

September 10, 2017

“Following the One Who Walks on Water”

Matthew 14:22-33

FCF: The need to be clear on who we are following

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus came to His disciples walking on water.
(magnet) This transforms what it means to follow Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

At the Yigal Allon Centre in Israel, there is an amazing archeological find on display - an ancient fishing boat from the 1st century A.D., discovered in 1986 on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It's 27' long, 7.5' wide, 4' tall, and could hold a crew of 15. Its flat bottom hull allowed it to move in shallow water near the shore. It was made of cedar but was spliced with several other woods as well, indicating numerous repairs over a long period. It's a glorious ruin.

Understand that no one is saying that this boat is directly connected to Jesus. But it is the kind we read of in the New Testament Gospels. Which is not surprising. For the events recorded in the Gospels are real. As are the things we learn of Jesus and what it means to follow Him.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 14:22-33](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Football season is upon us. And, whether you're a fan of the college or pro game, it's an opportunity to enjoy the feats of the players and the sounds of announcers struggling to describe those feats. Meaning that it's time for the hapless viewer to endure weeks of sanity defying expressions, grammar assaulting assertions, and superlatives that stretch the bounds of reality.

Not that I'm saying Matthew is guilty of such an offense. Not at all. But he is describing things that had never been heard or seen before. For Jesus' words and works, His message and miracles were proof that, with His coming, the kingdom of God had arrived. Think with me here. Jesus came to His disciples walking on water. This is unique, absolutely unheard of, far beyond the capacity or ability of any other teacher or leader at that time. Or any other time.

Jesus came to His disciples walking on water. This transforms what it means to follow Him. His walking absolutely shapes our following. How so? In at least these three ways. First, in how we see all things working according to His timing. Second, in the absolute necessity of our dependence upon Him. And then, thirdly, in our good assurance of His mercy towards us.

I. ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO HIS TIMING

First, we see Jesus working all things according to His timing. That is, according to His great wisdom, His good and wise plan and purpose, making clear that He is not at our bidding.

A) Sending Them Away

This comes out in two ways. First, Jesus sends everyone away ([READ Matthew 14:22](#)).

1. The backdrop

There is a note of urgency here. The other Gospel accounts speak of the crowds believing Jesus to be a political messiah and planning to make Him king by force, intending an armed uprising.

2. The dispersment

Jesus will have none of that. And so, recognizing the need to disperse the crowd, He dismisses His disciples. He will usher in His kingdom His way. And He works according to His time.

B) Allowing the Struggle

We also see this in how Jesus allows the disciples to struggle ([READ Matthew 14:23-25](#)).

1. The distance

If you do the math, you realize that these experienced fishermen have been rowing for about nine hours and had traveled only about three miles. It was a hard night fighting against strong winds.

2. The delay

Where was Jesus? He was in the hills for a time of extended prayer. We'll come back to this. But note the delay. Jesus could have intervened at any moment. But He didn't. Why? Because that struggle, that hard night against those strong winds, was part of His good plan for those men.

He works all things according to His timing, His good and wise plan and purpose.

Illustration:

Which means that He does not always rush in to relieve the pressure. Why? In order to mature and to strengthen us. C. S. Lewis speaks to this in [The Screwtape Letters](#) ([READ quote](#)):

He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger, than when a human, no longer desiring, but intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.

Application:

Sometimes it is for the best that the GPS fails and we get lost on a road trip. Sometimes it is for the best that we have to wait through the long weekend for the the test results to come back from the lab. Sometimes it is for the best to have to persevere in that "no man's land" between homes or jobs. Why? To test and expose, to drive and direct, to strengthen and deepen.

Jesus can intervene at any moment. And, at some point, He will. But there may be a stretch when the hard night against those strong winds is His good and wise plan and purpose.

Jesus comes to us walking on water. This transforms what it means to follow Him.

II. THE NECESSITY OF OUR DEPENDENCE

The storms - real and metaphorical - also show us our need of our dependence upon Him.

A) Jesus Praying to the Father

Let's come back now to Jesus' time of extended prayer ([READ Matthew 14:23a](#)).

1. A wonder to behold

This is a wonder to behold. Do we see what we're seeing here? This is the second person of the Trinity. And He has gone away to pray. This is the incarnate Son communing with the Father.

2. The reasons why

Why? He is the perfect Mediator, fully grasping the interests of each party. So He is praying for the safety of His disciples. And for His own strength, facing the temptation to take the easy way.

