

WALKING ON WATER

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SCRIPTURE: Matthew 14

Alright! We're looking at Matthew's gospel and the 14th chapter. When you look at this chapter and I'll let you find this passage in your own devices or the bible, but when you look at this particular chapter it starts off with a bit of sad news. We see that John the Baptist is beheaded. He spoke out against Herod telling him that he shouldn't be with his brother Philip's wife, Herodias and she didn't like it and so on his birthday, the daughter of Herodias was dancing and Herod liked it very much and promised her anything that she wanted with an oath. Prompted by her mother, she asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter and Herod gave it to her.

In verse 13 it says that when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself and when people heard of this they followed Him on foot from the cities and I imagine that Jesus was so grieved that John was no more and wanted to just spend time alone and yet even as He went to the secluded place, people followed Him, for His fame had spread and people knew that there were wonderful things that He was doing right from teaching to healing people and confronting the demonic and so they come there and they find him and they even though He is on a boat and when He comes back ashore He sees all of these people there and the disciples come to Him and say, this place is a desolate place, send the people home so that they can go into the village and buy food. Then we see the famous narrative of Jesus feeding the five thousand and then at the end of it in verse 22 immediately, He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side while He sent the crowds away.

I'm reading from verse 23

"After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night (that would be somewhere between 3.00 and 6.00 AM) He came to them, walking on the sea. 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 courage, it is I do not be afraid."

Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me."

Immediately, Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son.”

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.”

Well, this is a passage that you know very well and you have heard it many times and I have preached from this a couple of times as well. So when this popped up for me from the Lectionary I was thinking Lord, is this what You really want me to preach or should I look for another passage but couldn’t get away from this particular passage and so I said, “Okay Lord, I’m going to preach, I believe that Your Word continues to have fresh revelation for us as we look into it and I’m just going to wait upon You to show me what needs to be shared with everybody on this Sunday or whenever people listen to this sermon.” So I’m trusting the Lord for that. Would you just join me as we seek the Lord’s anointing and instruction for us?

Lord Jesus, this is an account of how You walked on water and how You dealt with Peter. Lord, we want to know how this relates to us today. So Lord, inspire us by the power of Your Holy Spirit, reveal fresh truth to us and help us to apply it in our day to day lives, we ask this in Your precious and Holy Name, Lord, Jesus, Amen.

So here’s the story—Jesus sends the disciples across and He goes up as He wants to be by Himself pray and the disciples go across in the boat and they come across this storm and they are far from the shore so they are stuck in the middle and out of the storm, the wind and the waves and all of that they see a figure walking to them and they are terrified. That’s not something that you see every day. In the midst of a storm for a figure to come walking, especially, walking on the waves, on the sea and so they are terrified and they think it is a ghost and then Jesus cries out to them He says, “it’s okay, it’s Me, don’t be afraid.” Then this remarkable response from Peter, suddenly, the fear that they all had and he must have had as well is gone. The moment he knows it is Jesus he says, “Lord, if it is You, then command me to come to You on the water.” And all Jesus says is, “Come!” and Peter is over the boat and walking to Jesus. Then the bible tells us that suddenly he saw the waves and he began to get fearful and immediately, he began to sink. But then he cried out and said, “Lord, save me!” And immediately Jesus reached out and picked him up and said, “Oh, ye of little faith, why did you doubt.” And when they got into the boat immediately, the storm ceased and the rest of them on the boat said, “Surely, You’re the Son of God.”

Well, you and I won’t have much opportunity to walk on waves, but as we look at this particular passage, I believe that there are some thoughts that we can glean from it that we can take and apply into our lives that will enable us to live lives of excitement and exhilaration. Because just imagine Peter, a fisherman, who lived his life just under the vagaries of the weather and the sea. They dictated what he could and couldn’t do. And yet, here he is, having walked on the water. Imagine, what an exciting moment it must have been for him to just be walking and looking around and saying, “Wow! I’m actually walking on

this water in the midst of a storm. With all these rising waves, I'm walking." And I believe that in our own lives as we go through our own journey with the Lord, that the Lord doesn't intend for life to be boring. He doesn't intend for us to just live kind of mediocre lives that don't have any excitement, we get up and its one boring day after another, we just do what we need to do, I believe that every now and then God just gives us mountain top experiences that just excite us that are so thrilling and that's part of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not a boring thing, it's not just something so sad and dreary but there's great joy in following after Jesus. I believe that even as we look at this passage we can find wonderful nuggets of truth that I'm going to share with you that can help us and if that is exactly where you are just going through the motions of being a Christian or a disciple and saying well there's nothing extraordinary that happens that maybe, today you can say, "Lord, I'd like to figuratively walk on water too, to get that kind of excitement in my life. So I'm going to place before you about five points and then very quickly go through them and see how we can apply it to our own lives to move from just an ordinary kind of life into something that is exhilarating and exciting and thrilling in following after the Lord.

