

Main Idea: Jesus is in a class all by Himself. Perhaps we learn that best in the storms of life, a truth illustrated vividly in Matthew 14:22-33. There are at least three lessons we can learn about Jesus from this story.

- I. Lesson #1: The Lord may send us *into* a storm (22-27).
 - A. Scene #1: Jesus sent the disciples away (22).
 - B. Scene #2: Jesus sent the crowd away (23a).
 - C. Scene #3: Jesus went up to a mountain (23b).
 1. The Lord was praying.
 2. The disciples were struggling.
 - D. Scene #4: Jesus came to the disciples (25-27).
 1. The storm produces fear.
 2. The remedy for fear is knowing that Jesus is with you.
 - II. Lesson #2: The Lord may teach us *through* a storm (28-31).
 - A. Peter learned something about himself.
 - B. Peter learned something about Jesus.
 1. The Lord uses storms to teach us how needy we are.
 2. The Lord uses storms to teach us how sufficient He is.
 - III. Lesson #3: The Lord can rescue us *from* a storm (32-33).
 - A. He's powerful (32).
 - B. He's worthy of worship (33).
- Implications: Here's the bottom line...
1. Jesus is in a class all by Himself.
 2. If there were no storms, we'd never learn how great He is.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 14:13-36

Do you like storms? There's something quite awe-inspiring about a thunderstorm. You see the brilliant flashes of lightning in the distant sky, and then you hear the deep rumble of the thunder. And you know it's coming.

The wind picks up, and the branches of the trees bend to unnatural positions. Then more flashes of lightning, this time brighter. And more claps of thunder, this time louder.

And then sheets of rain blanket the earth and blur your vision of the horizon. Followed by more lightning flashes and more thunder claps and more gusts of wind.

There's incredible power in a thunderstorm, isn't there? But the real power belongs to the One who creates and controls the thunderstorm. There's nothing like a thunderstorm to remind you of the great power of the Living God.

This morning, we're going to see a storm. We're going to see Jesus in a storm, the one described in Matthew 14. We're involved in a brief, two week series the purpose of which is to get to know Jesus better. I've entitled the series, "*In a Class By Himself.*"

We're investigating two stories that illustrate the unique power of Jesus. The first, which we saw last time, was the feeding of the 5,000. We learned that little becomes much when it's placed in the hands of the Master.

Jesus truly is in a class all by Himself. If He is your Savior, you know that. The day His Spirit opened your eyes to your need and His sufficiency, you learned that Jesus is unique.

But it will take eternity for us to begin to fathom just how great He truly is. Eternal life, according to John 17:3, is knowing God and knowing the One He sent, Jesus Christ.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC on 5/2/99.

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

And perhaps, in this life, we get to know Him best, in all His unrivaled power, in the storms of life. That truth is illustrated vividly for us in Matthew 14:22-33. It's the account of one of the two times when Jesus walked on the water.²

It's a wonderful story, indeed, a story full of practical implications. It helps us know Jesus better. As we'll see, there are at least three lessons we can learn about Jesus from this story.

I. Lesson #1: The Lord may send us *into* a storm (22-27).

He did with the disciples. Our story begins in verse 22 with the word, "Immediately." Which raises the question, "immediately" after what? The context goes back to chapter 10. There Jesus called and commissioned the Twelve Apostles, and sent them on a ministry tour throughout Galilee (10:1-4; 11:1).

As a result of the tour, two things happened. One, Jesus' popularity increased. The common people flocked to Him. But secondly, the opposition to Jesus also increased. The religious leaders hated and sought to discredit Him (12:24). What's more, King Herod killed John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner, and the news was passed on to Jesus (14:12).

At that point, Jesus took the Twelve and headed by boat for a solitary place northeast of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 9:10). But it turned out to be anything but solitary! A crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children interrupted the planned get-away (14:14).

