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Whose Strength Has My Attention?

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# Whose Strength Has My Attention?

Dawn Wyse

2023 so far has been a year of exciting opportunities to see God in new ways, deep sadness for hurts that I don't know how to heal, struggles with feeling like I am failing in serving God well, joy in scripture being opened up, difficulty in discerning God's will when I so desperately want an answer like a neon sign . . . basically a roller coaster. It has been overwhelming, which is why I am feeling blessed by God opening my eyes to Matthew 14. What a day!

Matthew 14 starts by telling of Herod's birthday party and how Herod's careless words led to the beheading of John the Baptist. In verse 13, Jesus hears about John and withdraws by boat to a remote place to be alone. We are clearly told Jesus wants to be alone and He takes measures to make it happen. He is mourning John. So do the people respect this? No. They follow Him. Instead of getting mad at them, He has compassion. He heals them and then has the disciples feed them. This is the story of 5 loaves and 2 fish feeding 5000 with the excess of 12 baskets of leftovers. (An interesting side note is that some believe the 12 baskets represent the 12 tribes of Israel, while the feeding of 4000 in chapter 15 has 7 baskets that represent the Gentile world). Once everyone is fed, Jesus puts the disciples in the boat and tells them to go. Then He dismisses the crowds.

Jesus is now alone. At this point I would have been shouting "FINALLY!" Now He can mourn John. Jesus heads up the mountain to pray well into the night. What a day . . . death, crowds, healing, bread multiplied . . . but it isn't done.

Picture Jesus praying alone on the mountain. Then avert your eyes to the disciples on the boat. Here's the verse that started my pondering. Matthew 14:24 "Meanwhile, the boat was already some distance from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them." What stuck with me was that it states that the wind was against them. It doesn't say the disciples were afraid, but it does say the boat was battered by the waves. Fear is mentioned when the disciples think they are seeing a ghost upon the water. I found myself wondering why fear was not mentioned earlier. The thought that came to my mind was that in verse 22, we were told that Jesus was the One who put them into the boat. Maybe, just maybe, their trust in Jesus overrode any fear they might have had.

Now drop down to verse 29b-30. "And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" This is the well known story of Peter walking on the water. Once Peter knew the figure on the water was Jesus and not a ghost, Peter desired to walk on the water to Jesus. Peter doesn't appear to hesitate climbing out of the boat. (Obviously, Peter likes the water far more than I do) He actually makes progress towards Jesus. He's not afraid. Then Peter looked at the strength of the wind instead of the strength of Jesus. Because Peter overestimates the power of the wind and underestimates the power of Jesus, Peter sinks. However, Peter was right in calling out to Jesus for help and "Immediately, Jesus reached out His hand, caught hold of him and said to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'" I want to point out here that Jesus did not say "You of no faith." Peter gets a bad rap for faltering. After all, he did walk a few steps on water with his little faith.

# Whose Strength Has My Attention?

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Notice that as soon as Jesus and Peter got into the boat the wind ceased, the wind that we were told was against them in verse 24. The boat Jesus placed them in protected them until He came. Jesus allowed the wind to stay as Peter exercised his faith by climbing out of the boat and taking a few steps upon the water. Peter grew his faith that day . . . not to the full amount he could have grown, but there was still growth. Once this growth opportunity passed the wind which was against them stopped. And those in the boat worshiped Jesus.

What a day. Death. Crowds. Healing. Miracles. Prayer. Forces against. Opportunities. Growth. Overcoming. Worship. And Jesus was in the middle of all of it. What a glorious reminder Matthew 14 has been for me. My question for myself is this: Whose strength will have my attention in the midst of the struggles of my life? God's strength, the absolute strongest or the strength of whatever I fear which will always be weaker than God? I pray I can learn to always focus on God's strength. During the ups and downs and unknowns of life Jesus is there, He understands. He will provide healing, nutrition, protection, opportunity for growth and the Most Worthy God to worship. Praise God. He is so good. As always, in pursuit