

WHEN FAITH IS WEAK

Matthew 14:22-33

Intro: I am going to read verses 12 through 33 here in Matt. 14 so that we can all have the context well in mind.

(Read Matt. 14:13-33.)

As verse 13 begins, the Lord had just heard that John the Baptist had been beheaded. We are probably safe in assuming that both Zacharias and Elisabeth were no longer living, and, since we do not know that John the Baptist had any brothers or sisters, there was really no one for Him to contact and to comfort. And so our Lord went on with His ministry, but obviously in sorrow. This also may have been an ominous indication of the fate that awaited all of them, and so the Lord took them away that He might minister to them.

But they could not get away from the people. And so the Lord spent the time ministering to the sick which He had hoped to spend with His disciples.

When evening came the disciples suggested to the Lord that He send the people away so they could get food. The Lord surprised them by telling them to feed the people. Matthew does not tell us where the food that they had came from, but John tells us that it was a young boy's lunch. When the Lord heard that they had food, He had the people sit down, took the lunch, prayed, and began giving the loaves and fish to His disciples. "Five thousand men, plus women and children, ate until they were all satisfied, and then there were twelve baskets full of food left over.

Think of the time that it took to feed all of those people, probably close to ten thousand in number, and how weary the Lord and His disciples must have been.

At that point we come to our text. And now our attention comes back to:

I. THE LORD AND HIS DISCIPLES (Matt. 14:22).

The word that should attract our attention in this verse is the word, "constrained." This means that the Lord had to *compel* His disciples to get into the ship that they all had come over in, while He sent the multitudes away. The word "constrained" means that they did not want to leave Him, but He

forced them to go. Why they were reluctant, we do not know. Perhaps they wanted to help Him dismiss the people because they knew how tired He must have been after such a heavy day of activity. Besides, if they left Him, how were they to get back to the other side of the Sea of Galilee?

But our interest in this should be increased when we stop to recognize that the Lord forced them into the ship knowing that they would be caught in a severe storm.

Now it is obvious that it was the Lord's will for them to go, and for them to leave Him with the remaining people whom He would send away. So this had to be a lesson in obedience for them, and it would become a lesson in faith. And it certainly does away with the idea that if we do the Lord's will, everything will run smoothly. Sometimes it does, but at other times, and perhaps most often, it does not.

But it is clear that the Lord prevailed, and the disciples left the Lord to send the crowd away.

This brings us to the second part of our story. Let us call it:

II. THE LORD ALONE (Matt. 14:23).

Now we see why the Lord wanted to be left alone. He wanted to spend time with His Father in prayer.

Which one of us is not rebuked by this incident in the life of our Lord. We often use our weariness as a reason why we do not pray. When we read verse 23 we need to remember that our Lord was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15). He knew what it felt like to be weary. Remember also the scene which the Apostle John has given us of our Lord in Samaria. He said, "Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well" (John 4:6) – Jacob's well! It was a part of our Lord's humanity that He would know how we feel when we are weary. And He felt this many, many times.

But in spite of His weariness, He stayed behind, alone, to pray. What does this tell you about prayer?

It tells us that our Lord considered prayer to be extremely important. It is good to be with people and to minister to their needs, but we must not be so busy that prayer, our fellowship with God, is crowded out. And this is

— a lesson of the greatest importance for all of us. While everyone else was headed home, the Lord was praying. We don't know how long He prayed, but the length of time is not what is important here. It is simply the fact that He prayed which is so important. Matthew really doesn't give us much of a time schedule for anything that happened on that day, or that night.

But as we move into the next verse, 24, the scene changes again. Now we are with:

III. THE DISCIPLES ON THE SEA (Matt. 14:24-33).

They had been caught in a storm. Waves were tossing the ship around, and "the wind was contrary." This means that *the wind was against them, like an enemy. Instead of making their journey easier, the wind made it more difficult.*

Here we are given some idea of the time involved. It was "the fourth watch of the night" when the Lord Jesus appeared to them in a different manner from anything that He had ever done with them before.

— The Romans divided the night into four watches, and this means that it was in the hours just before daybreak that the Lord appeared to them. This would make it some time after 3 a.m.

The Lord appeared to them "walking on the sea," and since they had never seen anything like this before, they assumed that it was some kind of a spirit. And so they were not only troubled, but "they cried out for fear." Now these were men accustomed to the sea, but this was something that they could not handle. But the Lord quickly brought peace to their hearts when He said, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Lit. He said, "Be of good cheer, **I am**, be not afraid."

