

Matthew 14:22-33

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 October 2024

Preacher: Ray Kelly

[0 : 00] Well, hi folks. This recording is being done to catch up in that on the Sunday when we studied Matthew 14, where the account of Jesus walking on the water.

! And so you probably will recall that last time we looked at the passage in Matthew 14, verses 13 to 21, in which we saw Jesus feeding about 15,000 people by multiplying a boy's packed lunch. And as we explored this, we focused our attention on dealing with the impossible and the hopeless by simply bringing what we have to offer into the situation for God to multiply.

We're often completely impoverished when it comes to having enough to deal with situations, particularly ones that are totally impossible.

And yet the Lord can take our small offerings and do miraculous things with them. And probably the greatest thing we have to offer into such situations is prayer.

[1 : 23] Although we do have other things as well, our time, our friendship, our hospitality, our labour and so on. And God can bring miracles about because of these things.

Primarily, though, our most powerful weapon is prayer. And we noted that Jesus had been very generous with his miracle when he fed the 5,000 men or the 15,000 plus people.

At the end were 12 baskets full of food left over, possibly one for each disciple, I don't know. But it wasn't a meagre provision. They all ate, we read, until they were gorged.

They were stuffed. And then there were 12 basketfuls of food left over. And then quickly, Matthew moves on to another amazing miracle.

It was astonishing. And it begins with Jesus sending his disciples away in a boat while he dismissed the crowds and went up the mountain or the hill to pray.

[2 : 30] This event is recorded in three of the gospels here in Matthew, as we're going to read in a moment, and also in John chapter 6 and Mark chapter 6.

And there are subtle extra details provided in those gospels which we will call upon as we try to understand it all. But this gospel, Matthew's gospel, as we've previously discussed, was written by a Jew to Jewish believers.

It's very possible, and I'll turn there and read. It's very possible that this event put them in mind of Psalm 77, verses 16 to 19.

So if you have a look at that with me. Where we have what I believe is a prophetic psalm.

And in verses 16 to 19, it says this. The waters saw you, O God. The waters saw you.

[3 : 38] They were in anguish. The deeps also trembled. The clouds poured out water. The skies gave forth a sound. Your arrows flashed here and there.

The sound of your thunder was in the whirlwind. The lightnings lit up the world. The earth trembled and shook. Your way was in the sea and your paths in the mighty waters.

And your footprints may not be known. You led. Sorry. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

And this event of Jesus walking on the water might well have put them in mind of this psalm. In the notes, there is a very, very basic map of the Sea of Galilee.

And the area where they fed the 5,000 is marked in green. And after and during the events we're about to read, they were scheduled to get into a boat and go to Bethsaida, which is a little way up the coast and not a very long journey at all.

[4 : 49] And under all normal circumstances, they would have stayed in sight of land, although this did happen at night. So they may not have been able to see the land. But where they actually landed was across the lake in Gennesaret, which would have involved going into the middle of the lake.

So what we read in Matthew 14, verses 22 to 33, if we turn there in our Bibles, what we read is this.

Immediately he made the disciples get into a boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the crowds away. After he had sent the crowds away, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.

And when it was evening, he was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

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.

[6 : 01] And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid. Peter said to him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

And he said, Come. And Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened. And beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me.

Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and took hold of him and said to him, You of little faith, why did you doubt? When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.

And those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, You are certainly God's son. So what we've just read is that immediately after this feast, this miraculous feast, Jesus commanded the disciples to get into a boat.

And the Greek there means compelled. It wasn't a suggestion. He told them, Get in the boat and go to Bethsaida.

[7 : 09] This was a journey of probably three or four miles. Should have taken, depending on the direction of the wind when they started, less than an hour.

Or if the wind was a little bit against them, maybe up to two hours max. And he sent them on their way. And because he is omniscient, knowing everything, he must have known that he was sending them into a storm.

In fact, that might have been the urgency. You know, get in the boat and get going or you'll miss the storm. We don't know that for sure. I suppose that that is the case.

But he dismisses them and he sends them into the boat and he sends them on their way. And then he goes back to dismiss the crowds.

And so John's gospel gives us a little bit of insight into why he did this. If we turn to John chapter 6. In John chapter 6, starting at verse 15.

[8 : 21] It says this. This group of people who struggled to make ends meet, who were, they were poor.

I mean, they brought no food with them. And the only packed lunch that they had to divide between them were barley loaves, which was the cheapest bread. It was the bread that poor people ate.

There's every reason to assume that these people eked out an existence in this agrarian society. And they'd just been fed miraculously to complete satiation from a lad's packed lunch. And it's occurred to them, no doubt, that with him as king, they would never again be in want.

Now, of course, they were watching out for a coming messiah. And in their heads, not only would he be a source of provision for them, but he would be a source of military conquest.

