

Sermon on Walking on the Water

Lessons: Psalm 18:1-6, 9-10, 16-19
Matthew 14:22-33
Apocalypse Explained 514

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November 7, 2010

“And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ”

(Matthew 14: 28 - 31)

“In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God ... And my cry came before Him, even to His ears.

He bowed the heavens also

He took me; He drew me out of many waters.” (Psalm 18:6, 9, 16)

The story of the Lord walking on the water is told in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John. In each of the gospel stories, after the Lord fed 5000 people in the wilderness, the Lord went up on a mountain to pray while the disciples got into a boat to row to the other side of the sea of Galilee. This was in the evening. Then the sea became very rough because a strong wind began blowing. To get an idea of the difficulty that the disciples in the boat were having, we are told that the Lord came to them during the fourth watch. The fourth watch is between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning. Since they had left the previous evening before it was dark, it appears that they had been rowing against the wind for at least nine hours, possibly more, and that they were about three or four miles out in the middle of a very rough sea, their boat being tossed by the waves. When the Lord came to them in this situation walking on the water, they were terrified, supposing that they were seeing a ghost. The Lord calmed their fears, saying "it is I; do not be afraid." When the Lord got into the boat, the wind ceased, and they finished crossing the sea.

While the three versions of this story in the Gospels are very similar, only in the gospel of Matthew contains the story of Peter walking on the water.

Peter represents faith from charity, and also in an opposite sense faith separated from charity, that is, faith alone. In all lists of the apostles given in the Gospels, Peter is named first. Peter is also the first of the apostles whom the Lord appointed, as we read in Mark 3:

And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:

Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter;

James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, ...

Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. (Mark 3:13-19)

In the Apocalypse Explained we are told that:

The reason why Peter was the first of the apostles, was, because truth from good is the first thing of the church. For a person does not know from the world anything about heaven and hell, nor about life after death, nor even about God. His natural light teaches nothing but what has entered by the eyes, thus, nothing but what relates to self and the world, and from these is his life. So long as he remains only in these things, he is in hell.

In order, therefore, that he may be withdrawn from them, and be led to heaven, it is necessary for him to learn truths, which not only teach that there is a God, that there are a heaven and a hell, and a life after death, but also teach the way to heaven.

It is evident therefore that truth is the first thing by which the church is formed in a person; but it must be truth that is from good. For truth without good is only knowledge that a thing is so. And mere knowledge does nothing except to make a person capable of becoming a church. But this is not brought about until he lives according to what he knows. Then is truth conjoined to good.... Truths also teach how a person ought to live, and ... when he loves

to live according to them, then he is led by the Lord, and conjunction with heaven is granted him. He then becomes spiritual, and, after death, an angel of heaven. (Apocalypse Explained 820)

Peter was the first of the apostles because he represented the first truths that we have which teach us what is good and what is true, which teach us how we need to live in order to be saved. These truths are therefore said to be the first things of the church which we receive.

But we need to point out that Peter could be at times very strong, even headstrong, and at other times very weak. He could be very inconsistent. In the Gospels after the Jesus says to the disciples on the eve of the crucifixion, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: *'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered;*' it is Peter who says to the Lord, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." And after the Lord said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" Yet, several hours later, that same Peter was denying that he ever knew Jesus. And as we read in the Scripture, it was Peter who after walking on the water, then began to doubt and lose faith because he became frightened by the wind and waves. After the Lord caught Peter and stopped him from sinking, the Lord said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt"

Peter, representing truth which is from good, could also represent its opposite, and several states in between. Peter could represent the seeds of truth in the parable of the sower. For example, when Peter came into doubt he is like the one who received the seed on stony places, of whom it is said,

"But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles." (Matthew 13:20-21)

Peter's strength for the truth, and his weakness, represent us. In different ways we are all like Peter in regard to the truth which the Lord sows within us. Sometimes we are strong in maintaining the truth, sometimes we are even headstrong in maintaining the truth. And at other

times, especially when confronted with tribulation, such as fear of the opinions of others or desire not to be thought of as different, we may be weak in maintaining the truth. We may like Peter, be tempted to say, "I do not know the Man."

In reading this story of Peter walking on the water, imagine ourselves in his place. The boat represents the church. And the disciples represent all of us within the church. Imagine that after being in a boat for nine hours, making little headway against a wind storm, we should see the Lord coming to us at three o'clock in the morning walking on the water. We feel the wind, we see the waves. Would we even consider getting out of the boat? Even more, would we even think about walking on the water? After all, eleven of the disciples did not. But Peter was different. He needed to ask, "*Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.*" If we were in his place, would we step out on faith at the Lord's command?

In *Apocalypse Explained* 514 it was said that Peter's walking upon the sea and beginning to sink represents the obscure and wavering faith of those in the church. Peter represents all of us. His walking upon the sea represents our desire to live according to our faith. Every time we are in a new state of the church, which can occur repeatedly in our lives, we may become wavering and uncertain, and we may feel as if we are sinking. The passages from Matthew and from Psalm 18 strikingly relate to each other. When Peter became afraid because the wind was so strong, he began sinking into the sea. Peter, in distress, called out to the Lord to save him. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" And the Lord hearing him reached out his hand, and drew Peter out of the water. Likewise, when we are in states of distress, when we feel that we are sinking spiritually, if we cry out, "Lord, save me!" He will reach out his hand and draw us out of the waters of our despair. And then He may say to us quietly, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Amen