

Madness: The King's Crises

The King's Crises

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Bible Text: Matthew 14:22-36

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Let's go to chapter 14 of Matthew beginning at verse 22.

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. 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. 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. 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? 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.

And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.¹

This is one of those most famous stories of the Bible where Jesus literally walks on the water. But it is not just the story of Jesus walking on water, it is the story of one man out of twelve who walked on the water as well. And as we go through this passage of Scripture today, the first thing that we have got to understand is the desire that God has for your life, the desire that he had for these disciples' lives. To begin to understand that, just kind of from an overview, we have got to look at the picture that is being painted before us. Immediately before this event is one of the other most well known stories in the Bible. It is what we call the feeding of the 5000. It was actually more like the feeding of the 25,000. The Bible makes it very clear that the 5000 was just the headcount of the men. That did not include their spouses and the children and relatives that may have been with them.

¹ Matthew 14:22-36.

And so there we are on the west side of the Sea of Galilee in an area where roughly 25,000 people had gathered with one basket of food. Jesus prays over the food. It feeds 25,000 and there are 12 baskets left over. That is a pretty incredible event to say the least. So much so—and this is going to be important in a moment—Jesus sends the crowd away and says, “We have got to go.” He sends the disciples in a boat and says, “I am going up to pray.”

As you continue in the story of Jesus’ life we discover that when the boat gets to the other side, the crowd that was fed is there to meet them. Now, once again, remember the Sea of Galilee is not a large body of water. It is about nine miles wide, about 13 miles in length. And so when that crowd saw where the boat was headed, don’t you think they showed up as well? I mean you have just been fed supernaturally from a small basket?

Can you imagine going to an Atlanta Falcons game, walking to the concession stand and one of the attendants saying, “We only have one hot dog, but it is going to work for everybody”? You would say, “You are crazy.” But that is exactly what happened. And I don’t know about you, but whoever that attendant was that made that statement and multiplied that hotdog, I would follow him wherever he went.

That being said, you can understand why the crowd was not content with them departing. If you were to take a journey by land, it would have been anywhere from 12-15 miles to walk around the upper crest of the Sea of Galilee.

You say, “Jeff, why is that so significant?”

Because by the time the disciples got there, the crowd was already there. In fact, the wind was contrary. The waves were roaring. Jesus did not send the disciples in the most efficient, easy manner. In fact, this story takes about 12 hours to develop. Even at a very slow rate people can cover that much territory in that amount of time. And so this isn't about getting in the boat as being the most expeditious. This isn't about getting in the boat for the quickest route. Jesus had a purpose and Jesus had a plan and as I want to share with you, I think he had a certain desire of what to share with them?

In this passage of Scripture it says that Jesus walked to the boat. By the way, the parallel passages are in Mark 6 and in John 6 and there are really two options that we need to discuss. Either, A, Jesus was going to go walking right on by the boat to show up on the shore with the crowd and say, “Hey, boys, what took you so long?” Or, as I would prefer to postulate, could it be, B, that Jesus’ desire all along was for them to walk with him?

Now I want you to think about that for just a moment. Was Jesus just going to walk on by and say, “Guys, what took you so long”? Or was Jesus’ intent to say, “Guys, why don’t you walk with me?” How does he operate? Is Jesus the kind of Savior who says, “Hello, I am here. What took you so long”? Is he the kind of Savior that says, “Hello, I would like you to walk beside me as we go”?

You know when he said, “Come and follow me,” in chapter 4 of the book of Matthew, that phraseology literally meant to walk in the dust of. Here we don't have Jesus saying, “Will you walk in the dust of?” We have him saying, “Would you walk in the spray of as I walk across the sea?” And I want us to see the desire that God has for our lives to move in a supernatural, miraculous way.

And the first thing to gather is this. The initiation that was given. Notice what it says in verse 26.

“And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea...”²

Who initiated this event? Jesus did. Now in the conversation that ensues, obviously it appears that Peter begins the conversation, but he would have never had a conversation with Jesus if he had not first walked on the water. Here is what I want you to see, that any time that God wants to move in a mighty way in our lives, you are not the one who initiates it. He is. We do not get the privilege of establishing our own self destiny. This was not their idea. This was Jesus' idea. We see a pattern in the Scriptures.

In Genesis chapter 2 Adam is not content with the only the animal kingdom of the world. In fact, the Bible says there was a help meet that was not found for him. So what did God do? God knocked him out and brought him whom we know as Eve.

