Research on: Jesus walking on the water

John 6:16-21

In the verses before, Jesus had just fed almost 10,000 people on the hillsides near Bethsaida and the people wanted to make Jesus a king by force. The disciples probably agreed with this popular enthusiasm, so Jesus “constrained” his disciples to leave him, get into a ship and go to Capernaum, so he could go into the mountains alone and pray. “Constrained” in Greek is *anagkazo* and it means “to compel (almost by force), command” (Thayer 36).

“He dismissed the disciples forcefully to help tame a messianic uproar (John 6:15)” (*EBC 9*.343).

The feeding of the 5000 is the only event or healing that is in all four Gospels. This event of walking on water is in three. The synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, not Luke, and John.

We can compare this story with the other Gospels to see added details:

“*Weather*:

Synoptic (Matthew, Mark, Luke): The wind is against them. Matthew adds that theya re being beaten by the waves; Mark adds that they are distressed in rowing.

John: A strong wind is blowing; the sea is becoming rough.

“*Position*:

Syn.: Mark says that they are out at sea but Jesus can see them from the land. Matthew says that they are many stadia distant from land.

John: They have rowed twenty-five or thirty stadia, but the distance from land is not specified.

*“Jesus comes:*

Syn: He walks on the sea; Mark adds that he intends to pass them by.

John: Not clear whether they see him walking on the sea or on the shore.

“*Reaction*:

Syn: They think it is a ghost and are terrified. Jesus reaasures them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”

John: They are frightened, but Jesus reassures them, “It is is I; do not be afraid.”

“*Ending*:

Matthew alone: The story of Peter’s walking to meet Jesus.

Syn: Jesus gets into the boat and the wind is calmed. Matthew adds that the disciples worship Jesus, hailing him as God’s Son.

John: It is not clear if Jesus gets into the boat; the boat comes to shore suddenly and perhaps miraculously” (Anchor Bible, 253-254).

16 And when even was *now* come, his disciples went down unto the sea,

“Evening” could be any time in the afternoon shortly before sunset. The disciples probably planned to cover the short distance between Bethsaida and Capernaum while daylight lasted. Twilight is brief in the Palestinian springtime, and they would naturally wish to reach home before dark. They actually ‘went down to the lake,’ for the terrain around the lake is hilly. For the feeding of the five thousand, the group had journeyed some distance inland. John states that darkness had already fallen before they actually began to cross the lake. The statement ‘Jesus had not yet joined them’ may imply that they half-expected him to do so and waited until the last minute, hoping that he would come” (EBC.9.73).

17 And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

“The sequence of the action indicates that they are already out at sea. How, then, was Jesus to join them? Perhaps they were sailing close to land expecting to meet Jesus on the shore” (Anchor, 251).

18 And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.

“The Sea of Galilee is six hundred feet below sea level, in a cuplike depression among the hills. When the sun sets, the air cools; and as the cooler air from the west rushes down over the hillside, the resultant wind churns the lake. Since the disciples were rowing toward Capernaum, they were heading into the wind; consequently, they made little progress” (EBC.9.73).

“Mark adds the graphic and touching particular, "He saw them toiling in rowing" (Mr 6:48), putting forth all their strength to buffet the waves and bear on against a head wind, but to little effect. He saw this from His mountain-top, and through the darkness of the night, for His heart was all with them; yet would He not go to their relief till His own time came” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

19 So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

“Three or four miles. Literally ‘25 or 30 stadia’” (Anchor, 252).

The disciples had left ahead of Jesus to sail to Capernaum, to be prepared to meet him there later. They were in the middle of the Sea of Galilee when a great wind arose, perhaps sweeping down the desert from the east or west from the Mediterranean Sea. These winds were known to swirl around the bowl-like hills of the Galilee area and cause large and immediate storms. The disciples could hardly sail their small boat, while it struggled into the head wind. John says that they had gone twenty or thirty furlongs, approximately four miles, which would put them directly in the middle of the lake. The sea was boisterous, the wind against them. So they were probably struggling with the sails all throughout the night.

“they were afraid—"cried out for fear" (Mt 14:26), "supposing it had been a spirit" (Mr 6:49). He would appear to them at first like a dark moving speck upon the waters; then as a human figure, but—in the dark tempestuous sky, and not dreaming that it could be their Lord—they take it for a spirit” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

20 But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.

“Jesus calmed their fears by speaking to them. When they recognized his voice, they were willing to take him into the boat. The miracle was designed to demonstrate that Jesus could be with them under all circumstances. As the multiplication of the loaves and fishes showed his power over matter, so the walking on the water revealed his power over the forces of nature. It was one more step in the education of the disciples’ faith” (EBC.9.73).

21 Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

In the Gospel of *John*, we read that they were immediately at the land whither they went; which means that Jesus was able to transport twelve men along with himself instantly to the other side.**4**

As a result of Jesus’ hours of communion with his heavenly Father on the mountaintop, Jesus teleported himself and his disciples over the Sea of Galilee, overcoming matter, gravity, time and space when he performed this miracle of walking on the water to meet with his disciples.

The disciples could not come to Jesus, so he went to them, -- noblesse oblige. They could not meet him on his own plane of thought, so he met them on theirs. Yet what a trying thing to get into a boat when one has been walking on the water! Probably not one of that little company understood in the least what this must have meant to Jesus. Such rare compassion was beyond their comprehension, and they only wondered that as he entered the ship “the wind ceased.” They however witnessed to the divine power thus manifested, when they said, “Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”