

Matthew 14:22-33 “How to Face Life’s Storms”

Intro. This passage tells of one of the most amazing and best-known miracles that Jesus Christ did. In this story we are told that Jesus literally walked on water! As a result, walking on water has become proverbial for amazing ability. The disciples saw Christ perform many other miracles, but when they saw Christ walking on water, they could not believe their eyes! In fact, they assumed He was a ghost. Apparently, they could not even *conceive* of the idea of Jesus walking on water. That was a miracle far greater than anything they had seen before. And by the way, that is one of many reasons why we know that Jesus actually walked on water. In mythology the people *expect* the strange and miraculous to occur from their heroes. But the disciples did not expect such a miracle as this. This is similar to the account of the resurrection. They were very slow to believe in it as well. So I believe that this miracle literally happened.

After this miracle, we read in v.33 that they worshipped Jesus, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.”¹ Honestly, that is the main point of this story. This is the first time that the disciples use the title “Son of God” to address Jesus. Since He is the Son of God, He is certainly the Messianic King God promised. But though what this passage teaches us about Jesus is very important, there is much more here that I want you to see. Some of you are going through a storm, so to speak, and this passage can help you face such a storm fearlessly with a confident victorious faith in Christ.

Now there are 3 scenes in our story today. In each scene we are going to learn some important lessons. So let’s look at this passage together. The first scene is:

I. THE STORM AT SEA

V.24 tells us about a storm that came upon the Sea of Galilee. Most of that Sea is surrounded by mountains or hills. Strong winds can swirl around into a powerful storm very quickly and unexpectedly. When the disciples found themselves in the storm, they kept trying to get to the other side, and yet for hours they were making no progress, “for the wind was contrary” (v.24). The wind and the waves were causing the boat to rock and sway violently, threatening to capsize. So they were in danger of sinking and perishing in the midst of the Sea. Worst of all, Jesus was not physically with them. In the last storm, Jesus was there with them, and after waking Him, He quickly came to their aid (8:24-25). But this time Jesus was not with them.

In the midst of the storm they no doubt wondered why Jesus had sent them out alone. How they would look back at the dim outline of the hills, where they knew He was, and wonder, “Why, Lord, did you send us out into this storm?” What made the situation worse was the fact that v.22 says that Jesus “*made* His disciples get into the boat.” He instructed them to go on to the other side without Him, while He sent the multitude away. Now as the Son of God, Jesus should have been able to anticipate that His disciples would face a storm. Yet, He sent them out by boat. Furthermore, when the storm did come, Jesus did not immediately come to their aid. Evidently, they struggled against the storm for several hours. Normally a trip across the Sea of Galilee would

¹ His divinity seems to be stressed by the absence of the article and the position of the word.

take about two hours. But note the length of the struggle in v.25. The fourth watch is from 3 to 6:00 a.m. So it appears to me that it was God's will for the disciples to face the storm.

The next time you face a storm in your life, you may wonder why God didn't prevent it from happening. You may wonder why God is allowing you to go through the storm. I have been through some storms, so to speak. In 1977 I had a car wreck. I was injured, and I totaled my car on the very day I was going back to Bible College. My first thought was, "Why, God?" In 1982 Cheryl and I went through a storm together when she almost bled to death several days after the birth of our first son. She had to have a hysterectomy to save her life. A few years after that I went through a storm in my first full-time church. The church had grown and some of the founding leaders were not happy with the direction of the church, and put me and the church through a period of grievous conflict. In the year 2000 my mother died of a brain tumor and in 2005 my sister took her life after years battling depression and mania. I could tell you of other storms of life that Cheryl and I have gone through. So we and many others have found that it is not a matter of *if* you are going through a storm, but *when*. And we often wonder why?

