



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 14:22–36

Gospel of Matthew

“The Possibility of the Impossible”

TRANSCRIPT

We are turning to Matthew chapter 14 and verse 22 through 36 for our Scripture reading. Now, for those of you who were not here last week, the context is the context of the day of the feeding of the 5,000, and it is the evening of that day that we read about in verse 22 and following:

“And straightway, Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a boat and to go before him unto the other side while he sent the multitude away. And when he had sent the multitudes away he went up into a mountain privately to pray; and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the boat was now in the midst of the sea tossed with waves for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were troubled saying it is a ghost and they cried out for fear. But straight way Jesus spoke unto them saying, ‘Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid.’ And Peter answered him and said, ‘Lord if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.’”

(Incidentally, that “if” is not the “if” of doubt, but the “if” of the assumption of reality, very much as our “if” in English. If I should say, I am going to town today, you might say, if you are going to town would you mind doing this for me, and that is the if).

“‘If it be thou then come unto thee on the water.’ And he said, ‘Come.’

And when Peter was come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried saying, ‘Lord save me.’ And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him and said unto him, ‘O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?’ And when they were come into the boat the wind ceased. Then they that were in the boat came and worshiped him saying, ‘Of a truth, thou art the Son of God.’ And when they were gone over they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place they sent out into all that country round about and brought unto him all that were diseased. And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment; and as many as touched were made perfectly well.”

May the Lord’s blessing abide upon his Word.

The subject for today is “The Possibility of the Impossible.” Can you walk on the land? Well, yes, we can walk on the land except perhaps on an icy morning like this, because the land is our natural element. The real test of our spiritual mettle, speaking symbolically with this incident in mind, is, can you walk on the sea? So I ask you that, can you walk on the sea?

Some years ago in India, 10 to be exact, L. S. Brow in Bombay, India, a noted exponent of yoga, tried to live up to an announcement that he would walk upon the water. Six hundred spectators came to watch him walk on the water from as far away as New Delhi. They paid from twenty to one hundred dollars in order to obtain seats to see and watch him walk.

He warmed up by swallowing what he said were tacks and nitric acid. And then in order to warm his feet, he walked over some hot embers. And then he climbed up the side of a steel tank filled with water in order to walk on the water, put one foot out and sank immediately to the bottom. [Laughter]

Well the spectators were very angry about it, and they shouted for their money back, and he explained to them that the reason he had been unable to walk on the water is that he had slipped on the Saturday preceding and had injured his back, and as a result of that he could not achieve a state of levitation, but he invited them to come back and he would try again. Now I don't know whether if he said he would charge them another twenty to one hundred dollars to see it again, but I am quite sure that when the time came for him to attempt it again there probably were very, very few spectators.

It is very difficult to walk on the water. In fact it's almost impossible—not completely, almost impossible. For Peter did walk on the water. If it is a miracle for Jesus to walk on the water, it's an even greater miracle for Peter to walk on the water, but that is precisely what happened here. I remember reading in a magazine or seeing in a magazine about 10 years ago, too, a cartoon of a man who was walking on the water in a swimming pool at a motel. Around the side of the motel were tables and umbrellas and people dressed in bathing suits, and this man was pictured by the cartoonist out in the middle of the swimming pool walking on top of the water, balancing himself like this, and the comment of somebody lounging in a chair on the side was, “Amazing. It's been years since that has been done really well.” [Laughter]

The Christian life is the impossible life. It is just as impossible as walking on the sea, and yet it is just as possible as Peter's great feat. We have ways of reducing the Christian life as the insipidly possible, however, and as you well know, there are competing viewpoints concerning the Christian life. One of these we might call the religious life. It is very common in professing Christendom to think of the Christian life as simply a religious life, that is a person engages in the practice of prayer. He attends church on Sunday, except on days like this. He does good works—that is good works

according to human standards of good works. He is kind, or just sickeningly sweet. He gives, which may make a minister do handstands, but it does not prove anything so far as the merit that means eternal life is concerned. He teaches Sunday school classes and he even ushers in church; all of these activities form parts of a religious life.

