

The Ups and Downs of Peter's Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Let's begin with a word of prayer. Lord our God, we pray to bless us today. We pray to bless your word. And we give thanks that this word is new every day.

Although the word in many ways is the same that has served every generation, yet we know that each day, just like the bread that we eat, is the diet for the new day, so this is our spiritual diet for each day.

And today is another day in our experience. And we pray that wherever we're at, whatever our needs, whatever situation we're at in life, that we might know the riches of your grace, that we might experience the blessing of God, because we know that that blessing, that it makes rich, and it adds no sorrow with it.

And so we pray for everybody today who tunes in to hear the message, that they might know your presence and your peace. Pray, Lord, for those who are struggling in life, those, Lord, who are in dark places, those who find life a struggle, and are filled with fears and anxieties, with all the different pressures.

There are things in life that they feel that they're struggling with, and that maybe there's nobody that they can share with. Lord, may they be able to share their troubles, their sorrows, their worries, their concerns with you.

[1 : 3 1] And may you grant to them a sense of purpose, and a sense of belonging, and a sense of peace. Help us, Lord, to realise that belonging to you, coming to faith in you, is the great blessing of life, because it gives us a rock, it gives us an assurance, it gives us a sense of belonging, a sense of knowing why we're here, a sense of knowing where we're going.

Because so often in this life, with all the uncertainties of life, people so often grapple about in the dark, wondering what happens next.

And while we don't know the future, we know, Lord, whose future it is, and that you are King and Lord over all. And so we pray to bless us, bless us in the light of our national predicament that we face, which indeed we face with all the nations of this world.

And we pray, Lord, that it might please you to help the scientists and the medicine, people in medical science, to find an effective vaccine.

We give thanks that trials have already started, and we pray that these trials may prove to be effective. We pray also that a cure, or that which will certainly alleviate the worst of this illness, will be found.

[2 : 5 4] And that you will bring help to us, and that in doing so, we may see that this is the hand of the Lord. And Lord, we pray that our leaders, and those in authority, might come to see that you are God of heaven and earth, and that they might place their trust in you.

Watch over us, then we pray. We pray for all who are sad and lonely, those who have lost loved ones, those who, Lord, are trying to nurse broken hearts. And we read so many different accounts through this illness and virus that is rampaging about.

We read of so many heartbreaking stories. Pray, Lord, for others who have suffered other illnesses, and have suffered losses through other illnesses.

And we pray for each and every broken heart and broken home just now. Watch over us, we pray, and bless all who are working at the forefront in all the different areas and aspects of life.

Keep them safe, we pray. Do us good. Cleanse us from our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. I'm just going to say a wee word to any of the young people that might be tuning in today.

[4 : 07] And I think I would say that in the last week, we've had the most amazing weather, wall-to-wall sunshine. It's not something that we get here too often, but it's just been the most glorious week.

When I was young, if I was asked, which would you prefer to have a week of wall-to-wall sunshine or a week of snow, heavy snow, and the chance then at night to come into a roasting fire, I would really struggle to come down on one side or the other.

Because I absolutely loved, when I was a boy, I loved, there's few things I loved more. Many of the happiest memories I have as a young boy was playing all day in the snow.

I know your hands would sometimes be numb and frozen, but so what? Just, it was, to me, it was, what life was about as a young boy.

And then come in, and sometimes it would be really sore when you'd be defrosting, as it were, in front of the fire. But I loved that. So as a boy, I would find it hard to work out which I would prefer, the snowy day or the beautiful summer sunshine.

[5 : 30] Obviously, now, there's no point in even asking that question. Apart from being able to fling a few snowballs when it's snowy, I don't like the snow anymore, which I suppose is a sign of not just getting old but having got old.

But, I've probably shared this story before, but the reason I'm talking about it today is it brings the walking of Peter on the water and how Peter walked on the water gives us a sort of a re-illustration with these two boys.

So these two boys, Peter and John, very biblical names, and they were playing in the snow. And earlier in the day, the snow was that kind of fresh and soft and so they were, to begin with, they were sledge and there was a hill nearby just like, I suppose, the Stronway Golf Course where you had a long slidey slide for ages, probably about 600 metres at least downhill all the way or at least 400 metres downhill.

So they were having a great time. And then the the day kind of changed a wee bit so that the snow became easier to put together. It wasn't that soft kind of snow and great for snowballs, great for building things.

And so they built a snowman and then they built a wee igloo for the snowman to live in afterwards. And then when they had kind of finished all that, they wondered what they would do.

[7 : 00] And there was a field beside them. It wasn't a wide field, quite narrow, but it was quite, quite a long field. So, John says to Peter, right, let's cross this field.

And the field went up a bray. Let's cross this field and see who can walk straightest. We'll look at their footprints afterwards. So, over the fence they went and they crossed the field.

And when they reached the other side, they looked back. And John, you could see his footprints were, they were all over the place. And Peter's footprints were in a straight line.

And John says, how do you manage that? Because he said, I was really, really careful how I walked because all the time I was looking down and I was putting one foot in front of the end and I was very careful and I was putting one foot, one foot there like that.

So, I was sure I was going to walk in a straight, much straighter line than you. When Peter said, what I did was, I just fixed my eye on this tree beside us here and I fixed my eye on that tree and I didn't take my eye off the tree all the way across.

[8 : 13] And as I walked, obviously, I walked completely straight in a straight line to it. And that's what we're going to look at when we come to see Peter walking on the water because it's a great example of how we walk as Christians.

Our eye is upon Christ, upon the Lord Jesus. If we take our eye off, if we look down, then we're going to zigzag as we walk our life.

But if we look to Jesus and focus on Jesus all the time, then we will walk in the right way, the way we're supposed to walk. So we pray that we'll be all able to walk in that way.

We're going to say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. Now we're going to read God's Word and again we're going to read in the same part as we read last week from Matthew chapter 14 but this time we're going to read from verse 22.

[9 : 31] So we're reading some of what we read last week. Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side while he dismissed the crowds.

And after he had dismissed the crowds he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came he was there alone but the boat by this time was a long way from the land beaten by the waves for the wind was against them.

And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them walking on the sea. But 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 heart it is I do not be afraid. And Peter answered them Lord if it is you command me to come to you on the water.

He said come. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind he was afraid and beginning to sink he cried out Lord save me.

[10 : 37] Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him saying to him O you of little faith why did you doubt? And when they got into the boat the wind ceased and those on the boat worshipped him saying truly you are the son of God.

Amen and may God bless to us this reading of his own holy word. Last week we looked at Jesus coming to the disciples through the night and walking on the water.

And this week I want us to follow that particular incident but to focus more on Peter going to Jesus walking on the water. You remember how Jesus sent the disciples away he sent them away to cross on the water on their own where he went up into the mountain to pray.

But we saw last week that he sent them into a storm and we suggested that part of the reason they were sent into a storm was to shake the complacency of the disciples because they had been part of the great miracle of the feeding of the thousands but it tells us in Mark's gospel that they didn't even consider what Jesus had done.

They had become so used to Jesus so used to his presence so used to his power that it didn't mean much to them. And if that ever happens to us that we begin to take Jesus for granted and that we don't realise the amazing thing it is to have Jesus as our Lord and Saviour we shouldn't be too surprised if Jesus will allow a storm into our lives.

[12 : 20] God has to remind us that it is in him that we live move and have our being and that every blessing that we have in life ultimately comes from him. And so it's one of the things that we should be looking for and asking the Lord to give us is a God consciousness every single day all throughout life even in the mundane things that we might be able to see God's hand in everything.

And if we do it makes life so different. It enhances life it brings another dimension it brings a spirituality to life in all the physical and mental and emotional things of life.

when we see God's hand at work. And so the disciples they were crossing the sea and then remember how they saw this apparition walking to them who of course was Jesus between three and six in the morning and they cried out in fear they were terrified they thought it was a ghost and again we suggested that if the disciples had been more spiritually tuned if they had been considering Jesus and who he was and what he was doing then they wouldn't have been so alarmed because in all doubt they would have recognised that this was Jesus coming to them.

And so often we can miss the presence of Jesus when we're not spiritually alive. But anyway Jesus came and he shouted across to them where they were there in their fear saying it is I be not afraid take heart it is I be not afraid.

So to that's the great thing we pray that we will all hear the voice of Jesus even today saying these words to us in our own personal and even in our own national storm it is I do not be afraid.

[14 : 15] But what follows on is really intriguing because this is where we find Peter making his way to Jesus on the water and the first thing that I love about Peter is his exuberant love for the Lord Jesus.

