

Introduction: Our current morning sermon series follows Jesus in what scholars call His ‘retirement ministry’, as He withdraws into solitary places in order to get away from His persecutors and to have opportunity to personally instruct His disciples. There are at least four of these ‘retirement’ or ‘withdrawal’ periods to note in the Gospels: where Jesus removes Himself and His disciples into Gentile areas, away from the riotous zeal of the Galileans who wanted to proclaim Him their king and carnal Messiah (John 6:15). Yet often, these ‘quiet places’ are full of their own challenges and dangers. You will find the apostles following their Lord into dangers from hunger in the desert and storms on the sea. We will soon turn in our notes to Christ’s amazing feeding of the multitudes in Matthew 15:32-39. But for this week’s notes, we go back to an earlier ‘wilderness miracle’ where Jesus walks on the water. Having dismissed the crowds who wanted to seize Him and make Him king in Matthew 14:22, we will see Jesus’ *timely rescue* of the lives of His terrified disciples on the water.

Mon/Tues: read Matthew 14:22-33. Though it is at first perplexing to see Jesus leave His disciples alone to face a new storm in their boat in Matthew 14:22-24, we understand why He does this when we realize that it was His *prayers* which filled His absence. Christ’s intercession in Matthew 14:23 is the most effective and spiritually supportive activity which He could use on His disciples’ behalf during that stormy night. After all, it is clearly not Jesus’ physical presence which is essential to either the 12’s salvation or ours. (Otherwise, we would be most dangerously exposed as His church on earth – given His departure from earth and ascension to God’s right hand.) No! It is “for our good” (John 16:7), that Jesus removed His physical presence in order to intercede in Heaven for us. His access to the Father on our behalf is the *key* to our safety and endurance – just as the disciples were absolutely safe on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee as Jesus prayed for them on the mountain and then on the beach.

Meditate and Pray: Let us consider these great statements which proclaim so victoriously how powerful Christ’s intercessions are on our behalf, sending us all that we need – beginning with His Holy Spirit:

- 1) Jesus intercedes for us by asking the Father to send the **Holy Spirit** in all His blessed effects on believers: “He lives forever to send the Holy Spirit unto his disciples. Without this constant effect of the present mediatory life of Christ the being of the church would fail, it could not subsist one moment. For hereon depends, 1. All saving light to understand the word of God... 2. All habitual grace, whereby the souls of the elect are quickened and regenerated; 3. All supplies of actual grace; which the whole church hath from him every moment, and without which it could yield no obedience unto God; 4. All spiritual gifts... 5. All comfort and consolation...” (John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. V, p. 536).
- 2) Jesus intercedes for us in our **sufferings**: “The Father always hears him; and we have not a deliverance from trouble, a recovering of health, ease of pain, freedom from any evil that ever laid hold upon us, but it is given us on the intercession of Jesus Christ” (John Owen, *Works*, Vol. 2 p. 145).

- 3) In respect of our continual need for **access** that we can never merit or maintain in our own strength: “Are not the saints on earth, being sinful, unfit to come into the presence of the King? Yes; but the glorious Advocate introduces them, procuring them access by His interest in the court; ‘For through him we have an access, by one Spirit, unto the Father’ (Ephesians 2:18).” (Fisher’s commentary on the Westminster Shorter Cat. Q & A 59).

Wednesday: read Matthew 14:24-25. Jesus does not only intercede for us in our trials on the storm tossed seas of our lives. At just the right time, He comes to us. Even though we may be exhausted in our efforts of self-preservation, like the disciples rowing all night long, Christ’s appearance is always timed for the moment when our faith will most benefit from His arrival. For example, Matthew 14:25 tells us that Jesus appeared at, “the fourth watch of the night”, which means the dawn watch (3 am – 6 am) – the same time at which the Lord came down in redeeming power to deliver Israel in the Red Sea from the chariots of the Egyptians (Exodus 14:24-25! Jesus is never haphazard in His redemptive work in our lives! Every step of our salvation is timed by His fulfillment of the Old Testament story!

Meditate and Pray: *“Lord, when the powers of sin, Satan and this hostile world threaten to catch up with us and run us over, please look down upon us in our plight and cause our enemies to be confused before your glorious face. May the face of the Lamb look down to care for us at the very same time that His face confuses our foes. Please come to us when circumstances are at their darkest, to teach us that the dawn of your coming is **always nigh** when things are at their darkest.” Amen.*

Thursday: read Matthew 14:25-27. It is amazing that the 12 are so easily panicked – as if Jesus would have forsaken and forgotten them. They assume that His appearance is actually only a ghost coming to them on the water! William Harrell writes insightfully about this trait of cynicism towards Jesus which we share with the 12:

“But why are we so quick to expect evil rather than good in our lives? The Son of God draws near in the storm, demonstrating that nothing can separate us from Him and His loving power. But we are prone to misunderstand His coming, expecting something worse than the storms we are battling. As Mt. 14:26 puts it: “They thought in their terror that Jesus was a ghost”. However, though His ways can and do frighten us, Jesus does not capitulate to our fears by staying away from us. He continues to draw near, revealing Himself to us and vanquishing our fears. Grace teaches us to expect His coming to us with such loving power, to replace our fears with His peace”.

Fri/Sat/Sun: read Matthew 14:28-31. From one extreme to the other, we see the disciples, (represented in these verses by their leader Peter), go from panic at Jesus’ “ghost” to an impetuous request to walk on the water! Notice the way Peter expresses his desire to walk on the water, and notice how wisely Jesus responds to his rash request: Peter says: “Tell ME to come TO you.” But Jesus refuses to answer Peter on his own terms. Jesus’ words are of a bare permission: “Come” is all that He says. He does not promise Peter the success on the water which Peter craves. Why is this important? Because through Peter’s failure, Jesus shows that He

alone can walk on the waters. Jesus' words prove that mere human courage is unable to stand up to the storm.

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God that the Gospel is about Jesus coming *to us* in the storms of life – not about our self-efforts to reach Him! He comes to us when we *can't* reach Him! He never allows us to drift in our sinking failures out of arm's reach! Sing about Christ's Lordship over the storm and His refusal to let us think we in our own courage can face the waves of life., using the words of hymn # 601:

*Jesus, Savior, pilot me
Over life's tempestuous sea;
Unknown waves before me roll,
Hiding rock and treacherous shoal.
Chart and compass come from Thee;
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.*

*Though the sea be smooth and bright,
Sparkling with the stars of night,
And my ship's path be ablaze
With the light of halcyon days,
Still I know my need of Thee;
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.*

*As a mother stills her child,
Thou canst hush the ocean wild;
Boisterous waves obey Thy will,
When Thou sayest to them, Be still!
Wondrous sovereign of the sea,
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.*

*While th'apostles' fragile bark
Struggled with the billows dark,
On the stormy Galilee,
Thou didst walk upon the sea;
And when they beheld Thy form,
Safe they glided through the storm.*

*When the darkling heavens frown,
And the wrathful winds come down,
And the fierce waves, tossed on high,
Lash themselves against the sky,
Jesus, Savior, pilot me,
Over life's tempestuous sea.*

*When at last I near the shore,
And the fearful breakers roar
'Twixt me and the peaceful rest,
Then, while leaning on Thy breast,
May I hear Thee say to me,
Fear not, I will pilot thee.*