

POWER

“. . . the gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation . . .” (Romans 1:16)

SIMON PETER: THE DISCIPLE WHO WALKED ON THE WATER WITH FEET OF CLAY

Wade L. Webster

Simon Peter stands out as one of the greatest characters in the Bible. However, he also stands out as one of the most human. At Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus asked His disciples whom they thought that He was, Simon Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:15-16; cf. John 6:68-69). Sadly, a little while later, this great confession would turn into a shameful denial. After Jesus' arrest, when questioned by a little maid, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus (Mt. 26:69-75). On another occasion, he did what no other man, with the exception of our Lord, ever did. He walked on the water. However, even on this occasion, we see his humanity. As you recall, when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and began to sink (Mt. 14:30). Clearly, Peter walked on the water with feet of clay. I am convinced that it is this mixture of greatness and commonness that makes Simon Peter so appealing to most of us. In this study, we will examine the text that best shows both sides of his life (Mt. 14:22-33).

Peter Gawking

In the fourth watch of the night Matthew records that Jesus came unto His disciples, walking on the water (Mt. 14:25). Jesus had seen their "toiling in rowing" and was coming unto them to help and to comfort them (Mk. 6:48). We can be assured that He remains as concerned with our troubles and as ready to help us today (Heb. 4:14-16; 13:5-6).

When the disciples saw Jesus "walking on the sea, they were troubled," believing that He was a spirit or phantom. The word translated as "troubled" means "to stir or agitate." Their minds were troubled like the stormy sea. White caps of fear were rolling within their hearts. In fact, they were so troubled that they "cried out for fear" (Mt. 14:26). Grown men were shrieking like school girls in fear. Can you imagine how they must have gazed at or gawked at the form that was approaching them on the water? They must have wondered who or what it was and questioned its purpose. Likely, they surmised that the purpose was not good. After all, generally speaking, you have to wonder about those who are out at 3 a.m. in the morning. Don't you remember your mother telling you that? To better understand the terror that seized the disciples, please consider the following:

- It was the first century and evil spirits were a reality. The disciples had seen firsthand what these spirits could do to people. On the shores of this very lake, they had met a man possessed by a spirit named Legion (Mt. 8:28-34). As you recall, Jesus cast Legion out and allowed him to go into a herd of swine. The swine then ran off a steep place into the sea and drowned.
- It was the fourth watch of the night (Mt. 14:25). The fourth watch would have been between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. Things tend to be scarier at 3 a.m. than at 3 p.m.
- The boat was in the midst of the sea (Mt. 14:25). Running away was not an option. Things are much scarier when cornered.
- They were physically exhausted from fighting the waves (Mk. 6:48). Things tend to be more overwhelming when tired.
- They were in the midst of a storm. Storms tend to set us on edge; especially, storms at sea that threaten to capsize small fishing boats. One commentator noted that there are two kinds of storms: storms of correction and storms of perfection. The book of Jonah records a storm of correction (Jonah 1), while the storm on this occasion was a storm of perfection. This storm would help to perfect their faith (Jam. 1:2-4). Earlier in Matthew's record, we see the disciples in another storm on this lake. On that occasion, their faith failed with Jesus in the boat (Mt. 8:23-27). Now, they were being tested to see how they would do without Jesus in the boat.

Perhaps, all of these details help to explain why Peter and the others must have sat motionless examining the form walking on the water. No doubt, they wanted to look away, but didn't dare to do so.

Peter Walking

Once Peter heard Jesus' words, "Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid" (Mt. 14:27), his mind

rested a little easier and he began to imagine great things. He answered, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water" (Mt. 14:28). "If" in this passage is not meant to convey doubt or uncertainty. It is used in the sense of *since*. Literally, Peter is saying, "Lord, since it is you, bid me come unto thee on the water." Had there been any doubt in Peter's mind about the identity of the form on the water, you can be sure that he would not have spoken out or stepped out. Even I know that you don't want to let an evil spirit know where you are, much less walk in his direction. Just as sheep know the shepherd's voice and are comforted by it (John 10:4), Peter knew the Lord's voice and was comforted by it.

