

## Worshipping in the Aftermath and Always

Matt. 14:22-33

**Intro. Matt. 14-22-33 - Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."**

Adversity and the storms of life come in many different forms. Like the disciples who strained at the oars, many believers who do the will of God are also doing their best to keep their heads above water financially. Others are working hard to stay in a difficult marriage or to get up each morning for a job that is beneath their abilities and interests. Still others are battling debilitating illness / the limitations of aging / and the complications of medical coverage and treatment regimens. Recent events have again reminded us that our world is becoming increasingly hostile and dangerous. Jesus prepared us for these storms and the persecution that accompanies our faith in Him. In **Jn. 6:33** He said, **"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."**

While troubles cause many to lose hope and to become depressed and others to turn to alcohol or drugs, Jesus said, **"Take heart, I have overcome the world."** His grace enables us to see beyond the storm. His presence provides peace in the middle of the storm and joy despite our troubles. The knowledge of His faithfulness delivers us from the *"good day-bad day syndrome."* With the Psalmist His unfailing mercies enables us to say, **"Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever."** - **Psa. 145:2** But to see God in the storm and to praise Him everyday demands a faith that is tested, mature and rock solid. It doesn't demand a great amount of faith...it merely demands a faith that holds on...a faith that is firm and unshakable. As we'll see in the story this AM, the disciples didn't yet have this kind of faith. They worshipped Christ in the aftermath of the storm when Jesus showed up and worship came easy. But they hadn't yet learned to trust Him in the middle of the storm and to worship Him always. Since this storm story is also recorded by Mark and John, from time to time we'll refer to details supplied by these other Gospel writers.

I want you to see that **Jesus** is predominant in these verses. The name **Jesus** appears 5 x's / the title, **Lord** appears 2 x's / and **Son of God** appears once. Along with these proper names and titles, the pronouns **he, him, himself, his** and **you** are used 13 x's with reference to our Savior! So here the spotlight is on Jesus. It's about Him. Having taught the disciples how ministry works by His feeding of the 5,000, Jesus is now about to teach them a second lesson. With this purpose in mind, the notes divide the story into 4 statements about Jesus. *Jesus controlling every circumstance / Jesus never far from His own / Jesus worthy of complete trust / and Jesus worshipped as God.*

**1. Jesus controlling every circumstance – vs. 22-24 - Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.**

To set the stage we need to hear from John. **Jn. 6:14, 15a - After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.** It was in this setting that Jesus **Immediately...made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side** The fact that Jesus **made them get in the boat** suggests some resistance from His disciples. At least 4 were seasoned fishermen who could predict advancing weather by the evening sky. The sun was now setting and they sensed the weather deteriorating. They knew it wasn't a good time to be on the water.

But there may be another reason the disciples were reluctant to leave. After 2 years of rejection and hostilities, they may have welcomed the affirmation from these Galileans. The crowd wanted to make Jesus their king and they were prepared to use force to make it happen. But Jesus knew the crowd was motivated politically and driven by selfishness. They were like "*Rice Christians*"...who become excited because missionaries feed them. They craved the benefits of Christ's kingdom. But very few were interested in repenting of sin or pursuing the righteousness Christ's kingdom demands.

Because it wasn't the prerogative of the crowd or the disciple's to crown Jesus, Jesus put the disciples in a boat and dismissed the crowd...He sent them home. The timing was premature and the circumstances were all wrong. It wasn't the Father's plan for Jesus to bypass the cross or establish His kingdom by force. Though the disciples may have been tempted by the crowd's enthusiasm, Jesus knew better. The temptation here was similar to the one posed by the devil in **Matt. 4:8, 9**. So Jesus immediately **made the disciples get into the boat and dismissed the crowd**. In all this we have a glimpse of Christ's sovereign authority. He controls believers and unbelievers and refuses to be controlled by them. The disciples are to be credited for obeying...they submitted to the Lord's command. It was like the time when Jesus told His disciples to let down their nets in deeper water. Peter said, "**Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.**" - Lk. 5:5

But we also see Christ's sovereign authority over the weather that night. Did Jesus know a storm was brewing? Did He realize His men would soon find themselves in great distress? Of course He did! His knowledge is unlimited, but so is His power. Before the sun rose the next day, Jesus showed His control over the forces of nature. The storm was part of His plan to disciple these men.