B) Peter Looking to Jesus

Jesus' dependence on His Father points us to the necessity of our own dependence upon Him. As we see with Peter. There is a profound parallel here ([READ Matthew 14:28-31](#)).

1. Not presumptuous foolishness

Let's be clear. This was not presumptuous foolishness on Peter's part. His assumption was right. And Jesus' call was clear. And note this. Peter climbed out of the boat. And walked on water.

2. But "little faith"

This was not presumptuous foolishness. It was the tension of "little faith". There was something there for Jesus to work with. But there was also something to be worked on. At one moment, Jesus was greater than anything in Peter's eyes. But in the next, it was the wind and the waves.

All pointing to the necessity of dependence. And needed preparations for the storms.

Illustration:

Think about Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. If you're in an area about to get hit, you need to get ready. You need to have water, food, and fuel on hand. You need to move the cars, board up the windows, know the evacuation routes. You need to take time to get ready. Before it hits.

Application:

The necessity of dependence is linked to the necessity of preparation. What do we learn from Jesus here? We need to have time alone in prayer. What do we learn from Peter here? Jesus needs to loom larger in our eyes than the wind and waves. How then will He loom larger? By our taking the time ahead of time alone with Him in prayer. Do you see the connection?

Jesus comes to us walking on water. This transforms what it means to follow Him.

III. OUR ASSURANCE OF HIS MERCY

But the reality of the storms brings the inevitable need for His mercy. Which we have.

A) The Lord of the Storm

For Jesus is clearly the Lord of every storm ([READ Matthew 14:32-33](#)).

1. In what they saw

Consider what the disciples saw. Jesus came to them not stroke by stroke in the water but stride by stride on the water. Who could do this? Only one ([READ Psalm 107:23-30; 77:16-19](#)).

2. In what they heard

So we have who they saw. And what they heard ([READ Matthew 14:26-27](#)). Literally, this is "I am", a common way of identifying yourself. But also the name of the sovereign God of Israel.

Which is all to say that, when they cried out, they were heard by the Lord of the storm.

B) The Heart of the Lord

And the Lord of mercy. For we see both the Lord of the storm and the heart of the Lord.

1. His words to the twelve

Think about His words to the twelve. They were spent, exhausted, and understandably shaken by the sight of this figure on the water. And He encourages them. And does so immediately.

2. His hand to Peter

We have His words to the twelve. And then His hand stretched out to Peter (**READ Matthew 14:31**). Yes, Jesus critiques him. But He does so to instruct him. And, again, we have this word - immediately. Peter cries out. And Jesus waits no longer than necessary to pull him up.

He loves those with little faith, even in their doubts. Which points to our good assurance of His mercy - that He hears and, at just the right time, reaches out His hand to take hold of us.

Illustration:

It would be madness to call on anyone else. This is obvious in the world of superheroes. You call not for Aunt May but Spider-Man. You look not for Jimmy Olson but Superman. You want not Alfred but Batman. And, amusing as she is, you call not for Etta but Wonder Woman.

Application:

Now, back to the real world. The events we read of here make clear that it is madness to call on, look to, rely upon anyone or anything but Jesus. For in Him we have this transformative and true mercy. And an assurance that no one is too far gone. No situation is too far out of His reach. He hears. The Lord of the storm hears. And the Lord of the storm has a heart of mercy.

Jesus comes to us walking on water. This transforms what it means to follow Him.

CONCLUSION:

There is so much that can capture our attention in this text, so many things to consider. It reminds me of the recent solar eclipse. You're enjoying the snacks and engaging in conversation. You're checking the tracking data on your smartphone and making adjustments to your camera. There's so much going on. So much, in fact, that you can miss the main event, the eclipse itself.

Here it's easy to miss the climax of the text (**READ Matthew 14:33**). You see, the climax is not the walking on the water or the ceasing of the wind. It's worship of the Creator. These miracles are windows. Pushing further, this text is not about Peter. It's about Jesus. Peter is but the treasured means through whom we learn the real lessons - what it means to follow Jesus.

Put another way, Jesus came to His disciples walking on water. Which means Christ is unlike any other teacher or leader. He towers over them all. He stands out. And, because Christ stands out, Christianity stands out. This is why Christians have to speak of there being but one way of salvation. Did you ever think about that? This is why we make these exclusive truth claims. It's because Jesus stands out. It's why there is but one way. It's why His is an authority over all of life and He can say the things He does about our lives. Because He is the Son of God.

Jesus comes to us walking on water. This transforms what it means to follow Him.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus came to His disciples walking on water.
(magnet) This transforms what it means to follow Him.