

Text: Matthew 14:22-33

Title: Jesus walks on water

Theme: Jesus delivers His disciples from the fierce storm in order to strengthen their wavering faith

INTRODUCTION

In his ministry on earth, Jesus had performed many miracles: changing the water into wine, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the paralytics, even raising the dead. The miracles Jesus performed were mind-blowing. But miracles are more than mind-blowing, they signify something more. Like all miracles, the miracle of Jesus walking on water has important lessons for us. So, what is the meaning of this miracle?

Having grown up in the Evangelical circle, I have heard some people say the main point of the passage is that we need not be afraid during difficult times, for we are under the care of God. Others say that the main point of the passage is to teach the importance of faith during times of the hard-blowing wind. There is no doubt that these statements contain some truths, but I think that these are very general observations. Let us look more carefully at the miracle.

We shall consider the passage in four sections this afternoon:

The Worry: The disciples trapped by the storm

The Word: Jesus calmed their fears

The Work: Jesus calmed the storm

The Worship: The disciples responded

I. The Worry: The disciples trapped by the Storm

Let us first consider the context of the passage.

The passage took place not too long after John the Baptist was executed by Herod (vv.1-12). Jesus wanted to find a solitary place to pray after he heard of John's death, but he was distracted by a crowd following him and he was moved with compassion. Jesus then paused and healed some of the sick, and He miraculously fed five thousand men plus many children and women by the shore of the Sea of Galilee (vv.13-21).

Our text begins right after the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus put His disciples into the boat and sent the crowd away. But why would Jesus not spend more time with the crowd? It is because in the parallel passage in John 6, John tells us that the people were so affected by the miracle of the loaves, that **they were about to take him by force, and make him a king**. Being free, Matthew tells us in verse 23 that Jesus went up to the mountain to pray. Jesus wanted and needed the time of prayer. From this we see here **the humanity of Jesus**. Jesus was probably sad having heard of the death of John the Baptist.

Matthew tells us that Jesus prayed alone until late into the night while His disciples had already gone ahead to Gennersaret. But their travel was not smooth or relaxing at all because they encountered a storm in the middle of the sea, about six kilometers away from the shore. In other words, they were too far to row back to the shore. We know that storms were a common phenomenon in the Sea of Galilee due to the geographical location. You see, the Sea of Galilee was 700 feet below the sea level and surrounded by high mountains. These mountains would often trap the cold winds that would rush down the mountains and cause great storms. And we should be reminded that disciples were fishermen and had probably encountered many storms. To them, sailing across the Sea of Galilee was like you driving home from work that you are so familiar with the route that you don't even think twice about it. But there is no auto-pilot mode this time, they were in deep trouble here because the wind and the waves were too strong for them.

Unlike Jonah who was fleeing, the disciples were obediently doing what Jesus had commanded, but they had encountered the storm. More than that, it was the second time Matthew recorded where the disciples were trapped in a storm. The first time they encountered a storm (Matthew 8) Jesus was there with them and He rose and calmed the storm. However, this time, Jesus was not there with them on the boat, He was not there to be awakened and calm the storm. **The disciples appeared to be helpless, they were in need of deliverance, for they were perishing**.

There are two lessons from this point:

1. First of all, **Jesus sets for us an example to pray**. Though He had so much work to do with others, yet he chose times to be alone. Jesus is the Son of God, and He took the time alone to pray, to be with His Father. Does that not teach us that we must do the same? We are needy people, and we need to pray. Those who don't believe in Jesus don't like to spend alone time in prayer, because they have no one to talk with. But we who are in Christ, should always look for solitude and enjoy it, because we have communion with God in Christ. And He will give us what we need!
2. **There are always dangers and troubles in the Christian's life. You are not exempt from troubles because you are a child of God**. The disciples were just obediently doing what Jesus had told them to do, and they got onto the boat, and there was a great storm. It does not mean that your path will be smooth and all after you have become a Christian, you may often encounter

greater troubles. But in the Lord's providence, He uses these troubles as a means to draw us closer to Himself. Not to mention, when you have experienced His comfort, you may also bring comfort to others!

II. The Word: Jesus calmed their fears

a. The disciples did not recognize Jesus

While the disciples were in distress, Matthew tells us that in the fourth watch of the night, which was between 3am to 6am. Jesus went to them by walking on the water. As Jesus approached the boat, the disciples saw a figure in the sea. They became afraid. They thought it was a ghost, an evil spirit making an appearance. (Jewish superstition taught that the sea was the home of evil spirits.) So instead of recognizing their Master had come to rescue them, as He had done before, they were controlled by fear – not faith in Jesus.

b. Jesus offered a Word of comfort

Now the disciples should have remembered the previous incident (in Matthew 8), when the Lord was able to calm the sea and saved them. And they should have recognized that He was the One walking on the water, but because they forgot who Jesus was and what He had done, their faith was overcome by fear. But Jesus did not rebuke them but responded with a word of comfort. He said, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." What a huge comfort for the disciples! Their Master had come to rescue them! When His people were in trouble, Jesus showed up in the midst of the storm, and reminded them that He was with them.

