

The Disciples in the Boat – Keeping Your Eyes on the Lord
People Jesus Met, Part 25
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Hey you know, when it comes to all the great miracles that the Lord Jesus did while He was here on earth, I wonder which one you would pick as being His most famous miracle. Now maybe you would think about His turning water into wine, or maybe feeding the 5000 people, or maybe raising Lazarus from the dead. Well, I need to tell you that my candidate for the most famous miracle of Jesus is none of these, but rather, based on how many people have heard of this particular miracle and based upon how often this miracle is used idiomatically in people's everyday speech, my candidate for Jesus' most famous miracle would be His walking on water.

That's what we're going to talk about today, because remember, we're in a series of messages entitled "People Jesus Met." Today Jesus is going to meet His twelve disciples floundering in a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee as He comes to them walking on the water. We want to go back 2000 years and look and see what happened then, and then as we always do, we want to bring that forward and talk about, "Okay, so what difference does that make to us in the twenty-first century?" So here we go.

Our passage is Matthew chapter 14. Here you should know that Jesus has just fed the 5000 people with two fish and five loaves of bread at Capernaum on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. Verse 22 then says, "And immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side of the sea while He dismissed the crowd. And after He had sent the crowd away, Jesus went up on a mountain side by Himself to pray. And when it was evening, Jesus was there alone. But the boat"—that is, with the twelve disciples in it—"was already a considerable distance from land and was being battered by the waves, because the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night"—that is somewhere between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m.—"Jesus came out to them walking upon the sea."

Now we all recognize that according to every law of nature, what Jesus does here is absolutely impossible. So you say, "Yeah, Lon, so you're an educated man. Do you really believe that Jesus did this, that this wasn't some sort of illusion or some sort of trick, but that Jesus actually, physically, really walked on top of the water?" Well, I absolutely do, and let me tell you why. I believe it because Colossians 1:16 says that "by Him"—that is, by Jesus—"all things were created." See, I believe that Jesus created the world and every law of nature in the world, and therefore, it's no problem for me whatsoever to believe that Jesus can suspend those natural laws whenever He feels like it. Anybody agree with me? Amen? (applause) Yeah, okay! Well, there you go!

Now, the Bible says when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and they cried out in fear and said, "It's a ghost!" But Jesus immediately said to them, "Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid." Okay, so far, so good. The disciples were in trouble. Jesus came out and rescued them.

We could end the story right here, and it would be a great story, but something very interesting happens next. Look at verse 28. "Then Peter said, 'Lord, if it is really You, then You command me to come to You on the water.' So Jesus said to Peter, 'Come.' Then Peter climbed out of the boat and walked on the water and came toward Jesus."

You say, "Lon, are you kidding me? I mean, look. It's one thing for Jesus as God in the flesh to walk on the water. It is a completely different matter for an ordinary human being like Peter to walk on top of the water. Do you really believe that this happened as well?" Oh yes, of course I do! Why not? I mean, if Jesus could suspend the laws of nature for Himself, why couldn't He suspend the laws of nature for Peter? Well, the answer is that He could, and the answer is He did.

Verse 30, "But when Peter saw the wind, Peter became afraid and began to sink." You get the picture here, of course. Here was Peter walking on the water toward Jesus with his eyes focused on Jesus and his hands outstretched toward Jesus like a little toddler just learning to walk would walk toward his mommy or his daddy. Peter was doing just fine (pauses) until, until he took his eyes off Jesus and put them on the circumstances around him, the wind and the waves and all the reasons why he

couldn't possibly be doing what he was doing. Then what does the Bible say happened? Immediately he began to what? To sink, that's right.

Verse 31, "And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of Peter and said to him, 'Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?'" Jesus says, "Hey, Peter, while your eyes were on Me, you were doing just fine out there, so why did you take your eyes off Me and start looking at your circumstances? Why did you begin looking at all the reasons why you couldn't do what I was already giving you the power to do and what I would have kept on giving you the power to do if you would have just kept your focus on Me?"

