

How Is Your Faith?

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[0 : 0 0] chapter 4. I just want to look at verse 40, Jesus' question to the disciples. He said to them, Why are you so afraid? How, or have you still no faith?

So I suppose the question we ask today is, How is your faith? Because Jesus is asking this very probing question of the disciples. Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?

That doesn't mean that Jesus was saying to them that they had no faith at all. But Jesus is asking them, Why are you not exercising your faith? It was almost as if they were making out.

It was almost as the way they handled the distress of the condition, the situation that they were in, as if they were actually faithless men. As we know, Jesus, with the disciples, are caught up in this terrible storm.

And it was a violent storm, because it wasn't just that the boat was lurching this way and that way. It wasn't just that the waves were battering the boat.

[1 : 1 0] The waves were pouring in to the boat. And it looked almost like that the boat was going to go down. And we've got to remember that these disciples, most of them, anyway, were seasoned fishermen.

And before they were going to raise the alarm, it is obvious that conditions were going to be really, really bad. Because it isn't that they were just some people who were out on a day's journey and weren't used to the sea.

They knew these seas, they knew the waters there inside out. And they knew that on this occasion, they were in a seriously dangerous situation.

And so they come to Jesus in alarm and in distress. And again, as is often highlighted in this episode, it highlights very clearly for us the two natures of Jesus Christ.

It highlights his divine, where with one word, or with three, actually three words, he is able to quell the storm. And immediately there's this great calm.

[2 : 1 4] So Jesus demonstrates that he is God over nature. But it also demonstrates his humanity. Because we find that, as Psalm 121 tells us of God, that he neither slumbers nor sleeps.

And yet we find Jesus sound asleep, really deeply asleep, in the stern of the ship. So this is showing us of just how human Jesus actually was when he was here in this world.

That the human nature that Jesus took to himself was exactly the same as our human nature, apart from sin. And so he was subject to all the weaknesses that we are subject to, of tiredness, of pain, of all the things that we experience.

Apart from sin, he could be tempted, and he was severely tempted. And he knew the emotional distress within himself, because we find Jesus weeping.

We find him weeping over Jerusalem. We find him weeping at the grave of Lazarus. And we find, so we find him in the garden of Gethsemane, just in torment, as a weight of what lay before him.

[3 : 2 9] Produced even sweats, sweating, as it were, drops of blood. So Jesus understood the extremities of human nature.

He was, as we're told, in all points touched as we are, yet without sin. And that today is a great encouragement to us. That Jesus knows and he understands everything about us.

Who we are, what we are, what we need. Our own particular needs. Our own unique particular needs. Because we're all different. And today every single one of us, although you may have many things in common with others, you are in your own particular place.

And the Lord knows exactly what you need. And that's one of the wonderful things, that he has been touched with the feeling of our weaknesses, with our infirmities.

And so we know that Jesus here, we find him exhausted. And that was one of the pictures that sometimes we're given of Jesus.

[4 : 33] Because we've got to remember that as he did so much and he went about, there are moments that we get Jesus saying, for instance, that the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have the nest, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

There were times that Jesus would indicate the relentless timetable that he was keeping. It was just going on and on and on. But also the healing took something out of him.

We sometimes think that Jesus just healed in this amazing way. And it was an amazing way. But it had its own impact on him. Because remember, for instance, with the woman with the blood she had been taking, losing blood for 12 years.

And she came and her faith took her to Jesus. And she was saying, if I could just touch the hem of his garment, I might be healed. And that's what she did. And Jesus turned around and said, who touched me?

And of course the disciples said, what do you mean there's just this big crowd around you? Of course people are touching you. But Jesus knew because he then said that virtue had gone out of him. So that in that healing there was taking out of him as he healed.

[5 : 49] And when we think of all the time where Jesus was healing continually, sometimes we read about it, that he healed. They brought every kind of illness to him.

The community were coming with all. There were the blind and the lame and the ill and the paralyzed. Jesus healed them all. Now we're not given the details of all the healing, but sometimes it's just summed up in a verse.

And when you think of all that was going on and all the teaching, there's no wonder that we find times where Jesus is as he is just now. He's exhausted. He's asleep in the storm.

But if the storm isn't going to wake in Jesus, then his disciples are. And they come to him and say, teacher, do you not care that we perish? They're absolutely afraid.

Do you not care that we are perishing? And that we includes everybody in the boat. It doesn't just include when they said, do you not realize that we're perishing?

[6 : 57] We're perishing, but you're perishing as well. And that is why Jesus is really rebuking their faith and questioning their faith. Because they have lumped him in with them.

