

### "Stepping out of the boat."

I heard about a guy who lives in Texas and he invited a lot of bachelors out to his ranch for a BBQ. He got them all together and said, 'Look over this edge at my little lake on my ranch. I have filled it with crocodiles and alligators.' He said, 'If there is anyone willing to walk across these alligators and crocodiles and go from this end of the lake and get out on the other side alive, I'll give you one of three things. I'll give you a 500 acre ranch, a million dollars in cash, or the hand of my daughter in marriage. Whichever one you want.'

He had no sooner said it then all of a sudden he heard a 'Splash,' he looked over the edge and there was a guy in that lake who didn't even take his shoes off. He still had a three piece suit on. He was running across those gators and crocs as fast as humanly possible. Water was flying everywhere. Crocodiles snapping and alligators chasing him and this guy was going through it all.

He made it all the way to the other end. He climbed out soaking wet but without a scratch on him. He was breathing deeply trying to get his breath. The rich Texan went over to him and he said, 'Son, I meant this as a practical joke. I didn't really mean for anyone to swim that lake. But you did it and I'm as good as my word. Which one do you want, the five hundred acre ranch, the one million dollars in cash, or my daughter's hand in marriage?' The young man looked at the rich Texan and said, 'I don't want neither one of them. I just want to get my hands on the man that pushed me in!'

We are going to look at one of the most thrilling events in the life of Peter today. And we are going to learn if we trust Jesus enough to walk out in faith, He will not only be our rescuer but He will ultimately be our Saviour. So let's turn our Bibles to **Matthew 14:22**.

Now I don't know about you but I find storms can be a very frightening experience and as were about to read, just like the disciples we often find ourselves in the middle of one. Ok, it may not be storms where there is thunder and lightning, but the storms of trials and difficulties.

You may even be here today and you're facing a storm, maybe your parents are going through a really tough time and your right in the middle of it all. Maybe you're struggling with a physical illness or having doubts about your faith. Maybe you're struggling at school or receiving pressure from your non-Christian friends about your Christian friends.

You see loved ones, the truth of the matter is, all of us have gone through or will go through some kind of storm in our lives. Now it is true that sometimes God calms the storms, but more often what He does, is He calms us, in order for us to walk through those storms.

And notice who's to blame for the disciples being in this storm. **Matthew 14:22** "Jesus made the disciples get into the boat." That word 'made' means that Jesus commanded His disciples to take the boat across the lake of Galilee. Think about it! The disciples were in a storm because Jesus ordered them to go across the lake in the boat. I believe Jesus, the Master of the waves and the winds, knew the storm was coming.

And while they are making their way across, **verse 24** tells us that "the boat was buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it." But why would Jesus deliberately send them into a storm? Well I can think of at least **two reasons**.

**First** of all, there are times when the Lord will use a storm as a way of **correcting us**. Remember Jonah, he jumped on a ship and was going in the wrong direction, **so what did God do? Jonah 1:4** "Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up." God sent a storm and provided the first submarine, in the form of a great fish, to get Jonah back in the right direction.

**Secondly** the Lord can use a storm to help us **grow spiritually**.

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Romans 5:3+4 "We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." James 1:2-5 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

The Lord will use a storm to help us grow and mature in our spiritual walk with Jesus, to help our faith and obedience to be stronger. I believe that the whole purpose of this storm was to help the disciples grow in their faith. And because they never understood the miracles of the loaves and fish, they had to learn to trust Jesus, even when He wasn't physically present with them. And so because the storm was so bad we can only imagine what it would have been like trying to row across the lake of Galilee.

And that's because it's never easy going against the tide, is it? When you think about the humble salmon, they will swim for miles going against the ocean's tide, when they get into the river, once again they are swimming against the tide. And more often than not, they will have to jump up to eight feet high to get over rocks. But why do they put all that energy into going against the tide? Simply because they have a purpose, they want to get back to their spawning waters where they can lay their eggs.

You see Jesus wants us as Christians to swim against the tide. The world says, 'just live however you want, live for the moment, live life for yourself' but Jesus says, 'I want you to go against the tide and live for Me'. The world says, 'well everyone else gets drunk on alcoholic spirits' but Jesus says, 'I don't want you to get drunk on alcoholic spirits, I want you to be filled with My Spirit.'

I understand that it's not easy and it can be very tiring at times going against what everyone else thinks is normal. And I know it can be frightening at times but you need to understand that you are not alone. You are surrounded by a bunch of Christians, young and old who know very well just how scary it can be at times when life's storms get a bit rough.

I guarantee there are people in this room who know what it's like to lose a loved one. I guarantee there are people in this room who know what it's like to lose all their friends because they decided to become a Christian. I guarantee there are people in this room who know what it's like to struggle with drugs and struggle with pornography.