When Jesus saw the multitude, He had compassion on them, healed their sick, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11). Then He fed them, multiplying five loaves and two fish into a gourmet banquet, a vivid foretaste of what He will do in His messianic kingdom. The disciples picked up the leftovers--twelve basketfuls--one for each of them.

The next word is "immediately" ("straightway" in the KJV of verse 22). Right after that event, Jesus did something in a very urgent manner. It's the first of four scenes in verses 22-27.

A. Scene #1: Jesus sent the disciples away (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." The NIV says Jesus "made" the disciples leave. The verb is strong. It means to compel, to necessitate. You get the idea that Jesus wanted to get rid of the Twelve, at least move them out of this scene. Indeed, He did.

Why? Matthew doesn't elaborate on a detail that John includes in his account. Look at John 6:14-15. John tells us the effect the miracle of the loaves and fish had on the crowd. "After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing they intended to come and *make him king by force*, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."

The crowd was trying to force Jesus' hand. They wanted a king, *their* kind of king. A king that would eliminate the Romans, fill their bellies, and bring them economic prosperity.

Friends, Jesus is a king, indeed, *the* King. But He's not a Genie in a bottle. He didn't come to gratify the self-focused desires of sinners. He came to rescue sinners from their self-focused desires.

²The first account is given in Matthew 8:23-27.

The crowd didn't understand that. What was worse, apparently Jesus' disciples didn't understand it either. It seems they, too, got sucked into the frenzy of the crowd. So Jesus compelled them to leave.

What's ironic is that He told them to go by boat to the "other side." John 6:17 identifies the destination as "Capernaum." That's where they had just come from earlier that morning! The get-away plan didn't work. Or did it? We'll see.

B. Scene #2: Jesus sent the crowd away (23a). Verse 23 begins, "After he had dismissed them." Here's a major turning point in Jesus' relationship with the Galilean crowds.³ From this point on Jesus will spend more and more of His time with fewer and fewer people. Again, His mission was not to attract crowds, but make disciples. Rather than succumbing to the fickle crowd's attempt to make Him king, Jesus sent the crowd away.

C. Scene #3: Jesus went up to a mountain (23b). Verse 23 again, "After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came he was there alone."

To which mountain did Jesus go? We're not told. Matthew does tell us two things that happened while Jesus was on the mountain.

1. *The Lord was praying.* Why did Jesus go to the mountain? The text says He went to pray. How often we see Jesus doing this in the gospels! *Praying.* He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21). He prayed to start His day (Mark 1:35). Before He called the Twelve, He spent the entire night in prayer (Luke 6:12). He took Peter, John, and James with Him to pray on the mountain (Luke 9:28). It was regular practice of prayer that prompted His disciples to ask Him to teach them to pray in Luke 11:1. John 17 records His high priestly prayer.

The record is clear. Jesus prayed a lot. In fact, Luke says in Luke 5:16, "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Does that statement convict you? It does me. If getting alone with God was important to the perfect Son of God, can we afford less? We tend to equate godliness with busy-ness. That's one extreme. The other is to say, "I can't serve God until I take time *for me* first." Jesus was busy serving--He'd been serving all day. But He made sure He took time for praying--in this case His personal time was the middle of the night, indeed a large portion of that particular night.

So too, we must carve out time to be alone with our Father. And pray.

How long did the Lord pray this time? Verse 23 indicates Jesus went to the mountain in the "evening" (some time after 6:00 p.m.). Then verse 25 states He joined His disciples during the "fourth watch" of the night--that's between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. Which means Jesus was on the mountain separated from the Twelve between nine and twelve hours.

What was He praying about while on the mountain? We're not told. Perhaps He talked to His Father about the crowd's recent attempt to make Him king, reflecting on the Hebrew Scriptures, letting them shape His conversation with His Father. It's my opinion, in light of what happened next, that one subject about which Jesus prayed was His disciples. I say that because Matthew informs us of a second event that occurred while Jesus was on the mountain. Not only was He was praying, but...