1. Every now and then in our Christian walk we get to do something exhilarating or exciting— SEIZE IT.

Listen to this, all the disciples had an opportunity that day to walk on water. Isn't it? All of them did, only Peter seized that opportunity.

The old adage is so true, "Opportunity only knocks once." It just comes to us once, and if we miss it, we miss it. I think of Peter sometimes just sitting with people and then reminiscing about his time with Jesus and then his eyes lighting up and then saying, "You know, I walked on water. I, I, walked on water towards Jesus" and the awe in people's faces as they looked at him and said my goodness we're in the presence of one who actually walked on water and Peter was able to say that because he took the opportunity when it came. Lord, if it's you, command me to come to you on the water." "Come!" said Jesus and he was out of the boat and walking to Jesus. The others get to tell their friends and their children and grandchildren, I don't know, but they get to say, you know what? I was there too when Peter walked on water. I was there too, I didn't walk on water but I saw Peter walking on water. That's all they could get excited about. Nothing compared to the excitement that Peter would have had in actually walking on water. So that's the first point that I want us to think about that God puts into our lives wonderful moments that will excite us. I think that that's part of what is captured in the abundant life that Jesus promised that we will have wonderful moments when we trust Him, when we're able to do just amazing things and be part of those amazing things that God allows into our lives, but we've got to seize that opportunity so seize it, is the first point.

2. Do due diligence first.

What do I mean by that? Peter made sure before he got out and began to try walking on the water, first he said, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” If it’s you, then you say the word and when you say the word, I will then come. Due diligence— He didn’t just jump and say, “Oh that’s Jesus, let me just walk just like He is walking.” No, if it is you, command me. Then Jesus said, “Come!” and then he was off and out of the boat. Is the Lord in it is the question we need to ask. Is this from the Lord? Before we jump into something that is exciting or exhilarating make sure that this is what the Lord is putting on your plate. How do you do that? How do we know that this is from the Lord? Well, I’ve always said that God’s will and God’s peace always go together. So however daunting, however challenging, this thing is that you think God is inviting you to take a step into just as getting out of the boat must have been to Peter. Do you have that sense of peace not from saying, “Oh yeah, I can do this, walking on water is not a problem. But wow! Goodness that’s the most difficult thing I’ve ever seen, but why do I have this strange sense of well-being about it. God’s will and His peace always go together as Paul would say in Philippians 4:7 “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” It’s this peace that will come together to let you know that this is the will of God because if it’s not you will feel God’s Spirit ruffling the waters of your heart and saying, no this is not from me. But when you have this sense of peace and well-being that tells you this is so difficult, and yet I have the sense that this is right. That’s when you need to be able to move, so make sure that you do due diligence first before jumping in.

3. Keep your eyes on Him—His power, presence and promises— and not on your circumstances.

Situations and circumstances beloved always have the potential to be overwhelming but remember, you’re not operating in your own strength. You’re operating in the power of the Lord God almighty. Peter could never have walked on water by himself as a fisherman. God gave him that beautiful moment, empowered him to do something extraordinary like what he did. And it is through the power of God that we are able to do these things that our human minds and capacity saying, that is not possible. And again Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” If this thing is from the Lord, then He has enabled you, He has empowered you to do it beloved.

You remember the story of Caleb and Joshua who went with the other 10 Israelites to check out the Promised Land. We read about it in Numbers chapter 13 and its worth looking at if you would quickly just turn to the 13th chapter of Numbers from verse 27 onwards. They come back and after checking out the land this is what they come and tell Moses.

“We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong,

and the cities are fortified *and* very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan.”

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.” But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.” So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land, through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of *great* size. (then they said, and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

Remember, this is the land that had been promised. God was already in it and yet when they went in, ten of them focused on the things that seemed daunting, forgetting that they were actually walking in the promise of the almighty God, except for Caleb and Joshua, the only two who made it into the promised land for God made them wander for forty years before they could come back in. So make sure, make very sure that you don't get caught up by situations and circumstances that you keep your eyes on Him and His power, His presence and His promises to you.

4. If you fall, call out to Him.

Sometimes, when we fall when we've taken a step of faith and we fall then our gut response is to crawl into a hole and say, “My goodness, I'm never going to do this again. Lord, I thought I was following you and look where it's got me now I'm just upset and angry and then it gets deeper and deeper. We stop reading the Word and we stop praying, we stop taking communion and all of these things just add up and yet it could be that there was an obstacle that came, but God was willing for you to move past it. God was willing that this was still His will, just as it was for Peter to walk on water. He fell because he took his eyes off the Lord, but it was still the will of Jesus for Peter to walk on water.

So, make sure that when you fall, or if you fall, that you call out to the Lord. Don't try and rely on your own self, as Peter said, “Lord, save me!” and immediately, Jesus did that.

