

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

What a fantastic story. Peter actually walked on water and experienced the supernatural. I believe this is the kind of life we are to live – one filled with experiences that literally defy logic, reason, sensibilities, the natural desires of our flesh, and the tangible realities of our world. We are to have the kind of experiences that leaves others starrng in amazement as we live the unfathomable.

As we continue our study on the Faces of God's Agape love, we are going to focus on the practical ways in which God desires our lives to be lived in the supernatural and how that reality is to invade our relationships with unbelievers. Over the last two weeks, we have discussed the fact that when we became believers God redefined all our relationships, especially those with unbelievers. As a result, He requires us to reprioritize all our relationships accordingly. Tonight we are going to dig a bit deeper to understand practically what that looks like in terms of our responsibilities to those in our life who do not know God.

Let me just say that faith is the key. Actively believing the truth is the door to the supernatural. If you are willing to get out of the boat, keep your eyes on Jesus, and if He is your sole focal point, you will often find yourself naturally doing the supernatural. You will find that your approach to life and relationships will lead you to do things that are contrary to your mind, your emotions, your desires, your needs, and to all that has been hard-wired into your DNA. You will find that your thoughts and perspectives are extremely unique and distinct from those in the world. And the decisions you make will not line up with what is practical, what is common sense, and with the normal way things are done in this world. Rather, your choices will reflect God's, mind, God's heart, God's methods, and they will be an expression of God's Agape love.

You will find that even in the midst of the storm, in the center of chaos, when the wind is contrary, and you are battered by the waves of circumstances, you will go where so few have even attempted to go. You will believe God, you will take Him at His word, and you will take action accordingly. Your choices will align up perfectly with what He tells you to do, no matter how crazy and impossible that instruction may seem.

Let's begin in Romans 12 and look at how this supernatural way of living will impact your relationships with unbelievers.

Romans 12:14-21

If people persecute you because you are a Christian, don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. When others are happy, be happy with them. If they are sad, share their sorrow. Live in harmony with each other. Don't try to act important, but enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible.

Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, "I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord. Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.

When people come against you, instead of the normal reaction of being defensive, protecting yourself, and attacking back, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you are able to pray that God will bless those how persecute you. Then as a result of those prayers, you will find that God will place you in situations where you can be that blessing. Keep in mind, most people who are who are hostile to your way of life and your beliefs are extremely insecure and needy people. They will often

use power, authority, and intimidation as a way to protect their weakness and their own struggle with inadequacy. Yet, you can actually provide for them in their need. Their souls are starving and are dying of thirst. They need the living manna and fountain of living water that can only come from Jesus.

Therefore, you can choose to build them up, encourage them, and find unique ways to love them despite the fact that they have been mean to you. In so doing, you will make a mark and a serious indentation on their conscience. Somewhere deep inside, they will be ashamed of the ways in which they have treated you. They may not show it, but it will be there. In honoring God in this way, in trusting yourself to Him, in refusing to pay back evil for evil, you will be living the supernatural life.

In addition, when you step outside of the pain and the circumstances in your own life and truly be happy for someone when the sun is shining down on their life, you are living a supernatural life that is not rooted in selfishness but in love. When your life is in order, things seem to be going ok, you don't have a lot of serious worries; yet, you are able to come along side someone who is suffering and share in their pain and walk with them through their difficulties, no matter how long it takes, you are living the supernatural life.

When you set aside your own rights, your own demands, and your own selfish desires, in order to live in harmony with the people in your life (whether at work, school or at home), when you refuse to consider yourself better than those who are just not as cool as you, and you purposefully engage in conversation and take an interest in the regular people in your life, and when you approach those relationships with humility and not a condescending know it all attitude that shows that you still think you are better than they are, then you are living a supernatural life that will be apparent to all.

1 Corinthians 10:31-33

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God. That is the plan I follow, too. I try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what I like or what is best for me, but what is best for them so they may be saved.

The Spirit desires you to be sensitive to those around you and the community in which you find yourself, so as not to cause someone else to stumble. This however takes wisdom – the supernatural wisdom that comes only from God. Unfortunately, this verse has been used to strap people with so many unnecessary burdens when it comes to dealing with religious people who have serious problems with legalism. Let me assure you, Paul is not talking about compromising the truth and supporting their legalistic hang-ups. For example, one time when Paul was hanging out with Peter and Peter started to separate himself from the Gentiles so as not to cause his Jewish brothers a problem, Paul publically rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy and his compromise of the truth. You can find this story in *Galatians 2:11-16*.

I believe Paul is laying out a general principle of living in the Spirit of God: you are to always be others focused and are to stop worrying so much about yourself, your fun, your rights, and your pleasure. Rather, you are to consider how the exercise of your freedom will impact those to whom God has sent you. And all your choices are to be based on what is best for them.

In that regard, God's instruction to you regarding the need to reprioritize the relationships in your life is really for the benefit of others, so that they may be saved. It may not seem so at first. You may reason with yourself and convince

yourself that there is no real harm in being close, intimate, and vulnerable to those in the world. You think you can handle it and everything will be ok as long as you are not doing anything “too bad.” Well that kind of thinking is foolishness and not entirely genuine. If you were to dig deep and be honest, you really just want your fun and you want to enjoy the pleasures of this world that these relationships afford you, and you do not want God messing that up.

But God asks you to set up these boundaries and to not be intimate with unbelievers because He knows that most of the time those relationships will lead you to compromise, resulting not only in harm to you but to the lives of those who don't know God. Your compromised life may become a barrier to their ever seeing the reality of the supernatural and to their ever believing that God loves them.

But if you are willing to follow God's prescription for relationships, if you are willing to jump out of the boat, if you are willing to only invest in those to whom God has assigned to you, if you are willing to trust that those people with whom you have been beholden to are not your responsibility but Gods, then you will find yourself walking on water. Sure, living this way will be scary and the waves will be crashing around you, and people will not be pleased. But if you keep your eyes on Jesus, reject your own wisdom, are honest with yourself and refuse to make rationalizations, and if you align your choices with the Word of God, you will do what few others have ever been able to do. It will be a wonder and you will see God's power as He moves through you and through the lives of those to whom He has given you.

This week as I have been mulling over this teaching, I keep thinking how sad it is that so many within Christianity have never experienced the power of God in this way. For the most part, we have refused to take God at His word and actively believe the truth. We can study it, we can discuss it, but living it is something

altogether different. I also am amazed at how patient God has been with Christians who just live empty, self-centered, weak and impotent lives. It is horrible and I know that it grieves the Spirit of God. God want us to display His nature at all times – a nature that is supernaturally empowered where we are able to participate in the will of God in heaven being done here on earth.

Titus 3:1-7

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

When you become so aware of how undeserving you are of God's mercy, when you truly come to grips with your spiritual depravity, when you begin to realize how deep the darkness within your old man runs, and when you understand that despite your worthless condition, God still chose to lavish His love upon you, and, therefore, you choose to show love and mercy to others who are equally undeserving, you are living the supernatural life.

When you willfully submit to your bosses, your teachers, your parents, as you would submit to the Lord (as long as that submission is not in contravention to how God is leading you), then you will be living a life that others will simply not understand.

It takes a work of the Holy Spirit to set aside your pride, especially when you have been wronged, misjudged, mistreated, or taken advantage of by an authority. It takes a work of the Holy Spirit to not just instantly get mad, draw your battle lines, and show them that you are not going to let them take advantage of you. It takes a work of the Holy Spirit to instead choose to be peaceable, gentle, and submissive, remembering that you also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending your life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

Peaceable and gentle obedience truly honors God. In *Hebrews 5:8* we are told that even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest. Similarly, when we follow Jesus' example, we are being qualified to be part of His royal priesthood, His ambassadors of love.

A couple of weeks ago we told a story from Jesus' childhood. His family came to Jerusalem for a celebration, but when it was time to leave Jesus stayed behind and did not tell His parents. A full day into the journey home His parents freaked. They thought Jesus was amongst their big group of relatives, but He was nowhere to be found. They searched for Him for 3-days and finally found Him talking with the teachers in the Temple. His mom was very upset but Jesus just told her that she should have known that He would have been in His Father's house. And although from His parents' perspective Jesus behavior was absolutely inappropriate for a 12-year old boy, Jesus always first prioritized the appointments of His heavenly

Father. However, I want to make a very important point; once that specific assignment was completed, Jesus once again willingly submitted to the leadership of His parents. Let's pick up with the final part of that passage in Luke.

Luke 2:49-51

"But why did you need to search?" he asked. "You should have known that I would be in my Father's house." But they didn't understand what he meant. Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them; and his mother stored all these things in her heart.

Therefore, absent God's specific instruction to the contrary, it is right for you to be subject to the authorities in your life. This is not to be done with an attitude as if you are being forced; rather, you are to serve in such a way that it is clear that you are showing consideration for all men.

Matthew 9:10-13

That night Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners. The Pharisees were indignant. "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" they asked his disciples. When he heard this, Jesus replied, "Healthy people don't need a doctor — sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices.' For I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough."

Yes, Jesus hung out with unbelievers. He hung out with the worse of the worse. He enjoyed their company, He enjoyed their meals, and He even enjoyed their wines. In fact, in *Matthew 11:19* and *Luke 7:34*, Jesus is accused of being a glutton, a drunkard, and a friend of the worst sort of sinners. But notice, Jesus relationship with them was not built around their darkness; rather, it was built around His light. First of all, we know that Jesus only did what His Father told Him to do (*John 5:19,20; 17:4*), therefore, every time He developed a relationship with someone it was because He was lead by the Spirit of God. Secondly, He entered into relationship with unbelievers with the purpose of healing their spiritual sickness, not because He was attracted to the pleasures of this world. Jesus was busy pouring the mercy of God on those who had never received mercy from the religious community.

Similarly, our relationships with unbelievers are to be based on the assignments that God has given us. We are to engage others with the purpose of drawing them into our light, versus being attracted to their darkness. We are to be legitimately concerned about their spiritual sickness, and we are to be God's instrument of healing. Therefore, we should want nothing that we do to become a barrier to their knowing the life that can be found in Jesus. Let me ask you, how often are your relationships with unbelievers not about the light, not about their spiritual sickness, but about such things such as music, money, careers, boys, girls, drinking, drugs, a certain life-style, etc? This is wrong! This is not the supernatural life to which you are entitled; it is merely your seeking to meet the needs of your flesh.

Matthew 5:43-48

"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that

way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too. If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Wow, loving those who are mean, cruel, and who have purposefully hurt you is a big call. Let me tell you, apart from a supernatural transformation of the very substance of your heart, this is an impossible command to fulfill. It takes perfection to love with this kind of love. It takes a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. That is why in *Ephesians 4:23-24* you are told that you must be willing to display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness – righteous, holy, and true. A person who lives from their New Creation will know how to love– even their enemies – with the supernatural love of the Lord. This is how you will be different from everyone else; this is the impossible, something they cannot do.

We are to live a life on the edge. A life that leaves others in total confusion and amazement as they try and understand what in the world makes us tick. This is how we jump out of the boat, walk on the waves and experience the supernatural.

Sadly, if you choose to live this way, most others will do little more than watch you as you participate in the unfathomable. Those who walk the narrow path, those who make God their *priority* and the absolute *authority* of their life, and those who listen to the voice of God and follow only His voice, are few and far between. Even the closest followers of Jesus just stayed in the boat and watched. No one

even wanted to give it a try; they wanted to stay safely tucked into the tangible which to them felt so secure, so familiar, and so real.

I can understand their being afraid to jump out of the boat, they must have thought Peter was crazy and out of his mind. Those who watch can never really understand the decisions you must make, for they have little experience with the ways in which the Spirit moves. To them it's all so confusing and way too risky. But you live this way because you have to – the Spirit compels you. You have no choice. Jesus is your life and doing what He says, going where He wants you to go, and doing His will has become the very food for your existence. You simply want nothing to stand in the way of your *oneness* with Him.

Now, honestly, I am still a little amazed that once the other disciples saw Peter actually walk on water that they did not line up at the edge of the boat to give it a try. After all, that was so totally cool and it was not really that risky. Even when Peter fell, Jesus was there to pick him up. I always thought that at least John would have jumped in even if it was just out of competition and not wanting Peter to get the best of him. But even John felt safe and comfortable right where he was at – watching while Peter experienced the supernatural. It is sad but that seems to be the way it still is. Most everyone likes to stay in their little safe box of reality attached to demands of their flesh; and, as a result, rarely – if ever – get to experience the power of Jesus that causes us to live outside of anything anyone would consider to be normal.

Are you a watcher or are you one who is willing to jump out of the boat? This is not meant to be just a cute little question to make sure you are challenged by this teaching. This is a question that is at the center of how God wants you to live.

God wants you to prioritize His voice and His instruction in your life over everything and everyone else. No one else, and nothing thing else, is to have

priority. That includes your family relationships, your friendships, your loved ones, your social circles, your cultural responsibilities, and so on. Nothing is to supersede the authority of God's voice in your life. Everything is to flow from Him. What others experience of you in relationship should be the overflow from what you have been experiencing with God. They are to drink of your excess.

Over the last couple of weeks, I have talked with many of you about applying these truths. In each and every one of those discussions, the choices that were before you stood in total opposition to everything deep inside your being. I am not just talking about the obvious behavior issues regarding fellowship with unbelievers, but I am talking about the motivations in your heart for being in and pursuing those relationships in the first place. If each of us were honest, I believe we would find that at the center of every one of those relationships is a place where we operate out of need, insecurity, desire, and a belief that God is not really going to be who He says He will be for us; a belief that God may work for some people, but we are not quite sure that He is going to work for us – at least not in the way we want Him to, when we want Him to.

It is this combination of wrong belief and unbelief that keeps you from redefining and reprioritizing your relationships in accord with the will of God. But if you want to experience the supernatural, you must be honest with yourself and come clean with all the unbelief and wrong belief that is at the center of your heart. I know that this is hard and taking a close look in the mirror reveals blemishes that you never wanted to know were there. But it is absolutely necessary to shatter the illusion that staying in the boat is the safe thing to do.

Let's get back to Peter walking on water. When he took his eyes off of Jesus and started to look at what was happening all around him – when he tried to fathom the unfathomable, make sense out of the impossible, he began to sink and sink fast. It

seems somewhat silly that Peter would have all of a sudden become so insecure and so freaked out – after all he was walking on water. You think he might have done a few cartwheels, back-tucks and done a little showing off in front of the other disciples. But regardless of the miraculous, it did not take much for Peter to lose his focus and sink. One moment he was up: emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and then the next he was all wet. All it took was a few seconds of distraction, a few seconds of looking at the tangible, a few seconds of doubt, and he went down.

This is the way it often happens. You start down this path of experiencing God and hearing His voice in your life, and it is all so exciting. Especially the first few times you know that you know that you know that God has spoken to you. It is such a high. But when what He asks you to do is outside of the realm of possibility for your mind, your emotions, and when it impacts the relationships in your life that have been so important to you, things become a bit uncertain. Fear starts to grow, worry, doubt, and even confusion. Yes, you heard His voice, but when you consider what He requires of you, it really makes no practical sense so you want to instantly go back to what is tangible, what is comfortable, and what you can reason through with your own mind. Instantly you start to sink.

Maybe you have taken a step to separate yourself from some of the relationships to which you have been beholden in the past; relationships that did not honor God. But the reaction you received was cold and a bit harsh. This hurt your feelings and although we have talked about the fact that your decision will not be well received, you still were hurt. And instead of taking that hurt to God and letting Him fill that area of need, you went back to that person and tried to find a way for that hurt to be cared for; and you began to sink.

Maybe you found yourself in class or in a new job and instead of standing secure and confident in who you are as a child of God, and having others attracted to you because of His light in your life, you started to react out of insecurity and the desire to be accepted, liked, and to be considered interesting and funny. As a result, you found yourself slipping into their darkness, and you began to sink.

If this is where you are, remember that although Peter was sinking, he cried “Lord save me” and Jesus immediately stretched out His hand and pulled Peter out of the water. Remember our teaching on the narrow path.

Psalms 37:23-24

The steps of the godly are directed by the LORD. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will not fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand.

This Psalm was Peter’s literal experience. This will be yours as well. Our God is so merciful and compassionate that even if we fail, even if we have blown it, He will be right there to put us back in the boat when we cry for Him to save us. This reality should bring us great comfort and give us confidence to go ahead and jump out of the boat without hesitation. All our fear, all our insecurity, all our “need” is just illusory and unfounded. It just keeps us from walking on the water and experiencing a life that is radical.

Personally, I want to live a life believing all that God has said. I want to naturally experience the supernatural as part of my day-in and day-out existence. Yes, in my flesh it is scary, to my reason it is insanity, to my emotions it is foolishness and way too risky, but it is how I want to live. I want to keep my eyes

on Jesus Christ. Further, I don't want to live by constantly sinking and having to rely on His wonderful mercy. Don't get me wrong, I am so thankful it is there and I have needed it often. But I want to learn to ignore all that is happening around me and focus on what Jesus has instructed me to do. I don't want to turn my eyes toward my pain, my sorrow, my trouble, and my fear. I want to keep my eyes on Him and not depart. I want to live a life that leaves others shaking their head in unbelief. I do not want to stay in the boat. I know this is easier said than done. Even as the words come out of my mouth my flesh is having a visceral reaction.

But what about you? What do you want? Remember, if you are content only experiencing pieces of God He will let you. But you will be with those who spend most of their time watching as others walk on water. But if you want all of Him, if you want to live the supernatural, if you want to share in His divine nature, strap on your seat belt, it will be a very rough ride, but I assure you that you will experience God like so few others have ever experienced Him. But you have to take God at His Word. You have to actively believe all that is true. You have to jump out of the boat and live by faith, walk by faith, and keep your eyes on Jesus Christ.

Let's Pray.