



“Getting out of the Boat”

“Walking on Water” or “That Sinking Feeling.”

-Matthew 14:22-33

by Pastor Tim Dodson
of JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisconsin
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Matthew 14:22-33 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. 24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. 25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." 28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

Like often was the case both then and now, disciples can quickly move from a spiritual high to an emotional low. God seldom seems to be in a hurry except maybe when it comes to growing us up. Maybe because it takes so long and we finite creatures seem to have so little time on this earth to learn what we need to learn. But for sure, Jesus not only *knew* about what was playing out in this storm, He also either caused it or at least allowed it to occur. Verse 22 says clearly that *Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side...* If Jesus knew everything including the local weather report, how could He do such a thing? Once again, we have so much to learn about what love really is in the paradigm of faith. Hebrews 10:11 reminds us that “*No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening — it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.*”

Coming off the ‘feeding of the 5000,’ having personally witnessed an incredible miracle at the hand of Christ, the boys immediately found themselves in a situation where apparently Jesus was no where around. And of course, with perfect timing they would be plunged into a storm, both physically and metaphorically. But the ‘ace-card’ herein was that it basically took just a few minutes for them to forget what they not only *witnessed* just an hour before, but what they actually *participated in!* Oh, how weak and frail we are as members of the human race! So the apostles moved from “wow!” to “*what?*” in record speed...

We are less apt to be so impressed by either event...the feeding of the 5000 or this story before us, because we know the end of the stories. And for us they can be just a bunch of disjointed independent stories...just another weekly episode of Jesus’ TV sitcom. But we must remember that all of these events...all since Jesus began his earthly ministry, took place in just a three year period...from the calling of Peter, to the cross, to the resurrection, to His ascension.

These incidents, as we are approaching them in the Life and Times of Jesus Christ series, are **linear**...connected to each other, following each other, **leading** to each other. Notice that the account of our story comes off the 'feeding of the 5000' and then says "**immediately** Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side." Immediately. So once again, these guys went from witnessing the incredible sovereign all powerful hand of God to 'meltdown' in a matter of minutes. We could criticize and ridicule if we weren't guilty of the same thing.

God pulls off the miraculous over and over in our lives and yet when the next crisis comes we recoil back into a spiritual fetal position crying that we are 'all going to die.' Jesus said in Luke 12:24 "*Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. **Of how much more value are you than the birds?*** Then in verse 28 of that same chapter He says "*If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, **how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?***" There is no way to read such passages without understanding the broader concept of "He-Has-Your-Back."

Few would argue that what was happening here was a 'teaching moment.' The account tells us that Jesus came in the midst of the storm in the "4th watch"...meaning between 3 and 6am. One can easily imagine that the apostles had been fighting this storm for quite some time by the time salvation came. Anyone who has walked with Jesus for any amount of time would concur that Jesus is never **early**! Mark's account of this story mentions that Jesus was watching them. And *yet*, He did not go to them until the '4th watch.' Why? Well, we have to see it all as a test...an opportunity for them to trust or to fear.

It's hard to have faith when things are dark isn't it? To Solomon God stated that "*He would dwell in the thick darkness...*" Psalms 139:12 tells us "*...even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you.*" God was there...even though they could not see Him. Just as God is with us, even when we cannot see Him. In fact, it is the embodiment of faith to believe even when we cannot see...when we do not understand.

The followers of Jesus that day weren't going into this storm because they had done something wrong. These guys were not the likes of Jonah...they weren't on the run from God. They had been obedient, but like Jonah they found themselves in a storm. We are so apt to think...as we find ourselves in the storms of life, that something is wrong. That maybe we have sinned or we are somehow on the outs with God. But these followers of Christ had been obedient, and whether we like it or not, they were right where they were supposed to be. This too, was part of their spiritual journey. This too was following Jesus. This too was discipleship training and living by faith.

Let us clarify something here at this point. The apostles failure of faith wasn't in the fact they did not believe that God would save them. God made no such promise and He doesn't promise to save you from death either! Faith doesn't believe that everything will end great and there will be a Hollywood ending to your story. Faith believes that God has got your back and the story will end as He sees fit and faith says that's ok. Faith is trust in Him to do right by you. **The apostle's failure of faith was in the fact that they didn't believe that God was in control.**

Much of the problem concerning faith today seems to lie in the devil's ruse of 'self-entitlement.' We tend to think we *deserve* a 'happy-go-lucky' life and a life of ease and worldly success and physical comfort. But that is not faith. If it is, then someone forgot to tell the apostles, not to mention Christ Himself! But in our misunderstanding of such, we are apt to turn away from God when things don't work out as we think they should, instead of trusting Christ to work things out as *He* thinks they should. Jesus isn't a lucky rabbit's foot, nor is He a genie to grant us wishes. He is God in flesh, and in our salvation there is the innate surrender of our life to Him and to His control.

When we attempt to take back that control, we are fighting against Him and rejecting His Lordship control of our lives. Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego believed that God would rescue them from the fiery furnace, but they also said that even if He didn't, they still wouldn't bow to the Nebuchadnezzar. Apparently, they trusted God, even in the darkness...even when they didn't know for sure what He was going to do. **That** is faith. **That's** what was missing out there on the water that night.