What a series of storms we are going through in 2020! We were hit with a global pandemic in March. While less than 1/10 of 1% of Americans have been hospitalized or died from COVID-19, we have all be adversely affected by the lockdowns and other measures to prevent its spread. Millions have lost their jobs. In the last 6 months over one million have suffered and died either alone or almost alone even if they didn't have COVID. Racial conflict and rioting have hit major cities, leaving behind what looks like a war zone. Many protesters believe that racial injustice has been committed, and many agree that an overuse of force by some police officers has taken place. Yet partly as a result of hostility toward all police, crime and murders are up in these cities. Wildfires have hit California. Then, on top of all that, a category 4 hurricane hit Louisiana a couple weeks ago, leaving a wide path of devastation. What's next? I haven't seen a killer hornet, *yet!* No matter who is elected in November, about half the country will be upset and there could be more violence.

Yes, we will with some regularity face storms in our lives. God could protect us from all the storms of life, but it is His will that we face such storms for the following reasons:

A. To Strengthen Your Character - These many hours the disciples had been harassed by the elements, and they were still a considerable distance from their destination. They really got a workout. They were rowing as hard as they could against the elements, trying to get to the other side. So the storm made them *physically* stronger. But it also made them spiritually stronger. James 1:2-4 says that the testing of our faith produces patient endurance, which in turn takes us closer to maturity and perfection. That is why James says we should count it all joy when we find ourselves in the various trials of life. Trials have a way of strengthening your character (cf. Romans 5:3-4).

I am told that the trees that grow in windy areas produce the strongest wood. Even so, when you respond to the storms of life in the right way, they will not hurt you, but only make you stronger. You see, there are at least two kinds of storms: storms of correction, when God disciplines us; and storms of perfection, when God helps us to grow. Both types are for our own good.

Another reason why God allowed the disciples to go through this storm was:

B. To Teach a Lesson about God's Will - Whenever you find yourself in a storm, you need to get ready to learn some important truths. God can teach you things in the storm that He cannot teach you in any other way. One lesson they learned had to do with the will of God. Now the disciples had obeyed Jesus, they were in His will, and yet they went through a storm. Many

Christians have the mistaken idea that obedience to God's will produces "smooth sailing." But this is not true. Furthermore, the storm came because they were *in* the will of God and not, like Jonah, out of the will of God. So this was not a storm of correction but a storm of perfection.

Even so, when you are going through some trouble and trial, it is not necessarily because you have been doing something wrong. Some troubles we bring on ourselves. But at other times you can be in the center of God's will, and still experience a storm in your life. We just have to face the fact that we live in a fallen, sin-cursed world, and you will experience storms and trials and troubles in your life. Jesus warned, "In the world you shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). You need to understand that your circumstances are not the measure of God's love for you. He loves you the same whether your circumstances are good or bad.

Finally, God will allow you to go through a storm:

C. To Experience God in a Fresh, New Way - Whenever you find yourself in a storm, you need to get ready for the fact that Jesus can reveal Himself more clearly in a storm. Furthermore, the storm led to an experience of His great salvation and victory over the storm. So if you are in God's will, and yet find yourself in the storm, then get ready, because God is about to do a work in your life, and teach you some lessons! When you go through a storm following God's will, you can be sure that Christ will be with you to deliver you from the storm. You will gain a great testimony of what God did for you. Diana Helsel is in the hospital and she testified to me that things could have been a lot worse for her, but God delivered her.

Now let's move on to the second scene. In the midst of the storm the disciples saw:

II. THE SAVIOR ON THE WATER

The disciples realized they couldn't fight the storm alone. If we had only v.24 the situation would be gloomy indeed; the violent wind, the darkness, the angry billows, the absence of Jesus! But Jesus intervened in several ways, and He is willing to intervene in your life in many of the same ways.

