

Rescued from Doubt

Fifteen years and this was the thanks that Odell was going to get? Downsized?

The 60-year-old Odell was contemplating his fate at the newspaper. The rumors had been verified last week: five percent of the sales and business offices would be let go in three months.

Odell had witnessed some coworkers, around his age, who were laid off to save on the bottom line. Older employees typically amassed higher salaries, and some businesses found it more lucrative to fire them.

How would he find another job at his age? Although specific names had not been announced, Odell was fearful that his name would be on the termination list.

It took his granddaughter to challenge him and redirect his attention to Christ. Simone was over to the house, French braiding her grandmother's hair, when Odell began talking to Eloise about the dreaded terminations.

"Granddad," Simone had begun, "you don't know if your name is on the list. What have you always told us?"

"Do your best to follow the Lord. Keep your eyes on Him," continued Simone, "and the Lord will take care of you. Whatever's going to happen, the Lord's got you!"

"Amen," said Eloise. "Maybe Odell will listen to you."

The women were right. He had been in a constant state of turmoil and doubt. Odell repented for his worry and unbelief.

"I know you got me, God," he said.

1. *What attracts you to the things you commonly look at?*

2. *When your eyes are on Jesus, what do you see?*

3. *How is your life when your eyes are not on Jesus?*

Jesus Dismisses the Crowds

Matthew 14:22-24, KJV

22 And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

Matthew 14:22-24, NIV

²²Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Matthew 14:22 leaves readers with the impression that there was a sense of urgency in Jesus' decision to dispatch the Twelve without any delay. It occurred right after Jesus miraculously fed over 5,000 men. This is in addition to an unspecified number of women and children (vss. 13-21).

It is unclear, though, from the text why Jesus wanted His disciples to enter their fishing vessel "immediately" (vs, 22) and head back to the other side of the lake. Meanwhile, Jesus dispersed the crowd and went up to a nearby mountainside by Himself to pray.

Jesus continued to pray well into night. While He was praying alone on the mountainside, the disciples found themselves in a severe storm in the middle of the lake. The Gospels of Mark and John also include accounts of this story. John 6:19 says that the disciples rowed about three or four miles. Mark 6:48 tells us that Jesus "saw the disciples straining at the oars"—struggling to control the vessel because of the winds that had swept down on the lake. As the turbulent waters "buffeted" (Matt. 14:24) the craft, the disciples were rowing unsuccessfully against the storm.

Perhaps they felt just as panic-stricken as they did during the earlier incident, which we studied in lesson 2.

4. *What did Jesus compel His disciples to do?*

5. *What did Jesus do once the Twelve had left?*

Jesus Walks on the Water

Matthew 14:25-27, KJV

25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

Matthew 14:25-27, NIV

²⁵Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Unlike the previous storm recorded in Matthew 8:23-25, Jesus was not initially with the Twelve, but Mark 6:48 states that Jesus, though physically separated from the disciples, saw them "straining at the oars."

It was during the "fourth watch of the night" (between 3 A.M. and 6 A.M.; Matt. 14:25, KJV) that Jesus decided to reunite with the Twelve. Eventually, they could see Jesus coming closer to their boat. Not even the windstorm, waves, or gravity could deter Jesus. Yet, as He walked in their direction on the surface of the lake (vs. 26), it seemed as if He intended to "pass by them" (Mark 6:48).

At first, the Twelve did not recognize who was heading toward them. This is understandable given the predawn dim light, the fierce winds, and the disciples' terror-stricken emotional state. The Twelve concluded that Jesus must have been a "ghost" (Matt. 14:26).

Just as the disciples began screaming, Jesus responded with familiar words of encouragement. Not only were they

to “take courage” (vs. 27), but also no longer to “be afraid.” The reason is that Jesus had arrived to rescue them.

6. What prompted Jesus to go to His disciples?

7. What caused the Twelve to become “terrified” (Matt. 14:26)?

Jesus Rescues Peter

Matthew 14:28-33, KJV

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

Matthew 14:28-33, NIV

²⁸“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

²⁹“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

³²And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Beginning in Matthew 14:28, the narrative shifts the focus to Peter and his request that Jesus allow him to walk on the water to the Savior. Jesus gave Peter permission to leave the vessel and make his way on the surface of the lake. Initially, the situation seemed to go well for Peter.

