

Courage
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Matthew 14:22-33

Opening Poll: Quick show of hands...How many of you love being out on the water in a boat? How many of you enjoy going on a BIG cruise ship? Now... how many of you enjoy being in a little boat on BIG water?

Like it or not, life is like a little boat on big water, and we are ALL in the same boat.

When the water is calm, different people respond in different ways.

- Some are humming, “*Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream, Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.*” Life feels predictable.
- Others believe they are the CAPTAIN of their own ship. They have plans, forecasts, and charts. As long as the sea stays calm, they feel confident.
- And then there are those who never liked boats to begin with. They sit quietly clutching a life preserver, just hoping to reach land again.

When the water is calm life seems manageable. When the sea is smooth, I can pretend I am in control. But when a storm comes it is a different story. I realize I can't control the storm so I must decide where I will place my trust. That question is the essence of today's familiar text in Matthew 14.

The point: For followers of Christ, the safest place in any storm is not the security of the boat, but the will of God — trusting the One who commands the wind and the waves and obeying Him (stepping out of the boat) even when it doesn't seem to make sense.

A little context before the text: The disciples had just witnessed Jesus miraculously feed 5,000+ people with five loaves of bread and two fish! Another miracle was on the way.

(NLT) — 22 Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. **23** After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. **24** Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. **25** About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. **26** When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, “It's a ghost!” **27** But Jesus spoke to them at once. “Don't be afraid,” he said. “Take courage. I am here!”

- Jesus made (“insisted”) the disciples go ahead in the boat without Him.
- They may have been nervous recalling how earlier He had calmed a storm (Matt. 8:23-27) while with them in their little boat (He was literally their “life preserver”).
- Sometimes storms in life are because of our disobedience (i.e. Jonah).
- In this case Jesus SENT them into a storm and they obeyed.

- Warren Wiersbe: *“As we read our Bibles, we discover that there are two kinds of storms: storms of correction, when God disciplines us; and storms of perfection, when God helps us to grow.”* Many Christians have the mistaken idea that obedience to God’s will produces “smooth sailing.” But this is not true...When we find ourselves in the storm because we have obeyed the Lord, we must remember that He brought us here and He can care for us.”ⁱⁱ
- Again, the safest place to be in a storm is in the will of God.
- After Jesus said, “bon voyage” He went “up into the hills to pray.”
- The text doesn’t tell us what He spoke to His Father about, but I don’t think it is a stretch to imagine He was praying for those disciples headed into the storm.
- What I know for sure is that Romans 8:34 promises us Jesus “...is at the right hand of God, [and] indeed is interceding for us...”ⁱⁱⁱ and 8:39 promises that NOTHING “...will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus...”^{iv}
- When Jesus sends us into a storm to grow our faith, He is PRAYING FOR US.
- Mark’s account tells us: *“⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And...he came to them, walking on the sea.”*^v
- When Jesus sends us into a storm, He SEES our situation and will COME to us.
- That’s a fundamental promise: **Isaiah 43:2 (NLT) — 2** When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. **Hebrews 13:5 (NLT)** “I will never abandon you.”
- He came to the disciples’ rescue, but we see some nuances in how He did it.
- Verses 24 & 25: *“...the disciples were in trouble far away from land...[then] about three o’clock in the morning Jesus came toward them.”*
- Question: Why would Jesus let them struggle with the storm for several hours?
- Wiersbe again: *“He waited until the ship was as far from land as possible, so that all human hope was gone. He was testing the disciples’ faith, and this meant removing every human prop.”*^{vi} Jesus will come but His timing is not our timing.
- Question: Why did Jesus walk on the water instead of just appearing in the boat?
- Mark’s account also tells us, *“He meant to pass by them...”* Perhaps a little test?
- They were frightened and thought Jesus was a “ghost” walking on the water.
- We might wonder why they didn’t recognize Jesus. Let’s be fair to the disciples:
 - It was pitch black, dark and stormy.
 - They were exhausted and stressed.
 - They never expected Jesus to come walking on the water.
- The lesson for us because we know this story: When we are in a storm, we should be LOOKING for Jesus to come to our rescue!
- Verse 27: Jesus gave them two commands and one reassurance we can all use: “Don’t be afraid!” and “Take courage” (be courageous). What is my assurance of that? Because Jesus says, *“I am here!”* (the GREAT I AM is here.)
- Now the story takes an interesting turn.
- John Wayne supposedly said, *“Courage is being scared to death... but saddling up anyway.”* If there was a “John Wayne type” among the disciples, it was Peter.