You probably can think of other things that go to make up a religious life, but we need to remember of course that all of these things that I have mentioned can be done without a changed heart. It is not necessary to be born again to pray. It is not necessary to be born again to attend the church, or to do what human beings consider to be good works. And it is not necessary to be born again to give or to teach a Sunday school class or to usher in a church service. All of these things can be done by the natural man.

Now most of us in this audience I am sure realize that the religious life is not the Christian life, but among Christians we have a way of transforming this Christian supernatural life into something that is legalistic, and the legalistic Christian life is not the Christian life either. It is full of negatives, and incidentally, when I give a few of these negatives I don't mean to imply by that that I am for the positives, but the negatives have, for the last few generations, been given for such things as, thou shalt not smoke, thou shalt not drink, thou shalt not dance, thou shalt not wear lipstick even, thou shalt not attend a Sunday football game and so on. Various kinds of taboos, often characteristic of certain parts of the country or certain parts of the world, and the viewpoint is expressed in such a way that one gets the impression that if we do not do these things then we are living the Christian life.

Or it may be a series of positives such as, thou shalt study the Bible and study it in the morning early before breakfast if at all possible. Thou shalt pray. Thou shalt witness. But the impression is given again that by doing these things we shall gain points—make points with God—and gain acceptance before him in our Christian life by the things that we do. I have a good friend who preaches the Word of God, and he likes to call this spirituality by works, and I do believe that

many of us who are evangelical Christians conceive of the Christian life as the doing of certain positive things by which we gain a little merit before God.

Now I want to test you just for a moment. When you get down on your knees and pray, and as you are praying alone, does not there come a thought over your mind as you are praying, I am making quite an advance in the spiritual life by being on my knees? Or perhaps when you get up having said your amen, you say now there are not too many of us that are praying so fervently as I am. You see by these very thoughts that flit through your mind—which often are your thoughts, not the thoughts that Satan inserts, but your own thoughts—you reveal the fact that you consider that what you are doing a means by which you make a few points with God.

The Christian life is not the legalistic Christian life. The Christian life has a distinctive element about it, the element of the supernatural. It is the life of the risen Lord which flows through those who are united with him by faith, and it flows through us by the power of the Spirit of God so that we are by his grace enabled to do the impossible. Now we don't always do the impossible as we should see, and we certainly fall constantly, but when we do please the Lord, it is because he has done something in a supernatural way through us. And we do not make any points with God by the things that we do. We do not gain acceptance before him by the things that we do. These are things that he does through us.

I think the supernatural Christian life is seen through Jacob who naturally was a schemer, and probably schemed a little bit even in the end of his days. But who, if you follow his life's history, you can see constant progress, and finally this natural schemer is resting in the grace and power of God near the end of his life—that's supernatural.

Or you can see it in a John who was a son of thunder, but who becomes the one that we think of as the apostle of love. Or the Apostle Paul, who naturally persecuted the church, but after he has come face to face with Jesus Christ and has had an opportunity to grow in the Christian life, becomes a preacher of the faith that he once wasted. That is the supernatural Christian life. It's the life of grace. It's the life in the Spirit to the glory of God.

The incident we are looking at, I think, illustrates the Christian life. It was primarily given us in order to reveal again that Jesus was the Messiah, that he was able to walk upon the water, because one of the characteristics of the Messiah taught in the Old Testament was that he was the one who controlled the winds and the waves, the natural elements. He was a divine Messiah, and this incident is designed primarily to teach that. But beyond that, it also teaches some very important factors that have to do with the Christian life, and we want to try and stress them in the message this morning.

