

Pentecost XII: Matthew 14:22-33: Jesus Shows His Power Over the Forces of Nature

1. The parallels to this account are found at Mk. 6:45-52 and Jn. 6:16-21. The account is not found in Luke. In fact, the intervening events recounted in Mk. 6:45 to 8:27 are not found in Luke. Fahling remarks: "The fact that Luke does not relate intervening events certainly proves a great stumbling-block to the theory of his dependence on Mark. The proponents of the dependence theory are usually quite silent at this point." True. Their theories won't stand up.
2. From Jn. 6:14.15 we learn that the 5,000 who were fed wanted to use force to make Jesus their king. Fahling says: "The effect of this miracle upon the minds of those present was overwhelming. Surely here was a Messiah after their own heart! They began to whisper to one another that this must undoubtedly be 'that Prophet that should come into the world' and 'the beginning of that reign of earthly abundance which in their carnal desires and in a false interpretation of Messianic promises they thought the prophets had foretold' (Dods). So great was their enthusiasm that they proposed among themselves to take Him by force, if necessary, and make Him a king. What a king who could effect cures, supply food, and provide prosperity for all! Thus the effect of the miracle just performed was to confirm them in their false Messianic hopes. Here was the time for instant action. Jesus Himself was not deceived by the brief blaze of a falsely founded popularity. He was aware of the danger of mob passion and instantly made His decision. First of all, and for their own good, the disciples, who were only too prone to share the popular conception, had to be removed. He ordered them, well-nigh compelled them, to go down to the beach and sail in the direction of Capernaum (Jn.) or the western Bethsaida (Mk.)" By the way, from Mk. 6:52 we learn that the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 had little or no effect on the disciples. And just one more thing. At Mt. 8:23-27 we read of Jesus' stilling the storm. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are unanimous in reporting that this miracle merely filled them with wonder. All of this will become important at the end of this pericope.
3. Vs. 22: εὐθέως "quickly" or "immediately". ἠνάγκασεν clearly indicates that Jesus gave the disciples no choice. They were in danger both because of the mob (Jn. 6:14.15) and from their own lack of faith (Mk. 6:52). προάγειν αὐτόν "to precede Him" which implies that He promised to join them later. εἰς τὸ πέραν, at the moment they were at the southwestern shore of the sea of Galilee. John tells us that they were headed to Capernaum. Mark says that they were headed to Bethsaida, a suburb of Capernaum. From John we know that Jesus addressed at least a remnant of the 5,000 the next day at a synagogue in Capernaum. That will become important later. ἕως οὗ, translated "while" unanimously by our translations. ἀπολύσῃ, Jesus dispersed the 5,000. From Jn. 6:22 we learn that not all left. Some stayed and followed Jesus to Capernaum the next day. Lenski remarks: "That multitude wanting to make him king was one of Satan's temptations to Jesus, and the sending these crowds away shows the temptation overcome."
4. Vs. 23: The first four words in Greek, a repetition from the previous vs., shows how important this dispersion was for Jesus. He had to overcome the temptation which they presented. From Jn. 6:3 we know that Jesus had been on the ὄρος with His disciples in the morning. He returns there alone (κατ' ἴδιον) to pray. ὀψίας γενομένης. In vs. 15 this denotes early evening, perhaps about 5 p.m. Here it denotes late evening, perhaps about 7p.m. Note μόνος, a repetition of the idea in κατ' ἴδιον from the previous sentence. All alone with His Father. Jesus must have spent at least eight hours in prayer. What did He pray about? Suggestions: a) The news of the Baptist's death (vs. 12) must have filled Him with foreboding of His own death, a year hence (Jn. 6:4); b) As pointed out above He had just overcome the temptation to be proclaimed an earthly king; c) Likely He foresaw that the remnants of the 5,000 would totally reject Him, the Living Bread from Heaven, the next day (Jn. 6:60-66); d) As pointed out above the Twelve were in danger for a number of reasons and needed to pass a severe

test the next day (Jn. 6:67-69). By God's grace, they did pass; e) Last, but not least, the betrayal of Judas was on His mind (Jn. 6:70-71). He was alone, humanly speaking, midst so much rejection, misrepresentation and unbelief. He must have prayed for the multitude, the disciples and for Himself. The God-man, Who had multiplied loaves and fishes, prays! Who can comprehend the mysteries of the incarnate Christ?

