

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 :

Things you don't want to hear during surgery

- Better save that. We'll need it for the autopsy.
- Wait a minute, if this is his liver, then what's that?
- Did we give him enough anesthesia?
- Oops! We took out the wrong kidney.
- Wait. Wait. Did we leave the surgical knife inside after we stitched him up.

Surgery is a situation where everything needs to be under control but sometimes things can go sideways. We were studying that even in the midst of difficulties, our Lord is under control.

REVIEW

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

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!

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

- 1. DO NOT FEAR THE UNKNOWN.**
- 2. HAVE FAITH IN THE LORD**

What was the lesson here last week : Peter did not ask to walk on water. What did he ask?

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

He wanted to be where Jesus is.

That's the lesson, in the midst of difficulties, more than asking to stop the problems or more than asking for a miracle...ASK THAT YOU WILL BE WITH JESUS AND THAT'S THE TIME YOU WILL SEE MIRACLES IN YOUR LIFE. As Spurgeon said – 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"

That's the time Peter began to sink.

Illustration on focus :

Edward deBono, the Oxford exponent of lateral thinking, suggests that when we can't solve a problem using traditional methods, we should try "detours and reversals," anything that will give us a different angle from which to ponder solutions. To illustrate, he tells this story about a problem faced by executives of a large company.

The company had moved into a new skyscraper and discovered that the builder apparently had not put in enough elevators. Employees were disgruntled because there were over long waits for the elevators, especially at both ends of the working day.

The company got a wide cross-section of the staff together and asked them to sit down and solve the problem. The task force came up with four possible solutions:

1. Speed up the elevators, or arrange for them to stop at certain floors during rush periods.
2. Stagger working hours to reduce elevator demand at either end of the day.

3. Install mirrors around entrances to all elevators.

4. Drive a new elevator shaft through the building.

Which solution would you have chosen? According to Professor deBono, if you chose the first, second, or fourth solutions, then you are a "vertical" or traditional thinker. If you chose the third possibility, then you are a "lateral thinker." The vertical thinker takes the narrow view; the lateral thinker has a broader view.

After some consideration, the company chose the third solution. It worked. "People became so preoccupied with looking at themselves (or surreptitiously at others)," said deBono, "that they no longer noticed the wait for the elevator. **The real problem was not so much the lack of elevators as the real problem was the impatience of the employees.**"

IT GREATLY CHANGES A SITUATION WHEN PEOPLE SHIFT THEIR ATTENTION OR FOCUS.

In the midst of difficulties and even if our faith is unstable our Lord Jesus comes to save us when we call.

IV. JESUS SAVES

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?"

I love how it was used here, "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him."

We shouldn't hesitate to call out to the Lord when we are in danger.

We have to remember, that Jesus is as near to us today as He was near as Peter.

And when we call unto the Lord, He will answer, specially if it's a call that's coming directly from the heart.

Peter's call to save him wasn't a casual call. It was a guttural call. It comes from the gut.

Whenever we call our Lord that way, He will answer.

Psalm 17:6 I call on you, my God, for you will answer me;

*Psalm 120:1 I call on the Lord in my distress,
and he answers me.*

*Isaiah 58: 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.*

Again, this is a very important for us. When we call, we need to have faith that God will answer. It's the Lord who said, "Ask, Seek and Knock" (Matthew 7:7)

Matthew 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

It's because Jesus is as near to us today as He is near Peter while he was sinking.

Illustration : When Hudson Taylor was sailing to China to begin his missionary work, his ship was in great danger. The wind had died, and the current was carrying them toward sunken reefs which were close to islands inhabited by cannibals—so close they could see them building fires on the shore. Everything they tried was to no avail. In his journal Taylor recorded what happened next: The Captain said to me, "Well, we have done everything that can be done." A thought occurred to me, and I replied, "No, there is one thing we have not done yet." "What is that?" he queried. "Four of us on board are Christians. Let us each retire to his own cabin, and in agreed prayer ask the Lord to give us immediately a breeze."

Taylor prayed briefly and then, certain that the answer was coming, went up on the deck and asked the first officer to let down the sails. "What would be the good of that?" he answered roughly. I told him we had been asking a wind from God; that it was coming immediately. Within minutes the wind did begin to blow, and it carried them safely past the reefs. Taylor wrote: Thus God encouraged me ere landing on China's shores to bring every variety of need to Him in prayer, and to expect that He would honour the name of the Lord Jesus and give the help each emergency required.

