



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 14:22-36

Topic

At first thinking it is a ghost walking on the water, the disciples trust it is Jesus when He speaks to them

Title

"GhostTrusters"

Introduction

I think I met Tim Burton.

It was over ten years ago. Geno and I were in a Peet's Coffee Shop in Tarzana. We were talking about a Tim Burton movie that was not yet released when one of the other patrons said something to us like, "I've just seen the pre-releases for the film, and they look great."

Meanwhile the barista greeted him by saying, "Good morning, **Tim.**"

1 of 14

Matthew 14:22-36

"GhostTrusters"

I'm pretty slow. Dense would be a better descriptor. It wasn't until it was too late that I realized it *was* Tim Burton.

Ever since then, I'm always on the look out for famous people. They can be harder to recognize than you might think.

In our verses, the disciples don't immediately recognize Jesus. When He comes to them walking on water in a storm, they first mistake Him for a phantom. Only after He speaks to them do they recognize Him.

He gets in the boat. Then, for the first time, they recognize something more about Him. They "worship" Him, saying, "truly, You are the Son of God."

These are Jewish boys who have the first five books of the Bible memorized. They know you are to worship only God. To bow down and worship anything or anyone else is blasphemy,

They were therefore having their first glimmer of the fact that Jesus was God and man - fully God and fully man in a union we cannot totally comprehend.

What can we learn for ourselves as we recognize the God-man? I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Have The God-Man Interceding For You, and #2 You Are God's Men (and Women) Interacting For Him.

#1 You Have The God-Man Interceding For You

(v22-33)

How could Jesus be omnipotent yet weak? How could He leave the world and yet be present everywhere? How could He learn things and yet be omniscient?

He can because He has two distinct nature that retain their own properties yet remain united in one person. He is fully God and fully human simultaneously.

Wayne Grudem, in his systematic theology, writes,

When we are talking about Jesus' human nature, we can say that He ascended to Heaven and is no longer in the world. But with respect to His divine nature, we can say that Jesus is everywhere present: "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20); "I am with you always to the close of the age (Matthew 28:20). So we can say that both things are true about the person of Christ - He has returned to Heaven, **and** He is also present with us.

When Jesus was on the earth in His first coming, though He remained fully God with all the attributes of deity, He voluntarily divested Himself of the independent exercise of His divine attributes. He chose to live as a man in complete submission and obedience to the will of God the Father in the power of God the Holy Spirit.

You see this, for example, in His temptation in the wilderness by Satan. He could easily have turned stones into bread, but He divested Himself of the independent exercise of His divine attributes and acted as fully human, in complete submission and obedience to the will of God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The twelve were on a kind of working retreat to learn how to proceed in the Lord's absence in between His two comings. Recognizing that Jesus was God was the next lesson for His disciples.

Among the things they will learn in these verses about Jesus as the God-man is that He intercedes for His disciples in Heaven, **and** He is with them always while they are on the earth.

Mat 14:22 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

The previous verses describe the feeding of the five thousand - which was really more like a crowd of twenty thousand when you include women and children. In the Gospel of John we learn that the people were ready to make Jesus their king. It wasn't for the right reasons, so Jesus "sent them away."

The disciples were reluctant to leave as well. Jesus had to make them "get into the boat."

The people weren't repentant, and the disciples weren't ready. The Father's plan was for Jesus to pour Himself out into these guys and then fill them with the Holy Spirit after Jesus ascended into Heaven.

Success - or what the world would label success - can be a distraction from spiritual things. We judge by outward appearance, by physical criteria like numbers, when God would have us concentrate on inward growth and spiritual criteria.

Mat 14:23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

Have you ever hosted a big event and, when the last guest finally left, you just crashed? The Lord's version of "crashing" was to ascend a mountain to be alone with God the Father.

What is important to our story is to see that Jesus ascended, as it were, and was interceding the entire time His disciples were on their journey. Meanwhile His disciples were in a boat together on their way to minister to folks on the other shore.

It sounds like the situation we find ourselves in everyday Jesus is gone awaiting His Second Coming. Jesus is ascended, not to a mountain but to Heaven, where He intercedes for you. Meanwhile you are sent out to minister to folks.

If that is the picture God is drawing for us, we learn from it that it's not going to be smooth sailing on the earth.