It was the day of the feeding of the 5,000, and at the conclusion of the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, remember the crowd rushed toward the Lord Jesus in order to make him a king—their own kind of king, they wanted to make him a political king. And so the Lord Jesus constrained the disciples, because he was anxious less they catch the contagion of this idea of kingship, which the Jews had at that time. He hurried them into a boat and told them to go on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

In the meantime he himself went up into the mountain to pray. There is a great deal of spiritual truth involved in that very fact that the Lord Jesus, the eternal son, went up into a mountain to pray. Someone has said no great discovery was ever made upon a crowded street. I doubt that Albert Einstein came across any of his significant scientific discoveries while sitting on a subway train in New York City. The chances are that almost all of the great discoveries have been made at times of meditation and quietness, and Christians can never expect to make any progress in the life of God if they do not head off by themselves alone and mediate over the divine revelation.

Now may I ask you a personal question? What about this past week? Was there any time when you got off by yourself, got down on your knees and communed with God over the truths of the Word of God? Is there any sense of this in your own personal life, that going up into a mountain to pray? Now you don't have to go into your closet literally. You don't have to get on a mountain; you can do this in your bedroom or even in your den, or in your kitchen. But it should characterize the life of the Christian that there are times of communion in which we get down before God and

bring before him our own lives and commune with him positively over the glories of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, I think one of the best ways to study the Bible is on your knees.

Now the Lord Jesus illustrates in this that he is not only a man who communes with God, but he illustrates that he is a man. Isn't it interesting that he calls on the disciples to pray, gives parable after parable which he stresses the importance of diligence in prayer, but he never prays with the apostles himself? He exhorts them to pray, but he never says, let's have a prayer meeting. He asked them to pray the Lord's Prayer, but he himself never prays the Lord's Prayer. Because while it is true that he is perfect man and possessed of a true humanity, he also is still the divine son and different. We should never forget that.

But he does in his human nature illustrate things that should characterize us as born again Christians. That is really superfluous, isn't it? If you are a Christian you are born again, and if you have been born again, you are a Christian. But we have to say “born again Christian” because we know there are so many people that say I am a Christian who haven't really been born again—at least the evidence seems to say otherwise.

Now the Lord Jesus then is a man possessed of true humanity, and he prays. Well, he prayed for the apostles. Mark, I think it is, tells us that he looked out over the sea, and he saw the disciples upon the water. So he was around the seashore on one of the hills by which he could look down upon the lake, so he must not have been too far away, and he was able to see them as they toiled with the storm, tossed by the waves because the wind was contrary to them.

So I think that probably when they got in that boat, I just imagine that Peter was at the tiller because I think of Peter as the leader of the apostles. I hope you won't call me a worshiper of the apostle Peter, and I do not want to give him a place that is not really his, but it does seem to me that he is the leader of the apostolic band. I rather think of him as *primus inter pares*, or the first among equals. For he is not greater than they, but he is their leader, so I think of him as being at the tiller.

And I can think of him as giving directions, because he was a fisherman and knew that little lake extremely well. He told some to watch for the sail. He gave duties to others, and as the breeze

began to grow to a blow—it was very common, incidentally for the winds to sweep down from the Northwest, down through the wadis very quickly because the Mediterranean Sea and its cool breezes blew eastward. And as they did, mixed with the hot air down where the Sea of Galilee was, it caused the wind to whip down these wadis, so that when the wind struck that little sea it did turn it into a boiling cauldron. And that’s what happened this night.

So I can see Peter there telling them to trim the sail, or trim the ship, or care for the sail, and finally I’m sure that he told them to take the sail down, because the storm was so great that it became a danger to have the sail up. I can see some of them clinging to the thwarts, some of them clinging to the gunnels and some clinging to the mast. And if you’ve never been out in a little sailboat in the midst of a storm, well maybe you won’t understand but I do. I’ve been out in one and have actually turned over, and I can imagine that these men were a little fearful of what might happen to them.

And there is Peter standing trying to maintain control of the sea, with the foam from the waves on his beard, shouting out his commands in the midst of the peril. Mark says he looked down and saw them toiling and rowing, and it was in the fourth watch that Jesus came. The fourth watch of the night is from 3 o’clock in the morning to 6 in the morning. So they spent quite a few hours out on that sea unable to get to shore. And as they were in the sea in the midst of the storm, suddenly Peter looked off and saw this white apparition moving toward them. And I think I can hear him say, “Look John what’s that coming?!”

