

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Saved from Drowning Matthew 14:22-33

In Leipzig, Germany there is a statue of a man named Goethe, the author of “Faust.” The head of the statue is turned toward the university but his feet are pointed in the direction of the Auerbach beer hall! What a graphic picture of competing loyalties.

Each of us struggles with conflicting loyalties; we love Christ but are distracted by the lure of our sinful nature within and the pressure of circumstances without. These compelling voices vie for our allegiance. We sometimes feel as if our faith in God is simply not powerful enough to weather the storms.

How can we be successful in our walk with Christ? How can we follow Him without being distracted by the world, the flesh, and the devil? How can we follow Him with our heart as well as our head and our feet? How do we manage the fears that would engulf us?

In **Matt. 14:22-36**, Christ taught Peter how to survive a storm. If he was to be a faithful man, despite impending powerful opposition, Peter would have to learn the secret of standing against contrary winds. Again the Master Teacher chose to use a common experience to teach an uncommon lesson. A storm on the Sea of Galilee would become a prototype of the storms of life.

Background

For a moment I would like to attempt to put the passage we will be examining this morning into a context which will help us to better understand the dynamics of what has been taking place in Peter’s life in relationship with Christ.

There is approximately a year that separates Peter’s first meeting with Christ which we examined in **John 1:35-42** where Peter recognized Jesus as the Messiah, and the fishing incident which we studied two weeks ago in **Luke 5:1-11**. During the course of that year Peter continued to fish along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. However, after witnessing the “miracle of the fishes,” **Luke 5:11** tells us, “**And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.**” The life of Peter, his brother Andrew and his fishing partners, James and John had been forever changed.

Peter never again returned to fishing during the public ministry of Christ. From that point on wherever we find Christ we find Peter. As we approach **Matt. 14:22-33** approximately another year has passed. A spectacular year of extraordinary teaching and incredible demonstrations of miraculous power all in the area of Galilee.

But it also was a time of increasing danger. In **Matthew 14:1-13** we are told of the violent death of John the Baptist. In **V. 14** we are told when Jesus heard about John’s death he withdrew Himself.

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You would think after such an event as the feeding of the 5,000 that the disciples would be able to trust the Lord. You would think that no matter what the inward pull of their flesh or the outward threats they would encounter, they would remain faithful to the Lord. But this is not so. Twice in the passage we will be examining this morning, Christ will give commands and twice the disciples, and even more specifically Peter, will prove themselves faithless while Jesus remains faithful.

And yet as I have shared with you earlier the story we are about to examine will help us to understand what is really truly necessary if we are going to avoid their same mistakes.

The First Command Matthew 14:22-27

The first command that we see Christ giving is in **V. 22. “And immediately He made the disciples get into the boat, and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.”** Christ it would appear, very forcefully let it be known to His disciples what He expected them to do. First of all, get into the boat and then to go to the other side. This was the will of Christ for their lives at this specific moment in time.

After He had done this, He finally was able to do what He wanted to do all along. He went up into a mountain to pray. **V. 23a “And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray...”** It was very late in the day and evening had arrived. **V. 23b “... and when it was evening, He was there alone.”**

Usually the disciples could row across the sea in an hour or two, but this night a strong wind had arisen. Most likely these winds came out of the north from the direction of Mount Hermon. **V. 24 “But the boat was already many stadia away from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.”** The KJV reads “**in the midst of the sea**” and the NIV reads “**already considerable distance**” but again as is so often the case the NAS is the most literal of the translations. Now all we have to find out is how long is a “stadia” to get some idea of how far the disciples had gone. A stadia is a Roman measurement and it is approximately 1/8 of a mile. According to **John 6:19** they were three to four miles away from the shore. This would mean that they were between 24 to 32 “stadia” away from the shore. They had been commanded to go across to the other side but rather than getting any closer to where they had been commanded to go they most likely were just as far away now as they had been when they first begun, but now they are further out into the Lake. Has Christ led them to attempt the impossible without His awareness or help? Were they in this storm because they were outside the will of God or in the will of God? They were in this storm as a result of being obedient to Christ’s command. We should not have the mistaken notion that a storm is proof that we are “out of the will of God.” In fact our most fierce opposition comes when we are in fact living in obedience to Him. Let us not fall into the error of thinking that we have made a wrong decision just because we are sailing into a storm. Sometimes our greatest trials come because we are walking in obedience to Christ’s command.

Has Christ led them to attempt the impossible without His awareness or help? This is unthinkable for this to happen for the very simple reason that though we may be faithless, He remain faithful. How do we see this demonstrated in the story before us?

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Jesus was fully aware of what was happening. Although the disciples could not see Jesus when He was praying on the hilltop, He could see them. This is clear from **Mark 6:48** which tells us that He could see them “**straining**

at the oars.” We must all come to the point in our walk with the Lord that we understand that the storms of life may hide the face of God; yet He is watching us, monitoring our movements. The disciples would have been well served if they would have understood this. When push comes to shove in life, as it so often does, it is more important that God see us than we see Him.

How else do we see the faithfulness of Christ demonstrated? By Him coming to them, walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee. **V. 25, “And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.”** The fourth watch would be between the hours of 3 to 6 AM in the morning. They had been out on the sea since the prior evening. They must have begun to assume that this time Christ had given them a command they could not keep. Try as they might, they simply weren’t able to obey His instructions to “to go to the other side.” But at their moment of desperation, Christ appeared to help them. Christ knew how much they could take, and met them at their darkest hour.

