

Have Faith

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 14, and reading at verse 25.

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 him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

There are incidents in Scripture that, well, I certainly find myself returning to over and over again and maybe focusing on some particular part of it.

And this certainly is one of these, because it is so full of instruction and so full of learning. In many ways, if you were to, and I remember doing a campaigner service a few years ago, not maybe three, four years ago, on part of this, because it is such a, fitting story and so full of teaching for young people.

But it's also full of teaching for people of every age. It's full of teaching for those who haven't come to faith, and it's full of teaching for those who have come to faith.

[1 : 43] It's just one of these incidents and experiences in the life of the disciples and in the life of our Lord that is so full of instruction. And as we see the incident here that we have, we find that the disciples are trying to make their way across the Sea of Galilee one really, really wild night.

And what turns out to be a very difficult crossing for them changes from being just difficult and frightening to, I would say, an experience that brought sheer naked terror into them.

Because walking towards them on the water was this apparition. And they were actually, they were crying. Now, you've got to remember, these are men who knew the sea better than any, because a good number of them were fishermen.

And they had spent their lives at sea. And they understood the ways of the water, even in a storm. And they were in a storm because they were battling hard. They had been in it for hours.

But whatever fears and uncertainties they may have had, all that changed when they saw this, as we say, this passion. And they knew it. They were saying to them, well, it can't be a passion.

[3 : 01] Because they knew, if anybody knew that nobody can walk on the water, they saw this apparition walking towards them. Now, of course, we need to look at the background to this.

And we're all familiar with it. But that, of course, is one of the things about the Word of God. And the very fact that we're familiar with something doesn't mean that we close our ears and our eyes to the truth, but that each time we come to it, we're asking that the Lord will open our hearts and open our mind so that we will hear what he's saying to us.

And when we see back from verse 14, we find this great crowd have been following Jesus. And we find an amazing difference between the reaction of the crowd and the reaction of Jesus.

Because we find that the crowd, there's this huge crowd, the disciples are saying, send them away. That's the reaction of the disciples, because it's come the time of day, and there's too many people, and the disciples are saying, right, just send all the people away.

There's too many of them. And they'll have to go and get something to eat into the villages. But Jesus, it's the very opposite. We find this tenderness and compassion in the heart of Jesus, because he's not going to send them away hungry.

[4 : 22] These people have been with Jesus. They have come to him. They've wanted to be with him. And Jesus is not going to send them away hungry and empty. And so we find this tremendous difference between those who are the disciples as an immediate group, and we find in the early days of the disciples and an amazing hard-heartedness about them.

They changed, and so they should. Over the years, they mellowed. Over the years, a compassion and a tenderness came into their hearts. We mentioned that before, and that's how it should be.

Because these sons of thunder, James and John, and we find Peter, and these men often displayed this hard-heartedness. Will we, Lord, will you call fire down upon these people? So different to the John, when we come to his writings in 1, 2, and 3 John. The writings full of love. So far removed from this, let's call fire down on these people. And here are these disciples, and they're saying, send them away. Same disciples, remember when the mothers came with the infants to Jesus?

[5 : 37] And they were trying to stop blocking them, blocking the mothers from coming. No, no, no, no. Leave them. And Jesus, in fact, rebuked them. He spoke sternly to them.

So we've always got to realize, and I think it's a very important thing to realize, is that the Christian is somebody who should be maturing, developing, and changing.

And I think I've said this before, we've got to guard against pigeonholing people and saying that how a person is at one particular point in their life is how they'll be forevermore.

The Christian is somebody who is on the move. Always on the move. For instance, if somebody is to give their testimony or to share their testimony, the testimony should actually be changing.

There will be certain parts that will be, when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, they will be able to talk about that. But there should be growth and development, and a testimony isn't stuck at the moment a person comes to faith.

[6 : 41] A testimony is an ongoing thing, full of all the experiences and the way in which God develops and works and matures and answers prayer and gives us insights into the truth and all these things.

The Christian's testimony should be changing and developing and growing, and the Christian ought to be growing. And that's the beautiful thing we see in the disciples, the Peter and the John of the epistles.

So different to the Peter and the John who walked with Jesus in the world. So we find that Jesus performs this miracle and he feeds the thousands.

And afterwards, he then asks the disciples, he presses the disciples. Verse 22, immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side.

