

In this world, some people are optimists, while others are pessimists. An optimist dreams of things that he would like to see happen, or think could possibly happen. A pessimist looks at the way things are and figures that things are not going to change very much, at least not very easily. He says things to the optimist like, "That sure would be nice, but ..." and then lists off the many reasons why he believes that things are not going to change. What an optimist thinks about and dreams could happen often sounds like foolishness to a pessimist. This morning, in the Word of God before us, we see what Jesus would have us be like in the spiritual realm. You see, being an optimist in this world may be idealistic, but in the spiritual realm, Jesus wants us to be men of faith, daring to do things that would seem to be impossible for a pessimist. All too often, when Jesus looks at us, He has to say the same thing He said to Peter, **WHY DID YOU DOUBT?** I. Faith takes Jesus at His Word. II. Doubts come when our attention is diverted away from Jesus.

After Jesus had fed the 5,000, He sent His disciples in a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee, while He stayed behind to pray. While the disciples were in this boat, winds came up, and were strong enough to impede their progress. Even though some were experienced sailors, the disciples had not been able to travel far that whole night. During the middle of the night, Jesus went out to them, walking upon the water. This was not a case of Him knowing where the rocks were, but through a miracle, Jesus was literally walking on top of the water. **"When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear."** (26) Even though they had just witnessed Jesus' miracle of feeding the 5,000, they were not letting their faith take control of their hearts. Their reason still told them that no one is able to walk on water, therefore what they were seeing had to be a ghost, maybe even the grim reaper come to get them in the fierce storm.

In order to calm their fears, Jesus told them not to be afraid. **"Jesus ... said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'"** (27) Then, Peter, who never does anything half-way, replied, **"Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."** (28) In the boldness of faith, Peter made a simple request of Jesus. Let me be able to walk on the water to come to You. Jesus has almighty power, and is able to grant any request, even one like this, so Jesus told him to step out the boat and walk on the water. Jesus did not rebuke Peter by calling his request foolish. He simply granted Peter's request made in faith. If the man they see really is the Lord God, then this would be simple for Him to grant. And so it was. **"Then Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus."** (29) It was as simple as that.

Peter demonstrated great faith, unwavering trust in the Lord, at this point in time. And that is exactly what Jesus asks of each one of us. He says that if we have the faith the size of a mustard seed, we can say to a mountain, *"Get up and be removed to the depths of the sea,"* and it will obey us. Jesus tells us to bring all our requests to Him, but when we do so, we are not to harbor any doubts about whether Jesus will be listening or whether He is able and willing to answer our requests. Faith requires absolute trust that we shall receive what we ask of Jesus. This is why we conclude each prayer with "Amen," meaning we trust that it will be just as we have asked.

God's children do express such unwavering confidence in the face of many dangers. Many times have members who were facing major surgery confided in me that they have no fears or worries because the Lord their God was watching over them, and would keep them in His loving care no matter what happened to them. That type of faith is what the world might call idealism, and they would be inclined to disregard such faith as "pie in the sky." But those who have had their sins all washed away in the blood of their Savior and have the sure hope of eternal life know that Jesus will never let us down. He will be with us and keep us safe from all harm all the days of our lives. That does give us a confident faith that trusts in Him, even when things do not appear to be going in our favor. As long as we keep our eyes focused on Jesus and His Word of promise, we will not have doubts that cloud of eyes of faith.

But as soon as we let our sight be diverted away from Jesus and His perfect love for us, then we may begin to feel doubts in our hearts. In the boldness of faith, Peter had asked to be allowed to walk on the

water with Jesus, and his request was granted. But then something happened. **“But when Peter saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’”** (30) Certainly Peter knew it was windy and the waves were rolling before he stepped out of the boat. But as he was walking on the water to go to Jesus, his attention began to be diverted away from Jesus to what was actually happening around him, and the great danger he was in. He was out of the boat, doing something that should be impossible, and the wind and the waves all around him. The eyes of reality began to take over from the eyes of faith. Then he began to sink. No longer did he have the same boldness of faith with which he made this request.

But Peter did the best possible thing when he saw himself getting into trouble. Instead of trying to save himself, he turned his attention back to Jesus and asked for His help out of the trouble he had gotten himself into. Jesus did not turn His back on Peter. **“Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’”** (31) Notice the rebuke which Jesus gave to Peter. It was not for making the request, but for failing to follow through in faith, trusting only in Jesus. Peter, half-way through, began taking his attention off of Jesus and looking only at the problems which were surrounding him. And that frightened him. And that is what Jesus was pointing out. Not that Peter had no faith, but did not carry through on the good beginning which he had made.

As I said, Peter knew where to go to get out of predicament in which he found himself. His prayer was like that of the man who said, *Lord, I believe; help me overcome my unbelief.* Only Jesus can take away all of those doubts and fears that keep haunting our lives. Only Jesus can give us the peace of mind knowing that with Him in control, all things are going to work out for our good and for His glory.

So, in other words, do not fret and worry over things that we have no control. Wringing our hands does not help the situation. Only looking to Jesus and trusting in Him to do what we are unable to do for ourselves will make a difference. This applies to every situation in which we find ourselves in in this world. The world in which we are living seems to be degenerating into chaos. We are living in the time of a pandemic, and even our best scientists are still learning how best to cope with it. Their growing knowledge of what works and what does not work seems to fueling the unrest of people who are tired of the restrictions necessary to bring the disease under control. Adding to the chaos are the protests which turn violent, destroying property and even taking lives. Now we have forest fires and impending hurricanes. Personally, we find ourselves being inclined to wring our hands in worry about how bad things are getting and there is nothing we can do about it.

But is that not just like Peter who took his eyes off of his Savior and focused on the dangers around him? Are we doing the same thing by focusing on the problems of this life, instead of looking to Jesus for the care and protection which He has promised to us? We do not have to worry how things are going to work out, as long as we keep our trust in the Lord and put our attention on Him. He will make all things work out for the benefit of His kingdom and His glory. We have His Word of promise on it. All we need to do is to keep our eyes focused on the only One Who matters, our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the world, believers will appear to be optimists. That is because we have our sights raised higher than this world to the One alone Who can hear and grant all of our requests. He it is Who inspires our faith and confidence. He it is Who has the power to care for us every day. It may not make sense to our human reason, but as long as our sight is focused on Jesus, there is no reason for us to doubt whether He will hear or answer our prayers. We know that He will. And yet, like Peter, sometimes we need a reminder to keep praying, *Lord, I believe, help me overcome my unbelief.*