

## Matthew 14:22-36 – Jesus Walks on the Lake

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### Never underestimate someone

Sometimes I feel like a good action movie. Recently I watched one where the IRA – the Irish Republican Army – sets off a series of bombs in London. They do it to try and get the British government to release some IRA members who are in prison. But one of the bombs kills an innocent girl, the daughter of a Chinese immigrant, Quan.

Quan is so distraught that he goes on a mission to find the names of the men who killed his daughter. First he asks the Irish Deputy minister, a former IRA member, to tell him the names. The minister doesn't know. But he also doesn't do anything to find out. And since this man is an old Chinese immigrant, he dismisses him.

Boy did he underestimate him. Quan first of all, sets off a bomb in his bathroom to scare him. Then he takes out four of his security personnel, single-handedly. He takes photos of him and his mistress, and even puts his dog to sleep to show how close he can get to him. It turns out Quan has military training and fought for the US army in Vietnam. He eventually hides out in the forest and outsmarts all the security guards to come face to face with the deputy minister. He finally realises he has underestimated Quan who has incredible intelligence and power. He gives him the names and Quan gets justice at last. It's dangerous to underestimate someone.

Well today we see that Herod and the disciples have greatly underestimated Jesus. Jesus is not just a prophet or a good teacher. He is God, the Creator, come in the flesh. And he uses his tremendous power, not to punish people and get justice, but to save people and show them his glory. Jesus shows us a few things today. Firstly, that prayer is essential. Secondly, that he is God in the flesh. And thirdly, that he comes to us *in the storm*.

### 1. Jesus shows that prayer is essential

Last week we saw that when Jesus heard John the Baptist was dead, he sailed away to a quiet place. But he was so popular that the crowds followed him on foot. And of course Jesus had compassion on them. All he wanted to do was to be by himself and pray. But he loved them and ended up feeding around 10,000 people.

This week we see that as soon as they had finished eating, he made the disciples go by boat to the other side of the lake. And then he dismissed the crowd. And what does he do? He prays:

**Matthew 14:23a** *“After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.”*

Jesus could have had tremendous fame. He could have basked in the attention and praise of the people. Or he could have gone home and slept after an exhausting day. But Jesus knew the most important thing in the world was spending time in prayer with His Father. That's what gives him the most joy and refreshment. Brothers and sisters, if Jesus, the Son of God, needed to pray, how much more do we creatures need to pray?

Through the busyness and tiredness of our lives, what do we need more than anything? Prayer. Spending time with our heavenly Father. Thanking him, praising him, asking him to refresh our souls. When the world and history come to an end, we will appear before God our Maker. And we will see that our relationship with Him is the most important thing in the universe. We are made to be joyfully dependent on Him. Robert McCheyne once said, "What a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and nothing more."

Bathe your life in prayer. Pray when you're happy. Pray when you're sad or worried. Pray when you're walking and driving and eating. Everything in this life is training us to rely on God, and commune with Him and find our joy in Him. Do you look forward to spending time with Him in eternity? Then pray. We begin eternal life as soon as we put our trust in Jesus. So begin enjoying eternity, today.

## 2. Jesus is God in the flesh

The beginning of Matthew's gospel reveals Jesus' identity. When he is born, the angel says he will be called, Immanuel, which means 'God with us'. But Chapter 14 begins with Herod grappling with Jesus' identity. He thinks Jesus must be John the Baptist, risen from the dead. That must be where he gets his miraculous powers from.

And it seems the disciples don't fully realise who he is yet either. But through this storm, they are about to find out. Remember, Jesus is the one who made them get into the boat. And now the boat is being banged around by waves because of the wind. This is the second time they are in a wild storm, but last time Jesus was with them in the boat. Why would he let them go through this alone? Only because he was about to show them his glory. So just before dawn, Jesus went out to them, *walking on the lake*.

Now just stop there and listen to that sentence again. '...Jesus went out to them, *walking on the lake*.' In case you missed it, this is not what normal human beings do! It is so amazing, that the disciples don't even recognise that it's Jesus. They think it's a ghost, because he's walking on water! So they were terrified.

But Jesus says some amazing words:

**Matthew 14:27** *But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*

Literally, 'Take heart. I am.' Now he could have just meant, 'It's me'. But remember when God revealed his special name, Yahweh, to Moses? Moses asked, 'Who shall I say is sending me?' and God said, 'I AM who I AM'. Is Jesus saying that he is Yahweh, the God of Israel, the Creator of the world?

Well Peter seems to think so because he says, 'Lord, if it's you tell me to come to you on the water.' And it's even stronger than that. For he uses a word that means, 'command me, like a king.' Lord, command me to come to you on the water.

