

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Jesus Saves Sinking People

Last week we witnessed a beautiful scene as Jesus well over 5,000 hungry people. It was a glorious thing, but it didn't take long for things to change. The people wanted to make Jesus their king; and Jesus wanted none of that. Before the disciples seemed to even know what was happening, Jesus "**made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side.**" Then Jesus proceeded to dismiss the crowd.

Stop for a minute and put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. He compelled them to go; didn't give them any choice in the matter. It all seems very rushed - "Hurry up, get in the boat and get out of here. Go to Magdala. I will meet you there!" Lo and behold, they found themselves in the middle of a storm in the middle of the night; and the storm was working against them. They were rowing against strong waves for anywhere from three to six hours. They were maybe three miles out in the middle of the lake and it was somewhere between three and six in the morning. Don't forget also that they just got done serving maybe ten thousand people a meal. They had to have been absolutely exhausted.

What would have gone through your mind at this point? "Why did Jesus send us out so quickly? Couldn't we have stayed on the shore and waited? Now we're stuck out here in the middle of this lake all by ourselves and we're going to drown!" After all the hopes and dreams they had of following Jesus into ushering in the new kingdom; all to drown in a middle of a lake! How quickly things changed!

That's how the Israelites felt when Moses led them out of slavery; just after God used the powerful plagues to loosen Pharaoh's grip; only to be led to the edge of destruction at the Red Sea. How quickly things can change!

That's the way life is sometimes; you're pushed into a boat in the middle of a lake and left to paddle until exhaustion. You didn't choose to go in the boat. You were shoved in it; and since God is in charge it is easy to blame Him. Imagine if you had a stroke today and you couldn't use half of your body. What if you lost your

job? What if your house burnt down? You'd be paddling upstream pretty hard and not making much ground. It doesn't take much for things to go south in a hurry. How quickly life can change; to feel abandoned. "Where did you go, God?"

We know where God went in this story. Jesus had gone off by Himself to pray. That's why He originally went to other side of the lake. John the Baptist had been beheaded. He wanted to talk to His Father in prayer, so He finally did. But that didn't matter to the disciples. In their minds He couldn't have picked a worse time to leave and pray. It didn't matter if Jesus was only four miles away. For all intensive purposes it could have been a million miles since it was beyond possible for him to reach them or save them. In the disciples minds they were abandoned.

But Jesus didn't lose sight of His disciples; not for one second. He knew exactly where they were and exactly how to find them. He hadn't abandoned them at all. It didn't matter that there was a storm raging. Nor did it matter that the disciples were in the middle of a lake. It was no barrier for Jesus at all even without a boat. Nothing would be able to separate Him from His disciples; not even a storm; He was willing to defy gravity; even in His humility; just for them. Here we see the truth of what Paul wrote to the Romans that "**Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" There are no storms that can keep Jesus away from you.

But even when Jesus came, the disciples didn't exactly jump for joy. **When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.** It takes a lot to make a grown man scream in fear; this put them over the edge. They were already exhausted after all they'd been through. Why not assume this was a ghost? Physical beings can't walk on water. They went from a fear of drowning to a fear of the supernatural. You may have had such fears in your house when you heard someone walking in the middle of the night; not sure who it was; waiting for a voice. You hold your breath; lay completely still; barely breathe; waiting to determine who or what it is.

Jesus didn't wait. He spoke immediately after they screamed. He didn't want them to be terrified of Him. With two simple commands and a simple identification; Jesus removed all fear. It didn't take any more words than that. "**Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.**" How ironic it was that that which terrified them ended up being their greatest comfort. The person they thought was nothing but a ghost ended up being their God! All this became clear with a simple word of identification. "**It is I.**" The literal phrase in the Greek is, "I am."

The funny thing was that the storm was still raging and they were still in the middle of the sea. The danger was still real. None of that had changed. But when they saw Jesus walking on water and showing His power over it; all of their fears melted; they forgot all about that; all with the simple identification of Jesus, "**I am.**" That is the same way that God defined Himself to Moses in the Old Testament. Tell the Israelites, "**I am**" has sent you. That same God who guided the Israelites through the Red Sea was with them now in the middle of the storm in the Sea of Galilee. Everything would be ok. He - the eternal and all powerful God and creator of the sea and the sky - would get them through it just fine.

Isn't it a good reminder for us on what to do in the middle of the storms of life? When you start screaming in fear, Jesus whispers to you, "Shh. I am." Stop screaming and listen to Him. Get focused on WHO is with you yet; the same One who died for you and rose from the dead and promised to be with you to the end of the age;

the same One who sent His Holy Spirit into you at your baptism; who gives you Himself in the Lord's Supper; stay focused on Him. He is still eternal. He is still in power. He is still with you in the middle of the storms. He never promised you there wouldn't be storms. He never promised you that you wouldn't drown. But He did promise that He would be with you always - to the very end of the world. He who tread on water also treaded on death. He promised you that you would rise from the dead and live with Him forever. When you focus on the eternal One; that makes all the winds and the waves of life go away.

