

Prayer Meeting Address
given at
Old Baptist Chapel, Chippenham
by Mr. G. D. Buss
on Wednesday evening, 14th September 2017

Text: *“O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Matthew 14, part of verse 31.*

We read more about the faith of Peter in the gospels of our Lord Jesus Christ than we do of any other of His disciples. We read, for example, that the Lord prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail when in Satan’s sieve. We read that it was Peter whose faith acknowledged the Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he said: “And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” The Lord acknowledged that the faith which Peter had, was the gift of God the Father, by the Holy Ghost, to him. In 1 Peter 1, Peter has much to say about faith, and especially that which goes with living faith: “Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” In Peter’s second epistle, he speaks of “like precious faith.” In other words, not only is faith precious (for it is God’s gift), but every believer is blessed with it in greater or lesser measure.

It was very evident, even in Peter’s life, that there were degrees of faith. On one occasion he could say, with such blessed confidence, that our Lord is the Son of God; verily God and verily Man. Yet, when his faith failed (that is, when it failed in him; it did not fail in Christ), Peter found he could not support his own faith. With the same lips that had made such a noble confession, those same lips said: “I know not the Man.” Friends, faith is to be known in degrees. Some are given strong faith; some have a weaker faith. But the strength of faith lies in the One to whom faith is directed. I have told you before of that godly woman, Lady Lucy Smith. She was a woman, supposedly, and I am sure it was true, of very great faith. She had many answers to prayer, and her life was bedewed with many evidences of what faith had wrought in her life. Someone once met her and said: ‘Are you the woman of great faith?’ ‘No,’ she said, ‘I am not. I am the woman with weak faith in a great God.’ Friends, you may bemoan your weak faith. You may wish you had a stronger faith. And, yes, the hymnwriter is quite right when he said:

“O that I had a stronger faith,
To look within the veil;
To credit what my Saviour saith,
Whose words can never fail.”

J. Ryland

But, remember: the strength of faith does not lie in you; it lies in Christ. Think of that weak woman with the issue of blood, her natural strength all but gone. She pressed through the crowd, but it was that touch of faith! Just a touch! What a wonderful deliverance it brought!

So, in the instance before us this evening, we have an example. On the one hand we have great faith, and on the other hand we have little faith. You know the circumstances well. Our Lord Jesus Christ, having dispersed the five thousand men, women and children after having fed them so abundantly, “constrained His disciples.” That is a wonderful word: “constrained.” It means to be made willing. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.” Paul says: “The love of Christ constraineth us.” ‘It does not drag us; it constrains us and takes over our will, over our mind and over our affections.’ “The love of Christ constraineth us.” Oh, that we might know more of this constraining! Sadly and solemnly, we know too much of the constraints of sin, the world, the flesh and the devil. But friends, there is one thing about the love of Christ: it is stronger than all other constraints. And, when once *that* is put forth, all other hindrances fall away. There is no greater power than the love of Christ. Oh, that I might know more of it, and you, as well!

“Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side.” There were two things that are inferred. Firstly, He said they were “to go before Him unto the other side.” That meant they would get there. The Lord does not send His people on useless errands. If He says: “to the other side,” to the other side you will come. Yes.

The second thing was that He inferred that He would come. They went before Him on this occasion and the reason was twofold. One was that they might learn to trust the Lord Jesus Christ when He was physically absent as well as when He was literally with them in the boat. Friends, He *was* with them in His omnipotence. His all-seeing eye and His ever-pervading presence was with them as much as if He was literally in the boat with them. Also, the disciples had to learn a lesson here: to “walk by faith, not by sight.” Or, we

could say, ‘to row by faith, not by sight,’ for they were soon toiling and rowing in the midst of a very tempestuous, stormy sea.

What did our Lord do? He went apart to pray. There is a very profitable line of meditation, on which we should perhaps look more often: the prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ. So often, before He performed a mighty miracle, we read that He prayed. We can be sure that when He went up into that mountain alone there were, perhaps, three things on His holy mind. One was communion and fellowship with His heavenly, Father. That was His chief delight while He was here below. Secondly, no doubt that heavy, awesome, intolerable load; which was growing, day by day, upon His holy Person, concerning the work of redemption that lay upon Him. This was a matter that He lay before His heavenly Father many, many times. “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” But, I am sure that He was also praying for these dear disciples. His eye was upon them and His heart was with them. “He ever liveth to make intercession for them,” we read. And, so He does. Although He is not physically with us, we have the same blessing as the disciples had. There is One praying for His people within the veil; One interceding for them within the veil; One who has His eye upon His dear, believing people, even the weakest believer; the smallest of His saints. Some of us have to come in there. He was praying for them.

