

J.J.

IN THE MIDDLE OF DIFFICULTIES
Matthew 14:22-32; Mark 6:45-56; John 6:15-21

Matthew 14: 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. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

25 Shortly before dawn 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."

PRAY

INTRODUCTION :

Story : Before I knew the truth in God's Word and followed Christ, I was afraid of "ghosts". I was afraid of ghosts that there are times when I'm walking on this asphalt road at night, my friend suggested that I walk very slowly. He said, on our shoulders are candles with small flames. That keeps away the ghosts so if we run, the wind will blow away the flame and then it will be dark and that's when the ghosts will come. So one time, I did that but I was imagining a lot of ghosts that I didn't care I just ran and shouted while I was running. One time, I did that, and I didn't see that there was a couple walking and they were the ones who got scared of me.

REVIEW

Last week, we started talking about Jesus in the midst of difficulties. We read the story

DURING DIFFICULT PERIODS

- Jesus allows struggles.
- Jesus sees.
- Jesus goes to our side.
- Jesus saves.

I. JESUS ALLOWS STRUGGLES

Matthew 14: 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. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

II. JESUS SEES.

Now remember the story I preached and it was in Matthew 8.

When they were in the middle of the sea, Jesus was sleeping. At least, they know that Jesus is with them and can wake Him up. *That's why Jesus said to them, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" (Matthew 8:26)*

This time, it wasn't a life and death situation because it doesn't show that they were scared of the waves, they were only really struggling (straining) and Jesus wasn't with them.

But where is our Lord even during our times of struggle? When life seems to be against us? When there are no opportunities opening up for us? Or nothing is happening when it comes to your health or your finances?

Mark 6 : 47 Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.

III. JESUS GOES TO OUR SIDE

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

Now, take note :

What was giving them the difficulties at this time? The water!

Now, you see Jesus walking on the water.

Remember, these are big waves and some theologians said that he's not walking on those waves like a surfer on top of the waves.

When Jesus was walking, He was walking, the waves were flattening out....giving way to Him.

Remember, He is God.

Biblical Illustration : Remember the Red Sea, God parted it so that the Israelites can pass.

The waves flatten out when Jesus was walking on it.

Illustration : Do you see servants around royalty in the past that whenever the king or queen passes by they stop whatever they are doing and give way and curtsy or do a bow.

That's what the waves are doing. It's their King passing by.

Isn't that what the disciples noticed in Matthew 8

Matthew 8 : The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

What's the lesson here THAT OUR LORD IS WALKING ON THE WATER THAT'S CAUSING THE DIFFICULTIES OF HIS DISCIPLES?

Jesus is on top of the situation or thing or the person that's causing you the difficulties!

Psalm 93

*3 The seas have lifted up, Lord,
the seas have lifted up their voice;
the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.
4 Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea—
the Lord on high is mighty.*

Application : God is on His throne... He is mightier than our difficulties. He is mightier than our problems. He is mightier than your boss. He is mightier than your sickness.

TO CONTINUE :

Now, let's see the reaction of His disciples.

26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

Theological debate : It is said that the reason why the disciples became afraid is because that the sight of a ghost is an implication that they will die soon.

But there is no evidence at all in the context that they were in danger of sinking unlike in Matthew 8, where it showed that the waves was getting inside the boat.

So why were they terrified?

Etymology : troubled in KJV “tarasso” fear, dread.

How afraid were they? *cried out in fear.*

Etymology : krazo “cry aloud”

So, why there so afraid? Remember, they weren't afraid while they were rowing. But now they're scared.

Note : It's because remember most of them are fishermen and live by the sea and they were somehow still in control of the boat and so of the situation. It was difficult but they were still in control.

They got scared it's because, they thought it was a ghost (phantasma). As simple as that.

Illustration : I remember when I was a teenager going home midnight at school, you have to pass through this long asphalt road that's dark and there's just vacant land full of tall grass. Once I was going home, the security guard teased me, “there's ghost on that road”. And I swore at them (I wasn't a Christian yet) but then in the middle of this road, and it was really dark, I saw a figure that was standing still and I became really scared, and then I went nearer, I saw the man's teeth because he smiled at me and he was just peeing at the side of the road.

Why did I get scared? It's because of the unknown.

IN THE MIDST OF THE UNKNOWN

1. DO NOT FEAR THE UNKNOWN.

The disciples were facing an unknown. It's the first time they've encountered something like this on the water.

