

# In the Midst of the Storm

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     A pastor attempting to walk on water like Jesus is eaten by crocodiles. A pastor attempting to demonstrate God's power by walking on water has been eaten by crocodiles.

Jonathan Mthethwa was killed by three crocodiles as he carried out a religious demonstration in Zimbabwe. Shocked witnesses said the clergyman had prayed the whole week before the stunt went tragically wrong.

He had also fasted in the lead up to the attempted miracle, which was inspired by a biblical tale of Jesus walking on water during a storm. Lucky for us and for Pastor Mthethwa, this story isn't true.

It's been circulated several times over the last few decades in different fashions. And it's been debunked. You can Google it. It's interesting, but it's been debunked. It's not true. However, even though I don't know what the motive was for writing this story, I think it's an accurate depiction of what people sometimes think about when they read the story of Jesus walking on water.

It's easy to go, okay, so Jesus walked on water. And since he said that I can do great things, even greater things than him because he's going to the Father, I should be able to walk on water too.

[ 1 : 2 8 ]     And if I don't walk on water, it means that my faith is not enough. Something is wrong with me. But I believe that something else is going on in this passage. And if we look at it through the eyes of Scripture rather than through the eyes of our own experiences, we'll see what it is.

But let's pray together first. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would open up your word to us and that you would speak to us through your Holy Spirit, that we will see Jesus glorified.

We pray this in your Son's name. Amen. Amen. So let's look at Matthew together. Matthew 14, 22 to 33.

So first of all, verse 22. Notice that Jesus sends his disciples to Bethesda by way of the Sea of Galilee.

And he does this in a way that seems to imply that his disciples don't want to leave him. He urges them. He commands them.

[ 2 : 3 4 ]     He sort of constrains them, makes them go away. That's the sense of the verse, verse 22. Why does he do this? Well, think about it. I don't blame them, really.

I mean, up to this point, Jesus has been doing miracles, left, right, and center. He's been doing so many wonderful things. And he just fed 5,000 people at a go. Just now.

More than 5,000 people, in fact. And this crowd of people wanted to make him king, wanted to make him prophet. And rightly so, but Jesus knew it wasn't time. And I'm sure the disciples would buy into the idea that Jesus should be king, should be crowned right now.

But he knew it wasn't time. And so he sends them away, dismisses the crowds, and goes up to the mountain to pray. Now, the Sea of Galilee, Sea of Tiberias, Sea of Gennesaret, the lake, the sea, take your pick.

It's a very important place in Jesus' ministry because he does many miracles around that sea. He called his first four disciples around that sea. He gave his disciples breakfast after the resurrection at the sea.

[ 3 : 41 ] The Sea of Galilee is 700 feet below sea level. It is about 12 miles long, north-south, 12 miles long, 8 miles wide at its widest point.

It's only 200 feet deep. So the deepest part of the sea is just 200 feet. So it's actually a shallow sea. Surrounding the lake, the sea, is our mountains.

They're just rising up to 2,000 feet above sea level, even higher. So what happens is that when the eastern winds blow over the mountains, they suddenly drop. Warm air rises, cold air drops, and you have a storm, and it's always dangerous.

This was common knowledge. The fishermen knew this. Jesus knew this, and yet he sends his disciples away by the Sea of Galilee.

One wonders why he wouldn't go with them to make sure that they were safe. Well, the disciples get into the boat, and all is well for a while.

[ 4 : 47 ] And then right when they're in the middle of the sea, a storm hits, and they find themselves struggling against the wind and the waves. But notice how long it takes them.

Their struggle takes. They begin their journey at sunset in the evening. But Jesus doesn't come to them until around the fourth watch of the night, which is between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m.

So for maybe 8 to 12 hours between that and that time, they were struggling against the waves, fighting to stay alive. And here's the thing.

And then Jesus knew. Because when you read the passage in Mark, the same story in Mark, it says that Jesus saw that they were making headway painfully, and yet he did not go to them.