“Unseen, yet for ever at hand.”

A. M. Toplady

So, these disciples began to row their way across the lake. They soon found, as God’s people often find, that it was a contrary path. There was opposition. Wind and waves and darkness were hindering them in the way. They were lonely. They *were* alone, but, just remember, the Lord Jesus Christ was alone. We read in the twenty third verse: “He was there alone.” In one sense, not even favoured Peter, James or John could enter into the depth of the path in which the dear Saviour was walking. We read: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me.” Sometimes He calls His people into lonely paths of fellowship in that respect; that they might learn to look to Him who trod the winepress alone. The disciples felt alone. But, would they trust Him where they could not trace Him? Would their faith stand the test?

Well, the fourth watch of the night came. The darkest watch: when, no doubt, their strength was at its lowest. Quite probably they were short of

patience and energy. They must have wondered where Jesus was. We have it in one of the other gospels: "And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them." Perhaps they were wondering in their unbelieving minds (and we would be just the same), 'How could He come? We left Him on the shore. Here we are, half way across the lake. How can He come?' You may be asking that tonight. 'Lord, can it be that Thou canst come? It seems impossible!' Yet, "with God all things are possible." And, in the fourth watch of the night, this dear Redeemer went to them. He knew exactly where they were on that storm-tossed sea. He needed no one to tell Him. And He knows exactly where you are on your storm-tossed sea this evening. He needs no one to advise Him as to where to find His dear people. He knows where His sheep get to. He knows what corners they are in, what nets sometimes hold them and what rough seas his people have to encounter. "Your Father knoweth." Your Saviour knows, and the dear Spirit knows, as well. "Jesus went unto them." They could not go to Him, but He could go to them. There is a wonderful little hymn that we sometimes sing:

"And when, through fear, I only creep,
Or dare not move a single step,
Yet Thou canst come to me."

J. Berridge

Friends, He can come to you! But, do I hear one of you say: "O when wilt Thou come unto me?" Those are the words of the psalmist. The Lord *did* come. It was like those who were watching for the morning; they were waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. "O when wilt Thou come unto me?"

And, He came in a way they never expected. You may have laid down a line, as it were, for the way the Lord should come to you in your trouble. You may have planned it all out. 'This is how it must be, Lord!' God's ways are not your ways. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD." He had a better way to show them His love and mercy at this time. He "went unto them, walking on the sea." Under His dear feet were the very things that were troubling them; the waves. He was outfacing the wind. The darkness was nothing to Him because to God, the darkness and the light are both the same. "The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." God never walks in the dark. We do, but He does not. "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Though your path may be dark to

you, to your God it is not dark. No. "O LORD, Thou knowest," was Jeremiah's anchor at such a time. We read in Hebrews 2: "Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet." Your sins, your temptations, your disappointments, your discouragements, your oppositions, your apprehensions and your tomorrows: all those things that burden you tonight are all under His feet. All of them, especially that hour and article of your passing from this time state, are under His feet and under His divine control. "Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea."

Because it was a strange, unlooked for event, (their poor, carnal minds had never seen anything of the like), they immediately came to a false conclusion. They were filled with fear. "It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear." But, friends, there is one thing that will put your fears to rest, one thing that will make the crooked straight, one thing that will turn darkness to light; when Jesus speaks. Jesus straightway, immediately to calm their fears and to quieten their spirits, said: "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." The world often uses that expression 'cheer up,' often in a false way. But, when your Saviour says it, it is good cheer. There is a good foundation for it. There is going to be a good outcome with it. "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Is that not enough for you, friend? "It is I." The Lord Jesus Christ, walking on your sea of trouble, is saying to you tonight: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." Blessed be Jesus to say: "It is I!" "It is I"; 'your Creator.' "It is I"; 'your Redeemer.' "It is I"; 'your Friend.' "It is I"; 'your Saviour.' "It is I"; 'your Shepherd.' So we could go on: all those glorious offices He holds on behalf of His dear people! "It is I", none other! It is your Jesus.

