

WEEK 8: JESUS WALKS ON WATER

Matthew 14:22–33



The Place of the Passage

The miracle of Jesus' walking on water is another instance of a miracle of dominion. In this miracle Jesus reveals his unique relationship to nature and thus the proper relationship between the Creator and his creation. If the calming of the storm displayed the way in which Jesus ministers authoritatively over creation for the good of our world, then this miracle displays Jesus' harmonious relationship to creation that he ministerially provides for the world to come. Jesus' defiance of the physical properties of water and the limitations of gravity project the nature of human life in the new creation. As the encounter between Jesus and Peter will show, this reality of the new creation, while not yet fully here, has already begun. This miracle of dominion not only leaves believers with hope amid this present world and its toil but also gives us a glimpse into life in the glory of the new creation. In this miracle Jesus reveals a crucial purpose of his ministry and how the lordship of Jesus offers a foretaste of the glorious new life God promises to his people and his creation.

The Big Picture

Jesus is the Lord of his creation, whose operations in this world serve as a witness to the glories of the world to come.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Matthew 14:22–33. Then review the following questions and record your responses. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 1851–1852, or visit esv.org.)



The Setting (Matthew 14:22–24)

The introduction to the miracle might seem odd: Jesus sends his disciples¹ ahead before praying alone, and the waves slow the boat as Jesus catches up on foot—by walking on the water! But how does this strangeness magnify Jesus’ control over all the time-and-space elements of creation?

Jesus is not on the boat with the disciples, because he is alone on the mountain praying (14:23). What is the significance of Jesus’ praying? What does his habit of prayer, especially alone at times (cf. Matt. 14:13; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12), model for the prayer life of Christians?

The Miracle (Matthew 14:25–30)

The image is shocking: Jesus comes to his disciples in the boat by “walking on the sea” (14:25). What is this defiance of nature intended to communicate to Jesus’ disciples—and us—about the way in which Jesus rules over and in his creation?

Do the responses of the disciples surprise you in any way? How is fear a fitting response of the Christian to God, and what does reverent fear look like (see Prov. 9:10)?

Jesus comforts the terrified disciples by presenting himself to them. How does Jesus comfort us with his presence today? In what ways have you experienced the ministry of Christ in your life?

Peter walks on the water too, even if only briefly (Matt. 14:28–30). How does this short-lived miracle reflect the inbreaking of the new creation Jesus represents

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and will one day bring? What other areas of the Christian life reflect the inbreaking of the new creation?

The Conclusion (Matthew 14:31–33)

Jesus saves Peter from sinking into the sea but also issues him a rebuke. What is Jesus’ rebuke of Peter intended to teach him? In what ways do we similarly doubt or lack faith, for which Jesus would rebuke us?

The conclusion of this miracle leads to the calming of the sea, followed by the disciples’ worship of Jesus (15:32–33). Is worship the automatic response of your heart when you see the work of God in your life? Why or why not?

In light of the purpose of miracles, what does this miracle teach Christians about the person of Jesus (who he is) or the work of Jesus (what he has done for us)?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

THE COMMANDS OF JESUS. A unique component of this miracle is Peter's participation in it. Amazed at the sight of Jesus on the water, Peter asks Jesus to command him to walk on water (Matt. 14:28). At the command of Jesus, Peter participates in the miracle, even if only for a few moments. While this event is not prescriptive to the life of believers, there are still lessons to learn about discipleship. The commands of the Lord Jesus are the assignments of his disciples. Moreover, just as Jesus' miracles are signs that point people to him, so also are Jesus' disciples commanded to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). At the command of Jesus all God's people respond in obedience.

THE SON OF GOD. The climax of this miracle event is worship. When Peter and Jesus return to the boat and the sea calms, the disciples respond in praise, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33). This is the truth the disciples—and we as readers—are supposed to see and believe. As we are witnesses of this "sign," Jesus' rebuke is directed at us as well: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (14:31). Do not doubt but believe in the Son of God.

Whole-Bible Connections

IT IS I AM. At first appearance the disciples think Jesus might be a ghost approaching the boat. His response in verse 27 is meant to comfort them: "Take heart; it is I." While this statement might not seem too special in English, Jesus chooses these words intentionally. The original construction is identical to the one used in Exodus 3, where God speaks of himself as "I am" (Ex. 3:14). In this miracle Jesus *shows* that he is God (he controls the wind and waves), and he *says* so as well! The words of Jesus are as shocking as the walking on water. The waves of the sea are a stroll in a park for the "I Am."

DO NOT BE AFRAID. The second half of Jesus' comforting statement to the scared disciples is the exhortation not to be afraid. While fear is a common experience of the disciples after Jesus performs a miracle, a common response from Jesus is to comfort them. In fact a theme throughout the Bible is the exhortation to fear not, which appears frequently in the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 31:8; Josh. 1:9) and the New Testament (1 Pet. 3:6; 1 John 4:18). While the believer is

called to fear God as an act of love and worship, this is uniquely different from worldly fears that are often experienced by believers and nonbelievers alike. This distinction is taught by Jesus not only in his care for the disciples in this miracle itself but in his teaching elsewhere, such as, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

Theological Soundings

JESUS PRAYS. The setting of the miracle positions Jesus away from the disciples as he desires time to pray to the Father. This intercession² is a preview of the ministry currently being accomplished by the resurrected and ascended Son of God. As Jesus prayed then, so he prays now for his church. Operating in the office of high priest, Jesus holds this office permanently and thus “is able to save the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Christ’s intercession is a gift to the church and a testimony to the power of prayer in the lives of believers.

ALREADY AND NOT YET. This miracle involves not only Jesus but Peter, who shares in this miraculous act. But, while Peter also walks on the water, he quickly begins to sink until he touches the hand of Jesus. As a miracle of dominion, the walking on water is a sign of the world to come, the glories of the new creation. This is where Peter’s participation in the miracle is so important, for it reflects the inbreaking or beginning of the world to come in the world that is now. Theologians refer to this reality as the “already and not yet.” The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus “already” give the Christian aspects of the new creation (e.g., freedom from sin and death, the gift of the Holy Spirit), but the fullness of the new creation is “not yet” upon us. It is still to come. In this miracle Peter shows us this already-and-not-yet reality. He tastes the water-walking with Jesus for a moment but cannot sustain apart from holding his hand. Even as we live in this tension, we too now “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). But, as the old hymn prays, “And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight.”

Personal Implications

Take some time to reflect on what you have learned from your study of Matthew 14:22–33 and how it might apply to your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Matthew 14:22–33

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Reflect on the challenging moments of your life and how Jesus has met you in them. Respond to this grace by proclaiming in prayer, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Definitions

¹ **Disciple** – Any person who submits to the teachings of another. In the New Testament it refers to those who submitted themselves to the teaching of Jesus, especially those who traveled with him during his earthly ministry.

² **Intercession** – Appealing to one person on behalf of another. Often used with reference to prayer.