At this point Peter spoke. Notice what he said: "Lord, **if** it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." We might think at first that this was a statement of a very strong faith which Peter made. But if we consider it for a moment, we see that he was asking our Lord to prove the truthfulness of what He said, and apparently what all of the disciples heard Him say.

— Here we need to realize that faith does not put any **if's** on the Word of the Lord. Neither do we ask the Lord to prove that what He says in His Word, is true.

But note how gracious the Lord is in stooping to Peter's unbelief. He said one word, "Come." And just amazing as it was to see the Lord walking on water, it was equally amazing to see Peter walking on water! And he really did walk on water.

However, he apparently did not get very far before he began to worry about the waves, and immediately he began to sink into the water. Peter knew that he could not survive that, and so he cried out, "Lord, save me."

Notice the difference between this brief prayer (because prayer is what it was) and what he had said to the Lord just before this. There is no asking the Lord to prove anything. In Peter's helplessness and His need, He didn't even have time to explain his predicament. There was not time for a long prayer. Peter couldn't have made it much shorter. He was convinced now that it was the Lord, and he cried to Him for help.

What did the Lord do? Peter really deserved to sink because he was the one who had set up the terms by which the Lord could show that He was the Lord. Instead, the Lord immediately stretched forth His hand, caught Peter, and saved him, but now it was the Lord's turn to speak to Peter. What did He say? He said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

What do you think the Lord had in mind? Was He asking about Peter's failure to walk on the water, and his failure to trust the Lord while he was walking on the water?

That may have been a part of it because Peter kept going the same way that he was going when he first spoke to the Lord.. You see, **true** faith never questions the Word of God. The Lord had said, "Be of good cheer; **I am**; be not afraid." And that is where Peter manifested that his faith was weak. In fact, can't we say that the Lord put His disciples into the ship and sent them out where He knew they were going to face that storm, because He wanted both to show the disciples how weak their faith was, in order that He might strengthen their faith. Peter had put himself in a spot which spiritually he was not ready for. And it turned out to be a most humiliating experience for him. Perhaps none of the disciples thought that there was anything wrong in what Peter said, but they were to see the effect of his weak faith by the fact that he failed when he got out on the water.

Concl: What lessons are we to learn from this incident in the life of our

Lord, and His disciples?

— First, our Lord teaches us in this passage the necessity of prayer, the great importance of prayer. Obviously if the disciples did not know why the Lord stayed behind, they would have found out later. Prayer must be given the greatest priority in our lives, equal to that of reading and meditating on the Word of God.

Second, we learn from this story that nothing will ever be able to keep the Lord away from us. He had no ship to travel by, but the Lord of creation walked on the water and came to where the disciples were. What a precious lesson that is.

Third, and I have already dwelt on this at some length, we learn from this incident that we are never to question any part of the Word of God. People made ridicule us for our naivety, but when God speaks, or when our Lord speaks, or when the Holy Spirit speaks, as they have in the Word of God, we are never to question what they say, and never to doubt that it is all true. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God, but it is when we hear it as the Word of God that it produces faith in our hearts.

— The story which Matthew recorded here is concluded by a very wonderful thing which the disciples did. They were still learning about the Lord. They were still growing in their knowledge of the Lord. But when they all were back in the ship, they said, the disciples said, and Peter must have said this with them, "Of a truth Thou art the Son of God."

Now the important matter for us to consider tonight is, what will we learn from this incident which the Holy Spirit has preserved for us. As I have said before about stories in the Bible which expose the sins and the weaknesses of the people of God, those stories are not there to embarrass or to shame those who were involved in them, but they are there for our admonition and learning. Those accounts are there to teach us, to warn us about danger signs in our faith, so that we will profit from their mistakes instead of doing what they did. We are all made out of the same stuff, and it is not good stuff. So we need to grasp every lesson we can from the Word of God. Otherwise we will repeat mistakes that have been made by others when God has warned us of what we can do if we are careless where others have been careless.

— And will you notice again how God works all things together for our good? He did that not only for Peter, but for everyone else who was on

that ship that night. What an unusual place for the disciples to have a lesson in faith! In the wee hours of the morning, the Lord met with His disciples to impress upon all of their hearts that He was truly the Son of God.