"What more can He say than to you He has said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?"

K., 1787

So, there were these dear disciples looking wonderingly over the side of the boat. They hear these glad tidings. Impulsive, impetuous, loving Peter immediately takes a course of action that none of the others did. We might think he was rash, but the Lord bid him come. There is one thing about Peter which is most commendable: he did not want any distance between himself and the Lord. He wanted that distance to be removed as soon as possible! If that meant he had to venture over the side of the boat to reach His Saviour as quickly as possible: 'so be it!' says Peter. Friends, is there a distance between

you and your God, tonight? Is there a distance between you and your Saviour? I know sometimes we have to wait for Him to come to us: *I know that*. But sometimes there is a running towards Him, a hastening. Yes. It is a great mercy when there is that gracious exercise. We read of those “who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before” them.

And, what Peter saw as He looked on the dear Saviour was twofold. Firstly, remember our Saviour was and is a real Man. Here was a real Man walking on the sea; this watery waste. Secondly, Peter knew what it was that enabled the Man, Christ Jesus, to walk on the sea as He did. It was His Godhead; His divinity, overcoming the laws of nature for a season, to illustrate the miraculous power and ability that He has. Peter believed that if the Lord Jesus Christ was willing to impart to him a degree of that ability, he could “do all things through Christ which strengtheneth” him. Yes, he could walk on the waves. Or, in another metaphor, he could walk through fire, so long as the Lord was with him. Paul says: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

So, Peter says: “Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.” Now, do notice this: this was not presumption. Peter had divine permission, yea, a divine command to venture. It was not presumption. Had the Lord not said “Come,” it would have been presumption. But He did say “Come!” And when the Lord says “Come,” He means it. He says to poor labourers: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He says, through His servant Isaiah: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” He says: “Come.” And, when the Spirit makes these things Spirit and life in your soul, then you will come.

Jesus said: “Come.” And the power of that word quickened the faith in Peter’s heart. Our faith must rest on the word; the word and faith go together. “So, then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” That word ‘come’ quickened the faith that enabled Peter to climb over the side of the boat. For a little while, he walked on the waves while the wondering disciples looked on. We do not know how many steps he took; several, I would think, but Peter took step after step towards the object of his faith: a precious Christ.

All was going well. Sometimes you think all is going well with your faith, don't you? When, for a few moments, the Lord enables you to believe, to hope, to love and to obey, you feel all is well. But Satan is ever at hand to try and turn us away from the object of our faith. It was so with Peter. After he had gone a few steps he suddenly realised, humanly speaking, the great danger he was in. From a natural point of view, he had the ocean depths beneath him. He had left the boat, he had not yet reached his Saviour. 'This great wave is coming at me! This great gust of wind is blowing on me!' We read "He saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink." Friend, faith does not feed on negatives. By that I mean that it does not feed on things like winds and waves or seas and storms. No. Faith feeds on *Him* who has those things under His control. When you get into a reasoning and a calculating spirit and try to reason everything out and work everything out, you lose sight of the object of your faith. The Lord Jesus Christ is on the throne. His dear feet are on those very things that are troubling you. So long as Peter kept His eye fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ, he *could* walk on the waves, and He did. "Looking unto Jesus the Author and finisher of our faith."

But then Peter began to sink. What a time it is, dear friends, when we begin to sink! Do you know what that is? The psalmist knew it. "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." Oh, those sinking times when we lose sight of the Saviour! All we can see is our guilt, our wretched nature and the difficulties of the way! We cannot get above the winds or the waves. They seem to overwhelm us. Sinking times! Prayer begins to fail, faith begins to fail and hope begins to fail. Will our religion go spark out under these waves? "Beginning to sink."

