

What are the STORMS that are testing your FAITH?

Welcome to Student Sunday, everyone. My name is Lenard Manuel, and I serve as the Youth Director at SKC. Today, I am thrilled to speak to you on this topic: What are the STORMS in your life that are testing your FAITH?

Last week, Pastor Jim, at the end of his sermon, asked us, the congregation, two questions, and those questions were

- “Church, where is your faith?”
- “Do you TRUST GOD?”

As I was thinking about those two questions, it dawned on me. What is my FOCUS on?

So, Church, to answer those two questions first, I believe you must answer this question.

What is your Focus on?

I believe where my focus is where I will find my Faith and Trust.

Romans 8:5 -6

⁵Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. ⁶So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

Paul divides the people into two categories: those who are dominated by their sinful nature and those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit. All of us would be in the first category if Jesus hadn't offered us a way out. Once we have said yes to Jesus, we will want to continue following him because his way brings life and peace.

When I was 10 years old, I got the opportunity to play Little League Baseball through P.A.L., and every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, we would practice, and while practicing, we would do some FOCUS drills to improve our hand-eye coordination. These FOCUS drills became the priority of every practice.

Because if we lacked FOCUS or hand-eye coordination, it became difficult to field the baseball, catch the baseball, and hit the baseball.

These three things are essential to playing baseball well, and like any sport, job, or extra-curricular we want to do well, we work hard and diligently to make sure our focus is always on the ball, always on the main goal, so we don't miss the mark.

I believe this is equally true for our spiritual life. There is a connection between our spiritual focus and our spiritual maturity.

Today, let us allow the Word of God to help us look at our lives and consider these questions:

- Is our focus on the worries of today and tomorrow?
- Is our focus on the distractions or STORMS in your life?
- Is our focus on temporary and worldly pursuits?
- Or is our FOCUS locked on Jesus and intentionally directing attention, thoughts, and daily life toward Him?

You see, church that is the goal, is it not? To have our FOCUS locked on Jesus and intentionally directing our attention, our thoughts, and our daily life towards Him. That is the picture of keeping our eyes on the ball, being spiritually focused on God, and through The Holy Spirit, we will grow to be more like Jesus.

But we often miss the mark daily to be Christ-like because our FOCUS is on worldly

- Desires
- Worries
- Distractions

So much so, that we begin to lose FOCUS on Jesus and consequently, we might no longer even see Jesus' plans for our lives. However, there is a Scripture passage we can examine this morning that will help us refocus our attention on Jesus.

Let us all stand to read the word of God.

Matthew 14:22 – 32

²² Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. ²³ After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone.

²⁴ Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. ²⁵ About three o'clock in the morning^[a] Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!"

²⁷ But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!^[b]"

²⁸ Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water."

²⁹ "Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the strong^[c] wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

³² When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped.

Thank you, please be seated and pray with me.

Lord, thank you for allowing us to gather here today. This is the day you have made and we will rejoice and be glad in it. Lord, I pray The Holy Spirit through me and guide me during this time as I share your word. Amen

Before I go into our main scripture for today, I would like to look at Matthew 14:13 – 21.

During this time, Jesus was seeking some solitude after learning the terrible news that John the Baptist has been beheaded while in prison. Just like you and I when receiving bad news, we want to get away and be alone to collect our thoughts. While Jesus was trying to seek solitude, a massive crowd continued to follow Jesus and the disciples until finally Jesus said let them be so everyone gathered around Jesus during this time. The disciples start to ask Jesus what we are going to do with this crowd it is getting late and we don't have food to feed them. Jesus directs the disciples to gather food. So, the disciples were able to gather 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread.

We learn during this time that Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the 5000, based on the text some theologians believe Jesus fed 10,000 – 15,000 people with 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread.

