

PM Matthew 14:13-33 Come and... walk on water!

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the Word of God for our reading, and it is not Matthew chapter 4, as some of you may have already guessed, but Matthew chapter 14, reading verses 13 to 33.

Matthew 14, verse 13. Now when Jesus heard this, namely the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.

But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them.

And healed their sick. Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, This is a desolate place, and the day is now over.

Send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves. But Jesus said, They need not go away. You give them something to eat.

[1 : 27] They said to him, We have only five loaves here and two fish. And he said, Bring them here to me. Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing.

Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied.

And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone. But the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

[2 : 53] And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, it is a ghost.

And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.

And Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. He said, come.

So Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water, and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me.

Jesus immediately reached out his hand, and took hold of him, saying to him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt?

[4 : 06] And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, truly, you are the Son of God.

Now to the word of God, in Matthew chapter 14. We've been looking over recent months, at some of the great invitations, and commands in scripture, containing the word, come.

And there's one here, in Matthew 14, in verses 28 and 29. Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you, on the water.

He said, come. So Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water, and came to Jesus.

Whether this counts as an invitation, or as a command, I'm not quite sure, perhaps both. Peter calls it a command, he obeyed it as a command, and it would have been wrong for him, and it would have been wrong for him, to disobey it.

[5 : 39] But it was given at his request, and it was what he wanted to do. So, in a sense, it was an invitation, as well. an invitation, an invitation, a command, to do something extraordinary.

something that he could only do, by the power of God. It was, of course, a personal command, to Peter, and to no one else.

It was made that once, and never again. No one here, I hope, would imagine, that we ought to be, literally, walking on water.

Even Peter, didn't imagine, that he could do this, any time he wanted to. After the resurrection, when he was, out in a boat, and, saw Jesus, on the shore, we're told, that he threw himself, into the sea, and presumably, waded to the shore.

Doesn't seem, to have thought, about walking on water. It was a one-off experience, and a very, wonderful experience, I'm sure.

[7 : 08] As far as we know, Peter, never wrote, an autobiography, but if he had, I'm sure, this would have counted, as one of the highlights.

An experience, that no one else, had ever had. Even Moses, had to have the Red Sea, parted for him, so he could walk, on dry land.

But Peter, just walked, on the sea. Until his faith, failed that is. And then he sank.

But even then, he experienced, the wonderful, grace, and power, of Christ. Reaching out, and saving him.

But although this was, a personal experience, of Peter, it does have a message, for us all. These gospel miracles, were intended, not just to amaze us, but to suggest to us, the possibilities, that are open to us, through faith in Christ.

[8 : 28] As the hymn puts it, ponder anew, what the almighty, can do, who with his love, doth befriend thee. These miracles, are often a picture, of spiritual, reality.

Living parables, we could call them. The healing, miracles, are a picture, of the healing, of the soul.

The cleansing, of lepers, are a picture, of our cleansing, from sin.

The feeding, of the five thousand, is a picture, of Christ, feeding us, on his word. Well, Peter walking on water, is a picture, of the Christian, doing the impossible, through faith.

I want to, explore today, some of the ways, in which, we can, metaphorically, walk on water. first, though, let's, look through, the story.

This incident, occurred, after, a very, very, long day. Began, with the news, that John the Baptist, had been, executed, by Herod.

[9 : 54] That must have, come as a, terrible shock. Must have been, a shock, to Jesus. John was, his cousin, and his, forerunner.

Only a short, while before, John had been, crying out, behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away, the sin of the world. Pointing to the death, of Jesus.

Now, John himself, was dead. It's a shock, for the disciples. Several of them, had, followed John, before, before they, followed Jesus.

They had, a high regard, for him. And they, must have wondered, why? This, Christ, who could, heal the sick, could he, not have saved, John?

Well, Jesus, doesn't explain. He, simply, withdraws, to a quiet place. In, Mark's account, he said, come away, by yourselves, to a desolate place, and rest a while.

[11 : 05] Another, come text, that I could have preached on. But, they didn't get any rest. The crowds came, and Jesus, had compassion on them, and healed their sick.

Mark, adds, that he also, taught them. By evening, they're hungry, and the disciples, suggest sending them, away, into the villages, to buy food.

Very sensible, suggestion. But, Jesus has a better idea. You give them, something to eat. How? He's asking them, to do the impossible. But, with God, nothing. Is impossible. They have, five loaves, and two fish.

Provided, John says, by a young lad. Jesus takes them, blesses them, distributes them, to the crowd. And, they are all fed. Five thousand men, plus women, and children.

