

Jesus Walks on The Water

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the Gospel according to Matthew, and chapter 14.

Matthew, chapter 14, and we may just read at verse 22, Matthew 14 at verse 22.

And again this follows the feeding of the 5,000. Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Now when evening came, he was alone there, but the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

Now in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went to them walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost.

[1 : 30] And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Be of good cheer, it is I. Do not be afraid.

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. So he said, Come. And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me.

And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him and said to him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt? And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Then those who were in the boat came and worshipped him, saying, Truly you are the Son of God.

[2 : 32] I want us to think together then on this passage, on Jesus walking on the sea to save his disciples.

And as you know, we have looked at the other two passages, Mark 6, 45 to 52 and John 6, 15 to 21.

These three passages cover the story of Jesus walking to his disciples out there into the middle of the Sea of Galilee and in the midst of a storm.

And you'll notice that the story ends, the account of the miracle ends with the words, Those who were in the boat came and worshipped him.

And that's where we begin this evening by way of introduction, because those who are followers of Christ are never more fitted for worshipping him.

[3 : 36] When they discovered anew the glorious majesty of the person of Christ. And we don't now see him walking on the sea.

Nevertheless, what we do see is him working in people's lives in dramatic ways. And in our own life too, we see him displaying his wonderful glorious power, his sovereign sway over all things.

And the disciples were confronted with that and they worshipped. But they were those who worshipped as those who had discovered again the littleness of their faith.

O you of little faith, verse 31, why did you doubt? And it's in these ways that the Lord brings us to see more of his glory and more of why we ought to trust him and rely on him and worship him too.

And he uses this method to humble us, of course. These disciples, and perhaps Peter all the more, these disciples were humbled by what they saw.

[4 : 52] Because they had the whole thing wrong in their thinking. They were brought low. They thought they were going to perish. They thought this ghost was going to take them and destroy them.

That's the way they viewed it. They were brought low. And we were thinking earlier today on this very subject. How the psalm writer in Psalm 116 said, He was brought low, but God saved him.

He saved him when he was at rock bottom. And this is the way the Lord operates. He fits us by humbling us for believing worship and service.

And at that level we are right where the disciples were, except they were on the sea in that storm. But we ourselves are being taught by the Lord and humbled by the Lord to be more believing and to recognize the glorious power of Christ.

The glorious power of Christ is undiminished. The passage of time and the difficulties that we have confronting us today. Don't alter the fact that as in a moment he can change things.

[6 : 15] He can demonstrate his power to act for those who wait for him. So we want to turn to the incident and we want to look at Jesus dealing with the disciples on this particular occasion at somewhere around four in the morning in the middle of a storm in Galilee.

The first thing I want us to notice here as he begins, if you like, the humbling process is that Jesus leaves his disciples to struggle in the storm.

He leaves his disciples to struggle in the storm. That was brought out by what we read earlier on. It's brought out here in this passage. Verse 24 tells us the boat was now in the middle of the sea. That's about three and a half miles across. Galilee is seven miles more or less wide and about thirteen and a half long. So they were in the middle of the sea tossed by the waves for the wind was contrary.

[7 : 34] And Jesus saw them like that. We'll come back to that. But you see he left them to it. He had fed the multitude five thousand men besides women and children.

And when the people were so impressed by his marvelous miracle of feeding the five thousand with a few fish and some wee barley cakes, they wanted to make him king.

This is the Messiah. Let's make him king. And of course, Jesus was able to prevail upon the people and disperse them and persuade them to go elsewhere and find shelter or make their way home.

And he, from that place, urged his disciples to go on ahead of him back across the lake. Back across to the other side.

Now, sometimes confusion arises here because it's quite clear that there were two Bethsaidas. And one was up in the northeast corner, more or less quite near where the miracle of feeding the five thousand occurred.

[8 : 53] But the one that's most frequently referred to was just near Capernaum on the western shore. And so he tells them to go back across to the other side.

You see there, verse 22, immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side while he sent the multitudes away.

So that's the picture. The best understanding of this, I think, is that he tells them to go back across. And you remember we read in one of the other accounts there, back across to Capernaum because Bethsaida was near Capernaum.

And the point is here, he sent them back across. And he didn't give them any indication as to how he would come after them.

