



Unit .24

Session .03

Jesus Walks on Water

Scripture



Matthew 14:22-36

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23** After dismissing the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Well into the night, he was there alone. **24** Meanwhile, the boat was already some distance from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them. **25** Jesus came toward them walking on the sea very early in the morning. **26** When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they said, and they cried out in fear. **27** Immediately Jesus spoke to them. “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” **28** “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter answered him, “command me to come to you on the water.” **29** He said, “Come.”

And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. **30** But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me!” **31** Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” **32** When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33** Then those in the boat worshiped him and said, “Truly you are the Son of God.” **34** When they had crossed over, they came to shore at Gennesaret. **35** When the men of that place recognized him, they alerted the whole vicinity and brought to him all who were sick. **36** They begged him that they might only touch the end of his robe, and as many as touched it were healed.

Intro Options



Main Point:
Jesus is in control over
all of life's storms.

Option 1

“Keep your eye on the ball.” This is common and worthwhile advice in baseball. In fact, it is worthwhile advice in any sport containing whatever ball is unique to that sport. Taking one's eye off the ball—whether in baseball, golf, tennis, or lacrosse—could easily result in a poor performance, or worse, injury.

For Peter, taking his eye off of the prize led to more severe consequences. His focus on circumstance instead of Jesus led not to striking out but sinking under. In faith, Peter stepped off the boat to imitate Jesus' miraculous move of walking on water. Yet, unlike Jesus, Peter's faith is frail, and he began to sink.

- **What sorts of circumstances most often distract you from focusing on Christ?**

Matthew 14:22-36 tells us of an amazing story but ends with an even greater confession. In these 14 verses we witness Jesus miraculously walking on the waves and water as if they were solid ground. Moreover, one of His disciples dared to join Him on the surface of the waters. This stunning miracle rendered an even more stunning confession from Peter and his shipmates—that Jesus Christ truly is the Son of God, a confession that must also be ours today.

Option 2

The word *sovereign* carries the idea of someone having complete authority and control. It is not easy to accept the doctrine of someone, even God, being sovereign over us. Our desire for independence makes it difficult for us to submit to someone telling us what we should or should not do. We are so tempted to refuse or reject someone's authority over us because it overrides the control we think we should have over ourselves.

For Christians, it is easier to accept the doctrine of sovereignty when it is discussed in the context of salvation. We all know that we cannot save ourselves. We will die in our sins unless God intervenes. Rarely do we have any issue with this line of thought, but there is usually tension when we work through God's sovereignty in the more specific areas of daily life—issues such as school, time management, relationships with parents, and so forth. In other words, we have difficulty with sovereignty when it presses in on the things that are not dealing with “church life” or “theological discussions.” However, when it comes down to it, our lives are better when we accept the fact that Jesus is Lord when it comes to the way we spend our time, use our words, or take a test during school. There is great comfort in knowing that Jesus is sovereign over every circumstance in life because of who He is—the Son of God.

- **What human forms of authority do we see in the world? Why might we have such a difficult time accepting someone else's authority in these circumstances?**

TEACHING PLAN

Read Matthew 14:22-24.



The scene began with Jesus sending His disciples away in a boat as He went to pray alone. In these verses, 22-24, we learn at least three things about the setting in which this miracle takes place. First, the passage tells us that the scene takes place well into the night. Most Bible scholars suggest sometime between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. Second, while Matthew's rendition of the story doesn't include this detail, the Gospel of John informs us that the disciples traveled 3-4 miles during this time. Third, we know there was tumultuous weather during this boat ride (v. 24). With these three items, the stage is set for a remarkable scene.

As the disciples departed, Jesus was not in the boat with them. In verse 23, we see Jesus' motivation for retreating away from the crowd was to get alone with God the Father and pray. Jesus, being fully human, needed time to rest and recuperate. It's amazing how He found retreat, refreshment, and rejuvenation by spending time alone with God the Father.

- **What benefits have you experienced from spending time alone praying to God?**

This took place in the evening, and the disciples were out in open water (vv. 24-25). While Jesus was with the Father enjoying time for rejuvenation, the world kept turning, and His disciples found themselves in the midst of a storm. In other words, Jesus was in prayer when the disciples began struggling to navigate their course during a violent storm.

During difficult times in our lives, we may be tempted to wonder if God has forgotten about us or even doubt that He loves us. Mark's Gospel account of the storm battering the disciples mentioned that Jesus saw how the wind was working against them and they were struggling (Mark 6:48). Jesus did not deliver them immediately, but He saw them, and He came to them walking on the waves.

- **When have you had to endure a struggle in your life that God did not immediately resolve? How were you challenged to grow in your faith through that struggle?**

Read Matthew 14:25-31.



Just imagine how truly terrifying this scene must have been. The disciples had been alone for hours, the weather and waves were battering their boat, and then off in the distance, they saw what they thought might be a ghost approaching them. The scenario was cause for panic. Yet, in contrast to the chaos of the moment, Jesus was calm. The waves were likely still tumultuous since the passage doesn't say the winds ceased until verse 32; yet Jesus walked on the surface of the raging waters.