He stepped down from the boat and began walking on the water toward Jesus. How far he walked is not stated. However, the gale-force winds on the lake continued and eventually distracted Peter.

Suddenly, “doubt” replaced Peter’s “faith” (vs. 31). Indeed, Peter became so preoccupied with the strength of the wind that he became anxious. Peter’s apprehension was so intense that he shrieked, “Lord, save me!” (vs. 30).

At once, Jesus extended His hand and grabbed Peter. The Savior followed this action by censuring Peter for having so “little faith” (vs. 31). In fact, the phrase “little faith” is an expression Matthew uses several times to describe those who doubt Him (for example, 6:30; 8:28; 16:8). Rather than becoming faint-hearted, Peter should have remained courageous and resolute in drawing closer to Jesus. Once the two arrived at the boat, the previously violent wind immediately died down.

But the high point of the story is not Peter walking on water, nor the stilling of the storm. Matthew 14:33 tells us that the Twelve prostrated themselves in worship before Jesus. Such a response is remarkable given that the disciples were monotheistic Jews (believing in only one God).

Also, while the Twelve bowed down in adoration, they declared Jesus to be the “Son of God” (vs. 33). This title means that He, as the divine-human Messiah, exercised the power and authority of the Creator (Job 9:5-8; Ps. 77:19). It is unlikely the disciples understood everything there was to know about who Jesus was at this point. The Synoptic Gospels all portray the disciples as coming to know Jesus in gradual steps. However, the disciples’ reaction foreshadows Peter’s later confession to Jesus that “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). It is noteworthy that Jesus neither denied the statement nor rebuked His followers for making it.

8. *In what way did Peter’s attitude change?*

9. *What caused Peter to suddenly panic?*

10. *How did Jesus respond to Peter’s plea for help?*

The Wind and Waves of Adversity

A major difference between the wind and waves is that, although you can feel the effects of a wind, you can't see it. Nevertheless, both can become catastrophic. The wind can become a deadly tornado, and waves can become a devastating tsunami.

Like the wind and waves, troubles can be either incomprehensible or perceptible. Usually troubles can be managed, but sometimes adversity can be truly terrifying, challenging our faith in God, and that's when we most need to keep our eyes on Jesus to sustain our spiritual health and maintain our close relationship with God.

Some of the most serious adversities can be the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or the discovery of a personal health issue. In those dark times, how can we keep our eyes on God? Of course, God doesn't want us to ignore our troubles and pretend we're fine and all is well in the world. What He does want is for us to place our trust in His love for us by focusing our eyes on our Savior Jesus, who is with us in our struggles.

It's certainly not easy to keep our eyes on Jesus during our most troubling times, and, like Peter, there will be times when we will falter and fall. God, however, will not abandon us when we do. If we cry out for His help, He will reach down and pick us up. God is both patient and willing to help us, and He is also able to help us over and over again. Like King David, let us sincerely say in our hearts, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4, KJV).

11. *What kinds of waves in our lives can be so daunting we can't take our eyes off them?*

12. *What wind of adversity in the past severely shook your faith?*

13. *When have you ignored the wind and waves and just trusted God?*

Rescued!

At times, fixing our gaze on Jesus can be extremely difficult. Those are times when sin, fears, and even preoccupation with daily issues can sway our vision. Those are times when we need to be particularly vigilant against anything that would draw our attention away from our Lord. Those are times when keeping our eyes on Jesus will increase and deepen our faith in God. Most importantly, as with Peter, the Lord will lift us up whenever we cry out to Him for help.

► *Think of a “wave” you are experiencing that has you wondering if the Lord is there for you. Ask Him to help you keep your eyes on Him and give you faith that He will bring you through the waves.*

KEY VERSE

And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?
—Matthew 14:31, KJV

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”
—Matthew 14:31, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSONS

Week of June 28 through July 4

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 56:1-8—God Welcomes Foreigners.
- Tues.** Ruth 4:3-6, 13-15—Naomi’s Sorrow Turns to Joy.
- Wed.** Leviticus 13:1-8—Symptoms and Treatment of Leprosy.
- Thurs.** 2 Kings 7:3-11—Lepers Share Their Good News.
- Fri.** John 4:39-42—Many Samaritans Believe in the Savior.
- Sat.** Luke 17:1-10—Doing What Needs to Be Done.
- Sun.** Leviticus 13:45-46; Luke 17:11-19—Cultivate Gratefulness for Acts of Healing.