



Peter Walked on the Water: A Picture of God's Grace

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Introduction:

We all know we are supposed to say that God's grace is amazing, marvelous, wonderful. That's what the songs tell us. And yet, I wonder when someone will write a song discussing how confusing it is. It must be confusing because I hear all kinds of different thoughts about grace. Many false doctrines circle around God's grace. And a whole lot of questions. That is especially true when we strive to recognize we are saved by grace (**Ephesians 2:8-10**) and yet if we do not obey God, we are not saved (**II Thessalonians 1:8**). To help clarify, I'd like for us to get a picture of God's grace set firmly in our minds. We can find it in the well-known story of Peter walking on the water in **Matthew 14:28-31**. Certainly, every illustration falls short in some areas. If they didn't, they wouldn't be illustrations; they would be the exact same thing. But I believe this can give us a clear picture of God's grace to help us serve the Lord. Let's examine what occurred there step by step and relate it to our own walk with God. We know that Jesus had sent the disciples ahead of Him across the sea as He stayed behind to pray. The disciples were plagued with wind and waves and were not able to easily get across to the other side. After hours of straining against the sea, they saw something. It was Jesus walking on the water. At first they feared it was a ghost, but Jesus let them know it was Him, trying to set their minds at ease. We pick up our story here.

Discussion:

I. Jesus commanded

- A. I don't know what made Peter do it, but he asked if this was really Jesus for Him to "command" him to walk on the water (**Matthew 14:28**). I want to highlight that word—command. When Jesus said "come," this wasn't a suggestion, a request, a possibility; it was an order, a command, a law.
- B. This is the first place of confusion when we picture God's grace. Sadly, when anyone starts talking about grace, we begin to fear that they are forgetting God's law. Too often, we see grace as nothing more than the ignoring or overlooking of sin. Therefore, when someone talks about grace, we fear that they are telling everyone they can sin as much as they want because God will simply ignore it. That however is not the case.
- C. God has given commands. God does have a law. And it does matter. Just as Jesus commanded Peter to "come," God has commanded us to submit to His law. Paul admitted we are under the law of Christ in **I Corinthians 9:21**. Further, we know what sin is. Sin is lawlessness (**I John 3:4**). If there were no law or if God's law didn't matter, then there would be no sin. If there were no sin, there would be no need for grace. Therefore, the mere fact that we claim we need grace is a claim that God's law matters. Jesus commanded Peter. God has commanded us and His commands matter.

II. Peter chose

- A. Peter has really stuck his foot in it now. I don't know why he set this in motion, but now he is put to the test. Jesus has given him a command to get out of the boat in the middle of the wind-driven sea. Jesus hasn't forced Peter to get out. Jesus didn't grab Peter and throw him out. He simply commanded it, and now Peter has to choose. And in **Matthew 14:29**, Peter chose to get out of the boat. That was Peter's choice. Jesus didn't choose for him. Peter didn't get out because Jesus had primordially foreordained Peter to get out of the boat. Peter chose.
- B. This is another place of confusion about God's grace. Some fear that anyone who talks about grace is in danger of removing the personal responsibility of man. No doubt, there are some Calvinistic teachers who do exactly that. But not everyone who teaches God's grace says so, and the Bible certainly does not teach that. Peter chose to get out of the boat.
- C. In just the same way, God has commanded us, and it is our choice whether or not we follow what He says. It is our choice to get out of the boat, if you will, and walk to and with God. Thus, in **Romans 6:17**, Paul says, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed" (ESV). It stems from our heart, our choice. And where did this choice stem from? Peter's faith. Though it is not expressly stated, it is demonstrated. Why did Peter get out of the boat? Because he had faith in Jesus to empower him to walk on the water. And thus Paul teaches us in **Romans 5:2** it is faith that gives us access to God's grace. And be clear that this faith is far more than just a mental assent. This faith was not merely Peter agreeing mentally that Jesus could empow-

er him to walk on the water. This was Peter trusting Jesus and therefore stepping out of the boat. As we have learned in the past, the only faith that works is a faith that actually works (**James 2:17-18**).

