

Matthew 14:22-33

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[0:00] All right, our text this morning's Bible study is Matthew chapter 14, verses 22 through 33. So if you can join me there in your copy of God's Word. And while you're returning there, I want you to remember that we're encouraging each of you to read through the Bible with us using the plan from the Read Scripture app.

And we're doing a couple of things to help you do so. One of those things is teaching each week from a text from the previous week's reading. And we're going to kind of be hopping and skipping through the narrative.

But we're hoping that it'll help tie it together for you, a biblical theology of the large theme of Scripture, which is the redemptive work of God for his people through the personal work of Jesus Christ.

And so we're going to kind of be hopping along. And we just really want you to join us in that. We think that you'll be greatly served in doing so, getting that broad narrative clear in your mind.

And this morning, we're going to consider the story of Jesus walking on water, which is found, as I said, in Matthew chapter 14, beginning in verse 22. Immediately, he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side while he dismissed the crowds.

[1:14] And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. But the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

And in the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and said, It is a ghost. And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. And Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

He said, Come. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and began to sink. He cried out, Lord, save me.

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt? And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

[2:14] And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, Truly, you are the Son of God. So let's first set the stage for this episode in the life of Jesus. Matthew's labor in the writing of this gospel account is to speak to the nature of the kingdom of God and specifically to the nature of its king.

He wants his readers to worship Jesus as the promised Christ. So he has been recording the miracles of Jesus and pointing to his fulfilling of the Old Testament prophecies concerning him. We are to see in the miracles the one who has authority over every disease, over demons, over nature, and even over sin itself.

We are to see Jesus as God and as the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us. At the beginning of chapter 14 of Matthew's gospel, we read about the death of John the Baptist.

And Jesus has told this news in verse 12. The beginning part of verse 13 tells us, Now when Jesus heard this, the news of John the Baptist, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.

[3:26] Jesus goes off to be alone. And I think it is a very safe assumption that he is going to mourn the loss of his cousin, John. The remainder of verse 13, though, says, But when the crowds heard it, they

followed him on foot from the towns.

Jesus goes to be alone, and he is followed. This is a point for myself, as I try to put myself in his shoes, that I feel annoyed. But he doesn't seem to be.

Our Lord does not send the crowd away. But verse 14 tells us that he had compassion on them, and he healed their sick. He also taught them, and then he fed them.

This is the crowd of about 5,000 men besides women and children. And it is this moment that our story begins today.

He has been grief-stricken over the loss of John the Baptist. And then he has turned himself in compassion to this huge crowd of people who's been ministering to them all day long.

[4:35] And that's where we pick up the story in verse 22. And we see that he sends the disciples on ahead of him to the other side, and he gets the crowds out of there.

He dismisses them after dinner for them to head home to sleep that night. And he goes up on the mountain, we see in verse 23, to pray.

Jesus once again goes to be alone to mourn the loss of John. But not to sulk in self-pity, but to pray. He goes to be with God the Father.

Now, this is not the primary point of today's text, but I want us to note the humanity of Christ. He needs time to be quiet, to contemplate, and most importantly, to pray.

I imagine, the text doesn't tell us, but I imagine his prayer was a pouring out to God concerning his grief for his cousin. And I imagine that he is strengthened in his praying as he is about to do yet another miraculous thing.

[5:40] And in so doing, in his humanity, going up on the mountain, grieving the loss of John, seeing his need for prayer, he goes then and does this miracle that declares his divinity.

Now, this episode in the life of Jesus is wonderfully structured. It is told by Matthew in two acts, Acts 1 and Act 2.

Each act is concluded with a statement of who Jesus is. The first act ends in verse 27 with the phrase, Take heart, it is I.

Do not be afraid. The second act ends in verse 33 with the phrase, Truly, you are the Son of God. So this will be the simple outline for our study this morning.

Number one, Jesus declares, I am. And number two, the disciples declare, you are. So first, Jesus declares, I am.