Now remember this. The Jews were land lovers. They did not like the sea. They did not want to be caught out on the sea in a storm such as this. And if you will study a little bit of Judaism, you will discover that Jewish popular belief often recounted the appearance of unusual apparitions on the sea. Strack and Billerbeck, in their commentary from the Talmud on the New Testament give several illustrations of this. So, what they thought they might have seen was something like a loch ness monster I guess, or something like that.

Finally someone shouts out, “It’s a ghost!” and I know they must have been in terrible peril then. Now, we don’t believe in ghosts in the 20th century, but I believe that if a ghost should come

into this auditorium at the present time, I would be preaching to as few I did this morning at 8:30 [laughter] because there is something deep down within us that terrifies us about a ghost. Now, it is daytime and I know you are not afraid, but it would be much nicer if I was preaching at about 2 o'clock in the morning in a dimly lit room. The Greek text said they shrieked, “it’s a ghost!”

Now the Jews, you see, had these ideas about the sea, and they thought about water demons, and I imagine they were thinking something like this: you know you can fight a storm because we have been in a number of storms, and we have come through the storms, you can at least contend with that, you know what to do even if you know you might not succeed, but what in the world can you do when a water demon is coming across the waves toward you? Surely now is our time to visit Davy Jones’ locker, they thought.

And yet this was God’s answer to their own un-uttered or uttered petition for help. Isn’t it often like that? We have some problem facing us or some difficulty, some tragedy perhaps, and we get down on our knees and we pray, O God deliver me, and then something comes that we cannot recognize at all as being deliverance. And yet in the long run, when we look back, we see that that was precisely what it was. Sometimes the answers to our prayers do not seem to be answers to our prayers at all, but just as bad as a ghost walking across the water when you life is in danger.

But the delays of the Lord Jesus, and the answers of the Lord Jesus are not denials. The one characteristic thing about Christianity is that Christianity gives us a God who cares. All other religions are engaged in the task of making God care. They set forth all the things we must do in order that God then may be made to care by the things that we do. This morning, again, as I was coming in to the Chapel, I listened to one of my favorite radio teachers, Unity Church [laughter]. Now it is one of my favorite teachers because almost every sentence is a denial of the biblical revelation, I am just amazed.

Now you have often heard people say that the modernist likes to think of ourselves as the captain of our souls. I have often heard that expressed. I have said it myself: that liberal theology tells us we are the captains of our own souls, and that everything depends upon us. This morning I heard

that same thing uttered—that very sentence—we are the captain of our souls, and our destiny rest in our hands. We can do anything. What kind of a gospel is that, when we look at our own hearts? I am so happy that I am not the captain of my own soul, but that the Lord Jesus is the captain of my soul.

Unbelief has stumbled quite a bit over this miracle as it does over other miracles, but this one is one that concerns the elements, and therefore it is the ultimate kind of miracle. You can explain a man being healed of some disease by simply saying that he was healed psychosomatically. But what about a person who controls the elements? There is no real contact between the spirit of the elements and the spirit of man such as their might be between the spirit of a man and another man.

It has been said by some of our leading interpreters that the Lord Jesus was not really walking on the water. He was walking on the seashore, and the disciples were so close to the seashore in the midst of that storm, they didn't reckon upon it being the seashore, and so they thought that they saw him walking on the water when he really was not. He was wading in the surf by the side of the seashore. Now if that were true, it certainly seems as if the Lord Jesus would have corrected their mistake and not allowed them to write an account, each of these accounts, in a way that would give us the false impression that he really walked upon the water.

Furthermore, why were they so afraid if he was just walking on the seashore? And finally, why did Peter or did Peter sink into the sand and cry “Lord save me” as he sank in some quicksand by the side of the lake? I have always said—I still believe it's true—it takes more faith to believe the explanation of the liberals than it does to believe the simple statements of the Word of God. They are the greatest believers in all the world, but they believe in something that is false.

