

PETER WALKING ON THE WATER
Matthew 14:22-33

Intro: This miracle is recorded also in Mark 6:45-52 and, surprisingly, in John 6:14-21. All three place it immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, and on the same day. But only John explained why the Lord "constrained" (Matt. 14:22) His disciples to get into a ship to go over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee—or at least John gave a possible reason for it even if it is not the true reason. The crowd the Lord had fed felt that He must be the prophet that should come, meaning the Messiah. And so they were going to force Him to be their King. See John 6:14, 15.

A couple of things were wrong with this. One, it was not the Lord's time to become a King. That has to await His second coming. And then, the Lord knows the hearts of all, and He knew that man can be attracted by something physical like food, when he will not be interested all in his spiritual needs. How important it was for the disciples to learn not to give in to the demands of the crowds at any particular time.

So the Lord quickly sent His disciples away by ship, and He went into a nearby mountain to pray.

David Brown, in his commentary, suggested that this was probably the time when the Lord reached the zenith of His popularity because it seems that from this point on it began to decline.

Why the Lord wanted to get away by Himself to pray, we cannot say for sure. But it would seem that He sought the peace and quiet of that time and place with His Father after a very busy day of ministry. And, from the events which followed, it would seem that the Lord wanted to get away to pray for His disciples in the test that they would be facing. Both of these are powerful lessons for those of us who minister the Word. While the work of the Lord brings great joy, yet it is very exhausting. We need the fellowship with the Father to have our own strength renewed, and we need to pray for those to whom we have ministered. The disciples always had a special place in the Lord's prayers.

However, a most unexpected thing happened to the disciples: this is the second time that we read about them being caught in a storm. The first time it seems it was daylight; this time it was dark. The first time the Lord was with them; this time they were by themselves without the Lord.

It is not unusual for storms to come up quickly on the Sea of

Galilee, but we can be sure that the disciples reflected on the fact that the Lord had made them get into the ship and set out on their journey when He certainly knew what was ahead of them.

We need to remember this in our times of testing. Our Lord is omniscient. He knows what is ahead of us. By His leading we often find ourselves in difficult circumstances, and we may try to second-guess our guidance. But this should be an encouragement to us, as well as the fact that the Lord was up in the mountain praying where He saw them, as Mark has told us, "toiling in rowing" (Mark 6:48). The word "toiling" means that they were physically tortured, in pain, because of the energy they were having to put out. The wind was not helping them; it was blowing against them. It was almost daylight, and according to the calculations of some, they were only about half way to their destination. And the distance was not that great! Undoubtedly those who were fishermen had made that trip many times without any trouble.

The Lord has never said that He would spare us from testing, but it is comforting to know that He always has gracious purposes for the things He takes us through. And then when we think of how He prays for us, that is another source of comfort.

I am inclined to think that we have an instance here in the life of our Lord when He sovereignly exercised one of His divine powers which He voluntarily had set aside when He became a Man. That was His power to see what was going on with His people even though He was not with them, nor near enough to see them. The Lord knew that they were in trouble, and so He went to them. But He went in a way that He had never gone before. He went walking on the water!

Let us think for a moment about:

I. THE LORD'S APPEARANCE TO HIS DISCIPLES (Matt. 14:25-27).

They had never seen the Lord walking on water. And Mark tells us that He "would have passed by them" (Mark 6:48). But one by one they all saw Him, not thinking at all that it was the Lord, but that it was a ghost of some kind--a living creature without a physical body! And these men were not only "troubled," but "they cried out in fear" (Matt. 14:26).

From what we know of the disciples, they were real men. But we can see from their experiences how quickly strong men can be terrified when they are in a situation that they have never been in before.

But the Lord did not permit them to be in such terror for long because Matthew tells us that "straightway" He spoke unto them. This is a word which seems to belong in Mark's Gospel rather than Matthew's. It means that the Lord lost no time in speaking to them. He wanted them to take courage, to stop being fearful. The Greek which is translated here, "It is I," is actually, I AM! And there is a special emphasis on the "I." Although the wind was still blowing, and so they were not out of danger, how wonderful it must have been to hear those words which they knew expressed His Deity and pointed to His divine powers!

It is wonderful to have someone with us when we are in trouble. The disciples must have been thankful that they had each other. But after all that comfort did not get them out of the storm. However, when the Lord spoke, and said, "I am," that was different.