And we find then what Jesus does. And after he had dismissed the crowds and the disciples, of course, had gone, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.

[7 : 48] So Jesus goes off on his own to pray. And we find this is a feature of Jesus's life. He was always having to go and to pray. And we say to ourselves, why?

Well, one of the reasons why Jesus was always wanting to be alone or to get periods where he could get alone, he needed to be in fellowship with the Father.

There was this constant dialogue between heaven and earth. And every step that Jesus took in his life, he took independence upon the Father, seeking to follow the will of the Father.

Everything he did was in order to glorify the Father. And we find that his life is filled with prayer.

Prayer before, prayer during, prayer after. Before Jesus chose the twelve disciples, he spent the night in prayer. Here we find him performing this amazing miracle with just a handful of things, with fish and bread, feeding thousands and thousands.

[8 : 57] And straight away he's back into prayer. What a lesson to ourselves. Because very often, we're at our most vulnerable, at our most prone to temptation and slipping is after blessing.

Because very often, after a time of blessing, it's possible that we're off our guard. And Jesus is giving us a lesson here, showing the importance of focusing, focusing in prayer, even after that time of great, great blessing, great victory, because Jesus had just performed this amazing miracle.

And so Jesus was constantly in prayer. And of course, this was his great delight. Let me ask you the question, is prayer your delight? Do you make sure every time in the day that you give some time to being alone with the Lord in prayer?

Well, it's vital that you do. Sometime in the day. Because we live in a very pressurized society.

There's so many demands on us. Make sure within your day that you give some time of that day to being alone with the Lord.

Now, I know it can be very difficult because our lives are so, there are so many different invasions upon our time and it doesn't matter, it often doesn't seem to matter where you go or what you try to do.

[10 : 30] There's something to interrupt, but try and make sure that you get time because it is vital. Vital to your growth, to your development. Vital not just for yourself, but for the very church at large.

Because what you are has an impact upon others as well. And so we find Jesus is constantly, it was his delight. He wanted to.

He wanted constantly to pray. And of course he lived, as we know, in our, as our mediator, he lived in dependence upon the Father.

But there was another reason why Jesus sent the disciples away. He sent them away into a storm. He deliberately sent them away into a storm. Because they needed, they needed to be dealt with. These men, we just saw the hardness of heart. Send them away. That's what they were saying about the crowd. Send them away. But that wasn't the only thing that was affecting them.

[11 : 30] Because we read in Mark's gospel about this particular miracle and it says, for they did not understand about the loaves, their hearts were hardened.

Now isn't that quite remarkable? The disciples not only witnessed the feeding of the thousands, they took part in it. They were the ones, they saw Jesus with just these, the few loaves and fish, and constantly producing more and more and more.

And they were part of it. They were the ones who fed the people. And instead of saying to one another, truly, this is the Son of God, as he said later on in the boat, they didn't understand the miracle.

They didn't appreciate it. It just went flying by. It didn't mean anything to them. Their hearts were hard. And the Lord, who is the searcher of every heart, is saying to himself, these men need to have their hearts dealt with.

These men have to have their hearts broken. And this is one way they were going to get their hearts broken and soften and melted and being brought into that teachable spirit by being sent out into a storm.

[12 : 53] We're talking about that very thing today in the whole way of the Lord humbling us in order that we will have the teachable spirit. Well, that's exactly what is happening here.

And so, the Lord sends them out into this storm. Something that will shake the hardness. Didn't mean anything to them.

I hope there's nobody in here like that tonight, as a believer, who's hard-hearted, who's taken their salvation for granted. That their salvation tonight doesn't mean really all that much.

Is it possible that we become so used to it that we just drift along? And we've forgotten what Jesus did.

We've forgotten God's love in sending his Son. How often do we look back to Calvary and see Jesus on that cross for me, tasting my death?

[13 : 59] Do we see the hell that was placed upon where Christ suffered what constitutes hell in my place?

Or do I just drift along? and every so often there's a wee recognition or a wee bit of realisation and we kind of stop and think a wee bit about it.

If so, our hearts have become hard. And if that's the way we are, be persuaded of this. There's a storm waiting for you. The Lord will see to it because you are precious to the Lord.

He wants the best for you. Remember we said that this morning about the Israelites journeying to the land of promise in order to enjoy the privileges and blessings they had to be humbled and prepared for it.

And the Lord's preparing you and me for glory. And he wants the best for us. And he doesn't want his people to have hard hearts. He wants us to be tender.