You know, I had the privilege last night of attending a Valentine's banquet. It was a banquet that was put on by one of our Sunday School classes here at church for young couples and one of the classes that is being taught right now during this hour. As far as length of time is concerned, their marriages are at a little bit of the younger stage. And I would say that the average couple in that room, outside of ourselves and the teacher, had been married six years or less. There were probably 18 couples there, I don't know exactly. And those couples would share this kind of information: their name and where they originally were from, how they met, where they met and how they got to East Atlanta.

Do you know what we heard as the common denominator for almost every couple in the room? Do you know how they found their spouse? They weren't looking for them. God brought them to them. I cannot tell you how many stories, including my own, when I wasn't “on the look,” God was looking for me. And here is Adam. He had been looking at all the animals and said, “Not good, not good, not good.” God said, “Brother, if we go at this pattern you are going to mess it up royally. Let me take care of this.”

How about Abraham? Was Abraham saying, “Oh, Lord, please, let me go somewhere I have never been before”? God initiated it. God came to him and said, “Abram, I have got an idea that I want you to consider.”

How about Moses? Forty years tending the sheep. And where is “there” for Moses?

² Matthew 14:26.

There is a bush that is burning, but it is not being consumed. God initiated his call to go to pharaoh. He didn't initiate it himself.

Let me tell you the problem that I see in most people's lives. We go to a bush, set it on fire and say, "Ok, God, start talking." No. We don't get to initiate it. He initiated the walking on water. Nowhere in the gospels do you get any idea that these guy had, you know, walks on water. We think that would be a good idea. Do you think we could get Jesus to model that for us? No, Jesus initiated it.

But here is the second thing about how God desires to move in our lives, our inclination. I want you to see what happens in verse 28. Peter said to him, "If it is you..."

You know, our inclination is to immediately not like the plans God has for us. Our inclination is to say, "God that is not how I would have done it. God, that is not my agenda. God, that was not my idea. This is not what I signed up for." That is our natural inclination. One of the things I communicate to people all the time is "If God is calling you to something..." Now some of you may not understand this, but hold on with me. If God is calling you to do something, to be something, to go somewhere, if God is calling you to do that, do you know the first piece of advice I give? Run. Because if it is God's desire for your life you cannot run away from it. But I see too many people run into stuff that God never called them to do. And they wake up five years later and say, "Whoa, I am sinking... this is a mess."

Our natural inclination in the flesh is to not like what God had in store. When God calls us to holiness, to righteousness, to delayed gratification, to relationships, to jobs, whatever it may be, how many times do we say, "Whoa, God, this was not on my radar"? This was not on their radar.

So he initiated it. Our natural inclination is to immediately not like the idea, but I want you to see the invitation that Jesus gives. Verse 29. "Come," one word. "Come." Now I want you to think about this invitation to Peter. Peter has never seen anybody walk on water before. He has no background. He can't turn to the other eleven and say, "Guys, how did this work for you?" This is something they didn't teach him in school. His parents never raised him with it. This was the last thing on his mind. He never even dreamed this is where he would be and God says, God in flesh says, "All right. Let's do this thing."

You know, one of the things that I have learned, and I know some of you can testify to this so well, life rarely, if ever, goes as I planned it. I mean you think about it for a moment. I know some of you love your spreadsheets. But there is a reason that God gave a delete button on the keyboard. Sometimes it just doesn't go as you had planned or expected. And do you know what happens? It messes up our world.

I want you to see in this story one guy got out of the boat and eleven didn't. He didn't say "Peter, come." Now think about that for a moment.

Remember when Lazarus was raised from the dead? Jesus says, "Lazarus, come forth." Why? If he had just said come forth all the graves would have been empty. When Jesus said, "Come," he didn't say just Peter. He said, "Come on, boys, let's go." And who gets out? Only one.

You know, years ago when I had the privilege - and, please understand if you are a first time guest or visitor with us, I in no way, shape or form mean this story in any way to be braggadocios. In fact, there are times I wonder why I even did it. For years of my life I went through academically a doctoral program. As I went through that just incredible academic process, you need to understand that it was one of the most stressful times of my life. I was traveling. I was gone some 200 nights a year away from home preaching all kinds of places. The academic rigor was unbelievable. I mean every moment of my life was absolutely stressed. Traci and I were stressed. Our finances were stressed. Everything was stressed.

