

PART I

The Gospels: A Unique Time

It is fairly typical to preach and teach the Gospel events by using the experience of the disciples and others characters in the narrative to illustrate some good or bad behavior for the purpose of improving the reader's life. The disciples and other minor characters are perceived to be examples of how to do something or not do something. For instance, the lad who gave his loaves and fishes to Jesus would become a lesson on how Jesus can multiply whatever you have, thus improving your life or perhaps success in ministry. Or frequently, the healings that Jesus gives can be yours if you only have enough faith, etc. Of course, there are always those who preach that the storm that Jesus stills (Matthew 8:23-27) means that Jesus can calm the storms of your life.¹ Of course, it requires that the interpreter manipulate of the meaning of the word "storms" from the literal "storms" to a totally different meaning that makes "storms" figurative (i.e., play on words).² Of course, since it cannot be shown that the author intended the reader to understand the "storm" as figurative, it becomes the word of the interpreter and not the Word of God.³

One common story used in this way is the narrative of Peter getting out of the boat in Matthew 14:22-34. This is interpreted frequently to mean that we, as believers, should "get out of the boat." Now, no one actually advocates a literal "getting out the boat," but again the interpreter makes it a figure of speech, meaning one should be taking risks (hopefully for Jesus) or one should get out of their comfort zone (however that is defined⁴). The need for relevance to the audience drives the interpreter to change the

¹ The author has not left the reader to interpret it on his own. If one reads to the end of the story about the calming of the storms, the author gives the disciples' reaction, which was "who is this Man that even the wind and the waves obey His voice?" The

² One place this is commonly done is in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 where the "talents" are money and the word is misused to preach about one's talents or gifts. That would be like someone telling about an elephant's trunk and the interpreter changing it to be applicable to a car trunk. It's the same word, but a different meaning.

³ Refer to the author's blog for a more detailed discussion of this passage and the meaning in the context at: <http://thebiblicalstory.org/baylis/2015/01/26/storms-are-they-about-your-life-or-about-Jesus/>

⁴ These phrases are secular and take on a life of their own and have no business being related to the Biblical text, unless specific to a Biblical application. These phrases become applied only as the preacher/interpreter defines them. For instance, one's own bed or a "good night's sleep is clearly a "comfort zone." But to destroy that "end of the day" respite would be pointless. Thus the phrase has no Biblical significance. However, if one's comfort zone was to go with the world's values instead of identification with Christ, then one should leave that comfort zone. However, the phrase is worthless since the "comfort zone" has to be defined as "evil," which can only be done within the

literal meaning to some symbolic message. For example, if the search phrase “Get out of the boat” is used on one popular sermon web site, it lists 507 possible sermons. Some creative titles are, “Which boat are you in,” “At least Peter got out of the boat,” and “Will anyone get out of the boat when they see you.”

Of course, creativity is absolutely not to be a part of the interpretation of the text. Creativity in interpretation is, by definition, from the mind of the interpreter, a violation of normal hermeneutics. The vast number of these creative sermons with multiple meanings belies the lack of an understanding of what this story is doing in the inspired text. Because he cannot advocate that his audience do what Peter did (“get out of the boat”) he changes it to something that seems reasonable to him. So he changes the boat to symbolize one’s false security (e.g., finances, family, health, etc.) and the water becomes what scares one from coming to Jesus, and Jesus, well . . . He’s Jesus⁵ (but of course not the real life bodily-present Jesus). Now while these applications may seem all well and good, the problem is that they aren’t what the Scripture is saying. On that day in history, Peter really got out of a boat in the midst of a great storm and really walked on (and fell into) the water. Now the reason all the preachers feel obligated to change the story to fit their readers is one simple problem. If they tell the reader to get out of the boat . . . he’ll drown. Why? Because Jesus was there! And Jesus isn’t here!

Now this is a very important . . . no one can do what Peter did. The interpreter must recognize that simple fact. What Peter did cannot be done today in any sense . . . not even a little bit.⁶ What happened to Peter was unique and Peter realized how unique

Biblical context. Thus “getting out of one’s comfort zone” is not evil or good and the phrase becomes worthless, and in fact does real danger because people then substitute “risk” as “good.” And any parent will tell you that “risk” is not always “good.” The exhortation is to use Biblical phrases and not these secular, undefined, and perhaps misleading, phrases. Stay with Biblical imperatives. They will tell you for what things one should take risks, and for what things one should not.

⁵ It is a massive misuse to try to make Jesus represent the reader here in some application. Only Jesus can be Jesus, the Christ, the Savior, the Son of God.

⁶ But the reader will object because Jesus is here in some sense through the Spirit. That is true. He is here through the Spirit. His bodily presence, however, is not here, but in heaven at the right hand of the Father. The Scriptures must define the effect of His presence through the Spirit, since one cannot know Him through the senses (touch, hear, see . . . that is why it is through the Spirit). Through the Spirit is clearly not the same as His physical presence (i.e., you cannot verify anything about Jesus through your senses, since that required His presence.) For instance you cannot verify that He is resurrected except through the testimony of the apostles, who saw Him! See Acts 10:39-41 where Peter states, “We are (eye) witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.” Thus, Cornelius had no way of knowing about

it was when he walked on water. If these interpreters would just read to the end of the story they would see what Peter thought of his own unique experience. Was it to extol others to learn some lesson on self-improvement (e.g., take risks)? What he did realize, and this was his understanding of the importance of what happened, was that he had done something that no one else EVER had experienced . . . He had looked into the eyes of God. No one in the Old Testament, for thousands of years of history, had ever done that . . . not even a little bit. Following Jesus' departure from earth, no one will ever do it again . . . until He returns.