The reality behind the waves and the breakers is that they belonged to Jesus. In His divinity, He knew the number of drops under His feet and the names of the creatures swimming underneath His heels. In His humanity, He had enough faith that the Father by the power of the Spirit would keep Him afloat as He approached the boat. Jesus' command over every drop of water showed that He truly is sovereign over all of life. 

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus is in control over
all of life's storms.

Matthew 14

23. Twice in Matthew 14, once in verse 13 and now in verse 23, we see Jesus retreating from the crowds to pray in isolation. There is much we can learn from this pattern in Jesus' life. First, if our goal is to look and act like Jesus, spending time in solitude with the Father in prayer must be a priority in our lives. Jesus did it, and we must as well. While our union with Christ cannot be shaken or taken away from us, our communion with Christ waxes and wanes. If we want to commune with the Lord, we must spend time with Him. Second, the Christian life is to be lived both in crowds and alone. Neither the introvert nor the extrovert can claim that their personality is better suited for Christianity. The reality is this: God redeems all kinds of people and our personality quirks are never excuses for disobedience in living a life modeled after Jesus.

For many Christians, prayer can be difficult. We lack diligence to pray consistently, our minds wander during prayer, we're not sure exactly what to pray, we feel too embarrassed or dirty to talk to a holy God, our schedules are too busy, and so forth. There are a number of reasons we excuse ourselves from the life giving exercise of talking with our God. This is not good for our souls. We are dependent creatures who need the Lord. Prayer is nothing less than a confession of our neediness. When we pray and seek the Lord we recognize Him as the giver and sustainer of life.

In addition, it is also important to note that the Christian life is to be lived both in crowds and alone. The extrovert may boast in her natural ability to work over crowds, talk to others in evangelism, or be with the masses as Jesus was much of the time. On the other hand, the introvert may boast of his ability to sit quietly at the feet of Jesus, pursue isolated contemplation about the goodness of God, or remain in silence alone with God like Jesus did in parts of this passage. However, God redeems both sinful extroverts and sinful introverts and uses their gifts accordingly for His kingdom purposes.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 96, DDG)

God is Omnipotent

God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

TEACHING PLAN

▪ How is the sovereignty of God a comfort to you as a Christian?

According to the Bible, there is no question that God sovereignly ordains trials in our lives at various points in order to reveal His character and nature to us in ways that we would never know apart from the storm (Rom. 8:28-30; Jas. 1:1-4; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). And it is in the middle of the storm that the presence of Christ becomes all the more real. Because Jesus is the great “I AM” and He is with us always, we can have courage and faith in the midst of our storms. But what if our faith falters?

In this passage, when Jesus walks on the water it is without doubt miraculous and marvelous; however, it should not surprise us. The Gospel narratives are filled with miracle after miracle performed by the wonder-working Son of God. What is surprising is when Peter takes a step out of the boat and begins walking on water himself. Already standing miraculously on the surface of the water, Peter made one wrong and then one right move. His error came as his eyes took notice of the strength of the wind and waves (v. 30). The wind gusts made him question his venture toward Jesus. The strength of the wind assaulted his assurance and like an anvil doubt made him sink. Peter’s mistake was taking his eyes off of Jesus and placing them on his obstacles. He had greater faith that his obstacle would overtake him than his Savior would secure him. This doubt led Jesus to address Peter’s doubt in the end. But also notice what Peter did right. In a moment of complete despair and fearfulness, Peter did the right thing by calling for Jesus.

▪ In moments of trial or tragedy, to what or whom are you tempted to turn for help or security instead of Jesus?

Read Matthew 14:32-36.



Although Jesus’ calming of the storm was a display of His supernatural power over creation, the key factor to this passage is found in verse 33 when the disciples worshiped Jesus. At that moment, the disciples confessed that Jesus is truly the Son of God. Their worship of Jesus, who was standing right before them, shows that they were fully convinced of His divine identity. The same can probably be said of us, that our worship of the Lord becomes more meaningful and sincere after we have seen Him do great work in our lives. Reflecting on Jesus being sovereign over our circumstances as well as our supplier of courage will allow our hearts to have an attitude of worship rather than worry.

Once they made it to shore, all of the sick in the region of Gennesaret were brought to Jesus, for they knew that He had the power to heal. Not only did He have the power to heal, but also just touching the end of His clothing was enough for the chronically ill to find healing and rest.

Notice that when the men of Gennesaret saw the power of Jesus, keeping it to themselves was not an option; they had to tell others. Once we’ve caught a vision for the beauty and glory of Jesus, we too find that the news is just too good not to share. 

▪ Why does the recognition of our own spiritual sickness and our need for Jesus compel us to tell others about Him?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus is in control over
all of life's storms.