He would deliver them from the harshness of the Roman Empire. And he would put them back in charge for a long, long time. They had been ruled over by Gentiles.

[9 : 39] And this was their opportunity to take their own rulership back again. And they realized from what had happened with the feeding of the 15,000 that with this man in charge, there would never again be any want.

They were craving material gain. And they realized that Jesus could provide it. Hence, they had this desire to force him to be their king. Which is a bit of an anomaly because in the best possible sense of the word, he was king.

But they needed to accept him as their king for the right reasons. And they needed to accept him as their king because he was the Jewish messiah.

Whereas nationally and certainly the religious leaders rejected him as the messiah. So you can see the conflict and you can see why Jesus did not want to be put in a position where anybody was trying to force him to be king.

He wanted them to accept him for the right reasons as the Jewish messiah. And if we read on later in the chapter of John chapter 6, it kind of confirms this.

[11:03] When Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, this is verse 26. Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

Do not work for the food which perishes, but for food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him, the Father God has set his seal.

So he was indicating that they wanted to make him king for all the wrong reasons. And that they worshipped him, not because of the proper reason for worship, but simply because he'd filled their bellies.

So he arrives at this point where he's wanting to send the crowds away and wanting to avoid being forced to be king or going through that drama.

And at the same time, he sent his disciples knowingly into a situation where they were going to need him and where they were going to get further revelation as to who he was.

[12:18] In the slides, the slide deck, which will be on the WhatsApp group as usual, there is a slide with a picture of a typical fishing boat.

And that typical fishing boat is not one you'd want to be caught in a storm in. So they had a number of disciples rowing this boat on what started out to be, I'm sure, a perfectly calm sea.

And they were all or many of them were seasoned fishermen. And so this would have held no fears for them. But of course, when the storms come and I know many people think, well, the Lake Galilee is just a lake.

So even when it gets really windy, you wouldn't necessarily get waves that would swamp a boat. But firstly, this is a small boat. It's low in the water.

And as you will see in a moment, if you click on the video link at the bottom of the next slide, the size of the waves on the Lake Galilee can reach quite a ridiculous level for a lake.

[13:35] More about that in a moment, though. So they set off. And let's just do a little bit of consideration of time. They ate their miracle meal in the evening when they were immediately sent into a boat to cross to Bethsaida.

So we can presume it was, let's say, 7 or 8 p.m., maybe 9 at the very latest. So they should have arrived at Bethsaida about 10 o'clock.

But we read that they were buffeted by winds and they were in the middle of the sea. So they'd obviously lost their way. They'd gone off in completely the wrong direction, probably blown there by the wind.

And that by the fourth watch of the night, they were still rowing. Now, the night was split into four watches.

And the last watch, the fourth watch, was from 3 till 6 a.m. So they should have arrived at their destination probably by half 8 or 9, certainly no later than 10.

[14:40] And they're still rowing and being buffeted by the wind at somewhere between 3 and 6 a.m. And I've personally been in a boat on a couple of occasions where the wind was so strong, the boat was unable to make forward progress against the wind.

And certainly with that little boat, you could easily have been in this situation. And in this case, they had also clearly been blown off course.

Their original course would have been quite coastal. But they were said to be in the midst of the sea. And in the end, they landed at Gennesaret, which is more across the lake from where they started than it is along the lake.

They must also have been exhausted, having been rowing against a very strong wind for something between five and seven hours. Now, if you click on the video link and if you I mean, you by all means watch all of it if you wish to.

But the key part, if you start it at the 10th minute and follow it through, the maker of the video has actually put a scale on the screen.

[15:51] So you let it play for a little one and on the screen it will freeze and it will show a scale that will give you an idea of the height of the waves. And.

It kind of makes you understand why they might have feared for their lives, because these waves can be anything up to 10 feet high. And in a little boat.

Like the one you see in the previous picture, you would easily be swamped. And you could understand why. Imagine yourself in a storm at night. Big waves.

Boat sinking. You would you. Anybody would fear for their lives. Now, the next slide on the notes gives us an insight into the why these storms happen on the Sea of Galilee or Lake Galilee.

The Sea of Galilee is. It's in the Jordan Rift Valley. And so the River Jordan runs down from the mountains into it from base of Mount Hermon, runs into the Sea of Galilee at 700 feet below sea level.

[17 : 07] The lake itself is about eight miles wide and about 13 miles long. And the air that's trapped in this hole below sea level.

And of course, the Jordan then flows out of the Sea of Galilee, carries on down the valley, the Jordan Valley and finishes up in the Dead Sea, which is 1300 feet below sea level.

But you get this hot bowl of air trapped and you get the cool air from the Mediterranean coming up over the mountains.