[15 : 01] He wants us to appreciate and to marvel and to wonder at what he's done for us. And so they're out in this storm.

That's how we find them. You know, I believe that if the disciples didn't have hard hearts, I believe that if they had been suitably exercised, they would have recognized Jesus coming to them on the water.

I think that's part of the problem. Here are these men who live their lives in the company and in the fellowship of Jesus. And yet their hearts are hard.

Jesus comes walking to them on the water and they don't recognize him. And I believe they don't recognize him because their hearts are hard.

If they were spiritually exercised, I am quite persuaded they would have recognized Christ before he even called out to them. And so we find here that the disciples are out at sea and they're battling away.

[16:10] They're being thrown in every direction. It's a terrible night. And as we see there that they've been out for hours and hours because it tells us that Jesus, that he went up into the mountain by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone. So it's obvious that he went up into the mountain before the darkness came. And it tells us that it was in the fourth watch of the night.

That's between three and six o'clock in the morning. By Roman calculation, there were four watches in the night. From 6pm to 6am divided into four periods of three hours.

So this, the fourth watch, was sometime between three and six in the morning. So the disciples have been nine hours at sea, plus, more than nine hours, battling in this horrendous storm.

And whatever difficulties and problems they had experienced before, what happens now, it almost drives them insane with fear.

[17:21] Because here, as we said, is this person walking towards them on the water. And they cried out in fear. And then these words came out of the darkness, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.

Words of assurance. I don't know if anybody heard words that brought more comfort than the disciples did at that particular moment. It is I. And you know, these three words are key to all the other words that are spoken.

if a voice had just come out of the darkness saying, take courage, if a voice had come out of the darkness saying, don't be afraid, it wouldn't have the same impact as these words, it is I.

It is because of who it is that the other words have their meaning. And my friend, it all was the same. because when we hear the words of Jesus and we know that it is him, that is what counts, that is where the meaning is.

And so we find when they hear these words that they know, here is one that is greater than any storm, greater than the raging pounding of the waves, one who is more powerful than any, the one they had previously seen, turned the raging storm into a calm.

[18:54] Remember, they had been with him in the boat another night, another day when they were crossing the same sea, and they went to him in fear, Master, do you not care that we perish?

And that must have been a ferocious storm, because remember the fishermen used to it, and Jesus, remember, just by a word, calms it. And my friend, I don't know where you might be tonight, or what darkness you might be confronting, what difficulties or problems you might be facing, but I want you to hear the words of Jesus, because remember, providence is his providence, and in your providence, and in my providence, the words are still coming out, it is I, be not afraid.

Then we see Peter's reaction, Lord, he says, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. Isn't this typical Peter?

There's no words from the others, we don't hear any of the other disciples speak, but here's Peter, Peter the impetuous Peter. You know, Peter is so fickle.

One day he's running to Jesus, another day we read about him running away from Jesus. But you know the wonderful thing about Peter? Whether he's running to Jesus or running away from Jesus, he's still got love in his heart for Jesus.

[20:28] And that's what's at the heart, I think that's one of the things we love about Peter. Because despite his failures and his failings, we always see this heart of love, this heart of love is beating.

And it's a heart of love that is crying out here. And Peter, who is a fisherman, knows full well that the one thing he cannot do is to walk on the water.

And that's why he calls out to Jesus and he says, command me. He doesn't say to Peter, give permission. That wouldn't have done. If Jesus had said to Peter, I give permission to you to come out walking on the water, that wasn't sufficient.

Because permission wouldn't have enabled Peter to do what he did. There had to be a command. So we see this, and we find, this is what I love about Peter, is his total confidence in the Lord.

Because Peter is a realist. He spent his life on these very waters. And he knew more than anybody else. The one thing it was humanly impossible for him to do was to get out, climb over the side of the boat and start walking across that water.

[21:47] He knew as much as anybody, as much as any fisherman would ever know, you can't do that. And yet Peter's saying, command me Lord to come to you.

I need to get to you. I want you. And he knew this was the only way. What confidence Peter displayed in Jesus Christ at that moment.