The Lord left them to it in that sense. You go back across, I'll see to me. And in fact, what we discover is he went to the top of the mountain to pour out his heart to his father after a really busy day.

[10 : 05] And no doubt prior to the next demonstration, if you like, of his miraculous power when he would still the storm and take them safely to their destination.

And so what we need is that the disciples set off and they weren't long on underway. Then one of these fierce storms came whizzing down into the lake and suddenly they were in the midst of a raging storm.

We said before, with reference to this, Galilee is famous for these storms that get whipped up very quickly and they became really quite difficult for small boats.

And so the disciples are very soon struggling. Mark 6 verse 48 tells us that Jesus saw them in the midst of the sea toiling in rowing.

They were in difficulty. Darkness was down round and about them and they were toiling. And of course you ask the question, well how did Jesus see them in the darkness?

[11 : 22] Well the answer to that is simply that for him the darkness and the light are both alike. That's what Psalm 139 tells us.

Darkness hideth not from thee, but night doth shine like day. Behold the darkness and the light. To thee are both alike all.

And so he knew exactly where they were and he knew exactly the state they were in and how near to doom they were too, no doubt.

But he left them to it. And in that first point there is a message to ourselves. That's the way the Lord operates. To humble us, to bring us low.

Before he comes near to us to show us more of his wonderful glory and power and his strength. And so as we've said, they were out there on the lake, halfway across, having spent hours getting there rowing.

[12:31] Some suggest about eight and a half hours. Well that's a lot of time rowing. And doubtless they were exhausted and despondent if they weren't actually despairing.

They were there in the darkness in the storm. And anybody here who's been at sea in a storm in the dark will tell you, they'll snag with the darkness in a storm so you simply can't see the waves coming.

That's what makes it difficult. That's what makes it dangerous. You don't know how they're going to hit the boat. And so plenty could be said about it. But it's enough to say that made it all the worse. One unusually high wave. And that could have been the end of the whole story. And they were living with that for these hours in the storm.

Where there is uncertainty in our experience as followers of Christ, it's not comfortable to the mind. We worry and fret.

[13:45] We become anxious. We begin to operate along the lines, what if? And we suddenly find ourselves in a maze, trying to work out this scenario or that.

So there they are. Unsure and afraid. Will they survive this time? Will they cope?

Will they simply end up in the bottom of the lake? The point, the first point we made is simply this.

Jesus left them to it on the lake. And that's what he does in our trials.

He leaves us to it. He leaves us to it until the point comes when he's ready to act. That doesn't mean, I don't mean to say by saying leaves us to it, that he totally and utterly turns his back on us.

[14:54] It's not like that. But no, he leaves us really to struggle. We were talking about the psalmist like that.

He was at the end of his own resources. He was left to it. And in a similar way, our trials at times feel like those very gigantic waves in a smallish boat on the lake of Galilee.

What on earth is going to happen? How am I going to get through this or that? Does the Lord care? What's he done? And just when they're beginning to faint and faint, Jesus comes to them.

Verse 25. Now in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. Jesus comes to his disciples, but they fail to recognize him.

He comes to them on the sea, and when the disciples, verse 26, saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, it is a ghost, and they cried out for fear.

[16:14] So, he leaves them to struggle in the storm, and then he comes to them in the midst of the storm, and in the middle of the night, and they fail to recognize him coming to them.

It is a ghost. I think it's fair to say that we have to use a little bit of sanctified thinking here, and to recognize that they were in a pretty distraught state.

They were feeling pretty desperate. And when they were feeling desperate, then Jesus put to sea, walking on the sea, and approached them in the night.

And they thought they saw a phantom on the stormy waves, and they were terrified. Now, it's a true saying that fishermen are notoriously superstitious whatever part of the world they come from.

And old habits die hard in the Lord's people. You're smiling, because you know that's true.

[17:31] Many fishermen wouldn't do certain things, or wouldn't do certain other things. I remember, having come from a fishing family, I remember that one of the absolutely bad signs among the fishermen was, if you saw a minister walking on the street with his clerical garb on, and they met him, they would go home.

They wouldn't go to sea that day. I can tell you all sorts of stories, but the fact is, fishermen, more or less, are superstitious.

And they were superstitious in those days too. And old habits, even in the Lord's people, as we know, die hard. And of course, their anxiety was heightened to such a degree with what they were seeing coming towards them, that they cried out.