Please notice from this that the Lord comforts us, gives us courage, in two ways:

- 1) He comes to us, and
- 2) He speaks to us.

We do not have the privilege of His physical presence like the disciples did, but we have His promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us. And while we cannot hear His voice audibly as the disciples did, yet the Lord speaks to us through His written Word. And therefore we have access to the same kind of encouragement and comfort.

And notice that the Lord came to them and spoke to them before the storm was over.

Cf. this idea in Phil. 4:6, 7 regarding prayer, although we don't know if the disciples were praying or not.

At this point we come to an incident which took place which is only recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. It has to do with:

II. PETER'S REQUEST (Mark 14:28-31).

There is an emphasis here on the pronouns "Thou" and "me."
(Read with that emphasis.)

Perhaps this gives us the key to the situation. It does not seem that Peter was questioning the Lord, but it does seem that he was putting himself ahead of the other disciples, in much the same way that he did when the Lord told His disciples that they would all forsake Him, and flee. That is recorded for us in Matt. 26:33-35. Peter seemed always to

want to demonstrate how much he trusted the Lord. But behind that desire was a pride which probably not even he (Peter) recognized. But the Lord saw what it was, and knew that He must deal with that in Peter if Peter were ever to become a useful instrument.

It seems that we can say that most of our trials, perhaps all of them, are designed by the Lord to deal with our pride. Do you remember what Moses said to the Israelites about the purpose of God's dealings with them in their journey from Egypt to Canaan? Listen as I read to you Deut. 8:2:

And thou shalt remember all the way
which the Lord thy God led thee these forty year
in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee,
to know what was in thine heart,
whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

We can't say for sure, but it seems that Peter was out to demonstrate that he had more faith than any of the other disciples. And so the Lord simply said, "Come."

And Peter walked on the water! He really did! Even though He was on water, and the waves were rough, he made his way to the Lord. That must have been exciting for all of the disciples to see, and exciting especially for Peter.

But then something happened.

Peter began to realize where he was. He saw that the wind had not died down (as perhaps he had expected that it would), but was still "boisterous" (which means just as powerful and strong as ever). And, as many have pointed out before me, Peter took his eyes away from the Lord, and starting looking at the waves, and his faith began to fail!

Illus: Allison in the park walking on the beam, scared but with her eyes on me all of the time.

It was only when Peter began to sink that he looked away from the waves and looked back at the Lord, and said, "Lord, save me." For the moment at least, all pride was gone. Peter was in trouble, and he knew it. But what is best was he knew that only the Lord could save him. He didn't call for his brother, nor for his close friends, James and John. He called upon the Lord. His prayer (because that is what it was) was very brief and to the point: "Lord, save me."

And just as quickly as the Lord had spoken before, He reached out His hand, "and caught him."

But our Lord also said to Peter, "O thou of little faith,

wherefore didst thou doubt?" Matthew does not tell us how Peter answered the Lord. I strongly suspect it was because Peter didn't answer Him. What could he say? He had wanted to demonstrate how much he trusted the Lord, but he wanted to do it for the wrong reason--to show the other disciples how great his faith was. The Lord did not say that Peter had no faith, but that his faith was not as great as Peter had thought that it was.

Probably the saddest thing about this experience was that Peter did not seem to learn the lesson that the Lord was seeking to teach him. And so he eventually got to the place where he denied that he even knew the Lord after he had tried to assure the Lord that he would be faithful to Him even if the others were unfaithful.

Now let us notice:

III. THE CONCLUSION OF THE ACCOUNT (Matt. 14:32, 33).

There were two which Matthew mentioned here.

- A. The storm stopped when Peter and the Lord got in the ship (v. 32).
- B. The men in the ship did not congratulate Peter, but worshipped the Lord, and declared, on the basis of what they had seen, that they were more convinced than ever that the Lord was truly the Son of God.

And so we have another example of how the Lord can be glorified even through our failures.

Concl: Perhaps one reason so much is said about Peter's failures in Scripture is because most of us are like Peter. There is no question but that Peter loved the Lord, and loved Him perhaps more than the others. But Peter was not aware of how weak he was, and how much pride he had in his heart. You know, don't you, that we can be proud of our devotion to the Lord. The real answer to the Lord's question as He lifted Peter up out of the water, is the main lesson to be learned from this miracle. Pride and faith do not mix. The Lord patiently works with all of us to take away our pride that our faith may be strong. When we know that we are weak, then we can be truly strong in the Lord.