

The Impossibility of Doubt

by

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And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Matthew 14:28-31(ESV)

The problem with the requirement of faith in following Jesus in radical occasions, (*and I'm not just talking about walking on water but everyday life*), is not the weakness of our faith but rather the *doubt* we put before it. A little faith can move mountains, for that is what Jesus said about "mustard seed faith" in Matthew 17:20. But doubt makes us sink like a stone in water. Doubt negates the possibility of being part of something truly magnificent. Ask Peter. Ask Jesus. Peter was doing so good and had been invited by Jesus to experience something truly radical when he got out that boat and for a moment or two walked to Jesus while defying gravity. That was the good aspect of Peter's faith. He had just enough faith during the first few steps to join Jesus in an impossible moment. But then he doubted, and things got back to normal in a hurry. What happened?

I think the above account is true and was certainly something that happened on the Sea of Galilee that night, but it was an unnatural possibility for a man at any time to experience, even for only a few steps. So don't think I am promoting any water walking to prove your faith. But I also believe that it is recorded for us to read, and not so that we try to replicate it, but that we learn something at the core of the event that teaches us how to live by faith in everyday life. Therefore, we need to look at the initial focus of Peter's faith and what was good about it, and then look at the doubt that changed the possibility of something impossible happening, back to actually being impossible. So let's start with what Peter did right.

In the account, we read that Peter and the other men were initially frightened when they spotted a figure, maybe even a ghost, walking on water. Why? It is most likely because they had never seen Jesus or any other person walk on water. Now remember, these were seasoned fishermen and they knew firsthand the dangers of the Sea of Galilee at night when a boat is being beaten with waves by the wind. Seeing a figure walking on water in that perspective would frighten any of us. Maybe the only way we could accept it would be if it was a wispy ghostlike figure that kinda floated over the water ... like fog would drift by. At least we could reason that our imagination took over and that is what we saw. That is what doubt and lack of faith does for us. It explains something that is obviously a God thing with finite answers so that we can reject intellectually that there is an explanation that we cannot understand. Not so in this case. That option was not available to Peter and the other disciples. They saw the person of Jesus, and they would know his approximate weight and size for they spent a lot of time with Him. They knew that He was doing the impossible and He assured them it was He when they asked. Now this is where Peter did something real good. He asked Jesus for permission to walk to Him. So where did his fear go? Where did his practical experience with the sea go? They were left out of the equation. Where did his faith to do this come from?

Look at the sequence. It says for a brief time Peter actually took steps on the water. He responded to Jesus' command to come to Him by swinging his legs over the gunnels of the boat and then he stepped

out of it to walk on the water. What do we learn from this first step of radical faith by Peter?

Peter showed us the first step of faith that we all must take. He showed us that we have to leave the comfort and safety of our predictable security to be part of an impossible occurrence that Christ invites us to. Peter left a boat that he was very familiar with and felt safe in to step onto dark waters that he knew would not support his weight. Personal experience had taught Peter that he would sink if he did this act. But Peter wasn't thinking of that at the time. Instead, he was focused on Jesus and what Jesus could do, rather than what the natural force of gravity and liquid water would do to him. That is the first step we must take with our faith. We have to leave our comfort zone to take a step in genuine faith. It always requires that our first step is a step in faith, and it be done toward God.

The next step in our faith, as was the case with Peter, is that we must focus on Jesus and what he can do. We cannot limit the imagination and ability of what Christ can do simply because we do not understand how He does it. No one in that boat that night who saw Jesus walking on the water could explain how He did what he did. Even today, science or philosophy or any other think tank coalition cannot explain how Jesus did it. Instead, they resort to attacking the credibility of the eye witnesses and deny it happened. But that is the world we live in, whose method is to discount anything that is unexplainable or not able to be proven scientifically. If it doesn't pass through their grid of explaining something, they think it cannot be true. You see, to these people faith is not a tangible or fact driven factor and therefore it is not relevant to truth, in their estimation. To them, faith is no more than wishful thinking. But what is relevant to their understanding and they do not understand, is that these doubters cannot understand because they do not have faith in Christ, for faith opens our eyes and hearts to understanding. And yet, their's are the voices, even in some of our churches around us, who say that our faith must be limited to the tangible and understandable, for going beyond the basic aspects of simply believing that there is a Supreme Being is on the fringe of lunacy. Think of that? To believe God can do miracles in our life much greater than our limited understanding is a sign of instability? With Peter and the other disciples watching Him, Jesus demonstrated what He was capable of doing, and then He invited Peter to come to Him and do the same. It was a clear invitation and Peter made a decisive response to it and it produced a few good steps, until his reasoning took over and he looked at the waves. When he took his focus off of Jesus and what He can do, he then focused on the impossibility of what he had stepped into and the danger and doubt took over, and when doubt took over, things got back normal.

What happens when we doubt what Jesus can or will do? Nothing good can happen. In the account I've referenced, we see the impossible event that was being made possible for Peter was once again becoming impossible when Peter doubted. The result was that Peter then began to sink. If we would read all the accounts of things Jesus said that are in the Gospels, we will read that Jesus was always speaking of the necessity of faith in following Him. He also mentioned that faith is required for great works of God to be seen. It is even said that He could not do some great works that He could have done in His own homeland because of the lack of faith by the people there. Note the emphasis is not on the great faith that we must have, but that we simply have real faith. Just a little bit of the real thing will move a mountain, but doubt cannot move anything and especially God's gift of an impossible solution to our need because it.

When Peter doubted, he asked for help. Peter cried out, "Lord save me!" when he began to sink, and Jesus lifted him up and did what was asked of Him. You see, even doubt will not stand in the way of God's rescue if we will uncompromisingly cry out to Him and ask for His help. The reason is because our faith is being restored and doubt is being replaced when we are honestly and earnestly seeking God's help. Peter saw no other means of help, nor did he ask for it. He didn't ask the guys in the boat to throw him a boat cushion or anything that would keep him afloat. It was either Jesus' help or a trip to *Davy Jones' Locker* for him. It is the same with you and me if we put our hope in multiple remedies and then explain God's rescue with other explanations rather than that God sent His help. In doing this, we are doubting Him. In doing this, we are in conflict with true faith that can see God's help when He gives it. We ***doubt*** Him and His involvement, for we listen to the voices of the faithless and would rather put

what we can do or what people can do, or even what luck can do above what God can do until we are in a place like Peter when there is no other means of rescue. Then we see clearly that we must cry out to Him. Now we might not want to admit it, but it is a *doubt* in God that we are dealing with, and the Lord has made it clear that *doubt* negates faith and having the possibility of something really good and really big being done for us. I believe God doesn't move many times in our life to show some amazing things other than a simple rescue every now and then because at the heart of it is that our *doubt in Him and His involvement in our life* is offensive to Him. I believe He sees our *doubt* in Him and putting our hope in something else as an idol that stands in the way of our faith. God has made it clear that He will permit no idols in our life that stand before Him, and you can be assured that this is likely why *doubt* has such a negative impact on our relationship with Him and what He is capable of doing in our life. So, if you want to strengthen your faith in Christ in order to see some amazing things done for you, you need to reduce your *doubt* to zero. We can see some amazing things done by God with just a little faith in Him and His capabilities. But *doubt* must not be present, or we will sink.