

Seffner Florida, near Tampa. The year 2013. A man is sleeping quietly in his bed. All of a sudden the ground opens and he falls several hundred feet into the ground and is buried. He dies. July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Lavaca Lane. The Villages, Florida. Sinkhole spotted. No deaths this time, but there goes your property value. No one will ever want to buy your house, even if the sinkhole is plugged.

Today I would like to talk to you about a sinkhole that takes place right next to you whether you're in your house or not. It is the sinkhole of fear. You may sink into fear shortly before a car accident, when you go to the doctor to look at some tests in regards to cancer, it may come when someone assaults you or robs you, it may appear as you wonder what your last days will be like before you die. How can we stay topside without sinking into the depths of our fears. Today we look to Jesus for the answers. We are going to see: Jesus Saves Sinking Souls.

Our story begins right after Jesus fed 5000 men with 5 loaves of bread and two fish. The disciples are exhausted after being waiters who went up and down the hillside serving the masses. Now Jesus tells the disciples to be on their way.

Stop for a minute and put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. He compelled them to go; didn't give them any choice in the matter. It all seems very rushed - "Hurry up, get in the boat and get out of here. Go to Magdala. I will meet you there!" Lo and behold, they found themselves in the middle of a storm in the middle of the night; and the storm was working against them. They were rowing against strong waves for anywhere from three to six hours.

What would have gone through your mind at this point? "Why did Jesus send us out so quickly? Couldn't we have stayed on the shore and waited? Now we're stuck out here in the middle of this lake all by ourselves and we're going to drown!" After all the hopes and dreams they had of following Jesus into ushering in the new kingdom; all to drown in a middle of a lake! How quickly things changed!

That's how the Israelites felt when Moses led them out of slavery; just after God used the powerful plagues to loosen Pharaoh's grip; only to be led to the edge of destruction at the Red Sea. How quickly things can change!

That's the way life is sometimes; you're pushed into a boat in the middle of a lake and left to paddle until exhaustion. You didn't choose to go in the boat. You were shoved in it; and since God is in charge it is easy to blame Him. Imagine if you had a stroke today and you couldn't use half of your body. What if you lost your retirement income? What if your house burnt down? You'd be paddling upstream pretty hard and not making much ground. It doesn't take much for things to go south in a hurry. How quickly life can change; to feel abandoned. "Where did you go, God?"

We know where God went in this story. Jesus had gone off by Himself to pray. That's why He originally went to other side of the lake. John the Baptist had been beheaded. He wanted to talk to His Father in prayer, so He finally did. But that didn't matter to the disciples. In their minds He couldn't have picked a worse time to leave and pray.. In the disciples minds they were abandoned.

But Jesus didn't lose sight of His disciples; not for one second. He knew exactly where they were and exactly how to find them. He hadn't abandoned them at all. It didn't matter that there was a storm raging. Nor did it matter that the disciples were in the middle of a lake. It was no barrier for Jesus at all even without a boat. Nothing would be able to separate Him from His disciples; not even a storm; He was willing to defy gravity;

even in His humility; just for them. Here we see the truth of what Paul wrote to the Romans that “Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” There are no storms that can keep Jesus away from you.

But even when Jesus came, the disciples didn’t exactly jump for joy. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. It takes a lot to make a grown man scream in fear; this put them over the edge. They were already exhausted after all they’d been through. Why not assume this was a ghost? Physical beings can’t walk on water. They went from a fear of drowning to a fear of the supernatural. You may have had such fears in your house when you heard someone walking in the middle of the night; not sure who it was; waiting for a voice. You hold your breath; lay completely still; barely breathe; waiting to determine who or what it is.

Jesus didn’t wait. He spoke immediately after they screamed. He didn’t want them to be terrified of Him. With two simple commands and a simple identification; Jesus removed all fear. It didn’t take any more words than that. “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” How ironic it was that that which terrified them ended up being their greatest comfort. The person they thought was nothing but a ghost ended up being their God! All this became clear with a simple word of identification. “It is I.” The literal phrase in the Greek is, “I am.”