Application : This is the reason why we become afraid. It's because of the unknown. People are afraid of the future...because it's an unknown. People are afraid of the recession, because of the unknown. People are afraid of dying, because it's an unknown.

But as Christians, we need not be afraid of the unknown. Why? It's because we believe in a God who knows everything and is in control of everything. He is our Father in heaven.

Why be afraid of death? When we know where we are going when we die.

Evangelistic : If we believe God's Word about our Lord's kingdom and if we put our faith that our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose again from the dead, then we need not be afraid of dying, because we know where we are going when we die.

Examples of people dying without Christ.

THOMAS HOBBS – Political philosopher: "I say again, if I had the whole world at my disposal, I would give it to live one day. I am about to take a leap into the dark."

SIR THOMAS SCOTT – Chancellor of England: "Until this moment I thought there was neither a God nor a hell. Now I know and feel that there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty."

VOLTAIRE – Famous anti-Christian atheist: "...I am abandoned by God and man." He said to his physician, Dr. Fochin: "I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months of life." When he was told this was impossible, he said, "Then I shall die and go to hell!" His nurse said: "For all the money in Europe I wouldn't want to see another unbeliever die! All night long he cried for forgiveness."

ANTON LEVEY – Satanic Bible author and high priest of the Satanic worship religion. ... His dying words were: "Oh my, oh my, what have I done, there is something very wrong."

But look at the dying words of someone who trusted in what Christ has done on the cross for us.

JONATHAN EDWARDS: Trust in God and you shall have nothing to fear.

D. L. MOODY: I see earth receding; heaven is opening. God is calling me.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE: Build me a hut to die in. I am going home.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: I commend my soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Savior, to be made partaker of life everlasting; and my body to the earth, whereof it was made.

MARTIN LUTHER: Into Thy hands I commend my spirit! Thou hast redeemed me, O God of truth

Why such a peaceful dying? It's because they know where they are going.

ARE YOU AFRAID OF FUTURE WORLD EVENTS ...WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THE WORLD?

If you truly believe God's Word, we all know that what's happening in the world right now is following God's plan according to the Bible.

Now, it's not in the Western news lately but do you know the reason why the United States is not seen in the end times because it is said that they will be insignificant.

Have you heard of BRICS? – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and now Saudi and Iran who were bitter enemies because of their difference as Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims are set to join as BRICS. What's the significance? India and China themselves have the most people in the world and since Saudi and Russia controls most of the oil, they will be controlling the economy of the world. You already see it now.

Significance? The attention is now transferring back to that part of the world where the end-times will happen.

It means, Jesus Christ is coming soon.

People are afraid of the future because they do not know what's going to happen. But we know what's going to happen.

But you might say, "Pastor, what about our future personally."

Quote : I have no fear of the future because God is already there.

Why be afraid of the future when look at what the Bible says :

*22 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.*

*23 They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

*24 I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."*

*25 The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;*

Important to note also : There are some unbelievers who are saying that what they saw is that Jesus was walking on the shore but the point that they did not recognize Him and thought He was a ghost because of the fact that He was walking on water.

2. HAVE FAITH IN THE LORD

Which brings us now to the next verse :

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

I love how it's translated in KJV.

But straightway Jesus spoke unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

Etymology : Take courage, be of good cheer, one word “Tharseo”

Now, let's look at the other account in Mark.

Mark 6: 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”

I can imagine Jesus smiling to them while He's about to pass them.

Now, isn't this the most comforting words you will see in the Bible?

Application : When you're unsure of what's happening? Or what's going to happen? Our Lord Jesus Christ is saying, “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”

I love that word, “Take courage.” It's an action word. It's a command.

Note : What happens is that sometimes circumstances or Satan or the devil will take away your peace. They will take away your confidence.

God is saying, don't let anyone take your peace... “take courage” instead of “taking fear” “**take courage.**” It's yours.

WHY?

the Lord saying to you in the midst of the challenges, in the midst of difficulties, in the midst of the unknown, “IT IS I.”

This is the reason David wrote :

*Psalm 23 : 4 Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;*

Then the Lord says, “Do not be afraid.

Illustration : It is said that there are 365 “Do not be afraid, or do not fear” in the Bible. One for each day of the year.

Here are some of my favourites :

Joshua 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Isaiah 43:1 But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Isaiah 41:10 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.

13 For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

NOTE : EVERY DAY, that's how we should be waking up. "Lord, I take courage.", put in your heart and say to Him "Because I know you are with me." And say, whatever this day brings, "I will not be afraid."