You see, in that boat there are twelve disciples, some would be terribly afraid and others like Peter, Andrew, James and John wouldn't be so afraid because they were fishermen. But the point I'm trying to make is that when the wind starts to blow against you, just talk to other Christians who are in the boat with you. They will help you because they have been through what you are going through.

And so Jesus after having some private prayer time, decided to catch up with the disciples. Matthew 14:25-27 "Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Now here's something happening you don't see every day of week, do you? Jesus is walking on the water, think about this for a moment. This is not the magician Dynamo walking on clear Perspex, pretending to walk on the river Thames on a clear calm day. This is not a man walking over alligators and crocodiles but this is Jesus, who's walking on water whilst it's blowing a gale.

Now some people don't believe that Jesus walked on water but why can't the One who created the water be able to walk on it? Why can't the One who created the sun and the moon, be able to stop them both for a full day, in order for Joshua to defeat the Amorites?

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Why can't the One who created life be able to raise Lazarus back from the dead in order for others to believe who Jesus was?

I love that story about a preacher who was speaking about how the Israelites were wandering in the desert for forty years and their clothes and sandals never wore out. When a young sceptic in the meeting place shouted out, 'rubbish, how is that possible!' The preacher slowly went over to the young sceptic and shouted in his ear, 'God!' The young man said, 'Oh, I understand' to which the preacher said, 'no son, no one really understands.'

And so Jesus is walking through the storm towards the boat, the disciples see Him walking on the water and think He's a ghost and they are petrified. But Jesus reassures them and tells them not to be afraid.

And what happens next, I believe this is probably one of the most exciting events in Peter's life. It's probably the event, possibly with the exception of the Mount of Transfiguration that Peter would never forget. **Matthew 14:28+29** "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus."

Now if seeing a man walking on water is an event you don't see every day of the week, then certainly doing the same thing, is an event you would never forget. Someone once said, 'expect great things of God, and attempt great things for God,' and that's exactly what Peter did.

Most Christians I know are satisfied with little things from God, but not Peter. Out of all the disciples, Peter was the only one who asked to join Jesus on the water. And with a simple command, Jesus says, "Come" and that was enough for Peter. He totally relied on the Lord's promise, climbed out of the boat, stepped on the water, and walked on the lake towards the Lord.

You see, Peter wanted to be with Jesus regardless of the risk and he knew that whatever God commands of us, He also empowers us to do. Peter also realises that it is better to be with Jesus, without a boat, than it is to be in a boat without Jesus. And loved ones, especially the young Christians amongst us, the Lord wants Christians with this kind of faith today.

The kind faith which is willing to follow Jesus, the kind of faith which wants to be close to Jesus and the kind of faith that wants to walk as Jesus walked, no matter the risk. The question is **are you willing to get out of the boat?** You see there are times when we all get very comfortable in our meeting places and we try to keep the storms away from us.

It's great being among like-minded people where it's easy to be a Christian, but **are you willing to trust Jesus and step out of the boat?** You see the church needs everyone, young and old to talk to people about Jesus outside these four walls.

When you're with your mates eating at McDonalds and you really want to talk to them about Jesus but you're afraid. Then just do what Peter did, step out in faith and trust Jesus and He will give you the right words to say at the right time.

When you're having a sleepover at your house or a friend's house, before you get stuck into that pizza, simply stop and quietly give thanks. And I'm sure that will get your friends talking which in turn will you a chance to explain why you give thanks.

You see we can all have a hundred excuses for not sharing our faith with others but that's exactly what they are, excuses.

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I love watching the Rocky films and in the film Rocky Balboa, when Rocky is speaking to his son who is throwing himself a pity party, he says to him. 'Let me tell you something you already know. The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard you hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward; how much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done! Now, if you know what you're worth, then go out and get what you're worth. But you gotta be willing to take the hits, and not pointing fingers saying you ain't where you wanna be because of him, or her, or anybody. Cowards do that and that ain't you. You're better than that!'

Do you know how much your worth? You are God's child, and Jesus says, you're worth dying for. And if you understand that then why wouldn't you want others to have that relationship too? You're a Christian and God loves you deeply and even if you're a very young Christian and you think you are too afraid to share your faith, then just remember that even God says you are better than that.

1 Timothy 4:12 "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." Are you willing to set the example amongst your non-Christian friends? Are you willing to expect great things of God, and attempt great things for God? Most Christians would say what the Kooks said in their song, Stormy Weather, "Yes I like stormy weather, from my window."