Verse 32, "And when Peter and Jesus climbed into the boat, the wind stopped. Then those who were in the boat worshipped Jesus and said, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" Well, yeah, I guess so!

All right, now that's as far as we're going to go in the passage today, because now we're going to ask the question that I know you've been waiting to ask. It's our most important question of the day, and we want all our campuses to do this with us together, so are you ready? Are you sure? Okay, here we go now, one, two, three—SO WHAT? Yeah!

You say, "Lon, so what? I understand this. Jesus walked on the water. Peter walked on the water, but you know what? When I go out on Monday morning to go to work, to drive the carpool, to go to school, what difference does any of this make to me in my everyday life?" Well, this is what we're going to talk about.

You know, God has given me the wonderful privilege of leading over 35 trips to the Holy Land since 1987. There are two questions that people ask me all the time. Question number one is, "Do you ever get tired of going?" The answer is, "Never." In fact, the more I go, the more I look forward to going.

The second question I get asked a lot is, "What is your favorite spot in all of Israel, personally?" Well, I don't really know that I can answer that with just one place. There are so many great places, but if I had a Top Five list, I can tell you one place that would definitely be on it. That's the top of Mount Carmel. The top of Mt. Carmel looks down into the valley of Armageddon. We go up on the roof of this monastery, and then

we do a devotional up there about the events that happened right on this hill from I Kings chapter 18.

Now, I Kings 18 is in the white section of your Bible, if you understand what I'm saying, so why don't you let me review the events of I Kings 18 for you just a little bit. If you remember, in I Kings 18, we meet our friend Elijah the prophet, who is in mortal spiritual combat with the king of Israel at the time, the northern kingdom, a fellow named Ahab. Ahab had married a lady, and many of you know her name. What was her name? Jezebel, that's right. Jezebel was a bad Oreo. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?

Jezebel was not even Jewish. She wasn't even Hebrew. She was a Phoenician princess, a Canaanite princess. It was a political marriage, and when she came to the northern kingdom of Israel, Jezebel came with an agenda. She came with 400 prophets of Baal, the male god of the Phoenicians, and 450 prophetesses of Asherah, the female goddess of the Phoenicians. Her agenda was to wipe the worship of the true Jehovah God of the universe right out of the northern kingdom, to eradicate it. She did a fairly good job actually. Her mortal enemy was Elijah.

In I Kings 18, Elijah summons the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah to the top of Mount Carmel, as well as most of the population of Israel. He proposes a contest. Here's what he says. He says, "What we need to do is you build an altar, and I'll build an altar. You put wood on it; I'll put wood on it. You put a sacrifice on it; I'll put a sacrifice on it." Then Elijah says this in I Kings 18:24, "Then you prophets of Baal and Asherah call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the god who answers by fire from heaven"—remember Baal was the god of lightning. If anybody ought to be able to do this, he ought to be able to do it—"he is God." All the people said, "This is a great idea! I can't wait to see this!"

Well, if you read the rest of the story, the prophets of Baal did that. They danced around the altar. They cut themselves and did back flips all day long. Meanwhile, Elijah was sending people down to get water and dousing his altar with water until it was soaking wet.

Then in verse 36, Elijah prayed, "Oh Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, today let it be known that You are God in Israel. Answer me, oh Lord, answer me so these people will know that You, oh Lord, are God." Verse 38, "Then the fire of the Lord fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and the wood and the stones and the soil and even licked up all the water in the trench around it." Wow!

But you know, Elijah didn't stop there. He said, "Grab all those 850 false prophets and kill them right now," which is what they did right at the base of Mt. Carmel.

Now what I really want you to see is what happened next. That was just a setup for what comes next. You go, "Are you kidding?" No, no, no, listen. Here's what comes next in chapter 19. "Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'May the gods deal with me severely if by this time tomorrow I do not do to you what you did to all of those prophets.'" What is she threatening to do to him? Well, she's threatening to kill him, exactly!

