus is the rightful king of kings, many did not receive him then and do not receive him now. Let's read John 8, 59, the verse after Jesus tells the Jews before Abraham was, I am.

So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself. That's a sad verse. They are not rejecting a new governor to oversee taxes, trade, and war.

They are rejecting the king of the universe. This ought to grieve us. Jesus graciously reveals to these people that hate him that he is God, but they have hardened their hearts and closed their eyes and ears.

Hebrews 3, 7 through 8 reads like this, Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. in verse 13, But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

So not all receive Jesus as we just read. Some reject and rebel against him. But what do the disciples do? Let's zoom back out to the boat from Jesus to see the disciples' response.

[19 : 06] Then they were glad to take him into the boat. John has a slightly different angle on this detail than the other two accounts in Matthew and Mark. Matthew and Mark both recount this action, he, Jesus, got in the boat with them, or in Matthew, he says they because Peter is also with Jesus.

And I expect some of you are thinking, what difference does it make? Jesus got in the boat. What difference does it make? How exactly it's written down? I propose to you that John is making this slight change in who is the subject or actor in this phrase for more than just to be quirky or different than his friends Matthew and Mark.

Rather, I propose to you that John is being very particular in his language and setting the story within the macro argument of his gospel and as Nathan mentioned last week, the structure of chapter 6.

So let's take a closer look at each of those two aspects. First, that macro level. We know John's stated purpose for his gospel from John 20, 31.

These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. I hope that by the end of our study of John we will all have this verse deeply ingrained in our memories.

[20 : 21] John is quite concerned not only with telling us these miracles and awesome deeds and teachings of Christ, but with what our response will be to them. He has done this by highlighting and contrasting the different responses to Christ that he saw while he was serving under Jesus.

In John 8, when Jesus reveals to the disciples before Abraham was, I am, what was their response? They wanted to stone him. So here, I think John is very particular in his arrangement to make sure we notice the disciples' response.

They gladly received him. I would not be shocked to learn there is a literary structure to make this contrast between John 6 and 8 more clear than it already is. Maybe we'll find out when we all get to the end of John 8.

As for the structure of this chapter, chapter 6, in verse 13, the disciples gather up the remaining bread. And just after our text in verse 35, Jesus says, I am the bread of life.

Then, in the middle of those pieces, you have the disciples receiving into their boat the I am, the bread of life. This is certainly no accident. For the rest of our shot here from John in verse 21, he tells us what is happening with the boat.

[21 : 39] And immediately, the boat was at the land which they were going. So this is a miraculous deliverance. The great I am has brought them all the way through the waters. Praise God for his Holy Spirit inspiring brilliant minds and revealing himself to us.

This is more than just John. This is all of the Old Testament beauty working together. This is Jesus fulfilling again and again these types, these slots that are made from the Old Testament and fulfilling them now.

There is a slot or type of who it is that heals the sick, feeds the multitude in the wilderness, makes a path in dangerous waters. And where God filled that slot throughout the Old Testament now we see Jesus doing all these things because he is God.

Very interestingly, this is the second miraculous demonstration of Jesus' divinity in our passage. First, Jesus is walking on the water in verse 19 and now second, here in verse 21, Jesus has immediately delivered his disciples through this dangerous storm.

Jesus' declaration of his divine identity is exactly between those two powerful wonders. This is an opportune time to clarify some possible misunderstandings or maybe even an apparent contradiction of some earlier statements that I made.

[23:00] I said, Jesus did not assure them, his disciples, that he would relieve their discomfort. He did not promise them that their circumstances would change. And we just read that he did in fact relieve their discomfort and change their circumstances.

So we have this concept of God allowing and using difficult or dangerous circumstances. So I think it's worth it to briefly explore this idea for just a bit.

A quick survey of some picked Old Testament examples. There's many more than this. Joseph was sold, accused, and jailed in Egypt, but God was with him.

David fled from Saul and later his own son, but God was with him. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the furnace, but God was with them. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, but God was with him.

Paul was shipwrecked, but God was with him. Stephen was stoned, but God was with him. All of these examples and many more teach us that trial, suffering, and hardship will come.

[24:04] But Jesus is God and he is with us. Here, Jesus did deliver the disciples through the storm, yes, but they did endure it alone for miles.

God brought Joseph out of jail, yes, but he did endure it for many days. Jesus did receive Stephen into his presence, but he was martyred. While we are enduring, it is tempting to believe that we are on our own and that God is no longer faithfully with us.

God cannot deliver you through the storm if he does not first allow you to be caught in it. John ends this passage by zooming back out again into that extreme wide shot.

So now we are at point one prime, the other side of the sea. Let's read verse 22. On the next day, the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone.

This verse is most clear what John is doing in framing up this passage for us as he is kind of resetting that first shot that we got in verse 17b through 18, but instead of Jesus on the shore, disciples on the boat, storm above, it's now the crowd on the shore and then he's giving another description that Jesus did not get on the boat with his disciples, so he's kind of restating all this information that we learned earlier in the passage.

[25:42] So this is kind of that repeat of information to follow the structure to make us pay attention of what did we miss from A to that repeat of information in A prime.

So we would be wise to ask how this section relates back to that center frame that we talked about, Jesus' declaration of his divine identity.

So here, the crowd noticed and knew that Jesus did not get on the boat with his disciples, but they also knew that he was no longer with them on that eastern side of the sea.

The crowd is curious as to how Jesus crossed the sea. This is the people that knew their waters, knew the sea well. Some of them most likely would have been able to surmise that Jesus certainly did not walk around in that time.

So John explores the interaction between Jesus and the crowd through the rest of the chapter, which we will not obviously get into today. So now that we have followed John as he started wide, zoomed in on the boat, zoomed in on Jesus, and then back to the boat, and back to that whole scene, let's consider some closing applications.

[26:55] Number one, believe the declaration that Jesus is God. Every day, as we work, parent, eat, live, and go, we must not lose sight of the truth of Jesus' deity verified by his resurrection.

Application number two, believe Jesus' promise that he is with us. Because Jesus has verified his divinity through his resurrection, when we hear his promise that he is with us, we get that from Matthew 28, 20, that he will be with us to the end of the age as we go.

We can have confidence, trust, faith in it. If Jesus had given us that promise to hold to, but he did not come out of the tomb, we would be fools to hold to it.

Praise God that we do not have to be those fools. And application number three, do not be afraid. Because Jesus has finished his work, if we are in him, we no longer have anything to fear.

Embarrassment, awkwardness, persecution, trials, even death, do not have any claim over us. The pastor of Hebrews put it this way in Hebrews 2, 14 through 15, which reads, Since, therefore, the children share in flesh and blood, Jesus himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

[28:35] That fear of death was the means the devil employed to keep us subject to lifelong slavery. But now, in Christ, we have the freedom to not succumb to that fear.

If you are not in Christ, if you do not have faith in the perfect life, atoning death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus, you cannot overcome death in and of yourself. You need the power of another.

Stop trying to work yourself to heaven. You must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing, you may have life in his name. You may be thinking that you do not fear death, and that's good, but consider, when I'm selfish with my time, it's because I know that death is coming.

I won't be able to watch that movie, play that game, read that book forever, so I ought to do it now, says my sinful flesh. But let's pick up that exhortation from Hebrews 3 that we read earlier.

We ought not to allow one another or ourselves to be hardened by this, to naturally prioritize ourselves above other things.

[29:45] We grumble, fight, and hoard because we fear, but our Lord and Savior has defeated death. He is with us, therefore, we no longer must be afraid and we are freed.

So now, we are to use that freedom to serve and love one another and so fulfill the law of Christ. Pray with me.