And it gets sucked down into this hole. And so you you get incredible vortices of air, sort of swirling winds.

There is a there is a picture on the slide deck of a storm over Lake Galilee. And it makes you realise that along with the darkness and the storm swirling, they wouldn't have known where they were.

[18 : 15] They wouldn't have known whether they were going left, right, forward or backward. They would have just kept rowing in hope that they would eventually hit the land. But it's a frightening thing.

And then what we have is they're in fear for their lives and they're rowing and rowing and rowing and they must be exhausted.

And then they're labouring away and Jesus starts to walk past them. And we must remember that he's walking on stormy waters. You often see pictures, artists' impressions of this, where Jesus is walking on a nice calm surface.

But this is stormy waters, waves up to 10 feet, possibly even more. I don't know. And he seems to be unaffected by the storm when he's about to pass them by.

And they suddenly all became even more convinced that they were about to die because they thought he was a ghost. And let me explain. It was commonly believed that just before you died, you would see the spirits of others.

[19 : 23] And so when they saw a ghost, it confirmed in their minds that they were at the end of their lives and they were about to die. And so Jesus said, you know, don't be afraid, it's me, to bring them out of their fear.

But in the noise of the storm and also with poor visibility, Peter obviously wanted to check that it really was the Lord. And I find this an interesting concoction of thoughts.

If it is you, Lord, call me to come to you across the water. And then when the Lord says, well, come. Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking. Obviously convinced from hearing the Lord's voice that it was him, but probably still not able to see him clearly.

But he starts walking towards the Lord. And one might ask, well, why would he do that? Well, you have to remember that a little earlier in Matthew's gospel, they were sent out.

[20 : 36] The twelve were sent out to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cast out demons and to preach the gospel of the kingdom. So they had been empowered before to do supernatural things by the Lord.

When he sent them out to do these things, they came back absolutely mind blown, said even the demons were subject to us. So they knew that the Lord had previously enabled them to do remarkable things.

And it's something for us to keep in mind that Jesus can empower people and can empower us to do whatever he can do if he wishes to.

But it's important that we don't presume that he will do those things, that we wait for him to call. And we note that Peter, he said, if it's you, Lord, call me to come to you.

But he didn't leave the boat until the Lord said, well, come. And then, of course, he was fearful. He began to walk towards Jesus and then looked at the waves in the wind and took fright and began to sink.

[21 : 55] Now, a couple of points worth remembering here. One is that when we are with Jesus, there is nothing to fear. And these disciples were fearful at the time.

But we must remember that all of them, with the exception of John, died martyrs deaths, which they volunteered for in the sense that if they had recanted their beliefs publicly, they wouldn't have been put to death.

So they died martyrs deaths voluntarily because they knew they were safe with Jesus. And this, to me, gives an eternal perspective on the whole concept of safety with Jesus.

It's not necessarily true that you'll get through this life without persecution and even having to die a martyr's death. But eternally, we will remain secure.

And the second point we can look at at this point is that Jesus can empower us to do what is impossible without him. We need to wait to be called to do it and not presume.

[23 : 03] And there is a trend in the word of faith movement at the moment in our land that says you can simply declare a thing to be so or declare a thing to be possible without reference to God because you are already empowered.

Peter waited for Jesus to call him before attempting it. And even then, when he took his eyes off the Lord, it started to go wrong. So he walks towards Jesus, looks at the winds and waves, takes fright, begins to sink.

When we are out there doing things for the Lord, even things that we know he has called us to do, there are times when it gets scary.

And when it does, we need to do three things. First of all, await the call. Don't move ahead of the call. Wait for him to call you forward.

The second thing is to keep our eyes on Jesus when it gets scarier. Things do get scary.

[24 : 09] I've personally been in situations of I won't bore you with the details purely because I don't want to glorify me. But there have been times when I've preached on the streets or when I've had to act in certain circumstances on the Lord's behalf.

And I found it very scary. But keeping my eyes on him has seen me through every time. And when we reach the point where in our human frailty we cannot cope, call out to him.

Peter called out, Lord, save me. And those who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. So we read that the Lord stretched out his hand and lifted Peter.

Historic references to Peter suggest that he wasn't a small man. The scripture itself doesn't refer to his stature, but he's often referred to in history as the big fisherman.

And Jesus reaches out a hand, lifts him up and they walk back to the boat together. Incidentally, this is the only gospel that records Peter's adventure.

[25 : 21] The other gospels leave it out. Why, I'm not sure. The other accounts simply refer to Jesus entering the boat. In John 6, verse 21, we read, They were willing to let Jesus enter the boat.

Now, it's interesting that Jesus asked. He didn't presume that he was welcome. He didn't take, obviously, as King of kings and Lord of lords, he could have taken authority.

