

MATTHEW 14:20-34 WALKING, THINKING AND SINKING; THE PRACTICALITY OF JESUS

Several years ago, as most of you know, one of my jobs was that of a high school football coach. The year was 2012 and we had checked into the hotel in which we were staying, prior to the biggest game of our lives. The next morning we would play for the state championship. The head coach and myself had been through this before and understood how we wanted things to go prior to the game. We needed the boys to focus. This was to be taken as a business trip. There would be plenty of time for goofing off after we won, if we won. We didn't need anyone getting hurt at the pool or doing something stupid that would have a negative effect on them of the game the following morning. Once again, we needed them to focus on the task at hand and not get distracted by any secondary issues. Focus! Focus! Focus!

And that is where we find ourselves today as we read about Jesus and His disciples just after the feeding of the five thousand.

Neither the crowds nor the disciples are aware of the culmination of Jesus' ministry here on earth. They have all ASSUMED that He will rid them of the Roman yoke and then everything will be as it was in the golden days of the Israelite empire. But that is not the case. The reality is that many in the crowds are turning on Jesus. And it's not just the religious leaders but the laity as well. They want their immediate "felt needs" fixed. To them, this Gospel of the kingdom is too abstract. On top of all this, John the Baptist has been beheaded. Not only was he a cohort of Jesus, they were cousins. The confluence of all these things caused Jesus to want to get away from everything for a while in order to hear clearly from His Father. Once again, that is an example for all of us. But as Jesus was walking to a secluded place, the crowds saw Him and brought their sick to Him. He had compassion on them and stayed all day with them. He even fed them in a miraculous way. But now all the good that has been done has brought about another problem. Let's look at what the Bible says.

Mt. 14:20-22

20 So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. 21 Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Jesus Walks on the Sea

22 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

Did you notice that “IMMEDIATELY” He sent the disciples away? Why was this?

- The parallel account in John

JN 6:14,15

Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

The people wanted to force Jesus to be king! They wanted the political solution to the problem, but Jesus could not become king at this time. He had to die for the sins of mankind. Jesus has to be focused on His mission even when the other weren't.

This is a hinge point in Jesus' ministry. From this point forward, His dying on the cross would be the focal point of all He said. And He will continually attempt to get this across the His disciples, though they don't really seem to fully understand it.

So, in order to keep the disciples from becoming entangled in the hysteria of the crowds attempting to get Him to “run for office,” Jesus hurries the disciples into the boat and sends them across to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

22 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. 24 But the boat was now in the middle of the

sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

- Jesus got alone with the Father to pray. This is the only time we are told that Jesus was alone in prayer, even though He has told His disciples to pray in this manner. Even in Gethsemane, He has three of His closest disciples with Him.
- Being alone with God is one of the most important things we can do. If Jesus needed this time in order to work through things and clear His head, who are we not to do this also? Remember we are to focus on the task at hand - the mission.
- The parallel account in John 6 states that the disciples were 3 or 4 miles out in to the Lake. (Sea of Galilee)
- The Apostles are having trouble making headway against the prevailing winds, but they aren't afraid of dying or sinking as they were in the other storm in which Jesus was on the boat with them. They were accustomed to storms like this.

25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

- Jesus was up there praying for a good while. The feeding of the multitudes was, at the latest concluded in the afternoon. And Jesus does not see the disciple again until the some time in the fourth watch of the night. Between 3:00 and 6:00 AM.
- The practicality of Jesus' miracles. Jesus doesn't just fly around on a magic carpet performing miracles. He performs them when they are needed and they are always done in a "practical way." They are not just done "willy nilly!" Here Jesus is just taking a shortcut to catch up with the disciples. What I mean is that Jesus wasn't just waiting on the mountain until they

- got a certain distance from shore until He shows up to rescue them.
- It is at this time that Peter's impulsivity takes over. We can't know what is in Peter's head. Some say he wanted to show off to the others, but he isn't rebuked for any bad motives. He is told to come on down!
 - Peter displays a characteristic mixture of attitudes. He will not attempt the walk without Jesus' direct instruction, but given that instruction he is not able to carry it through because he lacks the necessary faith. **His desire to emulate Jesus' miracle conflicts with the experienced fishermen's realistic assessment of the risk, when he saw the strong wind.**
 - And this is where we can all get into trouble. Very often, Jesus calls us to do something that seems impossible, even if it isn't walking on water. Doubt can creep into our thinking and therefore our lives very quickly.
 - **We can lose our focus on the task at hand!**
 - Remember, Jesus is dealing with all these things while He has to focus on His upcoming death. We are more like Peter. **We can lose focus on Jesus in a heartbeat. We quickly take our eyes off Him and begin to sink because we are focused on the circumstances – the storms of life rather than our savior!**
 - Sometimes it isn't even a storm but a blessing that can cause us to lose focus. In the end it comes down to priorities and from whom we see ourselves getting that which sustains us.

31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

- Doubt – this verb only appears one other place in the NT – Mt. 28:17. We should note here that it doesn't mean so much a theological uncertainty or unbelief as a practical hesitation/ wavering, being in two minds.
- **Peter's problem was not so much a lack of intellectual conviction but the conflict between the evidence of his senses and the invitation of Jesus.**

Nevertheless, Jesus promptly reached out to Peter and took him into the boat. At that point the storm ended and they found themselves at their destination.

- Jesus promptness is something on which we can always rely. Some might

argue that if He had truly been prompt, then the disciples would not have had to row for so long in the storm. However, Jesus is not here to rescue us from every trial. In fact, they weren't even scared of the storm. They were accustomed to it. It was only Peter's potential drowning that required any assistance. Jesus is not a genie we coax out of a bottle every time things get tough. To the contrary, He is a savior, a very practical savior on whom we are to affix our focus.

- **The truth is that a life lived while being focused on Christ has fewer self-imposed dangers and many more spiritual adventures, which require a focused faith.**
- Jesus was focused on Peter, as He is on us. Are we focused on Him and not the storm?

QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do we see the crowd's attempt to crown Jesus as king? (Focused on our immediate felt-needs.)
- 2) Would we have been a part of the crowd's thinking? Why or why not?
- 3) How do we see Peter's request to walk on the water? Was he being presumptuous or trying to show up the others in the boat?
- 4) What things shift our focus?
- 5) How big of an issue does it take to shift our focus?
- 6) What can help us to remain focused?
- 7) How can Jesus' practicality as it relates to His intervention on our behalf help us in our daily lives?