During this passage, we learn some amazing things about Jesus:

- We learn that Jesus can do MORE with LESS.
 - Because what was given seemed insufficient, but in Jesus hands, the 2 fish and 5 loaves became more than enough.
- TRUST and FAITH in Jesus can turn an empty stomach into a full stomach.
- Even when we DOUBT, Jesus is always in CONTROL

My three main points for this sermon are

- The importance of Prayer in your life
- The importance of God's reach in your life
- The importance of Faith in your life

Point 1: The importance of Prayer in your life

Church, I wish I could stand before you and tell you that being a follower of Jesus is easy. I wish I could tell you that all your problems will go away once you've accepted Christ into your heart. I wish I could tell you that your life will slow down and you will no longer be in a rush. I wish I could tell you that following Jesus means a quiet life and an easy road. Church, I wish I could stand before you and tell you all those things, but I can't.

I can tell you that there is POWER in a consistent and authentic prayer life.

We see Jesus demonstrate this in Mathew 14:22 -23

While Jesus sent his disciples across the lake to prepare the way for their ministry, he did something profound. Jesus went back on top of the hilltop and prayed.

Can I get you to raise your hand if this sounds like you.

- how many of you have busy lives?
- how many of you think your lives are busier than Jesus's?

This is not to shame anyone; I just want to point out that in Jesus' walk on earth, He prayed to His Father relentlessly.

But you and I

- We're too busy to pray.
- We're too tired to pray.
- We're too upset to pray.

Prayer nurtures a vital relationship with God and equips us to meet life challenges and struggles.

Develop the discipline of spending quality and uninterrupted time with God daily and when you are alone with God, don't do all the talking. Allow yourself time to listen for what God has to say to you.

Church, if Jesus thought it was worthwhile to make time to be alone so he could pray, we should also.

God intends prayer to be the means of obtaining His solutions in several situations in our lives.

- We pray in preparation for major decisions.
- We pray to overcome demonic barriers.
- We pray to gather workers for the spiritual harvest.
- We pray to gain strength to overcome temptation.
- We pray to obtain the means of strengthening others spiritually.

A lot of you don't know this story about my wife and I. When my wife was pregnant with our second child, Atticus. We were going to the doctor for our 20-week anatomy scan. When we get into the ultrasound room, everything is going well. Atticus is measuring great, fluids look good, and he's beginning to turn his head down. Then suddenly everything changes. The nurse stopped talking, she begins to look more intently at her screen, and she then called in another nurse to come into the room, all while my wife and I were still in the room, and no one was communicating with us until the doctor came in and told us that our son is at high

risk for Down syndrome. The doctor starts to point out all the things they see on screen and signs that point to Down syndrome.

- He has sandal foot
- He has an increased thickness of the nuchal fold, a fluid-filled space located at the back of the neck,
- Small bright spot on the heart,
- Abnormal aortic arch of the heart

After the doctor pointed out all these all the signs on the screen of Down Syndrome, she then followed up with the majority of parents, who, when hearing this news, chose to terminate the pregnancy. We looked at the doctor and said that's not an option. We then went back to our friends, jobs, and family and told them the news, and that no matter what, we're keeping our son.

Every night we prayed, Jesus, if this is your will, provide us the strength to care for and nurture our son the best we can.

We started looking up daycares that could care for our Down syndrome son, we started signing up for online classes that would provide us with more information on how to better prepare and even started planning out how to baby-proof our home even more.

Becca, my wife, then goes into labor, and our son Atticus is born. The doctor wipes him off; I cut his umbilical cord; and I ask the doctor, "Can you look him over? Because we were told he would have Down syndrome." The doctor then takes Atticus back for 5-10 minutes, which felt like forever, and when she returns, she asks who told you he would have Down syndrome and we told her the doctors and nurses during our last ultrasound. She said, "Well, he is perfectly healthy and has no signs of Down syndrome."

Church, I am here to tell you that prayer changes our lives and Jesus is still in the business of performing miracles to this day.

You see, without prayer, nothing changes, and we continue to live life for how the world influences us to live.

We get a good look at this in James 4: 2 – 3

You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong — you want only what will give you pleasure.

