

Introduction

This morning we are going to jump right in to another one of those amazing displays of the sovereignty of Jesus.

[Read Text; Pray]

This text of Matthew's gospel culminates in a recognition and worship of the person of Jesus Christ. It is all about the greatness of Jesus and a proper response to that greatness. From verse 22 all the way to verse 33, a series of contrasts between Jesus and the disciples emerges. Jesus is seen to be doing one thing while the disciples are doing another. And these distinctions call attention to the glory of the one who is to be worshiped on the one hand, and the manner in which he is to be worshiped, on the other. I want to break down this text this morning by drawing attention to each of these contrasting images.

I. First we observe Jesus commanding and the disciples obeying. I want you to notice a very strong word. In the ESV, the word is made. Jesus "made his disciples get into the boat." The Authorized Translation says that Jesus "constrained" his disciples to get into the boat. This word communicates that Jesus was getting some push-back from his disciples for one reason or another. It is likely that the wind was already blowing and they were uncomfortable with the situation, especially given that they were to go on ahead without him. But Jesus exerted his authority upon them and compelled them to get in the boat. Jesus also dismissed the crowds. He was acting with authority.

In contrast the disciples and the crowds were responding to that authority with obedience. They did get into the boat and the crowds were dismissed so that Jesus departed to a solitary place.

II. Next we observe that disciples were rowing while Jesus was praying. He had compelled the disciples to go to the other side. And while they were in transit, Jesus went up on the mountain by himself to pray. And he did so

for quite some time. It is important to realize that we can glorify God whether we are rowing a boat or bowing our heads in prayer. We dare not neglect prayer in our lives and let it become less than a top priority, but we also must eat and work and travel. We should seek to glorify God even in the seemingly mundane affairs of life.

III. Subsequently, the disciples were struggling while Jesus was subduing. The disciples were struggling with the sea. Ideally, the track taken by the disciples would have kept them fairly near the land, but the strong wind had apparently driven them out from shore toward the middle of the sea. Their vessel was beaten by the waves, and the wind was against them. They were struggling. Perhaps they were thinking in their minds, I do not understand why Jesus insisted that we cross the sea tonight with all this wind. We tried to tell him, but he would not listen. Now here we are in the middle of the night, sleepy, tired, and struggling. But while they struggled with the sea, Jesus had subdued it; he was walking on it.

This is a precious picture for you if you are a disciple of Jesus. The winds and the waves of life may trouble you. They may produce a struggle on your part. They may tire you, beat upon you, and be against you. But do not overlook this: Jesus walks on what troubles us. He is sovereign over our enemies. He is Lord over the details. He rules the wind and the waves. He rules earthquakes and floods and hurricanes and cancer and heart attacks and even the flu. He rules over circumstances . . . ALL circumstances. He even rules over temptations. And he is faithful in them all. And he uses them all for the good of his people.

It has been a few years since I was up at the Apostle Islands Lakeshore, but it is a place of beauty. There the waters of Lake Superior have carved out caves under the surface of the land, wonders to behold. But without the constant thrashing of the waves they would not be there.

Yes, we need to affirm and call to mind the precious picture of a stormy sea which heaves to and fro and whose waves crash relentlessly about us, yet standing undisturbed and unmoved and unshaken upon the sea is the ruler of the sea, the Lord Jesus Christ. He stands over the sea and it rests under him to obey his will.

One more aspect in this image demands our attention. In the scripture the sea is an image of judgment. Judgment fell upon the godless world in the days of Noah in the form of a world-wide flood of water. Judgment fell upon the Egyptians when the Red Sea covered over them. When Jonah refused to obey the voice of the Lord, he went and boarded a ship to go in the opposite direction, but the Lord sent a storm as a consequence. In the Psalms the waters are an enemy which threatens to pull us under.

Tumultuous waters depict the aggravation of the wrath of God against sin. But this text blesses us with an image of one who stands above God's wrath to rescue those caught in it who will trust in him.

IV. Now for the fourth of these contrasting depictions. The disciples cry out in unhinged terror, but Jesus speaks peace and assurance.