III. Peter walked by Jesus' grace

- A. Perhaps the most amazing statement in this whole story is in **Matthew 14:29**, "So Peter...walked on the water and came to Jesus" (ESV). It isn't really so amazing that Jesus walked on the water. He's God in the flesh. He has inherent power. But Peter? That is amazing. Because his faith led him to obey the command of Jesus, He accessed the grace of Jesus and was able to walk on the water. Far too often we jump ahead to Peter's sinking. But stop for a moment and be amazed that Peter did walk on the water.
- B. But let me ask you. Do you for a moment think that Peter walked on the water because of his own ability to obey Jesus' command to walk on water? Do you for a moment think this is about how awesome and powerful Peter was? When this was all said and done, would Peter be able to glory in himself that he walked on the water? Of course not. This was the grace of Jesus in His life. He was not powerful enough to walk on water. He was not strong enough to obey Jesus' command. But by faith in Jesus, he stepped out of the boat and gained access to the grace of Jesus that empowered him to walk on the water.
- C. And that is exactly what we need to grasp about God's grace in our lives. This is where the illustration breaks down a little. Peter was not able to walk on the water, because based on the way God has created the world, it is impossible for a man to walk on water. It defies the laws of nature. However, inability to keep God's commands stems from a different place. It is not a natural or spiritual law that we cannot obey God's commands. Rather, it is simply true that we have not. **Romans 3:23** says we have all sinned. That was our choice too. However, **Romans 6:16** explains the terrible consequence of that choice. When we submit to sin to obey it, we become its slave. It becomes our master. **Romans 7:14-24** demonstrates this consequence more clearly. Having submitted to sin, it has destroyed us and, even worse, dominated us. Despite our desire to do God's will, we have allowed sin in and we cannot overcome it.
- D. Therefore, we are now like Peter. He could not walk on the water apart from the grace of Jesus. In like manner, we cannot walk with God, apart from the grace of God. Thus, when Paul expressed his despair, he knew there was an answer. **Romans 7:25** says, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" God can deliver us from our inability to walk with Him, just as Jesus delivered Peter from his inability to walk on the water.
- E. And that is the picture of God's grace. Grace is not God's prerogative to overlook sin; it is God's power to overcome sin. But it is not merely His power to forgive us of sin; it is His power to free us from sin. God's grace is not intended to take us to heaven while ignoring our sinfulness; it is intended to lift us up, let us walk on the water, empowering us to walk with God according to His law and will. But when we have done that are we any more able than Peter to glorify ourselves and boast in ourselves that we walked with God? No. Rather, as Paul said, "thanks be to God," (**Romans 6:17**); that is, when we are walking with God we give Him the thanks for the empowerment to do so.

IV. Peter trusted in himself

- A. There is a fly in the ointment though. Peter got distracted. Though he walked from the boat to Jesus, he started looking around at the wind; no doubt, this refers to the effects of the wind (**Matthew 14:30**). He saw the waves. He saw the boat rocking. He became afraid. He began to doubt. What did he fear? He remembered that he couldn't walk on the water. He remembered that he was doing the impossible. In the midst of this story, we see a shift. Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and put them back on himself. His trust in Jesus' power to walk him on the water was broken. He began to trust in himself, but he knew that he couldn't.
- B. This is just like us sometimes. We are walking with God, but then we look around and remember, "I can't do this." We start to focus on ourselves. We think about all the people who are against us. We think about all our cravings for sin. We think about all the pleasure of sin that we just aren't sure we can deny for much longer. Perhaps we even decide for a moment that the pathway of sin is better. We take our eyes off of Jesus. Our faith in Him to save us by His grace wavers. Thus the Hebrew writer encourages us in **Hebrews 12:1-4** to look to Jesus. Don't look at the hostility around us. Don't look at the false promises of sin. Don't look at your own weakness. Look to Jesus. He is the founder and perfecter of our faith.
- C. But too often we turn back to ourselves. We trust in ourselves and, of course, we find there is nothing there to trust in. And that leads to the next event.