So we would think everything is wonderful. We might think all their problems are solved but this is not the way it happened at all. Even though Christ has proven Himself faithful, the disciples as is so often the case will prove themselves faithless. How do we see this in this story?

V. 26, “And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were frightened, saying, “It is a ghost! And they cried out in fear.” Now I understand that even though they had seen Jesus do some pretty incredible things, they probably would not have expected Him to be coming to them at 3-6 am, in the midst of a storm, walking on the water. But even though this would have been surprising their response was the response of the faithless. They responded in fear. What did they have to fear? What had Christ told them to do? He had commanded them to get into the boat and cross over to the other side. Even this was a ghost they had absolutely nothing to fear. This terrifying “ghost”, this phantom, was not something to be feared, but a hidden blessing. It was Jesus! The same thing could very well be true of our own lives, in the midst of our storms. The bad news you or I received recently may well have been Christ simply trying to put His arms around us!

Second Command Matthew 14:27-33

This response on the part of the disciples prompted Christ to call out to them. **V. 27, “But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”** Peter apparently instantly recognized His voice!!

According to the laws of nature, Jesus should not have been able to walk on water. There is a law of physics that says, “The buoyant force exerted by a liquid is equal to the weight of the water displaced.”

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This means simply that water will carry an object only to the extent of the weight of the water which has been displaced by that object. Jesus should have sunk to His shoulders, eventually becoming just as helpless in the storm as the disciples. But He is God, Lord over the forces of nature and over the law of gravity. **HE WALKED ON THE RAGING WATERS OF GALILEE WITH THE CONFIDENCE OF ONE WHO WAS TREADING ON A MARBLE FLOOR.**

The disciples at that moment must have been filled with awe. For them to actually be witnessing something all their senses told them was impossible, must have been paralyzing. This was apparently true of all but PETER!! At that moment in time he had an overwhelming desire to go to Christ. And he expresses that desire in words. **V. 28, “And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to You on the water.”**

Christ immediately responds and commands Peter to come in **V. 29, “And He said, “Come!” and Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.”** As far as we know, throughout history, only two people ever walked on water, Peter and Christ. But this magic moment quickly slipped away. Peter having gotten out of the boat had been walking toward Jesus. In order to walk toward Jesus he had to be looking at Jesus. But something else soon captured his attention. **V. 30, “But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, ‘Lord save me!’”** It would have been nice as soon as he stepped out of the boat for the wind to have stopped and the waves to have dissipated, but this did not happen. Why can't we, when we decide to come to Jesus, find the storms of our lives ceasing. Thirty years later, Peter himself would write, **“In this you greatly rejoice even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:6-7.)** Our faith is precious to God. And only in a trial can faith come to its fullest expression. In this story as we have just read, we can see very clearly the faithfulness of Christ and the faithlessness of Peter.

Christ was faithful. Peter asked Jesus to command him to come and Jesus commanded him to come. Jesus will not refuse those who desire to come to Him. This is true whether it is in response to Christ's invitation for us to find rest from sin and the consequences of sin as we saw in **Matt. 11:28-30** or for us to find grace to help in the time of our need as we find in **Heb. 4:16**. Those wishing to come, truly come to Jesus, will not be disappointed.

However in stark contrast to the faithfulness of Christ is the faithlessness of Peter. Christ had commanded Peter to come, there was nothing for him to fear but what happened?

He shifted his eyes from Christ to the wind. He had a moment of self-awareness, the sensation that he was doing something which under normal conditions was impossible, he turned to face the wind and the waves and was filled with fear and immediately began to sink.

What can we conclude made it possible for Peter to walk on water? It was his focus. He has been focusing on the object of his faith, but in that moment of temptation he changed his focus to the object of his fear.

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This is why Jesus responds as He does in **V. 31**, “**And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith why do you doubt?’**”

What was Peter’s greatest enemy? Not the storm, nor the waves, but doubt was his greatest enemy. There was no need to calculate the speed of the wind, there was no need to measure the depth of the water, for none of these forces could keep Peter from his victory. Doubt and doubt alone was the only enemy that could make Peter fall.

A high-wire performer said that he must walk the wire concentrating completely on a fixed point on the other side. If he has his attention diverted by looking at someone beneath him, or if he were to glance at the audience, he could lose his balance. Concentration is the key to walking where others have fallen. The disciples had lost their concentration in respect to Christ’s first command when they were filled with fear, when they saw what they thought was a ghost. They had forgotten the words of Christ commanding them to go to the other side. And Peter lost his concentration here in light of Christ’s second command in this text for him to come.

CONCLUSION

Whatever our source of greatest temptation, whether that is fear, as was the case with the disciples as they saw what they perceived to be a ghost, or the wind and the waves, as in the case of Peter. The way to victory is still the same.

We must keep our focus upon Jesus and His Word. We do not face the temptation of anger and bitterness effectively by focusing on our anger and bitterness. Saying such things as “I know that I shouldn’t be angry and bitter.” We are to turn to Jesus. It is extremely difficult to continue to harbor fear, lust, anger, bitterness, jealousy covetousness or whatever as long as we are looking at Jesus. What are some of the ways we can be helped in maintaining our concentration?

1. By maintaining regular times in His Word.
2. By living a life characterized by prayer.
3. By staying in close fellowship with the church.

The strength of satan or the intensity of our trials is not what forces us to fall; unbelief is always our mortal enemy. In light of this, let us remember the words of the song which says:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace