

Why Do You Doubt Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus Walks on the Water
(Mk 6.45—52; Jn 6.15—21)

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,^d for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

²⁸ Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind,^e he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”¹

In a sermon² by James R. McCormick, we are reminded there is nothing more important for us than to fix the focus of our lives. We must examine what is central to us. What is foundational for us? What is it that shapes our identity, our perceptions, our values, our decisions? What is the core reality at the center of our lives out of which everything else flows? Have you give serious thought to that. You like many people may not think about it very much. Most of us live from moment to moment, making the immediate decisions, attending to matters of necessity or matters of enjoyment, without giving much thought to the overarching meaning of it all. But at any given moment there is something we value at the center of our lives, causing us to think what we think, decide what we decide, and act as we act. At one moment it may be one thing, at another moment it may be

^d Other ancient authorities read *was out on the sea*

^e Other ancient authorities read *the wind*

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Mt 14:22-33

² *Abingdon Preacher's Annual 1993*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992, 247-251.

something else. But at every moment, there is something that prompts us and motives us. We do have a choice of what we will place at our center. The focus should not be following the course of least resistance. Life will be good or life will be less than good depending on what we place at the center of life. The scriptures make it clear that only the God made known to us in Christ is worthy of that positions.

We see this point made several times in our scripture from the Gospel of Matthew. Just after Jesus fed the crowd with the 5 loaves and 2 fish, he sent the disciples across the lake by boat. Finally he was alone. Remember from last week his original intent was to cross the lake and spend time recharging his physical and spiritual batteries. But the crowd had followed and he had compassion and ministered to their needs. Matthew says that he *compelled* them to embark on the boat and go on ahead. At first sight the word *compelled* sounds strange; but if we turn to John's account of the incident we will most likely find the explanation. John tells us that after the feeding of the multitude, the crowd wished to come and to make him a king by force (John 6:15). There was a surge of popular acclamation, and in the excited state of Palestine a revolution might have begun. It was a dangerous situation, and the disciples might have complicated it, because they were still thinking of Jesus in terms of earthly power. Jesus sent away his disciples because a situation had arisen with which he could best deal alone, and in which he did not wish them to become involved.

When he was alone, he went up into a mountain to pray; and by this time the night had come. The disciples had set out back across the lake. One of the sudden storms, for which the lake was notorious, had come down, and they were struggling against the winds and the waves, and making little progress. As the night wore on, Jesus began to walk round the head of the lake to reach the other side.

This experience of the disciples in the storm can be an encouragement to us when we go through the storms of life. When we find ourselves in the storm, we can rest on several assurances.

First, Christ brought us here.” The storm came because they were in the will of God and not (like Jonah) out of the will of God. Did Jesus know that the storm was coming? Certainly! Did He deliberately direct them into the storm? Yes! They were safer in the storm in God’s will than on land with the crowds out of God’s will. We must never judge our security on the basis of circumstances alone.

As we read our Bibles, we discover that there are two kinds of storms: storms of correction, when God disciplines us; and storms of perfection, when God helps us to grow. Jonah was in a storm because he disobeyed God and had to be corrected. The disciples were in a storm because they obeyed Christ and were being perfected. Jesus had tested them in a storm before, when He was in the boat with them (Matt. 8:23–27). But now He tested them by being out of the boat.

Many Christians have the mistaken idea that obedience to God’s will produces “smooth sailing.” But this is not true. “In the world you shall have tribulation,” Jesus promised (John 16:33). When we find ourselves in the storm because we have obeyed the Lord, we must remember that Christ brought us here and Christ will care for us.

Second, Christ is praying for us.” This entire scene is a dramatic picture of the church and the Lord today. God’s people are in the midst of a storm. Yet Jesus Christ is in heaven “making intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34). He saw the disciples and knew their plight (Mark 6:48), just as Christ sees us and knows our needs. Christ feels the burdens that we feel and knows what we are going through (Heb. 4:14–16). Jesus was praying for His disciples, that their faith would not fail.

If you knew that Jesus Christ was in the next room, praying for you, wouldn’t it give you courage to endure the storm and do Christ’s will? Of course it would.