Matthew 14

28-31. Jesus heard Peter's request and told him to come out and meet Him in the middle of the water! This must have been amazing for all of the disciples to witness. Remember, Jesus had not yet calmed the storm, so the winds were still raging and the water was still churning. And still, Peter obeyed Jesus by going to Him. However, on the water Peter began to focus on the strength of the wind, and his courage retreated. He once again embraced fear and lost his focus on Jesus.

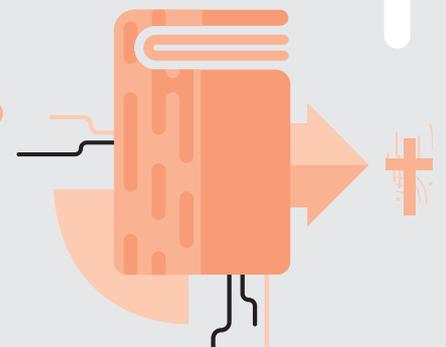
As soon as Peter cried out to Jesus to save him, Jesus did just that. Jesus then exposed Peter's lack of faith and asked him why he doubted. Little faith? From our vantage point, it probably seems that Peter had a pretty great amount of faith because he was willing to step out of the boat, yet Jesus said Peter had little faith. Jesus' rebuke meant Peter's faith was weak and needed to be strengthened. This only comes with having greater dependency on Jesus.

32-36. A mistake often made with studying the Bible is reading the story as an isolated event or as merely a moralistic story that has little to do with what comes before or after. For instance, with our passage for this session, it would be easy to read the story as a scene showcasing the consequence of doubt and a moral lesson for us to exercise faith. While the passage does teach us to exercise faith, it is also more than that; it is going somewhere. The passage reaches a climax in these five verses.

All that has taken place to this point in the story—Jesus walking on water, Peter's attempt to join Him, Peter's doubt, and Jesus' rescuing of Peter—led to an important result: their confession of Jesus as the Son of God (v. 33). This confession, that Jesus is truly the Son of God, is the confession of the church yesterday, today, and forevermore. Whether or not this confession takes place in our own lives is the most important question about us. We, like Peter and his shipmates, must confess that Jesus truly is the Son of God and give our days to loving and treasuring Him and His purposes.

(p. 98, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus demonstrated that He has sovereign power over nature by walking on water and calming the storm. Through His miracles, teaching, and most clearly His death and resurrection, Jesus proved Himself to be worthy of our faith and worship. He alone is able to save.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



What are some storms we face in life today?

What can we learn from this narrative when facing our own storm in life?

Heart



How does Peter's request while sinking serve as a model for us when we become overwhelmed with life's storms?

What are some current storms where Jesus is calling you to step out in faith?

Hands



How does this session challenge us when it comes to sharing Jesus with others?

How does this account challenge our own prayer life?

Main Point: Jesus is in control over all of life's storms.



Head

This passage should help us recognize that in what we might call the storms of life, we can often find our minds clouded with doubts and fears. Sometimes mental storms have greater impact and more collateral damage than physical storms. Although physical storms come and go, mental storms seem to remain. Regardless of the kind of storms we may experience, we can trust that Jesus always provides peace in the storm. The gospel reminds us that because of our relationship with Jesus, we have peace with God as well as access to the peace of God.



Heart

While Peter's mistake is obvious to readers, what is less obvious is that he actually made a good decision in this scenario as well. When his footing gives way and he begins to plunge beneath the surface of the water, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" This cry of desperation, though caused by a mistake, is the exact right cry in Peter's moment of anxiety. We would do well to learn from Peter when we find ourselves in moments of despair, sorrow, worry, or fear—even if we got there because of our own mistakes. "Lord, save me" is the cry of one who knows he cannot save himself. Peter could have kicked and swam and fought with all he had, but in his own efforts he would have never gotten back to the point of walking on the water with Jesus. He knew if the Lord didn't intervene, his salvation in that moment wouldn't have happened. This should be the posture of all Christians as those who believe in a gospel about God who saves the helpless. Whether it is for the once-and-for-all salvation from sin or salvation from momentary affliction, may the cry of Peter be ever on our lips.



Hands

When the men of Gennesaret saw the power of Jesus, keeping it to themselves was not an option—they had to tell others. Those proclaiming Jesus knew that the sick were the ones who needed to see Him. Not only do we know others who are sick and need to come to Jesus to be healed, we ourselves were also once sick in our sin. We have come to know Jesus not only as the one who heals the physically sick but also as the one through His life, death, and resurrection who can heal the most spiritually sick amongst us—even ourselves.

In addition, it's crucial we see Jesus engaged in ministry on a full-time basis during this season of life. He was fully dedicated to the mission God sent Him to fulfill. Jesus ministered to others with all of His heart, mind, soul, and strength. Therefore, to ensure physical endurance to complete the mission, He carved out the needed space to be alone with the Heavenly Father, which is something that all believers can learn from when it comes to being on mission with God.