Why were the disciples afraid? At the least they didn't recognize Jesus. I understand. If you are in a boat in the middle of a lake, struggling in a storm, the absolute last thing you expect is to see a man walking. I have noticed in my life that when my anxiety level is up, I can easily become even more fearful in response to just about anything. Worry and anxiety and fear are sinful tendencies that kick into high gear under the right circumstances. And then the very things that might result in peace and benefit can be seen as threatening. That is precisely what happened here. The very one who could help and who came to help was feared at first. He came to them in a way they could not have anticipated. It was a way only God could come, and so it alarmed them. It tested their faith. This is just the way God often works. He is not a man that he should be thought to work only in our measly kinds of ways. He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all we can ask or think. Sometimes when he does just that, it's so excessive that it may appear threatening at first. But we must remember God's ways often seem mysterious to us. He has never lost control. He uses storms and diseases and even people who do evil things to do good to his people.

I need to point out what Jesus said that brought the disciples comfort. He exhorted them to "take heart" and he told them "Do not be afraid." But it was what he said in between that stands out. It is translated in the ESV as

"It is I." Fair enough. Jesus was letting them know that it was him. But a little bit of Greek here unpacks an even deeper punch in the statement. Jesus's identification of himself here actually consists of two Greek words. Literally translated, that identification is this: "I am." It is as he said in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am." This is the self-revealed name of God. When the Lord was directing Moses to return to Egypt to rescue the Israelites, Moses asked him, "Who shall I say sent me?" And he said, "I am who I am. Say to this people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" This is the name Yahweh. By invoking this name, Jesus is recalling for our attention the personal name of the one true God. He is making an enormous statement about who he is. He is affirming himself to be the eternal God.

John Piper says that there are ten truths about God which this name expresses.

1. He never had a beginning.
2. He will never end.
3. God is absolute reality. There is no reality before him. There is no reality outside of him unless he wills it and makes it. He is all that was eternally. No space, no universe, no emptiness. Only God.
4. God is utterly independent. He depends on nothing to bring him into being or support him or counsel him or make him what he is.
5. Everything that is not God depends totally on God. The entire universe is utterly secondary. It came into being by God and stays in being moment by moment on God's decision to keep it in being.
6. All the universe is by comparison to God as nothing. Contingent, dependent reality is to absolute, independent reality as a shadow to substance. As an echo to a thunderclap. All that we are amazed by in the world and in the galaxies is, compared to God, as nothing.
7. God is constant. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He cannot be improved. He is not becoming anything. He is who he is.
8. God is the absolute standard of truth and goodness and beauty. There is no law-book to which he looks to know what is right. No almanac to establish facts. No guild to determine what is excellent or beautiful. He himself is the standard of what is right, what is true, what is beautiful.
9. God does whatever he pleases and it is always right and always beautiful and always in accord with truth. All reality that is outside of him he created

and designed and governs as the absolute reality. So he is utterly free from any constraints that don't originate from the counsel of his own will.

10. God is the most important and most valuable reality and person in the universe. He is more worthy of interest and attention and admiration and enjoyment than all other realities, including the entire universe.

I cannot say that the disciples thought of all these things when Jesus said, "I Am." But I can say that Jesus was giving his disciples the fundamental reason to be at peace and to be calm. The God to whom everything owes its existence stands before them in this moment on these billows. This wind and these billows are under his control and they are operating according to his will. Therefore, these men need not fear. They can take heart. He is coming to them not as a malicious spirit but as Almighty God to bring peace.

Child of God, when clouds gather and winds pick up, when waves roll in your life, it is not a time for fear but faith. I appreciate much the old hymn that says,

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform
He plants His footsteps in the sea And rides upon the storm
Deep in his dark and hidden mines Of never failing skill
He fashions all His bright designs And works His sovereign will

O fearful saints, fresh courage take; The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense But trust Him for His grace
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face

His purposes will ripen fast Unfolding every hour
The bud may have a bitter taste But sweet will be the flower
Blind unbelief is sure to err And scan His work in vain
God is His own interpreter And He will make it plain

Jesus is Lord over whatever troubles you. He works all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

V. With this we come to a fifth contrasting depiction. On the one hand we see a disciple sinking and on the other hand we see Jesus saving.