[6:43] Now notice that by this time, right, the boat is a long way from the land. They have struck out across the Sea of Galilee, and it is being beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

So the waves are moving in the opposite direction that they are trying to go, right? The waves are coming at them. The waves aren't propelling them across the Sea. They are working against them, and they are beating against the side of the boat.

This particular crossing has been a rough crossing. And don't neglect that it is in the middle of the night that they are doing this very thing, right? It is dark, it is stormy, and they are fighting against this wind to get to the other side of the sea.

And then we see that in the fourth watch of the night, the fourth watch is between 3 and 6 a.m., right? So the very dark of the night, just before the dawn, Jesus comes to them walking on the sea, right?

And when the disciples see him walking on the sea, they are terrified, understandably, and say it is a ghost. They cry out in fear.

[7:53] But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. So there's these two phrases, right? The one, take heart.

The second, do not be afraid. And they are teaching the same thing, but they're the opposite of one another. So there's the positive side of it, take heart. Or we could say, be of good courage.

Or be courageous. And then the negative side of what he's teaching them here is, do not be afraid. So do be courageous. Do not be afraid.

Jesus says to his disciples, and I imagine he yelled it at the disciples, because of the noise of the storm, have courage and do not fear.

He works to reorient their faith, and he grounds this work in his very being. At the center of this positive exhortation to courage and the negative expansion of the exhortation, Jesus says, as translated in the ESV, it is I.

[8:58] In the original, in the Greek, this phrase is two words, and it is quite literally, I am. And so listen to the verse read in this way.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, take heart, I am. Do not be afraid. As a student of the Bible, this declaration should draw your mind to Moses on the mountain, with God speaking to him from a burning bush.

In Exodus chapter 3 and verse 14, God tells Moses to tell the Israelites his name. He says, say to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you.

Of hopeful note, we see the combination of God exhorting us to fear not, in conjunction with his declaration of I am, a number of places in the scripture, and a particular number of places in the book of Isaiah.

And I want to share just one with you. So listen carefully to this reading of Isaiah chapter 43, verses 1 through 3, and see if you can pick up the similar theme happening here.

[10:07] But now, thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name.

You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

For, verse 3, I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. And we see this again and again, the conjunction, these two things being paired up together.

God's declaration that he is, I am, along with this idea of fearing not or being courageous. In addition to this text in Isaiah, we also see in numerous places in the Old Testament, declarations that God is powerful over the sea.

Here's one example from this morning's Bible reading. So just this morning, from our Bible reading plan, Psalm 89, and this is verses 8 and 9. O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you.

[11:18] You rule the raging of the sea. When its waves rise, you still them. So Jesus declares, I am.

And just in case you think that I'm making too much of this, you thought, what? It's just him pointing out that he is Jesus and not something else, right? If you've read past that many times in your life, as I have, that he's just saying, no, no, I'm not a ghost, it's me, Jesus.

Allow me to show you one more thing about the structure of this text. Here at the end of Act 1, Jesus says, Take heart, I am. In Greek, there are 91 words preceding this phrase, and you guessed it, 91 words following this phrase, right?

So Matthew places right at the center of this significant episode Jesus' declaration of who he is and his encouragement to his disciples to respond accordingly, right?

It's smack dab in the middle of these two sides of this story that is going on, right? It is no coincidence that Matthew places this grand statement at the very heart of this story.

[12:37] So Jesus declares, I am, with his words, but he also does so with his actions. In the Bible, the sea is often employed to represent evil because it is powerful, it is uncontrollable, and it is deadly.

Let me just give you two examples, right? So again, in Isaiah chapter 27 and verse 1, In that day, the Lord, with his hard and great and strong sword, will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent, Leviathan, the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

And then in John's vision in Revelation of the new heaven and the new earth, found in Revelation 21, And I'll just read verse 1. Notice what's missing from this new established place.

John records, So the sea often represents the forces of evil.

What do we note in our text today? What is so significant about what Jesus does as he declares, I am, as he walks on the sea?