As soon as he recognises this is Jesus he can't wait for Jesus to come he must get to Jesus and that's part of what makes Peter such an endearing character despite all his flaws and all his faults and there were many is that he had a passionate love for the Lord Jesus in his heart and so this is what is behind him when he says and his desire to get to Jesus because faith and love take over at that moment and see this as a great example of faith and love at work.

Now what I want to look at in Peter very simply and spend more on the first thing is Peter's great faith then we see Peter's little faith or weak faith and then we see Peter's returning faith.

So first of all Peter's great faith and he showed great faith in wanting to go over the side of the boat to see Jesus but that's really the nature of faith because faith views the object of faith and faith wants to get as close as possible to that object because you see faith worketh by love so the Bible tells us that faith works by love.

You can't separate faith and love because we have faith in our heart because of God's love to us. We love him because he first loved us and we love him and we come to faith in him by his grace.

[16 : 08] By grace you are saved through faith. Now if you've got somebody and says you know I believe God I trust I have faith in God and you say to her oh that's great and of course you love the Lord you love God.

A person might say well I haven't really thought about whether I love the Lord or not but I have faith. Well you can't have faith without love because as we said faith works by love and an evidence of the fact that you have faith is that you love the Lord and so that's what happens even in our own experience that's how it came about because we came to faith because of God loving us and in turn we came to him.

Now we don't analyze when you come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you aren't analyzing and working out and saying right at this particular moment am I exercising real faith? Is this our real demonstration of trust?

Am I completely tied to am I completely believing in the Lord? We come and we just all we're kind of saying is I love you Lord.

Remember when Jesus was examining Peter he didn't say to Peter right Peter do you have faith in me? Do you have faith in me? No he says Peter do you love me? And that the very fact that if we love the Lord it is evidence that that faith is already there.

[17 : 45] So here is Peter and it is evident that there is faith there but at this moment he is displaying that great faith and that's what faith does. Faith prompts us to do things that probably we normally wouldn't and so Peter says Lord command me to come to you on the water.

Now if there was any person who knew these waters it was Peter. He worked there. That was his livelihood. He was a fisherman on these very waters. And if any person was qualified to knowing that you couldn't walk on the water it was Peter.

And yet his love and his faith in Jesus was such that he's asking Jesus to help him to do the impossible. And so that's exactly what Jesus does.

He says Lord command me to come to you on the water. And Jesus just said to come. And the power of Christ's words enabled Peter to do the impossible.

Enabled Peter to walk on the water. And you know that's exactly what happens when a person becomes a Christian. it's the enabling of Christ's word of invitation to come.

[18 : 59] That works in us. See take for instance you might be somebody here like myself. You knew maybe you grew up knowing the Bible.

You knew the Bible stories and you knew about Jesus. You knew plenty about it. But a lot of the time it didn't really mean that much to you. There were times maybe you thought it would be fine to be a Christian.

Other times it didn't bother you. But then one day things changed because you heard God's word in a way that you'd never heard it before.

And you heard the invitation of the gospel like you never heard it before. There was a reality and there was a power in that word that went right into your heart.

And that word spoke right direct into you in such a way that it enabled you to do what you had never done before. It enabled you to believe.

[20 : 00] It enabled you to come and to receive and to rest upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation. And that is exactly the word of his power. It is an enabling word.

Enabling to do what you can't do and don't want to do of yourself. And if today you still don't know Jesus I would urge you to say just like Peter said Lord command me to come to you.

Speak that word Lord speak it right into my heart command me to come to you so that I may come into faith in Jesus Christ. And faith will take you on. And the wonderful thing is that faith takes you to places that you would never imagine.

Because faith enables you to do things for the Lord that you could never believe that you could do. And the Lord loves people who are failures and people who feel that they're not equipped to do what the Lord is going to ask them to do.

That's part of the challenge and part of the excitement of the Christian faith. Take for instance Moses. When God called Moses to lead Israel Moses basically said to the Lord Lord anybody but me you've got the wrong guy.

[21 : 18] My brother anybody else but don't ask me I can't do it. And that's what faith does. Faith enables the people who say I can't to actually do.

And so this is one of the wonderful things and faith takes you on a journey in life an exciting journey. And so faith leads to Jesus. Faith enables a person to continue following Jesus.

And even although sometimes like Peter we'll fall and fail and let the Lord down and let ourselves down and let others down. It leaves our heart and we want to get back to be right with God.

And so Peter displayed great faith when he climbed over the side of the ship. But then we see Peter with little faith. And what happens? Well three very simple things happen.

