

# COME, WALK ON THE WATER!

Matthew 14:22-36

Key Verse: 28-29

**“Lord, if it’s you,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’ ‘Come,’ he said. Then Peter go down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.**

As human beings, we easily get into a routine and build comfort zones around us where we feel most secure. Even in our Christian lives, we tend to put God in a box and expect him to conform to our way of thinking. So, we have to ask the question: how do I see God? How big is my God? This is a critical question for all of us. The answer to this question makes a huge difference in our Christian lives. It will result either in bad news or good news. The bad news is that, if your God is too small, your life will be constantly driven by fear and your circumstances. The good news is that, if your God is big, you will live an exciting life of faith, walking on the water. Another good news is that Jesus helps us to grow in faith. In the middle of the stormy sea in today’s passage, Jesus reveals that he is always greater than our problems. How can we experience this Jesus? How can we gain the courage to walk on water? Let’s walk through the passage together. I pray that our eyes can be opened to see Jesus, the Son of God.

## **I. Jesus’ prayer**

Immediately after feeding the crowd, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side (V.22). Jesus literally compelled his disciples to leave the crowd right way. Why? Perhaps it was because the disciples needed to take some rest after a long day. According to John 6, the crowd was so excited after eating bread from Jesus that they attempted to make him a political Messiah. Such popular enthusiasm probably made the disciples excited too. But Jesus was different. He quickly separated his disciples from the crowd by sending them into a retreat, and made them go on ahead of him on the other side. Jesus clearly had a special plan in store for them that night. Jesus wanted them to know him more personally and grow in faith.

After dismissing the crowd, Jesus **“went up on a mountainside by himself to pray”** (23). Matthew points out that Jesus’ prayer was critical here and in

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Gethsemane. Through the feeding of five thousand men (+women and children), he was revealed as the Messiah. Now, Jesus spent time in solitude to pray, which was the sweetest hour for him. Through prayer, Jesus lived by total dependence on God the Father. He waited on God, shared the Father's heart and was empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve his messianic works. (If our Savior Jesus prayed all night, how much more do we need to spend time with God in solitude! The well-known preacher Spurgeon said about solitude: "There are times when solitude is better than society, and silence is wiser than speech. We should be better Christians if we were more alone, waiting upon God, and gathering through meditation on his Word spiritual strength for labor in his service.")

## II. Meeting Jesus in the storm ("It is I. Don't be afraid")

In the meantime, what was happening to the disciples? **"And the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it"** (24). Boating itself was a piece of a cake for the disciples because several of them were professional fishers before following Jesus. They were probably expecting a routine boat ride, where they would enjoy the breeze and watch the beautiful sea. But that night, they were in big trouble: the problem was the wind; it was not a gentle breeze, but a powerful wind against them. Their boat was literally being tormented by furious waves that wanted to swallow them up whole. The wind was so violent that the disciples started to panic. Forget about a relaxing boat ride; they were now anxious about survival and getting safely to their destination. Jesus had made them get into the boat and they were now deep in trouble. They might have asked, "Where is Jesus now that we need him?" Did Jesus abandon them in the middle of the storm? They were heading towards a downward spiral about to hit rock bottom.

But in the midst of this chaos, what happened? Verse 25 says, **"Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake."**

Jesus was coming to their rescue. What was Jesus doing when he walked on the sea? He was revealing his divine power and presence. In the Bible, the sea represents the chaotic forces that can be controlled only by God. Job 9:8 says about this: **"He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea."** So, when Jesus walked on the stormy sea, he was doing what only God can do. By

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transcending the physical laws of nature, Jesus was showing that he was not merely human, but the same God who created the universe.

But from the perspective of the disciples, when they noticed a human figure on the water moving towards them, they were terrified. They were seeing something impossible. They were already in the middle of storm, struggling all night, exhausted by fatigue, tormented by distress and anxiety. So, when they saw Jesus walking on the stormy lake, they couldn't recognize him. They were so focused on their fear that the only possible explanation for this water-walker was a ghost. Have you seen anyone walk on water? What would you have done in their situation?

When the disciples were terrified and cried out in fear, what did Jesus do? Look at verse 27: **Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."** When the disciples were at the end of the rope, Jesus came to them in a way they could have never imagined. Jesus gave them great comfort by assuring them of his presence. We often despair when we meet our human limitations, yet it is at this point of humility and helplessness that God encounters us. Are you in the middle of a stormy sea?

God meets us to comfort us and says, **"Do not be afraid!"** This command is the most repeated command in the Bible, occurring in at least 110 Bible verses. It often occurs along with the phrases **"Take heart!"** or **"Do not be dismayed!"** For example, Isaiah 41:10 says, **"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."** Why does God command us so often, **"Do not be afraid"** or **"Do not fear"**? It's because God wants us to remember that we are not alone. God is right beside us; he knows exactly who we are and what we are struggling with. But often, we are very susceptible to fear. We are especially afraid when problems are out of our control. Jesus said, **"It is I. Do not be afraid!"** True comfort comes from Jesus, who is the very presence of God. Comfort is grounded in the Word of God! His Word helps us to overcome fear and unbelief. Knowing that God will never let us go, we can hold on to his Word. Praise Jesus who gives us comfort and empowers us to take courage!