And one day when I was in a seminar which is a classroom setting and our professor, whom I dearly loved, decided to share with the class that he was adding a paper to the assignments.

Now you may be thinking to yourself, well, what is the big deal. What is adding a paper? Understand that the average paper that we wrote was 40 to 50 pages single spaced. I kept a suitcase in the trunk of my car because I was only allowed to check out 90 books at a time from the library. It would take about 60 days, hundreds of hours to put this paper together. My world just got messed up. I mean plans, ideas, even taking breaks with Traci that we had scheduled. I am like, uh, oh, I don't even know if we can do that now because now this has been... does this sound like your life? Oh, you had plans for this weekend. How did that work for you? You thought you would be in place A. You ended up in B. You thought that relationship would be fine and look what happened. In other words, it doesn't work out. I will never forget.

The professor turned to me there in the classroom setting. He said, "Jeff, you look a little ill." I said, "I am ill." He said, "What is wrong?" And I said, "Sir, this was not on the syllabus. This was not on my agenda. I don't know how I am even going to do it." And he made this statement to me and it sounds a little crass, but let me unpack it for you. He said, "Jeff, you don't think we are just going to let you in the club, do you?" Do you know what he was saying? He was saying, "If you want to walk on water it goes by my rules, not by yours."

And when Jesus comes to them and says, "Come," do you know what he is saying? He is saying, "Hey, Peter and I may have had the conversations, but come on, boys." This was not on their agenda. This was not their plan. God's desire for them was to walk with him in an incredible, supernatural way. But eleven and a half of them messed it up.

You say, "How do you get eleven and a half?"

Eleven stayed in the boat and Peter went halfway down before Jesus had to pick him up. And so what I want you to see from this passage of Scripture is this. How do we get discouraged in life to the point when it comes to Jesus calling us to walk on water, we don't ever get out of the boat. How does this happen? And it happens in our lives the same way it happened in the disciples' lives. The first thing that can get us discouraged is our senses. What I mean our senses, I mean that which is tangible, what we can see, what we can hear, what we can touch.

I want you to back up to verse 22 of this passage. It says:

“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.”³

I want you to think about what these guys have seen. Since we last picked up the story in the book of Matthew he had calmed the storm in chapter eight. They have seen a demoniac delivered. They have seen a demon-possessed boy delivered. They have seen a man with a withered hand made whole. They have seen a woman who had a blood issue for 12 years touch the hem of his garment and be made whole. They have seen 25,000 people fed with a basket of food. They have seen some stuff. But do you know what they have also seen? Everywhere Jesus went he made somebody upset, didn't he? He made the religious leaders upset. He made the political leaders upset. And you kind of get this feeling that everywhere Jesus went, whoever was in charge didn't like him being there. And yet here was a group, 25,000 people. There are only 12 of them. You know, somewhere in the back of their minds they have got to be thinking, yes, we have finally got our army. We have finally got enough people to push back.

But do you know what they saw? Once again when Jesus told them to get in the boat they were in the numerical minority.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, someone who believes that his shed blood on Calvary is the only means of forgiveness and the only means of salvation and the standard for life is the Bible, the Word of God, let me share with you. You are now in this culture in the minority. You are now a part of the group that numerically is greatly outnumbered.

Have you ever had days where you just wish you had a group of people who thought the way you thought, who believed the way you believe? You know that is why church is so important. We come together and we can actually have that fellowship with one another. But this is what they had seen. They saw Jesus take the 25,000 and say, “See you later.” Would that not be discouraging to you? It would be to me to think, we just had 25,000 people. We just had these... I mean, Jesus you fed them with one basket. They will do anything you ask. This is incredible.

And yet Jesus said, “Go.” But it is what they heard that might have been the most discouraging. In verse 22 Jesus says, “Get into a ship.” If you go to the parallel passage in Mark 6:24, do you know what Jesus said? “Get into the ship.”

³ Matthew 14:22.

You have one of those ships. Every time it comes up you are like, “Oh, no, here we go again.” I mean every time they get in the boat they are not going to the other side and storms are brewing and life is happening. How many times have you heard this statement? Rejection again. Turned down again. Not going to happen again. I am sorry again. Well, you will just have to deal with it again. How many times do we feel that God brings this same boat in our lives to us every single day? Like Jesus, “I don’t want to get on that boat. I am tired of singing that song. I am tired of walking that path. Why can’t you send somebody faithful in my life? Why can’t you send somebody who is decent in my life? Why do you keep sending me this boat?”