5. Vs. 24: Because of a variant reading and the translation of words we list three versions:
 NKJV: But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. (variant underlined)
 NASB: But the boat was already many stadia away from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.
 AAT: The boat, now many hundred yards from the shore, was troubled by the waves because the wind was against them.
- We make several observations concerning this verse:
- a) From Jn. 6:19 we know that the disciples had come only 3-4 miles in no less than eight hours. A small boat, under ordinary circumstances, moves at no less than three miles per hour. The point from which they started to Bethsaida (Capernaum) is 6-7 miles. They should have reached Capernaum by about 9 p.m.
 - b) Why didn't the disciples head for land in this sudden storm? Evidently because the shoreline was rocky. Therefore, to land in a storm might have been disastrous.
 - c) βασσαυζόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν κυμάτων is a personification because ὑπὸ with the genitive denotes personal agent. Furthermore, βασσαυζω and its cognates is often used in NT to denote the work of Satan. In the providence of God this great difficulty, at the hand of Satan, was permitted somewhat like Satan's work in the life of Job.
 - d) From Mk. 6:48 we know that the disciples were having great difficulty rowing. Obviously they were not using sails in a headwind. The strong headwind and waves made it very difficult even to row.
6. Vs. 25: Though they were far from shore, Mk. 6:48 clearly indicates that Jesus, in His omniscience, knew their plight. The fourth watch of the night denotes the time 3-6 a.m. LB reads "about four o'clock", AAT "toward morning", TEV and NEB "between three and six o'clock". By the way, imagine how weary the disciples must have been the next day when Jesus preached the sermon found in Jn. 6! On ἤλθεν (He departed) Bengel remarks: "He departed to help His disciples, walking though the wind blew strong." Fahling says: "Jesus was neither ignorant of, nor indifferent to, the plight of His disciples. It was He who had directed them into the boat. From the mountain He had perceived their distress. Even now He was probably on the road running along the shore. But leaving the road, He turned down to the surf, walked out on the sea, and contrary to the laws of nature, was walking on the sea." But Lenski counters: "One might inquire whether he had walked all the way out from the shore through the storm in the dark, or had suddenly transported himself to the spot where the disciples saw him. Curious questions deserve no answer, and in Holy Writ receive none." What Fahling and Lenski are wrestling with is the question: "At which point did the human nature begin to use (though He always had) the divine ability to act contrary to the laws of nature?" We simply don't know. But, from Jn. 6:19, we definitely know that ἐπὶ at Mt. 14:25 must mean "on the sea" not "toward the sea". By the way, πρὸς in this verse means "toward". From Mk. 6:48 we know that Jesus "was wishing to pass them by". Surely not because He did not care, but, similar to Lk. 24:28, He did not force His help on them. Though they were in deep trouble, He did not foist Himself onto them.
7. Vs. 26: Mk. 6:50 adds the word πάντες "all" which is important. All witnessed this miracle. From

this vs. it is clear that ἐπι means that Jesus was walking "on the sea". The versions variously translate ἐταράχθησαν "troubled", "terrified", "frightened". λέγοντες likely denotes attendant circumstance. Their inner terror evidenced itself in words. ὅτι is recitative, like our quotation marks. They said: "It's a ghost!" This is plainly a superstitious remark. Obviously they don't mean "a ghost of Jesus" because He identifies Himself in the next verse. The superstitious thought of a disembodied spirit is frightening to mankind. καὶ is likely resultative. ὅπδ is causal: "and, as a result, because of their fear they shrieked."

