

-Can you believe Thanksgiving 2020 is already over? This year as awesome as it's been, has flown by. Now it is a mad dash to Christmas. We only have 26 days until Christmas and only 33 days of 2020.

-This time of year, there is so much crazy going on—people shopping, traveling, cleaning, and preparing for guests. Then Christmas, if your Christmas is like a normal Christmas for us, you will drive more in 2 or 3 days than you normally would in a week, you will spend more time with people that you would rather not than you do all year, and you will spend more money on useless things that you know will only bring momentary happiness. Boy, I love what we have made Christmas all about. I know that we say things like don't forget the reason for the season, it's better to give than receive, and we want to keep Christ in Christmas. And those are all great things, but do we do it?

-Today, we are going to talk about keeping our focus on Jesus through the storm but especially during this time of year when we get so wrapped up with everything going on around us. The stress of what to get for everyone, did I get the right size, color, it is the right one, and where the money will come from to get all those items. I know that we often lose sight of what we need to remain focused on at our house.

-We are going to be looking at when Jesus walked on water in Matthew 14. This was a big day for the disciples; they had just seen Jesus heal a large crowd of people that had gathered as He came in from a time of solitude. This turned into the feeding of 5000, for which they were servers and they did not even want to do. They wanted to send the crowd away to feed themselves, as they looked at the resources they had and saw that it was not sufficient to feed everyone. Well, we all know how that story goes and how Jesus had other plans. I am sure by the time it was over, they were exhausted.

-This story is like another story in Matthew, in the first story.

1. The disciples are also in a boat
2. They were afraid. Scared of the storm, scared of what would happen to them
3. They felt distant from Jesus because He was asleep. How could He sleep through this? Was He not concerned about their lives?

-As they wake Him, He says, "oli go pis tos" which means little faith.

-The disciples were amazed at Jesus' power and they ask a question. "what kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him."

-We will see some similarities and some differences in the story today.

-Matthew is writing to Christians in a time when they were seeing great persecution; the two storms certainly address issues of danger, fear, and faith.

-Please stand with me as we read God's word. Matthew 14:22-36

Pray

V22,23 -Jesus MADE the disciples get in the boat and go ahead of Him. He didn't ask them to go. The word used there is enankasen, which means "compel or force," so Jesus forced them to go. They were not just leaving Him there to deal with the crowd alone; they were being obedient.

-I wondered why Jesus would not have kept the disciples around to help with crowd control. It would have made it much easier, remember the crowd was 5000 men plus women and children.

-In John's account of this, He records that after Jesus fed the 5000, the people began to say, "surely this is the prophet who is come into the world." Jesus knew that they intended to take Him by force to make Him king. This could have been why He sent the disciples away so they would not have gotten caught up in all that.

-So, it is not surprising that Jesus goes to the mountain after sending everyone away. The mountain in Matthew is a place to encounter God.

-In this, He shows us He is both a leader of the crowds and the intercessor to the father in heaven.

-It says twice that Jesus is alone. This indicates His prayer's solitary nature; remember that after hearing that Herod had John the Baptist beheaded, He tried to go off and pray, but it was interrupted by the town crowds that we talked about earlier. This time He was sure to be alone, so He could talk to the father.

-There is one other time that Matthew reports Jesus in prayer. That is at Gethsemane. Both are difficult moments. In this instance, Jesus is praying about the recent unfavorable attention He is getting from king Herod, and at Gethsemane, He will prepare Himself for death.

V24 The boat was a considerable distance from land, this may seem insignificant, but it is important. In other accounts, it gives a little more detail about how far out they were. But for all accounts, they were about in the middle of the 8 mile stretch of the water. It is important for the upcoming events, making it easier to dispute the skeptics.

-It would be a little scary to be in a small boat, miles from shore, during a storm. But the text does not indicate that the disciples are afraid of the storm. This is one difference from the other boating story.

V25,26 There are a few scriptures that speak of God parting the waters or walking on water but never a man.

-Psalm 77:19 says your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters. So, with Jesus walking on water, He is proving to them and us that He is God.

-Earlier, I mentioned that the distance from shore that the boat was important. Here we see Jesus walking on water, and some want to argue that He was merely walking on a sand bar or was somehow fooling the disciples. But being 3 or 4 miles out would make that harder to believe than for Him to really be walking on water.