Lord can mean earthly master, but when God's special name, Yahweh was used in the Old Testament, it was so holy that the Jews didn't dare use it. Instead every time they read from the Scriptures, when they came

across the Word Yahweh, they would say Adonai, which is translated, 'Lord'. So when Peter calls him, 'Lord' here, I think he means Yahweh – the One true God.

He sees Jesus *walking on the water* and thinks 'This is the Creator of the World. He's basically saying to Jesus, 'If you are really God, your Word created the heavens and the earth. Your Word can make the molecules of water obey and hold me up.' And Jesus says a single word, 'Come', and makes *Peter* walk on water too. The same Word that said, 'Let there be light.' And that separated the oceans from the clouds, commanded Peter to walk on the water and he did!

Now he eventually started to sink, but when he did, he cried out 'Lord, save me!' Again, 10 out of 11 times in the Old Testament, the phrase, 'Lord, save...' (Lord, save us', or 'Lord, save me') is talking about Yahweh the One true God. Jesus is the Creator, God with us in the flesh. And he is the only Saviour. So Peter cries out, 'Lord save me!'

As we think about God the Creator, making light and stars and oceans and animals, he commands them all and they cannot help but obey. Human beings are the only ones who have a choice whether to obey or not. Here Peter shows that he wants to be like all of Creation. 'Lord, command me, and I will obey.' Are we obeying the voice of Jesus, our Maker and Saviour today? Are we seeing Jesus for who he really is, and listening to His Word? For Jesus is God in the flesh.

### **3. Jesus comes to us in the storm**

You know, we think that following Jesus will make life easier. That it will be 'smooth sailing'. But that's not the case. Jesus made them get into the boat. He knew the wind and waves would threaten the boat. He knew they would be afraid. But he did it so that they would have no earthly things to trust in. And they would see his glory.

Jesus came to them in the storm, and he comes to us in the storm as well. Jesus says in John's gospel, 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But **take heart**. I have overcome the world.' (John 16:33).

Often we fear the difficult experiences of life, like illness or bereavement, or losing a job. But it's in those times that we cry out to Jesus and we feel him to be closer than ever. He is always with us, but sometimes we don't feel it. He wants us to cry out to him in our distress. He wants us to trust him as our Maker and Saviour.

Now we know that Peter eventually started to sink, but the fact that he believed Jesus could make him walk on water is amazing! Anybody can sit in the boat and watch. It takes real faith to leave the boat and walk on the water.

The great example is that Peter realised that he was sinking and cried out to Jesus. 'Lord, save me!' Jesus didn't say, 'well sorry, you didn't believe me so you're gonna drown.' He immediately reached out his hand and caught him. But he does gently challenge him. 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'

Why did he doubt? Well it says, 'But when he saw the wind, he was afraid...' He took his eyes off Jesus and looked at his circumstances. This is so easy for us to do, isn't it? The Lord Jesus has told us one thing, but our world, or our circumstances tell us we are in danger. We take our eyes off Jesus; we look at our circumstances, and we start to fear. That's when we start to sink.

But the great news is, Jesus saves those who are weak in faith. Jesus and Peter walk back to the boat *together*. We may fail and fall along the way, but Jesus will always be there to pick us up, and walk us back home.

And Peter's failure doesn't take away from Jesus' glory. It leads to more glory. When they get back, the other disciples see the power of Jesus and *worship* him as the Son of God. They don't just respect him as a powerful man, or a good teacher. They worship him as 'God with us.'

If we attempt hard things while trusting in Jesus, our failures will not lead to humiliation. Those around us will see that even in our weakness, Jesus is strong. He is the one who makes us able to stand.

You know, we have been doing the Outreach Training in Growth Groups. And it's scary to talk to our friends and neighbours about Jesus. What if they reject us? What if we can't answer their questions? What if we freeze and don't know what to say? Brothers and sisters, even if we do, Jesus will be there to help us. And those around us will see that we believe that Jesus is the glorious Son of God. He is so important, that we are willing to try the awkward, scary thing of telling people about him. He's worth it. And knowing him is the best thing ever. We love them enough to ask the hard questions, and help them think about life. For we want the world to know his glorious grace and power of Jesus.

If we fail in outreach, Jesus is greater than our weakness, and he can still bring glory to himself. But what will not bring him glory, is if we don't try at all. Do we believe that Jesus will save people? Do we believe that Jesus will be there for us when we need him? The Lord who walked on water still speaks to us, 'You of little faith, why do you doubt?'

Jesus came through the storm to help the disciples, so they would know him as God and Saviour. Jesus also went through the storm of the judgement of God, so that he can save us from our sins. He came to bring us back into a relationship with God. Will we take time away to pray to him and be with him? Do we see and worship Jesus for who he really is? The Creator and Saviour of the world? Will you trust him even when things are scary, and take his hand in the storms of life?