

WORD OF TRUTH

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LORD SAVE ME!

The Shortest Prayer in the Bible!

Matthew 14:22-33

The Lord Jesus had recently fed the 5000 men, plus women and children, in Galilee. *“The importance of this outstanding miracle can be gathered from the fact that it is the only one of our Lord’s miracles to be mentioned by all four gospels.”* -Herbert Lockyer (1) The total number fed may have exceeded 10,000 people.

Just afterward we read: *“And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone”* (Matthew 14:22-23). Jesus was likely in prayer regarding His upcoming ministry in the Gentile regions such as Tyre and Sidon, and perhaps for His coming ordeal in Jerusalem. Isn’t it striking that Christ, the Messiah, was so often in prayer?

After His time of prayer the Lord began the journey to rejoin his disciples, who by this time were about halfway across the Sea of Galilee. His method of travel was different from anything ever seen. As I said in my recent article, *Walking on the Water*, in our day there are many jokes about walking on the water. I mentioned the famous football coach (the late Paul ‘Bear’ Bryant of the University of Alabama), who was jokingly said to have such abilities as to be able to walk on water. I think we all know that such a feat is beyond the power of mortal men. But Jesus Christ was able to walk on water, and he was doing that for three or four miles to get to his disciples. In my previous article I had said *seven miles*, but my information was probably inaccurate. The sea of Galilee is not that wide. In *total* miles, it is about seven miles wide, and is about thirteen miles long. If He was only halfway across, it was not over four miles. Anyway, I would almost wager that **you** can’t walk that far on water. I would go further and say **you can’t walk on water at all!** Only the Son of God can do this. He was walking on water in an intense storm! As our text says: *“But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea”* (Matthew 14:24-25). Note that the wind was *contrary*. It was *against them*. They were *tossed with waves*. It was not a pleasant boat ride! *“The peaceful calm of the Sea of Galilee can quickly become transformed by a violent storm. Winds funnel through the east-west aligned Galilee hill country and stir up the waters quickly. More violent are the winds that come off the hills of the Golan Heights to the east. Trapped in the basin, the winds can be deadly to fishermen.”*(2)

These ships of that time were not like today’s modern ships with several decks, individual cabins, a restaurant or two, saunas, swimming pools and a ballroom. This was likely a vessel around 26.5 feet long, 7.5 feet wide, and 4.5 feet high. It could hold 15 men. (Really, a boat!) (3)

The point is, such a ship was under great pressure in such a storm. Imagine a man walking on this

storm tossed sea as if He was taking a stroll through a park! This was Jesus. The contrary wind did not bother Him. Remember in an earlier incident Jesus was with His disciples on a ship in a storm, and He was asleep. They were scared out of their wits. *“And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, **Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?** Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!”* (Matthew 8:25-27)

We are told it was the fourth watch of the night when Jesus approached their ship. By Roman military reckoning there were four watches of three hours each in a night; from 6.00 P.M. until 9.00 P.M.; 9.00 P.M. until 12.00 A.M.; 12.00 A.M. until 3.00 A.M.; and 3.00 A.M. until 6.00 A.M.. This happened in the fourth watch, so the disciples had been in the sea for at least nine hours as Jesus approached them. When they saw Him, they thought He was a ghost. *“And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, **Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid**”* (Matthew 14:26-27). Some translations have this as Jesus saying *“Take courage! I AM! Stop being afraid!”* (4) The Greek $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ (I Am) warrants this reading which reminds us of *Exodus 3:14* *“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”* Also in *John 8:58* *“Jesus said unto them, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.**”*

One of my favorite passages is John 18:4-6 where His awesome power is revealed in a simple answer: *“Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, **Whom seek ye?** They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, **I am he.** And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, **I am he,** they went backward, and fell to the ground.”* (Note that “he” is supplied by the translators). Jesus Christ is the eternal I AM! (5)

Back in our Matthew 14 narration, suffice it to say that Jesus was once again reminding all of us of who He is, and of His abiding presence, and their protection in His hands. This account is also given in Mark 6:45-56, and John 6:16-21. But only in the Matthew account is Simon Peter’s part mentioned. This is the main reason for this article. I want to tell you about the **only other person** mentioned in the Bible who walked on water.

*“And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, **Come.** And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, **O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?**”* (Matthew 14:28-31)

Can we believe it was Simon Peter who walked on the water? Most Christians would probably rather be like Paul than Peter. We are probably all more like Simon Peter. Impetuous, outspoken, not always knowledgeable, but sure of himself. Before we criticize him too much, let us recall that there were 11 others in the ship, and **none of them** volunteered. What did that take? I agree with

Scottish minister Dr. Hugh Martin (1822-1885) commenting on Peter “‘*And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.*’ *He walked on the water. Unto Simon Peter it was according to his faith--his faith, grounded on his Master’s personal power and his Master’s faithful word. ‘He walked on the water, to go to Jesus.’*” (6)

