

[I Find Your Lack Of Faith Disturbing](#)

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By Rev Paul Graham

Read Matthew 14:22-33



A few days ago (5, to be precise), was Star Wars day, May the 4th (be with you). As a keen fan of most things sci-fi, I'm well aware that this puts me into the bracket of nerds and geeks, but it also makes for an entertaining life in the more niche area of New Testament Greek. Word order and sentence construction can throw up any number of amusing (to me) scenarios. Take today's reading for example. The disciples don't have much to say in the passage, but what they do say, in the literal translation of the Greek, makes them sound like Yoda, the Jedi master of the Star Wars films.

Whilst crying out in fear as they see Jesus striding towards them on top of the wave, they say, "A phantasm it is."

Later, when Jesus boards the boat and they get down to the business of worshipping him, they declare, "Truly of God Son thou art." For those who are familiar with Yoda's voice, this passage just got a bit more entertaining. For those who don't know what I'm talking about, please accept my humble apologies for wasting some moments of your time. However, there is a point to all this.

In Star Wars, the members of the Jedi order are trained by Yoda (other Jedi Masters are available) to be able to perform acts that defy the normal laws of physics in the same way that Jesus' stroll across the lake

did. Whether it's raising spaceships from watery graves, fetching lightsabres from beyond arm's reach, or throttling someone from the other side of the room, the Jedi mind trick is a powerful force for good and evil (and laziness – just imagine how much easier it would be to get a drink from the fridge without having to get out of your chair).

And no matter how long ago George Lucas and his cronies might try to persuade us the events of Star Wars took place, we can say with absolute certainty that Jesus beat them to it by about 1,950 years (the first draft of the screenplay for the original Star Wars film was written in 1974). And his feat of physics-defying strolling certainly caused a stir among his friends, who were worried that the *phantom menace* approaching the boat was going to cause them harm. But Jesus gives them a *new hope* in reassuring them that he is real, which must have made it all the more strange; a real person walking on the water is less believable than a ghost, surely?

Peter's courage (or foolishness, the jury is still out) in climbing out of the rocking boat remains the focus for the next stage of the narrative as we follow the *rogue one* as he joins Jesus. However, we tend to forget that there were eleven in the boat who stayed put, too afraid of drowning (quite rightly, you might say) to join Peter and Jesus.

But what does that say to us in light of 2 Chronicles 7:14? Where do we see parallels between Solomon's bedchamber conversation with God, the happenings on the lake, and whatever we face today in 2021?

Well, there is definitely something about recognition in each of these scenarios. God, in his conditional promise with Solomon, sets the challenge for people to "seek my face", something the disciples strained to do with Jesus walking towards them, and definitely something that we would do well to do for our own lives, and as a church wanting to know what God has in store for us as we move into the future.

The disciples needed to recognise Jesus for who he is, not for what they feared. The Greek again comes to our aid in this. In the original form, Jesus says to the disciples simply, "I am" in response to their question of identity. Those who follow the Old Testament will recognise this as the name that God gives to himself when asked a similar question by Moses (Exodus 3:14) and is used a number of times in the following centuries. Whether Jesus is doing this deliberately or not is open to discussion, particularly as most translations point us away from this by using alternative phrases.

Those equally familiar with John's gospel will point out that there are seven key occasions when Jesus says "I am" in the context of describing himself (shepherd, gate, etc). Is Matthew recording an equivalent statement from Jesus at this point?

Whether translations help or hinder, whether we spot parallels with the other gospels or not, it is Peter who shows us the way in seeking God's face. He was willing to step out in faith, literally, believing that Jesus would be there as he did so. The positive recognition of Jesus only came when it was put to the test. It was on the way that Peter found Jesus there already, with his hands ready to lift him when doubts threaten to sink him.

For those left in the boat, they too found themselves face-to-face with Jesus. For them, they got to see him, be with him, and worship him. But none of them got their feet wet in the same way that Peter did. None of them really put themselves to the test, or indeed put Jesus to the test, to see if he could do for Peter what he was able to do for himself. They may have looked at Peter with envious eyes, wishing that they had had his courage or impetuosity to leap out of the boat. Or they may have wished that he had been more patient, waiting with them for Jesus to arrive and be hauled aboard, rather than risk capsizing the boat as Peter launched himself overboard. Either way, they certainly pulled out all the stops when Jesus joined them.

At the end of Matthew's gospel is what has been called the Great Commission, as Jesus leaves the

surviving disciples a final set of instructions before ascending to heaven (Matthew 28:18-20). Again, the translators haven't done us many favours, as verse 19 is generally read as "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." (NIV), but what Matthew actually records as Jesus' words are "Going, disciple all the nations..." If we "go and make disciples", it infers that discipleship will only happen once we arrive at the destination. However, if discipleship happens as we are going, then Jesus is talking about action far more in common with Peter, who definitely learned lessons about faith as the water swirled at his ankles.

So, we are left with the challenge. When seeking God's face, as the Chronicler puts it, are we willing to wait for him to turn up, from the relative safety of our boats? Or are we to be like Peter, willing to put faith to the test, longing to meet Jesus on the way, to know the fear of potential failure, to find out that Jesus will be there when we need?

And before you think that I'm wanting all of us to be like Peter, or that God is challenging you to do something that he really isn't challenging you to do, I would add a note of encouragement. At least the eleven who waited were in the boat when Jesus arrived. There will be plenty of others who don't, or won't, get on board. Just make sure you have your place in the boat, if not on the sea.

Amen.

[1] A quote from the original Star Wars film, spoken by arch-baddy Darth Vader, but resonant of much of Jesus' disgruntlement with his disciples. At least Jesus was more forgiving.

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