The apostles were **struggling**. Now please don't see this discussion as advocating fatalism. Scripture never tells us to sit back and do nothing. That's not the opposite of struggling. We aren't to take a c'est-la-vie attitude toward our Christian walk! No, God calls us clearly to *participate*. But He doesn't call us to *control* or *usurp His authority*. Walking that line takes focus and an attentive relationship with the Holy Spirit.

The reality is that many of us bring much pain down upon ourselves or fail to participate in the miraculous...the 'glory of God,' because we are truthfully fighting against Him and what He wants to do. Maybe the very word "struggling" should be a warning sign to us. The fact is, a lot of us spend our lives in this struggle and one would have to ask why you would even want to *be* a Christian if you are going to spend your life fighting against God's perfect plan? Maybe, the fact is you simply *aren't*. Because the truth is, God is as much in control of the storms as He is over the blessings. Can you trust Him there also?

The very thing that the apostles feared was the vehicle that Jesus used to come to them. How ironic in the realm of the world. How typical in the realm of Jesus! Whatever the storm, Jesus is greater. That truth is critical to our faith, critical to our trust in Him. Maybe we just don't really believe that He loves us and is intimately involved in our living? Failure in that too will be a sure stumbling stone to faith. In fact, if we don't have a firm handle on **that** premise, it will be impossible to live the Christian life at all and find joy of living in His hands.

When Jesus DID come to them, they failed to recognize Him. His actions were not *normal* in their minds and therefore it *couldn't* be Christ! They had preconceptions of Jesus that were being challenged. They had understandings and ideas that didn't fit what was happening now. How many of us have Jesus all in a little box tied with a red ribbon? We think we have Jesus all figured out and we know what He wants and what He will do. So much so, that we fail to check with Him or wait on Him, and so often we then get out front of Christ because we are so sure of what is the right path, instead of following Him every step.

Notice that the apostles were **still in the storm** when Jesus came to them and said, "Don't fear...it's me, Jesus." Jesus promised to walk **through** the "valley of the shadow of death" with us, not take us out of it or guide us around it. Now lest you are might be thinking right now "well, what's the point then? Why do I need Jesus?" I would point out that you *are* going to make that walk in this life...with or without Jesus...there will be no avoiding it. Our choice is: *do we want to go it alone or with the living God beside you who controls everything?*

That is our option. There is no Christianity that promises you comfort, ease, and financial security! Such is just a lie by those who wholly fail to grasp the person of Christ and the relationship He is willing to have with us.

Jesus said to His disciples...in the middle of a killer storm, "***be not afraid.***" The original language actually says "***You stop fearing and don't you ever fear again.***" If we can ever grasp the fact that Jesus is in control of everything, that He is God, that He possesses all power, and that He really loves us so perfectly, then we can come to that place where we can trust Him fully through all the storms of life. And we can then live a life of 'no fear.'

Now despite all of Peter's character flaws and fleshly mistakes, you have to give him some credit here. No one else was fighting Peter to get out of that boat that day. He alone was willing. And in his willingness, Jesus answered him "come." "Let's go Peter...have at it...get out of the boat." There is a "faith" (if we can truly call it that) that says 'I believe, but I'm going to stay here in the boat thank you.' Then there is a faith that says "if Jesus controls everything...has everything in His hands...and loves me so very perfectly, then I am going to put myself in the position to do great things under His strength." That kind of faith gets up and gets out of the boat. That is a faith that understands the cross.

We today only seem to remember that Peter tried to walk on the water but failed. But did he? What we forget is that Peter *did* walk on the water. He got out of the boat and walked on water! He only began to sink when he took his eyes off of Jesus and put them on the storm around Him. It was then he began to sink! Just like us, he began to sink when he took his eyes off of Jesus. Kudos to Peter for trying! He believed and he acted on his faith.

Rightfully, when he began...when he got out of the boat, he wasn't looking at the wind and the waves...there apparently was no concern about the "impossible" nature of such an act. **One man** stood up and stepped out and walked on water, while 11-plus sat in the boat and watched. They didn't step up because they "can't walk on water." They had too much at risk...too many fears and doubts...so they held to what was "real"...what was "sure"...what was "concrete." And for eternity, his friends might be apt to remind him saying "remember when you sunk in the waves that day?" And Peter will be able to answer "remember when I *walked on water?*"

Peter made mistakes in his life and mission, but he learned from his failures and he kept going. He didn't quit. He didn't go find another church that was easier to be a part of. He didn't blame everyone else in the boat for his error. Even after he would deny Jesus in stellar fashion, he would go on to bravely face the Sanhedrin...the very men who sent Jesus to His death, and he would preach the gospel to them unflinchingly. Peter was a man who lived his faith in living action. He did indeed walk the 'valley of the shadow of death,' but Jesus walked it with him and he came out the other side.

I ask this: *who was in error that night? Peter for taking his eyes off Jesus and faltering? Or the rest of the gang in the boat who didn't get up and go to Jesus on the water?* How often we never experience the great things of God because we live in fear. We live in doubt. We prefer to live in the 'real world' of concrete and 'sure bets.' 1 Corinthians 2:9 boldly proclaim that "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."

What do you want your life to say at its end? How many of us will be able to sit as old men on our porches and start a story with "hey...*did I ever tell you about the time I walked on water?*"