Watch in verse 3. "And Elijah was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life from Jezebel." You say, "What? He ran for his life from a puny human being like Jezebel? I mean, what happened to the man who just called down fire from heaven? What happened to the man who just singlehandedly faced 850 false prophets and beat them all? What happened to the man, James chapter 5, who prayed that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't rain on the earth for 3 ½ years? What happened to that guy?"

Well, what happened to him, folks, is that he took his eyes off the Lord and put his eyes on Jezebel. What happened to him is that he lost his spiritual focus, and just like Peter when he took his eyes off the Lord on the Sea of Galilee, Elijah began to sink. Panic, fear, timidity, doubt, and cowardice set in, and Elijah had a spiritual total eclipse, an absolute meltdown.

Now I've got to tell you that, as a follower of Jesus Christ, there have been times when I've been right where Elijah was in I Kings 19. I've been right where Peter was in Matthew chapter 14. I mean, I've been going along by the power of God, spiritually walking on top of my problems, my struggles, and my trials, when all of a sudden, for no explainable reason, I take my eyes off the Lord and begin to focus on all the reasons

why I can't do it, why I can't make it, why I can't walk on top of my problems any more. Right then and there, emotionally and spiritually, I begin to sink. I'm telling you, I can go from walking to sinking so fast, it will make your head swim.

Unless I miss my guess, I'll bet that all of you guys here are just like me, and you've done this too. If you haven't, then you need to come on up here and preach, because I need to let you preach if you've never done this! (laughter) Some of us are doing it right here today. Some of us walked in here today with our eyes off the Lord and on our problems, saying things like, "I'm never going to get married," and "I'm never going to sell my house," and "I'm never going to survive this job I'm in," and "I'm never going to get through these health issues I'm facing," and "I'm never going to pull out of the financial hole that I'm in," and "My husband's never going to come to Christ," and "My marriage is never going to get any better," and "My children's problems are never going to go away." Just like Peter and just like Elijah, into a spiritual tailspin we go as well.

Now friends, when this happens to us, we need to know how to get back on top of the water of our problems. We need to know how to get our eyes back on the Lord. We need to know how to get our eyes back on His power and on His ability to enable us to walk on top of our problems. This is what I want to talk to you about for the rest of our message. I want to talk to you about the process that the Bible gives us whereby we can spiritually reorient ourselves, whereby we can spiritually refocus ourselves, whereby we can get our eyes back on the Lord again when we've taken them off.

The Bible refers to this in I Samuel chapter 30 as encouraging ourselves in the Lord. Sometimes, folks, we need to do this weekly. Sometimes we need to do this daily, and sometimes we need to do it twenty times an hour, but that's okay.

So you say, "Lon, that's great, but tell me how. I mean, a preacher's no good if he doesn't tell you so what and how, so how do I do this? I mean, when I feel myself starting to sink like Peter, how do I restore my spiritual focus on the Lord?" Well, that's what I want to tell you. I have a four-step process, a four-step grid, if you will—listen now--that no problem and no amount of doubt can survive being run through this grid.

I don't care how big your doubt or your problem is. If you run it through this grid, when you come out of step four, it's gone. Your eyes are back on the Lord, so here you go.

Step number one, if we need to get our eyes back on the Lord, we start by resting in the sovereignty of God. That is in the fact that God's control of every detail in the universe is utter, total and absolute. This is what the Bible says in Psalm 135:6. It says, "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in the heavens, on the earth, in the seas, and in all of their depths."

Many Christians will admit to God's sovereign control over the galaxies and over the planets, but they so often rob themselves of tremendous blessing by not seeing that God's sovereign control also extends to every minute detail of their life! Jesus said in Matthew 10:29, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? They're not worth a whole lot, and yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from the will of your heavenly Father." Jesus' point is that there is not one minute detail in the entire universe, not even little sparrows falling to the ground, that God doesn't have under His utter sovereign control.

