

Jesus Did Not Take His Eyes Off Peter

Based on Matthew 14:22-33

"Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him." — Matthew 14:31

SERMON SUMMARY

This sermon began by acknowledging that the story of Jesus walking on water is one of the most familiar passages in all of Scripture. We know the story. We know the application: if you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat. Step out in faith. Do something bigger than you could accomplish without God.

But the sermon gently pushed back: what if there is more here than we have been taught to see? What if the familiar application actually misses the heart of what Matthew is showing us? And what if that familiar application — step out in faith, be like Peter — is not only incomplete, but actually sets us up for discouragement when storms hit and we cannot get off the sidewalk, let alone walk on water?

The Context: Two Storms

The story does not begin on the lake. It begins earlier in Matthew 14, with the death of John the Baptist — Jesus' cousin, beheaded by Herod. When Jesus hears the news, he tries to withdraw privately to grieve and pray. But the crowds find him. He feeds 5,000 men (plus women and children) with five loaves and two fish — the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels — and then, when the crowd tries to make him king by force, he acts quickly.

He makes his disciples get into the boat — the word "made" is significant — and dismisses the crowd. He is protecting them from being swept up in a political moment they do not yet understand. The disciples do not run into the storm by accident or disobedience. They run into it because they have a divine appointment on the lake. Then Jesus finally climbs the mountain alone to pray and grieve.

So our story begins with two storms in parallel: Jesus on the mountain, grieving the death of his cousin, with a storm inside. His disciples on the lake, tormented by the waves, with a storm outside.

Matthew 14:23-24 "After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it."

The Encounter: "I Am" on the Water

Between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning — the dead of night, the fourth watch — Jesus walks out to them on the water. The disciples see him and are terrified. They think it is a ghost.

The sermon noted something crucial about this moment. In the Old Testament, four men did miracles on water — Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha. All four of them parted water. None of them walked on it. Only one being in all of Scripture walks on water: God himself.

- Job 9:8 — "God alone treads on the waves of the sea."
- Psalm 77:19 — "Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen."
- Isaiah 43:16 — "He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters."

When Jesus says "It is I — don't be afraid," the Greek is simply *ego eimi*: I am. This is the name God gave himself at the burning bush. Jesus is not merely identifying himself so the disciples won't panic. He is revealing who he is. The one walking toward them in the dark on the water is the Lord of creation himself.

Isaiah 43:1-3 "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you."

The Familiar Application — and Its Problem

Peter's request is extraordinary. "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus says, "Come." And Peter walks on water. One small step for a fisherman; one giant leap for faith.

The familiar sermon is clear: Peter represents risk-taking faith. The eleven who stayed in the boat represent fear. The application is: what is your boat? What are you clinging to for safety instead of stepping out in faith? Get out of the boat and do something only possible with God.

The sermon honored this reading — it is real, it is true, and it has inspired many. But it also named an honest problem: Peter stepped out of the boat. And then he sank. He failed. And a sermon that says "be like Peter" without accounting for the sinking is not fully honest — and not fully gospel. As the sermon put it directly: telling someone to step out in faith and walk on water when they can barely walk on the sidewalk is not good news. It is another burden.

The Deeper Truth: Jesus Never Takes His Eyes Off Peter

The sermon's pivot came here — and it is the heart of the passage. When Peter sees the wind, he is afraid and begins to sink. He cries out, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus reaches out his hand and catches him.

The real moral of the story is not that Peter failed because he took his eyes off Jesus. It is that Peter's failure did not matter — because Jesus never took his eyes off Peter.

Peter's faith was strong enough to get him out of the boat. It was not strong enough to stand up to the storm. And it didn't need to be. Because the one he was walking toward was already reaching for him before he finished sinking.

Matthew 14:30-31 "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."

And then the sermon widened the frame: Jesus doesn't only save Peter outside the boat. He gets back into the boat, and the wind dies down, and he saves the eleven who never stepped out at all. The text says "those in the boat" worshiped him. Jesus saved all of them — the one walking on the water, the ones huddled in fear, and the one sinking in the waves.

It does not ultimately matter where you are in relation to the boat. What matters is where you are in relation to Jesus. He is mighty to save — whether you are walking on the water, trembling in the boat, or going under.

What This Passage Is Actually About

The sermon closed with two grounding truths.

