

Matthew 14: 22-33 and Mark 6: 45-52; “Peter’s Walk on the Water”, Sermon # 38
in the series – “Astonished at His teaching”, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on August 2nd, 2015,
in the Morning Worship Service.

The example of Peter’s faith, in his walking on the water to Jesus, and how our Lord interacted with him in that situation, holds real lessons for us today. We, as believers, have come to know and to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. And, we most surely believe that He has all power and authority in heaven and earth. And yet when we are faced with trials and difficulties, we do not know in what way that He will come to our aid. Just like the disciples that night, our Lord Jesus does not let us know what He intends to do. That night, when He came to them on the sea, He made it appear that He would pass by them. And that was when they thought that He was a ghost, and they cried out and were troubled. But immediately He spoke to them saying, “Be of good cheer!” “It is I; do not be afraid.” He gave them assurances of His presence and His help, and showed His good will toward them. And it was at this time that Peter was emboldened to say: “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” His was a request with faith behind it; and our Lord Jesus knew it, and He responded to it. The lesson of the morning is for each of us to see that the Lord Jesus responds to our faith in proportion to its exercise. He shows us this through this interaction with Peter, in that He responded to him in respect to 3 different states of mind that Peter passed through in relation to his walking upon the water. He will respond to us in the same way when we exercise our faith. 1st of all – We want to look at Jesus’ response to Peter’s adventuresome faith. 2nd – We want to look at Jesus’ response to Peter’s crying faith. And then finally we would like to look at Jesus’ response to Peter’s little faith.

1st of all – Let’s look at Jesus’ response to Peter’s adventuresome faith.

(Verses 28 and 29)

Peter says to Jesus, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” Now, we do not know how far Jesus was from the boat, but it was close enough that Peter and the others heard His voice and they were pretty sure that it was their Lord. But Peter wants to make more sure, and so he says, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to You on the water. It was not that he doubted that it could be Jesus. It was just that he didn’t want to be deceived. He wanted to be able to do what Jesus was doing but he wanted to make sure that it was Jesus’ power that was going to enable him to do this miraculous thing, and not simply a whim of his own. And Peter knew that he could not walk on the water unless Jesus commanded that it would be so. But if it was Jesus, He wanted to be with Him, and he wanted to be able to do what he was doing. This is just like Peter at every stage of his life as a Christian. He had a bold and adventuresome faith. And Jesus did not crush this adventuresome desire in him. He simply said one word; “Come.” And so Peter, in faith, stepped out of the boat. “And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.”

There are a number of things that I think can be said at this point. This was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity for Peter. You do not read of it again in the gospels. You do not read of the other disciples asking Jesus for the opportunity to do the same. Peter saw the opportunity and he seized it; hoping that Jesus would permit him to do this miraculous thing. We should understand that Peter was naturally of the kind of personality and temperament; that he would not think twice about requesting to do such a thing. He would simply request it and do it. Some people would call this presumption and not real faith, but they would be wrong. When we read the account, we do not find Jesus rebuking him in regard to his request at all. He rebukes him later about the littleness of his faith, but not about his making the request to walk on the water.

Peter straightforwardly asks Jesus to command that it would be so, and our Lord simply said, "Come." This leads me to assert that although being bold and adventuresome is not something essential to faith, that it is something very commendable in those who would like to see great things done for the kingdom of God. I am sure that every Christian would like to be with Jesus and see Him do His mighty works. And having seen Him do them; they would also like to do them. But many Christians will not try, because they think about all the things that might happen to them if they did; and so they decide that they would rather not attempt anything for God.

They know that doing exploits for God and for Christ requires holy boldness and courage, but they would much rather not have to find themselves failures later on, and so they never really attempt anything for God. But Peter says, "Command me to come to you on the water." He sees the holy excitement of being able to do something which is entirely miraculous in nature; to walk on the water of a boisterous sea. He knows that Jesus has done it, and because Jesus was doing it; he could also do it; if the Lord would only command it. Not every Christian is that excited about such things. They would rather be safe than sorry. They would rather never try than to fail or have to admit that they could not finish what they had begun. They would be intimidated by the utter impossibility of what Jesus was doing, and would not want to even attempt to go forward to do these great things.

But I am here to tell you this morning that those who have a growing vibrant faith will want to do exploits for God. With the permission, power, and presence of Jesus Christ working in their life, they will be praying, and thinking, and dreaming about what they could do if Christ would command it for them. They will ask for the opportunity to go and do what other men would be totally frightened to attempt. And so, I believe that having an adventurous faith when such opportunities arise, when it is confirmed by the Lord's commanding word "Come", will ensure success in such endeavors. What I am trying to say is that for some Christians their faith has an element in it which will step out, not knowing where it will lead or how it will turn out. It is bold and adventuresome enough, by what it sees Christ doing, to go ahead when the opportunity presents itself, to do the same. It is the Lord's example which establishes their being led to do things which other Christians might not at all be led to do. Once their heart is excited about the possibilities of what can be done, then a person like Peter will pray that Christ will command that it be so.