More importantly, when Jesus had identified Himself to His disciple, He had revealed something more! Jesus said, "It is I; do not be afraid". This phrase is fascinating because the original Greek phrase here is "ego eimi", and this was used to translate the "I AM" statements in the Old Testament Septuagint! It was used in Deuteronomy 31:6 when the Lord commanded Israel to be strong and courageous, and it was also used when the Lord revealed Himself to Moses at the burning Bush, God said, "I AM who I AM". So, Jesus was telling the disciples, "Do not be afraid, because 'I AM'!" **Jesus was not only telling them that He was with them, but He also demonstrated His Deity. He told them that they did not need to be afraid because He was God! He was telling them that the God of Abraham, the God of Jacob and the God of Moses was right there with them!**

c. A fulfillment of the pictures of the Old Testament

More than that, the disciples should have also recognized Jesus' Deity when they saw Jesus walking on the water. It is because the picture of God walking on the water was all over in the Old Testament! Consider two examples:

In Psalm 77:17-19, the psalmist wrote, "The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side.¹⁸ The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook.¹⁹ Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen." The psalmist spoke of a clear picture of the power of God over all of creation, and the picture of God walking upon the sea and leaves no footprints!

Further, Job also recorded in Job 9:8, "who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea". What Job had recorded was the picture of the Divine Person walking on the waves of the sea. He walked on the waters as if he was walking on the flat land. So, when the disciples saw what Jesus did, they should have recognized these two passages and recognized that Jesus was the One these passages spoke of, the Mighty God, the Second Person of the Trinity. This was why even the water trembled before Him and was able to walk on the water! It is simply because Jesus was the One who created all things!

Lessons:

1. **In the midst of the storm, Christ will not be a terror to those to whom he manifests Himself.** Our true comfort is found when we understand who Christ is. He calms all our fears. Christians know that God comes not to harm, but to deliver. Jesus is the great I AM. He is the One who whispers to you when you are sailing through the storm, "Be courageous! I AM! Do not be afraid!"
2. Second, are you feeling that life is walking contrary to you? Either it is that you lose your job and you have a family to feed. Or that you are in school and you put your work in, but instead of achieving, you receive a grade that disappoints. Or that your loved one gets sick and things are so difficult. These life circumstances give us great problems, and we become afraid and we become distressed. Brothers and sisters, there are thousands of reasons for us to be afraid. **But this is a reminder to us that when our faith is weak, our prayers should be strong. Our cries must be stronger in the day of our troubles, we need to trust that He will offer deliverance at His appointed time. He who was faithful yesterday will also be faithful today and tomorrow.**
3. Jesus said, "I am with you always, even until the end of the age." Or do you remember what "Emmanuel" means? It means "God with us". Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus has promised us to always be with us, and that should be our greatest comfort. **All storms in life are small potatoes when we recognize that God in Christ is with us.** One commentator rightly described, "a right knowledge opens the door to true comfort, especially the knowledge of Christ".

III. The Work of Christ

a. Jesus saves Peter

While the rest of the disciples did not have much faith, Peter seemed to have some. He said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water". We may think that Peter is foolish here because he seemed to be testing the Lord, but this was the typical Peter. It

was out of sincerity and zealous affection toward Jesus that he said this. He was curious, he wanted to be with Jesus. In response to Peter's request, Jesus told Peter to come, for Jesus was about to show Peter how weak he was. So, Peter obediently walked on the water. But when he saw that the wind was strong, he was afraid and began to sink. His faith had failed him. His initial faith had stumbled upon the waves and caused him to cry out, "Lord, save me!"

But while his faith might have failed him, Christ's great mercy upheld him. Jesus did not leave him to sink but gave him time to cry, "*Lord, save me!*". So, Jesus stretched out His hand and lifted him up. And Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Peter had faith and it was true, but it was weak. Jesus was not saying that Peter had none, but it was small. It was not enough to carry him through. But Peter should have known better! He had not only heard the "I AM" from Jesus earlier but He had also seen the power of Jesus trampling on the water! But we see that Jesus took the opportunity to show Peter that it was His right hand and His holy arm, not any skill of Peter, that was his security. Jesus had done so in order to encourage Peter's faith. He brought him down and built him up again. He is a gracious Redeemer and Friend.

b. Jesus calmed the storm

Like the earlier incident in chapter eight, Jesus calmed the storm for the disciples. But instead of rebuking the wind, Matthew tells us that the wind ceased when Jesus and Peter both got into the boat. It was a miraculous incident in which Jesus did not use any means or word to calm the storm, but simply walked into the boat and the wind ceased! This demonstrates to us that even the wind and the waves were just supporting cast to the central character, and Jesus had complete control over them. He stirs them as He wishes, He calms them as He wills. We see here that Jesus did not only calm their fears, but He also calmed the storm. He did not go to the disciples to bring them encouragement and reveal His identity, then left them; Jesus also calmed the trouble that hindered them from going forward. It was absolutely miraculous! Jesus had complete control over the troubles.

