

Study Notes: Matthew 14:22-32
November 16, 2025: “Focus on Jesus”
Prepared by Reverend Robert W. Rice
Pastor, Muncy Baptist Church

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

- After Jesus fed the crowds, He sent His disciples ahead to the other side of the lake. He then dismissed the crowds. John’s Gospel indicates that Jesus dismissed the crowds because they were trying to force Jesus to become their earthly king. It was also likely that He dismissed the crowds so He could have the time alone that He desired.
- Jesus remained behind, spending time alone on the mountainside in prayer. During the night, while He continued to be alone, the disciples were still on the lake. They had not completed the crossing because they were buffeted by the waves and the wind that was against them.
 - The New American Commentary gives insight into the description of the disciples’ troubled crossing that night, “‘Buffeted’ is more literally tormented, a word that elsewhere can refer to demonic hostility against people (Matt 8:6; Rev 9:5). So, as in 8:29, there may be an occult element at work here. Normally, the disciples would have completed the lake crossing easily by now, even if they had waited a little while for Jesus at Bethsaida (cf. Mark 6:45).”
 - “A considerable distance” is an interpretation of the Greek phrase, “many stadia.” The disciples were likely near the middle of the lake.

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.”

- Before dawn, Jesus went to meet the disciples on the lake. Given the hour and their surprise to see anyone on the lake, they believed that Jesus was a ghost. They were afraid and cried out, but Jesus immediately reassured them and told them not to be afraid.
 - “Before dawn” is an approximation of the Greek phrase, which reads “the fourth watch of the night,” that occurred between 3:00 - 6:00 a.m. The idea of a ghost or specter was understood much like it is in our culture, today, as some sort of aberration from the realm of the dead.
- Matthew records Jesus telling the disciples, “It is I.” The Faithlife Study Bible explains, “Matthew may be employing this phrase in a colloquial manner (‘it’s me’). Alternatively, he could be intentionally using the Greek translation of the divine name (egō eimi) revealed in Exod 3:14. The Greek phrase used here, egō eimi, could be literally rendered as ‘I am,’ leaving off the additional pronoun often used in translation (‘he’). The miraculous nature of this event and the confession in Matt 14:33 seem to favor the interpretation that Jesus is equating Himself with Yahweh.”

“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. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

- Peter responded to Jesus with a challenge. Peter told Jesus that if it was He, for Jesus to then call him out on the water. Jesus called Peter, and Peter obediently walked on water. However, when Peter looked at the wind (and its effects), he began to sink and doubt. In his doubt, he cried out to Jesus, who saved him.
 - The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains, “Peter’s protasis (‘if it’s you’) is a real condition, almost ‘since it’s you.’ The request is bold, but the disciples had been trained for some time and given power to do exactly the sort of miracles Jesus was doing (10:1). What is more natural than for a fisherman who knew and respected the dangers of the Sea of Galilee to want to follow Jesus in this new demonstration of supernatural power?”
- The Expositor’s Bible Commentary gives insight into what goes wrong for Peter when he began to sink, “His outlook changed: when he saw the wind (synecdoche for the storm), he began to sink (v. 30). It was not that he lost faith in himself (so Schniewind), but that his faith in Jesus, strong enough to get him out of the boat and walking on the water, was not strong enough to stand up to the storm. Therefore, Jesus calls him a man ‘of little faith’ and his rhetorical question — ‘Why did you doubt?’ — helps both Peter and the reader recognize that doubts and fears quickly disappear before a strict inquiry into their cause.”

“You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” 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 challenged Peter’s faith and wondered why he doubted. They climbed into the boat, and instantly, the wind and waves died down. The other disciples worshiped and proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God. This miracle helped to confirm their understanding of who Jesus is.
- Part of the reason this miracle confirms the deity of Jesus is that it reveals His mastery over the wind and sea, which is something the Lord alone had mastery over. Biblical Scholar James Boice explains, “When Jesus came walking on the water, he was filling a role that in the Old Testament was reserved for God alone. An example is Job 9:8, which says, [God] alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.”