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## III. Stepping out of your boat to experience Jesus and his divine power

When Peter recognized Jesus and his voice, he was suddenly comforted and encouraged. What did Peter ask in response? Look at verse 28: **“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”** Wow! What a bold request! Walking on water? That’s a crazy idea, isn’t it? Should we interpret this as an expression of faith or as a reckless request made out of his impulse? (Given that Peter was the one who cut off an enemy’s ear when he felt threatened before Jesus’ arrest, we can learn that it’s in his nature to react quickly.) But here, we are dealing with Peter’s childlike faith. Until now, Peter did not see Jesus as someone so big and powerful. But now when he realized that the very Jesus he followed was the Creator God, he was very thrilled about this discovery. He was asking Jesus for something that was impossible with humans. But his request was not about experiencing miracles and gaining success through Jesus. When looking closely at Peter’s request, we should notice that he did not say, “Tell me to walk on the water,” but instead, **“Tell me come to you on the water.”** (cf. Chrysostom’s sermon). His request was to come to Jesus! Peter had a strong spiritual desire not only to know Jesus, but to also experience him. Peter loved Jesus and wanted to know Jesus deeper, and experience his divine power (cf. Jn 21). What about you? Do you love Jesus and want to experience him more?

As Peter wanted to experience Jesus deeper, he didn’t simply jump into the water. He didn’t say, “Hey Jesus, I’ll just jump straight in, so this is all on you. I don’t want to drown, so I expect you to back me up.” Rather, he said, **“Lord, tell me,”** or **“Lord, command me”** (ESV). Peter recognized Jesus as his Lord. He waited on the Lord to give him permission. We cannot use Jesus to serve our own agenda, whatever good intentions we may have. Like Peter, we must acknowledge Jesus as Lord and wait on him to work.

Now, look at verse 29: **“Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.** Once Jesus gave the command, walking on the water was simply a matter of trusting him. On Jesus’ words, Peter stepped out of the boat. By faith, he stepped out into the great unknown. Then, he walked on the water toward Jesus! For the first time in human history, an ordinary human was walking on water!

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What kind of implications does this story have on our lives? Should we go to Lake Michigan on a stormy day and practice water-walking in the middle of lake? This is not a story about risk-taking to test God for our own benefit. However, it is about a radical discipleship, taking a risk based on Jesus' words. How could Peter step out of the boat and walk on water? It was his faith and obedience to the words of Jesus that turned what is impossible possible.

When we stand on the Word of God, we can also step out of our familiar world. We love to live in our comfort zones. The physical human comfort zone is the temperature zone between 68 F minimum in winter and 78 F maximum in summer and a relative humidity between 30 and 60% where we feel most comfortable. We love to stay in a place where we feel most at home. Trying something unknown is scary and stressful. We fear something unfamiliar or unpredictable; we fear the unknown future.

But the Bible is full of stories of people who stepped out of their comfort zones and lived extraordinary lives. Think about Abraham. When he was called by God to go to the land God would show him, he left his country and his father's house and became the father of nations. He did this by standing on the Word of God. How about Moses who challenged the powerful king of Egypt and led the Israelites out of the slave house? He could do this by standing on the Word of God and confidently declaring, **"Let my people go!"**

Also, in church history, there are numerous people, who stood on the Word of God and stepped out of the boat. This year, we celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. When Martin Luther stood up for the gospel at the Diet of Worms, he risked his life. He said, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God!" These were all ordinary people, but they trusted an extraordinary God and his Word! Even today, there are numerous people who live a life of faith, like walking on water.

My story may not be as dramatic as Peter's, but through stormy times, God has been teaching me faith. After finishing college, when I was seeking direction for my life, God gave me his Word from Mk 11:22: **"Have faith in God!"** Upon God's Word, right after graduate school, I went to Greece, which was a great unknown to me. For the first time in my life, I took a plane to a foreign country at

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the age of 27 with one suitcase and the Bible in my hand. But when I had just finished a Greek language course there, God suddenly changed my direction by sending me to Germany to study theology. It was quite scary and challenging to me because I didn't speak German; the only German phrase I could speak was "Guten Tag." I had just gotten married at that time, but I had no financial stability to support my family. But during this time, his Word encouraged me to step into the unknown. When I obeyed his Word, God helped me to get out of my boat and walk on water. Often, I was afraid of challenges. But God's word strengthened me to overcome my unbelief. By God's grace, I could finish my studies there while serving God's work. Without God, I cannot even help myself, but with God, I could live as a missionary to bless others. Praise Jesus! Even now, there are times when I may doubt whether I am qualified enough to serve God. But when I turn my eyes upon God, who is strong even when I am weak, I am empowered by him. Though I'm an ordinary man, his Word gives me courage and strength to serve an extraordinary God by faith!