And in this situation, that they're perishing, they're all perishing. And I'm sure it also included all the other little boats that were there as well. Because it tells us in verse 36, And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was.

And other boats were with him. So there were lots of other boats out at that time as well. And, you know, sometimes you wonder how this storm just seemed to have arisen almost like from nowhere. Because, okay, we didn't have weather forecasts back in the day like you do today. But fishermen, like the disciples, would have known, been able to read the seas and the skies and the conditions. And there's nobody better at knowing when a storm was coming than fishermen. They're able to read. They've spent years. It's known. They know the signs. They know these things.

[8 : 08] And very likely they wouldn't have gone off if they had known there was going to be a terrible storm coming. But they went. And there's every possibility that this storm was a supernatural storm whipped up by Satan.

Satan can't create. But he can use the forces that are already in existence to devastating effect. If you go to the book of Job, you will see there of how Satan was able to harness, as it were, the winds to the fearful destruction in Job's family.

And so the forces and conditions that are already in being, Satan is able to use these and to harness them. And so it's very possible that he was behind what happened here in the suddenness of this storm breaking out.

But anyway, before we just come to consider the question that Jesus asked the disciples, I'm sure that the disciples thought that they were going to have a pleasant crossing since Jesus was on board.

And that is one of the things that we've always got to remember is that Christ within our life doesn't free us from the storms of life. And sometimes we think maybe when we become Christians that it's all going to change and life is going to become so much simpler.

[9 : 34] In many ways, life can often become more complex. And as we sang in Psalm 34, the trials or the troubles that afflict the just in number many be.

But the wonderful thing is that the verse doesn't finish there. But yet at length, at length sometimes, out of them all, the Lord doth set them free.

It doesn't say it's going to set them free immediately, but yet at length, out of them all, the Lord doth set them free. So we've got to remember that there's going to be constant deliverance, but there's also going to be trials.

In this world you shall have tribulation, the Lord said, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world. That's the way it always is. On the one hand, it's not going to be a troubled, stress-free journey through this world.

Anything but. But the Lord is going to be with us. And he has promised that he will deliver. His hand is still on the wheel.

[10 : 38] His hand is guiding us all the time. And so the Lord Jesus knows all our needs and all that we have. And the thing for the disciples, though, although it was a terrifying experience, and one that while they were going through it, they would say, this is the worst experience that I've ever had because we're dicing with death.

But, you know, afterwards, I'm sure they were glad that they went through that experience. Because they came to a place where they discovered things about themselves that they hadn't discovered before, with regard particularly to their faith.

But also they discovered more about the Lord Jesus Christ aspects to his being that maybe they hadn't grasped before. Because it tells us afterwards that there was a new fear that came upon them.

And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? And you know, it's true in our own experiences, although sometimes some of the things that you have to go through are painful and difficult.

You come to a place where you discover things. The Lord enables you to discover things. That you couldn't have seen otherwise. That you weren't able to see otherwise.

[12 : 02] They were there all the time, but you didn't see them. But it was through these experiences, sometimes harrowing, painful, distressing, that the Lord opened your mind, your heart to see something more about yourself, and to see something more about himself.

And so these experiences that we go through are all so necessary. But as we say, the Lord shows that just three words, and he calms everything.

It's quite extraordinary. And it's the same that the Lord was going to do at the end of the day. He's going to calm everything.

Just these three words. You know, you can use that at two different junctures in life. Peace be still. The Lord speaks these words, peace be still, when we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, his righteousness being brought into our experience produces peace.

[13 : 14] That's what we're told, that the fruit of righteousness is peace. And when we receive his righteousness made over to us, then peace comes to us.

And that's one of the wonderful things that we have, is peace of conscience, peace, calmness within ourselves. But it's also a picture of what will happen at the end.

When we will be changed. When we will be brought from this world into the next. And again, it's going to be just in a moment. Peace be still.

Because all that, as we will sing at the end in Psalm 107, that the storm is changed into a calm. At his command and will. And remember, it's his command and will.

We're not in control. We're not. We don't have the control or power of that. But he has. The storm is changed into a calm at his command and will. So that the waves which raged before now, quiet are and still.

[14 : 16] I would imagine on that particular day that the silence would almost be eerie. Although there wouldn't be an eeriness with Christ. The disciples would probably say, I've never seen.

These fishermen would say, I've never seen calm like this. Because the extreme from the height of these waves into a perfect stillness would have been awesome.

I mean, we've all been out on a boat, maybe just an absolutely. And you say, oh, this is flat calm.

This is amazing. But it's not as amazing as that scene.