Peter was so focused on Jesus that he even felt safer OUTSIDE of the boat - as long as he was closer to Jesus. Yet Peter was not so presumptuous as to just jump out of the boat without the word of the Lord. He asked Jesus to command Him; so that he would have permission to do something that would be foolish at any other time; and come outside of the boat in the middle of the storm; and walk on water to Jesus. Jesus commanded it, and Peter did it! He actually walked on water! What focus and faith Peter had to do such a thing; something that had never been done before; not even by the Israelites on their way from Egypt! Instead of parting the sea, they were walking on top of it! How amazing that Peter was willing to request such a command; to do such a thing; and that Jesus granted it!

Would any of us have been so bold? Would we not have been like the other 11? "We'll wait here for you to come to us Jesus. You're doing great! Keep it up!" We love to trust in Jesus as long as we also have a boat to sit in; but we never want to be without the boat. We need our security blankets; parents and spouses; jobs and abilities; things that are physical which we can touch. But how many of us are so bold as to follow Him and attempt to do the things He told us to - trust in Him to work out impossible situations - condemning sin when we should - fighting against the devil - reaching out to the lost? Peter wanted to go to Jesus; no matter that it would take a miracle to do so. That's amazing. It must have felt awesome to be able to do that!

What is even more amazing? How quickly he sank. **When he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"** Peter became afraid of something that was invisible; something he couldn't even actually see; he became afraid of wind - when he saw the wind producing the waves and blowing the rain through the air. What happened to Peter's great faith? Jesus asked him, "**Why did you doubt?**" But Jesus knew, and so did Peter. Peter lost focus. And the minute he lost focus, the powerful wind started terrorizing him. He started thinking, "How am I doing this? Why did I get out of the boat?" He started sinking. What was the key thing that made Peter's faith strong and then weak? It was the focus of his faith. When he was looking at Jesus his faith was strong. When he was looking at the waves his faith was weak.

It doesn't take long to lose your focus. It doesn't take much to start sinking. Even though Peter was able to walk on water, Jesus said that he had little faith. Why? Because it was only short lived and lost focus on Jesus. In the end, Jesus isn't going to care two bits if you gave millions of dollars to the poor, built hospitals, gave all of your time to charities; even if you walked on water or moved mountains; none of that will matter if you lose your focus on Christ. But Peter did the right thing when he started sinking; even with his weak faith. He looked back to the one who enabled him to walk on water in the first place. He **cried out, "Lord, save me!"**

Again we find the same word that we found before. **Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. . . when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.**³³ **Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."** Jesus didn't wait around. He didn't make Peter beg. Jesus reached out HIS hand and caught Peter. Once they got back in the boat, the wind died. The very

thing that threatened them with death was put to death. Jesus saved the day. He saved their lives.

That's the beauty in this whole story. This is not a lesson on how to walk on water. It's a lesson in God's mercy. Jesus saves sinking people. Oh that this would encourage and enable you to cry out to Him when you're sinking and look to Him even when you're walking on water in the midst of a storm. Somehow you might think that Jesus will only save you in the boat. Not so. Especially when you're sinking; when your faith has lost focus and become weak; that's when you need to cry out to Him all the more.

It's amazing to think about the roller coaster the disciples were put through in this whole ordeal; especially Peter. They went from the amazing day of hearing Jesus preach, feeding over 5,000 people - to nearly drowning in the sea; completely exhausted. They went from being terrified of a supposed ghost to seeing Christ. Peter went from walking on water to sinking in the sea to being lifted from the water and brought safely in the boat. Then, after all of that, the wind died down and they were IMMEDIATELY brought to shore from being in the middle of the lake as well. (John 6:21)

What does this tell us? Life can be a roller coaster! But we don't have to wait for Christ to come to us. We know where He is. We know where we can find Him. Think about it. Just because He ascended into heaven doesn't mean He's locked up there somehow. Doesn't He still speak to you in the Word that you've heard today? Doesn't He still give you His body and blood in the bread and wine? And doesn't the Holy Spirit still come through the water of baptism? You know where to find God.

We also know that with Christ nothing is impossible for Him to save us from. No storm is too big. No distance too long. No laws that are implanted on this world are able to get in the way of His will. He walked on water! He walked out of the grave! You think your storm is too big for Him to come through? You think your problems are too big? You think you've fallen too far? You could be on the bottom of the ocean; Jesus could reach down there when you look up. Don't lose your focus. This is the risen Christ here we're dealing with. "**I am**" is still the same. He's been through the storms of hell and back. Nothing can stop Him from saving you when you look to Him in faith.

So remember to stay focused on Christ. Life is going to change. Some days you'll be enjoying a nice meal with your friends on the hillside of a mountain; then the next you'll be in the middle of a storm or drowning in the sea. Having a strong faith doesn't revolve around you walking on water for a few seconds. It means staying focused on Christ in the middle of the storm; no matter where you are; safely in the boat; sinking in the water; or walking on it. Even if you're sinking; just remember to focus again on the One who saves the sinking. You aren't saved by the strength of your faith. You're saved by the One your faith is focused on; the One that walks on water and has walked from the grave. His name is Jesus Christ. He saves sinking sinners. He saves us. Amen.