Can you imagine what they would have thought? I mean, they have seen the crowds go away. And they have heard we have got to get in the same boat that we have been in. But then they are surrounded. They go into the midst of the sea. And when they get into the middle of Sea of Galilee, remember they are right there in the middle. They are five miles from any shore. What begins to happen? The storm brews again. In fact, it says it was toilsome. Remember back in chapter eight the waves were so great they thought they were actually going to die. These were professional fishermen. These are mariners.

Have you ever had one of those moments where God has brought you through something in the past, but you wonder about the present. And you are going, “God, do you not understand? This storm looks eerily familiar to the previous storm and I don’t know how we are going to weather this one.” But the surroundings get worse. At least in the other storm Jesus was in the boat. Where is he in this story? He is somewhere else. He is on the mountain. I mean, you can’t even sing the camp song I taught you last week. With Jesus in your boat you can smile through the storm. He is not even in the boat.

And so the crowds are gone. They are in the same boat. Big storm, no Jesus. Hello. Can we see discouragement settling in? Does this sound like life to you? Oh, but it gets more fun. There is a third element here. Yes, there is the sense of what they saw. And yes it is their surroundings. But how about their schedule? Do you realize this had not gone as they had planned? It said that they were toiling into the fourth watch.

Now that means basically it was between 3 AM and 6 AM. The way the Jewish clock works the first watch is 6 PM to 9 PM. The second watch from 9 PM to midnight. The third is from midnight to three and the fourth from three to six. I don’t know when they launched out, but the last time I read chapter 14 they ate supper first. That is what they would have called it, right? They ate supper, the feeding of the 5,000. So it was about supper or dinner time, probably about five to six o'clock in the evening. Ten hours later they have gone four miles.

Do you know what they were probably thinking to themselves? If we had walked with the rest of them, we would already be there.

Did you ever feel that in life? Do you ever struggle with that aspect in your life thinking,

“God, why this path? Why this relationship? Why this job? Why this time? Why now? God, if there is an easier path...?”

Yes, there is an easier path. Do you know what it is? Walking on water. But our discouragement, our perception is this is not easy. This is difficult since they were toiling into the night. It says the wind was contrary to them. Have you ever felt this way with God? God, I felt like you led me this direction. You are not even in the boat. The sea is choppy. The wind is in my face. Other people are getting there first. Hello, whose bright idea was this?

And yet here they are absolutely discouraged. And I believe that it was that discouragement that led to their despair and they never got out of the boat. And do you know what the enemy wants to do? The enemy wants to so discourage you that you never walk on water with Jesus. And so the ultimate question here is: What are the decisions that we have got to make? What are the things that we have got to do so that we don't end up like the eleven-and-a-half? What can we do in our life so that when God calls us proverbially to walk on water we are ready to go?

The first one is this. We have got to change our perspective. It goes back to the beginning of the story. When Jesus said, “Get back into the boat,” you realize that you cannot walk on water unless you first get into the boat. How many times have you said, “God, I am just not going there again. I am not going to forgive them again”?

Remember Peter said, “Jesus, how many times do I forgive somebody? Seven is that good?” And Jesus said, “Oh, no, no, no. Continually begin to forgive people.”

I am not going to forgive them. I am not going to trust anybody again. I am not going to invest again. I am not going to look again. God, I have been burned. I have been this. How many times do we say, “God, if you pull up the same boat, the same path, I am not getting in”?

You realize that if they had never gotten in the boat they would not have seen Jesus walk on the water and never had the opportunity to walk on water. And when the trials and the junk of life come up, we can either see it as an obstacle or an opportunity. We can either see it as, ok, God, I am not getting on that boat or, all right, God, I am getting on the boat, because you told me to and I don't have a clue what is about to happen.

In our family we have an illustration. We are not mariners. We drive a lot, so we don't use boats, we use buses. And this is our illustration, that we are in life and we are at a bus stop. And we don't get to decide when God brings the bus. We don't make that decision about what he calls or asks us to do, an area of service, whatever it may be. But inevitably when God brings the bus, you know how buses have the placards on the side of where they are going? Can I just be honest with you? Ninety-nine percent of the time that is not what I would have written on the placard. It is not. And sometimes the placard on the bus has the same thing that was on it last year. And you are going, “But, God, I just rode that bus. I don't want to ride that bus again.”

