

John 6:16-21



Group Study Outline

LAUNCH QUESTION

How would you summarise the message from last week's study (the rest of chapter 6?)

READ John 6:16-21

LOOK at the sign

What details does John give us to help us imagine this sign?

What would you say to the suggestion sometimes made that Jesus was walking *by* the sea, rather than *on* the sea?

UNDERSTAND the sign

What clues are there in the rest of the chapter to help us understand what this sign might be showing us?

(See v4, 14, 31-32, 49, 58)

If the Old Testament background is the Passover/ wilderness journeys in Exodus, what references to Exodus are there in this passage?

So what is Jesus showing us in this sign? (were the crowds right to describe him as the Prophet and want to make him king?)

Why does Jesus only reveal this to his disciples and not to the crowds?

OBEY the sign

If Jesus is the Prophet, the second Moses, how should we respond to him? (Deut 18:15,19)

Look at v66-71. How do the disciples show they have understood what Jesus has revealed to them? What implications do these words have for us? For our friends and neighbours?

PRAY



John at a glance

'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.'

This is the stated purpose of John's gospel, to show us the signs so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ and have life.

We're looking at each of the seven signs in John's gospel this term, to see what we can learn about how Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, so that by believing we might have life, and so that we might be witnesses to others as well.

Where this passage fits in...

This is the second of two signs that go together, the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on water. Both point to Jesus' identity as 'the prophet' a second Moses bringing a better redemption, eternal life.

Theme Sentence

Jesus reveals himself as the new Moses by walking on water.

Application

- Listen to Jesus, the Prophet who has God's words
- See that there is nowhere else to go, only Jesus has words of eternal life

Commentary

John introduces the feeding of the five thousand by telling us in v4 that 'the Passover was at hand.' This information adds nothing to the story itself. But it tells us what was in the minds of the people at the time; they were looking back to the days when Moses led God's people out of Egypt, through the waters of the Red Sea, and into the wilderness where they were fed by God for forty years before being led into the promised land. So this is a key to understanding the two signs of the feeding and the walking on water.

In v14, the people respond to the feeding by declaring that Jesus is 'the Prophet' (note 1:21 where John is asked if he is 'the Prophet' and denies it). This refers back to Deuteronomy 18:15-19. God promises that he will raise up another prophet like Moses, who will speak his words. The people must listen to him. It's worth turning to this passage with your groups if you didn't do that last week.

So the people have interpreted the feeding to show that Jesus is the new Moses. Have they got this right?

- 16 Jesus has had to make a sharp exit because the crowds have got overexcited and want to make him king. So the disciples are left by themselves and head home without Jesus.
- 17 This verse gives us two details: 'It was dark' and 'Jesus had not yet come to them'. The first detail, in setting the scene, gives a faint echo of the crossing of the Red sea, which also took place at night. The second detail is puzzling: why would we expect Jesus to come to the disciples now that they are in the boat and on the sea? Perhaps John is aware that his readers are familiar with this story and know what is about to happen. But he wants them to hear it again with fresh ears and grasp again the wonder of what happens.
- 18 The mention of the rough sea and strong wind adds nothing to the story, but again gives an echo of the crossing of the Red Sea. By themselves these echoes could just be coincidences: if you travel across the sea at night, it will inevitably be dark and there may be a strong wind blowing. But taken together in the context of the chapter, they may be intended to point us back to Exodus.
- 19 The details here confirm that this is a miracle. The disciples have set out across the sea and have now travelled three or four miles. So they would have been roughly in the middle of the sea when they first saw Jesus.

This rules out the possibility suggested by some that they simply saw Jesus walking 'near' the sea. The fact they were frightened also demonstrates this. They would hardly have been scared to see someone walking on the beach!

- 20 Jesus words are literally 'I am.' This was an ordinary way for someone to say 'it's me!' But in the context of John's gospel, where Jesus makes a number of 'I am' statements to show who he is, we are probably meant to read more into it. In Exodus 3, God reveals his name to Moses as 'I am'. Jesus through his actions is demonstrating that he is God. His statement 'I am', fits with that demonstration.

- 21 Presumably the disciples rowed away from Jesus when they first saw him. By the time he actually gets into the boat, they are 'immediately at the land to which they were going'. In other words, Jesus has crossed the whole sea by foot, just as Moses took the people of Israel across the Red Sea by foot.

The people have responded to Jesus first sign by declaring him to be 'the Prophet', a new Moses, miraculously providing bread in the wilderness. Now Jesus confirms that by miraculously crossing the sea.

But notice that this second sign is only seen by his disciples. The crowds know there's something odd about Jesus movements (see v22ff), but this revelation is especially for the disciples. The crowd have already tried to make Jesus their king by force, imagine how they would have reacted if they had seen him walk on water! But Jesus wants the disciples chooses to reveal himself to the disciples so that by their witness we might believe.

A number of Old Testament passages use the language of the Red Sea crossing to talk of a second Exodus, when God will once again redeem his people. See Isaiah 11:12-16, 43:2, 16, 44:27, 50:2. Jesus is demonstrating in this sign that he is the one who will bring about that second redemption.

The implication of this is that we should listen to him. V66-71 suggest that the disciples grasped this. When many others found Jesus teaching hard and left, they stayed because they recognized that Jesus has the words of eternal life and so there is nowhere else to go.