V. Peter sank from Jesus' grace

- A. The faith with which Peter stepped out of the boat broke. Because he let go of his faith, Peter lost his access to the grace that kept him afloat on the water. He sank. Yes, Peter fell from grace. But notice what caused him to fall. It wasn't that he quit being on the water. It wasn't that Peter decided not to obey Jesus' command and therefore Jesus chucked him into the middle of the sea to drown. He fell from grace because he abandoned his faith in Jesus. Having abandoned His faith in Jesus, he lost contact with the one person that gave him the power to walk on the water.
- B. This is like us. Certainly, we can fall from God's grace and be severed from Christ. **Galatians 5:4** makes that abundantly clear. **II Peter 2:20-22** drives the point home even farther. If we fall from God's grace, our latter state is worse than the first. It would be better for us never to have known the grace of God than to have known it and abandoned it.
- C. But I'm not sure I've always seen what it clearly means to fall from God's grace. I've typically just seen it as moving from obedience to disobedience and that disobeying causes us to lose the grace God had bestowed on us. But there is more to it than that as seen in Peter's story on the water. If faith is the access to God's grace (**Romans 5:2**), then it is lack of faith that cuts us off from God's grace. If we abandon our faith in Jesus' power to save us, we abandon God's grace. And if God's grace is the power to walk with Him, then we lose that power, and no wonder we turn to disobedience. Thus, the fall from grace was not accomplished because we did some disobedient act. Rather, the fall from grace was accomplished because we cut off our faith, and were therefore led to disobedience.
- D. Once again, we see a difference in our illustration and our lives. Sadly, in our lives we may abandon our faith in Jesus Christ to save and yet still appear to be walking with God. Our lives may look on the outside very much the same. We may still attend the assemblies and classes of the church. We may avoid the "big sins." But we may have begun to trust in ourselves that we are righteous (cf. **Luke 18:9**). When Peter was walking on the water and abandoned his faith in Jesus, there was no ability to fake it. You just can't fake walking on water, like we can sometimes fake walking with God. His fall was immediately apparent. For us, when we abandon our faith in Jesus' power to save us, while the sinking may be immediate, it may not be apparent immediately. That is why we must take great care to examine our faith as Peter directs in **II Peter 1:5-10**. And if we see that we have cut off our faith, we need to do what Peter did.

VI. Peter turned back to Jesus

- A. Imagine yourself in Peter's shoes, out in the middle of the wind-driven waves. The boat is some distance away from you and you start to sink. What do you do? Most would start trying to swim for the boat. "Andrew, John, hand me an oar! Toss me something to hold on to!" But that is not what Peter did. He immediately recognized his problem and he immediately knew the solution. It was Jesus who had empowered him to walk on the water; it was Jesus who would save him. He cried out, "Lord, save me" (**Matthew 14:30**).
- B. The same is true for us. When by our lack of faith we have fallen from God's grace and turned back into disobedience to God's law, we must turn back to Jesus. We must cry out to Him. Like the tax collector of **Luke 18:13**, we must cry out to God for mercy and salvation. We must not think we can prove to God how good we are at walking with Him by showing Him we can do it if He'll just give us time. We must cast ourselves on His mercy. Thus John teaches us to confess our sins to God (**I John 1:9**).
- C. The problem for many is instead of turning back to God, they tend to beat themselves up. "See, I told you you couldn't walk on water. Why did you even try? You might as well just get back in the boat." I've often wondered what the other apostles were doing when all of this was happening to Peter. I can imagine what I would do. "Peter, are you crazy? Walk on water? You can't walk on water. Don't do it, Peter. Don't get out." This wouldn't have been about faith in Jesus; this would have been about stopping Peter because his faith was making my lack of faith look bad. Then when he sank, "Peter, I told you. Get back over here with us in the boat." Too many of us, when we crack and sink from God's grace, we look to all of those other voices that mocked our faith, tried to get us to stay in the boat with them, and are now trying to get us to come back. Don't follow them. They can't save you. Only Jesus can. Turn back to Him. He will save you.

VII. Jesus saved Peter

- A. What did Jesus do? Did He command Peter to swim for a while? Did He tell Peter he had to walk a little more on the water on his own for a while? No. "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him" (**Matthew 14:31**, ESV). But notice Jesus' words to Peter. "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (ESV). It wasn't, "O you of little obedience, why didn't you obey." The fact is Peter had obeyed. But neither did Jesus say, "O you of great obedience, that's why I saved you." He pointed out the root of the problem—lack of faith.

- B. This is the same for us. When we turn to God for forgiveness, He is faithful and just to forgive (**I John 1:9**). He does not make us jump through hoops to get forgiveness. He lifts us up out of the water and saves us immediately. But we need to recognize the problem. The problem is not simply an obedience problem. The problem is a faith problem. Where are we putting our faith? If we put it in ourselves, we are going to sink. If we put it in man, we are going to sink. If we take it away from Jesus and His Word, we will sink. Do not doubt. Trust in the Lord to save you and through that faith gain access to the grace of God that will lift you out of the angry waves of sin and let you walk hand in hand with God.

Conclusion:

God's grace is powerful. God's grace is wonderful. God's grace is matchless. Apart from it we cannot be saved. But that is not because it is the nudge that makes up for where our obedience lacked. That is because it is the power of God to actually obey Him. And so, I do not ask you simply to obey God so that you can be saved. Rather, I ask you to step out of the boat in faith. You make the choice. You take the step. He will give you the power to walk with Him if you simply keep your eyes focused on Him. This is why Paul says his apostleship was intended to bring about the "obedience of faith" (**Romans 1:5**). Will you step out of the boat in faith today?