28 Then Peter called to him, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water.” **29** “Yes, come,” Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. **30** But when he saw the strong wind and the waves,

he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted. **31** Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

- Peter is one of those people that has you giving him a "high five" one moment then shaking your head in the next moment. He was admirable yet amusing.
- Verse 28: *"If it is really you, COMMAND me to come to you."*
- Question: Why did Peter ask Jesus to command him to come?
- Peter was impulsive but he understood dependence on Jesus' AUTHORITY.
- One writer said, *"Peter didn't step out because it made sense. He stepped out because Jesus said, 'Come.'"*
- Lesson in obedience to God: *"Lord, if this is Your will, confirm it through Your Word and Your wisdom — because if this is my idea and not Yours, I'm sunk."*
- Peter went from the "good example" to the "poor example" very quickly.
- Anyone who has studied this passage knows the application from verse 30. Why did Peter begin to sink? What did Peter have the good sense to shout?
- In a storm we may take our eyes off Jesus. When we do, we must cry for help!
- Verse 31 is a sermon in 19 words: **(NLT) — 31** Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"
- Jesus gave him grace (grabbed him) and taught him faith in a simple sentence.
- The lesson is not about the strength of Peter's faith, but the object of his faith.
- In **Matthew 17:20 (NLT)** Jesus told them. "...if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible."
- It has been said, *"It's not the strength of your faith that keeps you afloat—it's the strength of the Savior you trust."*

32 When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped.

In Jesus' perfect timing He always calms the storm.

33 Then the disciples worshiped him. [they exclaimed] "You really are the Son of God!"
Worship (and confidence) naturally come when we see Jesus for Who He really is!

- Any other thoughts or personal stories about trusting God in a storm?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Like it or not, life is a little boat on big water, and we are ALL in the same boat.
- The name of your little boat might be different than mine.
- Maybe your boat is the S.S. Self-Reliance, the S.S. Comfort Zone, or the S.S. Control Freak. Maybe your boat is the S.S. Doubt or the S.S. Anxiety.
- Maybe the best name for the "little boat" of many Christ-followers would be the "S.S. Almost." Almost obedient. Almost surrendered. Almost trusting. Almost in the will of God.
- It's like we say, *"I'll trust You, Lord...as long as the wind isn't too strong. As long as I can see the bottom. As long as I have a backup plan."*

- When the water is calm life seems manageable. When the sea is smooth, I can pretend I am in control. But when a storm comes it is a different story. I realize I can't control the storm so I must decide where I will place my trust.
- For followers of Christ, the safest place in any storm is not the security of the boat, but the will of God — trusting the One who commands the wind and the waves and obeying Him even when it doesn't seem to make sense.
- Sometimes storms in life come from disobedience (to correct us) but often God sends a big storm to test our trust in Him (to perfect our faith).
- When we are in a storm we can count on these promises:
 - Jesus (our High Priest) is praying to His Father for us.
 - Jesus (our Savior and Lord) sees us in the storm and will come to us.
 - Jesus (in His Sovereignty) will allow our faith to be tested but the timing of His deliverance will always be the BEST timing.
 - Jesus wasn't recognized by the disciples that night, but when we are in a storm we should be LOOKING for Him to come to our rescue!
 - Jesus (the Great I AM) gave us two commands for storms: "Don't be afraid!" and "Be courageous". We can because He is with us in the storm.
 - Jesus (our Teacher) will invite and enable us to "step out" in faith as long as: It is HIS idea (his will) not ours and we keep our eyes of trust on Him.
 - When our faith falters, Jesus (our Rescuer) will hear our cry for help, reach down and hold us safe in the "hollow of His hand."
 - Jesus (our Deliverer) will join us in our boat and calm the storm.
 - Whether in the storm or after the storm, we can confidently worship Him as the Son of God!

ⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 51). Victor Books.

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 51). Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Ro 8:34). (2025). Crossway Bibles.

^{iv} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Ro 8:39). (2025). Crossway Bibles.

^v *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Mk 6:48). (2025). Crossway Bibles.

^{vi} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 52). Victor Books.