[14:01] He shows himself to be Lord of the sea. In Job chapter 38 and verse 16, God rhetorically asks Job the following, Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?

Jesus identifies himself as God when he walks on the sea. He declares, I have. Jesus decides not to take the boat with the disciples to the other side of the sea.

He sailed with them many times before, but this time he sends them on and he goes up on a mountain to spend time with his Father in prayer. Jesus could have taken another boat.

He could have walked around the sea. But he decides to walk in the recesses of the deep to be abundantly clear to his disciples who was going to hang upon that tree for the remission of their sins and ours.

He wanted them to understand that he is the Christ, right? This promised one, the Messiah, that would come to take away the sins of the world, right?

[15:12] This is what he's establishing. And it is significant to their minds that would have been steeped in the Old Testament text, right? This is a massive way that he declares with his actions that he is, I am.

So that was the first point. Jesus declares, I am. Secondly, the disciples declare, you are.

This episode in the life of Jesus is primarily Christological, right? Declaring who he is, right? But it is also about us.

What does it mean to follow this Jesus, the great I am? We can learn this morning something of Christian discipleship. I think we can see two lesser lessons and one main lesson for following Jesus.

And first I want to look at the two lesser lessons. But before we do, I just want to say that I read some ridiculous commentary this week on this passage. Just some bizarre applications.

[16:22] Just a very, very broad over-allegorizing of the text itself. And we want to be really careful not to do that with these passages, right? They're teaching us a particular and primary thing.

And so with a little hesitation, I even speak of some lesser lessons here. As these are not the driving point of what we're meant to learn. But I still think they're worth some mention.

So in brief, I'll mention two lesser lessons. Number one, if you follow Christ's commands, it does not mean you'll be spared adversity. If you follow Christ's commands, it does not mean you will be spared adversity.

Notice verse 22, right? Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side.

Following Jesus does not mean easy sailing. Jesus knew the storm was coming. He knew that the wind would be against them. And he knew that the waves would beat against that boat.

[17:27] All the same, he made the disciples get into the boat and go. Beloved God's commands are good. And we, at some point in our Christian maturing, will have to allow God to define what is good and what isn't.

And if you find yourself this morning constantly fighting against that, I just would encourage you to stop. Stop thinking you know what's best. And start believing that God does in fact know what's best.

That he's always working for your good. In your favor. To the end that he is glorified. You stop defining what is good. And let him define what is good.

Your life may be full of adversity for your good. God asks us to follow him into the storm. Secondly, Jesus knows our adversities.

And he knows how to rescue us. Jesus knows our adversities. And he knows how to rescue us. Just notice in brief verse 32.

[18:32] And when they got into the boat, he and Peter, the wind ceased. So all this, this whole episode, this storm is raging on around them.

And in verse 32, the storm stops. We don't read exactly how Jesus stopped the wind. But just that he stopped it. I imagine that he whispered to it.

Too low for Matthew to hear him. And I'm reminded of an episode from Jesus' life just a few chapters prior to our text today. Where he vocally, loudly rebukes the wind.

Back in Matthew chapter 8, something not unsimilar has happened. Beginning in verse 23, when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea so that the boat was being swamped by the waves.

But he was asleep. This picture of courage and not fear. He knew he was secure, even in a boat being rocked by a storm.

[19:40] But they don't feel this way, the disciples. Verse 25, they went and woke him saying, Save us, Lord, we are perishing. And he said to them, Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?

Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. Verse 27 tells us, And the men marveled, saying, What sort of man is this that even the winds and sea obey him? And we'll see in this text, the second time that Jesus calms a storm, that they come to understand what sort of man this is. The rescue of Jesus is clear in these two stories, right?

In both cases, he stops the storm. But rescue doesn't always look like this. Sometimes as we follow God into the storm, he stills the storm.

Sometimes he gives us the strength to weather the storm. So these are some lesser lessons. I think that we are, as a church, fairly familiar with this lesson.

