

Be Courageous 2-13-05

Matthew 14:22-36 (NIV)

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." 34 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him 36 and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

I think one thing in the Gospels that captivates us is the themes we find repeated in our own lives. All through this little story we see things we can readily relate to, feelings and circumstances that are so like our own. These spiritual truths are so valuable because they are ones we so desperately need for everyday life. (Psalm 119:105)

Jesus had just fed the multitude. As soon as the baskets of leftovers were gathered, the crowd wanted to make Jesus a king. (John 6:15) No doubt, the disciples were more than ready to see this happen. They had been barely getting by, living on the generosity of others for the past two years (Luke 8:13) and were ready for the answer to the prayer, "Thy kingdom come...". (Matthew 5:10) They were ready to see Herod punished and Rome booted out of Israel. They longed for the reestablishment of the kingdom of Israel. Judas Iscariot and Simon the Zealot would have especially been eager to encourage the crowds. But Jesus knows our hearts. He knows when our timing is wrong and our motives are mixed. (Matthew 20:22-23) We can be certain we know God's will, certain we have found our call and yet be dead wrong. He graciously intervenes and redirects us.

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. Notice that Jesus "made the disciples get into the boat". They may have been arguing that this was the perfect time to ride the popular movement of the people, (Acts 1:6) but Jesus made them leave. He dismissed the crowd and headed up into the mountain to be alone with His Father. How unlike man who is greedy for fame!

Commented [notes1]: 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Psalms 119:105 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. John 6:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. Luke 8:1-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matt 6:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. 23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." Matt 20:22-23 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6 (NIV)

23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, This is a repeated theme in the Gospels. Jesus likes to get alone with the Father in prayer. (Luke 6:12; Matthew 26:36) Do you? He needed to be alone with Him. Don't you? When life clamors to make you famous or exalt you, do you run to be alone with your Father? This is the heart of one who truly loves God. Fame is fickle. The praise of man is often meaningless and usually a temptation. (Psalm 5:9) Jesus knows where stability and real love are found. He longed to return to the communion He had with the Father before the world was. (John 17:5) The closest He could come to it was alone with Him in prayer. Do you long for quiet times of prayer like that? When we don't, it is a warning sign that the world is taking up too much of our affections. It may be that our calling is usurping the One who has called us.

Perhaps you have never found the joy of quiet time in the presence of God. It isn't hard to discover, but it does require a heart that is willing to submit. (Ezekiel 12:2) Without the desire to submit to our loving Father, our ears will not be open to hear and we will just present our requests, our desires. To find joy in getting alone with the Father requires a willingness to hear His heart and pray His will. (1John 3:21-22)

24 but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. The fourth watch is between three and six in the morning. They had been rowing for about 8 or 9 hours against the wind that often comes up on Galilee. This wind was probably blowing them toward the middle of the lake. To understand their fears, you have to know that many Jews believed the bottom of the lake to be the Abyss. In their minds, that was the realm of the dead. With the exception of crucifixion, there was no death more frightening than drowning on the lake. They probably knew of men that had died in that manner.

Imagine for a moment what might have been going through their minds. "Why did Jesus send us into this? We were ready to crown Him king, and He sends us to our deaths. Why would He allow this? Maybe we weren't worthy so He's getting rid of us. We told Him we didn't want to go, and He commanded us to. We obeyed Him, and now this! He rebuked the wind and waves before, (Matthew 8:27) but it isn't working for me. Help!"

So many times in life we are just certain we know God's will, that is, until He sends us off in another direction. In obedience, but with reluctance, we go. Then we face one of the worst storms in our life, and the same kind of doubts cross our minds. Storms will come. Remember Jesus' parable about the house built on the sand and the other on the rock. (Matthew 7:25) The one thing houses have in common is that they will face storms. The three little piggies all had to face the wolf that huffs and puffs. One thing is certain, storms. The storms test what we have built our lives upon. Thank God, for they help us focus on what is eternal. (Psalm 1:4)

If the disciples were trusting in any other thing than the Rock, Christ Jesus, it was sure to fail them. (1Corinthians 10:3-4) They had probably tried every boating trick in their career, and prayed every prayer they thought would work. It's Interesting

Commented [notes7]: 12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.
Luke 6:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."
Matt 26:36 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 9 For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.
Psalms 5:9 (KJV)