The original there is they shrieked, they screamed, for fear. They were screaming, they were at screaming pitch. For fear.

And I think, sometimes it's better to just let the full emphasis of the word come out. It may not be delicate English, but it's what the Greek says.

[18 : 49] They screamed for fear. I'll be interested to know from the Gaelic speakers how it translates from Gaelic into English.

They screamed for fear. They had such a growing apprehension of their doom. They were expecting to perish through the power of this sinister phantom that was coming to them. That's the way they saw it. Don't forget. We mustn't import that it was Jesus. We must, as it were, stand or sit where they were in the boat in the middle of the night, in the middle of a storm, wondering would they survive.

And then this sinister thing appears. And as far as they're concerned, this is it. And yet, the fact of the matter is they did not recognize Jesus coming to help them.

Do you remember our second point was Jesus came to help them, they failed to recognize him. And that is an important point for you and me.

[20 : 05] A spiritual principle that never changes. The Lord comes to us one way or another in our experience, and we fail to recognize it's him.

We fail to notice he is working here. They stumbled, if you like, in their minds at his method of helping them.

And, if I may just sort of slow this down a wee bit, and simply say that we have to learn from this, we have to remember that the whole creation serves him.

That's why we're singing Psalm 8. It's a psalm about Jesus. How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord, is your name. You have advanced your glory far above the heavens.

The writer of the Hebrews takes verses from that psalm and shows that he felt supremely to Jesus. The whole creation serves him. Psalm 93, we sang there together, the Lord reigns.

[21 : 18] He is clothed with majesty. And even although the noise of the great sea billows is awesome, the voice of the Lord is mightier by far.

We have to take that to heart and we have to apply it. We have to think about how he manages our situation.

God knows our frame, he knows where we are, he knows our experience, he knows our disappointments, our discouragements, our rock-bottom experiences.

He's in charge. He's left us to struggle with them, but he hasn't forsaken us and he comes to us when he knows that time is right.

You know the story about William Cowper, how in a fit of serious depression he planned to throw himself in a lake and he set off in a fog and his horse-drawn carriage eventually took him all the way back to his home.

[22 : 40] And the fit of depression that made him feel he wanted to commit suicide passed and he was back home and he wrote that famous hymn as a result of it God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform he plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Deep and unfathomable minds of never failing skill he works out his wise design and effects his sovereign will.

I lost the quotation here but that is substantially what's being said. And long long before William Cooper wrote his words Moses said of the Lord himself there is none like the God of Jeshua who rise on the heavens for your help and in his excellency upon the sky.

The waves and the billows on the lake of Galilee that threaten to engulf these disciples were his waves and he was in charge of them.

And he walks upon those waves to save his terrified disciples. Someone said that his walking on the sea was anticipating the power of his resurrection body.

[24 : 24] Be that as it may. The fact is he went in that way to help them. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

And his reassuring words were to them be of good cheer don't be afraid verse 27. He spoke to them be of good cheer cheer up it is I don't be afraid.

And one of the old evangelical writers from a German writer said this we often take for another things that happen rather than Christ.

And what he meant by that is we fail to recognize Christ working in this situation or that. We fail to recognize it.

We take another for Christ and we don't look for Christ. They thought they saw a ghost. But it wasn't another.

[25 : 43] It was Christ who came to them at the right time. And let's pray therefore for wisdom and understanding to recognize the Savior coming to us in the word or through some encouragement that we hear from a friend.

He works and he works when we least expect it and in ways that we don't expect. And thirdly, Jesus bids Peter to come to him on the sea.

Peter answered him and said Lord if it really is you bid me to come to you on the water.

So Jesus said come. Now of course Peter is typically impulsive and he says Lord if this is really you command me to come to you and with a compelling word Jesus says come and out Peter goes on to the raging sea.

I think this is something that we often overlook. Peter really did get out of the boat. Peter really did walk on the water. We tend to think about him only as sinking.

[27 : 08] But he started to go forward towards Jesus and that in itself was a tremendous step of faith. The little faith occurred when he took his eye of Jesus suddenly his eyes turned.

We read it there. He walked on the water to go to Jesus but when he saw the wind was boisterous he was afraid and beginning to sink he cried out saying Lord save me.