I remember many years ago when we were just getting ready to going to study and seminary and all of that and going through a very difficult time in terms of health because we answered the call to go and get equipped and then come back and start the church and got hit by trouble with my knees osteoarthritis is what they said at that time and that's the time I found that I had diabetes as well and it seemed like we were being thwarted or I was being thwarted because I was thinking Lord, you called us to serve you and now this is what I've got and then remember saying, “No, but I'm not whatever it is we are going to serve you.” Then one day I remember lying down in

bed and just crying out aloud and being physically attacked by Satan. I was feeling a hand on my neck pushing me down and that was the only time I've actually been physically assaulted by Satan. I remember crying out to God and saying Lord, help me! And then the hand was released. I remember praying the next couple of days or sometime around that time saying, "Lord, I desperately need you to hold me during this time and the Lord said look up and I did and I saw this hand reaching out to me, and said it's always there. All you need to do is to hold onto me. So beloved, recognize that when we take steps of faith there may be times when we fall but God's hand is always there, ready to pick us up, to put us back onto firm ground and in Peter's case firm waters and to help us to continue on that way, rather than retreat draw into ourselves and forget about what God wanted to do.

5. When Jesus offers you His hand— TAKE IT!

I remember reading a story of a man who was on his second floor flat house and the floods had come in and it was pouring and he just got on top of the roof and he was crying out to the Lord and saying, "Lord, save me! You've got to help me. And a row boat came by and the guy shouted and said, "Hey, if you want to just jump in here I'll take you to safety and the guy said no, it's okay, God's going to come and get me and the row boat went away and then a motorboat came by and a guy saw him on the roof and said, "Hey, come to me I'll take you to safety and the guy said, "No! No! I've got faith; God's going to get me. I've been praying and telling God about my situation" and the motorboat went away and then a helicopter came and they dropped a rope to him and said "Hey, grab a hold of the rope and we'll take you to safety" and he said, "No, No I'm praying God's going to get me" and then the flood waters came and then the man drowned and landed up in heaven and couldn't wait to get to God and say, Lord, what happened I trusted You and then as the story goes he did and said God what happened? And God said well, I sent a row boat, I sent motorboat and I sent a helicopter but you didn't take any of them. That's a story, but it brings home a truth isn't it? Sometimes, we have very set ways of how God must come and save us. We have our own little box that we say, "Okay Lord, I need Your help but this is the route that You need to come to help me. God says, "I mean that small little box that you have? I don't operate inside your box. This is my world, my universe, I created it. I can come in, in any way that you have no idea about and help you. But when I do take my hand and allow me to bring you to shore or to safety."

So don't have preset ways of how God should save you or provide for you or take care of you. Remember, He knows what's best for you.

I started by saying that the Christian life is not just a sombre drudgery, that it's fun to follow him to walk with and to converse with Him and experience Him in fresh new ways and yes there may be difficult ways, challenging ways, but we still follow after Him. Let's not make the normal average our normal, the one that we just go through the motions.

Let's look to the Lord and say, "Lord, if Peter could walk on water, I'd like to do something too. I'd like for you to help me to do something that defies everything that I can think about Lord, what is it that you have for me that's exhilarating. The disciples saw Him heal the sick, the lame, the blind, the deaf, feed thousands of people, raise Lazarus from the dead, see the transfiguration, and now walk on water, exciting, exhilarating things and He is the same God beloved, that you and I follow. Don't settle for just a mundane, average dark life.

John Ortberg wrote a book and titled it, "If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat". Maybe, today God is saying okay, stop hanging on to the side rails of the swimming pool, you've got to get out to the deep and enjoy the water. Stop playing safe, I've got things, I've got you. Don't just settle for things in your life, take that step or leap of faith. Hold His hand and say, "What do You have in store for me Jesus that I can feel the wind on my face?" I want excitement, exhilaration, elation and thrill in my life because I know that that's part of what it means to follow the Almighty God and to be His disciple. Amen.

Well, our closing hymn is about Jesus.

"Jesus is all the world to me:
My life, my joy, my all.
He is my strength from day to day;
Without Him I would fall.
When I am sad, to Him I go;
No other one can cheer me so.
When I am sad, He makes me glad;
He's my Friend.

Jesus is all the world to me,
My Friend in trials sore.
I go to Him for blessings, and
He gives them o'er and o'er.
He sends the sunshine and the rain;
He sends the harvest's golden grain:
Sunshine and rain, harvest of grain—
He's my Friend.

Jesus is all the world to me,
And true to Him I'll be.
Oh, how could I this Friend deny
When He's so true to me?
Following Him I know I'm right;
He watches o'er me day and night.

Following Him by day and night,
He's my Friend.

Jesus is all the world to me,
I want no better friend.
I trust Him now; I'll trust Him when
Life's fleeting days shall end.
Beautiful life with such a Friend;
Beautiful life that has no end!
Eternal life, eternal joy,
He's my Friend.

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