

WHAT MAKES YOU BRAVE?

13 August 2023

Rom 10: 5 - 15

Salvation Is for All

5 Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that 'the person who does these things will live by them.' ⁶But the righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" ' (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷or "Who will descend into the abyss?" ' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? 'The word is near you,

on your lips and in your heart'

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'

Matt 14: 22 – 33

Jesus Walks on the Water

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

28 Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' ²⁹He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

~ -- ~

If your life as a Christian doesn't have patches of self-doubt then perhaps you're not taking God seriously enough. The life of faith can be tumultuous. It only isn't if you're peeping shyly over the battlements, safe from all exposure to enemy fire, and conquering precisely nothing.

In business you have to have a tolerance for risk in order to make money. In the life of following Jesus things get scary because Jesus is the epitome of someone who so longs to see the Kingdom of God come to fruition, he puts himself out there. In fact he put himself so far out, he lost his life in the cruelest of ways – and all on our behalf. Following Jesus can be nerve-wracking.

I ride mountain bikes twice a week at Woodhill Mountain Bike Park, and we ride in single file up and down the trails. Following a good rider, sometimes at breakneck speed (and two of our group have broken their necks at Woodhill) can be frightening. But O so thrilling!

My mother would say, *“It’s all beer and skittles until someone gets hurt!”* The counter is, *“Yes, I’ve been hurt occasionally but I’m still riding. Some people have never known the thrill of the chase.”*

There are three responses to threat: fight, flight or freezing. Let me tell you, when a predator is heading for its prey, there’s only one of those that may make the predator back off. Two of them will see you eaten, every time.

The wind and waves are raging on the Sea of Galilee and the disciples are terrified. Jesus appears walking on the storm-tossed sea and what does Peter do? He says, **‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’**

Jesus says, **“Come.”**

So Peter bravely got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. That’s a ‘fight’ response. It was a moment of sheer, terrified exhilaration. There was no apparent point to it. Just enough faith to say *“Lord, I need an invite from you!”*

Now Peter wasn't exactly a qualified water-walker, was he? And predictably just as would happen to you and me, ³⁰**But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink.**

Tell me, where were hyper-ambitious James and John, the ones who got their mother to try to negotiate a seat at Jesus left and right hands. Where was pragmatic Thomas? I tell you where they were. Back in the boat, only their large eyes and the tops of their heads visible above the sides of the boat.

It was Peter who was prepared to walk with Jesus, even to the point of being foolhardy in the eyes of the other eleven disciples. And predictably, he takes his eyes off Jesus and we read that after beginning to sink, he became frightened, and **cried out, 'Lord, save me!'**

And in the next verse, ³¹**Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'**

I'd like to tell you a true story. My mother, as an extra Christmas present, in 1962, had given me a copy of the New English Bible – just the New Testament. I was eight years old and it meant little to me so I put it aside.

In 1972 I came to faith in Christ during a mission run by Michael Cassidy at my school. In 1973 I spent the year in the army and drifted from God. *"So you suffered a conversion?"* asked my Padre, smelling of alcohol at 10 o'clock in the morning. *"You'll get over it."* I did so, and it was an unhelpful year.

At the beginning of 1974, before I went to uni, I simply knew I had to get back into fellowship with God, but I was plagued with the thought that I had no faith. Each morning I knelt at the side of my

bed and prayed, but it felt as though the ceiling was made of brass. My prayers, it appeared, were bouncing back to me.

But each morning I continued to pray for faith. I was also reading through Romans. One morning I read ¹³**For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'** Co-incidentally that's exactly what Peter did when he felt he was sinking; and we could spend some time talking about how, when we put ourselves out for God, he takes care of us.

However that statement, where I was at that time, didn't mean much to me.

But then I read the following verse: **14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?** Now the New English Bible puts it slightly differently. It says, **"How could they invoke one in whom they had no faith?"**

It happened all at once. I realized that I must have faith if I was calling upon God! And it seemed as though that 'brass' ceiling melted away as God's warm, liquid, golden love poured into me.

You see Peter had been walking with Jesus, for some months by then, and that gave him the faith to walk with Jesus on the water. The fact that he knew Jesus, and walked with him day by day meant he was both brave enough to walk on water and faith-filled enough to know that Jesus would save him were anything to go wrong. He was realistic enough to know that was a possibility, and sure enough, it happened.

But more importantly, when it did happen he called on Jesus who **reached out his hand and caught him.**

I have one question this morning. How can we be brave enough to be effective followers of Ghris in 2023?

- a year in which the church seems to be in some doubt as to its sustainability,
- a time when secularism is rampant,
- a time when atheists are becoming bolder in their mockery of Christians
- a time when there is a desperate need for us to put ourselves out there, with a firm belief and confident word that the Good News of the Kingdom is what each and every human being needs

In short, how can we be brave like Peter. Peter, who at Pentecost said to the festival crowds ³⁶ **“Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah,^[h] this Jesus whom you crucified.”**

And when they asked what they had to do to be saved, responded with these memorable words: ³⁸ **Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”**

But let’s remember too, that Peter was by no means a paragon of virtue. He bumbled around the apostolic scene and even denied Jesus three times.

But Peter walked with Jesus. He was his constant companion, day in and day out. Surely therein lies a secret. The secret to a bold faith, the kind we all desperately need at this time.

I'd like to conclude with this. The greatest need of the church in 2023 is that it becomes outward looking – what is known as missional. I'd like to read something I shared with the church in Ruakaka last week.

There's a reason Jesus took bumbling Peter along to the Mount of Transfiguration, along with those scheming and ambitious brothers, James and John. Just like you and me, these followers of Jesus had both strengths and weaknesses.

It's worth noting that Moses and Elijah disappeared after the meeting on the mountain. In a sense so did Jesus eventually; except he sent the Holy Spirit.

*God left behind three imperfect people. And he left a message: **'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'***

*It was a message that overrode Peter's words. ³⁴**While he was saying this ... from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'** It was a message for the disciples, and the reason God sent this message to them was that God does very little without human involvement, our involvement.*

If we are to reach out effectively to people with the Good News of the Kingdom – not just with a salvation message – that is only apart of it. The full picture is that God's Messiah has launched a project to bring all things in heaven and in earth under his blessing – if we are to have the clarity of vision and boldness to do what God has called us to do, like Peter, we need to walk with Jesus. Only drawing close to him will develop within us the motivation and bravery to do what God expects of us.

This is the project of the Christian's life, the project of your life and my life.

Let's be encouraged this morning. If O-so-human Peter can do it, so can we!

God bless you all this morning

Amen