What faith! Because he knew if Jesus commanded him then he would be over the side and he would be walking. Peter's faith is absolutely marvelous.
And that's exactly what happened. Peter at that moment, remember the conditions? It's a storm the disciples are not coping in. and yet Peter's not looking at the waves at this moment. He's not hearing the howling, whistling wind. He's waiting to hear the command of Jesus. And he knows that that storm will be nothing. That the sea will be like a pavement as he just walks to Jesus.
[22 : 59] And so Peter is saying, command me to come. Command me to come. can I say to anybody in here tonight who is without the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior?

Do you know what I plead with you to do? I plead with you to ask Jesus with the same words as Peter did. Command me to come to you.

Because do you know what things are at the moment? You can't get from here to the Lord unless he commands. This is what you need.

This is what you need. Because you see, we can't save ourselves. What we can do is what Peter did. We go to Jesus. We cry to Jesus.

We say to Jesus, I want to come to you. Command me to come. And my friend, the Lord will command you to come, just as he commanded Peter.

[24 : 00] If this is what you want, if this is your heart's desire, plead it, pray it, the Lord will do for you what he did for Peter. And so Jesus speaks just the one word.

That's all Peter wanted to hear. Because Peter knew that in that word there was power. And there was power. There is power in God's word.

And Peter knew that. And you know what I love about this is that Peter's request wasn't necessary. A lot of the requests that Jesus dealt with were necessary.

People came constantly in need with deformed limbs, with dumb, blind, deaf.

people coming to Jesus with requests about their health, requests about their soul, requests about their family.

[25 : 05] So many requests urgent, necessary. But here's Peter making a request to Jesus. That isn't necessary.

Jesus is making his way to the boat. If Peter waits for a little, Jesus will be in the boat. It wasn't necessary for Peter to walk out to meet Jesus.

And yet Jesus grants the request. And he says, come. So if Jesus is going to grant a request that isn't even necessary, how much more is he going to grant the request that is necessary.

And I hope tonight that you have this faith, the faith, this faith that Peter displayed, where he has such confidence in the Lord, that he knows one word will take him out of that boat and into the water.

You put yourself in Peter's shoes. It must have been an amazing moment to see Peter. I wonder what the other disciples thought.

[26 : 22] As they saw Peter climb up and climb out of the boat and let go and walk out. It really is one of the most remarkable, awesome scenes that you can find anywhere.

And here's Peter, the man of faith. As we said, fickle Peter. Peter, Peter who was so in many ways so unstable, and yet the Peter whose heart burned with love for Jesus.

And Peter begins to walk upon the water. We know unfortunately that Peter's faith to Gadipas he walked.

and it tells us very simply what happened because it tells us that as Peter was walking on the water, when he saw the wind he was afraid and he began to sink.

You know, Peter's faith was so great in the boat that he neither saw the waves and he didn't, he wasn't concerned about the wind. Nothing had changed.

[27 : 32] The conditions while he was in the boat and getting out of the boat and beginning to walk were exactly the same as when he was walking. But only one thing happened.

As he began to walk towards Jesus, his focus went off Jesus. And there must have been this realization. What am I doing? Look at the wind.

Look at the waves. Look at the condition. Am I going to make it? And as soon as he began to think like that, he began to sink.

You know, my friends, it's going to be the same for you and for me as well. And as we go through all the challenges and difficulties and problems and issues and storms of life, if we take our eye of Jesus, we will sink.

The only way to walk through life is to have him as our constant focus. As Peter began to sink, he called out, Lord, save me.

[28 : 41] And Jesus stretched out his hand and saved him. See the saving? This is, I think, what we'll finish with this. The saving is by Jesus.

The command came from Jesus, but the call came from Peter. That's how it works. We call to the Lord for salvation.

He is the one who commands us to come. He is the one who reaches out to save us. We don't save ourselves, he saves us.

Will you, my friend, go to him? Go to him and say, Lord, save me. And he will. He'll reach out his hand and he will save you tonight.

If you really seek him as your Lord and Savior, let's pray. O Lord, we pray that as we reflect upon this amazing incident in the word, that we might have this faith, this childlike faith, this implicit trust in the Lord, that we may see him, for who he is.

[29 : 57] Deliver us, Lord, from the unbelief that we are so prone to. Grant us the grace, Lord, to put our life in the hand of the Lord.

Watch over us, we pray. Shine thy light upon us and guide us day by day. Wash away from us all our sins, taking us home safely. We pray thy blessing upon the fellowship tonight.

We pray for Sandra who will speak. And we pray for Christian whose home they gather. Take away from us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.