There is something truly inspiring about Peter here, and it is not that he walked out on the water. I have heard not a few make much of the fact that Peter got out on the water while the other disciples remained in the boat. Such a frame of mind misses the real point here. The point is WHY he got out on the water. "Lord," he said, "since it is you (he wasn't testing to see if this was Jesus) command me to COME TO YOU on the water." It was not a desire to show out or show off that moved Peter to say this or Jesus would not have honored the request. It was Peter's desire to be right there with Jesus. He wanted be near Jesus. That is why Jesus said, "Come." And with his eyes on Jesus he came to him. He wasn't out there to say he could stand on water but to be in communion with Christ. We see a demonstration of the same kind after Jesus' resurrection. A group of the disciples had gone fishing but had caught nothing. As day was breaking a man stood on shore. He asked if they had caught anything and they said, "No." He told them to throw their nets on the right side of the boat. When they did, their nets were so full they could not haul them in. John declared, "It is the Lord!" When Peter realized it was Jesus, he left them all, threw himself into the water to go to shore to be with Jesus. When you really love people, you want to be with them. And if you love Jesus, you will want to be in communion with him.

Peter's intent to go out on the water to Jesus is an example of how earnestly and urgently we should guard our spiritual communion with Christ. Realizing more and more how awesome he is and how immeasurable a privilege it is to be with him, let us be constantly aware of his presence and consciously refuse to shut him out of anything we do.

Look at what happens when we do neglect that communion. It was when Peter came to Jesus that he looked away and noticed the wind. That is when he became afraid and began to sink. But while Peter was sinking, Jesus was saving. Peter cried out, "Lord, save me!" There is hardly a better picture in the Bible of saving faith than this one right here. Peter was overcome with the awareness of his vulnerability. He was sinking in the storm-tossed water. Even so every human being is sinking into the storm-

tossed sea of God's wrath. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God because he is a consuming fire. He is holy. And he cannot approve of evil. He must punish sinners. He will not leave the guilty unpunished.

It is like when Jonah was thrown overboard. In rebellion against God's call, he had boarded a ship to flee. But God had sent a storm. Jonah convinced the sailors aboard the storm-tossed vessel to toss him overboard. He prayed to the Lord: for you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me . . . The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me. This is the plight of every sinner in relation to God's holy and righteous wrath due to our sin. There is but one hope. And that is to call out to the only one who stands above that wrath. The reason that Jesus stands above God's wrath is because he himself sunk into it for us. He was placed on the cross and laid in the tomb, but he rose. And he will save those who, grasping that they are sinking in God's wrath, cry out to him in faith from their hearts, "Lord, save me!"

This is what the hymn writer captured when he wrote: I was sinking deep in sin far from the peaceful shore, very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more. But the master of the sea heard my despairing cry. From the waters lifted me, now safe am I!

Come every soul by sin oppressed. There is mercy with the Lord. And he will surely give you rest by trusting in his word. Only trust him. Only trust him, now. He will save you. He will save you. He will save you now!

VI. The sixth, and final, contrast is in verses 32-33. Here we observe that Jesus is ruling and the disciples are worshiping. Jesus gets in the boat and the wind stops. His sovereign control over the wind has been seen before and it is witnessed yet again. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He is I Am. And the disciples acknowledge it so. They worshiped him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The focus of their worship was not themselves but Christ. That is the essence of worship. I am not going to say that the disciples fully

understood the content of the title, but worship is surely reserved for God alone. And that is what they are doing. And Jesus is not stopping them.

The eyes of the disciples were turned squarely to Jesus and his glory, power, and sovereignty. And they acknowledged him for who he is. This is worship. My eyes are turned away from me and my heart is turned toward him. I bask not in myself but in Jesus.

Conclusion

We were created to glory in the worship of God. These contrasting pictures give us two portraits—one of the worshiper and the other of the one who is to be worshiped.

The worshiper submits to the command of whom he worships. The worshiper struggles in the midst of a sin-cursed world. The worshiper experiences fear even of the one he worships. But he is comforted by that one. The worshiper needs to be saved. The worshiper must be reproved for a lack of faith. But the worshiper bows and confesses who God is.

Meanwhile, here is a glorious portrait of the one who deserves worship. He commands. He has every right to direct our lives. He prays. Christ Jesus ever lives to intercede for his sheep. He operates in supernatural sovereignty over the world. He walks on water and even uses storms to fulfill good outcomes in the lives of those who are called according to his purpose. He comforts his fearful saints. He is the Great I Am. He mercifully and graciously instructs them. He saves them. He is their peace. He is the Son of God. His name is Jesus. Real worship focuses on him.

So much of what purports to be worship today is more about “me” than it is about Christ. Worship does not look at God for all the ways one can use God to get what one wants. Worship looks at God for all that he is and offers oneself to him as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him. Worship looks at God and is far more concerned with what I can give than what I can get. For he alone is worthy!