Now the main thing you need when you go through a storm is exercise faith in Jesus. Notice in v.31 that Jesus rebuked the disciples for having so little faith. They had doubts and fears instead of faith. Now when you go through a storm, I want to encourage you to:

A. Have Faith in the Prayers of Jesus – In v.23 we read that after Jesus sent His disciples a way to cross the sea of Galilee, He "...went up on the mountain by Himself to pray." During His earthly sojourn, Jesus spent much time in prayer. I believe He probably spent several hours in prayer on this particular occasion, for He did not cease praying and come out to rescue His disciples until about 3:00 in the morning. During that long prayer He could have been praying for Himself, praying for strength to resist the temptation of the people, who wanted to make Him an earthly King *now* (Jn. 6). He could have been praying for guidance. Furthermore, the shadow of the cross had come a little nearer and was weighing heavily upon His heart. But not only did He pray for Himself; the recorded prayers of Christ offer abundant evidence that He prayed also for others. They could not see Him but according to Mark's Gospel (Mk. 6:48) He could see them. He knew their distress, and no doubt He prayed for their safety, and He prayed that their faith would remain strong. Though the disciples were scared in Jesus' absence, they were secure in Jesus' prayers.

Even so, the Bible teaches that right now Jesus is engaging in an intercessory prayer ministry on our behalf. Romans 8:34 says that Christ "makes intercession for us." Heb. 7:25 says,

“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” So the next time you go through a storm, just remember that Jesus cares for you and is praying for you. It’s great to be able to ask your pastor, deacon, or other Christian to pray for you, but it is even greater to know that *Jesus* is praying for you!

Secondly, you should:

B. Have Faith in the Power of Jesus – When you’re in a powerful storm, you need an even more powerful Savior. So we read in v.25, “Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.”² What a display of amazing power! Who among us can walk on the water? I don’t know how He did it. Perhaps He caused the molecules to lock together to support His weight. Perhaps He temporarily suspended the law of gravity. Perhaps the most likely explanation is that He lifted Himself up enough to counter-balance the force of gravity, as He did in His ascension. Well, if Jesus can walk on water, He can calm a storm!

Then we read of another manifestation of His power in v.32, “And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.” What power He had over nature. Once again, even the winds obey His voice! So we should not be surprised to read in v.33 that they “worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’” Only God has the kind of power that Jesus displayed. When Jesus calmed the first storm (Matt. 8:23-27), the disciples said, “What manner of Man is this?” But now their clear testimony was, “You are the Son of God!” And the fact that He accepted their worship indicates that He acknowledged divinity.³ So Jesus clearly demonstrated yet again that He was the Son of God. Man can’t walk on the water, but Jesus can.

So Jesus was showing His supremacy over whatever storm we face. The waves that were over their heads were under His feet. He also caused the wind to cease. Always remember that Jesus is greater than the storm you are facing. So no matter what trial you face, Jesus is able to see you through, one way or another. May this text of Scripture give you a clearer vision of who Jesus really is, and what He can do for you.

Now a third thing you should do in a storm is:

C. Have Faith in the Presence of Jesus - Often we feel like Jesus has deserted us when we are going through the hard times of life. But for the child of God, Jesus always comes to us in the storms of life. He may not come at the *time* we think He should come, but He will come just when we need Him the most.

Now at first His presence terrorized them (v.26). The sight of a figure walking on the water in the dark, stormy night caused their scalp to creep and their hair stand on end. They assumed that He was a ghost, for men do not walk on water! No doubt they wondered why the “ghost” appeared to them? Possibly they thought that this apparition was a messenger of death. But Jesus was not coming to terrorize them, but simply coming to their aid, moved by their helplessness in the grip of forces beyond their control. He was coming to calm their fears, not add to them. He was coming to reassure them of His presence.

Now notice how Jesus comforted them. In v.27 He said, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” Notice that He said, “It is I”⁴ and only then said, “do not be afraid,” or “Stop being afraid.”

² Mark 6:48 adds an interesting detail. He “would have passed them by.”

³ Contrast Rev. 22:8-9.

⁴ Or literally, “I Am” (ἐγώ εἰμι), a fitting statement since He was proving that He is the Son of God, the great I Am! (Ex. 3:14).