Mat 14:24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

Three and one-half miles out, the disciples were making no progress whatsoever. On land we'd say that they were spinning their wheels; but, in this case, they were using paddles to get nowhere. Skimming their paddles??

They'd been in a spot like this once before, in chapter eight; but in that storm, Jesus had been with them on the boat. Now He was conspicuously absent.

Everything in this section is preparing them for Jesus' absence between His two comings.

What good was it to them that He had ascended the mountain to pray? How could Jesus help them? They were about to find out.

Mat 14:25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

The "fourth watch," as time was reckoned, was from 3:00am to 6:00am. They had been on the boat all night and were exhausted. It was the darkest hours before the dawn; it was the last possible moment.

This in between time in which we live, waiting for The Lord to return; it's gonna be quite stormy. The Lord's Second Coming is at the end of the seven year Great Tribulation. The final days of the Great Tribulation will be so bad that people on the earth will think humanity cannot possibly survive. It's going to get darker and darker before the Son of Righteousness returns to save His people.

Leading up to the Great Tribulation, in the church age in which we live between the resurrection of Jesus and His return in the clouds to resurrect and rapture His church, there are going to be afflictions and sufferings and persecutions. Christians have been, and will continue to be, martyred.

But because Jesus is the God-man, we're not alone in the boat. Not ever.

He'd been praying, and I don't think it's going too far to say He had been praying for them in their situation in the storm.

No matter your situation, the Father sees it, and the Son is interceding for you in it. Hebrews 7:25 tells us He ever lives to intercede for us.

"Jesus went to them." In their case, He physically went to them. That isn't true of us; but it isn't really necessary for us, either. We have something - Someone - that these disciples had not yet fully received. We have God the Holy Spirit residing in us.

Plus - because He is God as well as man, Jesus is omnipresent, even if He is physically in Heaven. I don't understand it, but it's true.

For just a moment, let's think of Jesus having divested Himself of the independent exercise of His divine attributes. Praying for His guys, the Father finally, in the last watch, releases Him to help them. But He tells Jesus to get to them... on foot.

The Father could have allowed Jesus to calm the storm with a word. He could have raptured Jesus over to the boat. But in this instance He wanted His Son to go on foot.

In perfect human obedience, divested of the independent use of His deity, The Lord descended the mountain and walked into the Sea of Galilee, walking on the waves and through the wind for three and one-half miles. He did it to please His Father, but also because He loved His disciples.

Jesus walking on the water, in the storm, shows the lengths He's willing to go to help us. It's a very human show of love - something we can relate to.

Mat 14:26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

I can't fault them. I would have screamed like a little girl.

Their help came, but not in a way they could have ever imagined.

The important thing to note is that nothing can separate us from The Lord. He's never absent; we may perceive it that way, but it isn't true. If it's the last watch, darkest before the dawn, when we are physically and spiritually exhausted and all hope seems lost... He's praying for us, to strengthen us for the trial.

I need to be honest. We can't always say that The Lord will calm the storm in the nick of time. Some ships sink. Paul the apostle, for example, was in more than one shipwreck. The Lord preserved him through them, it's true; but Paul was eventually martyred.

Let's face it: There are lifelong trials. You may have a chronic condition, for example, that you must live with. Using Paul again as our example, he had what he called "a thorn in his flesh" that The Lord chose to not deliver him from.

Jesus may not "come" walking on the water, to end the storm, but He is no less with us - praying for us, to strengthen us.

If the storm takes us, we're better off, are we not? To be absent from our bodies is to be present with The Lord.

Mat 14:27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

They heard His voice and it calmed their fears. The Lord still speaks, does He not?

- There is His Word, alive and powerful.
- There is the still, small voice of the Spirit.
- There are still metaphors and similes, visions and dreams, by which are fearful hearts can instantly be quieted.

If you are struggling today, you need such a word from your Lord.

Mat 14:28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

What??? I honestly don't know what to make of Peter's request. Commentators are split as to whether it was a shining moment of faith, or another of Peter's presumptions that would turn out badly for him. (Which it did).

Mat 14:29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

Mind you the wind and the waves had not subsided. I give Peter props, but I don't think the lesson for that morning was, "get out of the boat and go to Jesus." In the Gospel of John we learn that it was the Lord's intent to board and immediately get them to their destination. As soon as He got on the boat they were there - covering the last three and one-half miles supernaturally.

Peter's request reads like an interruption to me. Feel free to disagree; it can't really be decided one way or the other.

