

## WHEN GOD WALKS ON WATER

MARK 6:45–56

### Monday – Big Picture Overview (Mark 6:45–56)

*Read Mark 6:45–56 in one sitting.*

After feeding five thousand people in the wilderness, Jesus immediately urges his disciples into a boat and goes alone to a mountain to pray. In the pre-dawn darkness, the disciples struggle against a contrary wind in the middle of the sea. Jesus walks toward them on the water — and when they see him, they are terrified, thinking he is a ghost. He says, “Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.” He gets into the boat, the wind stops, and the disciples are overwhelmed with amazement. Mark’s pointed note explains why: they had not understood about the loaves because their hearts were hardened. The passage ends with a summary of healings at Gennesaret, where crowds press to touch even the edge of Jesus’ garment, and all who do so are healed. Two events are sharply contrasted: disciples who fail to recognize who is coming to them, and strangers who reach instinctively for salvation.

1. How does Mark link the feeding of the five thousand to the walking on water? What connects these two episodes?
2. What contrasts does Mark draw between the disciples in the boat and the crowds at Gennesaret?
3. What question does this passage raise for the reader that the disciples are not yet able to answer?

**Theological Prompt:** This passage poses the most dramatic question Mark’s Gospel asks: if even the disciples who have seen everything cannot recognize who is walking toward them, what does it take to truly see Jesus?

**Practical Application:** Think about a time when you didn’t recognize God’s presence during a frightening or overwhelming situation. What helped you realize it in retrospect?

**Prayer Prompt:** Ask the Lord to open your eyes to his presence, especially in dark and difficult moments when you’re most tempted to see only the storm.

**Tuesday – Yahweh on the Waters (Mark 6:47–48)**

*Read Mark 6:47–48; Job 9:8; Psalm 77:19; Isaiah 43:1–16.*

In the Hebrew Bible, walking on water is something only God does. Job describes Yahweh as one who “tramples the waves of the sea” (9:8). The Psalmist remembers the Exodus: “Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters” (77:19). Isaiah, announcing the New Exodus, hears Yahweh promise: “I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (43:19) — and he identifies Yahweh as the one who “makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters” (43:16). When Jesus walks on the sea, Mark is not describing a remarkable human feat. He places Jesus within the exclusive activity of Israel’s God. In the ancient world, the sea symbolized chaos and death; God’s sovereignty over it was the most fundamental assertion of his creative and redemptive power. The feeding in the wilderness (new manna), followed by the crossing of the sea (new Exodus), vividly represents what Israel’s prophets foretold the Messiah would do: lead a second and greater Exodus, with Yahweh himself guiding the way.

4. Which Old Testament texts link Yahweh to power over the sea? What theological statement does walking on water convey?

5. How does the sequence of feeding (manna) then sea-crossing reflect the Exodus pattern? What does this imply about who Jesus is?

6. What does it mean for your faith that the one who appears to frightened disciples in the dark is not a prophet or an angel, but Yahweh himself?

**Theological Prompt:** Walking on water is not mainly a miracle of power — it is an act of divine identity. Mark places Jesus within the exclusive realm of Israel’s God, who alone controls the waters of chaos.

**Practical Application:** In what areas of your life does chaos feel beyond control, too great for any human to fix? How does the promise of the New Exodus relate to that situation?

**Prayer Prompt:** Praise God that the one who makes a way through the sea has entered our world in the person of Jesus Christ, and ask him to make a way where none seems possible.

**Wednesday – “It Is I”: Epiphany and Fear (Mark 6:48–51)**

*Read Mark 6:48–51; Exodus 33:18–34:7; 1 Kings 19:11–13.*

Jesus' desire to “pass by” the disciples is not a sign of indifference; rather, it reflects the language of theophany. In Exodus 33–34, Moses requests to see God's glory, and God responds by “passing before him,” announcing the divine name. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah is told: “The LORD is about to pass by.” In both instances, “passing by” signifies an act of divine self-disclosure. Jesus' words to the disciples carry the same significance. “It is I” — literally, “I am” (Greek: εἰγὼ εἶμι, *egō eimi*) — echoes God's self-identification in Isaiah: “Before me no god was formed . . . I, I am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior” (43:10–11). The disciples are receiving the answer to their question from 4:41: “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” The answer is presented not as a proposition but through theophanic action and divine name. Their fear is not a lack of courage; it is an appropriate response to the living God. His “Do not be afraid” is the message that every angel and every theophany conveys: God's presence does not annihilate but comforts.

7. What does the phrase “passing by” mean in its Old Testament context? How does this clarify Jesus' intent in verse 48?

8. How does “It is I / I am” function in this passage, and what Old Testament background gives it weight beyond simple self-identification?

