Beginning to Sink

Mt. 14:30

Knowing my own mind, I find it very difficult to be hard on Peter. I am ashamed to reproach him for his failures because I have often been humbled by similar failures! There are many who don't join in condemnation of Peter's weakness, but at the same time they don't afford praise for his amazing qualities. Yes, He did fall! But I still aspire to the heights of courage and faith he attained!

Peter gave a bold challenge to Jesus as he saw His ghostly figure appear on the Lake of Galilee that stormy- night. You can picture the rest of the crew cowering in fear. Only Peter dared to speak, ***"Lord, if it is You command me to come to you on the water".*** (Mt. 14:28)

Peter had begun to grasp the truth underlying the words that Jesus would say later, ***"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing"*** (Jn. 14:12). What Jesus did was also possible for the disciple who trusted Him to do. ***"All things are possible with God."*** (Mt. 19:26) This great truth can easily degenerate into a platitude, but it has an amazing corollary! ***"All things are possible for the one who believes"*** (Mk. 9:23).

There was an immediate response, ***"Come"***. It always brings pleasure to the heart of God when we put Him to the test by a practical venture of faith. Peter doesn't hesitate. In a flash he is out of the boat and treading down on the water as Jesus was doing. Peter was right. The water carried his weight just as it carried Jesus. With his eyes on Jesus he walked on the water and **came** to Jesus. It may have been only a few paces, but those few paces were enough to prove God honoured the audacity of Peter's confidence in Jesus. The creaking timbers of the boat and the strength of the wind didn't give any assurance of security to the other disciples. They must have marvelled at Peter's courage as he abandoned what seemed like a place of relative safety for what looked like certain death.

In fact, there was no reason for anxiety! Peter on the water was just as safe as the disciples in the boat. The elements were powerless to touch either. As we read the story it will always seem risky to us to take God at His word and to start out on an untried way with no security but His promises.

Famously in mission history, Hudson Taylor began the CIM with £10 in the bank "***and all the promises of God***". In reality his situation couldn't have been better if he had had a million pounds in the bank! A small child going on a journey doesn't need to worry that he only has a few coins in his pocket. As long as he is holding his father's hand he knows that wherever they go together his father will pay! No difficulty can come up as long as they are not separated! Our Father in heaven makes Himself personally responsible for all expenses incurred in doing His will.

But the faith that had lifted Peter above the natural awareness of the fierce wind and the tumbling waves suddenly failed, ***"But when he saw the strong winds, he was afraid"***. We can imagine the devil saying to him, "Peter, what a fool you were to leave the boat! It's all over for you now! You can't save yourself!" Peter was "beginning to sink!"

This passage is in my thoughts as we move through another year. We have all heard the call from 'across the water', "Come"! Some of us recognised the voice immediately. Others needed time to be sure it was Jesus. The 'boat' is familiar and has meant such a lot to each one of us! In spite of this, people are leaving the 'boat' – the 'boat of home', the 'boat of past patterns of ministry' etc. What a joy to see so many tumbling out of the boat and walking on the water in obedience to His word!

Some of our new recruits will experience what Peter experienced – the glad discovery that the water, that by the laws of physics should have let him sink, actually bore his weight! The life of faith is a daily miracle! Workers in our countries today are walking across angry waters. They are being buffeted by strong winds and some are sinking!

Most who read this are longterm workers. What are some of the difficulties and temptations faced by new workers?

- They have to brace themselves to meet hardships.
- There is the hard grind of language study.
- There is the adjustment to a new climate, food and culture.
- They will be struck by what is not yet familiar to them (God grant it will never become familiar) – evidences of great spiritual need and destitution around them. Their spirits will be stirred as they see the utter neglect of the worship of our Holy God.
- For months they will remain 'dumb'. Ignorance of the language will prevent them doing what brings great joy – telling the story of Jesus and His love.
- They have been warned that it isn't always easy to live with co-workers and that not all local believers are full of faith and the Holy Spirit. The discovery that not all their team members have attained a state of sinless perfection will be painful!
- Worst of all is the discovery of their own failings, the bitter disappointment of realising their own weakness.

Satan, who sought to prevent them 'leaving the boat', will continue to do all he can to prevent the effectiveness of their witness. Sadly, 'leaving the boat' is not accompanied by leaving our sinful natures behind!

Our enemy seems to have two strategies:

a) Drive them out of ministry to 'neighbours' – i.e. drown them.

b) Leave them among 'neighbours' but busy with a multitude of duties, emptied of spiritual power and not fighting against the enemy of our souls.

But Peter didn't go under! As he was beginning to sink he cried out, ***"Lord save me"***! Danger caused him to turn his eyes towards Jesus just in time. The strong hand of Jesus reached out to him immediately and the danger was past. This is the secret of effective ministry. Only in this way can workers emerge victoriously!

So as we walk across angry waters, buffeted by boisterous winds; whether we know our particular temptations or not, let us cry to God that we may keep our eyes steadily and continuously fixed on Jesus.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." (Heb. 12:2)