³ R. T. France, 238

2. *The disciples were struggling.* Verse 23 concludes, "When evening came, he was there alone, *but* the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it."

The Sea of Galilee is notorious for sudden storms. The disciples, though experienced fishermen, ran into one. The storm battered the boat. And while the Lord was on the mountain praying, the disciples were struggling.

Please realize that the storm came (as Wiersbe observes, 51) because the disciples were *in* the will of God and not (like Jonah) out of the will of God. Did Jesus know the storm was coming? Of course. He intentionally sent His men into the storm. Warren Wiersbe offers this insight about the disciples, "They were safer in the storm in God's will than on land with the crowds out of God's will."

That's true for us, too.

I think there's a beautiful picture here of the continuing relationship between Jesus and His people. We face storms, don't we? In so many ways, life on a earth is a storm. But where is Jesus? Romans 8:34 says He is in heaven making intercession for us. He saw the disciples then, and He sees us now.

Beloved, if you knew that Jesus was in the next room praying for you, would that encourage you to be faithful to Him in the storm? The truth is, it's better than that. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, His Spirit lives in you. And Jesus Himself is in heaven as your advocate before the throne of God. He sees you. He knows your need. And He's in sovereign control of your situation.⁴

D. Scene #4: Jesus came to the disciples (25-27). Notice verse 25, "During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake." I love how Matthew is so non-chalant about this: "Jesus went to them. Oh, by the way, He was walking on the lake."

I know this is a familiar story to most of us, but answer this question. Why did Jesus do it? Why did He walk on the water? Remember, the writer of this gospel, Matthew, was there. He saw it firsthand. But, again, why? In Mark's account, we discover an insight not mentioned in Matthew's: "When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. *He saw the disciples straining at the oars...*About the fourth watch of the night He went to them...(Mark 6:47-48)."

This isn't profound, but it's important. Jesus came to them because they were struggling. In the hour of the disciples' need, He came to them. As He does with us in the storms of life.

Then what happened? Verse 26, "When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear."

Jesus came to them, but they didn't recognize Him. Why not? Maybe it's because they weren't looking for Him. They certainly weren't expecting to see Him. John 6:19 indicates by this time they'd rowed three or four miles.

Matthew records they thought they saw a "ghost." The Greek term is *phantasma* which depicts an apparition (we get the English word "phantom" from it). The sight terrified the disciples. And the text indicates they "cried out in fear." The Greek verb *kradzo* means to "scream" or "cry out."

Would you notice that God allows His people to experience situations that produce fear. Why does He do that to us? Fearful situations have a tendency to strip us of our

⁴I'm indebted to Warren Wiersbe for this insight (p. 51).

pride and self-sufficiency, don't they? A proud man will never admit he needs a Savior. But, at times, God in His grace puts us in situations that force us to realize how vulnerable we really are.

But Jesus didn't leave them in their fear. Verse 27 states, "But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'" I'm comforted by the word "immediately." Jesus didn't let the men remain in their fearful state. He didn't send them into this storm to hurt them, but to help them. And seeing their fear He *immediately* speaks to them and says, "It's Me! Stop being afraid!"

We learn a couple of things from this fourth scene.

1. *The storm produces fear.* It did for the disciples. So did the sighting of the supposed ghost. The storm produces fear. But secondly...

2. *The remedy for fear is knowing that Jesus is with you.* The presence of Jesus makes all the difference.

Several years ago there was a commercial showing a group of people preparing to jump out of an airplane. The plane approaches the jump sight. The leader stands by the open door and barks out commands to the jumpers. "Here's what to do. Jump, grab your cord, and pull." And so one by one the individuals throw themselves out the door, and each time you hear the instructor's voice, "Jump, grab your cord, and pull." Finally, the last person prepares to jump, and nervously asks the leader, "So, you've jumped many times before?" To which the man replies with a shocking announcement, "No, this is my first time. But I did sleep at a Holiday Inn Express last night."

