

John 6 – Walking on Water

The Apostle Paul likens the life of the believers to be a journey – a voyage, in fact. And those who have gone astray “concerning faith have made shipwreck” (1 Tim. 1:19). These are those who began a journey to the coming Kingdom, yet who were not able to contend with the rigours of stormy waves. They become shipwrecked concerning faith.

In our New Testament reading of John chapter 6, we read of the disciples likewise embarking on a journey – and they were not shipwrecked: for our exhortation today we shall consider certain particulars regarding that journey, and the faith needed to reach the desired destination.

The first detail we are given is that: “it was now dark, and Jesus was not come unto them” (Jno. 6:17). Although this is a literal description, in the symbology being acted out in this event, it was dark because the light of the world had not yet come. As Jesus proclaimed later: “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (Jno. 12:46). Judas, however proved himself not to be a child of light – he made shipwreck concerning his faith. The description of John is that: “he then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night” (Jno. 13:30). It was night! Judas was in darkness, having forsaken the light of the world: he was lost, being “the son of perdition” (Jno. 17:12), and his ultimate end will be that it would be better for him to never have been born (Mrk. 14:21).

The next aspect John brings our attention to, is that the sea became stormy: “the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew: (Jno. 6:18). Again, whilst this is a literal event being narrated, the record frames the circumstances in such a way as to reveal spiritual principles. In the darkness of night, in the absence of Messiah, the sea became stormy and windy.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the turmoil of nations in similar terms: “the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa. 57:20). How much is this like the world in which we live! Turmoil on every side, with the uncleanness of sin being cast up with the raging waves. The sea of nations is stormy, and difficult to navigate for those who don’t become shipwrecked.

The stormy sea was made such by “a great wind”. Even so it is that in the journey of life, the believer must learn to withstand the stormy winds: “... that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). Notice that the winds here are doctrines, which buffet and try the faith of the saints. We must endeavour to remain steadfast, and not to be blown off course by the forces of specious reasonings.

The next event, is that in their distress, the disciples saw the Lord having dominion over the stormy waves, and walking to them on the water in complete control: “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” (Jno. 6:19).

The record brings our minds back to Psalm 93:

“ ... The floods have lifted up, O Yahweh, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. Yahweh on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea” (Psa. 93:3-4).

So it was that Messiah demonstrated the power vested in him, to also be “mightier” than the noisy waters, and turbulent waves of the sea.

Another record of the Lord walking upon the water is in Matthew chapter 14, where we read of Peter’s faith to do likewise:

“... Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Mat. 14:28-31).

How great faith Peter began with, to step out of the boat onto the stormy waves! But it was when his line of vision became broken by the storm, that he began to sink. The situation is comparable of that in Psalm 107:

“... he commandeth, and raiseth up the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble ... then they cry unto Yahweh in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still” (Psa. 107:25-29).

The Almighty himself was the cause of stormy winds and waves, and when the believers cried out to Yahweh in their trouble, the storm was calmed, and the waves stilled. Even so, Peter cried out for his Saviour to stop him sinking into the water – and the Lord saved him.

Notice that salvation came to Peter through Messiah’s stretched out hand: “immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand”. We think, perhaps of the Angelic ministers who led Lot and his family away from the destruction of Sodom and her associated cities. They took them by the hand, and led them to safety.

Peter began by implicitly trusting in his Lord. Paul also recognised the Lord working in his circumstance: “I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me” (Phil. 4:13). This was the spirit of Peter – even when he had begun to sink, he trusted in his Lord to save him.

The Lord reproved Peter: “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Mat. 14:31). The language here reminds us of the Proverb which forms part of our Old Testament reading for today: “if thou faint in the day of adversity, **thy strength is small**” (Prov. 24:10). Here, like as Peter had only a little faith, so those who fail in adversity also only have a little strength. Indeed, this principle is seen in Messiah’s letter to Philadelphia: “... for thou hast a **little strength**, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Rev. 3:8). Although their strength was small, nevertheless they continued to keep the commandments of Christ, and did not deny his Name.

Revelation chapter 17 describes a harlot woman sitting upon the waters, controlling the sea of nations: “And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are people, and multitudes, and nations and tongues” (Rev. 17:15, see also vs 1). But this position contrast greatly with the situation with our God: “Yahweh sitteth upon the flood; yea, Yahweh sitteth King for ever” (Psa. 29:10). The harlot woman “saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow” (Rev. 18:7), yet her destruction shall surely come, at the hands of the Great King.

The Lord Jesus Christ also spoke of storms elsewhere. Matthew chapter 7 recounts the parable of the Master regarding wise and foolish builders. The foolish builder erected his edifice upon the sand:

“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Mat 7:27).

But by contrast the wise builder dug deeply to lay a foundation upon the rock:

“and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” (vs 25).

The interpretation was given:

“Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (vs 24).

There is a need to be doers of the work, and not hearers only. It is more difficult to dig down into the rock, than to lay a foundation on sand – but the extra effort will all seem worthwhile in the day of adversity.

The Lord Jesus Christ had the power to still the waves, and bring his disciples to the desired destination. But he also has power over the sea of nations, hence in the Apocalypse we read of John’s vision:

“And I saw as it were a sea of glass having been mingled with fire (Bro JT translation); and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God” (Rev. 15:2).

And again:

“before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal ... (Rev. 4:6).

Notice that here, the nations are at rest, and there isn't even the slightest ripple of violence. And whereas turbulent nations cast up mire and dirt, the sea under the feet of the saints is clear as crystal, clean and transparent.

In a world of violence and wickedness, this is the day to look forward to: when Messiah shall still and cleanse the raging waves of the sea of nations. This is the earnest heart's desire of all the faithful: that the righteousness of God will be established in the earth, “and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isa. 32:17) – and may that day come soon!

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