So he gets off to a good start and then he looks at the difficulties and that too in itself reminds you and me that it's not enough simply to step out in faith we have to go on despite the difficulty there he was looking at the destructive power of the sea and not Jesus the prospect of a watery grave bore in upon him in a flash and he began to sink and so he cries out to the Lord that the Lord would save him and surely this speaks to our own hearts that it is well nigh fatal to us to take our eye of Jesus I remember years ago sometimes these gospel songs can be overdone a bit but sometimes they have a point by overdone

I mean they become favorites of favorites you hear them every time you go to a service but I remember years ago being in Wales and one of the favorites in a particular gospel hall was fix your eyes upon Jesus look full in his wonderful face and the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace and there's an important point in that I mentioned because you see Peter took his eye off Jesus and he began to sink and when we in our experience as a congregation struggling as we are take our eye off Jesus when we begin to lose a sense of his capacity for helping us we are in trouble and I say that to me as well as to you you see if you go back in your own

Christian experience when you first came to know the Lord everything was great you had no doubt about Jesus and his power to save you believed his word come to me and I'll give you rest you believed his word come to me and I will in no wise cast you out and you took him and you came to him and you trusted him but then you see the storms of life batter our poor frame and we begin to take our eye off Jesus you see what he says there Peter went out and he walked on the water to go to Jesus verse 30 but when he saw that the wind was boisterous the raging and roaring of the sea he was afraid and beginning to sink and there's a lesson surely in it that we must refocus on the

[31 : 00] Lord Jesus Christ and I say that having trawled our own situation in recent months we need to refocus and we need to look all the more steadfastly to the Lord to help us and to lift us up and advance us and see what Peter says beginning to sink in this trial on the sea Lord save me Lord save me there's a sense in which we never get beyond that we come in to the faith with Lord save me and we go on in the faith when we hit rock bottom again and again Lord save me that's what we were said this morning I was brought low and he saved me but the same man who said that cried

Lord save me and we know that we can we can come to him and cry to him like that Lord save me and what does it say and immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him he didn't say sorry you're a little faith you've had it he said simply caught him by the hand immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him and said oh you little faith why did you doubt and there's a wonderful encouragement in this surely that the Saviour's hand is mighty to save it's mighty to save our faith at times is so weak we can hardly hold on but the psalm writer said you know we sing it nevertheless continually oh lord

I am with thee thou dost me hold by my right hand it's not I hold you by my right hand it's you hold me psalm 73 verse 23 following you hold me lord and this is wonderful to us it should be wonderful to our hearts the psalmist nearly wrecked his life by being envious of the wicked by wanting what they had and he nearly sank he nearly fell away but the lord kept him and immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him and said oh you of little faith why did you doubt and then

lastly jesus stepped into the boat and the wind ceased of course we should say and peter stepped into the boat too but just think about this as we leave it here they were they had gotten themselves into such a state screaming like frightened children at this ghost on the sea and it wasn't a ghost at all it was jesus and they weren't going to die death by drowning because he was there and we have to realize that as long as we are to be in this world we'll not be left to perish we're safe until we get our home call and we're not to forget it his hand is mighty to save now of course it's easy to be wise after the event but the whole point of these miracles are to make us wise before the next event occurs in our lives so that we're wise and taught and we know what to do we look to the Lord we trust him to save us to bring us through because that's what he did for his disciples that's what he's been doing down through the generations and to all who have found refuge in him and to all who will find refuge in him he says cheer up I have overcome do not be afraid it is I do not continue to be afraid his power to help us is undiminished and I think that this is it no doubt bears upon us individually in our own experience in our health and all sorts of things but it bears upon us about our own life as a congregation his power to help us is undiminished and if he is bringing us low and he is then it is in order to lift us up when we get to the point where there's only one thing to say

Lord save us the storms are his and the waves are his they are his by appointment when no one but Christ could help said the songwriter love lifted me and that's the way we are to think about this sinking we may be but he knows where we're at in our experience and when no one but Christ could help love lifted me and immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him and said to him oh you of little faith why did you doubt then and only then those who were in the boat and [37 : 50] Peter too came and worshipped him truly you are the son of God and we can be sure as we leave it then at that point they were more ready than ever humbled they were more ready than ever to worship and to serve him by faith Amen God God God up God God.

God