The same took place with Mary Magdalene in the garden following the Lord's resurrection (John 20:16). When Peter was convinced that the form on the water was the Lord, He wanted to be with Him. He requested to come to Jesus on the water. It is important to note that Peter's petition to walk on the water was preceded by Jesus' doing so (Mt. 14:25; cf. Job 9:8). Peter got the idea from the Lord. He didn't come up with it on his own. Furthermore, please note that Peter did not presumptuously step out of the boat. He asked for permission to do so. As you likely know, Peter could be presumptuous at times (Mt. 17:4). However, on this occasion, he waited for permission.

He said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water" (Mt. 14:28). The word translated as "bid" in this passage refers to the command of a king. Peter and the others had already been impressed by the authority that Jesus possessed (Mt. 8:26-27). On an earlier occasion, at Jesus' command, he had launched out *into* the deep (Lk. 5:4-5). This time, he was launching out *onto* the deep. On the previous occasion, he had a boat, it was daytime, and the seas were calm. This time, there was no boat, it was night, and the seas were rough. I believe that you will agree that this occasion required more faith. Not only is it important to note that Peter didn't step out of the boat presumptuously, it is important to note the reason why he did step out of the boat. Peter stepped out of the boat to be with Jesus (Mt. 14:28). Peter did not merely want to walk on the water. He didn't want to put on a show for the other disciples or to show them up. He wanted to walk to Jesus. Evidently, he felt safer with Jesus on the stormy sea than he did without Jesus in the

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boat. He was coming unto the Lord for rest (Mt. 11:28-30). With one word, Jesus granted Peter's request "Come" (Mt. 14:29). Peter asked and he received (Mt. 7:7). The others asked not, and received not (Jam. 4:2). The same opportunities were there for all of the disciples. However, only Peter made the petition. Only Peter walked on the water. Only Peter did the impossible.

In hieroglyphics (ancient Egyptian picture writing), the concept of the impossible was pictured by a man walking on the water. What had been considered impossible for thousands of years was made possible by the Lord (Mt. 19:26). Peter did that which no other man, with the exception of our Lord, ever did. He walked on the water. Almost two thousand years later, the feat remains unmatched. What an opportunity is out there for someone! They can be the first since Peter to walk on the water. Their story can be in all the papers and on the evening news. Aren't you waiting on pins and needles for someone to join Peter? I'm not either.

I recommend that those thinking of trying this feat wear a life-jacket and hold off on calling the press. I think that Peter's place in the record books is safe, don't you? The God who parted the sea and congealed the depths for Moses, made the sea a pathway for Peter. In like manner, the God who made an axe head to swim for Elisha, made Peter so that he didn't have to swim (2 Kings 6:6). Although Peter's faith was not perfect, as will be seen shortly in the context, it is still amazing. It allowed him to imagine the impossible and to do the unthinkable. As far as we know, the thought never entered the minds of the other disciples. Are we as big in our thinking as Peter was in his? Let's never forget that we serve a God who is able to do "exceeding, abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

Peter Balking

In baseball, a balk is when the pitcher starts to pitch, but then doesn't. A balk is considered illegal because it puts both the batter and the base-runner at a decided disadvantage. Just like in baseball, individuals can balk spiritually. John records a number of individuals who started to follow Jesus, but then turned back (John 6:66). You may recall that this is what Orpah did with Naomi (Ruth 1:12-15). In the context under consideration in this study (Mt. 14:22-33), Peter balked. He started to go to Jesus on the water, and then he hesitated.

The text reads, "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me" (Mt. 14:30). Notice the word that begins this passage - "but." This little word contrasts Peter's prior action -

walking on the water by faith, with Peter's present action sinking in the sea by doubt. It is amazing to consider the tremendous faith and troubling doubt that existed in the same heart on this occasion. Like a pendulum, Peter's faith swung from one extreme to the other. Please note that Peter didn't sink like a rock. He didn't go straight to the bottom of the sea. The text records that he began to sink. Personally, I think that he sank more like a water-logged cork. As we will see in a moment, he had time to make a short request (Mt. 14:30).

Why he sank is a far easier question to answer than how he sank. Clearly, Peter sank because he shifted his focus from the Savior to the storm (Heb. 12:1). He began to walk by sight, rather than by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). The pendulum in his heart swung from great faith (getting out of the boat) to "little faith" (wanting back into the boat). He had gone from a *get out of the boat faith* to a *get back into the boat faith*. Jesus asked simply, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Mt. 14:31). The word translated as "doubt" means "twice" or "two ways." It means "to waver, hesitate, be uncertain." "It is a figurative word taken either from a person standing where two ways meet and not knowing which to choose (inclining sometimes to one, sometimes to the other), or from the quivering motion of a balance when the weights on either side are approximately equal (when first one side, then the other, seems to predominate)."

It seems to me that Peter was flip-flopping between walking forward to Jesus and getting back into the boat. He was double-minded, and as such, he was unstable (Jam. 1:5-8). If he had been walking in the steps of father Abraham, he would not have staggered (sunk) in unbelief (Rom. 4:12, 20). Sadly, we often skip right over one of the most important details in the story. Peter finished his walk. The text reads, "And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased" (Mt. 14:32). "They" has reference to Jesus and Peter. Peter made it back into the ship. How did Peter get back into the ship? It seems to me that there are only two options - he either walked or Jesus carried him. While it is possible that Jesus carried him, it seems more likely that Jesus simply took his hand and walked with him. Of course, He will do the same with us today.

Peter Talking

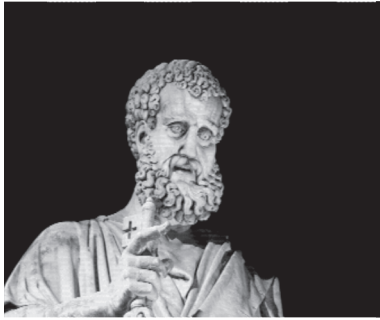
When Peter saw the boisterous wind, he was afraid, and started to sink (Mt. 14:30). Please note in the context that Peter's faith preceded his walking and his fear preceded his sinking. Truly, faith is the victory (1 John 5:4). Sadly, for a

moment in Peter's heart, fear prevailed. He was "afraid" (Mt. 14:30). The word translated as "afraid" means "terrified" and refers to a fear that causes one to run away. It seems clear that Peter wanted to run back to the boat once he saw the wind. However, he did a far smarter thing, he ran to Jesus. When he started to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me" (Mt. 14:30). Granted, it wasn't always a good thing when Peter started talking. Like us, he often put his foot into his mouth (Mt. 16:22; 17:4; 26:33, 35). However, on this occasion, it was a good thing. He cried out for Jesus to save him.

To his credit, Peter knew where to go for help. He didn't trust in himself or turn to the other disciples. He knew that he couldn't save himself and that the other disciples were in no position to help him. The other disciples had been battling the waves and the wind all night with little success. Peter turned to the One who was not so limited. He turned to the One who had earlier calmed the sea and rebuked the wind (Mt. 8:23-27). He turned to the One who had made the sea and wind. He turned to the only One who could save (Acts 4:12). Please notice that Peter's request was only three words - "Lord, save me." We see the subject (Lord), the action (save), and the object (me). We see the Helper, the help, and the helpless. Peter said all that needed to be said in the shortest and simplest of ways.

Someone noted that if Peter had made his request like we sometimes make our prayers, he would have been 29 feet under. Although we make our requests to the Father through the Son today, this inspired account teaches us a great lesson about what to do when we are overwhelmed with worldly cares and concerns. It should be noted that this text (Mt. 14:30) does not support praying to Jesus, anymore than the text involving Stephen does (Acts 7:59). In both cases, the perishing people could physically see Jesus. It should be noted that Jesus by word and example taught His disciples to pray to the Father (Mt. 6:9-13; John 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). Furthermore, the passage under consideration (Mt. 14:30) cannot serve as a justification for the sinner's prayer. First, it should be noted that this was a request for physical deliverance and not for spiritual deliverance. Second, it should be noted that Peter was one of the Lord's disciples. He had evidently been baptized under John's baptism (John 1:35, 40-41). As a disciple, he had a relationship with the Lord that others did not.

Third, it should be noted that Jesus had not yet died on the cross. We often make this same point relative to the penitent thief (Lk. 23:39-45). We live on the other side of the cross. Fourth, it should be noted that when Peter later told men what to do to be saved, he did not tell them to pray the sinner's prayer or to utter the words that he did



2009 POWER LECTURES

July 26-30, 2009

Simon Peter: The Disciple Who Walked On Water With Feet Of Clay

Sunday—July 26

9:30 A.M. – Simon Peter's Shadow: An Overview Of Peter's Life—**Wade Webster**

10:30 A.M. – Keynote Speaker On Pentecost (Acts 2)—**Garland Elkins**

7:00 P.M. – Not The Pope: Rebuked By Paul (Gal. 2:11-14)—**Sean Hochdorf**

8:00 P.M. – Operation Restoration: Tell The Disciples & Peter (Mk. 16:7; Lk. 24:34)—**Paul Sain**

Monday—July 27

9:00 A.M. – When Peter's Preaching Landed Him In Jail (Acts 4)—**Chad Ramsey**

10:00 A.M. – Liar, Liar: When Peter Shut The Door On A Sinful Couple (Acts 5)—**Cliff Goodwin**

11:00 A.M.—Feed The Flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4)—**Jerry Martin**

1:00 P.M. – Ready Always To Give An Answer (1 Pet. 3:15)—**Caleb Colley**

2:00 P.M. – The Inner Circle (Mk. 5:37; 14:33; Lk. 8:51; 9:28)—**Mike McDaniel**

2:00 P.M. (Ladies Class) - Mary Magdalene: The Woman Who Told Peter About The Empty Tomb (John 20)—**Cindy Colley**

7:00 P.M. – Peter Learns To Worry About Himself (John 21:20-24)—**Gary Hampton**

8:00 P.M. – When Jesus Washed Peter's Feet: A Lesson In Humility (John 13)—**B.J. Clarke**

Tuesday—July 28

9:00 A.M. – Simon Says, "Repent and Pray" (Acts 8:9-24)—**Jason Roberts**

10:00 A.M. – When Peter Went To Sleep In Class (Mt. 26:40; Mk. 14:37; Lk. 9:32)—**Clarke Sims**

11:00 A.M. – Qualified To Serve In Spite Of Past Failures—**Billy Bland**

1:00 P.M. – Put Up Thy Sword (John 18:10-11)—**Paul Meacham, Jr.**

2:00 P.M. – The Debate Over Circumcision (Acts 11, 15)—**Tony Lawrence**

2:00 P.M. (Ladies Class) - Peter's Mother In Law: Who Showed Her Gratitude By Service (Mt. 8:14-15)—**Tanya Cox**

7:00 P.M. – Eyewitness Of His Majesty (2 Pet. 1:16)—**Kyle Butt**

8:00 P.M. - Desired By Satan (Lk. 22:31)—**Michael Shepherd**

Wednesday—July 29

9:00 A.M. – Too Many Tabernacles (Mt. 17:1-5)—**Greg Dismuke**

10:00 A.M. – Seventy Times Seven: A Lesson In Forgiveness (Mt. 18:21)—**Kevin Ruiz**

11:00 A.M. – The Rooster That Woke Peter Up (Mt. 26)—**Barry Grider**

1:00 P.M. – Andrew: Simon Peter's Brother (John 1:40-44; 6:8)—**Todd Crayton**

2:00 P.M. – In The Hands Of Herod/In The Hands Of God (Acts 12)—**Ronnie Scherfuss**