9. Why is the disciples' terror in some ways an appropriate response, and how does Jesus' “Do not be afraid” transform it?

**Theological Prompt:** The disciples are being given what Moses requested—a glimpse of the divine glory. The fact that they see it in the face of a man walking toward them on water is the scandal and the glory of the Incarnation.

**Practical Application:** Reflect on how you have experienced God's presence in ways that initially frightened you before bringing reassurance. How does the pattern of theophany — terror, then “do not fear” — influence your approach to prayer and worship?

**Prayer Prompt:** Ask God to give you a holy fear — the kind that recognizes his presence and is transformed by his reassurance rather than fleeing from it.

**Thursday – Hearts of Stone: The Disciples' Failure (Mark 6:51–52)**

*Read Mark 6:51–52; Mark 3:5; Mark 8:17–21; Isaiah 6:9–10.*

Mark's editorial note in verse 52 is among the most theologically startling sentences in the Gospel: "They had not understood about the loaves because their hearts had been hardened." The language of hardened hearts has appeared previously in 3:5, describing Jesus' opponents — the Pharisees who watched him in the synagogue, hoping to catch him in wrongdoing. Now Mark applies the same language to the disciples. This is not a minor rebuke. The phrase echoes Isaiah 6:9–10 — the passage about those who see but do not perceive, hear but do not understand, whose hearts have grown dull. In Mark 4:11–12, Jesus cited this text to describe those "outside" the kingdom. Now the disciples, the insiders, show the same opacity. The two miracles interpret each other: if the disciples had rightly perceived the feeding — recognizing it as an act of Yahweh providing bread in the wilderness — they would not have been astonished to see the same Jesus still the wind by stepping into the boat. Hardness of heart is not merely a moral failure; it is a statement about the limits of human perception before the mystery of God incarnate. The disciples are not condemned. They are being shown what they still require: a transformation of heart that only the Crucified and Risen One can provide.

10. Why is it important that Mark describes the disciples as having "hardened hearts" — language that was previously used only for Jesus' opponents?

11. How does the feeding of the five thousand serve as the interpretive key for the walking on water? What should the disciples have understood?

12. What does Mark suggest is necessary for the disciples' hardness to be overcome? When in the Gospel does this become possible?

**Theological Prompt:** Spiritual perception isn't just about witnessing the right events. It involves a transformation of the heart — which is itself a gift from God, not something we earn.

**Practical Application:** In which areas of your spiritual life has knowing the right information not yet led to the right perception? What would a softened heart look like in those areas?

**Prayer Prompt:** Pray Ezekiel 36:26 over yourself and your community: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you." Ask God to take away the heart of stone.

**Friday – Reaching for the Hem: Faith and Salvation (Mark 6:53–56)**

*Read Mark 6:53–56; Mark 5:27–34; Numbers 15:38–39.*

The contrast Mark establishes is deliberate and powerful. The disciples — witnesses to the feeding, walking on water, and calming the wind — cannot recognize who is with them in the boat. Meanwhile, the crowds of Gennesaret, unaware of these miracles, recognize Jesus as soon as he steps ashore and rush throughout the region to bring their sick. They beg to touch even the fringe (Greek: *κράσπεδον*, *kraspedon*) of his garment — the tassel worn in obedience to Numbers 15:38–39, symbolizing Jewish faithfulness to Torah. The woman with the hemorrhage had reached for the same thing in 5:27–34, and Jesus told her: “Your faith has saved you.” Here, the verb Mark uses for the healing of the crowds is *σωζω* (*sōzō*) — “were being saved.” The word carries the full weight of the Gospel’s promise: physical healing, yes, but also restoration, wholeness, and ultimate salvation. These crowds do not fully understand the theology. But they have need, and they trust — and they reach for whatever contact with Jesus they can find. This exemplifies the church’s approach to Christ at every age: not complete understanding, but desperate and persistent reaching for the one who alone can save.

13. What contrast does Mark draw between the disciples and the crowds of Gennesaret, and why is this significant theologically?

14. What does the use of *σωζω* (*sōzō*, “were being saved”) suggest about the nature of the healings at Gennesaret?

15. What does reaching for the fringe of Jesus’ garment teach us about the nature of faith — and about how the church approaches Christ in worship and sacrament?

**Theological Prompt:** The healings at Gennesaret serve as signs of the eschatological salvation Jesus offers. Each act of healing in Mark’s Gospel reflects a partial realization of the kingdom where God renews all things.

**Practical Application:** Reflect on how you approach Christ in the liturgy, in prayer, and in the sacraments. Are you reaching for the hem with trusting anticipation, or has familiarity dulled your sense?

**Prayer Prompt:** Ask the Lord to rekindle your desire to seek him — through Scripture, in the Eucharist, and in prayer — trusting that everyone who touches Him, even at the edge, is being saved.