This is a miracle. We cannot walk upon the water naturally, but the Lord Jesus did. Now in the midst of their crying out, “it is a ghost,” the Lord Jesus heard this cry, so he must have been relatively close to the boat—twenty-five feet perhaps?—but at any rate, he shouted out, “Be of good cheer!”—now that's not much help [Johnson laughs]—“it is I, be not afraid.” Now to tell someone

in the midst of a trial like this, have courage, buck up, that is not a bit of help. Have you ever had someone do you that way?

You see the key thing here is that central statement of this three point sermon—it is a three point sermon by the way; it is not a alliterative, so it is not the best kind—but it is, be of good cheer and then the foundation for the good cheer is given: it is I. Now this would have meant a great deal to them. It was the time of the Passover, John tells us in his account of the feeding of the 5,000.

In the Passover ritual which the Jews were familiar with, and were especially familiar with this time of the year, there were certain passages of the Old Testament that were recited by them. These passages pictured God as the one who rules on the waters and in the waters, the one who controls the storms. Passages from the book of Isaiah are found in that Passover liturgy. So they had the concept fresh in their minds of Yahweh of the Old Testament who was the covenant keeping God who had entered into relationship with Israel and had brought Israel out of the land of Egypt by his mighty outstretched arm. And furthermore, they had the concept of this Yahweh as a God who controls the storms and who controls the waters.

So when the Lord Jesus walks to them and cries out—oh incidentally, I should have said this. In the Old Testament, in the book of Isaiah and in other places, the equivalent of the “it is I” is the Hebrew expression *ehyeh hu*: I am he. And over and over again in the book of Isaiah 43, and others of those chapters there, and God says, “I am he.” He is identifying himself as Yahweh, the covenant keeping God, the self-existent God. The one who said, “I am who I am”—the God.

So when the Lord Jesus comes across the water, walking on the water and shouts out to them, “Be of good cheer, *ehyeh hu*,” or *egō eimi*, for that is the New Testament equivalent. I am he. He was proclaiming to them the fact that he is the God who brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, brought them through the Red Sea, and ultimately into the Promised Land.

You see, it is the boldest theophonic formula that one could possibly think of. It means, essentially that where I am, there God is. There God calls. There God acts. There God ministers to

us. There God blesses. I am he. John knew this beautifully. He constructed his whole Gospel around these great ‘I am’ statements, by which Jesus is identified as the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

So they heard him say, “Be of good cheer,” and we can be of good cheer if we know that he is there. I am he. So be of good cheer, be not afraid, Jehovah is with you. Peter evidently understood, because he then, picking up the word that the Lord had spoken, said, “Lord if it be thou come unto thee on the water.” Now you notice that he calls him Lord, and of course he has come to recognize or he does recognize who he is. And of course that is fundamental to the Christian supernatural life, to realize that the one with whom we have to do is the Lord. So Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto the water to thee.

Now what a beautiful picture this is of the Christian supernatural life. It is a picture of strength and weakness. I don’t want you to get the impression that I am trying to give you a Keswick kind of message in which you can attain to a certain position in your Christian life in which there will be no more struggle. It’s evident that the very moment Peter is accomplishing this great supernatural impossible feat of walking on the water, in the next moment he’s sinking. So we have both the weakness and the greatness of the Christian life expressed here.

So Peter clamors out of the boat and puts one foot out on the water and begins to walk toward the Lord, and mind you, he walked on the water. Now some say, well he didn’t walk very long because the Lord Jesus was there and could hear his shouts, so it may have only been fifteen or twenty feet. Well, I only say to my friends that if you can walk one step on the water that is enough for me [laughter]. Whether you walk one or twenty, it doesn’t make a whole lot of difference. It is the first step that is the important step, as L. S. Brow discovered. [Laughter] That kind of objection, it seems to me comes from a heart that is somewhat rebellious.

We used to have a swimming pool in the last house that we lived in. I don’t have one now. And we once had a young lady who may even be in this congregation come out to the house to swim. She was very small then. She was just a little girl about three years old. I will never forget, she did not know how to swim, so everybody was on pins and needles around her, but she was absolutely

fearless. And so she would step out into the water whether it was eight feet or four feet, it didn't make a bit of difference. She would step right out on the water.