Commented [notes10]: 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.
John 17:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 2 "Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.
Ezek 12:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.
1 John 3:21-22 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 27 The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"
Matt 8:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.
Matt 7:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
Psalms 1:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.
1 Cor 10:3-4 (NIV)

how Jesus takes us to the very end of our rope. That is when we see Jesus. (Psalm 73:2) If we don't get to the place of hopelessness, we harden our heart and give the credit to something else. We don't get the revelation that we so desperately need. There is something wonderful that happens in the valley of the shadow of death. It is the realization that He is there with us. (Psalm 23:4)

25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. Remember, they think they are riding above the Abyss. Here comes a ghost, seemingly out of the deep. They may have thought, "Is it coming to greet us into the realm of the dead?" No wonder they were terrified. You would be too. The other Gospels tell us that it looked like He was going to walk on by them. It seems to me that Jesus was doing everything possible to get them to call out to Him for help. (Jeremiah 33:3) They were at the height of terror during this frightening experience when He called out to them. The last time a storm threatened them, Jesus was in the boat sleeping. (Matthew 8:26) They called out to Him and were saved. Now He is teaching them that even if He isn't physically present, they can still call out to Him.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." He didn't let the terror linger any longer. What He literally said was, "Be courageous! I AM! Have no fear." I love the words of Jesus. They are so perfect. They are so powerful. In the midst of the storms of life, when my mate has a dreaded disease, when I lose my job, when my friends turn their back on me, when the thing I feared has come upon me, when the waves threaten to sink my boat and what I think is the angel of death is coming for me, I hear the same voice the disciples heard 2000 years ago. His words are eternal. (Psalm 119:89) He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, (Hebrews 13:8) and he says the same words. "Be courageous! I AM. Have no fear."

If our Creator, the Sovereign Lord of all, says to us, "Have courage!" is there any reason not to? Whatever He allows, He will see us through. (Isaiah 41:9-10) He is the eternal One, the One who sees the end from the beginning. (Isaiah 46:10) That is what is implied in the name Jehovah, the I AM. He sees the future. That is why He can tell us authoritatively, "Have courage!" Whatever your situation in life is at this moment, if you are in the boat and you are in at His instruction, then be courageous. He is with you. He will see you through. It may not come out like you prefer, but do not fear, He will see you through the storm you are facing today. If your house is built on the Rock, it will stand.

28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." I think this is the heart of Peter speaking out. He'd rather be with Jesus than in that boat. It's a safer place to be. Some of you would rather be with Jesus than the boat you are in. That is admirable. But sometimes we are asking for more than we are ready for. We ask for more than our faith can handle. In His graciousness He invites us to come, to do what we desire, and so we take a giant leap of faith.

Commented [notes17]: 2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. Psalms 73:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Psalms 23:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.' Jer 33:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. Matt 8:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 89 Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Psalms 119:89 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Heb 13:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 9 I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. 10 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. Isaiah 41:9-10 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Isaiah 46:10 (KJV)

29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. Peter took pretty seriously Jesus' command to be courageous. I've been on a boat on Galilee and tried to imagine stepping out on the water. It caused me to really admire how much faith Peter did have, even though I know he was rebuked for his lack of faith. I wouldn't have had the courage to ask. Sometimes we envision doing something that takes faith. We ask God to tell us if it is His will. When He says to go ahead, we take a leap of faith. I think the Kingdom of God could use more people who are willing to get out of the boat. Most of us don't even ask. We just cling to what we know, the hull of some fragile boat. Notice that it was Peter's initiative to ask that elicited Jesus' command, "Come".

30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Peter's focus went from the Lord who he desired to be with, to the wind and waves. His eyes shifted from the Lord of circumstance to the circumstance itself. Every time we do that we sink. Every time we take our eyes off the One who is I AM and get them on the temporal, the miracle begins to fade. (2Corinthians 4:18) Courage turns back to fear. Faith turns to back to doubt. Suddenly we find ourselves sinking and calling out with Peter, "Lord, save me!"

We were the ones who dared to ask to do something God sized, and He was gracious enough to invite us, but when we look away from Him, the faith that made it all possible, the conviction that He is over all things, begin to fade. Down we go. And then we pray in earnest, "Lord, get me out of my mess that resulted from my lack of faith." If that has been you, don't be condemned. Nobody else got out of the boat. We are talking about Peter two millenniums later. He is the only human other than Jesus to have ever walked on water. Better to have tried and failed and through it learned a great lesson than to have stayed in the boat.