You see, James mentions three of the most common problems in prayer:

- Not asking at all.
- Asking for the wrong things.
- Asking for the wrong reasons.

Our prayers will become more powerful when we allow God to change our hearts so that our hearts perfectly align with his will for our lives.

Which leads me to my 2nd point.

Point 2: The Importance of God's reach in your life.

In Matthew 14:24 – 26

24 Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. 25 About three o'clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!"

While Jesus was praying on the hilltop, the disciples encountered a storm on the middle of the Sea of Galilee at night, fighting a strong headwind, and they were not making any progress. The disciples were facing a storm because they were following Jesus' commands.

The most important thing to remember in your life is that just because you are in a tough spot does not mean that you are not in the right spot. You could be exactly where God wants you to be.

Sometimes following Jesus means going through trials and tribulations in your life.

Numerous times in the Bible, prophets faced severe trials, enduring loss, persecution, and physical hardship to test or refine their faith.

- Job: He lost his wealth, his children, and his health, enduring profound physical and emotional distress while remaining faithful.
- Joseph: Betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, he later faced false accusations and imprisonment in Egypt before eventually rising to prominence.
- Daniel: Thrown into a den of lions as a punishment for refusing to stop praying to God
- The Apostle Paul: Faced beatings, shipwrecks, and multiple imprisonments across the Roman Empire for preaching the Gospel.

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him because he had a purpose for the trials they would face.

Jesus has a purpose for the storms in your life

- The purpose to strengthen our FAITH and TRUST in Christ Jesus.
- The purpose to cling to the HOPE and LOVE Christ Jesus offers daily.

We miss opportunities for growth in our faith daily because we're too FOCUSED on self instead of the kingdom of God.

Church, we cannot continue to miss opportunities. Those nudges and urges we feel are The Holy Spirit guiding us to speak the truth, live in truth and abide in truth, but too often we are afraid.

Jesus may seem absent from our lives like the disciples while they're facing their storm, but Jesus is still mindful of our needs even when we're going through hardships and storms.

- What are the storms in your lives that are hindering you from FOCUSING on Jesus?

You see Jesus came to help the disciples, but they didn't recognize him. Sometimes we don't recognize it when God comes to rescue us because the chaos and desires of this world hinder our vision from the True Savior. God can be right there ready to help you and I, so we need to be ready to respond to Jesus saving mercy.

The disciples could not comprehend a human being walking on the water, so the disciples assume Jesus must be a ghost.

Little did they know the man who was walking towards them has divine authority over the whole entire world that he created.

We are never out of the reach of the God that

- Created you
- Knows you by name
- Loves you
- And sent his only son to die on the cross for you and I.

Paul says in Romans 8:34 – 35:37

Who then will condemn us? No one — for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or tragedy or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?

No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

Church, we might feel like we're stuck in the middle of this chaotic world, going nowhere, far from any help or rescue. But remember, Jesus fulltime job is serving as the intercessor between us and God. Jesus is the perfect one to do so because he is fully God and fully Man. Jesus understands God and he understand us as humans.

You see, the storms in your life. Jesus can walk all over them, just like he did on the water to the disciples when they faced their storm. We are never out of God reach.

My Final Point.

Point 3: The importance Faith in your life.

First, we talked about the importance of Prayer, then we talked about the importance of God's reach, and we will finish with the importance of Faith in your life.

Church when we look at vs 26 – 31

When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!"

²⁷ But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!^[b]"

²⁸ Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water."

²⁹ "Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus.

³⁰ But when he saw the strong^[c] wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink.

"Save me, Lord!" he shouted.

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

Church, I remember my first time ridding on a boat. It was my senior year in high school at Kansas City Christian. We went on a mission trip to Belize and after our week of serving the wonderful people in Belize we got the opportunity to go snorkeling in the Caribbean Sea.

For some reason this day it was very windy, so the waters were wavey and the motions of the boat going up and down made me nauseous and seasick very fast.