First he took his eyes off Jesus. As long as Peter had his eyes focused upon Jesus he walked. But then it tells us very simply when he saw the wind.

[22 : 18] In other words when he saw the impact of the wind. The effect of the wind. When he saw the waves. And when he took his eyes off Jesus and fixed his eyes on what was going on round about he sank.

And you know so have you and I. And the times that we sink in our Christian life is because we've taken our eyes off Jesus. And we've started to look at other people and look at this and look at that.

Instead of focusing on Jesus. Second thing was Peter stopped hearing the word of Jesus. He was hearing now the roar. He wasn't hearing the word come. He was hearing the roar of the wind and the surge of the sea.

And that's what was going on. That's what he was hearing. And we'll sink as well when we hear the other thing. If we listen for instance to our own heart, we'll sink. When we find David having displayed great faith, then he really sinks.

And why did he sink? Because David said within his own heart, surely one day I shall die by the hand of Saul. See, he was talking to the most deceitful thing that you can talk to in a sense is your own heart.

[23 : 30] So David took his eye off the Lord. Peter took his eye off the Lord. And when we take our eye off the Lord and stop listening to God's word and listen to the other voices around us and the voice of the world and the voice of circumstances, we too will sink.

And the third thing was the situation around him seemed bigger than Jesus. Everything around seemed, oh no, this is too much.

And so you lose sight of Jesus in the circumstances and that often happens in life with the trials and sorrows and difficulties and things. They loom large and they loom so large we lose sight of Jesus.

So that's why we have to focus on Jesus. And that brings us finally to the returning faith and very simply Peter turned again to look to Jesus.

He turned and he looked and he saw him and he cried in desperation as he was beginning to sink, Lord save me. And Jesus stretched out his hand and saved him.

[24 : 35] And Jesus will always stretch out his hand to save anyone who calls that cry, Lord save me. Always will. And that's why we have to today realise that the Lord Jesus has an outstretched hand and he's reaching out to us with the gospel saying I'll give you hope for life.

I'll give you peace. I'll give you a sense of purpose and understanding of life. Take me John Bunyan the pilgrim's progress we know the illustration of the man raking about in the dust and he was always looking down, looking to find a coin or looking to find maybe some hidden jewels or something and all the time head down he was raking about in the dirt and in the dust.

Above him was a beautiful person with an outstretched hand holding the most magnificent crown. the most rich crown possible.

But he never looked up. If only he had looked up he wouldn't have to rake about anymore but never once looked up. Bunyan was saying his illustration was so many people are like that.

They spend all their life raking about trying to get things that will fulfill and satisfy them and they never look up to the Lord who is holding out to them the crown of life.

[25 : 58] Will you look up today to Jesus who is holding out the crown of life to you. Let us pray.
Lord we give thanks for your word.

We give thanks that this word is a source of life, a source of encouragement to us. And in this world of uncertainty and fear and darkness although it's a great world and we have so many blessings, we have so many things that we are thankful for.

Yet Lord it is uncertain. But we pray that we may lay hold upon the one who is certain in life. That we may have you for life and that we may have you for death and that we may have you for eternity.

Lord bless us and bless our homes and our families and all whom we love. Commit everybody into your care and keeping and cleanse us from our sin we pray. Do us good not only throughout this day and throughout this week but throughout all the days of our life.

Forgive us our sin in Jesus name. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing from Psalm 34. Psalm 34 and this is from verse 5.

[27 : 10] They looked to him and enlightened were, not shamed were their faces. This poor man cried, God heard and saved him from all his distresses.

Here we have this poor man just like Peter who felt himself singing and he cries to the Lord and the Lord hears and saves him and he will for you and me as well. The angel of the Lord encamps and round encompasseth all those about that do in fear and them delivereth.

O taste and see that God is good, who trusts in him is blessed. Fear God is saints, none that in fear shall be with want oppressed. The lions young may hungry be and they may lack their food, but they that truly seek the Lord shall not lack any good.

5-10 Psalm 34 They look to him and lighten to wear. They look to him and lighten wear, not she lit wear, wear faces.

this poor mankind called her and save him from all his distresses.

[28 : 33] The angel of the Lord encamps other providers of to take stand his Or the ■ her hands we in all hands God is good, earth has sin in this place.

Fear God is safe, and that in fear shall be with all to rest.

The lions young may and may be, and they may not bear food.

But there's a truly sin, the Lord shall not have given you.

Amen. And now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.