

## Stepping Out at His Command

**Matthew 14:22-33**, *Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 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. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."*

When reading this passage of scripture, I found that there are numerous things which stand out:

- Jesus made His disciples get into the boat without Him.
- The boat is stuck in the middle of the sea where the conditions are fraught with danger.
- Jesus comes to them just before daybreak.
- Jesus is walking on the same sea that threatens their existence.
- The men in the boat are fearful and express it in their cries.
- Jesus identifies Himself in order to dispel their fears.
- Peter asks Jesus to command that he comes Him on the water.
- Jesus has a specific response - one word, "Come."
- Peter obeys the Lord's command and walks on the water. But he gets distracted by the stormy sea and becomes afraid.
- Peter starts to sink and cries out; so Jesus rescues him.
- Jesus rebukes Peter for having little faith, and for his lack of conviction.
- They both enter the boat and the storm ceases.

Looking through these twelve points, there are a few spiritual truths revealed. Truths that we can learn from:

(1) **An assignment from God is never without violent opposition.**

Jesus gave His disciples specific instructions. He made them get into the boat and go before Him to the other side. Their assignment was 'to get to the other side'. Notice that Jesus had sent them out on to the lake in complete darkness without Him. No problem! They were experienced professional fishermen. Each one of them certainly began sailing as a child (in the family business). The lake had been their classroom, it was their workplace, it was their home away from home. When the winds and the waves came, I'm sure that the disciples, who had been raised on that lake, thought, "*We can handle this. We've been through many a storm before. This is no big deal. Come on guys, let's get those oars going, we can beat it. We can get to the other side!*"

So what happened? Why did these expert fishermen get so afraid? Didn't the Lord Jesus tell them to go to the other side? The disciples had heard the Master's voice many times before and had witnessed its authority. So what made this assignment different? What had changed? The Romans divided the night into watches of three hours each. There were four watches to each night. During the first watch of the night these men probably began rowing with great intensity and strength. But when they reached the middle of the lake the storm came and they were suddenly going nowhere! According to Matthew, the boat was being tossed by the waves and a strong wind was against them. So they began to get discouraged. In the second watch of the night, I'm sure that a couple of them were tempted to quit, but someone must have said, "*Come on lads, we can do this! We've all done it before. This is nothing new.*" As a result, they continued to struggle against the adverse conditions to fulfil their assignment.

In the third watch of the night they had again made no progress, and many of them were tempted to despair. Once more, a lone voice must have been heard spurring them on, saying, "*Come on, I know we can do this! We can do it, we've done it before. Don't give up now. Let's keep going.*" In the fourth watch utter distress and hopelessness had set in. They felt totally defeated. I can imagine the disciples saying to one another, "*We're doomed. We can't do it. We've lost. The sea is too great for us. We are going to die!*" Surely they didn't believe that Jesus had sent them out there to die? Yet I'm sure, during the fourth watch (just before daybreak), there are many of us that would readily give up!

When ever there is violent opposition, you might be tempted to think that God must be against you. In adverse circumstances, you might even think that you've done something wrong, and that you are being punished for it. Nevertheless, when you find yourself in pain, in distress, in suffering, are you really far from God? Jesus comes to His disciples in the fourth watch. He comes when it's darkest. He comes after they have struggled for nine or ten hours. He doesn't come to them at the beginning, He comes at the end of their struggle. After they had already experienced violent opposition.

(2) **When the Lord is late, He is always on time.** Why did Jesus wait until the fourth watch of the night? Why does He wait until just before daybreak? One answer is certain, God lets us struggle so that we might increase in faith. Another is this; God lets us struggle so that we might see the reality of who He is. Remember what the disciples said after all this took place... They fell down on their knees before Him and said, "*Truly You are the Son of God.*" We get to know the reality of who He is after we have struggled to believe. The realisation of divine truth does not come to us when life is comfortable. The revelation that becomes 'real' to our hearts does not arrive when everything is going right, when our bank accounts have a massive surplus and everybody is treating us the way we want to be treated. The revelation of divine truth comes when we are still struggling. But in the same struggles we get to believe.

When you've struggled through the first watch of the night into the second watch, and through the second watch of the night into the third watch, then through the third watch of the night into the "watch of despair" (the fourth watch), it's only then that you hear the Master's voice clearly. It's when you have suffered the agony of despair; and the agony of facing your own helplessness; and the agony of your unbelief; that you are granted the "revelation" of God which leads to victory. However, in the midst of your struggle, you may even be tempted to look around and complain to God about how others have it easy. A reputable minister once thought about the depth of God judgments, so he

enquired, "Lord, how is it that some die when they are young, while others drag onto extreme old age? Why are there those who are poor and those who are rich? Why do wicked men prosper while the just are in need? He heard a voice answering him saying, "Son, keep your attention on yourself; these things are according to the judgment of God, and it is not to your advantage to know anything about them." Always remember that the fourth watch is just before day-break. It may feel dark and cold, but the Son is about to arrive!