Well, Christ is not in the next room, but He is in heaven interceding for you. Christ sees your need, Christ knows your fears, and He is in control of the situation.

Third, Christ will come to us.” Often we feel like Jesus has deserted us when we are going through the hard times of life. In the Psalms, David complained that God seemed far away and unconcerned. However, David knew that God would ultimately rescue him. Even the great Apostle Paul got into a situation so difficult he felt “burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor. 1:8, NASB).

Jesus always comes to us in the storms of life. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you” (Isa. 43:2, NASB). He may not come at the time we think He should come, because He knows when we need Him the most. He waited until the ship was as far from land as possible, so that all human hope was gone. He was testing the disciples’ faith, and this meant removing every human prop.

Why did Jesus walk on the water? To show His disciples that the very thing they feared (the sea) was only a path for Him to come to them. Often we fear the difficult experiences of life (such as surgery or bereavement), only to discover that these experiences bring Jesus Christ closer to us.

Why did they not recognize Jesus? Because they were not looking for Him. Had they been waiting by faith, they would have known Him immediately. Instead, they jumped to the false conclusion that the appearance was that of a ghost. Fear and faith cannot live in the same heart, because fear always blinds the eyes to the presence of the Lord.

Fourth, Christ will help us grow.” This was the whole purpose of the storm and this story, to help the disciples grow in their faith. After all, Jesus would one day leave them, and they would face many storms in their ministries. They had to learn to trust Him even though He was not present with them, and even though it looked as though He did not care.

Now our center of interest shifts to Peter. Before we criticize Peter for sinking, let's honor him for his magnificent demonstration of faith. He dared to be different. 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.

What caused Peter to sink? His faith began to waver because he took his eyes off the Lord and began to look at the circumstances around him. "Why did you doubt?" Jesus asked him (Matt. 14:31). This word translated doubt carries the meaning of "standing uncertainly at two ways." Peter started out with great faith but ended up with little faith because he saw two ways instead of one.

We must give Peter credit for knowing that he was sinking and for crying out to the Lord for help. He cried out when he was "beginning to sink" and not when he was drowning. Maybe this incident came to Peter's mind years later when he wrote in his first epistle: "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12).

This experience was difficult for Peter, but it helped him to grow in his knowledge of himself and of the Lord. The storms of life are not easy, but they are necessary. They teach us to trust Jesus Christ alone and to obey His Word no matter what the circumstances may be. It has been said, "Faith is not believing in spite of evidence, but obeying in spite of consequence."

Fifth, Christ will see us through." If Jesus says, "Come," then that word is going to accomplish its intended purpose. Since He is the "author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2), whatever Christ starts, Christ completes. We may fail along the way, but in the end, God will succeed. Jesus and Peter walked on the water together and went to the ship.

Peter's experience turned out to be a blessing to the other disciples as well as to himself. When they saw the power of Jesus in conquering and calming the storm, they could only fall down and worship Him. 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, “Truly you are the Son of God!”

The disciples had helped to feed 5,000 people, and then God permitted them to go through a storm. In the Book of Acts, they won 5,000 people (Acts 4:4), and then the storm of persecution began. No doubt Peter and the disciples remembered their storm experience with the Jesus and took courage.

This miracle magnifies the kingship of Jesus Christ. In fact, when Matthew wrote Peter’s request, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water,” Matthew used a Greek word that means “the command of a king.” Peter knew that Jesus Christ was King over all nature, including the wind and the waves. His word is law and the elements must obey.

We ought to imitate the disciples, bow at His feet, and acknowledge that He is King of kings and Lord of lords!^{3 4}

In life the wind is often contrary. There are times when we are up against it and life is a desperate struggle with ourselves, with our circumstances, with our temptations, with our sorrows, with our decisions. At such a time no person need struggle alone, because Jesus comes to us across the storms of life, with hand stretched out to save, and with his calm clear voice telling us take heart, focus on him, make him our center, do not doubt - have no fear.⁵

Thanks be unto God!

³Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mt 14:22

⁴Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:54

⁵Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume 2*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible, Rev. Ed), S. 103