I love sharks but the strange thing is, a shark will only grow in proportion to the water it is in. For example if you take a baby shark and put it in a fish tank, the shark will be fully developed and will grow to around 8 inches long. But if you take that same baby shark and put it in the ocean, he will grow to around 16 feet long.

Now when I look around, I see some of the cutest, little baby Christians swimming around in their meeting place, looking out of the window. You see your faith won't grow if you don't get out there and share your faith.

Let me ask you, what do you think the other disciples were thinking when Peter is stepping out of the boat? I can imagine them saying, 'Peter the weather is stormy, stay in the boat'. Peter, are you nuts? 'You are going to drown'. Now let me ask you this question, how do you think Peter got onto the water? Did he just dive bomb in and say, 'yeeha I'm going walking on water with Jesus'?

**Volunteer to demonstrate what Peter would have done. Volunteer to create the waves.**

I would imagine that Peter was frightened and took his time, he probably hesitated with his first step, possibly even seeing fish swimming around under him. But Peter is now walking on the water, walking towards Jesus. You see loved ones we will never know what our faith can achieve, until we step out in faith and trust Jesus. Matthew 14:30 "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

I can imagine the other disciples sitting in that boat with their mouths dropping, totally mesmerised when Peter is walking on the water. But then, as the text says, 'after he saw the wind, fear set in and he began to sink'. Peter began to look around him and saw, the water, the wind, the waves, and the storm and when he did, he began to sink in fear.

In other words, the focus of his attention changed and he allowed his circumstances to get between him and Jesus.

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Let me try and illustrate this because this is a problem that many Christians face when they take their eyes off Jesus.

**Volunteer to read Psalm 23.**

"The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Now notice how easy that was to read when you're totally focused on the text.

**Let's read it again this time with distractions.  
Audience participation, wind, rain and hailstones.**

Psalm 23 "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Now I don't know about you but I would find that very distracting and very difficult to focus on what I'm reading. **But can you see the difference between walking on water and sinking in despair?** It's all about focusing our eyes and ears on Jesus, not on what's happening around us.

**Hebrews 12:2 "Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."** That word, 'fixed' literally means to glue. When we keep our eyes glued on Jesus, we're able to walk through any storm which life throws our way. And if our heart's desire is to go closer to Jesus, then nothing will stand in our way.

But when we start looking at our circumstances, our situation, at the storms of life, then we lose faith and a lost faith causes us to sink. What we focus on in life will either feed our faith or feed our fear. Peter wanted to be with Jesus, but to do so, he had to keep his eyes fixed on Him, regardless of the circumstances.

**Matthew 14:31 "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"** Now notice what Jesus didn't do, He didn't point a finger at Peter and say, 'you should have known better'. He simply reached out and gave him a helping hand.

And I'm not convinced that Jesus was rebuking Peter by saying, 'you of little faith, why did you doubt?' I can imagine Jesus smiling because Peter had done so well in stepping out of the boat and actually walking on the water.

I believe that Jesus was saying, **"Peter, after bringing you out on the water, why did you doubt I wouldn't save you, when you began to falter?"** You lost sight of me, but that doesn't mean I am not here to lift you up."

You see faith isn't about your ability to do great things for God, faith is about God's ability to do great things through you for Him. And our rescuer, our Saviour, is always able and willing to help us get back on our feet when life gets us down. And at that crucial moment, the One who understands human weakness completely, immediately stretches out His hand and catches Peter, preventing him from sinking further.

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In other words, when Peter shouted, "Lord, save me," Jesus responded and saved him and became his Saviour. And now Peter is once again standing on the water, and walks with Jesus and **Matthew 14:32** says, "And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down."

Wow, what an experience that must have been for all the disciples, especially Peter. Jesus and Peter are back on the boat, the wind, rain and high waves have all stopped and we can only imagine just how peaceful everything is now. And when Jesus saves anyone, the response is always the same, praise and worship. **Matthew 14:33** "Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

None of us have walked on water but we've all faced some storms in our lives and time and time again God has helped us through them. Now just before we finish, let me ask you, **do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?** Let me put that question another way, **are you even in the boat?** Because you can't walk on the water until you first get in the boat.

**Are you willing to get in the boat? Will you allow Jesus to save you?** If you're not a Christian this morning then you need to know you still need rescuing. You see loved ones, its one thing believing that Jesus can be your rescuer but it's another thing to step out in faith and allow Him to save you.

Maybe some of you have been coming to youth weekends for years because they are great fun and you can hang out with your friends, but you still haven't accepted Jesus as your Saviour. Maybe for some of you this is your first time visiting a 'church' of any kind.

You see it makes no difference because the question remains the same, **will you allow Jesus to save you?** Please don't leave here today without asking someone exactly how Jesus can save you.