There is a book by J. Ortberg called: "If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat." The author repeats that if you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat. Your boat is "whatever presents safety and security to you apart from God." God is pleased with those who are eager to experience him by taking a risk. Are you going beyond your human abilities by depending on God? Jesus promised in John 14:12, "**Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.**" I pray that we may depend on God's Word and experience him more deeply. Amen.

## IV. Staying focused on Jesus ("Why did you doubt?")

Look at verse 30: **But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"** At first, while walking on water, Peter's eyes were firmly fixed on Jesus. His mind was entirely filled with Jesus' presence. But when Peter saw the wind blowing the water and his clothes, he was suddenly convinced of the reality of the situation and focused on his human inabilities. He was saying to himself, "What was I thinking? I shouldn't be doing this." When he started to doubt, fear overtook him and he began to sink. What

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changed here? Nothing except for Peter's focus. Peter failed because he took his eyes off of Jesus and focused on the wind, that is, his current situation.

Beginning to sink, Peter, cried out, **“Lord, save me!”** Look at verse 31. When Peter cried out for help, immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. Even though Peter lost sight of Jesus, Jesus didn't lose sight of Peter. The beauty of this story is that Jesus saves us even when we fail. We all fail sometimes. Right? Time and time again, my faith may become shaky, but Jesus always remains faithful yesterday, today and forever. Jesus helped Peter's faith, saying, **“You of little faith! Why did you doubt?”** Doubt (*“distazo”* in Greek) means literally to “be divided in two.” It is like trying to go in two different directions at once. But faith is the very opposite – it is a single-minded focus on Jesus.

Can we blame Peter for his failure of focus? No. Peter acted in greater faith than the other disciples in the boat. He was the only person who walked on the water. When Jesus said, **“why did you doubt?”** he was helping Peter to learn and grow through his failure. (Think about Peter's great confession in chap 16). Jesus teaches that the real enemy is not the wind, but doubt.

Even when we step out of our comfort zones, there are still possibilities that we will fail. But it is not about whether we fail or not. The important question is this: when you fail, how do you handle your failure? When you fail, do you condemn yourself and become more afraid? Do you blame others? Or do you turn to Jesus? Jesus wants us to grow through our mistakes and learn to focus on him.

Throughout our lives, we are fighting through the storm for a right focus between Jesus and the wind. How can we stay focused on Jesus when the wind scares us? Even in the storm, we must focus our thoughts on Jesus' words. As we take small steps on the water, we must fix our eyes on Jesus through the word of God. As we focus on Jesus through his words, our faith grows stronger and stronger.

## **V. Growing in the knowledge of Jesus (“Truly you are the Son of God!”)**

Look at verse 32: **“And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.”**

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As soon as Jesus and Peter entered the boat, the wind died down. In the Bible, stilling storms are a sign of God's authority. In an earlier occasion in Matthew 8, the disciples had already experienced how Jesus stilled the storm by rebuking it. But this time, Matthew doesn't write about Jesus rebuking the wind. Instead, the storm died down out of respect for Jesus.

**“Then, those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”** (33) When the disciples experienced Jesus' divine authority, it blew their minds. Through this encounter with Jesus, they grew in faith, so they confessed, **“Truly you are the Son of God!”** The disciple's eyes were opened to see Jesus. Their sight of Jesus grew even bigger than before. In fact, Jesus is always greater than our challenges or problems. The confession, **“Truly you are the Son of God!”** makes a decisive difference in our lives. Our life is in the hands of our God whom we can fully trust. As we go deeper with Jesus through various tests, we will grow in the knowledge of him and meet him in wholehearted worship. This is the goal of discipleship.

We love to hear the message about how great our God is. But how big is your God in your practical life? Why do you think the disciples went through a stormy and eventful boat ride? Why did Jesus make Peter walk on the water? It was because Jesus wanted them to grow in faith. The world is always like a stormy sea. As Christians, we should not expect a smooth sailing on the sea. Jesus wants us to be people unbroken in discipleship. At a recent missions conference, a Kenyan pastor made a biting comment about America, saying, “I don't send missionaries to America for training because it makes them too soft.” Whether you agree or not, I believe that we should examine whether we are too soft and afraid of taking risks in our Christian culture.

Are you ready to ask Jesus as Peter did? **“Lord! If it's you, tell me to come to you on the water!”** In what areas do you want to come to Jesus by challenging a great difficulty and drawing nearer to him? Do you want to experience the power of the gospel in your personal life? How about in your campus and ministry? Do you want to overcome your fear of speaking out the truth? Do you want to overcome your addictions and powerlessness? Do you want to raise devoted gospel workers? Then come to Jesus and experience his grace and power by faith.

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We are now praying for a spiritual revival in our church as we prepare for the 2018 ISBC in Louisville titled, “His Kingdom.” Are you expecting great things from God, as you prepare for this international conference? We have Jesus, so let’s ask him, **“Lord! If it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water!”** Jesus wants you to abandon yourself to his words, as Peter did. As you trust his words, Jesus will grow bigger in you. Amen.