

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

DOUBT

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

Matthew 14:30-31

Peter was a very strong, courageous, and faithful follower of CHRIST ever since that day that the LORD had called him away from his fishing nets. He had every reason to be confident that he would remain steadfast regardless of what might befall him. After all he feared no man. Yet, just prior to the arrest and trial of the LORD JESUS, HE said to Peter, "*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*" (Luke 22:31-32)

All of the events which transpired over the course of the next few hours (as well as those of his whole life) were designed to occur exactly as they did in order to demonstrate to Peter, two things, one; was his own weakness in the flesh, and two; was the utter faithfulness of GOD to sustain and keep him in spite of his failure, denial, and weakness of faith. Peter was sure that he would not deny the LORD (see Mark 14:31) even as were all of the rest of the disciples. Yet to a man they all fled and abandoned HIM as if they did not know HIM.

If one error characterizes the false gospel which is so common today, it is the constant attempts to stir up men to "believe" and "have faith". Faith is commonly viewed as a trait which any man can exercise simply by deciding to do so. Many actually believe that it is possible for men to increase their "faith", by obedience and determination, and thereby to gain favor in GOD's sight by such exercise, as well as to perform great and mighty deeds thereby. If anyone could have done so it surely would have been a lion-like man such as Peter.

The disciples were sent away in a ship, by the LORD just after HE had fed the five thousand men (besides women and children) with five loaves and two fishes. Few of those who were fed that day recognized the miracle that took place, since they were merely satisfied to be fed with loaves and fishes and had no regard to how they were provided. Yet the disciples were given the privilege to see the LORD multiply a handful of bread and fish into a feast. This is a manifestation of the fact that the truth is hidden from the multitudes and revealed unto a few.

The LORD directed HIS disciples to set out by ship to cross the Sea of Galilee while HE stayed behind to disperse the crowd that HE might go up into the mountains alone to pray. Thus as darkness fell around the disciples, they found themselves toiling alone in the midst of stormy seas, without any knowledge of the LORD's whereabouts or what HE was doing. Yet all the while HE was praying for them. HIS faithfulness and not theirs is what sustained them in the lonesome and dangerous journey.

When HE appeared unto them, walking on the sea, they were at first very troubled, because they were not sure who or what was approaching. Both John and Mark record this incident in their gospels but only Matthew includes the account of Peter getting out of the ship and beginning

to walk towards the LORD. Peter, (being Peter) and perhaps exuberant at the thought of CHRIST walking on the water, called out to the LORD, confident that HE was their SAFETY. The LORD bid HIM to come to HIM. Peter, whose mind was on CHRIST and not the circumstances, descended from the ship and began walking towards the LORD. Men cannot walk on water, even faithful men cannot walk on water. Yet here was Peter at least momentarily, walking on water, with his eyes firmly fixed on CHRIST.

What we see next is that Peter began to sink as his focus became centered on the impossibility of his situation and not the MASTER who had called him. Quite often this account is set forth by “teachers” as an example of the failure of Peter’s faith. Yet the reality is that this is an example of the inability of all flesh and in this is not specific to Peter at.

The LORD did not call Peter to come to HIM, hoping that Peter would traverse the water, only to be disappointed when he did not. Rather the LORD called Peter to HIMSELF, that HE might demonstrate to Peter the weakness of all flesh lest he be lifted up with pride and recount to the other disciples how he had “walked on the water”. This is not a picture of Peter’s having faith and then losing it any more than Samson’s strength was in the length of his hair. Rather the LORD would show Peter that without HIM he could do nothing. HE would teach Peter that there is no place of salvation except in the hand of HIM who plucked him from the waves.

The LORD said to Peter, “Wherefore didst thou doubt?” This question is literally, “why were you wavering, or halting between two opinions?” Now the LORD knew the answer but HE would have Peter to recognize the impossibility of trusting the arm of the flesh and obeying CHRIST at the same time. Peter got out of the boat when he saw CHRIST, he began to sink when he recognized that he could not walk on water. There is no mixture of what man does and what the LORD does. Salvation is all of grace.

It was in this dire situation and state of halting mind, (not when he was in some triumphant condition of “faith” or “victory”), that the LORD was pleased to reach down and pluck him from certain destruction. And so it is that the LORD teaches men of their own weakness (“when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid”) and shows them the peril they are in by nature, (“and beginning to sink”), HE moves them to cry out for deliverance (“he cried, saying, LORD save me.)

Now the “if only” crowd would view this situation as a failure on Peter’s part, which “if only” he had kept the faith he would have triumphantly crossed the water to the LORD. Yet this is exactly what the LORD demonstrated to Peter that he could not do. The LORD puts HIS people in situations from which they cannot extricate themselves to teach them wherein their STRENGTH truly lies. This was not a failed experiment or test of Peter’s faith but rather a demonstration of the LORD’s faithfulness to lead HIS people in a way that they knew not so that they might learn not to have any confidence in the flesh.

Doubt is not necessarily a bad thing. Especially when a man is made to doubt his own strength and ability as Peter was. In fact it is in this doubt (wavering between two opinions, trusting some in the flesh and some in the word of GOD) that the LORD is pleased to remove doubt and cause a man to flee to HIM alone for mercy.

When the LORD delivered Peter safely to the ship, Peter no longer halted between two opinions, but knew clearly (with Jonah) that “*Salvation is of the LORD.*” Nor did he spend any time talking about walking on the water, his thoughts were firmly fixed on his DELIVERER. This is that place to which the LORD is presently bringing HIS people.

The everlasting mercy of GOD is seen in the manifestation of HIS faithfulness to that elect people which HE has loved in CHRIST from before the foundation of the world. HE will not leave them “in doubt”, but will convince them of sin, righteousness, and judgment. HE will cause them to confess that they are sinners, wretched and undone who shall perish completely apart from HIS salvation. HE will teach them that their only HOPE of this SALVATION is in HIM. Whether they be a Philippian jailer, an adulterous woman, a self righteous Pharisee, or a strong and burly fisherman. “*But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble.*” (Psa 37:39)

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