But he didn't. He waited to be asked. I'll make a small aside here. After the Sunday that I preached this, Malcolm mentioned something to me that I thought was at least interesting, which is we can think of the boat as the church.

That when the boat is, when Jesus is in the boat, we're safe. And when Jesus is in the boat, calmness comes back.

When Jesus is not in the boat, we're in trouble. We're in a storm. As a bit of typology. And I thought that was a worthwhile aside to include in this recording.

[26 : 35] But Jesus asks, you know, we read of the church of Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3, that Jesus is knocking at the door of the church, asking to be let in.

And it's the church that keep him out. The church don't invite him in. Now, it behoves us to, at every opportunity, invite Jesus into everything that we do.

So we are doing the things he's called us to do, and we invite him in to do them with us. It's the only safe way. He will permit us to struggle on, fighting and losing battle, if we do not welcome him in.

They had had a previous experience recorded in Mark's Gospel, chapter 4, verses 38 to 40, where they'd set off on a journey in a boat with the Lord, and he was sleeping when the storm blew up, and the boat began to fill up.

And his response to all of them was similar to his response to Peter on this day. Oh, you of little faith, why did you fear? On the first occasion, Jesus' command of the weather didn't elicit worship from the disciples, but fear and wonderment.

[27 : 58] This time, however, they worshipped him as God's son. Surely you are the son of God. Their experience was that as soon as Jesus got into the boat, the wind stopped.

They were also, from my reading of the scripture, they were translated to their destination, because the wind stopped, and they were immediately at their destination.

So this speaks of another miracle, where God took them and the boat, and they were immediately at port, having moments earlier been in the midst of a storm.

Now, speaking personally, I know that the day I got saved was a day when all the storms and turmoil and troubles of life ceased, and peace came to me.

I'd not known peace for many, many, many years. And when the Lord entered my life, and when the Lord entered our home and our marriage, we didn't get a period of trouble-free time.

[29 : 10] What happened was that the troubles didn't destroy our peace anymore. And that's not to say that I haven't at times returned to turmoil.

I've never had since that time the sense of hopelessness that I had previously. But when he metaphorically came into my boat, I had peace through trouble.

John 6, verse 22 confirms that the crowd had perceived that Jesus did not get into the boat, but did arrive at the destination.

And so he must have arrived by mysterious means. And so we have to ask ourselves, what was the overarching purpose for the disciples and for us with this miracle?

Why would he send them into a storm, let them struggle, come to the end of themselves, come to them by miraculous means, calm the storm, empower Peter to walk on water, translating them to their destination, and so on.

[30 : 20] A string of mini miracles within the whole miracle. What was Jesus doing here? And I believe that for them and for us, it was to etch upon their understanding the fact that Jesus was divine and supernaturally empowered to do all things.

They were going to go through a time after his death and resurrection when they would face massive persecution and martyrdom.

And yet they would see things through knowing that eternally they were in the right place and that God would be with them. Jesus himself faced death having all power and authority.

He faced death when he could have walked away from it because it was necessary and because of his love for people. And the disciples did the same thing.

They faced all sorts of persecution and death because they'd been commissioned to do something by the Lord and because they loved the people to whom they were ministering.

[31 : 35] And we could also be called upon to face the same despite acting under his instruction. He might send us into storms.

And when he does, we need to keep our focus on Jesus to see us through the storms. And if we do die acting in obedience to him, we will then be numbered among the saints under the altar in Revelation 6 verses 9 to 11, which I will read.

And it's one I frequently refer to because our destination as saints of God is either to be raptured or martyred.

And so verses 9 to 11 of Revelation chapter 5. And they sang a new song. So this is the saints in heaven and along with the angels.

And it says, And they sang a new song saying, Worthy are you to take the book and to break its seals, for you were slain and purchased for God with your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

[32 : 54] You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to our God and they will reign upon the earth. And then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders.

And the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

Every created thing which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all things in them, I heard saying to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb, Be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.

And the four living creatures kept saying, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped. These elders under the altar also, when the sixth seal was opened, the fifth seal, not the sixth seal, I'm sorry.

When the lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained.

[34 : 13] And they cried out with a loud voice saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth? And there was given to each of them a white robe, the white robe being the garments of salvation.

And they were told that they should rest for a little while longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed, even as they had been, would be completed also. So there is this glorious outcome. We either win through on this earth with Jesus or we win through in heaven with Jesus.

Either way, we win through. But we need to keep our eyes on him. So I suspect I haven't done as good a job of that as I would have done if I'd have been faced with an audience.

Preaching to a computer and a microphone is a bit soulless. But hopefully it will at least make sure there are no gaps in the internet record. So God bless you all. And I hope the talk has blessed you as much as it has blessed me.

[35 : 25] God bless you all by now.