

Unsinkable – Seeing Jesus

9/19/21

Matthew 14:23-33

Sunday AM

Good AM. I hope you've had a blessed week. Let me begin by saying thank you for your kindness and generosity to my family as we celebrated 10 yrs. Last Sunday was more than we could've ever imagined. Thank you again for making ministry a joy. We love you and we're grateful for your love for us.

If you have your Bible, I want you to turn w/ me to Matthew 14. Today I want to begin a series entitled, ***Unsinkable***, based on one of the most astounding miracles in Scripture – *the time Peter walked on water*.

When I think of the term ***unsinkable***, my mind turns to April 14, 1912 – when an ***unsinkable*** ocean-liner carrying 2,224 passengers struck an iceberg in the icy waters in the north Atlantic. W/in 2½ hrs, the ship that couldn't be sunk went down and 1,514 souls perished. Prior to her maiden voyage, Phillip Franklin, VP of White Star Lines proudly said, *“There's no danger the Titanic will sink. The boat is unsinkable – and nothing but inconvenience will be suffered by her passengers.”*

Talk about infamous last words – Yet truth is, few if any of us will make it thru life w/out experiencing a moment of sinking. It might occur in our career, our marriage – or in a friendship. It might be in regard to our health. The question is – ***how do we keep our heads above the waterline when life begins to sink?***

Over the next few weeks, I hope to offer some practical advice from this remarkable story to help all of us to *live above the waterline* w/ an unsinkable faith.

The word ***unsinkable*** is an adjective that describes *something that's incapable of being sunk*. **Profound** – I know. Yet sadly, too many people have been so tossed by the storms of life that their lives, and their faith, are seemingly shipwrecked or going under.

Just over this last yr/half, I've seen/heard of people throwing in the towel of faith due to their struggle w/ Covid or in trying to deal w/ the frustrations w/in our nation. In all of the calamity/craziness, far too many people have been so sunk that they've turned away from God unto a way that seems right to themselves.

But *what if* God had something else in mind for us? *What if* our storms were being allowed for a higher purpose? *What if* our storms were intended to build our faith rather than sink our lives? *What if* God's real objective is to help us to see Him for who He really is?

Isn't this the message of James – *Consider it pure, untainted joy whenever you experience trials and challenges of many kinds b/c you know the testing of your faith will bring you under and in alignment w/ God – and His purposes for your life. And even in the midst of these difficulties, call out to Him for direction, protection, and help, and w/out hesitation, He will give you everything you need to see you thru.* James 1:2-5

Such was the case that incredible evening on the Sea of Galilee when Peter climbed over the side and into the storm to walk on water. Listen to **Matthew 14**:

While Jesus dismissed the crowd, He made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side. 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 b/c the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. They cried out in fear, “It's a ghost.” Then Jesus said, “Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.” Peter replied, “Lord, if it's you, command me to come to You on the water.” Jesus said, “Come.” Then Peter got 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. Then Jesus said, "You of little faith, 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." Matthew 14:23-33

Before we jump into the story, let me set the stage b/c what happens leading up to this event is uniquely tied to Jesus walking on the water.

Recap – Jesus and the 12, had just endured possibly the longest, most exhausting/exhilarating day of ministry. It began w/ the news of the death of John the Baptist and continued w/ Jesus ministering to a large crowd before ending w/ the feeding of the 5,000.

What might surprise you about this event is that it's inseparably linked to several previous events – the 12 going out in pairs/the feeding of the 5k. In fact, you can't appreciate one w/out the other. Why? B/c they were all one lesson – ***Jesus was trying to get the 12 to see Him for who He was and not for who they wanted Him to be.*** See – the feeding of the 5k was never intended to be a catered fish fry, but a final exam. After going out on their own in Jesus' name performing miracles, the 12 returned to face their greatest test – feeding 5k+ people w/ only 5 bagels and 2 sardines. Well, as we'll see, they failed the exam – so Jesus put them on the Sea of Galilee for a make-up exam.

*Later that night, Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars, b/c the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn He went out to them, walking on the lake. **He was about to pass by them**, but when they saw Him walking on the lake, they thought He was a ghost. They cried out, b/c they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately He spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Then He climbed into the boat w/ them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, **for they had not understood about the loaves**; b/c their hearts were hardened.*

Here's where it gets fun. What does the statement – *for they had not understood about the loaves* – have to do w/ Jesus walking on water? To appreciate this statement, we have to understand Jesus' intent for the feeding of the 5,000. Turn w/ me to John 6.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip replied, "It'd take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Andrew spoke up, "Here is a boy w/ five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about 5,000 men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same w/ the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So, they gathered them and filled twelve baskets w/ the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. John 6:5-13

Remember – everything Jesus did thru-out His earthly ministry, whether it was a teaching/miracle, was always for the sake of teaching the disciples to know Him, trust Him, and follow Him, so that they might carry out His commission upon His departure.

If you recall, the 12 had just returned from their missionary outings – Jesus had sent them out in pairs, but now He was going to show them the bigger picture. So, He offered them an impossible task that only He could solve. Note Phillip's response – *it'd take a ½ yrs wages just to give everyone a bite* – much less fill their stomachs. So, Jesus took a boy's lunch, and He fed 20k+ people w/ leftovers.

Here's the best part – how many baskets were filled to overflowing? **12!** Why? How many disciples were there? **12!** I believe Jesus intentionally gave each disciple a basket full to prove Himself to them – after all, they each were literally holding the miracle of God in their hands. **WHY?** So, they'd see Jesus for who He really was – the Great I am and the manna of God.