(3) **Jesus is Master of all circumstances.** Jesus shows His disciples that He is in complete control of the very circumstances threatening to consume them. He is Master of the wind and the waves! **Mark 4:39-40** confirms this, *And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, "Peace, be still." And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"* Jesus is the Master of all circumstances. Every name in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, is in total submission to His authority (**Philippians 2:10**). There is nothing that is named, in the physical realm or the spirit realm, over which Jesus Christ does not have supreme authority. In fact, Jesus holds the universe together by the "word" of His power (**Hebrews 1:3**). His "word" keeps every created thing (every atom) in perfect harmony! So don't you think that His "word" can also hold your life together?

(4) **Jesus responds to a request for the miraculous.** All the men in the boat had seen Jesus walking on the water, but only one person wanted to emulate Him. Only one man desired to do what the Lord was doing. Peter addressed the Lord and said, *"If it is You, command me to come to You on the water."* I like this man! He doesn't ask for something that's easy to perform, he asks for the miraculous. There is a vast difference between feeling the solid wood of the boat beneath your feet and stepping out onto a surface that you know cannot support your weight. Never mind, that this will only occur because someone has told you to do so! But what's vitally important is that you recognise the voice of the Person who is beckoning you to do so. Peter had asked Jesus to invite him to come to Him and the Lord simply said, *"Come."* Once Peter had heard his Master's voice, he had to take a step that goes contrary to all the laws of nature. He had to act on the Word he had just heard! Remember, miracles do not happen until you begin to take Him at His Word. Therefore, when you ask the Lord for instructions, be prepared to act on them immediately.

(5) **Adverse circumstances will always try to distract you.** If the Lord asks you to step out in faith, don't let the very circumstances that He has displayed mastery over distract you. Peter was distracted by the wind and the waves, and so his focus was taken off the Lord and placed on the elements that are already under His authority. How sad is that? Having done the difficult part, he allowed himself to get into fear and started to doubt the Lord's word. Without faith, he was unable to sustain the miracle he had asked for. So he immediately sank into the raging sea. This must have been quite traumatic! Doesn't it sound like a familiar scenario? How many of us step out in faith only to find ourselves sinking because things appear to be getting worse? If ever you take your eyes off Jesus and focus on your circumstances, be prepared to get wet!

(6) **Salvation is never far way.** When you need a miracle and you decide to step out at His command (like Peter did), don't worry about making a mistake. Your salvation is never far away. Peter may have got wet, and the Lord rebuked him, but he walked where no other mortal man had ever walked. Peter stepped out of the boat because his desire went past the physical; it became supernatural in his heart and mind. Walking on water is not natural. Remaining in the boat is natural and normal. No man in his right mind will step out of a boat in a stormy sea and expect to walk on water. In the midst of a serious life-threatening storm, would you

choose to remain in the boat or would you rather step out and experience the miraculous?

It was not normal for Peter to step out of the boat in the midst of a tempest, but these were not usual circumstances! There was someone out there! A Person approaching him in the storm, and He was actually walking on the raging sea. Not only that, but the sea seemed to have no effect on Him. It did not bother Him at all. It was as though He was taking a quiet stroll along the shore. And that's what made the difference. Not the storm, not the wind or the waves, but Who it is that was out there in the midst of their fears and anxieties. Listen to the first thing Jesus says, *"Be of good cheer; it is I; do not be not afraid!"* The Lord is literally saying, *"Cheer up, your salvation is near."* All the disciples saw the Lord and what He was doing. Yes, no ordinary man could do that; which is why they at first thought it was a ghost. All witnessed the Lord walking on the waves but only one man wanted to emulate Him! Only one man requested to do what the Lord was doing. Maybe the others also wanted to do so but they were waiting to see whether Peter was successful or not. Maybe they were waiting to see if it was safe! How many times have we found ourselves in the same position? Hearing God's voice but being too fearful and too timid to venture out to where He is beckoning us.

The truth of the matter is Jesus has not sent you on an assignment, which leads to death or distraction. In **John 10:10** He states clearly that He has come that we might have life, and have a life that's out of the ordinary. Isn't this what Peter experienced in the midst of a raging sea? Jesus is Master / Ruler of every negative circumstance. So if He appears to be late, don't despair, He is always on time! The fourth watch may be the most testing time, but soon the Son will rise. Then, in the midst of your struggles, ask the Lord for your miracle.

Jesus loves it when we ask for the impossible! It shows that we have a sincere dependence on Him, and Him alone. Following that, when you hear the Master's voice, don't delay step out in faith. Yes, at His command, do whatever it takes! And always remember that whatever the outcome Jesus is close enough to rescue you. Hallelujah! Who is ready to ask the Lord for a miracle today? Who is ready to step out and walk on the water with Him? Who is ready to move when He beckons us? Jesus is walking with you in your storm today!