So, the relevant preacher wants to know, what is the application? Well, since the audience can't look into the eyes of God (i.e., Peter's experience is not duplicable), then what is there to learn from what Peter did? The Gospel writers do not leave the reader to make a guess at the application. It is actually right there in the story. Peter and the disciples, having experienced this event, came to the shore and made a simple conclusion, "You most certainly are God's Son!"⁷

That's it! That's what readers are to glean from this story. What Matthew is trying to relate to the reader is Peter's experience of looking into the eyes of God, because Matthew's readers cannot do it. Jesus appeared on earth 2000 years ago and Peter experienced it. So it was absolutely necessary for Matthew to record Peter's experience, so his reader could hear for himself about Jesus while He was here. This Jesus will never be seen on this earth in the reader's lifetime. Matthew wants the reader to realize the reality of this Jesus, who is alive in heaven, but not here! But Matthew knows that no one can know this Jesus unless someone tells about Him. Matthew wants to do that. He will tell his reader what the apostles saw and heard as they walked and talked with Him . . . something no one can experience today . . . but something they need to know . . . so they can see Jesus through the eyes of one who was there . . . an apostle. It is their experience ("these (signs) are written . . ." John 20:31) by eyewitnesses (the apostles) so that the reader will be enabled to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His Name."

Now this is very important! The Gospels are about Jesus when He was on earth. They are not about methodology (financial tips, ways of evangelism, how to have success in some area). Jesus did not teach some process of evangelism, nor some psychological principles that will help the reader have a better relationship with someone. They are not meant as examples of good or bad behavior that should change in the readers' life. They aren't there to find examples of how to have friends, or mentors, accountability or transparency. They are meant solely to introduce the reader to the God who became a

Jesus, His appearance, and the promise that He had made while on earth in His body. Peter gave him those facts by testifying what He had said and done as seen and heard by Peter while Jesus was here.

⁷ Now there are many implications of this simple discovery, which may include risking your life for Christ, giving up materials to God, etc., but those are not part of this story and would need to come from the message of the story. The article will cover more about that later.

Man and walked this earth. This is the God who had to become a Man to fulfill all that the Old Testament had spoken of; the One who would come and live among humanity. And He came to change everything. He did not come to give self-improvement seminars, or to urge men to do the same, nor to give men a standard of living to which they could attain in this fleshly body. He came so that his followers would die to those 21st Century, westernized, human wisdom concepts (and the arrogance that comes with self-progress) and live solely based on the absolutely new life that is given to believers by this unbelievable awesome loving God who became an unbelievable awesome loving Man . . . Jesus.

If the readers don't get that when they are done with the Gospels and think they are a bunch of examples of how they should live . . . they will have missed the appearance of God on earth and His impact on them. They will have lowered the greatest announcement and appearance in the history of mankind to a common principle for the improvement of their worthless Adamic life. They will have exchanged that moment of experiencing Jesus through the eyes of Peter for some self-improvement principle that will be buried with them. This is about Jesus and Him only. Only knowing Him and what He alone will do for the believer will change their life . . . forever!

Oh, yes, it is necessary to inform readers as to what they can expect by embracing this Jesus that Peter saw. It will not be success in any fashion that can be seen or counted in a material sense, even in any way that can be counted. It won't be financially, materially, more friends, or even success in evangelism, church membership, or even successful mission trips according to numbers. The guarantee of the New Testament to the believer during this age is to "believe and suffer" (Philippians 1:29), or as Jesus said, "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Mt 5:11-12)

If anyone wants psychological principles, financial investment principles, processes for evangelism, risk management, or other helpful processes, then they can stop reading this article, because there is nothing else here but Jesus. Jesus is the Father's solution for everything. Man is not the solution, not even a little bit. Man's self-improvement won't further the kingdom one little bit . . . not at all.⁸ The kingdom is coming in its all its glory with or without any particular man or his accomplishments. It's coming because Jesus was on earth and did what He did and said what He said. It's coming because of Jesus . . . alone! In fact, man's self-effort (read self-righteousness) is only going to get in his own way of appreciating and enjoying the journey to the kingdom, provided by Jesus. So . . . the reader of the Gospels should just sit back and look through the eyes of Peter and John, listen to what they heard and come to the same conclusion they came to about Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (see John 20:31). That realization will then change the reader's life . . . forever. For their hope will be more and more in Jesus and less and less in themselves.

⁸ Refer to 1 Timothy where Paul tells Timothy that "bodily discipline is of little value."

Now that's the point of the Gospels. Of all the courses that I teach, I tell the students that I love the Gospels. Why? Because it's the only book that records the Savior on earth, walking the roads of Galilee, the streets of Jerusalem, talking to people. It never happened before. It will never happen again in the same way. Of all the times I wish I was alive . . . it's then. It's not only rare time . . . it is unique. Don't miss it.