Why not? Why not solve their problem immediately? And then when Jesus finally comes to them, he does so in a very interesting way. First of all, he walks on water.

[ 5 : 51 ] Because, you know, that's what people do. Nobody walks on water. Of course not. But why did he walk on water? If he was trying to get to them, think about it.

He's Jesus. Why not just simply fly? First of all, it's faster. And it's easier on the knees, definitely. But then from the mountaintop, he could have simply calmed the sea, just calmed it down from the mountaintop.

He did something similar in Matthew chapter 8. And then he could have floated down to them, you know, just like Storm from X-Men or Thor from the Avengers or something. And that would have been a sight to see, definitely.

But he doesn't do that. He walks on water to them. Why does he do that? And then second, he acts like he's going to pass by them, and then he keeps going.

So the book of Mark, that's what Mark says. He acts like he's passing by them. And Mark uses a language that is reflective of what happened in Exodus when God says to Moses, I will cause all my glory to pass by you and declare my name.

[ 6 : 59 ] I am. And here you have Jesus pretending like he's going to pass by them. They call out to him, and he says, Do not be afraid. It is I.

Or in Greek, I am. What's going on here? So to his credit, Peter takes what Jesus said seriously. He believes it's Jesus on the water, but he seems to want more proof.

Granted that his chosen method of verification raises eyebrows, but, you know, he has faith. He wants to know that it's Jesus. And Jesus says to him, Okay, come to me.

Now, think about this. If you're a disciple, maybe not Peter, one of the other disciples, and you're sitting in the boat, and all this stuff is happening, and you're terrified that a ghost is speaking to Peter, what's going on through your mind?

Peter, are you nuts? Are you out of your mind? If that is Jesus, why don't you ask him to calm the storm, to prevent the wind from blowing, make everything okay?

[ 8 : 03 ] You want to go to him? You skipped your medication this morning, didn't you? You know, I know a psychiatrist that can help you with your particular faith problem, ETC. That's what I think anyway.

So, what's going on? Now, I've asked some questions, and I'm going to answer them, but first of all, I want us to talk about the sea, water, the ocean.

I am not a great swimmer, and so it's not on my bucket list to go on a Caribbean cruise anytime soon. Don't get me wrong, if the opportunity presents itself, I will go, so feel free to buy tickets for me.

I'd be grateful. But no, getting on water is something that I don't think about too often. I mean, when you watch movies like *The Finest Hour* or *The Perfect Storm*, it takes a certain amount of faith to still get on the water.

It really does. Think about hurricanes, for example. 1900, a hurricane hit Galveston, Texas.

[ 9 : 01 ] 8,000 people killed. Hurricane Katrina, 2005, 1,200 people killed. Last year, Puerto Rico, Hurricane Maria. We still don't know how many people died from that. Estimates range from 3,000 to 45,000.

We just don't know yet. The sea is a powerful force. When it gets mad, it can really get mad. And so you see in Scripture, over and over again, we're told how the sea is a powerful force, and only God can control it.

Psalms 89 is an example of one of these. Psalm 89 says, God is faithful. He is great. Then the psalmist goes on to say, he will establish his throne.

He will make David his king forever. And then it explains why we can trust that God can do that. It starts talking about his qualities.

And one of the things it brings out is that God is powerful and can control the raging seas. When he speaks, he can still the waters, and everything stops.

[ 10 : 09 ] So that's one of the reasons why we can trust, definitely trust, that he's going to establish David's throne and fulfill the promises of the covenant. Or how about Psalm 107, verse 23 to 32.

This is what it says. Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business in the great waters. They saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep.

For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven. They went down to the depths. Their courage melted away in their evil plight.

They reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wit's end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank you, the Lord, for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man.

[ 11 : 15 ] Let them extol him in the congregation of the people and praise him in the assembly of the elders. Did you notice how that passage parallels the Matthew passage? And I think this forms the center of what Matthew's trying to get at.