[12 : 10] With twelve baskets, left over. Jesus is proving, himself here. As if he hadn't, proved it enough, already. that he is, the Messiah.

One, greater than Moses. Moses, had prayed, and God, had sent down, manna from heaven. But, Jesus has provided, food himself, for all, these multitudes.

In, John's gospel, he goes on, to explain, to explain, the next day, I am, the bread, of life. It's after, all this, that Jesus, at last, dismisses, the crowds.

He sends, his disciples, over to the other side, of the lake, and he goes up, into the mountain, himself, to pray. And, very soon, the boat, is a long way, from the shore, being beaten, by the waves.

And, the disciples, are struggling. But, Jesus sees them, and in the fourth, watch of the night, he comes to them, majestically, walking, on the water.

[13:33] They're, understandably, terrified. It's a ghost, they say. Jesus says, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid. It's another, wonderful example, of Christ's, love, for his disciples, aware of their need, and coming at once, to their aid.

It's also, a clear sign again, of who he is. Job 9, and verse 8, speaks of God himself, treading on the waves, of the sea.

So, who then, is this? Treading on the waves, of the sea, walking towards them. Or, again, Psalm 77, it says, your way, was through the sea, your path, through the great waters, yet your footprints, are unseen.

This is obviously, the son, of God. God, it's also, another living parable. Jesus, coming down, from the mountain, to save his disciples, in their distress.

Isn't that a wonderful picture, of Christ, coming down, from heaven itself, to save, his people, from their sins.

[15:01] Jesus, or indeed, we could see, another picture here. Jesus, praying, up on the mountaintop. Isn't that a picture, of Christ, our great high priest, praying for us, in heaven, and yet ready, at a moment's notice, to come to us, when we're in need.

Now it's at this, moment of, recognition, that Peter says, in verse 28, Lord, if it is you, command me, to come to you, on the water.

Now that's typical Peter. It's a magnificent gesture, but has he really, thought this out? What if it isn't Jesus?

This is going to end, in disaster. But Peter, I think, believes that it is Jesus. I don't think, he's testing Jesus here.

The word, if, isn't necessarily, an expression of doubt. It can be, an expression of certainty.

Effectively, he's saying, in that case, Lord, if it's you, command me, to come to you.

[16:27] You see, discipleship, for Peter, means, following Jesus. He's just seen Jesus, walking on the water, and he wants to do the same. And why not?

After all, Jesus, had quite recently, given them the power, in Matthew chapter 10, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse lepers, to cast out demons.

In other words, to do everything, that Jesus was doing. So, why not walk on the water, as well? To his credit, he doesn't, rush, presumptuously, into it.

He might have done. Peter, was a very impulsive, character. One could quite imagine, him rushing, onto the water. But no, he knows, that only Christ, can make this possible, and therefore, he waits, for Christ's, word of command.

No one else, apparently, even thought, of doing this. No one else, saw the opportunity here. No one else, apparently, followed Peter's example.

[17:46] They're all watching, just to see, what's going to happen. But Peter, at this point, is full of faith. He really believes, that by the power of Christ, he can walk on water.

And Christ, gives the command, come. And Peter, walks, on water. Peter. Verse 29, Jesus says, come, and Peter, gets out of the boat.

What a moment, that must have been. Taking that first step, of leaving the security, of the boat, putting his faith, to the test. And he walked, on the water, and he came, to Jesus.

But then, the doubts, set in. In verse 30, when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me.

Faith, is all about, focus. Fix your eyes, on Jesus. And you'll be okay. Look away, and you'll sink.

[19:05] Hebrews 12, speaks of, looking unto Jesus, the author, and finisher, of our faith. Look away from him, and you'll start, to have doubts.

Peter's experience, is the classic, example of this. We could liken it, to a man, climbing in the, high mountains, with a guide.

And the guide, tells him, to step out, onto a narrow, ridge. shh, just trust him, and follow him.

The guide, knows what he's doing. If you stop, and you look down, at that thousand foot, precipice, on either side, then you'll start, to get dizzy, and frightened, and you may well, fall.

Peter, looks away, from his guide. He looks, around himself, he sees the wind, he thinks, about the danger, and suddenly, he's gone.

[20 : 16] Almost. Peter, must have got, very close, to Jesus, by this stage. It says, he came, to Jesus. He is within, touching distance.

Failed, at the last moment, as it were. At the last moment, he's beginning, to sink. But even now, Peter, still has faith, in Jesus.

Faith, that he can save him. He may have, somehow, lost his faith, that Jesus, could enable him, to walk on water, but he still, believes, Jesus loves him, and will, save him, from death.