Now, you may ask, why did our Lord tell him,

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Note : Our Lord wasn't rebuking Peter for calling on Him. He was commenting on his faith.

Peter was looking at Jesus. He wanted to be with Jesus. He was already walking on water and then when he looked at the wind...(he became aware of the problem)... NOTHING WRONG WITH BECOMING AWARE OF THE WIND...IT WAS THERE ALL THE TIME ANYWAY... BUT WHAT HAPPENED... AGAIN HIS FOCUS SWITCHED FROM LOOKING AT JESUS AND WHAT HAPPENED.

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

Again, note, our Lord wasn't rebuking Peter because he called on Him... he rebuked Peter because he was afraid.

QUOTE : FAITH WILL MAKE US WALK ON WATER. FEAR WILL MAKE US SINK IN THE WATER.

And what would fear do to you... **it will make you doubt.**

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Etymology : doubt "distazo" only used twice in the New Testament, the word means...to think twice.

In short, Peter was already walking on water but because he saw the big winds, he thought again if he can walk on water when he was already doing it.

Application : You have a job today even if there's a recession. Instead of you praising God and enjoying the work but you focused that there's a recession, you begin to think, what will happen if I lose my job today? Then you begin to fear...to worry... that's the time you begin to sink.

Quote : Fear and worry doesn't solve problems tomorrow, it only takes away the blessings of today.

The real problem is not the wind... the problem is that WE LET FEAR OVERTAKE OUR EMOTIONS AND OUR THINKING.

Look at what happens when we keep on trusting and looking at the Lord and marvelling at all His blessings.

*Isaiah 40 : 31 but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.*

So instead of Peter, marvelling and enjoying the blessing and miracle of walking on water. He looked at the wind.

Like us... instead of us enjoying, that we woke up today and we are in good health. That we can eat...that we can taste food... we looked at the problems around us and what might happen to us.

Remember again the passage 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.

Peter would have walked with Jesus up to the shoreline while the other disciples were afraid and wondering what was happening.

32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

Mark 6: 51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed,

Not only that, looked at what happened in John's part of the story :

John 6: 21 Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

MIRACLE : Look at this, when they climbed into the boat. The wind stopped and definitely the waves and then it looks like they were teleported from the middle of the sea to the shore.

Isn't that a glimpse of the rapture? In the blink of an eye.

Significance:

It shows that our Lord was in total control of the situation.

- He allowed them to go through this difficulty.
- He showed them he was on top of all the things that are causing this difficulty.
- He showed them that you can also be on top of all this difficulty if you are with Him.
- He showed them that He can save them immediately from this difficulty.

JESUS IS IN CONTROL OF WHATEVER SITUATION WE ARE IN RIGHT NOW. WE NEED NOT FEAR. WE ONLY NEED TO ASK THAT WE WILL BE WITH HIM.

Quote : *Every problem is an opportunity to prove God's power. Every day we encounter countless golden opportunities, brilliantly disguised as insurmountable problems.*

C. Swindoll, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, p. 35

So from now on, when you encounter problems or difficulties, count it as an opportunity to see God's power.

For what purpose?

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

That word worship :

Etymology : proskuneo "worship" face on the floor...

CONCLUSION :

God will allow difficult situations in our life so that He can show us that He is on top of the situation and in control of the situation and that just as long as we are with Him, we can rise above the situation and then in the end **GIVE HIM ALL THE GLORY!**

And this should be all our longing...just like Moses :

Exodus 33:17 And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." 18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

That is the purpose of God in everything even on what's happening nowadays.

*Philippians 2: 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

REMEMBER, WHEN WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF DIFFICULTIES AND TRIALS OUR LORD IS IN TOTAL CONTROL OF THE SITUATION, THE ONLY THING THAT WE NEED TO ASK HIM IS THAT WE WILL BE WITH HIM IN THIS SITUATION, THAT WE WILL WALK WITH HIM.

That's why I love that song by Don Moen

I just want to be where you are
Dwelling daily in your presence
I don't want to worship from afar
Draw me near to where you are

I just want to be where you are
In your dwelling place forever
Take me to the place where you are
'Cause I just want to be with you

I want to be where you are
Dwelling in your presence
Feasting at your table
And surrounded by your glory
In your presence
That's where I always want to be
I just want to be
I just want to be with you

Oh my God, you are my strength and my song
And when I'm in your presence
Though I'm weak, you're always strong

Peter was a weak person, he can't walk on water but when he was looking at Jesus, he did.

S.G.D.