Mat 14:30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

Whether he was supposed to get out of the boat or not, there is a lesson for us that every Bible study on this passage points out. If you're going to walk by faith, keep your eyes on Jesus and not on your circumstances.

Mat 14:31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

I would have let Peter flounder for a while. Teach him a lesson, as it were. Jesus helped him "immediately."

If someone is calling on The Lord, repentant and humble, let's help them as quickly as possible.

Peter received a gentle correction from Jesus. I've noted over the years that Christians are overly sensitive to even mild corrections, let alone rebukes. At least the ones that come from other well meaning, caring believers that see them going in a wrong direction - that are afraid they will sink because they are no longer walking with their eyes securely on The Lord.

Toughen up! Be willing to hear a correction. Then analyze it to see if it is accurate. It just might save you from drowning.

Let me throw this out too. When was the last time you received a gentle correction from The Lord? It stands to reason that, since we are all spiritual works in progress, correction would be a regular experience.

I think we can get overly sensitive to The Lord correcting us, and slough it off without doing anything about it.

Mat 14:32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

If I'm one of the other eleven guys, I'm thinking the storm would have ceased a little quicker if Peter hadn't wanted to get a personal lesson from Jesus.

There is a sense, and it is pointed out by most commentators, that the boat represents the church during Jesus' absence in between His two comings. We are all "in the same boat" and should therefore maintain a unity of purpose rather than promote ourselves.

Mat 14:33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

Exactly how much they understood about what it meant to be "the Son of God," we don't know.

The remarkable thing, as I already mentioned, is the fact that all of them, without any hesitation, "worshipped Him." They knew Jesus was a man; now they knew He was God.

Jesus was absent interceding for them, but He was present among them, too. Nothing could separate them from His love. Their time - our time - on the earth in between His two comings will be rough sailing. It will be exhausting. It will seem darker and darker.

All the while His prayers **and** His presence sustain us because He is the God-man Who loves us.

#2 You Are God's Men (and Women) Interacting For Him

(v34-36)

The arrival at the opposite shore, and subsequent healing ministry, seems like a quick footnote. I think it's a continuation of the lesson The Lord was teaching His disciples.

They had been together journeying and had learned a valuable lesson about who Jesus was. Out of the boat, they learn a valuable lesson about what Jesus does.

If the boat represents the church, the idea is that the Lord's prayers for and presence in the church prepares us to go out to minister to others who have great spiritual needs.

In the New Testament Book of Ephesians we are told that, in the church, we become equipped to do the work of the ministry. Most of that "ministry" is stuff that takes place out in the world.

Let's see The Lord among the people and get inspired about our own interactions out in the world.

Mat 14:34 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret.

Mat 14:35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick,

Mat 14:36 and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well.

Do you think it would be going too far to say that Jesus was walking in the midst of another sea - a sea of humanity?

We use that expression, and so does the Bible (e.g., in Revelation 17:15) to describe the human race.

I think the fact that, in this case, it was by touching the hem of His garment that they were healed draws our eyes to Jesus feet and to His walking among them.

Once before He had healed when a woman reached out and touched the hem of His garment. He had been walking through a crowd, with folks pressing against Him; e had been walking through the sea of humanity.

It doesn't take much imagination to see wave after wave of sick individuals coming to The Lord, touching the hem of His garment, and immediately being healed.

What's up with the hem?

Num 15:38 "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners."

Blue seems to be associated with Heaven. The color blue on the hem of the garments of the Jews was to be a reminder to them that they were a unique people, a heavenly people. As they dressed each morning and as they saw one another throughout the day, they were to remember they were pilgrims on this earth, headed for a heavenly city whose "Builder and Maker is God."

Jesus is going to explain to His disciples that He would be leaving for Heaven, but that they would remain to do the work of ministering to people. This episode pictures that for them.

He was on the earth, robed, as it were, with humanity so that as the God-man He could minister salvation to the lost. We don't wear robes with blue tassels, but we are robed - spiritually speaking.

One of the illustrations we are given throughout the Bible to help us understand our relationship with Jesus has to do with clothing. We are depicted as standing before The Lord in filthy, vile robes. When we are saved, He exchanges our filthy robes for His robe of righteousness.

In His absence, therefore, we are robed with His righteousness as His representatives in order to minister the Gospel. It's as if people can still 'touch' The Lord because we are among them, sharing the Gospel.