And so, he cries out, Lord, save me. And of course, he does. Yes, there's a gentle, rebuke there, in verse 31.

Oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt? But the Lord, doesn't, abandon, his doubting, disciple. How important, that can be, for some of us, when we go through, times of doubts, when we fall, into various sins, when we think, of ourselves, as a complete failure, you did run well, who did hinder you?

[21 : 32] The Lord, won't abandon you, even then, even in that moment, of great weakness, he may rebuke you, but he'll still save you. Peter, may have only, a little faith, but he does, still have faith, even now, that Jesus, can rescue him, and that faith, is rewarded.

So, they both, get back in the boat, and at once, the wind, ceased. Just like it says, in Psalm 107, he made the storm, be still, and the waves, of the sea, were hushed.

And the disciples, are amazed, those in the boat, worshipped him, saying, truly, you are, the son of God. Walking on water, himself, enabling Peter, to walk on the water, and now, calming the storm, it all pointed, to one thing, this, really, was, the son of God.

And they worshipped him, and so should we. But now, let's make some, practical applications.

There are, many occasions, when Jesus, invites us, indeed, commands us, to do, the impossible, trusting, in his power, to enable us.

Times, when he invites us, as it were, to walk on water, metaphorically speaking. Indeed, the whole Christian life, is in one sense, walking, on water.

[23 : 25] Let's think about, three examples. First, let's think about, conversion, itself. Some of us, have been Christians now, for many years, and perhaps, we've forgotten, what a huge, thing it was, to take that, first step, of following Christ.

Even if you were, brought up in, the Christian faith, and you had a, relatively, gentle, introduction, to the faith, there was still, a time, when you, realized, that you, personally, had to follow, Christ.

Christ. And that, will have been, a big moment, a big challenge. For most people, that first step, is not easy.

You know, we talk to people, around us, about the gospel, and we, tell them, glibly, all they've got to do, is trust in Christ. As if that, were a simple thing, to do.

It isn't simple, it isn't easy, it's very hard. Indeed, it's actually, impossible, except, by the grace of God.

[24 : 47] Think about it, what's happening, when you begin, to follow Christ. You're trusting, in Christ, whom you have, never seen. You're believing, a story, which by, any normal, standards, is, virtually, unbelievable.

You're trusting, in a man, who lived, 2000 years ago, believing him, to be the son of God. You're believing, that he died, on the cross, to save us, from our sins, and that he, rose again, from the dead.

And you're believing, that he's in heaven now, and that he's coming, again, to judge the world.

Does, any of that, make sense? Yes. The world would say, no, it's crazy.

But the spirit of God, has convinced you, it's true. And you're ready, to venture, your eternity, upon it. You're willing, to step out, onto the ocean, as it were.

Trusting, entirely, in him. you're willing, to, to start, a new life, that makes, impossible, demands of you.

[26 : 06] A life, of love, and holiness. You've never, been full of love, and holiness, before. But when you, become a Christian, here you are, committing yourself, to a quality, of life, way, beyond anything, that you're, capable of doing, or being.

Trusting, only in Christ, to make it, possible for you. You're willing, too, to, lose, your friends, to be hated, by the world.

God. That's not easy, either, is it? Something, that you can, only do, by the power, of God. In one sense, becoming a Christian, is stepping out, into the unknown.

Yes, you have the evidence, of the Bible, proving, by many, infallible proofs, as it says in Acts, that Jesus, rose from the dead. Yes, he's told you, what to expect.

Yes, he's made, many, wonderful promises, to you. But it is still, all new to you. You've not, traveled this way, before.

[27 : 16] And who knows, what winds, and waves, there might be, ahead of you. Becoming a Christian, really is, walking on water. I remember, my conversion, 49 years ago, 1973.

gradually, becoming convinced, that the gospel, was true, and yet, being unable, to take that, first step, of stepping out, of the boat, as it were.

Yes, my little boat, at that time, was rocking about, in the wind, and the waves. But I still, felt safe, and secure, in there, in my old life.

Beginning, a new life, was an enormous, challenge. And I knew, that I couldn't, live that life, in my own strength. But Jesus, said come.

And I came. And spiritually, speaking, I've been walking, on water, ever since. Occasionally, yes, looking at the wind, and the waves, and sinking.

[28 : 26] But the Lord, has repeatedly, rescued me. And I've carried on, by grace, walking, by faith. And most of you here, have done the same.

I'm not presenting, my experience, as if it was something, extraordinary, or anything to boast about. I've done nothing, except what the Lord, has enabled me to do. Most of you here, in one way or another, have had that same experience.

And if you haven't, let me say to you, in the power of Christ, you can. Secondly, there is, Christian service.