The problem is if we don't get on the bus we are going to miss the ride. If we don't get on the boat we can never walk on water. So we have got to change our perspective that God is never going to tell us to get in a boat that he doesn't desire to move through in our lives.

But the second thing we have got to make a decision on is our perception of life, how we perceive. I want you to notice that when Jesus shows up what did they think? He was a ghost. He was a spirit. Now I am going to be real honest with you. You are never going to see Jesus walking on the water if you are too busy griping about him not being in your boat. That sounds like a book, or to a country song. I can't decide which. But you are never going to see Jesus walking on the water, if you are too busy worried about why he is not in your boat.

They were so consumed with the struggles around them that they went into absolute panic mode when they saw Jesus. No recollection, no idea of who he was. They completely missed him because they were looking for him in the boat.

You know life isn't easy and there are things that come up and there are struggles in life and often times we get caught in this trap that, well, Jesus is in my boat, there is something wrong. Maybe Jesus wants you to walk on water. And so there is this perception that has to happen in our lives where we see it not just from God's perspective and our own, but where we actually can see Jesus because we are not too busy looking for him where he isn't.

But then there is this last element here. When Jesus says in verse 29, "Come," it says. "And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus."⁴

You know, there was a book written some years ago called *If You are Going to Walk on Water You Got to Get out of the Boat*. How do you get out of the boat? You have got to allow pride to subside, because this isn't according to natural law. This isn't what everybody would advise. Eleven people said, "Not a good idea." And Peter said, "Too bad." He said "Come. I am getting on the water." And when he was out on the water with Jesus he was fine.

And let me tell you about the pride of life that is so destructive. If God can only move in your life according to your rules, you are going to be in a world of hurt. He gets to establish the parameters. He gets to establish the rules. And when he says, "Hey, I have got an idea, it is different from yours." Are you on are you off? How many of you if you were in the boat and have gotten to the other side would have realized, man, I missed out on an opportunity there? Because it wasn't what I was looking for. It wasn't comfortable for me and it wasn't the way I would have done it.

⁴ Matthew 14:29.

You know, I made mention to you earlier that we got to go to a Valentine's banquet last night and one of the assignments was that all the couples brought a wedding portrait and showed off. You know, it was funny. Because we had been married longer and, of course, styles have changed and that was fun. But one of the things that you get to do at times like that is you get to go back into the memory bank and start thinking about how things happened. And without going into grave detail and without making more of it than I should, let me just share with you how my wife and I ended up getting together.

About a month before we met she had a three-year long relationship end in an absolute disaster. Ladies, one where you go get a couple of gallons of ice cream and say, "I am not coming out of my closet for weeks." It was one of those. It was a bad deal. The day that we met I personally was in a very serious relationship with somebody not named Traci. You talk about a walk on water experience. Because you know what everything said in her life? Stay in the boat. Don't trust anybody. Stay in the boat.

Do you know what was going through my mind? I thought she was already in the boat. Think about that for a moment. And if you were to sit down and talk to me I would tell you that literally sometimes God has to take a two by four and he took one and he popped me that day and he said, "Son, that is her."

And I said, "Lord, this is going to mess up everything in my life."

And do you know what? It ended up being the biggest blessing in my life, because it didn't fit my schedule. I didn't initiate it. God brought it to me and said, "Hey, what do you want to do with his one?"

And sometimes it is a relationship and sometimes it is a job opportunity and sometimes it is a new friendship and sometimes it is a new endeavor or a new ministry or a mission trip or whatever it maybe, but I am here to tell you often times when God calls us to be or do something, it is not what we had on our plate. It is not what we had on our agenda. But you never walk on water if you have this pride that says, "Well, God, I already had plans and this messes up my plans and I am sorry."

You know that is why most people never get saved. They never get saved. Why? Because they go, "It wasn't in my plans to give up control. It wasn't in my plans to admit that Jesus is the only way. It is not in my plans to confess that I want to live my life my way, my direction and if I trust Jesus as my Savior then he is in control. Do you know why people don't get saved? It is because of pride. They don't want to relinquish control of their life. They want to create their destiny. Here is the problem. Because of sin in our life we have created our own destiny, eternally, called hell. And Jesus says, "Get out of the boat and follow me." And where is he able to take us? He is going to take us right to the pearly gates of heaven.

Pride goeth before destruction.