But, Peter did not lose his faith altogether, did he? Although he was strong in faith while he walked those few steps, now weak faith comes to his rescue, blessed be God. "Beginning to sink, he cried," not back to Andrew, John, James or others in the boat. No. He knew where to go with his trouble. He did not turn back; there is no armour for the back. And when you begin to sink, dear friends, do not turn back! "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil." "Beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." That is one of the shortest prayers in the whole of the Word of God. It comes alongside the dying thief's prayer: "Lord, remember me." Or Hezekiah's prayer:

“Undertake for me.” These short, brief prayers brought amazing answers. Such prayers took the dying thief to paradise and delivered Hezekiah from his affliction and from his enemies. Hezekiah was promised fifteen more years of life, and, more than that, he could say: “Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.”

And Peter’s brief prayer brought an immediate answer. The Lord knows when you need an immediate answer. To some of our prayers the Lord says: ‘Not yet.’ Then we have need of patience. “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” But He knows when you are in need of an immediate answer.

“When most we need His helping hand.”

J. Swain

It may be tonight that you need His help more than you have ever needed it before. Well, here is a prayer that will suit you. “Lord, save me.” Between the word ‘Lord’ and the word ‘me’ is the word ‘save.’ ‘Lord’: that great almighty God. ‘Me’: a poor, sinking sinner. And there is the hand stretched out: “Lord, *save* me.”

Immediately, this loving, tender-hearted Jesus stretched forth His hand; those hands that were to be, not long after this, nailed to a cross. “Immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand “and caught him.” He caught him, literally, as He grasped Peter’s hand. We have it in Psalm 73: “Thou hast holden me by my right hand,” said Asaph. Asaph was a sinking man; he almost sank to apostasy! “Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand”, the hand of my faith.’ The Lord held Asaph’s faith so that he did not altogether sink into that terrible sin. May God hold your faith and mine.

So, while the Lord held Peter’s literal hand, He held Peter’s hand of faith with this loving reproof: “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Notice three things. Firstly, it was little faith that had such an amazing answer. Peter was not to glory in his faith, was he? It had become small, it had diminished. He was to glory in the answer that it received: the hand of Christ stretched out. We are not to glory in the grace God gives us; we are to glory in the God who gives that grace. That is why sometimes God permits your faith

to get to a low level. He will not have you walk around this earth boasting of what you are and who you are.

“Yes! I’m a poor sinner and nothing at all
But Jesus my Saviour is my All in all.”

A.R. Habershon

“O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” The second thing we would notice is that the Lord knows our doubts. We often speak of doubting Thomas, don’t we? Well, here is doubting Peter. Dear friends, I believe there is not a believer here tonight who is not sometimes greatly tempted with doubts and fears. Oh, the ‘ifs,’ the ‘whys’ and the ‘wherefores’ that you cannot explain! They bring so many doubts. ‘Does the Lord love me? Am I one of His people?’ It may go even further if the devil gets busy: ‘Is there a God? Is anyone in control?’ Oh, these doubts! But, blessed be God, the devil did not have the last word with Peter. And nor will he with you; poor trembling, sinking, crying-out sinner tonight. Our Lord and Peter came “into the ship.” That hand that stretched out did not leave Peter. It brought him safely “into the ship”; into safety and into security. “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” The Lord brings His people “unto their desired haven. And, those who were in the ship watching, came and worshipped Him. “Of a truth Thou art the Son of God.”

Another miracle at this time, not mentioned by Matthew, is taken up in one of the other gospels. “Immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.” *Suddenly* they came to the very place where they wanted to be. Sometimes the Lord does things suddenly; when it is for His honour and glory, for our teaching and for our good. “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” I thought of ‘Mr Fearing in Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. I have often wondered what the words were that his Saviour spoke to him as he went into the Celestial City gate. I wonder if it was this: “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” I am sure that is what the Lord would say to some of us who struggle along.

“I’ve wrestled on towards Heaven
'Gainst storm, and wind and tide.”

A. R. Cousin

It will be such a miracle to get safely home and to find, after all, that all those doubts were not true at all. 'Little faith' *will* get safely home. He will. Why will he? Because, dear friend, the Word of God tells us that "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" What is it, dear friend that has caused you to doubt? What is it that has made your poor soul cast down? Listen to David's words, I will close with them: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God..." Whether it be in providence, grace, body, soul, time, eternity, life, death, family, Church or business, whatever it may be: "...hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Yes, little faith in a great God.

May God add His blessing.

Amen.