We're saved to serve, and without exception, every Christian will find, there is some kind, of service, expected of them. Maybe for, a few of us, that it's preaching.

Maybe for others, that it's witnessing, to their friends, maybe helping, elderly folk in the church, maybe teaching the children, maybe some kind of, administration work.

[29 : 38] But whatever it is, it will be challenging. I remember the first time, that I was asked, to preach, was only a, ten minute sermon, in the church of England.

But I was terrified, so terrified, that I actually thought, of doing a Jonah, as they say, and actually leaving, the area, completely, secretly, to avoid, having to do it.

the problem, was that it was, something entirely, new to me. And beyond, any power, that I thought I had.

I've never been, a fluent speaker. I stumble, over words, even now. But I read, at that time, in Isaiah 30, the tongue of the stammerer, shall be ready, to speak plainly.

And that, for me, was Jesus saying, come. Believe me, even, today, stepping up, into the pulpit, is still, stepping out of the boat, and walking on water.

[30 : 46] But I'd have to say, the same of every aspect, of Christian ministry. Teaching a Sunday school, years ago, that was walking on water, for me.

Visiting, in hospital, I always used to find, that particularly hard. That was something, I really couldn't do. But the Lord, was saying, come.

It needs doing. And you're going to do it. And I will empower you. If the Lord says, come, then you can do it.

Not in your strength, but in his. Whatever it is, that the Lord is asking, commanding you to do, venture out, by faith.

And you will find, that he gives you, the ability to do it. Don't limit yourself, to the things, that you know, you can do. If I'd done that, years ago, then I would have become, church treasurer, and it would have stopped, at that.

[31 : 52] Having worked in accounts, for years, I'd have been confident, about doing that. And I would have missed out, on so much, that the Lord, wanted me to do. Don't stop, at the easy things, you know you can do.

Whatever he says to you, do it. Even if it seems, like walking on water. Finally, and, this is the hardest of all, there is death, itself.

Now many Christians, say to me, I'm not afraid to die. And I'm sure they mean it. But death, is the last great enemy, for the Christian.

The last great challenge. challenge. It's the ultimate, test of faith, whether you can, step out of that, little boat of your body, out onto the waters, of death, trusting, that Christ, is there, ready to receive you.

And for some, those waters, may not be calm. Many Christians, I've known, have faced, wind and waves, in their final days, such as they never, imagined before.

[33 : 21] Now is the time, more than ever, to trust in Jesus. When he eventually, says to you, come, in that sense, come up higher.

Come into my presence, forever. Just trust him. And even if you, find yourself, struggling, as some Christians do, remember that those, arms of love, are ready there, to save you.

None of the disciples, was lost that night. The boat, didn't sink. No one was swept, overboard, by the waves. Even Peter, survived, when his faith failed.

Isn't that a picture, of our perfect security, in Christ. Our experiences, may vary, but if we're truly his, then we will, be brought, safely home.

So let me, urge you, as we draw to a close, to, trust, in Christ, to enable you, to do, extraordinary things.

[34 : 36] Many Christians, fail to see, the possibilities, of faith. Many Christians, live such very, ordinary lives, and attempt, so little.

Those other disciples, back in the boat, they attempted, nothing that night. Only Peter, saw the opportunity. Look for the opportunities.

that Christ, is giving you. Imagine, if they'd, all seen it, and they'd, all got out, of the boat, and they'd, all walked, in procession, to the shore, with Jesus, at the head of them.

How impressive, would that have been? How wonderful, it would be, in the church, if everyone, were stepping out, in faith, attempting, the impossible, in the power, of God.

that again, there are, others, who see, the possibility, but they get, cold feet, and they give up, without even trying.

[35 : 50] It takes, a measure of courage, to venture out, onto the water. There was, a popular book, a few years ago, with the title, if you want, to walk in water, first you've got, to get out, of the boat.

clever title, and yes, that's true. But actually, first, you've got to look, to Jesus. It's no good, getting out of the boat, if he hasn't called you.

But if he has called you, all things, are possible, to him, who believes. And having begun, keep going.

I wonder, if the other disciples, were willing, Peter on, that night. Maybe calling out, to encourage him.

Or were they, shaking their heads, in disbelief. That's silly man, Peter. We don't know. But we do, need to encourage, one another, to keep going, in faith.

[36 : 56] All of this, is really, only another, variation, on that, famous maxim, of the, missionary, William Carey.

Expect, great things, from God. Attempt, great things, for God. In that order. May the Lord, help us all, this week, to do our own, little bit, of walking, on water.

Amen.