

God in Flesh

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, January 25, 2015
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
by S. Michael Durham
© 2015 Real Truth Matters

Matthew 14:23-33

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. 24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. 25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. 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. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." 28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

You were probably already familiar with this story, but if you're not I can only imagine what you might be thinking. *That's a great story but it's more like a fantasy you would read in a book of legends. It's impossible to believe a man can walk on water.* When I was a kid growing up, I was always taller than everybody. By the time I was a freshman in high school I was already six feet. Kids liked to tease me about my feet. They would say things like, "Those are boats," or "Those are skis," but it doesn't matter how big your feet are—they're not big enough to walk on water. They will not displace the water at the proper ratio to keep you afloat. You will sink. I know that reading this story is almost comical. This guy is walking on the water and another guy gets out and tries to do the same thing. But the story is real and Jesus did it on purpose to say something, not just to Peter and the other 11 who stayed in the boat, but to you and I today.

I. Christianity Is Not a Pie in the Sky Kind of Religion

In other words, being a Christian is not some insurance policy for after you die. Christianity and most people live it in such a way that observers cannot conclude anything other than to be a Christian means that when you die you go to heaven and that's about it. Most people who profess to be a Christian are not a whole lot different than other people. They may go to church on Sunday; but the Christian life is about much more than attending a public service like this. That's what Jesus is trying to communicate in a very real way.

A. To Be a Christian is Not Solely About Preparation For Life After Death.

But isn't that how most people think of it? *I better get ready for dying, so I'll ask Jesus to come into my heart and then I'll be ready. I'll continue to live the same way but I know I'm saved because some preacher or Christian minister told me that's all it takes. Now I'm ready to die.* Dear friends, Christianity is not just about being ready to die it's about learning how to live now. That's what this is all about. That's the celebration we just witnessed in water baptism. It's not just when Ray dies he gets to go to heaven, that's cool, that's awesome—I don't want to minimize it—but that's not what this thing is about. I need something now. I can't cope with today.

That's what this story is all about.

Eternal life is not what you enter when you die. How many of you have walked through a cemetery and read the tombstones? "Rest in peace." "Beloved family member." "Entered into eternal life." Entered into eternal life? No. They didn't enter into eternal life when they died. Jesus defines eternal life as now. It's not only a quantity of time without end but a quality of life.

How many of you are happy with your quality of life? I've never met a person that was. There are billionaires today who are not satisfied with their quality of life so they try to make more money. No one is satisfied with his or her quality of life. I'm not satisfied. My satisfaction doesn't come by the world's standards or by trying to accumulate more of the world. My desire for a better quality of life is a desire for more of this Jesus who is eternal life. Jesus said eternal life is something you possess now.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life (present tense. They already have it), and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:27-28)

Jesus defined eternal life this way:

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3)

In other words, Jesus is saying Christianity and eternal life is all about knowing Him. You might be thinking, *I already had that figured out. I know all about God.* But look, He didn't say "...know about Me," He said "know Me." That means you are to know Him in a relationship of experience. Are you experiencing Jesus in a vital relationship? That's not about checking off a decision card after having prayed to ask Jesus into your heart; we're talking about something so much more important. We're talking about eternity being put in you. "This is eternal life, that they may know You..."

John, one of the guys in the boat that day, was watching all this and years later he said,

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:13)

Present tense. You *now have it*. Why? Because Jesus is eternal life. If you have Jesus you have a new kind of life living in you. This is what Christianity is all about—it's *not* about being religious. It's not about putting on a suit and tie and coming into a building and having a religious event. That wrong idea about Christianity is damning a lot of people. It's sending a lot of people to hell. A lot of people are dying and going to hell because they're doing religious things. I was a man who did religious things. I started preaching the day after my fifteenth birthday but had I died before December 1, 1986, I would have gone to hell.

Christianity is this—it is God in us. That's it. Christianity is God in you.

B. Christianity is About God In Us.

Let me ask you a question. Do you think that if the infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing God were in you that you would know it? Don't you think that you would know something was different? Don't you believe that would be a whole lot more significant than asking God to come in your heart and forgive you of your sins so that when you die you get to go to heaven?

To our guests, don't think this message is tailored to you. Ask anyone that comes here—this is the message they hear often because we're still trying to learn this. Religion has told us for years this isn't what Christianity is. Religion has told us that Christianity is doing all of these good things. No. Christianity is God in me. My problem today—and I have a lot of them—is namely that I do not understand that God is in me. I can trace every problem that I'm wrestling with today to this one thing—I'm not reckoning, believing, or standing upon the fact that God Almighty, eternal life, is in me and therefore I have everything I need in Jesus. Why do I worry? Why do I get anxious? Why do I think tomorrow may not be as good as today when today wasn't all that good? Because I don't believe God Almighty is in me with everything I need. If you're a Christian, you have everything you need. Christianity is about God in us.

II. God is Revealed in Man

That's the only way we can know God. God is revealed, displayed, manifested, in man.

I'm going to capsule this story then break it apart. In this story we see God acting as a man so that God can be seen. Then we see a man trying to act like God but all we see is failure.

That's what this story is about. And it's the Christian life most of us are living. We're like Peter, failing because we're trying to imitate God. We have lost, forgotten, or never knew that Christianity is not about trying to be like God, it's about God in you.

How do I come to that from this story? Simple.

A. Adam Was Made in the Image of God.

God scooped him up from the dust of the ground and breathed into him His very own Spirit and Adam became a living being. The Bible says man was made in the image and likeness of God. That doesn't mean he looked like God. When you looked at Adam you wouldn't see any visible similarities because we don't know what God looks like. In fact, do you know why you don't know what God looks like? If you saw what God looked like you wouldn't be around to tell about it. The Bible is very clear that nobody can look on God's face and live.

So God made a man and made Him in His image and likeness. There were some qualities that Adam possessed that were God-like but mainly to be created in God's image meant Adam was to be God's representative on the earth. He was to represent God in all of creation. God gave him dominion and power over creation and he represented the Lord. And we know what happened next. Or do we?

God gave Adam a test of obedience. "Do this and you'll live. Don't do this and you will die spiritually and finally physically." What did Adam do? He did what every one of us would do, only we would have done it sooner, he disobeyed. Immediately the Spirit of God that was in him, God in him, left and man became something God did not create.

Some of you look really nice, some of you look really great, some of you look, well, you did the best you could this morning. I understand. Believe me, I understand. But you are nothing like what Adam and Eve was before they sinned. If Adam and Eve walked down this aisle you would want to bow down and worship them. They were beautiful, powerful, and intelligent. The Bible says they were made just a little lower than the angels and the angels have a lot of power and beauty. But the moment Adam said *no* to God and chose to be his own god, he sunk within himself. The Spirit of God left him.

God visible in His representative was gone. Mankind became sub-human, a monstrosity—a nice way of saying *an ugly creature*. We're nothing like we should be. We're messed up. That's why I still have issues. It's because I am not what God intended me to be. So in order to get us back to His original design, the Manufacturer became like one of us.

B. Jesus Who is God Was Made in the Image of Man.

Man was made in the image of God and now God was made in the image of a man. Isn't that remarkable? He's after you with a jealous love. He wants you. He knows you can't see God and live so He comes like one of us. It wasn't a mask or a costume but a real man with the soul, spirit, mind, and body of a man. He was a real man but God! I can't explain that. I can't tell you how that works but the Bible says it. I think an all-knowing, all-powerful God can pull it off and He did. I don't have a problem with that. I don't have a problem with the fact that I can't explain it to you. I don't even have a problem that you don't understand it. If we could understand God fully and completely, He wouldn't be big enough. I'm glad I don't have this figured out.

C. God Was Visible by Jesus.

So here is Jesus who is God and He became one of us. He incubated in a womb for nine months just like we did. He was born, and now God was visible again through the man Jesus. You could see God. Better yet, I should say, you could see how God behaves and acts, because you can't see God and live. Men who saw just a little bit of God thought they were going to die. So here is God in flesh and we can now see how God lives and acts and what He intended for you and me from the beginning.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

Then the same John we quoted a moment ago wrote,

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

In other words, we saw what God was like. He goes on to say in the next four verses that no one has seen God and lived. But Jesus, who is in the Father, has declared Him so now we get to see what He's like in the person of Jesus.

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (John 1:18)

D. God is Acting In a Man So God Could Be Seen.

Here Jesus comes walking at three o'clock in the morning on a stormy sea. God, being a man, so we can see what God can do and what He is like. The disciples see *that* and are scared to death. Can you imagine what it would be like if you did see God in all of His glory?

Peter sees this and after he gets over his fear he says, “I want to do that.” That's just the way Peter was. If he saw Jesus do it he thought he could do it too—and he was right. We criticize Peter but he had something going for him that most of the other disciples didn't. He believed what Jesus could do he could do, he just tried to do it himself. And that was his problem. He didn't do it the way Jesus did it. He was not a man acting with God in him; he was a man trying to imitate God.

III. A Man Trying to Act Like God

Here you have Peter trying to act like God when God is a real man walking on water so we can see what God is like and how powerful He is. But Peter tries to act like God. What happens? He fails. Why?

A. It Was Impossible for Peter to Walk on the Water.

Ladies and gentlemen, do not go home and try this. Don't go to the foot of Broadway today and try to walk on the surface of the Ohio River. It won't work. It's impossible to walk on water. God

was in Jesus, who was a man showing us what God can do. Jesus could do it because God was in Him. “Well,” you say, “He was God.” I know that. But He was also a man filled with God. We’ll show you that in just a few moments. He wasn’t doing this as God. That’s the most important thing you can hear me say right now. Jesus did not walk on the water because He was God, He walked on the water because as a man He had God in Him and He was trusting His Father. Peter sees this and tries to do the impossible and he fails.

I’m going to blow some of you out of the water because you’re trying to walk on it right now. Some of you are trying to walk on water, you’re trying to do the impossible—you’re trying to live the Christian life. You’re trying. You’re trying to do what is required of you. I know this because I watch us and I watch me. I hear myself say to God, “Father, watch what I can do! I’ve watched You and now I’ve learned and I’m going to do it!” and I fail because it’s impossible for me to live the Christian life. Just like it’s impossible to you.

B. It is Impossible to Live the Christian Life.

Somebody said, “Living the Christian life isn’t difficult; it’s impossible.” And it is! You cannot pull off acting like God, and that’s what the Christian life is. Remember, we spent all that time at the beginning of this message defining the Christian life as God in you so that you can now act like God. I can’t do that in myself, in my strength, and in my own abilities, I’m fallen. I’m sub-human. I’m a monster created by my own sin and rebellion. It’s impossible to live the Christian life.

Wait a minute, you say, before you get too critical of Peter you have to commend him. He did walk on the water for a little bit. He took a few steps! Yes, he did. This is a key step for us. Faith is the answer of how to live the Christian life. You cannot, by sheer determination, pull this thing off. I’ve tried. I tried for 26 years *before* becoming a Christian. I’ve been saved now for 28 years and the Lord knows in those 28 years I’ve tried again and again and again, and every time I do what Peter did—I sink. I fail. God never intended us to pull this thing off and be like Him on our own. That’s not why He came and died on a cross.

Let me tell you why Jesus died on a cross. So that God could be revealed in man—God in us—and that others could see that it’s not us living the Christian life but God in us. Think about this for a moment. Let’s say Rory could pull this Christian life off, or at least fool us, or Brother Gary, who led us in worship. Let’s say these two guys did a good job of doing everything you’re supposed to do, checking off the boxes, making sure you don’t do all the wrong things but all the right things. I would look at them and say, “I can’t do that. I don’t have the ability to do that. I’ve got too much going against me. I’m not them. I’m not as smart as he is. I don’t have his personality. I can’t live like them.” Do you see what would happen? Christianity would simply become a religion where people try to do their best and if they appear to pull it off, then the rest of us feel like abject failures.

So what God did is make it impossible for all of us. The only way you can do this is if God comes and invades your life and you simply, by faith, walk trusting Him. It’s that easy. This is not rocket

science. This is simple. All I've got to do is get God in me and then trust the God that lives in me to live His life through me.

How do you do that? Just like Peter did before he failed, "Lord, if that is You, bid me to come to You." Jesus said, "It is I, come." And Peter does this awesome, unbelievable, crazy thing. He thinks he can do what Jesus did. He climbs out of the boat and actually stands as firmly on the water as I'm standing on this platform. I don't think his feet broke the surface of the water. I think his feet were on top of the water like I'm on top of this platform. It is not scientifically explainable. He thought he could do what Jesus was doing and he did. How did he do it? By faith.

The question, then is, how do you live by faith? It's clearly seen here in our text.

Look at verse 29 and 30,

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

This woman over here is my wife. If I'm walking to her, what am I doing? I'm coming to her; she's the focus, she's the goal, my eyes are on her. There is no doubt that when Peter got out of that boat he was looking at Jesus.

³⁰ *But when he **saw** (emphasis mine) that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"*

How do you see the wind is boisterous? Only by observing it! About that time a wave smacked him on the side of the face. Then a wave came and smacked him on the other side of the face. He was then afraid. He broke his reliance on Jesus at that very moment. This is crucial to this message. He broke his reliance and dependency on Jesus. Earlier he had kept his eyes on Christ because Christ is the one who gives us faith. When you know who Jesus is and you look at Him with the eyes of the heart you see He is everything you need and then some. And you rest. You rest in Jesus' sufficiency. It's not work. It's not struggle. It is rest. That's why Jesus said, "You who are weary and heavy laden, come unto Me and I will give you rest." What is He saying? He's talking to people like me who try to pull this thing and live like God and I'm worn out by it because I can't do it .

I want to say something to you Lifeline men. You can't do what these folks at Lifeline are asking you to do. I don't know why they're doing this to you. You can't be like Rory because Rory can't be like Rory. You can't be like Jake because Jake can't be like Jake. These guys have Jesus in them! That's the only difference.

As I'm looking to my wife and walking toward her, I'm looking into her eyes and she's communicating to me. She's saying, "Come on, baby, come on." She loves me and she communicates that to me. She communicates her love to me as I walk toward her. I'm picking up on that in her facial

expressions, her demeanor; it all tells me to come and I have confidence that when I get there she's not going to reject me.

Do you hear what I just said? Jesus will not reject you! Why would He come and do all of this if when you said, "Okay, I'm coming!" He shuts the door in your face? That's Satan's lie to you. Just think—He wouldn't have suffered as He has suffered for us and say "Come" and then reject us when we do. No, look at Him bleeding for you. Look at Him in anguish for you. Look at Him between heaven and earth bleeding His life out for you, crying out, "Father, forgive them!" You can look at Him and believe that when you get there He will receive you. That's faith. That's properly relating to Him.

Faith is desperate dependency. I know I can't pull the God thing off so I'm desperate because if I'm not able to live holy, then I'm going to hell. I'm a failure. But since I can't pull it off I'm desperate so I've got to depend and I relate to Him and I look to Him every step. "Thank You, Jesus,"—another step—"Thank you, Jesus." It's not, "Oh God, help me." It's, "Thank You." Why? Because He's promised. If He's promised and you're praying, "God, help me," you're saying you don't believe He's promised.

But the moment you're like Peter and you begin to look inward and say, "Boy, this is really hard, I don't know if my faith can do this," you begin to sink. The Christian life is not about you trying to pull off the God thing it's about letting God come in and doing it through you. That's what this story is about. It's what Christianity is all about: letting God be God in a man or a woman, doing what is impossible for them to do.

IV. God Can Only Be Manifested Through Us Doing the Impossible

How many of you have ever asked yourself, "Why do we not see more miracles today?" Here's the answer: Because we're not trusting Jesus to be God in us doing the impossible. We're trying to do it.

Faith requires you to be desperately dependent upon God so that God can literally be God in you and do things that are unexplainable, and as far as man is concerned, can only be explained by God Himself.

What is it that can take your life and completely change it so people say to you, "You're not the same person you used to be? What happened to you?" They know you could never bring about this change. The only explanation is God. Here's our problem and it's why our society is rejecting our Christ and our Gospel—it's not God-filled. When God shows up He does things that are only explainable by Him. He will ask you to attempt to do impossible things by simply trusting Him and that releases His life in you so that when He does it He's glorified and people have to say "There is a God!"

Here we are as a church and this is the crucible for us. This is the test, Oak Grove. Will we stop trying to be Christians—coming to the conclusion that we are nothing but failures at it—and believe that God is in us and let Him live through us? Even if He asks you to do something that is as crazy as He told Peter to do, will we keep our eyes on Him, relating to Him one step at a time, not looking at the impossibilities or our abilities but keep our eyes on Christ and let Him do the impossible?

That's where God has my wife and I right now. It's where He has several of you. If God doesn't come through for you, you are going to fail. The only answer is God in you and the only way God is activated in you is by your faith in Him. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

What does it mean to trust in Jesus?

A. Trusting in Jesus is the Continual Acknowledgment of Our Weakness and Receiving the Continual Supply of Jesus' Sufficiency

The first element of trusting Jesus is constant admittance that you can't do this. You constantly acknowledge your weakness and the fact that you can't be like Jesus. If someone slaps me on the face and says, "Prophesy—who hit you?" Forgiveness isn't the natural reaction in that scenario. That's not the natural reaction. I grew up fighting. On the first day of school, I got into a fight. Then they told me I needed to channel all that and put it in a boxing ring so I boxed for a while. When somebody starts taking a punch, instinct takes over. How can you explain natural instinct not taking over when someone punches you and instead of punching back you forgive, love, and do good to that person? There's no explanation except Jesus because only Jesus pulled that off. And every saint of God that's done that since did it because Jesus was in them, it wasn't that saint. This is what Christianity is all about. Jesus being seen through man.

The first part of trusting Christ is that you have to acknowledge continually how weak you are. I do good walking with Jesus for a few steps, like Peter, but then I stop and I say, "Oh, I've got this now, Lord. Just watch me!" And I fail every time. You would think I would learn but I guess I'm a dunce spiritually. I have to keep learning over and over and over that I'm a failure because I'm too weak. Then I have to receive the continual supply of Jesus' sufficiency.

Faith is connecting our need to God's supply. It is connecting my inadequacy to His adequacy.

I want you to turn in your Bible to John 14.

In this passage, Jesus is going to help the disciples see how they're going to pull this thing off, and it won't be them, it will be God in them. Jesus is going to be crucified the next day and He wants to make sure they get this lesson. He's trying to get it in through their thick skulls, just as He's trying to get it into mine.

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.¹¹ Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.¹² Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.¹³ And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." (John 14:8-14)

Jesus expects nothing out of us but failure.

You need to get the expectation game answered. God knows you're going to fail, even now that you're a Christian. Just look at me; I do enough of it myself. We do fail. God has never expected anything more from me than before I became a Christian. I'm going to fail. Weakness. Failure. Poverty. That's what I have to offer. Let's just answer this question right now: does God expect anything out of me? No. All He expects out of me is failure. But what He knows is if I will rest in Him and trust in Him—abide in Him—and keep rightly related to Him, He'll do it through me.

There's a text in Ephesians 4 that says, "Don't give place to the devil." Paul is writing to Christians. Why does He say that? Because that's what Peter did. The moment you give Satan permission in your life you're not relating to Jesus by faith.

But I still sin, pastor. I do too, I understand. When you sin, what should you allow to dominate you? The Gospel. I have a Savior who died for *that sin*. I have a Savior who didn't expect anything else out of me except to trust Him that He'll help me by living in me so that the world can see what God looks like.

That's what this story is about and that's what God is offering to you if you're not His child. Christians, that's what He's still offering us out of all these years of being His child and we still haven't got it yet. The invitation is still here. Christ in me the hope of glory. So I invite you this morning to obey the word and believe it. I'm not asking you to do something; I'm asking you to do something you can't do. This is impossible. I'm asking you to believe that God can do it through you. You say, "Not me. Look at my life. Look at my life, it's messed up." That's the point! He didn't expect it to be any other way. He said, "I can do it through you. But you've got to trust Me."

What's it mean to trust God? I've already told you, you've got to continually acknowledge you're weak and continually receive His supply. Another way of saying it is this: commit yourself to Him. Not just your sins, not just your afterlife, you commit your *life* to Him because you believe that He can sustain you walking in the impossible. You believe you can turn in your guilt for gladness, your sorrow for joy, your discontentment for peace. You know that's not possible for you because you're tried to be at peace and it never stays. God can do it. Just trust Him. Commit to Him and you too can live in the impossible. Amen.