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The Gospel According to Matthew

What Does Walking on Water Mean?

April 7, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 14:22-36

Scripture Reading: Psalm 107

Mat 14:22-36 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. (23) And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, (24) but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

(25) And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. (26) But when the disciples saw

him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. (27) But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

(28) And 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 and walked on the water and came to Jesus. (30) But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me."

(31) Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

(32) And 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."

(34) And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. (35) And when the men of that place

recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick (36) and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

And let's also read John's account of the same event:

Joh 6:16-21 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, (17) got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. (18) The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. (19) When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. (20) But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." (21) Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

Once more, Matthew is including these events in his Gospel in order to show us the theme – the King and the kingdom of God have arrived.

Jesus had sent His disciples on ahead of him in a boat while He remained behind just after feeding the 5,000. They find themselves in a frightening situation once more on a rough sea.

The wind is contrary so they had to pull out the oars and strain against it. To make matters worse, it was dark. Jesus was back on shore praying for them.

Now, let me suggest something that I believe there is very solid support for concluding:

Jesus prayed that the storm would come upon the disciples. In fact it was HE who commanded it!

As always, we look to the OT for clarity:

Isa 51:15 I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD of hosts is his name.

Jer 31:35 Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD of hosts is his name:

And these are not the only Scriptures that say the same thing – that the Lord stirs up the sea so that its waves roar. Listen to William Hendriksen on this:

“...for how often do not believers

ascribe their unpleasant experiences to the machinations of some sinister power, when in reality they are the manifestations of Christ's loving care? How frequently does not that which at first appears to be a stumbling-block turn out to be a stepping-stone to glory?" [New Testament Commentary]

That is to say, the Lord commands trials for us for the purpose of us knowing Him better, for our faith to grow stronger, and to experience personally His "still of the waves."

I think that the primary message of Jesus walking on the water however is this. Listen to these Scriptures:

Psa 65:5-7 By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas; (6) the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; (7) who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples,

Psa 107:28-30 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. (29) He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. (30) Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought

them to their desired haven.

Psa 89:8-9 O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you? (9) You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

Mat 8:23-27 And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. (24) And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. (25) And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." (26) And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. (27) And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

Isa 51:15 I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name.

Jer 31:35 Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name:

Do you see it? Jesus is the King. Jesus

is Yahweh – He is the Lord, the Creator of land and sea and all that they contain. He is the One who divided the Red Sea in Moses’ day. He is the One who delivers His people.

Listen again to this portion:

(Matthew 14:25) And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. (26) But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. (27) But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

What would you do if you were already in a frightening situation and suddenly in the darkness you see a human figure *walking toward you on the raging water!* I think that we would also be terrified as they were.

But what else do we see here? What other facts did they learn about the Lord? Well, here is *God*. People wonder about Him. What is He like? Jesus answers the question. *He cares for us*. He wants us to know Him, so that we fear Him, but that we are not afraid of Him. You see the difference? “Do not be afraid.” The fact is the the Lord always knows where we are and what situation we are in – He is always

with us.

And then listen to this remarkable part of the story again:

(Matthew 14:28) And 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 and walked on the water and came to Jesus. (30) But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” (31) Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

What is the Lord telling us here through Peter’s experience? Well, although Peter’s faith failed him in a few moments, the fact is that by genuine faith in Christ, He was enabled by Christ to do what Jesus was doing. I mean, would YOU have stepped out of the boat? By faith in Christ we are enabled by Him to do some remarkable things.

But, what happened? Peter got distracted by the wind. He was afraid. His faith faltered, and he begins to sink. Crying out to Jesus to save Him, He finds that the Lord does just that.

I cannot explain it and apply it better

than J.C. Ryle. Listen to him [Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospels]-

“We learn...from this miracle *what power Jesus can bestow on them that believe on Him*. We see Simon Peter coming down out of the ship, and walking on the water, Like His Lord. What a wonderful proof was this of our Lord's divinity! To walk on the sea Himself was a mighty miracle. But to enable a poor weak disciple to do the same, was a mightier miracle still.

There is a deep meaning in this part of our history. It shows us what great things our Lord can do for those that hear His voice and follow Him. He can enable them to do things which at one time they would have thought impossible. He can carry them through difficult trials, which without Him they would never have dared to face. He can give them strength to walk through fire and water unharmed, and to get the better of every foe. Moses in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, the saints in Nero's household, are all examples of His mighty power. Let us fear nothing if we are in the path of duty. The waters may seem deep. But if Jesus says, ‘Come,’ we have no cause to be afraid. ‘He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do.’(John 14:12)

Let us learn [also] from this miracle,

how much trouble disciples bring on themselves by unbelief. We see Peter walking boldly on water for a little way. But by and bye when he sees ‘the wind boisterous,’ he is afraid and begins to sink.

The weak flesh gets the better of the willing spirit. He forgets the wonderful proofs of his Lord's goodness and power, which he had just received. He considered not that the same Savior who had enabled him to walk one step, must be able to hold him up for ever. He did not reflect that he was nearer to Christ when once on the water, than he was when he first left the ship. Fear took away his memory. Alarm confused his reason. He thought of nothing but the winds and waves and his immediate danger, and his faith gave way. ‘Lord,’ he cried, ‘save me.’

What a lively picture we have here of the experience of many a believer! How many there are who have faith enough to take the first step in following Christ, but not faith enough to go on as they begun. They take fright at the trials and dangers which seem to be in their way. They look at the enemies that surround them, and the difficulties that seem likely to beset their path. They dwell on them more than on Jesus, and at once their feet begin to sink. Their hearts faint within them. Their hope vanishes away. Their

comforts disappear – And why all this? *Christ is not altered. Their enemies are not greater than they were.* It is just because, like Peter, they have ceased to look to Jesus, and have given way to unbelief. They are taken up with thinking about their enemies, instead of thinking about Christ. May we lay this to heart, and learn wisdom.

And then finally, I must also share Ryle's observations with you about the kindness of Christ as we see Him revealed in this account:

“Let us learn, in the last place, from this miracle, *how merciful our Lord Jesus Christ is to weak believers.* We see Him stretching forth His hand immediately to save Peter, as soon as Peter cried out to Him. He does not leave Peter to reap the fruit of his own unbelief, and sink in the deep waters. He only seems to consider his trouble, and to think of nothing so much as delivering him from it. The only word He utters is the gentle reproof, ‘O thou of little faith, why did you doubt?’

See then in this concluding part of the miracle, the exceeding ‘gentleness of Christ!’ He bear with much and He can forgive much, when He sees true grace in a man's heart. As a mother deals gently with her infant, and does not cast it away because of its little

waywardness and forwardness, so does the Lord Jesus deal gently with His people. He loved them and pitied them before conversion, and after conversion He loves and pities them still more. He knows their feebleness, and bears long with them. He would have us know that doubting does not prove that a man has no faith, but only that his faith is small. And even when our faith is small, the Lord is ready to help us.

Psa 94:17-18 If the LORD had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence. (18) When I thought, “My foot slips,” your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.

May we only remember, that while we do not despise little faith, we must not sit down content with it. Our prayer must ever be, ‘Lord, increase our faith.’”