

He Loved Me . . .

He Loves Me Lots

The Gospel of John

Text

John 6:14-21

Topic

The disciples make little progress
as they row against the storm

Title

"Rowing Nowhere Fast"

He called himself The Masked Magician.

He was featured in a series of television specials exposing the secrets behind classic magic tricks.

He walked on water across a swimming pool to reveal how Criss Angel might have done it.

The secret was a series of clear and, therefore, unseen plexiglass steps just below the surface.

There *are* at least two ways a person can walk on water:

1. I'm quoting from a science article. "Some fluids have enough viscosity to be able to support the weight of a human body under the right conditions. Oobleck is a mixture of corn starch in water. Its viscosity

increases if the pressure applied on it increases. The faster we move in this fluid, the harder it is to overcome the friction force. This property of oobleck can easily be exploited if we move over its surface with enough speed. A person walking over it at a brisk pace can easily move through without any fear of sinking, due to the high amount of reaction force from the fluid. However, on the other hand, if a person doesn't move quick enough, *the oobleck will swallow him like quicksand.*"

2. You can stay afloat on water if you move fast enough. You would not be **walking** on water, however, *because you'd be moving at 100ft per second.*

Jesus walked on water.

- It wasn't across a small pool but on a raging sea.
- Plexiglass was not invented until 1933.
- It wasn't dosed with oobleck.
- He wasn't running 100^{ft} per second.

Jesus came to the aid of His disciples, and simultaneously illustrated how they should live: As rowers.

The New Testament uses athletic illustrations to help us understand our relationship with Jesus. The apostle Paul was a big fan of the Olympics, especially running and boxing.

I would submit that rowing be considered another athletic illustration.

It's a good one. I read this on the blog of a Christian who is part of a competitive rowing crew: *"The rower's back is toward where they are heading, their eyes are on the coxswain, their ears are open to his voice, and they trust the hand that's on the rudder. My LORD asks only that I hold firmly but also stroke purposefully my one oar. He's my coxswain - but much more - who sees what's ahead. I find stability and strength by the ability to see in my wake God's past faithfulness to me: His goodness and mercy have followed me."*

To paraphrase Dori, "Just keep rowing, just keep rowing, rowing, rowing." I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Row, Row, Row Without Any Hesitating**, and **#2 Row, Row, Row With All Hastening**.

#1 - Row, Row, Row Without Any Hesitating (v14-17)

It's a standard plot device for two or more characters to recall the same events differently. The song *Summer Nights* in *Grease* is a good example:

*Took her bowling in the Arcade
We went strolling, drank lemonade*

*We made out under the dock
We stayed up 'till ten o'clock*

Matthew, Mark, and John each recount this miracle. They are all different. Not contradictory, but different.

John's account is the briefest. One commentator pointed out,

John doesn't tell us that Jesus sent the multitude away or that He was praying on the mountain. He omits Mark's comment that Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars or that He intended to pass them by when He came to them on the water. He doesn't say that the disciples thought that they were seeing a ghost (although he does say that they were frightened). He doesn't mention Peter's walking on the water.

As readers of God's Word, the challenge is to know the entire event without ignoring each author's unique perspective. These guys were not simply telling a story. There was purpose in the details they included and omitted. God the Holy Spirit inspired John to edit his account and place it exactly where he did in his Gospel.

Joh 6:14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Joh 6:15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

They weren't wrong. Their understanding, however, was incomplete:

- Jesus is *not* a prophet like others in the Bible. We are told in the Revelation, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (19:10). The purpose of prophecy is to testify of Jesus Christ and reveal Him. He is the source and the fulfillment of prophecy.
- Jesus is *not* a king like David or the other men who sat on David's throne. He is *the* King, of whom we read in the Revelation, "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (11:15).

The crowds did not factor the Cross upon which Jesus must die to deliver them spiritually from Satan. In addition to Prophet and King, the Messiah would be a Priest who offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world so that men would not perish but have everlasting life.

You don't make Jesus King; He is King.

When Joshua was contemplating the Battle of Jericho, "he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "*Are* You for us or for our adversaries?" So He said, "No, but *as* Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" (5:13-14).

The United States of America; "land that I love." Is Jesus *for us* or *against us*? His answer is, "No," and we respond by worshipping Him as His servants.