Because it was calm when you left. Everything was flat calm. And you enjoy. It's lovely like that when you're going in a boat. And it's just gliding, as it were, very gently through the water. But if you had been hurled all over the place.

And the waves crashing over the boat. And you'd be looking at these mountainous waves. And then all of a sudden it's flat calm. That calmness would appear greater than ever a calmness before.
[15 : 19] And that's how it's going to be when we're taken into glory. That all the troubles and all the strife and all the pains and all the sorrows and all the conflict. And maybe even that's how it might be at the end of our day.

We don't know what kind of death we're going to have to die. And maybe we'll have struggles and there'll be real battles and storms. And then it's going to give way. In a moment. Brought into glory. And what is extraordinary is that we will be changed. It's one of the things that I struggle with. To lay hold upon. It's not that I struggle to believe it.

But I struggle to lay hold upon it. It's how we will be changed. How can this corrupt, deceitful, this awful heart that we have.

That is so clouded and infected with sin. And there's just layer after layer after layer after layer of it. Down within us.

[16 : 22] In a moment. That we're made perfect in holiness. You know we can't grasp that. Can't understand that. And yet we have to believe it.

Because that's what the word indicates to us. And it's one of the wonderful things. As the scripture says. He will change. In a moment. He will change our vile bodies.

So to resemble him. So we have again. This is all by faith. We take hold of these things. By faith. That's how it was with Abraham.

Remember Abraham was given great promises. But it tells us about his great faith. That he believed in the one who had promised. And that's what we do as well.

Although there's lots of things we don't understand. And say you know I can't get my mind around this. This is too. Such knowledge is too strange for me. It's too high to understand. But you still believe it.

[17 : 19] Because God has said it. And you know it will happen. Even though you can't understand it. So that's where faith comes into play. And so we find that this great calm comes down.

But we find Jesus rebuking the doubt and uncertainty of the disciples. And sometimes we have to ask ourselves the same thing. What is our faith like?

Because how do we react in the storms that come into our lives? Because we've always got to remember that while the disciples had the physical presence of Christ with them.

We have the spiritual presence of Christ with us. And a greater revelation given to us of Jesus Christ and the whole work of the gospel than the disciples had at that particular time.

Although they were later to understand in a way that where their understanding was opened and they saw things wonderfully. But at this particular juncture we have a greater knowledge and a greater understanding of who Christ is and of his mission and his purposes and the whole scope of the gospel.

[18 : 36] So Jesus will come back to us with a question as we enter into the different storms in life. How is your faith? Or as he says here, have you still no faith?

Are you still doubting? Because Jesus is on board with us in our life. He's with us. He has promised never to leave us nor to forsake us.

He has promised, I will be with you. I will help you. I will strengthen you. You go through the Bible and you'll find no end of promises that he gives to his people.

And he's saying to us, look, I want you to look to me. These promises are for you to rest upon. I am the God of the promise.

Trust me. And so Jesus asks us this question. And yet, we have to confess that so often, like the disciples, we fail.

[19 : 37] We come into a new storm. And sometimes these come all of a sudden and they throw us completely. And like it says in the scripture, we reel and stagger like one drunk.

At our wit's end, we be. That's the way we feel. And we're saying what's to become of us. And all of a sudden, we're plagued by the doubts and the fears and the uncertainties.

And the faith that seemed to be there and strong, we're saying, where is it now? Where is the Lord in all this? Is God sleeping? Has he forgotten me? And so these are real questions and real struggles that we have.

And I think maybe to answer that, let us look at a couple of people from the Bible, which maybe will help us a wee bit in the understanding of this whole area where faith can soar and faith can

plummet.

You take, for instance, in the life of David. And we find that David, as we know, was one of the great men in the Bible. And so often, David's faith soared.

[20 : 42] But we find him sometimes in the situations with Saul. We have a classic example of David's faith wavering. Of his faith, as it were, almost collapsing.

And there was a time when David, you remember where David, Saul came into the cave where David was hiding. And Saul and David's, the men were saying to David, look, Saul is in here. Just go and kill him. All it takes, one plunge. And God has put him into your hand. And David says, I won't raise my hand against the Lord's anointed.

And remember how he went up and he cut off a wee bit of Saul's cloak while he was sleeping. Saul's robe. And after Saul had gone away, David called back to him and he shouted, Saul. And he showed him. And Saul saw that he was at David's mercy and that David could have killed him. And he said to David, you are a far better man than I.

[21 : 44] And he said, one day this kingdom will be your kingdom. And so on. And it was a supreme moment for David where David's faith was soaring. Wonderful. And yet the very next chapter opens with the words where it says of David, David said in his heart, I shall surely one day perish by the hand of Saul.

