
OVERCOMING FEAR

Of all the stories in the Bible, this is perhaps my favorite.

- JESUS walking on the water is, in one sense, no big deal.
 - After all, HE heals the sick, calms the storms, raises the dead.
 - Last week, HE fed a multitude of people with five dinner rolls and two sardines—no big surprise.
- But Peter walking on the water—just an ordinary guy—that’s amazing!

I like stories about Peter, because I think I’m a lot like Peter.

- Oh, I’d rather be more like Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement,” or John, the “disciple that JESUS loved.”
 - But truth be told, I’m more like Peter.
 - I sometimes speak without thinking;
 - or put my own agenda ahead of GOD’S;
 - or worry more about what others think of me than trusting in GOD’S love.

This Gospel narrative especially speaks to me as I look at Peter and think about myself.

- And I think it has a lot to say to many of us in times of concern and uncertainty, because it is a story that talks about overcoming fear.
 - Overcoming fear is both necessary and vital for Christians, because if we don’t, we can become fearful, faithless, and fruitless.

Peter...a man of faith or a man of impulse?

- And look what happened.
- He walked on the water at first, but then he sank.

A good question for us to be asking is, “What caused him to descend into the waves?”

- For that matter, what even made him think about trying to do this?
 - Perhaps he wanted to be more like JESUS.
 - Perhaps he wanted to show off for the others.
 - Perhaps he wanted to do something none of the others had done before.
 - Perhaps he didn’t even think but just did the first thing that popped into his head.
- Of course, JESUS did say, “Come,”
 - and there was Peter out on top of the water—for a few moments anyway...
 - until he saw the waves...and felt and heard the wind...and began to be fearful...and lost faith...and started to sink.

You see, that’s what happens.

- We’re just fine until we see the storms...and then we become afraid.
 - A global pandemic and faltering economy.
 - A spot on an x-ray or a bad test report.
 - A harsh argument and words spoken in anger.
 - The storms come and fears grow...and then we lose faith.

It was faith which allowed Peter rise above the storm and walk on the water.

- But then he became fearful and faithless...and he sank.
 - And when the storm and the wind and the waves close in around you,
 - when you’re in a situation you can’t escape,
 - when it seems that you have no control over your circumstances,
 - you’re not going to be fruitful either.

Peter's dream after meeting JESUS was to serve the LORD, to share the gospel, and to spread the Kingdom.

- But fearful of the storm, Peter's faith weakened, and producing fruit for the Kingdom was the furthest thing from his mind.
 - When you're up to your chin in crashing waves, you become fruitless—
- but that might be the best time to reevaluate your priorities.

The name "Peter" literally translates to "rock."

- As Peter begins to sink like a rock, he's no longer interested in impressing his friends, or doing something special, or being like JESUS.
 - Now Peter's priority is to survive.

A lady came to the church I served and asked for food.

- She said she and her son had no more money until the end of the month a week later.
 - While the church office secretary went to the food pantry to get some provisions for them, she told me about a program she had seen on television—cable television.
- I said to her, "You don't have money for food, but you're paying for cable?"
 - She said she needed her programs, that her son loved to watch.
 - So, I pointed out to her that cable wasn't going to do them much good if they were dead from starvation, and that maybe now was a good time to reevaluate her priorities.

Most of those who are recovering from chemical dependency will tell you that they had to "hit bottom" before they were able to change.

- It took being confronted with the loss of home, or family, or job, or life for them to change.
 - They hit bottom and suddenly their priorities changed.

Believe me, Peter didn't need to hit bottom to know he needed something to change.

- But, when the storms come, when the hard situations surround us, we can either panic, or lose faith, or give up,
 - or we can see this as an opportunity to reevaluate and adjust.
 - We can see it as a time to pause and ask, "What really is most important to me?"

I suspect many of us, on one level or another had to do that during the pandemic.

- Masks or no masks?
- Distancing or not?
- Stay at home or go out, and where, and for how long?
 - The priorities for us changed so that we had to think about our safety, the safety of family, and the safety of others.

For Peter, it was no longer attention, or prestige, or power.

- For Peter, as it has been for us, it was now about his life.
 - Fortunately, Peter knew where to look.

"LORD, save me," Peter cried out.

- This was the lesson JESUS wanted Peter to learn when HE invited him out of the boat:
 - to depend on HIM,
 - and to keep his eyes on HIM.
 - This is the lesson GOD wants all people to learn.

GOD'S instructions about sacrifice in the Old Testament were very much about dependence and trust.

- Life in biblical times was very much season-to-season and day-to-day.
 - People lived according to their daily income, and there was little if any left over.
 - So, the instruction to give up your first-born lamb, or the first part of your harvest, or income was a call to an act of faith—
 - to depend on GOD that there would be other lambs or produce or income.

When JESUS praised the widow, who gave her last to coins to help the poor, it was not about the size of her gift (all that she had).

- HIS praise was about the size of her faith, and her trust that GOD would provide for her.
 - Her faith allowed her to overcome her fear of the future.

Peter knew where to look.

- His faith in the LORD brought him back to the safety of the boat.
 - Granted, he arrived there with less than he'd hoped for.
 - But he also arrived with much more.
 - Peter was now more committed than ever before to the LORD and HIS mission.
 - Peter's trust in the LORD rather than in himself was greater.
 - And when they arrived back in the boat, Peter, now focused on JESUS alone, found that the wind and the waves had died down.

Keeping our focus on JESUS can help us overcome fear.

Faith in our LORD can allow us to rise above the waves.

- It doesn't mean that there won't be storms.
 - It doesn't mean that life will turn out exactly the way *we* want it to. - It won't!
- But it does mean that fear in the future can be lessened or removed.
- It does mean that the challenges of life will seem small when compared to the promise of life with GOD.
 - It does mean that we will see things differently as we begin to see them from GOD'S perspective rather than our own.

Storms will come.

The wind will blow and the waves will rise.

- But with our eyes set on JESUS, we will hear the words of comfort that only HE can truly offer:
 - "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."