2:00 P.M. (Ladies Class) - Dorcas: Raised By Peter To Continue Serving (Acts 9:36-43)—**Rose Crayton**

7:00 P.M. – Get Thee Behind Me Satan: When Simon Rebuked The Savior (Mt. 16:22-23; Mk. 8:32-33)—**Wayne Cox**

8:00 P.M. – Not The Pope: He Led About A Wife (Mt. 8:14; 1 Cor. 9:5)—**Steve Higginbotham**

Thursday—July 30

9:00 A.M. – Not The Pope: He Refused Worship (Acts 10:25-26)—**Russell Kline**

10:00 A.M. – Things Most Precious (1 Pet. 1:7, 19; 2:4, 6-7; 2 Pet. 1:1, 4) – **Ben Wright**

11:00 A.M. – The Lost Art Of Fishing: Answering The Call To Be A Fisher Of Men (Mk. 1:16-18)—**Mark Reynolds**

1:00 P.M. – Peter and John: Thunder & Lightning (Lk. 22:8; John 13:24; Acts 3:1, 3, 4; 4:13, 19; 8:14) — **Brandon Britton**

2:00 P.M. – Peter Learns A Lesson About Tax-Exemption (Mt. 17:24-26)—**Robert Jefferies**

2:00 P.M. (Ladies Class) — Rhoda: The Girl Who Forgot To Open The Gate For Peter (Acts 12)—**Tish Clarke**

7:00 P.M. – Mt. 16:18-19: Was The Church Founded Upon Peter? Did Heaven Follow Peter's Lead?—**Tom Holland**

8:00 – Confronting False Teachers and Scoffers (2 Pet. 2-3)—**Robert R. Taylor, Jr.**

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Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

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while sinking on the sea. He told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). Fifth, the Bible clearly defines baptism, and not prayer, as the way that alien sinners call on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). Although the text under consideration (Mt. 14:30) could be misused to try to justify many things, it can rightfully be used to teach disciples what to do when the cares of the world weigh them down and cause them to start sinking. Peter would later write, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). No doubt, Peter had seen the truth of this statement demonstrated a number of times in his own life, including the occasion under consideration in this lesson. In like manner, Paul wrote, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). Getting back to the text under consideration, we should also note that Jesus "immediately" stretched forth His hand and caught Peter (Mt. 14:31).

There was no hesitation to help on the part of Christ. Peter cried and the Lord came. In like manner today, we can "find grace to help, in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). Furthermore, it should be noted that Peter did not stop talking, as we often do, once the Lord granted his request. He followed up his request for help with praise for what the Lord had done. We read, "And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Mt. 14:32-33). Safely back in the boat, Peter evidently joined the other disciples in

worshipping and praising Jesus as the Son of God. More than any other, He knew Jesus' power. He had personally experienced it on that day. Of course, the gospels contain several statements from Peter's lips that echo the sentiment expressed on this occasion.

As you recall, at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus asked His disciples whom they said He was, Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16). On another occasion, when Jesus asked His disciples if they would follow the crowds in departing from Him, Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68-69). Peter was fully convinced that Jesus was God's Son. He would give his back, his freedom, and ultimately, his life, for this conviction (Acts 4-5).

In this study, we have seen the greatness and the commonness of Simon Peter. We have seen the life of one who walked on the water with feet of clay. For sure, our feet are also of clay. We have our share of doubts and fears. However, if we will demonstrate the faith that Peter did, we too can do great things for God. As Jesus did with Peter, He has extended the invitation for us to come (Mt. 11:28-30). Do we have the faith to step out of the boat and to walk to Him?

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- i Zodiates, Spiros. **The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament.** Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992, p. 1366, #5015.
 - ii Ibid., p. 472, #1365.
 - iii Ibid., p. 1449, #5399.

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