His presence is the only rational foundation for calm fearlessness. Psa. 23:4 says, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me....” (KJV). The Lord says to all believers, “Don’t worry or be fearful about this storm—I’m here.” And the consciousness of His presence banishes all fear. And what is there to fear? Christ is either on the mountain interceding for us with the Father, or He is on the sea walking to us. In either case we are secure. There is no reason for anxiety no matter how severe and hopeless the storm appears. Even if God allows death to come, we can say, “absent from the body ... [is] to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). So as we face the storms of life Christ commands us to not fear but to have courage and confidence (Gk. *tharseo*⁵). How this word is needed today!

When you go through a storm, you are going to ask, “God, where are you?” But you need to trust in the unseen God, who has promised to be with you in every storm of life.

Some of you have seen or read, *Love Comes Softly*. In that story Clark suffers several tragedies in his life. His wife died and he was left to raise their daughter Missy alone. Later he remarried a widow named Marti, who evidently had very little church background. After they suffered yet another loss when the barn burned, Marti said, “I don’t understand why the God you pray to would let such unthinkable things happen to decent people.”

Clark took her to a hill where he worshiped God and said to her, “Missy could fall down and hurt herself even if I’m walking right there beside her. That doesn’t mean that I allowed it to happen. She knows with the father’s unconditional love, I’ll pick her up and I’ll carry her. I’ll try to heal her. I’ll cry when she cries. And I’ll rejoice when she is well. In all the moments of my life, God has been right there beside me. The truth of God’s love is not that He allows bad things to happen. It’s His promise that He’ll be there with us when they do.” [Illus.#C-1166].

Oh, child of God! Just as Jesus manifested His presence in the storm, even so He will be present when you go through a storm. Isa. 43:2 says, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned....” Learn to trust in the promise of God’s presence.

Finally, let’s move on to scene 3 and see:

III. THE SAINT ON THE WATER

Perhaps even more amazing than Jesus walking on the water is the fact that *Peter* walked on the water! A most interesting person, this Peter. He was so impulsive! Notice in v.28 it says, “And Peter answered..., ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’” You could count on Peter to be the first to respond. Furthermore, he would try anything.

Now notice a few things about Peter’s experience in this story. First:

A. His Discernment – Peter wanted to be with Jesus but he was very discerning. He knew he had to have faith to be able to walk on the water out to where Jesus was. But he also understood that faith must be based on the Word of God to be true and effective faith. The way to walk on water is to get the permission of Jesus (v.28). So first, he said, “Lord, if it is You....” This did not express doubt, for it can be translated, “Since it is You, command me to come to you....” Notice he called Jesus, “Lord.” He recognized his Lordship now more than ever.

Even so, before you try to walk on water, you must first get the word of Jesus that He will enable you. Faith, apart from God’s promise, is presumption! It is putting God to the test. So don’t do something crazy and expect God to bail you out. Don’t quote the verse, “I can do all things

⁵ Every time this word is used in the New Testament it is in the context of someone facing difficulty.

through Christ who strengthens me,” and then jump off a tall building, expecting God to enable you to fly. We have no promise from God that He will enable us to fly. To attempt to fly is not faith, but presumption. And you need to have some discernment when you are listening to preachers on TV. Some want you to “step out on faith,” sell most of what you have, and give it to their ministry. Or someone may convince you to throw away your medicine. Well you better be sure you have a word from God before you do that! We are not to simply have faith in faith but faith in God and His Word.

