

THE UNNATURAL ROLE OF FAITH IN TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES - Matthew 14:22-33 - "Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. [23] And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, [24] but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. [25] And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. [26] 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. [27] But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." [28] And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." [29] He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. [30] But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." [31] Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" [32] And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. [33] And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Jesus asks the only question that matters - four very simple, monosyllabic words - "*Why did you doubt?*"(31). And the important point for our consideration is what kind of *tone* do you hear in Jesus' voice in those words? Because I don't think they are the words of frustrated exasperation. Like, "Peter, what in the world are you doing? What kind of weak-kneed goofball are you, anyway?"

Rather, they're words inviting self-examination - "Peter, you need to really understand and learn what went wrong here. There are life-giving lessons for your future growth in faith."

#### 1) FAITH MUST BE CONSTANTLY EXERCISED IN FOLLOWING JESUS

Something happens to his faith in the process. The storm gets the best of him. The waves overwhelm him. The faith he started out with *wanes* somehow. So we learn faith isn't an automated spiritual process. You can't set it and forget it. You and I can never *presume* a heart and mind of faith. We can never be lazy or careless about exercising it.

The very same lesson comes out in another passage of Scripture: Luke 8:22-25 - "One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, [23] and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. [24] And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. [25] He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"

Jesus seems to be driving home the very same point over and over again. You always *need* to be applying your faith in following Him. You can never just *live off your conversion*.

But Jesus teaches something very different here. The believer needs to constantly expend great energy squeezing his faith into the battles of life. There are obstacles. There are temptations. There's the pull of the world. There's the inner pull and deceitfulness of our own hearts. There are the wiles of the devil. The faith that got you out of the boat is not enough to keep you on top of the waves. There's a connection between church attendance and victory in daily life. There's a connection between obedience and a strong marriage. There's a connection between the prayer room and a successful, pure life morally.

Understand it well. Peter's problem is not that he has no faith. His problem is like ours. He doesn't work out that faith very well once he's on his journey. He thought all he needed was faith to *start out*. He didn't realize what it would take to *continue*.

#### 2) WE CAN CREATE OUR OWN DOUBTS

It's right at this point that the order of events in the story is of great importance:

- a) Jesus *sent* the disciples out in their boat - Matthew 14:22 - "Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds."

There is every reason to *assume* Jesus knew about the coming storm. Which means storms are not incompatible with the will of God. They were in the storm because they had listened to Jesus.

- b) Jesus then went up into the mountains to pray and seek the Father. During this whole time the disciples were out in the storm on the lake.
- c) Jesus then appears to the disciples walking on the water. The storm is still raging. And that's the important point. The storm isn't a *new factor* in the equation at this point. However difficult it was, they had already been in it for a while.
- d) The disciples eventually recognize that it is Jesus walking towards them. Peter tells Jesus to invite him to walk on the water with Jesus. Jesus does so.

- e) Peter steps out of the boat and walks on the turbulent sea. Remember, ***the storm was already raging when he stepped out of the boat.*** And here's why this matters. We now know ***Peter created his own doubts.*** He messed up his own mind. He short-circuited his own faith.

It is fascinating to see the way the apostle Paul picks up and develops the same theme of the danger of the **waves** - **Ephesians 4:11-14** - ***“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”***

There is a ***process of maturity*** described here. There is a ***resoluteness*** required in the exercising of our faith because you have to commit deeply to the process ***before*** you sense the danger of the storm. Spiritual maturity is ***incremental***, not ***sudden and explosive***. The stabilizing benefits of it are easily snubbed and staying with it is incredibly challenging.

Storms ***naturally*** devour our attention. Looking to Jesus instead of the waves ***isn't*** natural. Maturity in faith takes ***unnatural effort***. You build fascination in Jesus over time by His Spirit and the tools He's given to the church. And the reason it's so important is found in our last point.

3) **IF YOU'RE EVER GOING TO STAY ON TOP OF THINGS YOU NEED TO KEEP LOOKING TO JESUS**

Storms come. Life gets dark and windy. People drown in the storms of life every day. But there is one who is majestic over all - one who triumphs - one who can not only walk on the waves, but can pick you up as well!

Do you see it? Walking on water is impossible. Everyone ***knows*** it's impossible. Satan has been telling me that a lot lately. It can't be done. "My marriage situation is impossible!" "My spiritual situation is impossible!" "My personal situation is impossible!"

Not with Jesus. Look to Him. Peter walked on the water - ***twice!*** There the proof. Jesus is the ***author*** and the ***finisher*** of our faith.

**Jude 24-25** - ***“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, [25] to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”***