

## **He Rules the World (John 6:1-21)**

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"The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the LORD on high is mighty!" (Ps 93:3-4) The truth about God doesn't just exist. It reorients. It takes our hearts and minds that are prone to see the world one way and causes us to perceive it in a completely different light. Ps 93 is a good example.

What does the psalmist see first? He perceives chaos because he hears chaos, represented by the sound of a roaring, thundering flood. It's loud. It's consuming. It's powerful. Floods go where they want and do what they want. They're no respecter of persons. The circumstances of our life feel like that sometimes.

But what does the psalmist see next? He perceives that the power of "many waters," the might of "the waves of the sea," is a foil, a point of contrast, for the infinitely greater power and might of God, the covenant-making, covenant keeping Lord who sits enthroned above the circle of the earth. He goes from seeing the flood to seeing the flood in relationship to the Lord of the Universe and the Lord of the Universe in relationship to the flood. When that happens, his perspective is reoriented.

Christians sometimes speak of trusting God as if it's some sort of violent mind game. "If I could just rip my attention away from my circumstances and keep all my attention focused on Jesus, then I know I would be at peace." That's not at all what the Bible means when it speaks of trusting God, friends. Scripture is far more careful and helpful. We don't trust God despite our circumstances as if gnostic transcendence of the physicality of our fallen world were the key to happiness. We trust God because of who he is in relationship to our circumstances.

The truth about God doesn't replace the psalmist's awareness of the flood or dull the thunder of the waves in his ears. Rather, it causes him to see the flood and to hear the waves for what they actually are – another part of the universe that is completely subject to the supreme power of King Jesus.

Whether you are exploring the Christian faith, new to the faith, or have been following Jesus for a long time, we never outgrow our need to be reoriented by the truth about God. The passage before us in Jn 6 is designed to have the same sort of spiritual effect. It's written to help us see who Jesus is in relationship to the circumstantial forces in our

life. Regardless of what you're going through right now or will soon experience in 2021, there are several things you need to know and remember about Jesus.

### **1) HIS POWER IS ABSOLUTE (vv. 16-19)**

For a historical account designed to help us see who Jesus is in relationship to the circumstantial forces in our life, you may find it strange that John doesn't begin with Jesus doing or saying anything. In fact, when the story opens, Jesus is strikingly absent.

He's just finished feeding upwards of 15,000 people on the hill country near the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Instead of humbly trusting and obeying him, the crowd wants to subvert Roman rule by making Jesus an earthly king. Jesus came to deal with a far greater enemy than Caesar, so he (v. 15) "withdrew again to the mountain by himself" leaving his disciples with the crowd.

Soon evening arrives and the sun begins to set. The disciples get into a small boat on the shore and head across the Sea of Galilee for Capernaum, presumably to find lodging for the night. By now it's completely dark and there's still no sign of Jesus. What could have been a peaceful journey of at most a few hours, however, quickly becomes exceedingly difficult. A strong wind begins to blow, stirring up the sea until it "became rough."

Have you ever been in a little boat in a large body of water when a storm comes through? It's not a laughing matter. But these are experienced fishermen, at least some of them, so they keep rowing for Capernaum until they've covered 3-4 miles of what was probably a 5 or 6-mile trip. John doesn't tell us exactly what they're thinking at this point, but it's not hard to imagine. The last few hours have been physically exhausting, mentally stressful, and painfully slow, on top of what had undoubtedly been an incredibly long day.

Have you ever found yourself in a similar sort of situation? "Jesus, I feel like I'm coming off one of the greatest spiritual moments in my life. I've seen your power. I've seen your glory. My trust in you was growing. I mean, I just watched you feed some 15,000 people with 5 loaves and two fish. Talk about a miracle! You did the work. We picked up the leftovers. This whole "following you" thing was shaping up to be pretty amazing."

"But now I don't know where you are, what you're doing, or why you're taking so long! The forces of nature you readily overcame a few hours ago are literally smacking us in



the face and calling the shots the way they always did before you arrived. I guess that was just one of those mountain-top experiences. Now it's back to the real world."