But she had the idea—it was obvious as you looked at her—she had the idea that she should be able to stay up and it kept disturbing her that she would put her foot out and sink right to the bottom. So when she came out with this determined look on her face, she went over and got her shoes, her sandals, and she put on her sandals [laughter] and then she walked over to the side, and she put her foot out, and she fell immediately right to the bottom of the pool [laughter]. She really thought that if she put on her shoes that perhaps she would be able to stay up [laughter].

No, this is something that is impossible. Now, this is a picture of weakness of human nature, because, of course, Peter, as long he was able to keep his eyes on the Lord Jesus he walked on the water, but when he turned and looked at the boisterous waves, he began to sink. That is a picture of the weakness of the human being.

But there is also here a picture here of the greatness and the supernatural power that flows through the Christian upon occasion, as he looks to the Lord and trusts in him. And Peter was able to walk on the water as long as he kept his eyes on the Lord Jesus. Holy living is as much a miracle, the Christian life is as much a miracle to the natural man as is walking on the water. Walking on the water presents no proper foundation for our feet. The water has no stability or equilibrium, and especially when tossed up and down in the midst of a storm, it is impossible for us to do it. But holy living is just as possible as Peter's great feat when the eye is kept upon the Lord Jesus.

The secret of his sinking is that he took his eyes off the Lord Jesus. The secret of his walking is that he looked unto Jesus, and as long as he kept his eyes upon the Lord Jesus, the virtue and power of the Son of God, by virtue of his union with him, flowed from the Lord through him, and he was kept by the mighty power of God from sinking. So you see the whole issue is the contact that we have by trust, by faith in the Son of God, by virtue of our union with him accomplished through the redemptive work.

I wonder if this is the source of Peter’s great statement in his first epistle that we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time.

Well the sequel of the great event follows. Peter began to sink, and he cried out, “Lord save me!” Dr. Carl Armerding used to love to say about this that if Peter had prayed as we pray on Sunday morning in our pulpits, he would have been six feet under the water before he got out his petition, Lord save me, and probably so. What a beautiful illustration of a brief, to the point prayer. Flowery prayers maybe useful for men, but they are not particularly helpful in getting us out of imminent danger. And so he didn’t pray, O Thou great God that dwellest between the cherubims, [laughter] the great eternal Trinitarian God, Thou who has redeemed us—you can see him sinking in the water all the time [laughter]. But as he began to sink, it is, “Lord save me!”

You know, about ten years ago I spoke on this subject, and I didn’t make any reference to this, and someone came up to me afterwards and told me a story of a little boy who is now playing football for the Highland Park football team, but he was just a little boy then. And he had done something to displease his mother, and she had told him that he had done this wrong, that he had displeased her and he had displeased the Lord, and she suggested that he go to his room and pray. And as mothers are warped to do, she went over and listened while he prayed.

The door was closed, so she said she couldn’t hear exactly what he was praying, and she was straining to hear until suddenly she was shocked to hear him shout out, “Help!” [Laughter] She opened the door, rushed in real quick and said, “What’s the matter, what’s the matter?!”

He said, “Nothing. I just couldn’t seem to get through to God [Johnson laughs].”
But I am sure the Lord heard that help. That’s the kind of prayer that Peter uttered here, Lord help, Lord save me.

Now we read that when the Lord Jesus stretched out his hand, Peter had evidently had walked far enough out on the water so he was right over in the presence of the Lord, and all the Lord Jesus had to do was stretch out his hand and take hold of him. It could be, you know, that he walked right over in the presence of the Lord, and just as he got there he said you know I am doing very

well, [laughter] and then taking his eyes off the Lord, he looked at the Lord and said, oh!, and began to sink [laughter].

But the Lord Jesus just reached out his hand and took him. And then the two of them walked back to the boat. That was a great feat. I can imagine Peter being called upon by all the evangelists of that day to get up in the time of testimony and tell how he walked on the water.

