

The Word of God we'll consider today is the Gospel from Matthew chapter 14. Let's begin with prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, when storms arise, on you alone I'll fix my eyes. Through Word and water, bread and wine, I hear you saying, "You are mine!" Your promises are strong to quell all fear of harm and death and hell. Amen.*

He had no reason to doubt. The victory had been a complete and total success. He trusted in God, and God delivered. So why did Elijah run away? What was he afraid of? After the amazing victory that the Lord had just won, you'd think Elijah would be on cloud nine. Fire from heaven. A sacrifice burned up. Evil men destroyed. The people bowing in worship. Finally, the tide seemed to be turning in the northern kingdom of Israel. Wicked Ahab and Jezebel had met their match when they sent the false prophets of Baal into battle with the Lord. Now the people were confessing that the Lord was the true God. And the prophets of Baal were cut down at Mount Carmel so they couldn't lead any more souls to hell.

But Elijah didn't see it that way... in fact, he couldn't see it at all. He was blinded by the problems of the present. Yes, God had won a great victory... but Jezebel still wanted to kill him... Yes, the people had said the right things on Mount Carmel when God sent fire from heaven and defeated the prophets of Baal... but that sentiment had not spread throughout Israel, and Elijah was feeling pretty alone again. Caught in the storms of sin and evil he lost sight of God and his promises. His doubt led to fear. And his fear had him on the brink of being lost... until God intervened.

Peter was no better. Even though he had the benefit of spending years at Jesus' side... even though he had seen Jesus calm the winds and the waves of Galilee once before... even though he had just witnessed one of the greatest miracles of all time when Jesus fed 5,000 men and their families with one little boy's lunch... even still, Peter doubted. Caught up in looking at the storm that surrounded him, Peter doubted. And his doubt led to fear. And his fear had him on the brink of being lost... until Jesus intervened.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is pretty good at doing just what his name means – The Lord saves. Today as we consider another amazing miracle of Jesus, we'll also consider how this account reminds us of a beautiful truth we all need to hear again and again. Because we too get caught up in the storms of this life... we also, like Elijah, and Peter, are all too capable of falling from the highest peaks of faith, into the deepest valleys of doubt. And that doubt leads to fear. And our fears can put us on the brink of being lost. But just like he did for Elijah and Peter, Jesus reaches down, Jesus grabs ahold of us, Jesus speaks to us again... and he does what he does best as Jesus saves us from doubt and fixes our eyes of faith once more on the One who walks on water... the One whom winds and waves obey... they One who has power to save – and a heart for those who need saving.

Let's take a closer look again at this miracle in Matthew 14 before we consider some of the implications and applications for us today. Matthew begins this part of his Gospel telling us: **Immediately Jesus urged the disciples to get into the boat and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed the crowd, he went up onto the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.**

As I mentioned, this took place right after the feeding of the 5,000 miracle. And it was actually the people's response to that miracle that likely caused Jesus to quickly force his disciples to take off across the lake in a boat. In St. John's account of this miracle, we're told: **After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did... they intended to come and make him king by force.**

Jesus did not do miracles so that people would have carefree lives without grocery bills or 9-5 jobs. He did miracles as signs... signs that pointed to his power as God and the authority of his Word. Jesus didn't come into this world just to help sinful people continue to live in a sinful world... and to have a little less health trouble or a little more to eat or a little longer life. He came to fix problems permanently and to bring us to a real and eternal life. St. Paul put it well in 1 Timothy chapter 1: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.** And yes, there will come a day when all of sin's consequences like hunger, and sickness, and disease, and death will be gone. But for that to happen, sin had to be dealt with once and for all. And that meant the cross, not being crowned by the people to reign as their bread-king.

But after sending the crowds away, Jesus now turned his attention to his disciples. It's amazing to consider Jesus taking the time to serve the crowds, spend time in prayer, and now serve his disciples all over the course of a very long day that had begun with Jesus trying to find a quiet place to rest with the twelve. But that's Jesus. Always ready to do what was needed for his people. And on this occasion that meant a walk to their boat on the lake. Matthew tells us: **By then the boat was quite a distance from shore, being pounded by the waves because the wind was against it. In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came toward them, walking on the sea.**

The fourth watch of the night was between 3 am and 6 am. This means that the disciples had been trying to cross the lake all night but had been unable because the boat was being pounded by waves stirred up by the wind. The disciples were tired from a long day, and now a long night of fighting the sea. You can maybe understand why they thought their eyes were playing tricks on them when Jesus came walking towards them on the water. Matthew continues: **When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and cried out in fear, "It's a ghost!" But Jesus spoke to them at once, saying, "Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid."**

This was no ghost, and Jesus' words assured them that it was him, the amazing miracle worker, their mighty God himself, walking out to meet them. And Jesus' words certainly seemed to encourage at least one of the disciples. Peter, as he often did, spoke up first. **Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come!" Peter stepped down from the boat, walked on the water, and went toward Jesus.**

What a leap of faith! Can you imagine jumping down out of a boat in the middle of a raging storm and trusting that the water would turn into a walkway!? Peter did. He saw Jesus. He heard Jesus. And he trusted Jesus, no matter the storm... until of course... he didn't. **But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid.**

Has anyone gone from bold and fearless faith to sinking doubt and fear faster than Peter? One moment he's walking on water. The next he's about to drown. What happened? Well, this one isn't hard to figure out, is it? Peter took his eyes off Jesus... that is, he took his eyes of faith off of Jesus. And instead of trusting in Jesus which leads to confidence and certainty... he fixated on the raging storm and the doubts, like waves, came crashing down on his head. Matthew concludes telling us: **As he began to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. Those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God!"**

Do you think Peter ever forgot that day? Well... actually, yeah, it seems he did. Or at least he forgot the lesson of faith from that day. We would see Peter again sinking, not on a lake, but in the high priest's courtyard... cowering in fear not from a storm but simply from someone questioning whether or not he was one of Jesus' followers. And again, Peter needed saving. But this time Jesus would not reach out his hand to grab ahold of Peter... instead he reached out and took hold of the cross... his hands taking the nails... his body taking the pain... his soul suffering the anguish of separation from the Father as the sins and failings and doubts and fears of Peter and you and me and all the world came crashing down over him... sinking him in the depths of God's wrath... with no relief from the storm coming until he had paid everything. Only then emerging from the deep – Jonah-like – alive and well and eager to announce God's saving victory to a world of sinners who need to be rescued from the storm.

When we say that Jesus saves us from doubt this is what we mean. Yes, there are many storms we face in this life that cause us as believers to doubt some of God's promises... "Can God really help me in marriage? Will God really be with me in this cancer? Will he forgive me again after I messed up again? Will God keep his promises?" Our sins, the sins of those we live with, the sickness and sadness that are results of a sinful world – all of it rages around us like a storm threatening to drown us.

But storms are no match for our Jesus. His Word is sure, even when we are unsure. His promises are certain, even when we're uncertain. He will help us in our relationships as fruits of faith yield patience and perseverance. He will be with us in sickness and trouble and death – delivering us from it all time and again in this life, or even better, delivering us from this life to himself in heaven. And he will never fail to forgive those he was willing to die for. He will never fail you.

So, cry out today brothers and sisters! Cry out like Peter! Cry out in faith! Cry out when doubts assail you! Cry out in the storm! Because Jesus saves us from doubt. He saves us from drowning in the storms of this life. He has saved us from our sins, and we will walk with him – safe from the storm – now on earth and forever in heaven. Amen.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. Jude 24-25