He's gone from there to there. From this moment of supreme faith and behaving in the most exemplary Christian way to absolutely rock bottom.

And he says, I'm done. Saul is going to kill me one day, as sure as anything. So how did this happen to David? Well, there are two or three things that are very obvious.

The first is the length of the trial. And a long trial is hard to bear. If you go through something and it's just for a little, it's like a day or a week.

And then it's sort of, it's lifted from you. That's one thing. But when a trial goes on week after week, month after month, and month running on into year after year, there are times within that period you're up, but there are other times you're really, really down.

[23 : 09] And we can't help that because we're human. It's human nature. And yes, I know that our faith should be always fixed upon the Lord, but our human nature over a long period of time can often bring us down.

But again, another thing that you will often find is that we often fall. We fall down after a time of great blessing.

And I don't know why or why, how it is, but there seems to be a vulnerability about us. After a time where maybe the Lord has bathed us in his love, where he has given us great answers to prayer, where he has revealed himself in a way where we're giving new insights into things, and we all of a sudden, we feel, Oh, I just feel so much better.

I really, I'm finding this as a Christian, just, I'm in a good place. Then bang. I don't know whether it is that we take our foot off the pedal, whether we feel that we're more secure than maybe we ought to be feeling, but it often happens, and that's what's happened to David as well.

But then there's another thing with David. David is speaking to the worst thing he could speak to. In so many of David, well, this is one of the beauties of David's life.

[24 : 37] If you were to study through David's life, it's his constant discourse with God. He's always praying to God, and if you read, go through the life of David and go to the Psalms, so many of the Psalms link into David's experiences from these times, right throughout his time, from the time he was being chased by Saul right through as king, and many of the Psalms correspond to particular periods in David's history.

So you get a fuller picture of the man, of the highs and the lows. But he's always talking to the Lord. And even like from his time with Saul, he's saying, Oh, you know, being chased by Saul, there's this, Oh, Lord, I would just love to get back to your house.

One thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain, that all days of my life I may within your house remain. That's what David is saying when he's in the wilderness. But on this occasion, David isn't speaking to the Lord.

He's speaking to the most deceitful thing he could speak to, his own heart. David said to his heart, or within his heart, Surely one day I shall perish by the hand of Saul.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it? So if we are, if this is where our dialogue is, if this is where we are reasoning within ourselves, don't be surprised if

we plummet.

[26 : 09] Because we're not going to find anything in there that is going to bring us the encouragement. And to become so introspective, where we're just looking in all the time, it's going to bring us down.

It's going to bring us down. Bring us down. But you know, it's so human for us to look in. That is why we have to make the effort. That is why we have to say to the Lord, Lord, help me.

Help me to stop just looking in. Help me to look up. Help me to see you. Because you see, if we don't see the Lord, while we're in the middle of trial, we're going to be down.

It's so important that our focus is brought back up on him. And of course, that's always what happened with David. The other example, just very briefly, is Elijah.

And you remember, you look at Elijah, great, one of the other great Old Testament saints. A man full of incredible zeal and passion for the Lord. A man who stood all on his own for the Lord.

[27 : 17] You remember him on Mount Carmel, where he had that challenge to Israel. If the Lord be God, follow him. And we find this great man sinking so low that he was lying under a tree and he asked the Lord and he said, the Lord, it's better that I die.

He's asking that the Lord would take his life away. He felt so utterly helpless. And here's this man who stood against the whole nation of Israel and against the whole might and power of Ahab and Jezebel.

And yet, it tells us in chapter 19 when Jezebel said, surely, I am going to kill Elijah. When Elijah heard that threat, he ran away.

It's almost, you can almost hardly believe it. Because up till now, this man, his demonstration of zeal, he almost appears a superhuman character. His passion is zeal, his strength.

He seems to be the most robust person you've ever come across. And yet, here he is, running away from Jezebel and going down under the tree, saying, Lord, just take my life away.

[28 : 40] How did that happen? Well, I think, again, it's very simple that there was this build-up, this huge build-up. If you remember what happened, how he stood alone for the Lord up on the top of Mount Carmel and they had the offering.

Remember how the prophets of Baal were to call upon Baal and Elijah was going to call on the living and through God and the prophet and the God who answered by fire, let him be the God. Remember how Baal went through all, the prophets of Baal went through all the rituals and so on. Of course, there was no answer. Then Elijah, he set up and he called and of course, God answered by fire.

And then there was the slaughter of the priests of Baal. Then there was him going away back up to the top of Carmel again. Got to remember the whole physical exhaustion of this. He's away back to the top of Carmel and he's praying, praying, praying, praying, praying for rain.