B. His Demonstration of Faith – Peter heard the Lord say, “Come.” That is all that he needed. So after receiving the Word, we read in v.29 that Peter “...walked on the water to go to Jesus.” One can imagine that with hushed expectation the other apostles looked at Peter as he let himself down over the side of the boat. Do you think Peter tapped the water first with his feet, before putting his full weight on the water? I probably would have done that, but not Peter. I believe he just rather impulsively and courageously stepped out of the boat, into the stormy waters. You see, Peter not only stepped out on the water, but he first stepped out on Jesus’ Word! No doubt he was confident in the Master’s ability to enable him to walk on the water. So to the amazement of the other disciples, the impossible happened. He did not sink! In fact, some of our oldest Greek manuscripts indicate that “he came to Jesus” [aorist, accomplished fact; “B” textual rating]. We have to give Peter credit. Anybody can sit in the boat and watch. But it takes a person of real faith to leave the boat and walk on the water.

Oh the power of what faith can do when God gives us a promise we can rightly claim for ourselves! By faith the power of Jesus flowed unto Peter, and He was able to walk on water just like Jesus! As Peter was held up, so we shall be held up everywhere, and in any storm, as long as we set our confidence and faith upon Him. Real faith always leads to action. Is that true of your faith? If you want to experience the power of God in your life, you got to take a step of faith.

Ah, but Peter’s demonstration of faith quickly turned to:

C. His Defeat - He started out great. He may have walked 20 to 30 feet on the water. But in v.30 we read, “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out....” Peter was doing just fine, walking on the water, but then there was a sudden breakdown in Peter’s trust. The vital link to the source of power was severed and Peter began to sink, and fear gripped his heart. He went from victory to defeat in just a moment. Now we need to learn something from Peter’s defeat. Notice:

1. The Cause of His Defeat –Notice in v.30 that he took his eyes off Jesus and on the waves. There we read that “when he saw that the wind was boisterous....” Instead of thinking about how big and powerful Jesus was, Peter started thinking about how big the waves were. He should have been more like young David, who did not concentrate on how big Goliath was, but on how big his God is. In comparison to God, Goliath was rather small!

Even so, our faith is sure to fail when we turn away our eyes from Christ to look at the apparent dangers of our circumstances. When we go through a storm, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus, and not on the circumstances we are facing.

2. The Reasons God Allowed His Defeat - Christ allowed him to sink: 1) because difficulties and dangers often send us back to trust in God once again. The trial lasted long enough to wash out Peter’s self-confidence. His distress got his eyes back on Jesus. Does trouble do that to you? 2) Furthermore, a defeat that leaves you humble is better than a victory that leaves you proud.

If Peter hadn't suffered defeat, the other disciples were not have heard the end of his adventure walking on water!

D. His Deliverance – Notice in v.30 that Peter, “beginning to sink,... cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’” At this point he got his eyes back on Jesus. Even so, when you are going down, or when you are in danger, that is a grand opportunity to place your faith in Jesus. And when you do, notice what happened in v.31. There we read, “And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him....” The child of God may go down, but he will not go under. So having saved Peter, the implication is that Jesus and Peter walked on the water together and went to the boat. What a Savior Jesus is! As Jesus saved Peter and the other disciples from the storm, even so He will save you if you trust Him.

Conclusion: I indicated earlier that I have gone through several storms in my life. At times God allowed the storm or defeat to get my eyes back on Jesus. At times I believe God was just strengthening my character, and teaching me some important lessons. But through it all, I can say that none of those storms really hurt me, but only made me a better person. And you have heard the story of Job. Through all his suffering God taught him some important lessons, and then Job ended up with twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10).

I am probably speaking to someone who is going through a storm right now. Will you turn your eyes upon Jesus right now? Perhaps you are going through a storm because that is the only way you will turn from sin, and trust in Jesus as your Savior. Perhaps you are going through a storm because God wants to strengthen your character, and teach you some important lessons. Will you turn to Jesus right now? Will you place your faith in Him? If He can walk on water, He can handle any problem you are facing, including the coronavirus! He wants faith to replace fear. He wants to comfort you. Call out to Jesus in prayer, and He will help you. He is only a prayer away.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2020; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); John MacArthur, Jr. (specific source unknown); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [Ver. 5:30]* (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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