Whether his disciples were frightened by the storm John doesn't say. But they soon saw something or rather someone that shook them to the core. V. 19, "they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat..." There was a certain tameness, a delightful comfort, to watching Jesus fill the hungry stomachs of 15,000 people. But there was nothing tame or remotely normal about seeing someone walking on water.

Imagine peering through the howling wind and waves in the middle of the night and seeing what looks like the form of a person appear and disappear, appear and disappear, drawing closer and closer to your boat. Moses parted the Red Sea and Israel walked through the water. Elijah parted the Jordan and Elisha walked through the water. But walking on the water? It had never happened before. No wonder they were terrified. We know from Mark's gospel they thought it was a ghost.

What were they actually seeing? It was Jesus, defying the laws of nature in a stunning display of the absolute power of God. The sea is battering the disciples for all they're worth and Jesus is walking on it like you would walk across your front lawn. Why did he do it? Because the One who created all things and sustains all things wanted to show his disciples just how much ever force in the natural world was completely subject to his sovereign power, raging seas included.

Even before they realized it was Jesus, their instinctive fear indicates they got one thing right. The figure drawing closer to their boat was entirely other. There was nothing "ordinary" about him. It was a glimpse of the transcendent majesty of God. Their response wasn't unusual. When the saints of old like Isaiah or Daniel saw the glory of God, they didn't inch a little closer or strike up a casual conversation. They crumpled to the ground under the weight of divine splendor, quaking in fear.

When was the last time you stood in awe of Jesus, friend? Or have you gazed so long at the gods of this world that you've lost any sort of feeling sense of how great he really is? What you think, feel, or believe about Jesus does not change the fact that he is absolutely sovereign over every power in the universe.

Job 38:8–11, "Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?'" Jesus did, friend. From the waters of a flood to the

mutation of a virus, you will never encounter a person or a situation than will delay Jesus, stop Jesus, or force him to go with plan B. Jesus doesn't do plan B. Why not? Because he is God.

Stop looking at the situations in your life and saying, "Well, I guess that's just the way it's going to be. I'll never change. That relationship will never improve. That provision will never come. It's too late. Even if he wanted to intervene, what could God do at this point in the game?" Do you think the disciples ever thought Jesus would come walking to them over the water? Of course not! Isa 55:9, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

We serve a God who delights to shatter our small thoughts, small prayers, and faithless conclusions with displays of divine power we never dreamed possible, who says to the voice of doubt, "I am the God who plants my footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. Is anything too hard for me?" That's the first thing we must know and remember about who Jesus is in relationship to the circumstantial forces in our life. His power is absolute.

## **2) HIS WORD IS OUR COMFORT (v. 20)**

How did Jesus respond to his disciples' fear? He identified himself, shouting over the raging sea, "ἐγώ εἰμι, μὴ φοβεῖσθε." It is I; do not be afraid. As a parent comforts a child whose just had a nightmare by saying, "Son, it's me, dad," so too Jesus comforted his disciples. On one level, it was a simple statement, a common way of saying, "It's me." But there's also a deeper level of meaning here that emerges in the larger context of John's gospel where ἐγώ εἰμι is also translated as "I am."

It's what the Lord said to Moses in Ex 3:14 when Moses asked, "What is your name?" "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" Who is Yahweh? He is the great I AM, the self-existent one, the uncreated one. You have a beginning. God does not. You have needs. God does not. You are dependent on all sorts of other things to sustain your life. God is not. The aseity of God is the essential distinction between who we are as creatures and who God is as our Creator.

By crying out, "ἐγώ εἰμι," Jesus calmed his disciple's fears. But he also called them and us to a different sort of fear, a holy reverence, a righteous awe, the kind of fear Prov 1:7 says is the "beginning of wisdom." It's "the fear of the Lord" that trembles before the majesty of God. That's a good fear, an altogether necessary fear that recognizes the supreme worth of God and honors him accordingly.

By itself, "ἐγώ εἰμι," is not good news, friend. Why not? Because it reminds us by way of contrast that we are creatures accountable to our creator for every thought and word and deed. ἐγώ εἰμι tells us we are not captain of our fate, master of our souls. ἐγώ εἰμι tells us we are not alone in this world. ἐγώ εἰμι says there is a Righteous Judge in heaven in whose sight every one of us is found wanting on account of our collective disobedience.