I guess, the point was, if I sleep at a Holiday Inn Express, I'll sleep so well that I'll feel like I can do the impossible. That may work in commercials, but not in real life.

Before I heed the counsel of someone telling me to do something radical, He'd better have the credentials.

Let that sink in. What right did Jesus have to command the disciples to stop being afraid? It's because He has the credentials, right? He can tell them not to be afraid of the storm because He's in charge of the storm.

What's more, notice that Jesus didn't *suggest* this. He commanded the men, "Don't be afraid." And when we read His Word, He commands us too. Are you a fearful person? Many of us are. We need to learn to live, not by our hunches and feelings, but by our Sovereign Lord's commands.

Friends, we're living in a post-Genesis 3 world. That means at times we will hear the doctor say, "I have bad news." And the boss will say, "Clean out your desk." And the newsman will say, "The stock market has tumbled again." And when we hear those things, when the storms do come, we will feel like giving way to fear. But we must not. We need not, for the antidote to fear is knowing that *Jesus is with you*.

Lesson #1 is this. The Lord may send us into a storm.

II. Lesson #2: The Lord may teach us *through* a storm (28-31).

Like He did Peter. Watch how the Lord taught Peter *through* this storm.

Verse 28, "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'" You have to love Peter. He's a man who loved Jesus and wanted to be with Him even if that meant taking risks. Sure, he sank, but at least he got out of the boat. It's easy to stay in the boat and criticize the person who's radical for Jesus.

That was quite a request Peter made, wasn't it? So was the response He received from Jesus. Verse 29, "'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus."

So far so good. How many steps did Peter take? Matthew doesn't tell us (and he's the only gospel writer to record this incident). But he did it. Peter actually walked on the water.

And then he started sinking. What went wrong? Peter got in trouble when he did what we often do, something very simple. He took his eyes off of Jesus. Verse 30 says, "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'"

Peter learned a couple of things through the storm that night.

A. Peter learned something about himself. Peter was a self-confident man. You may be, too. "I can handle this. I know how to do this." But that night Peter learned a lesson we all need to learn. No one is strong enough to face the storms of life on his own. No one. The moment we take our eyes off of Jesus, we're all in trouble.

B. Peter learned something about Jesus. Notice how verse 31 begins. "Immediately Jesus." That's the third time we've seen those words in this story (22, 27). "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'"

What did Peter learn about Jesus that night? He learned that our problems are *no problem* for Jesus. Yes, Jesus admonished Peter for his lack of faith. But notice that Jesus saved Peter *before* He admonished him (Bruner, 535). Aren't you glad He does the same with us? He saves us from our folly. But He doesn't leave us there. He saves us so He can change us.

You see, this wouldn't be the last storm that Peter and the disciples would face in life. Jesus knew that. He knew His followers would face many storms in their families and ministries. And they needed something more important than safety. They needed to learn two truths.

1. *The Lord uses storms to teach us how needy we are.* And secondly...
2. *The Lord uses storms to teach us how sufficient He is.* "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

E.g.—

The Lord may send us into a storm. Secondly, the Lord may teach us *through* a storm. Thirdly...

III. Lesson #3: The Lord can rescue us *from* a storm (32-33).

Verses 32-33 tell us, "And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"

Jesus took His disciples *into* the storm, so He might teach them *through* the storm, and eventually rescue them *from* the storm. The truth is, the climax of the story isn't the storm. Nor is it what happened to Peter outside the boat. Rather, it's what happened inside the boat. It's this confession that the disciples made to Jesus.

The disciples made two things clear about Jesus in verses 32-33.

A. He's powerful (32). The moment Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat, the storm stopped. Now that is power! That puts Jesus in a class all by Himself. Who else can stop a storm by merely speaking? He is powerful. What's more...

B. He's worthy of worship (33). In the presence of One so powerful, the instinctive response of the disciples was to worship Jesus. Worship in a boat? Yes, with no praise band nor stain-glass windows. Worship is simply responding with proper reverence to the Living God. Have you been doing that in your life? It's what Jesus deserves.