What kind of examples can be given here which will make this application clear and yet keep us from simply being impulsive and rash in our decision making? I can think of a number of examples of what some people might be led to do in evangelism, are certainly appropriate here. I believe that evangelism is a command that was given to the whole Church of Jesus Christ, and that each and every Christian ought to be able, as Peter says, to give an answer for the hope that is within them. But not every Christian is going to go to the mission field, nor should they. And yet some Christians have this bold and adventuresome spirit within them to become involved in this good work. Are they to be discouraged by the local church that they attend because they have not been called to the ministry, or called to the mission field? No, I believe that our Lord would say, "Come". Come and see and experience the somewhat wild and unpredictable world of "walking on the water" with Jesus. If you have this desire to "get out of the boat" and walk to Him, you should do so.

What do I mean? I mean that you should pray and ask the Lord to show you a good tract that you could take door-to-door and share your faith with people in your neighborhood. You might pray and ask, as I did years ago, for one other person to go with you in this good work. The Lord immediately supplied me with a friend; that was Daniel Kemp's dad, John Kemp, to help me in this work. We went out, not knowing whether we would be rejected or accepted at the doors which we knocked on; but had the excitement of knowing that God was doing

something for us and with us, which was a great thing. We were involved with Christ in His work, and that work did see miraculous results at certain points. There are people who will respond and think about a few simple questions about whether they have really ever heard or understood the gospel. People really can, and sometimes do, come to know the Lord in this way, when you “step out of the boat to go to Jesus”. It is amazing what the Lord will do with simple Christians who have a desire to see the Lord work in order to bring to people the light of salvation. These Christians are willing to step out of the boat to do this, and walk with Christ. A good book in this regard is Hannah Hurnard’s book, *Wayfarer in the Land* which relates how she went through some of the cities of Israel evangelizing door to door to try to win Jews to Christ. What an exciting book it is.

Another application that I think is appropriate to our study today is that of taking a personal interest in some particular person, in order to help them in the way of befriending them. You might help them in the areas where they are weak without making it obvious to them that they are weak and thereby humiliating them. You might spend time with them and help them with all kinds of things that they cannot do around their house. You might take them to do things with you that you are good at; but which they are not either good at, nor experienced in. You might even get radical and try to befriend an unbeliever in this way. A Christian who is involved in this kind of work of compassion will not allow their convictions of truth and what is right and wrong to slide when they are around that unbeliever, but they will rather pray to be wise and holy and loving. Works like cleaning their gutters and shoveling their walks without being asked, and without expecting to be rewarded, are something that you might just be able to do; and Christ will reward you. If you are a woman, you could bake cookies or bread, and take it to another family in the neighborhood just to show them you care. But I am saying that there are Christians who are able and willing by God’s grace to get out of the boat and walk on the water in this way. And when the desire is there; Jesus says, “Come.”

I think about John 14: 12; the words of Jesus to His disciples before He went to the cross. “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.” “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” When Jesus walked on the water, it was a very great work. But when Jesus let a mere man walk on the water; it was something greater yet. And it is always so when mere men are enabled to do miraculous things by the grace and power of Christ and be involved in His work. “What shall we do that we may work the works of God?” “Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” (John 6: 28, 29) This Peter was doing when he stepped out of the boat.

Now 2ndly – Let’s look at the Lord’s response to Peter’s crying faith.

(Verses 30 and 31)

“But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord save me!’” “And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him....” Here Peter has set out walking on the water away from the boat and toward Jesus; stepping out in faith I believe. But our faith is related to who or in this case, what we are looking at. And it says in verse 30 that it was when he “saw” that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and he began to sink. If we are looking at the great winds of those things that are adverse to our spiritually walking with Jesus in a supernatural and miraculous way; it will affect our faith, and we will begin to sink in our spirit. Peter was originally looking to Jesus, but as he began to walk on the water, his attention was drawn to the boisterous winds. Now we need to realize that although Peter had no doubt been partially motivated by faith and love to make this request to come out on the water to Jesus, I also believe that there must have also been something within him of self-confidence. I do not think that he understood just how dependent he was upon Jesus

to be able to do this miraculous thing; once he got going. Peter's walking upon the water is a good picture of the believer's spiritual walking with Christ. In the book of Hebrews Chapter 12, verse 1, if you will turn with me there, we are given a picture of the Christian life as "running a race." And we are informed here how we are to run it. "Therefore we also since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." The witnesses are those godly men and women of the past who have lived by faith and have done exploits for the Lord by faith; just as we are talking about this morning. Chapter 11, verse 8 says, "Abraham obeyed God when he was called to go to the place which he would receive as an inheritance." "And he went out, not knowing where he was going." That was his witness. That was his godliness. That was his evangelism in that day. He did it by faith. This was his "stepping out of the boat." This was his "walking on the water" with Jesus. He had to keep his eye on the promises given to him by God which were all fulfilled in Christ. Even so, you and I are called to leave alone and leave behind the temptations of the World and not give in to our fleshly desires in living our lives. We are to "lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us". We might think that we can do this now that we have become a Christian. The power and ability will automatically be there. But our text is saying that it will not if we do not keep our eyes on Jesus.