The Lord didn’t say in His rebuke “O ye of NO faith” He said “little faith”. Peter had a little faith. Maybe more than Andrew, James, John, Thomas, Bartholomew, Philip, James Bar-Alphaeus, Judas the brother of James, Matthew, Simon Zelotes, and Judas Iscariot. (Paul wasn’t there. Paul was not converted yet. That came years later). Which of these on board volunteered? Answer: NONE! But Peter **started** walking on the water toward Christ. Yes, he did it! The only other man that we know about that has ever walked on water. But, then he saw the wind boisterous (raging), and he took his eyes off of Jesus Christ. Then he began to sink. He was going down in to the raging sea. Was he thinking “this is the end of me?” J.C. Ryle has some good comments here “*(Peter) did not reflect that he was nearer to Christ when once on the water, than he was when he first left the ship. Fear took away his memory. Alarm confused his reason,*” (7)

But wait, did not Jesus Himself say Come? Can you not **believe Him**, the Son of God? Yes, you can. So, what did Peter do? He cried “Lord save me!” This is what we call “the shortest prayer in the Bible.” We see it answered. Jesus reached out and took him by the hand and saved him from death. He was already a called disciple of Christ, and to seal the bargain of Peter’s salvation, and ours, Jesus was yet to taste death at the cruel Roman cross. But Peter’s earthly life was here saved in answer to this shortest prayer. We must know that it is not **how long** we pray, or **how short**. Not necessarily **how fervent** (though this one was fervent, I assure you). It was effectual! 1. Peter prayed to the right person. 2. Peter prayed to the point. 3. Peter prayed in sincerity. 4. Peter prayed in urgency. 5. Peter prayed to the one that he knew had the power to answer him.

The Lord gave him a rather gentle rebuke, not harsh. He said to Peter “***Why didst thou doubt?***” He didn’t doubt at first, but later did. The wind and the waves were not his problems, unbelief was. The Lord has told us “***All things are possible to them that believe.***” “***If you have faith as a grain of a mustard seed, you can say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and it shall be cast into the sea.***” Then before you know it, they were all in the ship together on the calm sea. No problem for Jesus to calm a raging sea in your life or mine, Blessed be His Name! “***And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.***” (Matthew 14:32-33)

Some Good Related Thoughts from Matthew Henry

(See) “The concern Christ has for his disciples in distress: *He drew nigh to the ship; for therefore he walked upon the water, as he rides upon the heavens, for the help of his people, (Deuteronomy 33:26).* He will not leave them comfortless when they seem to be *tossed with tempests and not comforted.* When they are banished (as John) into remote places, or shut up (as Paul and Silas) in close places, he will find access to them, and will be nigh them. (3.) The relief Christ gives to his disciples in their fears. They *were afraid*, more afraid of an apparition (for so they supposed him to be) than of the winds and waves. It is more terrible to wrestle with the rulers of the darkness of this world than with a tempestuous sea. When they thought a demon haunted them, and perhaps was instrumental to raise the storm, they were more terrified than they

had been while they saw nothing in it but what was natural. Note, [1.] Our real distresses are often much increased by our imaginary ones, the creatures of our own fancy. [2.] Even the approaches of comfort and deliverance are often so misconstrued as to become the occasions of fear and perplexity. We are often not only *worse frightened than hurt*, but *then most frightened* when we are ready to be *helped*. But, when they were in this fright, how affectionately did Christ silence their fears with that compassionate word (**John 6:20**), *It is I, be not afraid!* Nothing is more powerful to convince sinners than that word, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*; nothing more powerful to comfort saints than this, *“I am Jesus whom thou lovest; it is I that love thee, and seek thy good; be not afraid of me, nor of the storm.”* When trouble is nigh, Christ is nigh. -Matthew Henry on John 6:20

NOTES:

(1) Herbert Lockyer; *All the Miracles of the Bible*, page 197; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1961. Dr. Lockyer went onto say regarding this miracle *“This repeated miracle is also referred to a second time in Matthew and Mark, making, in all, six mentions in the gospels. In this prominent nature miracle, the lordship of Jesus over nature and providence is clearly seen. He is concerned about bodily needs, as well as spiritual, and is before us as the All-Sufficient One. Because of His sovereignty, He is capable of creative power exercised on behalf of the needy.”*

(2) Todd Bolen; *Sunset*, BiblePlaces.com; <http://www.bibleplaces.com/seagalilee.htm>

(3) from an illustration and note in *English Standard Version Study Bible* on Matthew 14. It is stated that the information and illustration is based on the remains found on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee of an approximately 2000 year old fishing boat. More information may be found, along with a photo of the reconstructed ship at <http://www.bibleplaces.com/seagalilee.htm> under “Wooden Boat Reconstruction.”

(4) *Amplified Bible*, on Matthew 14:27: copyright 1987 Zondervan Corporation and the Lockman Foundation; Published by Zondervan, Grand Rapids.

(5) See also *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* by George Ricker Berry; on Matthew 14:27; John 8:58 and John 18 :4-6; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1967 edition.

(6) Hugh Martin, *Simon Peter*, page 44; Banner of Truth, London; 1967 edition; OOP

(7) J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels; Matthew*, page 163, James Clarke, London, 1965 edition

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