The Lord specializes in using storms to show people how great He is. In his book, *In the Eye of the Storm*, Max Lucado tells the story of another sailor whom the Lord met, as He did with Peter, in a storm (pp. 205-6):

"Although separated by seventeen centuries, this sailor and Peter are drawn together by several striking similarities: Both made their living on the sea. Both met their Savior after a nine-hour battle in a storm. Both met the Father in fear and then followed him in faith. Both walked away from their boats and became preachers of the Truth.

You know the story of Peter, the first sailor. Let me tell you about the second, whose name was John.

He had served on the seas since he was eleven years old. His father, an English shipmaster in the Mediterranean, took him aboard and trained him well for a life in the Royal Navy.

Yet what John gained in experience, he lacked in discipline. He mocked authority. Ran with the wrong crowd. Indulged in the sinful ways of a sailor. Although his training would have qualified him to serve as an officer, his behavior caused him to be flogged and demoted.

In his early twenties, he made his way to Africa, where he became intrigued with the lucrative slave trade. At age twenty-one, he made his living on the *Greyhound*, a slave ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

John ridiculed the moral and poked fun at the religious. He even made jokes about a book that would eventually help reshape his life: *The Imitation of Christ*. In fact, he was degrading that book a few hours before his ship sailed into an angry storm.

That night the waves pummeled the *Greyhound*, spinning the ship one minute on the top of a wave. Plunging her the next into a watery valley.

John awakened to find his cabin filled with water. A side of the *Greyhound* had collapsed. Ordinarily such damage would have sent a ship to the bottom in a matter of minutes. The *Greyhound*, however, was carrying buoyant cargo and remained afloat.

John worked at the pumps all night. For nine hours, he and the other sailors struggled to keep the ship from sinking. But he knew that it was a losing cause. Finally, when his hopes were more battered than the vessel, he threw himself on the saltwater-soaked deck and pleaded, 'If this will not do, then Lord have mercy on us all.'

John didn't deserve mercy, but he received it. The *Greyhound* and her crew survived.

John never forgot God's mercy shown on that tempestuous day in the roaring Atlantic. He returned to England where he became a prolific composer. You've sung his songs, like this one: 'Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.'

This slave-trader-turned-songwriter was John Newton.

Along with his hymn writing, he also became a powerful pulpiteer. For nearly fifty years, he filled pulpits and churches with the story of the Savior who meets you and me in the storm.

A year or two before his death, people urged him to give up preaching because of his failing sight. 'What!' he explained. 'Shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can yet speak?'

He wouldn't stop. He couldn't stop. What had begun as a prayer of fear resulted in a lifetime of faith. During his last years, someone asked him about his health. He confessed that his powers were failing. 'My memory is almost gone,' he said, 'but I remember two things: I am a great sinner, and Jesus is a great Savior.'"

Implications: In light of what we've seen today here's the bottom line...

1. *Jesus is in a class all by Himself.* He's a great Savior! The truth is, He endured the greatest storm of all, and He did it for us. On the cross, He faced and felt the fury of the judgment of God. Why? Because He chose to pay the penalty for sin we deserve to pay. He took the wrath of God in our place, so that now, through simple faith in Him, we don't have to. "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so no one can boast (Eph 2:8-9)."

My friend, this is why He's worthy of your worship, of your *life*. Not just because of His power, but His incredible love. He gave His life for us. Have you given your life to Him?

If not, why not now? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

And if you have put your trust in Christ, keep this in mind.

2. *If there were no storms, we'd never learn how great He is.* Yes, the Lord may send us *into* a storm, and may teach us *through* a storm, but don't lose heart. The Lord can rescue us *from* a storm, and ultimately He does for His children.

Are you facing a storm right now? Be encouraged. He knows. He sees you in the boat. He's interceding for you. And He's using it right now to show you how great He is, and how sufficient.

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*It is well (it is well)
With my soul (with my soul)
It is well, it is well with my soul*