

Keys to Dynamic Bible Study
When Footprints Cannot Be Seen
Read Mark 6:45-51

The pitch-blackness of a mid-night sea and the shrill winds creating monstrous waves proved to be the stormiest voyage the disciples had encountered on the Galilean sea. (Mark 6:45-51). And Jesus was not with them. He was still back on land, having insisted that his disciples “go ahead of Him” to the other side (v. 45). Predictably, as they were “straining at the oars,” Jesus “came to them” (v. 48). What astonished them, however, was that Jesus was “walking on the sea” and controlling the storm--something only God could do.

Seeming to foreshadow this event on the Sea of Galilee is a passage in Psalm 77 where Asaph writes that the waters which “saw” God at the Red Sea incident, “were in anguish,” and the “depths also trembled” (Psalm 77:16). Clouds which “poured out water” and thunder which sounded like God’s voice “in the whirlwind” (vv. 17 and 18) are also reflected in the Galilean storm. The psalmist ends the remarkably similar episode by reminding us that God had led His people “like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” through the Red Sea (v. 20). But just before this conclusion of Psalm 77, we are given a riddle to solve: God walks where His footsteps cannot be seen (v. 19).

Riddles were as captivating, in the ancient world, as a television game show like “Jeopardy” is today. Did you catch on that it was a riddle which got Samson into a calamitous predicament in a book called Judges? When his fellow celebrants could not unravel Samson’s riddle in a wager at his wedding feast, they knew they were going to have to “pay up.” They were desperate enough to threaten his new wife and her father with arson (Judges 14:12-20). Riddles could be perilously challenging.

In the year 1810, a famous riddle was composed as a nursery rhyme:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men
Couldn’t put Humpty together again.

The aim was to figure out, from the clues given in the rhyme, what could fall, crack into a myriad of pieces, and be impossible for even a company of elite soldiers (and, humorously enough, their horses) to glue together again. You probably know, since most books containing the nursery rhyme have a picture of Humpty Dumpty—he’s an egg. Riddles could be downright entertaining.

The one-lined riddle mentioned above—“And your footprints cannot be seen”--reveals its clues in the preceding lines of the text:

Your way was in the sea
And Your paths in the mighty waters,
And Your footprints cannot be seen.

Footprints which can be “seen” on land disappear instantaneously on waters. The riddle discloses that God walked ahead *on* the waters of the Red Sea as He ripped them apart, like the sky at the Lord’s coming, for the Israelite’s to cross on dry ground. Riddles could be vastly enlightening.

In the same way God had, Jesus walked on a sea. Jesus was “intending to pass by” His disciples so they could follow Him (as Jesus had instructed them to do when He had called them to discipleship). If they had allowed Him, Jesus would have “led them like a

flock” through the sea (Psalm 77:20). Jesus came to a halt, nevertheless, at their panic when they saw Him: “It is a ghost, an apparition,” they cried (Mark 6:49). Then, once He assured them with the words, “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid,” He climbed into the boat with them (vv. 50-51). And the wind stopped.

Walking on water and controlling the storm, that’s what God did at the Red Sea.
Walking on water and controlling the storm, that’s what Jesus did at the Sea of Galilee.
“Your footprints,” O God, “cannot be seen.”