ILLUSTRATION : A man was bragging that he had cut off the tail of a man-eating lion with his pocket knife. When asked why he had not cut off the lion's head, the man replied: "Someone had already done that."

WE WILL NOT BE AFRAID BECAUSE Our Lord has already cut off the lion's head.

WE WILL NOT BE AFRAID whatever the situation is, WE ARE ALREADY VICTORIOUS! I'M NOT SAYING THIS IN THE FUTURE TENSE.

In every problem, we do not say, "I will be victorious." We say, "I am victorious" in this situation because God has already given us the victory, we just have to pass through this.

That's why the Bible says,

*Psalm 23: 5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.*

In short, OUR LORD IS already preparing the party, the celebration, the banquet even in the midst of the challenges.

Romans 8: 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

And this is what Peter demonstrated.

Allow me to paraphrase this in Peter's situation.

"No, in all these things, Peter can walk on water aside from walking on land BECAUSE OF JESUS

Now, here is faith in the Lord, personified.

28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

29 "Come," he said.

Now, imagine this, Jesus walking on water and then standing there when Peter asked him, that he can go to Him on the water.

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

Imagine Peter, who knows the sea because he's a fisherman. I'm sure he's used to sinking in the water but this time, he steps and as if he's stepping on land. That's amazing!

THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE ARE APPROACHING OUR LORD EVERYTIME IN PRAYER, WE ARE GETTING HIS STRENGTH AND POWER IN OUR LIVES.

Now, I want you to observe something here.

Peter did not say, "Lord if it's you, let me walk on water." He said, "tell me to come to you on the water."

PETER WANTED TO BE WHERE JESUS IS.

Faith is not saying, "I will endure this difficulty or kakayanin ko itong problemang ito." Or "I will take care of this problem."

Faith is saying, "Lord, I want to be with you in the midst of this problem."

And you know what happens when, you say that, "That's the time, you will be able to walk on water." That's the time you will be as Spurgeon said, a "water-walker"

In short, if you say to the Lord, "I want to be with you in the midst of this problem." That's the time you will see wonders and miracles in your life. That's what faith does.

IF YOU ARE WALKING WITH THE LORD, YOU WILL BE A WATER-WALKER.

3. ALWAYS FOCUS ON THE LORD.

30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Now remember that Peter is already walking on the water and walking toward Jesus. It means, he is looking at Jesus.

But then he "saw" the wind. Interesting word that was used here..."saw", the wind.

Etymology : saw "blepo"

This word can be used "physically" as literally we can see but it's also used "metaphorically", it means "your thoughts turned to it." Or "you turned your attention to it." Or "you became aware".

ILLUSTRATION : It's just like, someone is standing behind your back. That person is always there and then you say, "there you are. I didn't see you."

It's just like this.. THE WIND HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE AND PETER WAS WALKING ON THE WATER BECAUSE HE WAS FOCUSED ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

APPLICATION : In the midst of difficulties, always make sure you're focusing your attention on our Lord Jesus Christ. Let the wind howl as they may but only look at JESUS CHRIST.

Remember, trials and tests are there and allowed by the Lord to perfect our faith.

The only way we will develop our faith is when even in the midst of trials, we are *Heb 12: 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*

You know what will happen when we focus on our eyes on the Lord?

Illustration : Have you seen a magnifying glass and then focus it on the sun and on the paper. What will happen? The sun's light focused and concentrated will bore through the paper because of the heat.

Application : Yes, the sun is the source of the heat but if you focus on the source of Light or on the Light Himself, then one of these days, you will have on what we call a BREAKTHROUGH.

CANAANITE WOMAN

That's what happened to the Canaanite woman, she continued on focusing on the Lord no matter what the obstacle and her daughter was get rid of demons – BREAKTHROUGH.

BLEEDING WOMAN FOR 12 YEARS

That's what happened to the woman who was suffering from blood for years, she focused on the Lord and didn't care about societal norms or even the crowd, she pushed through to touch the hem of Jesus and she got healed - BREAKTHROUGH

BLIND SINCE BIRTH

That's what happened to the blind man who kept on shouting and crying out to Jesus even other people are saying to Him to keep quiet, He kept on shouting to Jesus. What happened? He was able to see. .. BREAKTHROUGH!

Now, remember this, there will be times that God is going to allow trials and difficulties in your life...DO NOT FEAR, HAVE FAITH, AND ALWAYS FOCUS ON THE LORD because GOD IS PREPARING YOU FOR YOUR BREAKTHROUGH.

S.G.D.