

## INTRODUCTION

In our series on Parables and Miracles we are examining two of the most famous miracles of Jesus. In the last message we talked about the Feeding of the Multitude and the ONLY word that Jesus doesn't understand: Only.

You might have heard your first swimming teacher toss you in the pool and say, "Sink or swim." But usually when we use that phrase we aren't talking about water. It refers to facing any difficult challenge. If you fail, then you sink. But if you manage to exert enough energy and drive you swim and succeed. With Jesus, there is a third option: "Sink or swim ... or walk!"

Matthew 14:22-32. "Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. [Even with a busy schedule Jesus made time to pray.] When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night [that's between 3 and 5 a.m.] Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' 'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.' 'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"

When I first heard this story I wasn't surprised Jesus could walk on water—He's God in the flesh, after all. But I'm still amazed Peter could walk on the water because he's a human being just like us. So this miracle is about more than Jesus' ability to walk on water. It's a lesson about how we can walk above the turbulent waves of trouble that threaten to sink us.

Are you the kind of person who is always drowning under a sea of trouble? Does it seem that you spend all your time treading water or trying to swim away from this problem only to find yourself being knocked back under the surface by the next wave of circumstances that slams you? Have you noticed there are some people who seem to deal with problems and pain with a sense of assurance and faith? They aren't immune from the storms of life, but it seems that they have learned how to walk above the trouble.

The French artist, Amédée Varin, painted a picture of Jesus walking toward the disciples on that dark night. You can see why they might have thought He was a ghost.

The lesson for us is that if we want to walk in victory over troubled waters, we must learn to walk by faith. The Bible says, "For we live (walk) by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7) If you're walking by sight, you will be focusing on the troubled waters beneath you and



*Jesus Walking on Water*  
Amédée Varin  
c. 1860

the stormy waves around you. But if you are walking by faith, you are looking at Jesus. Someone has said, "Hope floats, but faith walks!"

Jack Taylor is one of my spiritual mentors. In his book, *After the Spirit Comes*, he wrote, "Jesus invites us to live an overcoming life in which we have the authority to walk on the waves of our turbulent surroundings. It's an invitation to get out of the boat of ordinariness and onto the water of fully trusting Jesus regardless of what common sense tells you. It is that moment of truth when we decide to climb out on God and put our weight so much on His provision that if He does not COME through then we ARE through. This is an invitation to leave your boat of security and sameness, whatever it might be, and get out on Jesus! That's where the action is!" (page 81)

Walking on water is an adventure. Remember, we're not talking about walking on H<sub>2</sub>O, we're talking about the ability to overcome the troubled waters of life. There were seven things Peter did that teaches us how to be water-walkers. If you want to be a water walker, the adventure begins when you:

### **1. Refuse to give in to your fears**

It was a dark and stormy night and the first reaction of the disciples when they saw Jesus was fear. Jesus said to them, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

They were already terrified before they saw Jesus. It had been a long day; they had served food to 15,000 people. And they had been up all night fighting the waves. They were tired. When you're tired, it's easy to be afraid. Vince Lombardi said, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all."

It was dark, and darkness always magnifies your fears. There's always something a little spooky about being out on the water at night. In those days they didn't have the equipment to determine the depth of the lake. There were legends that the Sea of Galilee was bottomless and there were stories about sea monsters, like the Loch Ness monster. It doesn't take much to push you over the edge when you're afraid of something in the water. Millions haven't stepped into the ocean

since the movie "Jaws." So you can imagine the fear of the disciples that night. Then they saw someone walking on the water and the Bible says they were terrified and cried out that it was a ghost. Ghosts don't even exist, except for the Holy Ghost. Fear will make you see things that aren't really there. Zig Ziglar said that the letters FEAR stand for False Evidence Appearing Real.

Fear can be a powerful force. I read an article recently about something that happened in Spain that demonstrates the power of fear. A man was driving along carrying an empty coffin in the back of his truck. He stopped to pick up a hitchhiker who sat in the back. After a few miles, it started to rain. The hitchhiker wanted to stay dry so he opened the coffin lid and climbed inside. Meanwhile the driver stopped to pick up two more hitchhikers. They were riding in the back of the truck for several minutes when the first hitchhiker raised the lid of the coffin and said, "Good, it's stopped raining." The two other guys were so terrified they jumped out of the moving truck, both sustained minor injuries. Fear can be a powerful force.

The Bible says God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind. John writes that perfect love casts out all fear. Our love for God isn't perfect, but His love for us is. You'll never walk over your troubles until you refuse to give in to your fears.

## **2. Confirm your desires with God's Word**

Peter saw Jesus walking on the water and he thought, "I want to try that!" But first he said, "Tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," Jesus said. Peter didn't just jump into the water. He didn't assume just because Jesus was walking on the water that he could. He asked for a specific word from Jesus to authorize him to become a water-walker.