The funny thing was that the storm was still raging and they were still in the middle of the sea. The danger was still real. None of that had changed. But when they saw Jesus walking on water and showing His power over it; all of their fears melted; they forgot all about that; all with the simple identification of Jesus, “I am.” That is the same way that God defined Himself to Moses in the Old Testament. Tell the Israelites, “I am” has sent you. That same God who guided the Israelites through the Red Sea was with them now in the middle of the storm in the Sea of Galilee. Everything would be ok. He - the eternal and all powerful God and creator of the sea and the sky - would get them through it just fine.

Isn’t it a good reminder for us on what to do in the middle of the storms of life? When you start screaming in fear, Jesus whispers to you, “Shh. I am.” Stop screaming and listen to Him. Get focused on WHO is with you yet; the same One who died for you and rose from the dead and promised to be with you to the end of the age; the same One who sent His Holy Spirit into you at your baptism; who gives you Himself in the Lord’s Supper; stay focused on Him. He is still eternal. He is still in power. He is still with you in the middle of the storms. He never promised you there wouldn’t be storms. He never promised you that you would not die or drown. But He did promise that He would be with you always - to the very end of the world.

Note when Jesus comes to us.. He comes to us at the darkest hour. "...a little before morning..." The time when you’re the most needy. He comes to us victorious over our greatest fears. "...Jesus came walking on the water..." In other words, he comes walking on the very thing that frightened the disciples. Do you see it? What are they worried about? They’re worried about the waves.

In His quiet, majestic way, as He’s walking on the water, Jesus is saying, "Guys, the thing that is the greatest storm in your life, I keep under my feet." If you’re sick, He comes walking on your sickness. If you’re afraid of death, what did He do on Easter? He came walking on the waves of death, "Oh, death where is thy sting? Oh, grave where is

thy victory?"

He's standing on top of the stone. He's saying, "I'm able to do exceedingly, abundantly more than you can ever ask or think. I can do that which gives you the greatest fear, the thing which causes you to tremble, the thing which causes you to falter. I come walking on it. I stand on that stuff. I'm victor. I'm the one who reigns. " Hallelujah. He comes walking on the water.

There's a great passage of Scripture, Isaiah 43: "But now, the Lord who created you, O Israel, says, 'Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you go through the deep waters and the great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through the rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up, and the flames will not consume you. Why? For I am the Lord, your God.'"

And you know when we keep our eyes focused on Jesus and the promises He gives to us in His Word, we can handle any storm that comes our way. In a sense, like Peter, we can walk on water. Look at Simon Peter will you. He has faith that His Jesus is the Son of God. All Powerful. And that His Jesus can give him the power to walk on water. So what is he able to do. That's right, walk on water. Do the impossible. But when does Peter start to sink? Its when he looks around at the big waves, the rain, and starts to look at himself thinking, this is impossible to do. He takes his eyes off Jesus.

The same holds true for us. When we keep our eyes focused on God's Word, the promises of support and strength that are given to us there, we will handle the cancers, the tragedies, the accidents that come our way. And even if we have our weak moments, like Peter, and our little faith falters, and we cry out, "Lord Save Me!". Will Jesus abandon us? No way. He will extend His hand to lift us up. Not only will He rescue us, but He will calm the troubled waters in our life.

When you find yourself scared to death at nature's roar, sinking in front of the waves, look to Christ. Remember that the strongest faith is not found in only looking at the glorious miracles of Christ - but the dirtiest ones. Our faith is strongest when we can see Jesus feet nailed on a cross instead of walking on water. Our faith is strongest when we see Jesus sinking under the sea of God's wrath for our sins, instead of walking on the Sea of Galilee. For it is only in the cross that we find a salvation completed.

It is only at the cross that we are saved from drowning in a lake of fire and not just a lake of water. The strongest faith is found when we believe that even though we sink under the sea of this life, one day we like Christ will walk out of the grave, since Jesus conquered death.

So remember to stay focused on Christ. Life is going to change. Some days you'll be enjoying a nice meal with your friends on the hillside of a mountain; then the next you'll be in the middle of a storm or drowning in the sea. You aren't saved by the strength of your faith. You're saved by the One your faith is focused on; the One that walks on water and has walked from the grave. His name is Jesus. He saves sinking sinners. He will never let you go!