Listen...Jesus has sovereign control over everything! This is the unshakable foundation our faith is built on. Faith isn't a blind leap. It's a rational response to the facts as presented in God's Word. And one remarkable fact is this...nothing is beyond the reach of our Savior's control...not our finances / our marriage / our job / our health / or circumstances we may face in this life. Our Savior has complete control of people and events and He promises to make everything right in His time.

**2. Jesus never far from His own - vs. 25-27 - During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."**

We probably shouldn't press details too far, but the story suggests some analogies that are hard to ignore. From Jewish territory, the disciple's boat was headed in an easterly direction toward a region inhabited by Gentiles. In the prophecies of both Testaments, a raging sea often represents the restlessness of unbelieving nations who reject Christ and persecute His people. For example, **Isa. 57:20, 21** says, **the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."** In Daniel and especially in **Rev.13**, the **Beast** is said to come up out of the sea while the second beast is from the earth.

Scholars believe the beast from the sea is the final Gentile ruler and his kingdom on earth. The fact the storm happened at **night** may represent the present...a time when Jesus is away from and His people are tossed around by storms of difficulty. This harmonizes with **Jn.9:4** where Jesus said a period of darkness is coming when Gospel ministry would be impossible. He said, **As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.**

And notice another detail in **v. 25**. It says Jesus came to His disciples during **the fourth watch**. The Romans divided the night into four watches. 6 to 9PM was the first watch. 9 to 12 AM was the second watch. 12 to 3AM was the third watch. Then finally, 3 to 6AM was the **fourth watch**. The fact Jesus came to His disciples **during the fourth watch** means they had been struggling against the storm for as many as 8 or 9 hours! The original language describes powerful winds from the north producing waves that pushed their boat farther and farther from shore. Fear intensified as their crisis became more critical with each passing hour. This seems to parallel prophecies about the Church during the perilous times of the last days when Jesus said wickedness would increase and troubles would intensify.

Now I'm sure you've heard me say, *"God has never let me down, but He's scared me to death a couple of times."* God often makes us wait before He sends help or resolution. In the meantime, He urges us to be fearless and of good courage as we trust Him. Now this waiting business is something we're not very good at it. Am I right about that? Everything in our lives, from instant coffee to fast food is designed for people in a hurry. Vendors advertize service with no waiting. We love express lanes / fast passes / email / and overnight deliveries. To patiently wait for the Lord is hard work. We are so accustomed to waiting on God, when He meets a need quickly we're surprised and maybe even a little suspicious. (You can apply that anyway you want.) But our willingness to wait on Him relates to how much we're willing to trust Him. So Jesus didn't show up with the first storm surge. He didn't come in the middle of the night. He came when the disciples were exhausted and had almost given up hope. Once again, God sometimes allows our faith to be tested to the limit. Why? Because as Peter said, the trials of our faith are **of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire**. God's purpose is to produce in us a faith that is **genuine...a faith that results in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed...a faith that endures while praising Him everyday...even when circumstances are severe and His help seems distant. (I Pet.1:6, 7).**

So if the night represents this present period of darkness when Jesus is away and we find ourselves in storms of adversity...the fact that Jesus came in the early morning hours may foreshadow His return and the dawn of a new age. Listen friends...Jesus has promised to come back for us. His return is anticipated in **Mal. 4:2 - But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.**