1. Where to look — not at ourselves, not at our bravery, not at the storm, but at Jesus. The call of this passage is not primarily a call to courageous action. It is a call to focused trust. "I am" — the God who walks on water, who made a way through the sea, who summons us by name — is the one calling to us in the dark.
2. Where to put our trust — not in our faith or our bravery, but in him. Our trust is not in the quality of our step out of the boat. It is in the one who reaches out his hand before we finish sinking. No matter where we are — walking, trembling, or drowning — Jesus saves.

Key Takeaway

This passage is not primarily about the size of our faith or the courage of our steps. It is about the identity of Jesus and the reach of his hand. Peter's failure did not matter — because Jesus did not take his eyes off Peter. Whatever storm you are in, whatever boat you are clinging to, whatever wave is pulling you under — he has not taken his eyes off you either.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Take your time. Listen well to each other. There are no wrong answers — only honest ones.

1

The sermon acknowledged that the familiar application of this story — "get out of the boat, step out in faith" — is real and has inspired many people. Has it ever inspired you? Has it ever discouraged you? What's your honest relationship with that framing?

2

Jesus sends his disciples into a storm deliberately — they have a divine appointment on the lake. How does it change the way you process a storm in your own life to consider that God may have sent you into it intentionally?

3

The sermon pointed to Job 9, Psalm 77, and Isaiah 43 — showing that walking on water is something only God does in Scripture. When Jesus says "I am," he is using the divine name. What does it mean for your trust in him that the one walking toward you in the dark is not a moral example but the Lord of creation?

4

The sermon named a problem with "be like Peter" sermons honestly: Peter stepped out and sank. And sometimes just getting through a hard day is hard enough. What storms in your life right now make the call to "walk on water" feel less like good news and more like pressure?

5

"The lesson is not that Peter failed because he took his eyes off Jesus. The lesson is that Peter's failure did not matter because Jesus did not take his eyes off Peter." How does that reframing land for you? Does it feel like relief, or does it feel too easy? Why?

6

Jesus saves both Peter outside the boat and the eleven still inside it. The sermon said: it doesn't matter where you are in relation to the boat — it matters where you are in relation to Jesus. Where are you right now — walking, trembling, or sinking? What does it mean that Jesus saves all of them?

7

The sermon ended with a man who had just received frightening medical news and still spoke with peace and assurance — not because his storm had calmed, but because he knew a Savior who was with him. What would that kind of peace look like for you in the storm you are currently in?

LIVING IT OUT

The call of this passage is not to manufacture courage. It is to fix our eyes on the one who is already fixing his eyes on us.

In Your Inner Life

- Read Matthew 14:22-33 this week alongside Isaiah 43:1-5. Let Isaiah interpret the walking-on-water scene: the same God who says "when you pass through the waters, I will be with you" is the one walking across the lake in the dark. Let those two passages form a single image of who Jesus is.
- Sit with the question the sermon asked: What is your boat? What are you clinging to for safety that is not Jesus — a job, a reputation, a relationship, a plan, a sense of control? Name it honestly. You don't have to abandon it. Just notice what you are holding most tightly when the storm rises.
- The sermon said our trust is not in our faith, but in the object of our faith. This week, when fear or anxiety rises, practice redirecting: not "I need to have more faith" but "he has not taken his eyes off me." Say it out loud if you need to.

In Your Closest Relationships

- The sermon began with Jesus grieving — he had just lost his cousin John and had not yet had time to pray or mourn before the crowd found him. He carried an inner storm even as he walked into the outer one. Is there someone close to you who is carrying an interior storm that no one is acknowledging? Be the person who asks about it this week.
- Think of someone in your life who is in a storm right now. Don't offer a solution or a call to be brave. Simply show up and remind them, in your own words, that Jesus has not taken his eyes off them. That is the message of this passage. Carry it to someone who needs it.
- The eleven disciples in the boat were not praised for their faith and not condemned for their fear. They were simply saved. Is there someone in your life who feels like they are failing the faith test — not stepping out boldly enough, not trusting big enough? Share this sermon's reframe with them this week.