Well, they got back into the boat and we read in the account here, and immediately, or rather, “now when they were come into the boat, the wind ceased.” What a beautiful incidental comment that is. For it suggests to us that the solution to life’s riddles is found in the company of the Lord Jesus. Contrary elements yield to the divine presence. He is Lord of the bread and can multiply it, and he is Lord of the waters and he can mollify them. He is that great.

And it says that they worshiped him. The highest function of the redeemed soul is to worship the Lord Jesus. It is not service, it’s worship. The highest function of the redeemed soul is not witnessing; it is worship. The highest function of the redeemed soul is not to serve him, it is to worship him, and then out of that worship flows the service that is effective. They worshiped him.

Now I think we have a picture here of the Christian life, in that what the Christian life is a relationship which through supernatural experiences leads to him. Now of course, when the worship him, they say he is the Son of God, and that is, incidentally, the first time he is ever called the Son of God or recognized as Son of God. So they have come to the recognition of the greatness of the Lord Jesus. Undoubtedly, this is primarily for it’s messianic significance. They now know, by virtue of this miracle, that he is not only the Messiah of the Old Testament who performs miracles, but he is the divine Messiah. Very plainly, the divine Messiah. This is another one of the messianic miracles.

But we have said before that the Lord Jesus was in the mountain praying, but now we find him in the boat, and the disciples at his feet after he has performed this miracle crying out he is the Son of God. So he is a person who on the mountain is truly human, praying—what a beautiful picture of humanity—but now we find him walking on the water, and in the boat, and the disciples

falling at his feet, worshiping him saying he is the son of God, and we have the transcendent deity of the son. He is man and he is God, the divine person who possesses humanity, true humanity.

And isn't it an amazing thing how the apostles or the writers of the New Testament are able to describe our Lord's life and put together the utter lowliness of the Son on one hand and the transcendent greatness of the Son on the other, weave these together into a harmonious story in such a way that neither one of these facets of the person of Christ are confused at all. They never are contradictory, they are beautifully harmonized.

I have always contended that it is impossible for us to produce a Word of God, and I think this is another illustration of it. There are individuals who tell us that the Bible is only the book of man. Well, if I think if they are to sustain that claim, if it is only the book of man, then some great man ought to be able to give us something like the Bible. So, I like to ask my friends who say something like that, that it is only the book of man, well, if it is only the book of man and you feel you have the power to criticize it and find fault in it and with it, then you ought to have the power within yourself to produce some of this yourself. So, I would like for you to produce for me a paragraph or two—I won't ask you to write a book or a Gospel—but just produce a paragraph or two that we will recognize as being the equivalent, or the equal of what we find in the Bible.

No one has ever written a paragraph that ever convinced anybody that it ought to belong in the Word of God in that way among the modern critics. I have a paragraph that I have written, and I think I could fool you. But do you know what kind of paragraph it is? It is a paragraph which is largely a combination of parts of the New Testament. In fact, way back in the centuries past, some Christian reading in the Bible about the letter from the Laodiceans, decided he would supply a book which he thought the apostle referred to in the Epistle to the Colossians.

So he wrote the letter to the Laodiceans, and it circulated for a while, even got into some of the early editions of the German Bible. But when you read it, as I used to read it to students at the seminary, everyone laughs, because all it is is a combination of phrases and clauses from other Pauline epistles. There is nothing original about it at all.

How are these men here able to take the utter lowliness aspect of our Lord, and the transcendent loftiness aspect of his personality, weave this together into a story that is perfectly harmonious—how are they able to do it? Well, you say they were divinely inspired. Well of course, that is true.

But there is another reason. You know why? Because they were reporters, that’s why. They didn’t really invent anything. They didn’t really create anything. They observed, and what they observed they wrote down. They were reporters. They didn’t imagine anything. They just observed everything, and they wrote down what they saw. And in writing down what they saw, they were able to produce this inspired Word of God, because what they observed had the stamp of the eternal God upon it. That is how they were able to do it.