Before we leave this point, let me say this...the Gospels have two distinct storm-at-sea-episodes and the book of Acts has a third. In the first storm, Jesus was asleep in the boat's stern. He was present in the boat with His disciples...but He was asleep. When awakened by His disciples, He rebuked the wind and waves. In this second storm, Jesus was nowhere to be found. He was praying on a mountainside a considerable distance away. But fully aware of their distress, Jesus came to them and calmed the storm. The third story is found in **Acts 27**. Paul was onboard a ship bound for Rome when the ship was caught in a terrible storm. Now remember, about 30 years earlier Jesus ascended to heaven. He wasn't asleep in the boat or praying on a mountainside. When this storm affected Paul, Jesus was seated at His Father's right hand in Heaven. Now I'm thinking heaven is about as far away as help could be. But Jesus knew all about Paul's storm. This time He didn't come in person nor did He calm the raging sea. Instead, He sent an angel with a message of hope. **Acts 27:23-25** says Paul encouraged the captain and others on board this way...**Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul.**

**You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.** The angelic messenger basically said what Jesus had said to His disciples 30 years earlier. He said, **don't be afraid...you will arrive at the destination I have planned for you.**

The progression presented in these storm stories is intentional. It provides assurance every disciple needs. Whether Jesus is actually with us in the boat / a distance away from where we are / or interceding from heaven...He is never too far away to help us! He is never unconcerned and our circumstances are never beyond His control. As **Psa. 46:1** promises, **God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.** In the Great Commission of **Matt. 28:19, 20** Jesus promised to be with us to the end of the age. Again in **Heb. 13:5** He promised to never leave or forsake us. His Spirit is always with us and in us. Church...do you believe this?

Yet these storm stories have something more in common. In each episode the disciples were terrified and in distress. They doubted they would survive the night or ever make it to shore. They wondered if the Lord knew and cared about their trouble. And in each situation, Jesus or a messenger He sent asked why they were so afraid. Jesus actually sent them into the storm to teach them to trust Him more completely. For this same reason the Lord allows us to experience various trials today.

Now remember, this second storm story in **Matt. 14** and **Mk. 6** happened immediately after Jesus fed the 5,000. Mark reports what Jesus did and how the disciples reacted. **Then He climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. (Mk. 6:51, 52)** The disciples had just witnessed Jesus perform a miracle of creation. He multiplied a boy's lunch to feed more than 5,000 hungry people. After everyone was fed and satisfied, each disciple was given a doggy bag of leftover loaves and fishes. Maybe some bread and fish littered the heaving deck of their boat. But just 10 hours later, these same disciples didn't connect the dots or remember the miracle Jesus performed. They still didn't understand how these miraculous signs proved His deity and confirmed His authority and sufficiency in every crisis. Their hearts were still unreceptive and **hardened**. And this inability to see and this reluctance to believe may also explain why they didn't recognize Him when He came walking on the water. The same can be true for us. Sometimes we don't see God in the storm or recognize His help when He sends it.

So we're no different than these men. In our troubles we often react just like they did. God comes through for us in some miraculous way. But if the wind starts howling a short time later, our faith begins to waver. If economic indicators plummet, our fears begin to rise. When some crisis rocks our world we begin to tremble. Like a knee jerk reaction we cry out, "*Why me, Lord?*" We wonder where God is / we wonder what we've done to deserve this / and we wonder why the God who says He loves us has allowed this to happen. Storms test our faith like nothing else. And so often, like the disciples, our faith shows up shaky and weak and unworthy of God's unfailing faithfulness. But when has the Lord ever let us down or failed to keep His promises? How many times must He demonstrate His sufficiency before we trust Him for everything?

**3. Jesus worthy of complete trust – vs. 28-31 - "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"**

Even though John and Mark record this story, Matthew is the only apostle who tells us Peter got out of the boat and actually walked on the water with Jesus.

He's the only one to include this story within a story. Yet Peter's experience adds an important element to the overall lesson Jesus taught that night. A whole series of messages could be developed from **vs. 28-31**. In fact, John Ortberg has written a book about it...a book Craig Bishop / Nick Lang / and I are studying together. I know some of you have read it. The book is entitled...**If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat.** Despite the book's title, this was a one time event. So far as we know, no other human being has ever walked on water as Jesus and Peter did. Today Jesus doesn't enable His followers to be mountain-movers / water-walkers / snake-handlers / poison-drinkers / or faith-healers...at least not in the literal sense. He gave abilities like these in the apostolic era when the Church was in its infancy and signs were needed to authenticate these men and their new message. But these miracles ceased with the end of the first century. **Heb. 2:3, 4** explain the role of these miracles. **This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.** (the apostles) **God also testified to it (salvation truth) by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.** But the age of sign miracles has temporarily ended. In place of Christ's call to walk on water, He invites us to walk by faith...to rise above stormy circumstances while continuing to worship Him.