I believe that when Jesus walked on the stormy sea, he was declaring that, I am God. I am here. I have come to fulfill the promises.

I already mentioned that he just fed more than 5,000 people. And when he did that, he was saying, I am the prophet that Moses was talking about.

Listen to me. Because any good Israelite would see that miracle and be thinking about how the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness and God fed them with manna. And then now he's walking on water.

He's telling them, I don't want you to misunderstand this. I am God. I have power over the sea, and I will fulfill my promises to David. I am king. I am here. I'm reigning.

[ 12 : 17 ] And that's the point of the story, to show that Jesus is God and that he is king. It is not primarily about having faith that Jesus will be in the midst of the storm with us, although that is true.

It's not primarily about having faith to walk on water, even though something can be said about that. We should hold on when we're struggling through things. Definitely. Perhaps Jesus will show up and calm the storm, or when we enter into glory, we're given sweet relief.

It's possible. But the point of the storm is to show Jesus as king. And while we are painfully making headway, I think it's comforting to know that Jesus is watching.

The silence doesn't mean that he's abandoned you. No. He's watching. It just means that something greater is going on that you are a part of, that you may not know about, that I may not know about.

And this is not to dismiss the difficulties that we pass through. Only God and the disciples know what they were going through for those 8 to 12 hours when they were struggling in the water.

[ 13 : 30 ] But it's to give you hope that in the midst of your troubles, Jesus is watching, and something great is going to happen. And I wonder whether Peter was thinking of Psalm 89, Isaiah 43, when he made his request to Jesus.

And Jesus grants him the request. He gets on the water and starts walking. While he's keeping his eyes on Jesus, that water becomes a solid pathway to his Lord.

But then, he looks away. The wind, the waves, and he starts to sink. He cries out, Lord, save me! Jesus reaches out, saves him.

And then he says to him, Oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt? What was Jesus talking about? Was he talking about faith to walk on water?

I don't think so. I think it was about faith. Why did Peter doubt that Jesus was who he says he is? See, the faith of Peter isn't faith to walk on water.

[ 14 : 32 ] It's faith to go to Jesus, wherever Jesus is. That's the faith that's important. It's not about miracles. It's about going to Jesus. Look at Jesus. That's the faith that's important.

And that's the faith that we want to emphasize, that sees Jesus as king. And you know, when he was looking at Jesus, when Peter was looking at Jesus, it wasn't that the storm stilled.

It wasn't that the waves quieted down. The storm was still going on. But when he was looking at Jesus, the storm became to him what it was to Jesus. Jesus was walking in the storm.

He wasn't struggling against the wind. He wasn't trying to keep himself dry. He was walking. It was like he was taking a stroll. And he was like, hey guys, how are you doing? He was walking. It was not a problem to him.

When we focus on Jesus Christ, that's what happens to our problems. We see it the way he sees it. One last thought. For those of us who have surrendered ourselves to the kingship of Jesus Christ, we've become his ambassadors.

[ 15 : 39 ] And we have the opportunity to walk on water every day. Now let me explain that. What I mean by this is that there are so many man-made storms, whether it's immigration issues or terrorism here and overseas, famine and drought in Africa, persecution of Christians everywhere, oppression of people.

There are storms everywhere. And you and I, as ambassadors of Christ, can walk in the middle of those storms, not to take credit for anything that we do, but to tell people, Jesus is king in the middle of all this thing.

He's going, he's here. He's king. And he will bring it all together, reconciling all things to himself. That is what we do when we are feeding the hungry, when we are helping the poor, when we visit people in prison.

We're trying to show people Jesus is king. We don't take credit for it. No. Jesus takes all the credit. He gets all the glory.

So you can walk on water, but please don't do that in the sea with alligators. Rather, do it where Jesus can shine. His glory is exalted through you. Let us pray.

[ 16 : 52 ] We ask, Father, that you will help us to exalt Christ in our lives. And in the midst of our storms, as we hold on and wait for you, to see what he's doing and be to other people, signs to Christ.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.