

The Wednesday Word, May 15, 2019: Yahweh Walks on Water

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus had just fed 5000 people, and now it was time for Him to get alone and pray. He, therefore, sent the disciples away in the boat but when the disciples were in the middle of the lake, the wind picked up. The waves got higher. This was more than a squall for the boat was being beaten (v 24, lit. tortured, tormented). Fierce as this night at sea was, it is not the wind, not the waves, not the storm that frightened the disciples. It's Jesus. The disciples are afraid when Jesus shows up.

Jesus' walking over the sea is filled with a meaning that we miss if we don't understand the mentality of the people of Jesus' day. In their minds, the sea was the manifestation of death. The sea was that which swallows. It was perhaps even a demonic power. So, when Jesus walked on water, He was not only showing His control over creation; He was also showing His power over death. Jesus was treading under His foot the ancient serpent (see Gen. 3:15). But the disciples didn't know that it was Jesus who was walking towards them.

So, put yourself in their shoes. You have left Jesus up on the mountain and have been struggling to row the boat across the sea for hours. You are tired, wet, and frustrated. Now, around 3 AM, a figure comes strolling towards you over the sea, death, and the dreadful serpent.

They cry out in fear (verse 26) believing Jesus to be a ghost, an apparition, perhaps even the Lord of death himself. But Jesus calls them and preaches the gospel to them. Preaches the gospel? Yes! He says, "It is I" (verse 27). He, Jesus, is the gospel.

In English, we, unfortunately, lose the most important thing Jesus says here. Jesus isn't just saying, "It's Me." He is saying, "I am." Remember when Moses asked for God's name (Exodus 3:14-15), God responded, "I am who I am." God gives Himself the name Yahweh. Later, God will define what Yahweh means, "A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). Jesus is taking the divine name, Yahweh, and applying it to Himself.

Peter pipes up, and we must dismiss a common belief about Peter in this text. Peter walking on water is not an act of faith. Peter's request to walk out to Jesus comes from Peter doubting Jesus' words. "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water" (verse 28).

It is absurd that Peter makes this demand. Here is Peter doubting Yahweh manifest in the flesh. He questions the Creator of heaven and earth. He is challenging the God who answered Job saying, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the world? Do you keep the sun rising and setting? Did you tell the waters, 'You can come this far'? Have you been to the source of the sea? Have you walked in the recesses of the deep?" (see Job 38:4-18).

But does Jesus scold Peter for his doubt? No! Jesus graciously tells Peter, "Come." At that word, Peter gets out of the boat, and he too walks on the sea, death and the serpent. Peter isn't enabled to walk on the sea because of his faith. Peter walked on water because of the word of Jesus, "Come." That one word carried Peter from the boat, across the water, toward Jesus.

Notice what causes Peter to sink. He doesn't fear the storm, the waves, or his distance from the boat. He fears what is least threatening to him – the wind (Matthew 14:30).

The same happens to us when we lose our focus on Jesus. If we focus on our circumstances or anything that isn't Jesus, we sink like a stone.

And that's the Gospel Truth!