Lessons:

1. **In the midst of trials, Jesus does not only offer a word of encouragement, but He also responds with action!** In the midst of your trials and fears, remember that Jesus stretches out his arm, to uphold you, so that you may not sink in your trouble. Jesus upholds you with His holy, omnipotent right hand.
2. **But there is a richer lesson:** Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus is gracious that He delivers us from the strong wind and waves in our lives. But He also came to deliver us from a greater storm, a greater threat in our lives. And it was the deliverance from the curse of sin and judgement. When you were helpless in your sins, dead in your trespasses, Christ did not inform you that you were in trouble, but He came as man and He took your place in order to deliver you from eternal condemnation. Jesus threw Himself into the storm, He was demolished in order to bring your peace with God! Brothers and sisters, this is true deliverance! This is what the passage tells us, Jesus delivers us from not only the temporary troubles, but the greatest trouble. Take heart therefore, He who has delivered you from the greatest trouble, will also deliver you from your temporary troubles.

IV. The Worship of Jesus

Up to this point, the disciples had already seen Jesus performed a good number of miracles, but they were still unable to grasp who Jesus was. We see that in the earlier incident in chapter 8, after the disciples saw the work of Jesus, they asked, "what kind of man is this, that even winds and seas obey him?" These words indicated that the disciples did not yet grasp who Jesus was. And right before Jesus walked on the water, they also saw the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, and after they had seen such miraculous act, they were still unable to recognize who Jesus was. It is because miracle by miracle, bit by bit, Jesus was stirring up faith in His disciples.

But Matthew tells us that the moment had finally come, as it happened, through this miracle, Jesus had finally revealed to them that **He was the Almighty God**. The disciples were finally able to recognize who Jesus was. As a result, they worshipped, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God!" The disciples worshipped Jesus because they saw that He was indeed the True and Living God who was dwelling among them! They did not worship simply because they had been delivered, but it was because they saw and recognized the Deity of the One who was in front of them!

The disciples had sung and heard the great account of God's deliverance of their forefathers from the hands of the Egyptians and how He opened up the Red Sea and led them through. But **now they had not only heard, but they had seen and experienced firsthand the power and glory of God!** This miracle was a confirmation of their faith in Christ and served to convince the disciples that Jesus was indeed the Son of God!

What lessons should we learn from this last point?

1. **Let this miracle strengthen your faith.** Brothers and sisters, there are times when we doubt and there are times when we question if Jesus had really done this, but the disciples testified that Jesus had done this, and Jesus had also manifested His glory through this miracle, and it had served as a confirmation to the disciples' faith. Remember that it was where Peter began as well, he had faith, but it was "little faith." But we later see him becoming a great instrument of Christ and he testified the name of Jesus until his death. And it was said that he died being crucified upside down. Brothers and sisters, we must likewise put our faith in the Lord Jesus, believe in what He had accomplished in His death and His resurrection.

2. **Respond with worship when we recognize God's deliverance.** Brothers and sisters, do you remember the times when you were trapped by your troubles and storms in your lives and the Lord graciously delivered us, how did you respond? Did you respond immediately by praising Him and worship? Or did you go on as if you have walked yourself from your troubles? The disciples here taught us to respond with worship! It should be the first thing we do!
3. We should also recognize that the ultimate deliverance that God has given us was the deliverance from the curse of sin and eternal death. We must therefore respond with worship. When Christ manifests his glory for us, we ought to return praises and worship to him, one commentator wrote, "faith is the proper principle of worship, and worship the genuine product of faith."

Conclusion

We see that Jesus had allowed his disciples into the storm in order to test them, expose their weak faith, and strengthened them. Jesus was asking his disciples to entrust themselves entirely to His provision. Yes, the disciples' faith was weak. Yes, they forgot the earlier miracle in which Jesus calmed the storm to strengthen their faith. (Matthew 8). Their faith was still not strong enough. But our Lord Jesus responded with a gentle rebuke and demonstrated His Deity and glory for the strengthening of their faith. What grace, such grace!

Brothers and sisters, just as the Lord Jesus had delivered His disciples from the storm and graciously strengthened their faith with action. The Lord Jesus will likewise deliver you from your storm. In fact, He has already delivered you from your greatest storm, which is the eternal judgement. Your sins have been washed clean by the shedding of His blood so that you may not perish eternally but may have fellowship with the Father through Him. That is the true and greatest deliverance!

Maybe you are in the midst of a fierce storm, but your greatest comfort should be that He who demonstrated His Deity by fulfilling the pictures in the Old Testament, and He who had been with Moses, with Elijah, with David and with the disciples, will also whisper to you, "be of good cheer, it is I, do not be afraid". Your confidence rests in Christ, He is your Redeemer, Shepherd and Friend.

The psalmist also offered a wonderful reminder in Psalm 46,
"Be still, and know that I *am* God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!
The LORD of hosts *is* with us;
The God of Jacob *is* our refuge."

The way to be still for a Christian is, to know that He is God, that He is the "God with us" in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, praise Him that in his mercy he is willing to strengthen our wavering faith.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, you will never experience true comfort because of your sins. But if you turn from your sins and look to Him today for mercy, he shall have compassion on you. Come, come to Jesus! Come lay down your burdens and find comfort for your weary soul. Amen.

Let us pray.