If our eyes go to the winds of other doctrines besides what the Bible teaches, and we are led astray by them; if our eyes go to the glitter and sensual pleasures of the World; if we find ourselves trusting in our own riches or strength or our own resources, we will fall to our own pride and vanity. We will become self-confident when we ought to be very humble and simply keep looking to Jesus. We should not look to the right hand or to the left as we live the Christian life, or we will begin to sink. We must keep looking right on to Jesus. This is how we started our Christian life and this how we continue it all through our life. "Look unto me all the ends of the earth and be saved," it says in Isaiah 45: 22 That is how we first come to Christ. But in Colossians 2: 6 the Apostle Paul shows us how we continue our "walking on the water with Jesus." "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with Thanksgiving." Peter had his eye on the winds. He had begun well, but part of his spiritual walk was based on his own self-confidence. And the Lord knew that he had to know the truth about this and about himself. Our ability to live our Christian life in this supernatural and miraculous way, by the power of Christ, will not be there when we want more than anything else for it to be there, if we take our eyes off of Jesus and look to the winds. You and I will come to the place where we will cry out just as any unbeliever cries out for the first time to be saved from themselves and their sins, "Lord, save me!" And you younger believers should understand that this is something that is not simply done once at the beginning of the Christian life, but it is also done often in our walk with Christ.

Turn with me to Matthew 7 and you will find a good picture of this given by Jesus Himself. Verse 24 says, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock." "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house of the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell." "And great was its fall." The person who builds their life on Jesus; their spiritual house will not fall; they will not be destroyed forever by God's judgments against their sins; His casting them into hell. They will be able to face also the storms and waves and winds of life because they are situated on the rock of Jesus' words. Their eyes are upon Him and their ears are listening to His voice speaking to them in His word. Peter was founded upon

the rock. He had begun His walk on the water by looking to Jesus and listening to His word. But he faltered the farther he continued. He had simply forgotten this all-important principle of truth. Our eyes must be continually upon Jesus. We must not regard the circumstances of things which are opposed to our faith in Him. We must not regard those more than Jesus, or allow our gaze be turned to consider them as having greater power than He.

Psalm 123 says, "Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens." "Behold as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us." That is faith, and it is also coupled with hope. We will look "until" He be gracious to us. And Psalm 71: 14 says, "But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more." "My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day, for I do not know their limits." "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only." That is what Peter should have been doing that night on the water. But he didn't; and yet he did not sink finally, or fatally, because he cried out. He had a crying faith and Jesus responded to it immediately.

The text says that He immediately stretched out His hand and caught him...." This was true for Peter that night physically, and it is true for all believers today spiritually; that Jesus sees the spiritual predicament of our not looking to Him at all times, and He "catches us" and prevents our faith from sinking, and our walk from sinking down into being overwhelmed with fears and cares. Our Lord Jesus is faithful to each believer in this way. If He was not; our faith would fail. But again; this is not automatic. Jesus did not reach out to catch him before he cried. Each believer should learn to cry to God mightily when they sense their faith is not strong; when the circumstances of strong temptations and physical weakness and inability have overtaken them. Jesus will hear the cry of your heart and will respond to a crying faith.

Then 3rdly – We want to see how Jesus responded to Peter's little faith.

(Verses 31 and 32)

"And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' "And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased." The way that Jesus responded to Peter's little faith was to point it out and to reprove it. He called it what it was; "little faith" and he questioned why he doubted. For Peter to have doubted that he could have continued to walk on the water is equivalent to having little faith. He had sunk down in the water; down from the miraculous walk that he was engaged in, because of his doubts. When any Christian gives place in his spirit to desponding doubts and fears he is acting as though the Lord Jesus is not right there in His heart with him. He is doubting the Lord's ability to do something about the circumstances. I like what Charles Simeon says about this. He says, "There is nothing that dishonors God so much as unbelief." "Other sins pour contempt upon the law: but unbelief reflects upon the Lawgiver, as calling in question his veracity, or power, or love." "Be ye then as lights in a dark world." "The world looks only to second causes: you must show them that everything, even to the falling of a sparrow, is under the direction of the first Great Cause, who alone is worthy to be regarded with either fear or love."

Let us ask ourselves in closing whether we are believing or unbelieving in the various trials that we have faced lately? Let us ask ourselves whether we are full of doubts and forebodings of what is happening to us now, or what we think might happen to us in the future? Let not your unbelief reflect upon God Himself; when others are looking and listening to see whether you will exercise your faith. Christ most certainly has regard for your faith. Therefore, keep your eyes fixed upon Him, the Author and Perfecter of your faith. And continue to believe that your supernatural faith which Christ is the author of, is something which He every moment sustains; and praise Him for it. Amen.