In Your Daily Life and Work

- The disciples were sent into the storm by Jesus, not by accident or their own choices. When circumstances feel chaotic or hard this week, ask: is it possible I have a divine appointment here? What might God be doing in this storm that I cannot yet see?
- Peter's greatest moment in this story is not walking on water. It is crying out, "Lord, save me!" — honest, immediate, unashamed dependence. Practice that prayer this week in whatever form your storm takes. Short, honest, urgent. He answers immediately.
- The sermon mentioned *ego eimi* — "I am" — the divine name Jesus uses. This week, when you read or pray through the seven "I am" statements in John's Gospel (I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, etc.), hear them as the same voice speaking in the storm: it is I, the Lord. Don't be afraid.

In Your Faith Community

- The sermon was delivered to a combined gathering of two congregations alongside a group of young women studying this passage all year. Think about someone younger in your congregation or community who is in a season of storms and self-doubt. Find a way to speak this specific truth to them this week: Jesus has not taken his eyes off you.
- The man the sermon described — who had just received frightening medical news and still spoke of peace — did not have a calm storm. He had a present Savior. If there is someone in your church facing illness, loss, or fear right now, visit them this week. Not with answers. With presence and prayer.
- In worship this week, pay attention to the moments when the congregation cries out together — in confession, in lament, in the prayers of the people. These are the moments of "Lord, save me" in community. Don't rush past them. Let them be honest.

A Word to Carry

You will not always be able to walk on water. Sometimes you will barely manage the sidewalk. On those days, remember: the question is not whether your faith is strong enough to stay above the waves. The question is whether you will cry out "Lord, save me" — and he will reach out his hand immediately. He has not taken his eyes off you.

SERVICE CHALLENGE

Jesus saves the one walking on the water, the ones huddled in the boat, and the one sinking in the waves. This week, go to someone who is sinking.

This Week's Challenge: Reach Out Your Hand

Jesus reached out immediately when Peter cried out. This week, be that reach for someone who is going under.

Step 1 — Name Someone in a Storm.

Think of one person in your life who is currently in a storm — illness, grief, fear, loss of work, a hard season in a relationship, a crisis of faith. It doesn't matter whether they are walking, trembling, or sinking. Write their name down.

Step 2 — Reach Out Immediately.

Contact them this week — in person, by phone, by note. Don't wait. The text says Jesus reached out his hand "immediately." The speed of the response is part of the message. Don't overthink what to say. Just go.

Step 3 — Speak the Truth of the Passage.

At some point in the conversation, share what this sermon said in your own words: Jesus has not taken his eyes off you. You don't have to perform a better faith than you have. He saves the ones in the water and the ones in the boat.

Step 4 — Pray Together.

Before you end the conversation, pray for them out loud — briefly, honestly, specifically. Let your prayer be the equivalent of Peter's cry: "Lord, save them." It doesn't need to be long. It needs to be real.

Step 5 — Come Back and Share.

If you're in a small group or Sunday school class, come ready to share briefly what happened. We are practicing together what it looks like to be the reach of Jesus' hand in each other's storms.

Optional Extended Challenge

- Read Isaiah 43:1-7 slowly this week as a personal prayer. Substitute your own name in verse 1: "I have summoned [your name] by name; you are mine." Let the passage be not just theology but a word spoken directly to you.
- Look up Amy Carmichael's story — the young Irish woman mentioned in the sermon who spent 55 years in India serving girls rescued from temple prostitution. Read one chapter of her biography or a few pages of her writing. Let her life be an example not of heroic self-confidence but of sustained, daily trust in a God who never looked away.
- If someone in your life is facing illness or frightening medical news, consider visiting them this week with the specific posture the sermon described: not offering answers, but embodying the peace of someone who knows a Savior who is present in the storm.

Closing Prayer Guide

Whether you're using this in a group or on your own, close by praying through these four things:

- Give thanks — that Jesus is the one who walks on the water, who speaks "I am" in the dark, and who reaches out his hand immediately when we cry out — whether we are walking, trembling, or sinking.
- Confess honestly — the boats we are clinging to, the fears we are managing on our own, and the times we have cried "Lord, save me" with doubt rather than trust.
- Ask for eyes fixed on Jesus — not on the storm, not on our own courage or lack of it, but on the one who has not taken his eyes off us since before we were born.
- Pray by name — for the person you named in the service challenge. Ask Jesus to reach out his hand to them this week, and ask for the grace to be the way that happens.

"The lesson is not that Peter failed because he took his eyes off Jesus. The lesson is that Peter's failure did not matter — because Jesus did not take his eyes off Peter."

— From This Week's Sermon