And so here we have the Lord Jesus praying, and now we have him walking on the water and there is no contradiction whatsoever. Those are aspects and facets of the one person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone has defined the deity of the Lord Jesus in a way that is very striking. It has been said that the article of Christ’s deity which we confess is the theological expression of the evangelical experience of salvation. In other words, we have been saved by the Lord Jesus and since only a God can save us, we express the fact in our acknowledgement that he is the Son of God. The apostles saw him walking on the water, and they knew that he had saved them and they recognized him as deity too.

Well, I don’t have time to speak about the significance of the sign. I have given a few more sentences in the *Believers Bible Bulletin*. I invite you to read them. There is an application that this story has for the messianic ministry of the Lord Jesus. There is an application for other things as well, other aspects of New Testament truth.

I want to say just a word or two about some things that are brought home to my mind as I think about Peter walking on the water—and I’ll be very brief; won’t take but just a minute or two—but I want to repeat a couple of things that I think are useful. I want you to notice first of all that Peter produced his own doubt. He walked on the water to the Lord Jesus, keeping his eyes upon his

face, but when he turned and looked at the boisterous waves he began to sink. Now when Peter clamored out of that boat and put his first foot on the water, Jesus did not shout out, look out Peter you are going to sink. He originated his down doubt, and I have a hunch that often happens to us. We produce our own doubts as with turn away from him.

Now another thing I want you to notice is that doubt is not incompatible with faith. The fact that we doubt does not mean that we are not Christians. Christians doubt too. Thomas doubted, and he was clean on account of the word, John said. And even Peter, when he was sinking in the water cried out, Lord save me, so he had faith, and in fact Jesus said, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt.” He had a little faith. In fact I think he had a great deal of faith when he clamored out of that boat—all conquering faith for a while.

That is Christian too, you know, to have all conquering faith for a while, because we fail constantly. So doubt is not incompatible with faith. The antidote is great faith, and the greater the knowledge of the Lord God the greater will be our faith. He said, O Lord if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water, and as long as he maintained the concept of the Lord Jesus as the Lord and kept his eyes upon him, he did the impossible.

I think also that one little lesson that we get from this is that we should refuse afterthoughts. When God has led us in a certain path, we shouldn't stop and say I wonder if this is the right path. That evidently is the kind of thing Peter did, because when the Lord said to him, come, and he got out onto the water, and he had an afterthought when he looked at the boisterous waves, and afterthoughts are always disastrous, it seems. Faith is strengthened and maintained by the look at the Lord Jesus.

Well I began by asking you the question can you walk on the sea? And you said no. I know you said no. Deep down in your heart you said no. And I point you to Peter for the answer, “Can you walk on the sea?” Well, Peter told us a great truth: with eyes upon Jesus Christ we can walk upon the water.

Now he has told us that we should not expect to spend the rest of our life dancing around the waves. But in the tragedies, and trials and difficulties and crises of life, we have the assurance through the Word of God as we look unto Jesus that we are able through him to do that which is impossible and that is the true Christian life.

Let me close by reading two verses from Hebrews chapter 12, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witness, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.” That is it: looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. The great illustration of faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We are not told that we shall not have trials. We are not told that we shall not have storms. In fact that storm was a storm that came from God ultimately, and Peter constrained them to get into the boat in order to experience it, but we are told that we have the confidence that as through the power of the Holy Spirit we keep our eyes upon him, he will maintain us and deliver us, and bless us in the experiences that he has for us.

If you are here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, you don't have these wonderful promises, they pertain to believers. They don't pertain to those who think they are the captain of their own souls. These pertain to those who know that they are unable to control themselves and can find control only in the control of Jesus Christ. So if you are here and you have not Christ, we invite you to turn to him for personal redemption through the saving shed blood of the cross at Calvary offered for sinners. And if God the Holy Spirit has moved in your heart to see your need, may God help you to turn confessing your sin and sinfulness to receive the Savior who gives life. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be in—abide with—all who know him in sincerity.

“The Possibility of the Impossible,” by S. Lewis Johnson
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And may, O Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we be enabled to keep our eyes upon
him, through whom comes our fruitfulness in the Christian life.