And he's interceding with the Lord and he was sending his servant back and forth. Any sign, any sign of a cloud, any sign, remember it was the seventh time, servant came back and he said, oh, I see a cloud the size of a man's hand.

[29 : 51] Then we find Elijah running all the way back and he runs a distance of about 18, 19 miles, more than half a marathon, halfway between a half marathon and a marathon.

And so there's this incredible, massive, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual output. And there's no doubt that he's done.

He's humanly exhausted. And then the word comes, Elijah, I'm going to kill you. And Elijah takes fright.

And what happens? Well, it's the same as David. For a moment, Elijah looked at the circumstances and because he was so weak and he was so vulnerable at that moment, he looked at, he looked at everything from a human point of view and he felt there were various factors came into it.

There was, as we said, there's all this exhaustion, but there was an acute sense of loneliness in it as well. He didn't, he thought he was all alone. Remember when he called out to Israel, if the Lord be God, follow him.

[31 : 05] And it says, Israel answered not a word. Elijah at that point, and he had every right to think so. And that's why he said, I, even I only am left.

He thought it was down just to him as to the only believer left. Imagine, imagine how you would feel if in our country today you thought you were the only Christian left.

You would feel isolated and lonely and vulnerable. Well, that's where Elijah was at that moment. He thought he was feeling his loneliness. Loneliness is an awful thing, even in, even in a perfect world, in paradise, on this earth, when in the garden of Eden, God said, before sin had entered, it is not good for man to be alone.

We need one another. And certainly we need one another in Christ Jesus. And so, Elijah plummeted. But you know, when we look at our own lives, at our own faith, and there are times when we do sink, there are often very simple things that occur.

Sometimes it can be a duty omitted, or it can be a sin committed. It can be either. If we're neglecting to do what the Lord requires of us, or if we are doing what we know the Lord doesn't want us to do, these things can play havoc with our faith and with our assurance of faith.

[32 : 34] And we can sink so easily. As it says, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. That is, if I cherish sin, if I nourish it, if I hold it close, the Lord's not going to hear my prayer.

And if the Lord's not hearing your prayer, then you feel lonely, you feel isolated, you feel that the heavens are brass against you. Remember in Isaiah 59, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that he cannot save, nor is he heavy, that he cannot hear.

But your sins have separated between you and your God. So sin causes this separation. That doesn't mean that for the Christian that the Lord has turned his back upon us.

But it's, what sin is like are the big black clouds that hide the sun. We know the sun is there. The sun is not gone. But the impact of the sun can't be seen and it can't be felt.

And sin does the very same within our own lives. It spoils everything. Just on a really black, grey day. We can have a really black, grey days as well because of our sin.

[33 : 46] And so sin has to be dealt with. And it's also vital that every day there's the simple things that we take of the sincere milk, that we eat the strong meat of the word, that we feed upon these things.

Because the more we do, the more robust our faith will be. And so it is vital that our focus gets back to the word, to the God of the promises and learn to lean upon him and depend on him.

So that the Lord won't be looking at us as he looked at the disciples, questioning their faith. How is it that you have no faith? Well, of course, they did have faith, but it couldn't be seen.

May that not be true of us, but that our faith will be growing faith. And that the Lord will be the centre of our vision every day and every night. and if you haven't yet come to know and rest upon Jesus, then seek to do that.

And I know that sometimes there can be so many obstacles in that. And I believe that people have already done that, but they're still looking to do it, to come to faith. And you say to the Lord, well, Lord, if I've never come before, I'm coming now.

[35 : 03] And even sometimes you might be here today and you're a Christian and you've followed, but you wonder even, am I? And you know, sometimes we still say to the Lord, Lord, I've been following you for a long time, but you know this, I feel so far away.

I feel like, I feel, am I a Christian at all? Well, Lord, if I've never properly come before, I'm coming again. I'm coming. I'm coming to you. And like the disciples said, remember, on the road to Emmaus, abide with us.

The day is far spent. Ask the Lord to come in and to abide with you. That beautiful word, the abiding presence of the Lord. May we all know that.

Let us pray. Lord, our God, we pray that you will indeed bless us. We give thanks for your goodness and mercy towards us. We pray that as we so often complain about our faith, that you will be gracious to us and that you will grant us the faith to believe and to trust.

because faith is so essential for our Christian life. We pray that you will bless every single one of us. Bless us in our homes, in our families.

[36 : 17] Bless those who are in need, those whom we love, who our prayers have long gone out to and for. We ask, Lord, that you will bless them. Watch over us, then we pray, and do us good.

Cleanse us from our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.