8. Vs. 27: εὐθὺς "immediately". Jesus never permits the frightened, penitent sinner to flounder. "Jesus spoke to them by saying". ἐλόλησεν here likely denotes Jesus' own characteristic, recognizable way of speaking. Cf. λαλῶ at Jn. 8:43 where it denotes Jesus' characteristic way as opposed to His λόγον. In other words, He spoke in His usual, comforting way. It's like a frightened child who hears the voice of mother or father with the result that fears dissolve. Forms of θαρσέω are found seven times in NT. Except for Mk. 10:49 this verb always denotes the comforting words of the Lord. With ἐγὼ εἶμι He identifies Himself. μὴ φοβείσθε as usual, means "cease being afraid". In the Scriptures, whenever the Lord says: "Fear not" He also gives the reason for not fearing.
9. Vs. 28: ἀποκριθεὶς means "in response". That Peter recognized Him is clear from the word κύριε. Now we have a fact (first class) condition. Does the protasis mean: "If it is really you" implying that Peter is not sure, or does it mean: "If, as I know, it is you"? Furthermore, was Peter's request foolhardy and presumptuous (Fahling) or was it true boldness of faith on Peter's part (Lenski)? In any case we shall have to agree with Bengel who says that κέλευσόν με ἐλθεῖν denotes a remarkable exercise of faith. πρὸς ἄγαν (see vs. 25) means "toward".
10. Vs. 29: Only Matthew records the episode of Peter's request, Jesus' command and Peter's action. The single word Ἐλθέ is the almighty Word of God. It enabled Peter to walk on the water.
11. Vs. 30: βλέπων is more than "seeing". Bengel remarks: "Peter both FELT the wind, and SAW it on the waves. The wind had been strong before that, but had not been so much observed by Peter." AV and NKJV translate the questioned word ἰσχυρὸν with the word "boisterous". JB renders: "As soon as he felt the force of the wind." NEB has: "When he saw the strength of the gale". ἐφοβήθη is ingressive "he became afraid". He is doing the very thing Jesus told them not to do. That Jesus approved of Peter's walking on the water is surely indicated by His command. Read Hebr. 12:1-3 at this point, especially vs. 2: "Looking only to Jesus, the author and completer of our faith." If and when a believer, in his difficulties, looks away from Jesus only at his difficulties he begins to falter and sink. Read James 1:5-8 at this point. Faith dare not be unsteady like a falling and rising wave but steady as calm water. Doubt is the beginning of unbelief. The doubter begins to sink, here literally, otherwise metaphorically. Note the repetition of ἐκράξεν (vs. 26). Peter shrieked as the disciples had before. Again he says κύριε, but this time he does not add: "If it is you." He knows it is Jesus. And as he commanded in vs. 28, so he here commands: "Save me!" From Jn. 21:7 we know that Peter was a good swimmer. But when faith wanes, even that which the believer can do well, under ordinary circumstances, fails. Commentaries sometimes criticize Peter for impetuosity but he at least must be commended for crying "Save me!" We all are very like Peter.
12. Vs. 31: In all three instances (vss. 22, 27, 31) the adverb εὐθὺς or εὐθέως denotes the Lord's immediate concern or help. αὐτοῦ is the partitive genitive used with this verb. The Lord always uses forms of ἀλιγόπιστος, not to put the disciples down, but rather to make them realize their own true condition. It is always addressed to believers. And, doesn't that include all of us? εἰς τί means "to what purpose?" Doubt is always in vain, dangerous and to no purpose in the life of a believer. It is

even unreasonable in view of the many promises of God.

13. Vs. 32: The genitive absolute is clearly temporal: "While they were getting into the boat." That the wind suddenly ceased at this point is another miracle.
14. Vs. 33: "Those in the boat" surely includes Peter. The following words can mean: "They worshipped Him by saying" or "They prostrated themselves before Him, saying". It makes little difference. The sensus literalis is crystal clear from what they said: "Truly you are God's Son" which reminds us of Nathanael's confession (Jn. 1:48) or that of the centurion (Mt. 27:54) and that of Peter the next day (Jn. 6:69). In fact, we think that the Lord permitted all of this to happen to strengthen the disciples in view of their insensitivity to the miracle of the loaves and fishes (Mk. 6:52) and also in view of the ordeal in Capernaum the next day (Jn. 6) when, after all the others left Jesus, Peter, in the name of the disciples made such a wonderful confession.
15. Jn. 6:21 adds another miracle: "And immediately the boat came to the land to which they going." It's about six miles from where they started to where they were going. At this point they were a little over three miles from the starting point. The boat covered the remaining three miles "immediately" or "quickly". This is a total of four miracles: Jesus' walking on the water; Peter's walking on the water; the quieting of the wind; the rapid transportation of the boat to the land. What a remarkable account!