As Edward Klink observes, "Standing where only God can stand, Jesus declares what only he can claim: I AM." That is where we too must begin with Jesus if we are to grasp the reality of our need for deliverance from sin and death.

But Jesus did not stop with ἐγώ εἰμι. What did he immediately add? "Do not be afraid." What's that, friends? Here too, the fuller context of Scripture helps us. It's the hope of the gospel! What did the angel say to the shepherds in Lk 2:10 the night Jesus was born? "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

In light of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man there are two statements that do not go together: "It is I" and "Do not be afraid." And yet that is precisely what Jesus came to accomplish. His words had an immediate and decisive impact on the trembling hearts of his disciples. Little did they know they would lead him all the way to the cross, for it is through Jesus' sinless life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection that ἐγώ εἰμι and "Do not be afraid" are ultimately joined hand in hand.

Jesus holds out the same words of comfort to you today, friend, if you are willing to bow your knee to him. Through the words of Scripture he confronts our fearful, trembling hearts with the same good news. Who is God in relationship to your situation? He is the great I AM. Transcendent, real, and reigning, now and forevermore. And who else is God in relationship to your situation? He is the Lord who says to you, "Do not be afraid." I lived for you. I died for you. I rose from the grave for you so that you could run to me for salvation instead of away from me in fear, so that nothing in all creation would ever separate you from my love.

The person and work of Jesus is what enables us to say with the psalmist, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling...the Lord of

Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (Ps 46:1-3, 7). What must we know and remember about Jesus in order to be spiritually oriented next year? First, his power is absolute. Second, his word is our comfort.

### **3) HIS PRESENCE IS OUR GOOD (v. 21)**

After the word of the Lord calmed their fears, what happened? V. 21, "Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going." Jesus walking on the water was miracle number 1. Miracle number 2 was the boat immediately arriving at their desired destination as soon as Jesus came aboard.

Now we have to be careful here, friends. The lesson here is not, "Invite Jesus into your boat and all will be well." Jn 6:21 isn't a spiritual promise of smooth sailing at some point in the journey of your life. No. It's a promise of something far better because it holds true even when the wind is still blowing and the waves are still crashing, even when you don't sense the Lord's nearness, Christian, and struggle to believe he's actually in the boat with you through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Here's the principle and it is exceedingly good news. The supernatural power of God is not restricted to his own experience. He delights to exercise his power on behalf of his people, especially when we are struggling and tired and exhausted. John couldn't be clearer. It was not the hard work of the disciples that ultimately got them to Capernaum. It was the power of God. Did they work hard along the way? Absolutely. But their labor was not decisive. The presence of God with them in the boat was.

I don't know all you're expecting as you anticipate 2020, Christian. But I'll tell you something you can happily expect. You can expect to experience the supernatural power of God at work in your life accomplishing for you and in you what would otherwise seem impossible. Phil 2:13, "...For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Don't become a functional atheist and write the supernatural out of your future. We do not control the nature or timing of God's manifestly supernatural activity, but we can confidently anticipate experiencing as much because Jesus is just as present with us through the Holy Spirit as he was with his disciples in that little boat. It's how the Lord has always cared for his chosen people.



Ps 107:23–30, "Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters...They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven."

His presence is our good, brothers and sisters. Let us enter 2021 with great expectations of a great God. He will see to it that you fulfill his purpose for your life. He knows exactly where you need to go, and he will get you there by his power. Wind and waves don't hold a candle to the presence of Almighty God.

## **CONCLUSION**

No matter what comes our way, here's what we need to know and remember about Jesus in relationship to the circumstances in our life. His power is absolute. His Word of our comfort. And his presence is our good. What does all of that mean? It means getting spiritually oriented in any situation, Christian, begins with knowing the Lord of the Universe is with us. So I exhort you in the words of my favorite bishop, J.C. Ryle.

"Let all true Christians take comfort in the thought that their Savior is Lord of waves and winds, or storms and tempests, and can come to them in the darkest hour, 'walking upon the sea.' There are waves of trouble far heavier than any on the Lake of Galilee. There are days of darkness which test the faith of the holiest Christian. But let us never despair if Christ is our Friend. He can come to our aid in an hour when we do not think, and in ways that we did not expect. And when He comes, all will be calm."