But there's a point to this story within a story. Just as Jesus asked Peter to get out of the boat, He asks us to trust Him even when His request seems impossible. Peter's miracle demonstrates how fearless we should be because Jesus is worthy of complete trust. His story also illustrates our need to keep our eyes on Him and not become distracted by the sound of the wind or the sight of the waves. Jesus has grace that enables us to endure and power that enables us to do whatever He asks us to do. God's ability to do for us is praised in **Eph. 3:20 - Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...** So Jesus is powerfully able to calm our storms and resolve whatever trouble comes...and He will. But His help often comes late in the game...**in the fourth watch**. Until help arrives, He asks us to wait for Him...to trust Him...to maintain confidence as we wait in hope. To suffering believers **Heb. 10:35** says, **So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.** But this leads to a final point.

**4. Jesus, worshipped as God – vs. 32, 33 - And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."**

After Jesus and Peter climbed back in the boat, Jesus calmed the storm. If calming a storm wasn't great enough, a detail is added in **Jn. 6:21 - immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading**. Notice the disciple's response in **Matt. 14:33 - Then** (that is, when the crisis was over) **those who were in the boat worshiped Him**. This is the first time the disciples openly declared Jesus to be the Son of God. In the dark, they were terrified and anxious. They didn't recognize Jesus in the wind and the waves. But after He appeared and their trouble was resolved, they worshiped Him. The disciples were part-time worshippers and fair-weather believers. That's the best we can say about the disciples at this point. They praised Jesus in the calm but doubted Him in the storm. Where's the faith in that? But will you join me in admitting that it's often that way in our lives too? On Sunday we sing, *"A mighty fortress is our God. A bulwark never failing. Our helper He amid the flood, of mortal ills prevailing."* But come Monday morning when our transmission blows up, we're not in the mood for praise choruses. Or Tuesday, when a diagnosis shows something positively negative...our confidence is shattered. Or Wednesday, we lose our smile when a fellow believer offends or fails to appreciate us. You get the point. But here's the facts...Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Because His love / faithfulness / mercy / and power are endless...our confidence in Him and our praise of Him should be perpetual. We find this encouragement throughout the Bible.

- Habakkuk's worship continued in a time of famine. He said, **Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields**

produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. (Hab. 3:17, 18)

- Through Isaiah, the Lord gave the rationale for this kind of unshakable faith. **Isa. 54:10 - Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.**
- David exemplified this kind of everyday faith and no matter what worship. **Psa. 119:61, 62 - Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law. At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.**
- Then, when Paul and Silas were severely beaten and jailed, **Acts 16:25** says, **About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.** They actually practiced the truth David was talking about in **Psa. 119.**
- Finally, this unshakable kind of faith is encouraged in **Jas.1:2** which says, **Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.** Notice, joy is appropriate for the believer...not after the trial is over, but **whenever** we face them.

So friends listen...it's good to worship God in the aftermath. It's good to celebrate and thank Him when the winds die down and the storm ends. But it's far better to worship Him everyday despite our difficulties. It's far better to trust Him in the storm. Though far away from us right now, our Savior remains an **ever-present help**. He has promised to be with us and to bring us safely to the other side. This kind of "*whenever joy*" / "everyday optimism" / and "all occasion worship" is extraordinary yet it's the kind of faith God uses for His glory. It's the kind of uncommon faith unbelievers recognize and admire...the kind of testimony God uses to turn heads and hearts. But more importantly, it's the kind of faith Christ is worthy of...the kind that glorifies Him. Jesus deserves our praise everyday in every situation. Do you trust Him that way? He is worthy of nothing less.

Now you may be here thinking to yourself...I wish I could trust Jesus that way. I want you to know, you can. He invites you to come to Him. **Matt. 11:28 - "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**