Jesus could have said, "Sorry, Peter, water walking is only for Messiahs." But instead, He spoke one powerful word: "Come." He authorized Peter to walk on the water. So in one way, Peter wasn't walking on the water, He was walking on the word of Jesus. Do you know why I can't walk on the water? Because Jesus didn't authorize me. He spoke that word to Peter, not to me.

When you face a difficult decision, you should always seek confirmation from God's Word. Are you contemplating a job change, or a move to a new city? Don't just jump into the water. Spend time in the Word and prayer. Talk to godly friends who can give you good counsel. In James 1 we read that if anyone lacks wisdom they should ask God and He will give it to them. But you must ask in faith believing that God will answer your prayer. James says that he who doubts is like the waves of the sea blown and tossed by the wind. (James 1:5-6) In other words, you can't be a water walker without first seeking God's wisdom.

Whenever you face a major decision, always confirm your desires with God's Word. There are plenty of things about which God has already given us His authority. He says, "Go and make disciples of all nations." "Love your neighbor as yourself." "Give and it will be given unto you." And when Jesus gives you a command He always provides the power to obey.

## **3. Leave the boat of mediocrity**

After he heard the Word from Jesus the Bible says, "Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus." Here's how the great British preacher Charles Spurgeon describes this scene: "Peter came down from the vessel. How strange he must have felt when that water in which he had been so often swimming became as solid marble under his feet! Others have sailed their way through the sea, but Peter walked over it. The laws of gravitation were suspended for his support. What Jesus was doing Peter was doing. Faith made Peter to be like his Lord. There were two walking, the one by his own infinite power, the other by the power imparted to him-the power of faith."

John Ortberg wrote a book entitled, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*. The title says it all. There are all kinds of boats. There are bass boats, rowboats, cruise liners, and supertankers, but all boats have one thing in common. They keep you from sinking into the water. Boats represent safety and security.

But when Jesus is out on the waves, sitting in the boat represents a lack of faith. Sitting in the boat represents your comfort zone. It's the status quo. The boat life is dull. It is safe, but it's sour. But Jesus calls us to think outside the boat.

It took a lot of courage for Peter to throw his leg over the boat and place his foot on water. But he never would have experienced the adventure of water walking if he had stayed in the boat. What is your boat today? What is it that limits you from stepping out in faith and trusting God for something so great that if He doesn't come through, then you're sunk? Are you willing to throw yourself out of the boat of mediocrity and move toward Jesus?

#### **4. Are willing to risk failure**

Peter was walking on water briefly, but then something happened: He failed. The Bible says, "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink..." Peter's failure started when he took his eyes off Jesus and started looking at the stormy circumstances. When Jesus rescued him from the water He said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Faith and doubt are mutually exclusive. Doubt is looking at your stormy situation instead of at God. Faith is looking at God instead of the storm.

Remember, Peter wasn't walking on the water; he was walking on the Word of Jesus. I think Jesus let him start sinking to teach us a great lesson about failure. Peter wasn't in line to become the assistant Messiah. He wasn't going to become the fourth person of the trinity. He was a person just like us, and as much faith as we have, we'll fail sometimes. Peter teaches us the valuable lesson that it is much better to attempt something great and fail than to never attempt anything at all.

I have a sign in my study with a quote by Theodore Roosevelt who said: "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with

those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat." I say, "Bully!" to that. Sure Peter sank, but he was the *only* one who had the courage to get out of the boat.

You could say Peter failed, but the biggest failures were those in the boat who never attempted to walk on the water. The greatest failure is to never try at all. It is the fear of failure that keeps many people from ever attempting to serve God in great ways. You're afraid to join the choir because you're afraid you can't sing. I know most of the people in the choir and half of them can't sing either, but they're trying. You won't teach the Bible, because you're afraid you might say something wrong. I've been teaching the Bible for forty years and I still make mistakes—and people always let me know about my mistakes!

Life is a risk. Getting out of bed in the morning is a risk. Driving a car is a risk. Eating at a restaurant is a risk. But as the saying goes, "No risk, no reward." If you are afraid of failure you'll never leave the boat. So go ahead and step out of the boat and walk by faith. That doesn't mean that you won't have failures and setbacks. They'll come. But don't beat yourself up over your failures. Instead, do what Peter did.

## 5. Cry out to Jesus for help

Peter prayed just three short words. But he didn't just utter them calmly; the Bible says he cried out. He yelled, "Lord, save me!" The most effective, eloquent prayers are those that are the shortest and most sincere. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned us not to pray like the hypocrites who pray standing on corners to be seen. He also warned us not to pray like the pagans who babble on and on and think they'll be heard because of their many words. Instead Jesus said when we pray we should go into our prayer closet and pray sincerely and simply to our Father.

When some people pray publicly today, they use a different voice and vocabulary to sound super spiritual. If Peter had been like some of the pious pray-ers today he when he started sinking he would have said, "Almighty Father, we come to you on this stormy night ... glub, glub, glub."

Through the years many people have said to me, "I want to pray, but I just don't know how." I tell them, "Just talk to God like you're talking to me right now." You don't have to use a lot of 16-cylinder, double-jointed words with God. Just talk to Him simply but sincerely.