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" When we cry out to the Lord in earnest, He is there to reach out His hand and catch us. We may hear a rebuke with that saving hand, but it is a rebuke of conviction not condemnation. It's important for us to understand the difference. Conviction says, "You should realize who I am and trust in me. Next time keep your eyes on me." Condemnation says, "You are a failure." Conviction is from God. Condemnation is for the unrepentant unbeliever. Conviction encourages you to make that failure a lesson learned. Condemnation says to give it up.

I'm always amazed that Jesus expects us to have more faith. He knows how fallen we are, and yet, He seems surprised at our lack of faith. (Matthew 8:26) I guess that after we hear so much from His lips, He sees that it should produce faith. Faith comes from hearing the word of God, and yet, we hear so much but have so little faith. (Romans 10:17) Then Jesus asked a rhetorical question designed to make us all think. "Why did you doubt?" You had your eyes on the Creator of all matter and yet you feared matter. You asked to do some great thing for God, saw it coming to pass, knew it was miraculous and then you started looking at things in a practical way. Why would you do that? After all you have seen and heard, how can you doubt the ability of God? Why do we doubt? It really makes no sense to doubt. Why don't we walk in faith in the One who is I AM? (John 10:37-38)

Commented [notes25]: 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. 2 Cor 4:18 (KJV)

Commented [notes26]: 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. Matt 8:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 37 If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. 38 But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. John 10:37-38 (KJV)

32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." In Mark's accounting of this story, it says they were amazed. They hadn't understood the miracle of the feeding of the 5000; their hearts were hardened. (Mark 6:51-52) How could they have seen that and not known Jesus was God? Never underestimate the mind of man in explaining away the miracles of God. We come up with the most elaborate of explanations so that we don't have to believe and bow down. The disciples had seen their Master walk across a lake in the middle of a storm to find them, save Peter, and stop a storm. If their hearts had explained it all away up until this point, this was now over the top. When we give up explaining and know it is the supernatural for our benefit, we worship. When we are so out of our realm of comprehending that our minds are overloaded with wonder, we worship. Have you been there?

Commented [notes29]: 51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. Mark 6:51-52 (NIV)

How often do you worship? Worship is recognizing the greatness of God and the smallness of me. Worship is marveling at His attributes and amazement at His works of grace. You don't have to experience a miracle like this one we read about, you just have to see His greatness in your life and the world around you or in His word. (Psalm 19:1, 8)

Commented [notes30]: 1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Psalms 19:1 (NIV)

34 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him 36 and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed. Had these folks heard about the woman with the issue of blood? (Matthew 9:20-22) The corner of the Jewish garment was tied in a way that reminded them of the books of Moses. It was a tassel. Jews believed that the tassel of the Messiah would have the power to heal. To touch the tassel meant they had faith that He was the Messiah. (see sermon Touching Desperation) That faith was enough to receive healing for all who touched Him.

Commented [notes31]: 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. Psalms 19:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes32]: 20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. 21 She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." 22 Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment. Matt 9:20-22 (NIV)

This was the end of the popular period of Jesus' ministry. From this point forward Jesus would spend more time in Gentile regions and with the disciples. He was about to tell the crowds that they needed to see Him as the way of salvation, not a deliverer from those present world conditions. (John 6:27) They would turn and leave. What the disciples had experienced on the lake in the physical, they were about to experience in the spiritual. What love He shows us in preparing us like that. He takes us through physical storms to prepare us for the storms that really matter eternally, the spiritual storms.

Commented [notes33]: 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." John 6:27 (NIV)

This story leaves us with some all-important questions. Is your house built on the Rock? Are you ready for the storms of life? Are your eyes on the conditions or on Jesus? Finally, we have that question from Jesus, Himself, "Why do you doubt?" The only way to make it through the inevitable storms of life, the huffing and puffing of the wolf, is to have your house built on the rock. It is to keep our eyes on Jesus. It is to hear Him say to us, "Be courageous. I AM. Do not fear!" Seeing Him for who He truly is will cause us to abandon our doubt and worship.