It is wonderfully true that "If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?" (Romans 8:31). Dialog from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* might help us get a handle on this:

"Is Aslan quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion," said Susan.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

Jesus is "for us," but in ways that we cannot fully fathom. Whether it is smooth or storm, we worship Him.

Joh 6:16 Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea,
Joh 6:17 got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them.

The other accounts say that Jesus "compelled them." It doesn't mean they argued with Him.

John told this story emphasizing that the disciples did not hesitate but obeyed the Lord, Who "sent them ahead" without Him.

Hesitation can be deadly. Law Enforcement knows that. You can find example after example of an officer or a deputy reluctant to use force when force is necessary for their safety. Fear of an out-of-context iPhone video going viral is costing blue lives.

Adam and Eve were the first to hesitate. "When the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate" (Genesis 3:6). She hesitated, and in her hesitation, humanity was lost.

Don't hesitate when sin is involved.

The apostle Paul refused to hesitate. God had to slam doors of ministry in his face to keep Paul from constantly going forward. He permitted Paul to be arrested and imprisoned to stop him long enough to write a good portion of the New Testament. Paul knew that if he hesitated, *people would remain lost*.

#2 - Row, Row, Row Your Boat With All Hastening (v18-21)

Their boat could not get over the wave.

I'm talking about the *Andrea Gail* in the movie, *The Perfect Storm*. The combined star power of George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg, and John C. Reilly was not enough to propel the boat. The sea took them.

Joh 6:18 Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing.

Do you ever get overwhelmed in your reading by the mastery of a single sentence or phrase? "The sea arose." That's stunning.

- Matthew says, "they were tossed by the waves" (14:24). Not bad, but familiar.
- Mark says, "the wind was against them" (6:48). A little more descriptive.

John **personifies** the Sea of Galilee. Like a fell foe, the water rose as if it was conscious of them.

A fishing boat from the 1st century AD was discovered in 1986 on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel.

They called it, *The Jesus Boat*, although the *only* connection between it and the Lord is its first-century date.

It does give us a look at the style of the boat the boys were desperately rowing:

It is 27 feet long, 7½ feet wide, with a maximum height of just over 4 feet. Constructed primarily of cedar planks joined together by pegged mortise and tenon joints and nails, the boat is shallow drafted with a flat bottom, allowing it to get very close to the shore while fishing. However, the boat is composed of ten different wood types, suggesting either a wood shortage or that the boat was made of scrap wood and had undergone extensive and repeated fixes. The boat was row-able, with four staggered rowers, and also had a mast allowing the fishermen to sail the boat.

The boat in our story may have been similarly patched together, barely seaworthy. Think *Orca*, Quint's boat in *Jaws*.

Four men at a time could row. It just happens that there were four fishermen in the crew - Andrew, Peter, James, and John. You've got to think they did all the rowing. Would you want Matthew, the tax collector, on an oar in a life-threatening situation?

Joh 6:19 So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid.

Your Bible may use the word "heights" in place of "sea." One commentator said,

So it is in the Hebrew. It means the "high waves;" that is, He walks upon the waves of the ocean when lifted up by a storm. This is spoken of here as a proof of the greatness of God; and the meaning of all is, that He is seen in the storm, in the heaving ocean, when the heavens are black with tempest, and when the Earth is convulsed. It may be added here, that the Lord Jesus walked amidst the howling winds on the lake, and thus gave evidence that He was God.

Another commentator said, *"This is a very impressive image. God not only walks upon the waters, but when the sea runs mountains high, He steps from billow to billow in His almighty and essential majesty."*

We can only wonder if one of the disciples was reminded of these words of Job: "[God]... treads on the waves of the sea" (9:8). It would have been a great comfort, don't you think?

Believers in Jesus Christ can be comforted by Him through His written Word, the Bible. When believers in the newly formed church in the city of Thessalonica were dying, the apostle Paul didn't want them to "sorrow as others who have no hope" (First Thessalonians 4:13).

He described the resurrection and rapture of the church to them and said, "Therefore comfort one another with these words" (v18).

If you are in a storm, likely God has already spoken to you through His Word. If not, ask Him to do so, and His living Word will comfort you.

Warren Wiersbe writes, "*Hope is not a sedative; it is a shot of adrenaline, a blood transfusion. Like an anchor, our hope in Christ stabilizes us in the storms of life, but unlike an anchor, our hope moves us forward, it does not hold us back.*"

God's Word is alive, it is powerful, and it is altogether true. It has been validated by the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He is God, God in human flesh, the God-Man, Who saves all who believe in Him.

There is no other source of spiritual hope.

Nonbelievers *cannot* have hope in this life or the next. If they have what they call hope, it is a false hope based on false promises from their false religion or philosophy.

Eulogies for nonbelievers are the epitome of false hope. "He's in a better place," or, "Heaven needed her," or, "One more angel is in Heaven," or any such declarations are lies, the language of false hope.

Buddhists and most Hindus believe in reincarnation. The physical body dies, but the soul comes back in another body. Who wants to come back?

You may be reincarnated as something other than a person. You might remember the short-lived 1960s television show, *My Mother the Car*. A man whose deceased mother is reincarnated as an antique car communicates with him through the car radio. Do you find hope in that?

Let's get back to Jesus' wave-walking. Think of how waves toss crab boats in *The Deadliest Catch*. Jesus was in His human body - a body just like yours and mine. The Jesus Boat was three or four miles from shore. The average person

takes one hour to walk that distance on flat land. Jesus walked it against the storm. He wasn't going 100ft per second. It took Him quite a while to get to them. He didn't hover over the sea. I'm guessing He was wet.

Remember, too, that in the verses which precede, Jesus had gone up into a mountain. He had first to descend. It was night; He'd had a long day of ministry and no sleep.

I'm going to say something that may not be obvious. The way Jesus came to them was romantic.

You probably never heard of the group, *The Grass Roots*. Their 1969 hit record, *I'd Wait a Million Years*, goes like this:

*I'd wait a million years
Walk a million miles
Cry a million tears
I'd swim the deepest sea
Climb the highest hill
Just to have you near me*

How about the iconic *The Princess Bride*? Westley must rescue his true love Princess Buttercup from the odious Prince Humperdinck. Westley overcomes obstacles such as the flame burst, the snow sand, and the ROUSes (rodents of unusual size).

There were other ways Jesus could have helped:

- He could have spoken, and the sea would have become instantly calm.
- He could have miraculously transported from the mountain to the boat.

He came to them in the way we would recognize as love conquering any obstacles.

Joh 6:20 But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."

John left out them thinking they saw a ghost. He wants us to understand that all of our fears are overcome when we hear Jesus say to us in our storm, "It is I."

"It is I" could be translated as "I AM" and be a claim of deity and equality with God the Father.

"It is I, I AM." How's that for conquering your fears in the storm? You know Jesus, the God-man, Creator of all things.

Joh 6:21 Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.

God the Father permitted the storm to reveal things about His Son, our Savior, that could not have otherwise been known. The storm would change the disciples.

Every storm can be a perfecting storm.

F.B. Meyer wrote, "Ah, afflicted one, your disabilities were meant to unite with God's enablings, your weakness to mate His power. God's grace is at hand - sufficient - and at its best when human weakness is most profound.

Appropriate it and learn that those who wait on God are stronger in their weakness than the sons of men in their stoutest health and vigor."

Jesus didn't get in the boat until they "received" Him. One reason that we struggle in storms is that we don't "receive" the truth that in our weakness we are strong. We despise weakness.

"Immediately the boat was at the land where they were going." It was a miracle during a miracle.

You gain insight by reducing what you've read to its minimum. The disciples kept rowing in the storm until Jesus came to them and they supernaturally arrived at their destination.

- We are disciples.

- We encounter storms in our lives.
- We are told in many places to persevere, to endure, to “keep on rowing.”
- Jesus comes for us in the resurrection and rapture of the church, at which time we will be immediately safe at our destination - Heaven.

Think of it. One day you will be rowing in the storm when suddenly the Lord takes you home.

The apostle Peter was rowing The Jesus Boat. He says we can “hasten,” accelerate, the Lord’s return in his second letter as we live lives of endurance serving Him. It’s the greatest row on Earth.

The disciples were never alone in the storm. Whether Jesus was on the mountain or the waves, He was with them.

You cannot ever be alone, certainly not in a storm. Quit waiting for Jesus to show up.

A. W. Tozer wrote, “The knowledge that we are never alone calms the troubled sea of our lives and speaks peace to our souls.”

Keep rowing and you’ll see God’s mercy and lovingkindness in your wake.