When our car breaks, when we lose our job, when we get transferred, when we miss a promotion, when we suffer financial loss, when our children get sick, when our children begin having problems at school, when some tragedy strikes our life, the one thing that the Bible is clear about, the one thing that we must keep reminding ourselves of is that the reason this is in my life is because the sovereign God of the universe wants it in my life. This is step number one to getting our focus back on the Lord. We need to go back and rest in the sovereignty of God, or as God said in Psalm 46:10, we need to "be still and know that He is God," and not us.

Number two, if you want to get your eyes back on the Lord, then step number two is that we must, second of all, remember that God's plan for our life is perfect. I love what God said to Jeremiah. He said in Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Would you look and see here that God's plan for Jeremiah's life and for your life and my life doesn't start at birth or at conception? Friends, God's

plan for our lives started in eternity past, before we were even a thought in anybody's mind. This is why David said in Psalm 139, "All the days that were ordained for me were written in Your book, God, before even one of them came to be here on earth." This is a staggering thought!

What kind of plan does God have for us as His children? Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans that I have for you," says the Lord, "plans for good and not for evil, plans to give you a future and a hope." Friends, I have to tell you that, when I start sinking down in my circumstances, it really helps me to go back and remind myself, number one, that every single piece of my life has been carefully scripted out down to the minutest detail by the sovereign God of the universe, and number two, to remind myself that there is a divine and eternal significance to every event that happens in my life, and third, to remind myself that everything in my life is running right on divine schedule. It may not be a schedule I can figure out, but it's running right on schedule.

This is step number two to getting our eyes back on the Lord. After we rest in the sovereignty of God, then remember that God's plan for our life is eternal and perfect. There are no accidents. There are no coincidences. There is no such thing as fate. There is only the perfect plan of God.

Number three, if you want to get your eyes back on the Lord, then third, we need to remind ourselves that God's promises are unbreakable. I love what Peter said in II Peter 1 (verse 4). He said, "God has given us His great and precious promises." Like what? Well, like Romans 8:28, that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him; like Hebrews 13:5 where Jesus said, "I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you." There are hundreds and hundreds more promises in the Bible. These promises, my friends, are inviolable. They are impregnable.

In Numbers 23:19, the Bible says, "God is not a man that He should lie. If He says it, He will do it." If He promises, He will make good on it, which is why Hebrews 6:19 says, "We have these promises as an anchor for our soul," as a spiritual anchor that keeps our souls from getting tossed around by the winds and waves of this world. This is why we need to be reading the Word of God. This is why we need to be

learning the promises of God. This is why we need to be memorizing the promises of God and putting them on the walls of our house and on our desk at work and listening to them through Christian music during the day, so that when we begin to sink, we have those promises on our fingertips that we can remind ourselves that we have them and that they are unbreakable. This is the third step in getting our eyes back on the Lord, reminding ourselves that God's promises are unbreakable, and even if God has to suspend all the natural laws of the universe to keep His word to you and me, God will do it. He never breaks a promise.

Finally, number four, if you want to get your eyes back on the Lord, then step number four is to recall that God's power is greater than any problem you and I will ever face. I mean, look, it's a great thing for God to make promises to us, but those promises aren't much good if He doesn't have the power to back them up!

Well, God says, "Don't you worry about that." Jeremiah 32:27 says, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for Me?" When he announced the virgin birth to Mary in Luke chapter 1, Gabriel said, "Mary, nothing is impossible with God." Jesus Himself said in Luke 18:27, "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God."

Hey you know, that night walking on the Sea of Galilee, think about it now. Peter's problems all started when he forgot that God's power was greater than the winds and the waves. And Elijah's problems all started when he forgot that God's power was greater than Jezebel.

This is why, under Moses and Joshua, whenever God would do a great miracle for the Israelites, He would always say to them, "I want you to build a rock pile here," and "I want you to build a rock pile there," and "I want you to build a rock pile here." Why? Because God said, "When you get in trouble in the future and you're facing difficulty in the future, I want you to look back at all of these rock piles and remember the power that I displayed in every one of these cases, and then I want you to remember that the very same God who displayed that power then has the power to overcome your problem today." Wow! God wants us to remember that you and I will never face a problem that He cannot overcome.