I can't imagine being on a boat in the middle of the night and the winds are high and waves are crashing into the boat. I would also be terrified just like the disciples were.

We know the disciples are terrified and panicking because they think the person that is approaching and walking on water is a ghost. This sight grips them with fear.

They are already in a terrible storm and now they believe there is a ghost walking on the water.

As the high winds continue to blow, water continues to crash into the boat, and waves continue to rock the boat erratically back and forth.

There is a lot going on to inspire fear in the disciples. Yet they had nothing to fear, because little did they know the person walking toward them has the ability to.

- Calm the ragging sea
- Heal broken hearts
- Comfort those who are lost
- Love those who are undesirable

Jesus tells them, “It’s me. Don’t be afraid.” And then Peter says to Jesus, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you on the water.” Jesus tells Peter, “Come.” And Peter does! He gets out of the boat and starts walking on the water toward Jesus.

- Church, can you imagine the faith it took for Peter to step out of the boat?
- Can you imagine what Peter was thinking when his foot first touched the water and then he put the rest of his weight onto it.
- Can you imagine how awesome it would have been to find to suddenly find yourself walking on the water towards Jesus in the midst of the winds and the waves.

Peter is a lot like you and I. Once our prayers are answered and our lives are going well. We instantly take our focus off Jesus we start judging, shaming, and becoming prideful. Once our eyes are off Jesus, we lose focus, and we fall flat on our face.

Then Just like Peter we cry out, “Lord, save me!” And Jesus does! Jesus reaches out his hand and catches us before we sink down beneath the surface of the waves and our sinful lives. Then Jesus looks at you and says, “You of little faith,” “why did you doubt?”

Often our greatest defeats come right on the heels of our greatest victory.

But what Peter, you, and I often forget is that we are safer on the stormy water with Jesus than on the boat without Jesus.

You see Church when you’re focus is on Jesus then it is easy to have faith and trust in Jesus. Don’t lose your focus! Keep your eyes on Jesus, not on your storms. Then God can do big and beautiful things in your life. The life of faith is a life of adventure! So often we want God to do amazing things in our lives, but we’re afraid to take that first step of faith.

Listen to this quote by Chuck Smith

“Faith and fear are mutually exclusive

Faith cancels fear

Fear cancels faith.

You are going to either walk in one or the other. If you walk in faith, it will cancel the fear. But if you walk in fear, it will diminish your faith!”

Jesus has called you to step out in faith and has promised to be with you and support you every step of the way.

Church, do you saturate your mind with Scripture, worship music, and stand upon the promises of your loving God.

Each morning, I believe we live this story out in our personal lives, because let's face it, have you ever had a time in your life when there wasn't a storm blowing around you that causes you to lose focus?

Each day we are called by Jesus to step out of boat in faith with our eyes focused on Jesus so he can lead us, protect us, and guide us to where we need to go and be.

Perhaps many of you are going through some difficult times right now. Perhaps many of you feel like you have been stuck out in the middle of the lake for a long time and no one is coming to save you. Maybe you feel like God has forgotten you, or he has abandoned you, or he just doesn't care.

Jesus has a purpose for the storms in your life, and the purpose is to strengthen our FAITH and TRUST in Christ Jesus so that we can cling to the HOPE and LOVE Christ Jesus offers daily.

God loves and forgives you even when you fail. Even when you lose faith, even when you lose focus, even when you mess up big time, you just need to call out: "Lord, save me!" and Jesus is right there with his arm stretched out and his hands wide-open ready to help you back into the boat.

Do not lose focus! Keep your eyes on Jesus. Trust him, have faith that Jesus will walk on water and deliver you from your sins. Believe in him. Step boldly out into a life of faith and adventure. And remember.

- The importance of Prayer in your life.
- The importance of God's reach in your life.
- The importance of Faith in your life.

Church as I leave you today, I would like to re-ask the two questions Pastor Jim asked last week and add one question.

- "Church where is your faith?"
- "Do you TRUST GOD?"
- What is your Focus on?