But they missed it! *They had not understood the loaves* b/c they too got swept up in the mob mentality, and instead of seeing Jesus as God in the flesh and their Lord/Savior, they saw Him as the crowd saw Him – as a prophet/king who'd come to rescue them from Rome. So, when the 12 missed seeing Him, Jesus put them on the Sea of Galilee to finish the lesson.

I think too often, we can miss who God is and what He is up to in our lives, b/c of our faulty preconceived ideas/expectations. So, God has to move us from a miraculous blessing into an orchestrated storm so that He can reveal Himself to us for who He really is and not just for what we think He can do for us.

But there's more to the story if we're going to see Jesus for who He really is. **BTW** – this might be a good place to mention that there are **(2) kinds of storms**. Storms God authors which are the result of our obedience; and storms which occur as a result of our defiance/disobedience that we bring on ourselves. The first God *authors* to accomplish His will in/thru us that we might thrive in our walk w/ Him; while the other are situations God allows to discipline us to turn our hearts to Him. ***This is a storm of obedience.***

Jesus sent the 12 out onto the Sea of Galilee. Evidently, when they pushed off, it was going to be nothing but smooth sailing, yet shortly after they began their journey, the winds picked up, and suddenly, what should've been a brief cruise had turned into a nightmare. All night, the 12 rowed against the wind and had now found themselves off-course in the middle of the sea taking on water and fearing for their lives. Then, **Jesus shows up.**

There are a number of lessons to note. First, in the midst of their storm, the 12 missed Jesus. Each of the Gospel accounts say that they thought He was a ghost. But honestly, who else would it have been? Still, the truth is, more times than not, when we're in the middle of our storms, tormented by *doubt, disappointment, despair, and destruction*, we too can times have difficulty recognizing the presence of Jesus.

Can I tell you what I think happened? B/c many of the 12 were trained fisherman, I think they thought, "This is no big deal, we can handle this storm in our own ability/ingenuity! This isn't our first squall!" But as the storm grew bigger – they soon found themselves in a helpless situation. That is until Jesus showed up.

And we often do the same. I can handle this situation – I have the skill/ability to do this w/out God's help.

And like the disciples, we seemingly wait until it's too late and then wonder why God did show to intervene on our behalf – and of course, we get mad at God.

Yet like w/ the 12, God was present – only He didn't show up as they might've expected. *Sound familiar?* I think we often miss how God uses storms as a passage-way into our lives to help us to see Him more clearly for who He really is. Yet if we're not looking for Him, we're likely to miss Him – although He's present.

I would rather be in the midst of the storm w/ Jesus than in the calm waters w/out Him. B/c it is better to have Christ in a crisis than to have life-as-usual w/out His presence. *Jerry Vines*

WTM – let me assure you of something – God never wastes a chance to reveal Himself in our lives. Jesus is never not up to something – He's always up to good in us and thru us for His glory. Calling us to someone and something greater than ourselves.

This is where an interesting phrase in Mark's version of the story comes into play– *He was about to pass them by?* Isn't that a curious statement? To what is Mark referring?

The Greek verb here (*parerchomai*) is used in the Greek translation of the O.T. as a technical term to refer to a *theophany*. A theophany is an O.T. visible manifestation of God – it's when the pre-incarnate Jesus makes an O.T. appearance – like when Jesus showed up in the fiery furnace w/ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Or when God put Moses in the cleft of the rock so that he could see God's glory pass by; or when God told Elijah to stand on the mountain to watch the Lord to pass by.

The pattern is clear – In each case, God passed by to get the attention of His servants so they might see Him for who He really is and respond to His calling upon their lives.

Thus, when Jesus came to His disciples on the water *intending to pass them by*, He was revealing His true identity to them. He was helping them to move beyond seeing Him as the crowd was seeing Him as their deliverer from Rome. He was helping them to see Him as God in the flesh – as Messiah, Savior, and Lord. And they did – Look at Matthew 14:33 – *Surely you are the Son of God!*

DMT – b/c I believe a case could be made that this was the defining moment of salvation for 11 of the 12 disciples. In this event, it finally clicked, and they saw Jesus as their Savior/Lord – *you ARE the Son of God.*

Faith – true life-changing faith – begins w/ seeing God for who He really is and not for what we want Him to be or do for you. This is a significant truth to grasp.

True salvation can never be discovered so long as we come to Jesus on our terms instead of on His terms. After all, if I put my faith in what is false – what good is such kind of belief? See – True fellowship and dependence on God will never happen so long as we prefer our view of Jesus over the reality of who He is.

So, instead of fighting the storms of life, start looking for God in the midst of them – I promise, He is present, and He's wanting you to see Him in the midst of them.

Let me offer a few takeaways/next steps for us today.

TAKEAWAYS

Faith begins w/ seeing Jesus for who He really is and not for who I want or think He should be in my life.

To see Jesus for who He really is founded/discovered in Scripture, not in the opinions and ideas of people.

We can take great solace in knowing we will never find ourselves in a storm outside of the guiding, loving hand of God. He promises He will always be present.

NEXT STEPS

- 1 Take time this week to re-read each of the Gospel accounts of the feeding of the 5,000 and the moment when Jesus walked on water.
- 2 Either in your devotional time or as a family altar, read Matthew 14:13-36 and discuss the following GROW questions.
 - G** – What are some preconceived ideas or manmade statements you've heard about God?
 - R** – When have you ever missed God because of a faulty, preconceived idea or belief you held?
 - Q** – Why is seeing Jesus for who He really is so important to our faith and to our daily pursuit and fellowship of Jesus?
 - W** – What can you do today to address and eliminate any faulty ideas and beliefs about God you might still have in your life?
- 3 Take time this week to share w/ someone what God is teaching you about seeing God for who He is.