

Five Unbreakable Links (Part 1)

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[0:00] I'm going to look at Matthew 14 and verse 22.

as I'm just preaching in a different kind of venue, kind of setting.

But for the next two weeks, we're going to look a little deeper into this passage. Some of this passage I have treated and dealt with in various sermons.

You may not remember, but when I was preaching through 1 Peter, we referred to this passage, or I did, a couple of times. You don't remember that probably, but maybe you will as we go along.

And so, let me go ahead and read the text, starting with verse 22. We'll read verses 22 through 33.

And by the way, I don't have any notes for you. This is something you'll just have to jot down if you find something you'd like to remember.

[1:19] All right, starting with verse 22. 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 began to sink. He cried out, Lord, save me.

[2:26] 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 worshipped him, saying, You are certainly God's son. All right, so there's the story. And the principal characters, really, it's very simple to identify who the characters are in the story.

They're just two characters in a sense. One group would be the disciples. And the other one would be the Lord Jesus himself. And they're out in the middle of the sea.

You know, the Sea of Galilee. And nobody else is around. And so it's the disciples and the Lord Jesus. And the disciples, of course, find themselves in one of those situations.

Situations of life. Now, it's not necessarily a situation that any of us have ever been in. I don't know if you've ever been out in a boat in the middle of the sea, a stormy sea.

[3:31] Maybe you have. A few times I've been up in a plane, you know, and felt like, am I going to make it down? It's going to go down one way or another.

But am I going to make it down safely? When, you know, we've got a pilot right here, Paul. And when, in reality, probably it was in no danger whatsoever.

But when it starts to get, you know, kind of like that, and you're worried about it. But beyond that, I've never been in this kind of situation. But, of course, the situation here that the disciples were in is symbolic or it's representative of a wide range of situations in life that you and I might find ourselves in.

And it's just a situation that is characterized this way. Everything's out of control. Or that particular thing in your life is out of your control.

At least it seems to be beyond our control. And sometimes there are things that occur in our lives, and they are absolutely beyond anything we could ever, ever do.

[4:46] Beyond any control that we might have. Any remedy that we might devise ourselves. And so this is kind of the situation here. The ship is being tossed by a stormy sea.

But then, the other principal character, and I would say the principal character in the story, is Jesus. Jesus is in our story. And though He is not in the ship with the disciples, at least not at first He isn't, He is not uninvolved.

Not by a long shot. He's not uninvolved in the events of the story. He's very much involved in them. In fact, I would even suggest to you, and I want to suggest it a number of times in our study, that He is in absolute control of the entire situation, from the very beginning to the end.

And that's why I would say that in this story, Jesus is the key character in the passage. He's the one we need to keep our eyes on here. Now, the story in Matthew, this story in Matthew 14, that I read a moment ago, you can find it also, parallel accounts of it, in Mark and also in John.

I'm going to refer to both Mark and John, kind of along the way, when they add little nuggets of additional information that Matthew does not include.

[6:15] And so, but this story, as it's told, written down by Matthew, and as well as Mark and John, is a clear message for born-again believers.

This is what we need to be alert to, that there's something in this for us, other than just being an exciting story, and certainly other than just being one of those, again, one of those miracle stories, because we're going to, you know, Jesus is going to be walking on the water, and so forth.

Other than that part of it, that would wow us, and maybe even excite us, and maybe even cause us to admire and adore Jesus even more, there is a message for us here, each of us individually.

Now, the disciples, and this doesn't take a stretch of the imagination, but the disciples here, represent you and me. That's what we need, this is where we need to see ourselves in the story.

The disciples represent you and me. They represent all born-again believers. The ship that they are in is representative of life.

[7:33] You can see these, I think, clear parallels here. Disciples, that's you. That's me. We're disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. They're in a boat. We're in a boat. They're in a real boat. We're in a boat of life, the boat of life.

And, of course, life, the life we live, has all of its twists and turns in it, and ups and downs, right? It certainly does. And we don't see many of those twists coming, those turns coming. They come sometimes unexpected. Sometimes we do expect them, but we're hoping it's not going to happen. You know, there's just all kinds of ups and downs and twists and turns in our life, and the boat represents life. The sea, I think, is representative of the specific circumstances of life.

The events that surround us, and not only just surround us, but intersect with our lives and enter into our lives.

[8:37] And the sea represents these things and represents the experiences that, I want to say to you, God uses to shape and guide and mature our lives.

And so the sea represents these things. Sometimes the seas are calm. And maybe some of you would say right now, you know, things are pretty calm, smooth sailing. Sometimes the sea is rough. Right? It is. Maybe all of you are in the calm. That's why you're not saying, not responding there. But sometimes they're rough.

Sometimes downright stormy. The seas of life. And so there are those times when things are seemingly out of control, or at least beyond our control.

And these things happen in our lives. Now there is this man in the story. His name is Jesus. And who does he represent? He represents himself.

[9:40] Okay? That's pretty clear. He represents himself. He's the Lord, the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And where is Jesus in the story? Initially, anyway.

Well, if you remember, as I read it a moment ago, he's on the mountain. And he's up on the mountain. What is he doing? He's praying. Alright? That's very important. We'll get back to that here before we're done tonight.

Now, the mountain is also representative, I think, of where Jesus is today. He's the resurrected Lord Jesus. He is on his holy mountain, in a sense, seated in the heavenlies, at the right hand of the throne of God the Father.

And he's living. Right? Praise the Lord that he's living, that we do not have a dead Savior. He's living. But the Bible says he's living to make intercession for us.

And so, what Jesus is doing on the mountain for the disciples, Jesus is doing for us, even right now as we speak. And we'll get to that here in just a minute. So, he prays for us.

[10:50] Alright, now, according to the story, Jesus did not stay on the mountain, did he? He came down from the mountain and walked across the sea.

He came to his disciples and he did so while they were in the midst of their storm. This life-threatening storm that had surrounded them.

He came to them. And so, here just initially, this is kind of all introductory, there is a sense then, we understand this, a sense in which Jesus is present with us all the time.

Right? A very real sense. That's not just, you know, some symbolic thing or figurative thing. In a very real sense, Jesus is with us all the time.

He lives in us. He, and there is then never a time when Jesus is absent from us. Now, we may not know he's there and we may have some sense that he's far from us, but it really is not Jesus that's far from us.

[12:00] We sometimes are far from him in our thinking, in our understanding, in our experience. But Jesus is never absent from us.

Not if you're a born-again believer. But there are times when Jesus comes to us in a very special way, in a unique way, what we could call a manifest way, where he comes and manifests himself, where he demonstrates his presence in some very, very amazing way.

And so, he reveals himself, he reveals his mighty power. There are times when he does that, as he did with his disciples in this story. Now, that's kind of a rundown of the story.

It's kind of hitting the high spots, which we can call that kind of a cursory outline of the story. You know, the various terms of the story and the key elements and the symbolic elements of the story for our lives.

And so, what I want us to get tonight, and we'll finish this up next week, what I want us to get is this. When you find, putting all these things together, when you find the ship of your life in the midst of the storm, and either you're in one now or there's one coming, okay, when you find your ship, the ship of your life in the midst of the storm, know that there is an anchor, steadfast and sure.

[13:33] And that anchor is really a person. And that person is the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 6.19 is the passage to jot down, remember, at least jot down the reference.

The Bible says, which hope we have, speaking of Jesus, He is the hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.

I just love that verse of Scripture. That's one of those jewels out of the book of Hebrews. Alright, now what I want us to see is this. As born-again believers, and I'm just going to say, that's all of us in this room here.

I'm not validating anybody's spiritual condition. I can't do that. But assuming that we're all children of God through, by grace and through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ being born again, then you and I are securely anchored to the anchor, to Jesus.

And we are secured to that anchor by a chain. You know, anchors, you can kind of picture that in the ship. They have the anchor chains. And so I want you to think about the chain that holds that anchor, holds us, attaches us, keeps us secure to that anchor, the steadfast and sure.

[14:51] The chain has five unbreakable links. And this will be the outline or the main points of my teaching. Five unbreakable links that keep us secured to that chain, or anchor rather.

The anchor being Jesus. Here's the first link. It may not be what you're expecting. In fact, it may not even be what you want. But the first link is the providence of God.

The first link is the providence of God. Do you think it's normal for us, usual, typical for us, when we find ourselves burdened by some major thing in our lives, some major trouble?

Do you think that it's natural for us to just immediately think that this is the providence of God? And yet, we must understand that if we are born-again children, we are His, then everything that takes place in our lives comes under that overarching reality, and that is the providence of God.

You know that God is sovereign? We would all say amen to that. We know He is. He's sovereign. He's a sovereign God. We know that.

[16:20] So, if that's true, if you believe that, then can you name anything anything or anyone or any event that might intersect your life that is beyond His sovereign control, the sovereign control of God.

Can you name anything? Well, you might try, but you can't. God is sovereign over all things, all people, every event that could happen.

I mean, even a blade of grass is under His sovereignty. You know, even unobserved leaf falling from a tree branch, falling to the ground, is under His sovereignty. And just as much as the rise and fall of nations is under the sovereignty of God. And many, many other things couldn't even begin to live. Our salvation is under His sovereignty. Everything that occurs in our lives, everything that occurs in creation is under, in submission to the sovereignty of God.

[17 : 26] David wrote in Psalm 24, verse 1, the earth is the Lord's. And that means everything is His and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein, they're His.

Now, they don't, most people in this world do not hold any allegiance to Him. express any love toward Him, any belief toward Him, any submission to Him, but everyone is His.

For He hath founded it upon the seas and established it upon the flood, upon the waters. Alright, so understanding then the sovereignty of God, then the sovereign God who owns the world and all who are in it is at work accomplishing His eternal purpose.

That's what we need to understand about the sovereignty of God. It's not just He's almighty and He can do what He wants and He has full authority and full power. Sovereignty means something much, much more significant and it means that He is at work always accomplishing His eternal purpose.

He's at work among nations even though it may from our perspective it may seem out of control. Rogue nations, rogue government leaders who just seem to be able to do what they want, even in our own country.

[18 : 53] But He's at work among the nations, at work among governments. He's at work in His churches. We bring that scope down. He's at work in our church and all churches.

He's at work in individual lives. And what's He doing? He's moving His creation toward His goal which is His desired purpose.

Now, what do we call that? We call that the providence of God. See, the providence of God and sovereignty are almost synonymous concepts but we could consider it this way, understand it this way, that the providence of God is the outworking of His sovereignty.

Moving all things in a direction according to His divine purpose. We can define it this way, a sovereign God, you can just jot it down this way, a sovereign God working in and through His creation to accomplish His eternal purposes.

Let me say that again. This is the providence of God. A sovereign God working in and through His creation to accomplish His eternal purposes.

[20 : 10] All right, now, let's understand something, though, about this. We're not to approach the providence of God on, you know, in some fatalistic way.

You know, thinking, well, you know, what will be, will be. This profound truth, this reality of the very character and nature of God in relation to His creation should not lead us to think all things are just fatalistic.

You know, God's will. And so we just respond to everything that happens and we just kind of live life like it's let go and let God and whatever happened. Well, providence of God, God's will.

You know, kind of like the lady, I've used this illustration before, the lady who fell down her stairs all the way down to her basement and she picked herself up and brushed herself off and said, glad I got that over with.

It's some fatalistic kind of thing. That's not it at all. God allows His people freedom to be themselves. And, believe it or not, the freedom to make decisions and choices, good and bad.

[21 : 26] But the point is that God works. He's not hindered by even our bad decisions. bad choices. God works sometimes within our choices, I think oftentimes in spite of our choices.

And He's going to accomplish His purposes. We've been promised, by the way, in Scripture, and you know this, this very familiar passage of Scripture, sometimes I think misapplied, but we've been promised in Romans 8.28 that for a believer, God's providence is always going to work toward our good.

You know what the Bible says in Romans 8.28? And we know, Paul said, we know that all things, I don't know which part of all we don't understand, but all things work together for good.

And the idea is the ultimate good, and that's God's good, to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose. We know that verse by heart. You may memorize it with a different version.

But we know then that God's providence is always going to work out for our ultimate good, even if it doesn't seem good to us at the time, and oftentimes it does not.

[22:47] But if we really believe that passage, that one that's so often quoted and memorized, if we really believe that Scripture, then we have to admit that for a believer, there are no accidents.

There are no accidents with God. And we can make wrong choices and suffer consequences, and that's part of God's providence as well. But there are no accidents for a believer, like the cowboy that I heard about who was applying for health insurance, and the agent was kind of asking some questions, filling out the application, and he just asked the cowboy, have you had any accidents this past year?

And the cowboy said, well, no, I haven't had any accidents this past year, and I was bitten by a rattlesnake and nearly died. I was kicked in the head by a horse, and I was laid up for a long time, but I haven't had any accidents.

And the agent said, what do you call those if they're not accidents? He said, well, they did it on purpose. It wasn't an accident. All right.

Okay, not a good joke. But there are no accidents when it comes to believers. We've got to understand that. No accidents.

[24:02] All things work together for good, God's good, God's ultimate purpose for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose, that is, for true believers.

Now, we have an example of this providence. We're finally going to get to the passage. An example of this in Scripture in verse 22. Look at verse 22 in our passage.

Immediately, He, that's of course Jesus, made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side while He sent the crowds away.

We have a mention here, an allusion to the clear providence of God. See, the disciples were soon to encounter a storm at sea, which would not be a good thing by anybody's standard, not something that you want to face.

But who was it that sent them into that storm? Jesus did. Jesus Himself. He, the Bible says, made them, I like the King James, constrained them.

[25:16] That kind of adds a little bit more force to it than just the word made. But it literally is made them or constrained them to get into the boat and sail, to head out into the sea to ultimately get to the other side.

That is, He commanded them. He commanded them to get into the boat and sail out into that sea.

Now, if you don't see the providence of God in this, through God the Son, the Lord Jesus, then you have to minimize the Lord Jesus sovereignty and knowledge, knowledge even of the future.

Now, I don't think you want to limit Jesus at all. He knew full well what was in their future. And He sent them out into it. This is a clear example of the providence of God.

What lay before them was a storm. And that was the providence of God for them. And so likewise, the things you and I face in life, good things and bad things.

Maybe you might be thinking, well, it's more bad than good. Maybe it is right now in your life. And maybe if we were to itemize all the things in life, we get to the end of the life, maybe the bad things, the tough things, the hard things, would far outnumber what we would term as good things, just from our human perspective.

[26:49] But the things you and I face, whether bad or good, are all under the sovereignty of God and the providential control of Almighty God, and they are working to accomplish His purpose in our lives.

And though this doesn't necessarily, the truth of this, doesn't just totally take away any of the sting of these things, the hurts and burdens of these things.

I mean, it's still tough, it still hurts. And yet, to understand this about God's providential care and control of our lives, does give us a great amount of liberty.

Liberty and freedom. Freedom from becoming discouraged and depressed and thinking that God doesn't care and that God is not there.

This is a liberating truth, that the providence of God is working in our lives. All right, so it was the providence of God that sent the disciples into the eye of the storm. And why would He do that?

[27:59] Why would a loving God, we might ask this question, regard to our own storms, why would a loving God send His children into hardship and into danger?

Well, to accomplish something, to accomplish His eternal purpose. Whether we see that and that becomes very vivid in all those questions that are answered at the time or even in this life is not the point.

It's the point that we understand even on the front end of the storm and even in the midst of the storm, that God is working His eternal purpose. And what would those purposes be?

Well, I'll just give you three broad categories. First of all, and not all three are going to be, you know, the reason why God, not all three will occur at the same time.

These are broad categories of various reasons why God would allow us to suffer some of the storms of life. The first one would be to correct us.

[29:02] to correct us. Now, I would admit to you that this is the first thing we think of when things are getting tough, that God has gotten out His, you know, His holy paddle and He's spanking us, you know, that kind of thing.

But God does allow us to suffer things because He desires to correct us, to discipline us. That would be a word that we would generally think of, although the word discipline in Scripture is really a much broader term.

In fact, discipline covers all three of these things that I'm going to share with you. Not just the correcting of us, but He does do it to correct us. So, Jesus, you need to understand, Jesus sent His disciples to the sea, ultimately into a storm, because the Bible says that the people were desiring to make Jesus their earthly king.

We look at the context here, and we really have to go to John's account of this to see this vividly, but in John 6.14, the Bible says this, Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, guess what miracle that was?

Feeding of the five thousand. When they saw that miracle, they said this, these men said this, this is of a truth, that prophet that should come into the world. That is, this is the Messiah.

[30:34] He's our deliverer. And when Jesus therefore perceived, because Jesus could read the hearts and minds of people, when He perceived that they would come and take Him by force to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone.

And what John does not tell us and Matthew does tell us that He sent the disciples out into the sea, and then Jesus went up into the mountain to pray. And He did that as a response to a reaction to the desires of the crowd to anoint Jesus their military king.

And that's really what they had in mind. Now, the question is, and this is just speculation, so I would press this on the text, but it could have been that some of the disciples, maybe specifically Judas could have been involved in this.

We know that Judas was expecting Jesus, and maybe even some of the other apostles entertained the same thought that Jesus had come to be the deliverer right then. And not just a deliverer in the sense of spiritual deliverance and salvation, but to be a king, be a military leader, to put down the Roman oppression and establish Israel as a nation in all their glory.

Judas was expecting that. Could it be that Judas was maybe the instigator behind this desire to make Jesus king? And so, Jesus diffused the whole thing, sent them out into the storm.

[32:10] Now, sometimes, and here's the point, when we sin, when we sin, we do every day, or when we develop perhaps a blindness to sin, a particular sin or sin activity, we've kind of just closed our eyes to the sinfulness of a certain thing.

Or when we get away from God, we're not close to Him, not spending time with him. Or when we step out of God's will. Sometimes we do that, we start making decisions that are contrary to His will, and there becomes a pattern of decisions that are leading us in a contrary way, contrary to the will of God.

You know, any one of these scenarios, maybe others we can think of, then God will providentially allow certain events to take place in our life, with the goal being not to destroy us, but to correct us, get us back on track with Him.

Sometimes to bring us to our very knees in repentance, because we've sinned, we've chosen to be out of His will. Now this, to correct us is not the only reason God allows things to happen in our life, so it's not always sin at the heart of some of the troubles we face, but this is one thing that can happen, one scenario that's very typical for us, and so God allows us to go into the storms of life to correct us.

Secondly, another possibility is that He would do so to protect us, to protect us, not because we've sinned to correct us, but to protect us from things sometimes we can't even see.

[34:04] Jesus' disciples did not need at that moment to get drawn into the influences of this crowd. They could have very easily been drawn into this movement to anoint Jesus as their military king.

The disciples needed to be guarded from that, and they could be trusted to do that on their own, so Jesus got them out of the situation. And so, you know, let's just think about this logically.

If the people that day had been successful in, you know, forcing their will upon Jesus and crowning him their new king, I assure you the Romans would not have been standing by and allowing that kind of thing to happen.

This would be treason, this would be insurrection, and the Roman army would have stepped in immediately, and they would have put this thing down, and not telling what might have happened. Jesus and his disciples might have been imprisoned, or worse. So here's the point, the principle, God sometimes will do whatever it takes, whatever it takes, and oftentimes things that are not agreeable to us.

[35:20] He'll do whatever it takes to remove us from certain dangers. Sometimes, ironically, he will even send us into harm's way in order to protect us from far greater harm.

Something that we may never see, and would not see. I mean, think about it, I'm convinced that the disciples could not have known what Jesus was saving them from by sending them out into the sea. They could not have known that. I mean, they're just finite humans. They could not have known what he was protecting them from. You know, that they were actually safer in the boat, in the midst of the storm, in God's will, much safer there than on the shore, the safety of the shore, with the crowd that sought to make Jesus king, and to be there out of God's will, much safer in harm's way than to be in a place that would seemingly, from all human perspective, would have been safer. God knows these things. He protects us, and we may never know what God is protecting us from. And by sending us into the storms of life, sending us on some of these detours of life, and we look back and while we're on this detour, we think, well, what is going on here in my life?

And then, you know, thankfully, sometimes God is gracious to bring us through all that, and we can look back and say, ah, now I see why God led me this way. That's not always the case.

[36:55] We may never know in this life. The things that God has saved us from, protected us from, that we would have no wisdom to protect ourselves, able to protect ourselves, and no strength to protect ourselves, and God does it providentially.

And then one last thing, and I'm going to have to quit with this, I guess, to perfect us. So there are three things. Correct us, these are broad categories, to correct us, to protect us, and to perfect us. To perfect us. Jesus said to Peter in verse 31, he said, you of little faith. Peter had little faith, but now he could have included the rest of the apostles, because they were certainly no spiritual giants. And he said, you have little faith, why did you doubt? That's not just simply applied to that particular situation. Here's Peter, walking on the water, and then he begins to sink, because he's looking around.

You know the situation, and you can make an application at that point, but the situation was just a symptom of a much broader problem in Peter's life, and that is he had little faith, he had weak faith, and Jesus identified it.

[38:18] I believe that God's main purpose for sending us into some of the storms of life is to increase our faith. faith. And that doesn't always occur to us, and shame on us.

You know, usually the first thing we think is, God's just mad at me. You know, I don't know what for, but he's just mad. I don't know why we have a tendency to come to that conclusion first, that God's spanking me for something.

You know, he's just an overbearing, cruel parent, you know, that kind of thing. That's kind of our first, and maybe we will entertain the thought that, well, you know, maybe there's something out ahead of me that I can't see, and God is directing my life in another way, so that I will avoid something that would be of devastating harm to me spiritually.

We might be so spiritually astute to come to that conclusion, but how often do we really consider that what God is doing here is maturing me, correcting my, or rather perfecting my faith.

That's what God is doing, often times. James 1-2, we'll get into this passage in a couple of weeks. We'll take the first four verses of James when I start our study and we'll look at this one in depth, and it's a great one.

[39 : 44] It really kind of identifies the overall theme and purpose for James' writing, but in James 1-2, James writes, my brethren, and you can include sisters there, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations or trials.

He's talking about difficulties, hardships. Count it all joy, he said. Well, boy, that isn't that hard to do. But James goes on to say, knowing this, and this is what we should know.

We should know that the testing of your faith works patience. And let patience, he said, let patience have her perfect work in your life.

That you may be mature, perfect, and entire, complete, wanting nothing. Not talking about physical things, material things, talking about spiritual things.

That your life would be complete, and the thing that we need is faith. And we need a strong faith.

And so James is saying that these hardships, difficulties, temptations, testings, persecutions, and be a long list of things to describe it, that they are, we ought to know that these things are happening to test our faith.

[41 : 06] Try it, prove it, to increase it, so that we'll be perfect and entire, and wanting nothing.

Alright, so no matter how stormy the sea of life might be, and maybe for some of you, 2013 was one of the stormiest years of your life.

I know some people, people in our church, who had a tough 2013. And then, you know, we look to 2014, and the things that are in store for us that we have no idea about yet.

And how are we going to respond to those things when they come? Are we going to know that we have an anchor that's steadfast and sure, and that there's an unbreakable link to that anchor, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the first one is His providence.

God is working out His will, His desire, His goal, for your life. And really, by the way, that goal reaches beyond this life, reaches on into eternity, and into an existence that we know very little about, and God is preparing us for that, and He's working His will.

And so, in spite of our knowledge, sometimes, you know, that God is in charge, we, in spite of our lack of knowledge of that, or acknowledgement of that, we need to look at this passage and be encouraged about our future.

[42 : 52]