If you heard Bobby Welch's battlefield story last weekend, can you ever forget that scene of him lying in a pool of his own blood praying, "God, help me?" He said it was just three words and he prayed it twice. And God answered that prayer.

Maybe you're sinking right now. You're in trouble and you don't know what you do or say. Just cry out to Jesus today, "Lord, save me! Lord, help me!" Your misery will be directly proportionate to the time between when you start sinking and when you cry out to Jesus.

## 6. Learn to walk WITH Jesus

I love the next part of the story. The Bible says, "Jesus reached out his hand and caught him ... and when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down." Jesus rescued Peter because He is the God of the second chance...and the third and the fourth and the thousandth chance. And you can be sure that when you fail Jesus will pick you up if you cry out to Him. Notice I didn't say *if* you fail, I said, *when* you fail.

Now have you ever thought about *how* Peter and Jesus got back to the boat? Do you think Jesus walked and Peter swam? Nope. Do you think Jesus walked and carried Peter in His arms? Probably not. I think Jesus put his arm around Peter's shoulder and they walked together on the water back to the boat. There's a great lesson here. It's a lot easier to walk on the water with Jesus than to walk on the water without Him.

Jesus says to us, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." If I am yoked with Jesus and He is walking above the turbulent waters of my circumstances, guess where I am? I'm walking with Him above my stormy circumstances.

Have you ever asked someone, "How are you doing?" They respond by saying, "I'm doing pretty good UNDER the circumstances." That would be like me asking you, "How did you sleep last night?" And you said, "I slept alright UNDER the mattress." You shouldn't sleep UNDER your mattress; you should sleep ON it. Circumstances are the same way. You don't have to live UNDER your circumstances. When you are yoked with Jesus you can live above them.

## 7. Worship Jesus as God

When they got back into the boat the Bible says, "Then those who were in the boat worshiped him saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" The disciples had been terrified when they saw Jesus. But He said to them, "Do not be afraid. It is I." In Greek, the words are "Ego eimi." That literally means, "I am." When Moses stood at the burning bush he asked God to reveal His name. God said, "My name is I AM." That's the name Jesus also claimed. He was saying to the frightened disciples, "You don't have to be afraid because the great I AM is here."

Was Jesus really God? Well the Bible says the disciples worshipped Him and we are to *only* worship God. He accepted their worship. There can be no doubt that Jesus is God. Have you come to the place where you worship Him as the great I AM?

When you are hungry for spiritual truth He says, "I AM the bread of life." When you are in the darkness He says, "I AM the light of the world." When you're needing access to heaven He says, "I AM the door." When you are searching for the way He says, "I AM the way." When you're searching for truth He says, "I AM the truth." When you're searching for the real meaning of life He says, "I am THE life." When you come to the point of dying He says, "I AM the resurrection of the life." When we say to Him, "Lord, I AM NOT all that I should be." He says, "I know, but that's okay because I AM all you'll ever need." Will you worship Him today?

## CONCLUSION

Jesus came to them walking on the turbulent waters for a reason. He wanted to show them that the very thing they feared was actually a pathway for Him to be with them. The Christian life is not always smooth sailing. There are storms. But Jesus uses those personal storms as a sidewalk to come to us.

What were the disciples afraid of on that stormy dark night? They were afraid of sinking and drowning. They were afraid of dying. That's why they were struggling, bailing, and rowing, to keep their heads above water. But Jesus came walking on top of the very thing they feared. In essence He was saying, "Don't be afraid. What you fear that will be over your head is already under my feet!"

What storms are in you in today? What is it that is threatening to drown you? I can assure you that it is already under the feet of Jesus. How do I know that? The Bible says God has placed everything under the feet of Jesus. "For he (the Father) has put EVERYTHING under his (Jesus) feet." (1 Corinthians 15:27) There are going to be stormy times in your life, but that's okay because they are under the Jesus' feet. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

So whatever you think may be threatening to drown you, I want you to say aloud: that which is under his feet can never be over my head!"

Twelve men saw Jesus walking on the storm-tossed waves. One had enough faith to take the risk to join Him out on the stormy waves. One man reckoned that it was better to be out on the water with Jesus than to stay in the boat. Eleven stayed behind afraid to risk themselves. They were more concerned with bailing water from the boat than getting out on the adventure of water-walking. Which choice will you make?

## OUTLINE

### THE ADVENTURE BEGINS WHEN YOU:

1. Refuse to give in to your fears

Jesus said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

2. Confirm your desires with God's Word

Peter replied, "Tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said.

3. Leave the boat of mediocrity

"Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus."

4. Are willing to risk failure

"But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink..."

5. Cry out to Jesus for help

Peter cried out, "Lord, save me!"

6. Learn to walk WITH Jesus

"Jesus reached out his hand and caught him ... and when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down."

7. Worship Jesus as God

"Then those who were in the boat worshiped him saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes