

Can You Walk on Water? (Matt. 14:22-33)

Introduction:

- I. Our text for this lesson is taking from Matthew 14 and beginning with the twenty second verse. If you have your Bible, you might want to open it to that place. Before we begin looking at the text itself, let's set the stage.

Jesus, according to McGarvey in the Four-fold Gospel, is on His *third circuit of Galilee*.

"[In the first circuit of Galilee some of the twelve accompanied Jesus as disciples (see Section XXXIII.); in the second the twelve were with him as apostles; in the third they, too, are sent forth as evangelists to supplement his work.]" *The Fourfold Gospel: or A Harmony of the Four Gospels*.

Now, in Matthew 14 we find a few things have transpired. First, John the baptizer has been put to death and his disciples have come and given Jesus the bad news. Second, the apostles have returned from their mission and have given Jesus their report. Missionary work is hard and even grueling at times and after they give their report to Jesus as to what was accomplished, Jesus withdraws with them, by way of boat, to the other side of the Sea of Galilee for a little rest. However, when the crowd sees that Jesus has left, they run across the northern shores of Galilee and beat Jesus to the other side. When Jesus and the apostles get to shore, they see that there is already a great crowd that has gathered. So Jesus, having compassion on them, spent several hours healing the sick until the day was past. At that point the disciples came to Jesus and urged Him to send the multitudes away so that they could get something to eat in the village. But Jesus said, "*They need not go away; you give them something to eat.*" Well, all they had was five loaves of bread and two small fish, but for Jesus that was more than enough and with that little bit of food, Jesus feeds over five thousand people and still they have 12 baskets of food left over.

Finally it is time for the day's work to come to an end. This is where our text picks up **(Matt. 14:22-33)**.

- II. This passage of scripture and the story it tells is full of practical teachings that are faith building and life changing. I want to begin, though, by asking you a simple question, "Can you walk on water?" I'm not talking about literally walking on water. No one has done that since Peter did it in our text. In this lesson, I want "walking on water" to represent doing things that are seemingly impossible. If you would have asked Peter before this incident if he could have walked on water, he would have immediately said, "No, that's impossible." Yet with the help of God, Peter did the impossible.

By walking on water, then, I am referring to doing something great for God. It represents doing something special for the Lord and his cause that you really don't think you can do, yet, with the help of God you can do it. For you walking on water might be standing before God's people and preaching a sermon. It might be becoming a more consistent and active member of this local church. It might be becoming fully faithful to God in all areas of your life. It might be overcoming fear to tell other people about Jesus. It might be becoming a deacon and then perhaps even an elder in the Lord's church someday. Whatever it means to you, it embodies something that right now you think is impossible. But I'm here to tell you that what seems impossible right now, what you think will never be possible, is in fact very possible with the help of God. Listen to me: you can walk on water, and this text before us gives us some clues how to do it.

Lesson:

I. Get into the Boat! (ver. 22)

This first point is a rather obvious one, but still it needs to be made. Getting into the boat demonstrated an obedient faith. Why did the apostles get into the boat? I'll tell you what didn't happen. Jesus didn't threaten them with a club. Jesus didn't pick each apostle up and throw them into the boat. No, Jesus simply told them to get into the boat and they complied. Why? They got in the boat because they had an obedient faith. Listen: their faith wasn't perfect. They had room to grow, but they had a foundation of faith before they ever saw Jesus walk on water. It wasn't a mere mental assent; it was a faith that compelled them to comply when Jesus spoke.

Now listen: if you want to do anything special for God, you must possess an obedient faith. If you want to live better, if you want your light to shine more brightly, if you want to do greater things for the Lord, you must have a basic, fundamental desire to obey God. I'm not talking about faith that can figuratively move mountains. That comes later. I'm giving you the nuts and bolts of being a Christian. I'm giving you the ABC's of Christianity and I'm beginning with A because before you can reach for the stars, you first have to be able to lift up your arms. Some of you are already past this point and that's great. I'll get back to you in a minute because we all have room to grow. But there are some in the body of Christ who haven't yet developed an obedient faith.

If you don't attend every service, you are still standing outside the boat, looking at Jesus with a puzzled expression. Listen to me: You need to get into the boat! If you are still living a worldly life, complying to the habits and hobbies of this world and following the practices and patterns of the ungodly, you are still standing on dry ground. You need to get into the boat! If you hesitate in any way to do what Jesus says, you are not in position to overcome your fears and realize your potential in Christ. If you don't have a rudimentary desire to obey God, you are just not in the place you need to be to make a difference in your life and positively affect people around. You

need to get into the boat. You may ask, “How do I get into the boat?” It really depends on what is stopping you from having an obedient faith. It might be mixed up priorities. It might be the influence of people you call your friends. It might be you love yourself more than you love God, but this much I can tell you: you will never walk on water until you first get into the boat, and without an obedient faith you will stand outside the boat, doing the same old things and getting the same old results, never being what God wants you to be.

II. **Don't Let the Storms of Life Stop You! (vers. 23-25)**

Why? We shouldn't let the storms of life stop us because we don't always know why we are going through a particular storm. We all go through the storms of life. Sometimes the devil is behind them. Sometimes chance is behind them. But sometimes God puts us in the midst of a storm, or at least He allows us to suffer through them because He knows that they can build our faith. The evidence suggest that this is what Jesus did with His apostles on this occasion. Why do I say this? I say it because Jesus allowed the disciples to struggle in this storm for hours. Notice that Jesus came to the apostles in the fourth watch of the night (**ver. 25**). Now, the Jews divided the night into four watches. The first watch was from 6:00 to 9:00 and called *evening*. The second watch was from 9:00 to 12:00 and called *midnight*. The third watch was from 12:00 to 3:00 and called the *cockcrowing* time. The forth watch was from 3:00 to 6:00 and called *morning*.

Mark 13:35

Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:

Now what does this tell us? Well, since the disciple's boat was caught in the storm sometime in the evening watch, which is the first (**ver. 24**), and Jesus came to them in the fourth watch, they struggled in this storm for at least six hours, and maybe for as many as nine or ten.

Now, did Jesus know that they were caught in a storm? I have to say yes. First because Jesus was God manifested in the flesh and therefore was omniscient. Do you remember when Nathanael came to Jesus and Jesus said, “Behold a Israelite indeed.” And Nathanael said, “How do you know me?” And Jesus said, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Oh yes, Jesus can see us no matter where we are and what we are doing. Second, if Jesus didn't know they were out there in the midst of the sea, why did He walk on the water in the first place? Do you think Jesus was merely going for a stroll on the sea? Third, it appears that Jesus knew just where He was going, doesn't it? He didn't go out there calling out to His apostles. We don't see Jesus yelling, “Peter, where are you?” John, where are you?” “Hey James, can you hear me?” No the Bible says He just came right to them. Why? He knew where they were. The evidence is that Jesus knew exactly what His disciples were going through, still He waited to intervene.

Now I can't be sure why Jesus let them struggle in storm for as long as He did, but it seems to me there is only one of two answers. Either the prayer He was praying was too important to break away from, or He allowed His disciples to struggle because He knew in the end it would build their faith.

Listen: there are two kinds of storms that God allows us to experience in life. There are **storms of correction** wherein God disciplines us; and **storms of perfection**, wherein God helps us to grow. Either way the storm is necessary and beneficial. So, just because you find yourself going through a storm in life, keep fully rely on God and don't quit. If the apostles would have quit, Peter never would have walked on the water. But since they didn't quit, it ended up being a faith-building experience (**ver. 33**).

So don't quit. Listen up brethren: you might be in the midst of a storm right now, but tomorrow you just might be walking on some water. Tomorrow you might find yourself doing something for the Lord that you never thought possible. Tomorrow you might find, having come out of today's storm, that your faith is stronger, your love for the Lord is more sturdy and your soul is more secure. You might find yourself teaching that Bible class you never thought you would teach. You might find yourself talking to that neighbor you never thought you would talk to. You might find yourself forgiving that person you never thought you would forgive. Tomorrow you might find yourself in a better place spiritually than you ever thought possible because in the midst of today's storm you never stopped relying on God. So, the point of it is this, when the storms of life arise, don't ever quit because if you do, you will never walk on water.

III. **Cast aside All Fear! (vers. 26-27)**

We can't blame the apostles for being afraid at first, can we? They thought they were going to make a quick trip from one side of the Sea of Galilee to other. It was a trip that they had made many times before, including the one they made less than a day before. They were abiding in the will of their Master, simply doing what He had told them to do. But then out of nowhere they find themselves fighting for their lives in a storm that is so violent that the boat is tossed away from the shore out into the midst of the sea. The word tossed is dramatic word for Matthew to use here. It literally means to be tortured. The boat was being beaten by the waves so relentlessly, that it is described as being tortured by the waves. This fight that the apostles find themselves in, goes on and on and on for hours. They are now mentally, emotionally and physically drained, a condition that makes one susceptible to imagining things. Then, out of nowhere they all see an apparition—a ghostly figure that they can't make out but is coming right towards them. Can you really blame them for being terrified at that moment? I'm quite sure that we all would have reacted the same way. So, we probably shouldn't criticize the apostles for being afraid on this occasion, but still their fear would have been an hindrance if it did not subside. Do you think Peter would have asked to come out into the water if he continued to be terrified? Of course not.

Fear has always stopped Christians from reaching their full potential. The devil wants us to be too afraid to try to be great. The devil wants us to be so fearful of failing that we don't even try. At one point fear was getting the best of Timothy, a young man with great potential, and Paul had to remind Timothy to cast aside the spirit of fear.

2 Tim 1:6-7

6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. NKJV

Listen, ladies and gentlemen, if God hasn't given us the spirit of fear, then God doesn't want us to have it.

Rom. 8:15-17

15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

If we are ever going to learn to walk on water, we are going to have to remember who we are and in whose presence we abide. We are children of God and thus we are joint heirs with Christ. Who is going to tell me that I can't serve God in an exceptional way? I'm a joint heir with Christ. I don't have to fear the devil and his devices. I don't have to fear what man is going to say or do. I don't have to fear the trials and tribulations of life. I don't even have to fear failing because as long as I am fully relying on God, I know I cannot fail. Paul once said, *"I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me,"* and I have what Paul had and so do you, that is, we have the abiding presence of Christ.

Do you know when the apostles stopped being terrified in the midst of the sea? It was right when they realized they were in the presence of Jesus. When we are in the presence of Jesus, it doesn't matter what we are up against, we don't have to be afraid, and when we are not afraid we can do great things for the Lord. Peter and John did something great when they stood before the Sanhedrin (**Acts 4:11-13 w/Psa. 118:22**). Peter and John weren't afraid because they knew they were in the presence of Jesus. And when we know that we are in His presence of Jesus we will not be afraid, and when we are not afraid, we can step out of the boat and walk on water. In other words, if we know that Jesus is with us we can do great things for the Lord, even things are seemingly impossible.

IV. Desire to Do Something Great for the Lord! (ver. 28)

Peter never would have walked on water if he didn't make this request. And of course, he never would have made the request if he didn't want to do it. Doing great things in any walk of life, almost always demands desire. The

problem with the church today is that there are too many of us that are satisfied with mediocrity. We want to excel in business, but we are satisfied with being an ordinary at personal work. We want to be an A student at school, but when it comes to being a Bible student, we are okay with getting Cs. We want to master TV shows like Jeopardy and The Price Is Right, but we are okay with being average when it comes to our Christianity. What's wrong with wanting to be a great Christian? What's wrong with wanting to be mighty in the scriptures? What's wrong with wanting to surpass our own feeble abilities with the help of God and reaching for the stars. Doing great things comes as a result of desiring great things. The brethren of Macedonia serve as a prime example of this (**2 Cor. 8:1-7**). Paul is another example of this (**1 Cor. 15:9-11; Phil. 1:20-21; 3:12-14**). Let's rise above mediocrity and do something great for the Lord. Let's push ourselves to the limit and challenge ourselves to be better. Let's not be ashamed to want to walk on water once in a while.

V. Get Out of the Boat! (ver. 29)

It was one thing for Peter to desire to get out of the boat. It was one thing for Peter even to ask to get out of the boat. But it was something else altogether to actually climb out of the boat and into the water. Peter has taken a lot of criticism over the years because he wanted to get out of the boat. Some have said that he was just showing off. Some have said it showed his impulsiveness. Some have said it was a demonstration of pride. I really don't believe any of those things because Jesus knew Peter's heart and He never rebuked him for wanting to get out of the boat. No, the truth is, Peter climbing over the side of the boat and into the water, was, no matter what else you say about it, an act of great faith. Peter was leaving the comfort of solid ground to step where no man except Jesus had ever stepped before. Getting out of the boat took courage, trust and a commitment to Christ. The question is, do you have the courage to do what Peter did. Do you have the faith to leave what is comfortable to you and take a chance for the Lord? Get out of the boat and do something. Why don't you wait on the Lord's Table? "Well, I might mess up and drop something." Don't worry about it. Get out of the boat! Why don't you set up that home Bible study that needs teaching? "Well, I might not have all the right answers." So what! Get out of the boat.

Listen to me: you can do a lot of good inside the boat, but you can't do anything great. You can go to heaven inside the boat, but you probably won't help anyone else get there. You can be content inside the boat, but one thing you can never, ever do in the boat is walk on water. You have to climb over the side in order to do that. To walk on water you have to step out on faith. To walk on water you have to be willing to take a risk. Can you walk on water? Yes, you can, but you must have the courage to act.

VI. Keep Our Focus on Christ! (ver. 30)

The fact that Peter began to sink doesn't mean that it was wrong for him to get out of the boat. In fact, we know it wasn't wrong because Jesus told him

to come. The reason Peter began to sink is simply because he allowed himself to get distracted and he took his eyes off Jesus. He lost focus and so his faith began to waver just a little bit and he started to sink. The Hebrews writer said we must “look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” Too many times we let the world distract us. We get distracted by material things. We get distracted by family and friends and we get distracted by our jobs. Different things cause different Christians to lose focus, but one thing we all share alike is that when we lose focus and take our eyes off of Christ, we begin to sink. Let’s keep our eyes focused on Jesus, knowing that He can protect us from all the dangers of this world. And, if we happen to lose focus and we find ourselves sinking, let’s do something else that Peter did. Peter cried out to the Lord to save him. He turned to the right source when he started to go under. Can’t we learn from this too? Too many times, Christians begin to sink in one of life’s storm and never call on Jesus to save them. That’s a terrible shame when Jesus is standing so near, ready to reach out to us with a helping hand. All we have to do is ask for His help.

Conclusion:

Can you walk on water? To summarize all that we have said, if you want to walk on water, you have to do one thing—you must fully rely on God. Relying on God fully will get you into the boat, caused you to endure the storms and allow you to cast away all fears. Fully relying on God, will help you to have a desire to do great things for the Lord, to actually get out of the boat, that is, leave your comfort zone and step out on faith and to remain focused during your journey. Yes, you can walk on water, but you must trust Jesus in order for it to become a reality.