-In other translations, it reads in the fourth watch of the night; this is where the complete exhaustion sets in. It would have been roughly between 3-6am. So they have been up all day, hearing horrible news about a dear friend John the Baptist, serving the largest group of people that didn't want to serve in the first place, now they have rowed all night and have had to bail out the boat from the storm. It's been a rough day.

-In biblical literature, the sea is often referred to as the home of demonic forces. So that wrapped up with being overexerted meant that when they saw a figure walking on water, their minds went crazy.

-Was it a demon from the sea, was it some sea creature, was it a ghost? If it was a ghost, who would it be a ghost of?

-They could have easily thought that maybe during the few hours it had taken them to row out to where they were, that king Herod's men could have found Jesus in the mountains praying and killed him, and this was His ghost coming to warn them.

-These men would have been familiar with these waters. Although the storm was dangerous, they knew how to handle that. But a man walking on water was new to them, and they had no idea how to deal with that.

-No matter what it was, they were scared.

V27) Jesus quickly reassures them with a 3-part statement.

1. Cheer up = be happy, words of encouragement, not a rebuke.
2. It is I = the word used here is translated to "I AM."
3. Don't be afraid = this phrase is used 7 times in Matthew alone. Always used as reassurance and encouragement.

There is a type and a shadow here. We see the boat, the disciples, the storm, and the wind.

-Boat = the church, and it is tossed and shaken by the tempest of temptations.

-Disciples = Us the Christians who are persecuted

-The storm = Trials, setbacks, the fight that we endure

-The wind = The devil that will not let us rest, strives to hinder us

This story tells the church that even when we are backed into a corner, when the enemy has us surrounded, we need not fear. Because Jesus is with us all the time.

V28 This is the only account of this story that tells this part about Peter walking out to meet Jesus. And this is where our focus on Christ needs to prevail.

-Peter's request shows us several things.

1. we can not be seed thrown on rocky soil, where we sprout quickly but fail because our roots are not deep.
2. We must be careful not to test Jesus. If it is really you, do this to prove yourself.
3. We also can not tell Jesus what to do. He has this all under control and does not need us to be a back-seat driver.
4. It is a good picture of asking for permission and waiting on the father to give the answer.
5. It shows a difference between the scaredy-cat disciples from verse 26 and trusting disciples now.
6. The story of the church. Fearful and confused, looking for help in the midst of a storm.
7. It is the story of every Christian as we stray from doubt and faith. Sometimes we focus on the storm and other times on Jesus.

V29 Jesus responds in a positive way and tells Peter to "Come."

-This is a moment of total trust in Jesus. A moment where Peter had to totally believe that Jesus could make him walk on water too.

-Have you ever had a moment like this? A moment when you know that without God, this was impossible? Every disagreement with my wife is a moment like that.

-John Piper said, "Darkness comes. In the middle of it, the future looks blank. The temptation to quit is huge. DON'T! You are in good company. You will argue with yourself that there is no way forward. But with God, nothing is impossible. He has more ropes, ladders, and tunnels to get you out of pits than you can conceive. Wait, pray without ceasing and hope."

V30,31 We have no idea how far Jesus was from the boat or how far Peter made it before the wind blew, but it is great to know that when we need Jesus, He is always close enough to save us.

-You may say that Peter's faith was not strong enough or that it was imperfect, but it was undoubtedly bolder than the other disciples who never left the boat.

-This is where we need to make sure that we do not let a gust of wind distract us from focusing on Jesus. We do not have to be walking on water to start sinking when we let the world's issues and problems steal our attention.

-Lucky for us, Jesus saved Peter first then rebuked him for his lack of faith. He will do the same for you; He will save you from the storm you are in before helping you realize that He had you the whole time.

V32,33 As His church, we need to realize that He is ruler over everything, not only the water to walk on but also the winds. As He gets in the boat, He shows us that if we remain focused on Him and allow Him to rule over our lives, then He promises that the persecution will eventually cease.

-In the other story back in chapter 8, the disciples ask a question, "What kind of man is this, Even the winds and the waves obey Him?"

-This time, it is declared that He is truly the son of God.

-We must remember that adversity is not a sign of God's displeasure in us, and prosperity is a sign of God's pleasure in us. We must remain focused on Christ through it all.

Pray