[20:47] But it seems especially worth mentioning in a difficult time that we walk through right now. The main lesson, however, for us in this text is about the nature of Christian faith.

And that is this. Christian faith is courageous. Christian faith is courageous. Or Christian faith does not fear.

And I want to suggest to you that anxiety and fear are synonymous. Anxiety seems to be kind of a brooding fear, a subliminal fear.

Fear is the crying out. Like, we're being destroyed. Our boat is being broken to pieces by these waves. Anxiety works in kind of underneath.

And I can imagine that many of us may feel that kind of fear even this morning. So Christian faith does not fear, but it is courageous.

[21:52] I do not think that I was planning to ignore Peter. I was not. Peter's part in the story shows us both the positive and the negative of the lesson in just a few verses.

At the end of Acts 1, Jesus says, Take heart, it is I. It is I. Do not be afraid. Right? He says, in essence, because I am, be courageous. Then Matthew begins Act 2 immediately.

And Peter answered him. Right? So in response to what Jesus has said, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. And he said, come.

So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. So we see first the courage of Peter, the positive of the lesson.

Right? If it is you, you are the I am, then command me to come to you and I will. I will be courageous. In response to Jesus' statement, take heart, it is I.

[22:52] Do not be afraid. Peter says, you have told us to be courageous, so I will be courageous. Some have suggested and respected commentators have suggested that Peter was asking outside his station.

That he should have recognized that his place was on the boat and not out in the water. But I just disagree. I just flatly disagree with this estimation.

Because Jesus does not hesitate to reward his courage with a beckon to join him on the water.

There is no reason to think that Jesus didn't want him to come out with him.

Second, we see the negative or the opposite of the lesson. So Peter is initially courageous, but verse 30 tells us, when he saw the wind, he was afraid.

And beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me. And then Jesus immediately reached out his hand, takes hold of him, saying to him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt?

[23:56] If we are not courageous, if we fear, Jesus says to us that we are doubting. That we have little faith or are faithless.

We find ourselves in fear, in having anxious hearts. It's because we have failed to believe something he has said about himself or something that he has said he is doing in the world.

Peter takes his eyes off Jesus, the great I am. He allows the adversity of his circumstance to strike fear in him.

He stops looking to Jesus. He starts looking to the things that are going on around him. Note that when he is afraid, he cries out to Jesus in faith. He knows that Jesus can save him.

It seems like suddenly his attention gets brought back to the Christ. And Jesus is not slow to do so. Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him.

[25:01] Jesus rescues us from our fears. And he does so with immediacy. Beloved, none of us are sinking in the sea in the midst of a storm, literally.

But we often find ourselves sinking in the sea in the midst of a storm, metaphorically. And Jesus will calm our fears and grant us courage with immediacy.

Not metaphorically. Actually, but he'll do so by his word. He has spoken about who he is and what he is doing.

And Jesus is quick to speak. The problem is that we are too often really, really slow to hear. So, Christian fear...

Excuse me. That's a mistype. So, Christian faith is courageous. Christian fear is not courageous. That's not right. Christian faith is courageous.

[26:02] In this episode of Jesus' life, he declares, I am. And the disciples declare, you are and they worshiped.

So, once he and Peter rejoin them on the boat and the storm is calmed, verse 33 tells us, those in the boat worshiped him, saying, truly, you are the Son of God.

So, we have that very opportunity this morning to recognize that whatever we may be going through in our life, the storms that tend to toss our little boats.

If we are in Christ, we are secure in him because he is the great I am. And we have an opportunity to lay down our fears and anxieties and say to him, you are.

You are the Son of God. You are the one who came and died to take away the sins of the world.

You are the King of the kingdom in which we are citizens.

[27:07] So, I pray that will be the case for us this morning. You are the one who died to■ the brothers in the■■■■. You are the one who died to■ the brothers in the■■■■. You are the one who died to■ the brothers in the■■■■. You are the one who died to■ the brothers in the■■■■. You are the one who died to■ the brothers in the■■■■.

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