Now listen. This doesn't mean that people who are walking with their eyes on the Lord are in denial. People who are walking with their eyes on the Lord understand the obstacles and the problems are there; it's just that they also understand that their God is bigger than all of those obstacles, and that's the faith they walk in.

This is step number four to getting our eyes back on the Lord, recalling that God's power is greater than any problem we face and to stop focusing on how big the problems are and start focusing on how big God is and His power. See, I think we need to go up to our boss and say, "You know what? God is bigger than you!" (laughter) Now you might want to say it to yourself. (laughter) But it's true!

If we're in financial trouble, God wants us to look that trouble right in the eye and say, "God is bigger than you." If we're having trouble selling our house, we need to look at God and say, "You know what? God, You are bigger than the recession. You've been through a lot of recessions, God, and You are still doing just fine. You can handle this." Friends, fill in the blank. It doesn't matter what you put in the blank; the answer is still the same. God is bigger, and His power is greater! (applause)

All right, so let's conclude. Hey, you know what, folks? I am convinced that there are no waves in life so high and no problems in life so great that we can't walk on top of them spiritually and emotionally, so long as we have our eyes on the Lord. Conversely, I am just as convinced that when our eyes are not on the Lord, even the tiniest problems in life will overwhelm us. This is why the Bible says in Hebrews 12:1, "Let us then run with endurance the race that is set before us"—here on earth; look at the next three words—"looking unto our problems." Is that what it says? "Looking unto our circumstances"—is that what it says? "Looking unto the obstacles"—is that what it says? No, it says "looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith."

But you know, since we're all human, just like Peter, and since we all have a bad tendency to get our eyes off the Lord and start sinking, we need a process to know how to restore that focus when we lose it. That's what God gave us today. Number one, we need to go back and rest in the sovereignty of God and to remember that every single thing in our life is there because an almighty sovereign God wants it there. Number two, we need to remember that God's plan for our lives is perfect. There are

no accidents. This is here as part of the perfect plan of God. Number three, we need to remind ourselves that God's promises are unbreakable, and even if He has to suspend natural law to keep His promise to you and me, He will do it. Finally, we need to recall that God's power is greater than any problem we will ever face. I mean, I think of Lazarus being dead for four days in the tomb. That's a fairly significant problem, right? Wouldn't you say so? Yeah, and Jesus handled that one, didn't He? If He could handle that problem, believe me, whatever problem you've got is miniscule compared to that one. He can handle it.

And friends, let me repeat what I said earlier in closing. I believe that no problem we will ever have, no amount of doubt that we will ever encounter can survive being run through the grid of these four biblical truths. You start it at the top, and you shove it through the bottom, and when you come out, your eyes will be back on the Lord, I promise. So use it, friends. This will work. Even if you've got to go out and do it twenty times an hour, well, so what? Do it, and keep your eyes on the Lord. I promise you, if you do, you won't sink. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, You know that we're hopelessly human, just like Peter, just like Elijah. Lord, You know that we can be doing just fine, like they were, and in a finger snap, we can be sinking and our eyes are off the Lord one more time. So Lord Jesus, forgive us. Show us mercy, Lord. Thanks for Your very wonderful word that gives us a simple grid, a simple process by which we can restore our spiritual focus and get our eyes back on Christ. Help us to go out and use this process hourly, daily, weekly, so that we can have the experience that Peter had when he stepped out of that boat, of walking on top of whatever problems we face, Lord. Change our lives because we were here today, Father, and use our ability to walk on top of our problems as a great testimonial to people all around us as they watch, that there is a living, awesome God in this universe. Lord, draw them to You through us, through our obedient walk with Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name, and what did everybody say? Amen. All right, now go out this week and use this! God bless you!