

The Cloud of Witnesses

Peter

Lesson 1: Peter – Put Out Into The Deep!

Reading

Luke 5:1-11.

You can only really trust God when there is no other help available.

Just imagine being Peter. You are exhausted from cleaning your nets after a hard and fruitless night's work. Jesus comes by and borrows your boat to speak to the people and then suggests you go back out to fish during the day! Understandably, he was reluctant. He was a professional fisherman, not just a pastime fisherman. He knew the when, where and how about fishing and going then was pointless!

Nevertheless, he summoned up enough humility to do what Jesus asked and was then overwhelmed by the miracle-sized catch of fish!

Putting 'out into the deep' suggests going where you are no longer in charge. You are outside your comfort zone – a place where you have to depend totally on God. Peter found that as he did that in total dependence upon God, God honoured his trust and obedience.

It's the same for us. It's not until we get to the end of ourselves that we really begin to know and understand God. You see, God is not human, nor is He the 'genie of the lamp'. He is not there just to make me happy and to get me out of the messes I keep getting myself into. He is the Holy Almighty Creator of the Universe. He longs for us to trust Him and to live in obedience to His will for our lives. The problem for us is that we are self-centred and control freaks.

Yet it is not until I submit totally to His will and His way that I truly begin to live. I will never experience miracles if I forever submit to living my life my way and for myself. As Jesus said, He who would keep his life will lose it. He who loses his life for My sake shall find it.

Peter would say to us today...

God wants to teach you to trust Him in every circumstance of life. That means He will take you where you feel uncomfortable and scared. But it is so that your capacity to trust and live in peace will grow. Beware it never stops. Just when you think you have 'cracked' 'trusting God', He will lead you into an even more challenging experience!

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Lesson 1 continued: Peter – Put Out Into The Deep!

Prayer

Father, thank You that You are trustworthy! Thank You that I can read the Bible and see how faithful and patient You are. Thank You that not only were You faithful and patient with the people then but You are equally faithful and patient with us, with me. Please help me to trust You more – in every circumstance of my life. Amen.

Additional readings

Psalm 34; Habakkuk 3; James 1:2-28.

Questions

What circumstances have you experienced which have caused you to trust God more?

Why do we try and avoid 'putting out into the deep'?

How do we convince ourselves that God is Trustworthy?

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Lesson 2: Peter – Walking On Water!

Reading

Matthew 14:22-36.

Miracles always *follow* obedience.

I love the record of this event.

The disciples had just 'witnessed' and been involved with the miraculous feeding of the 5000. They were on their way 'home', crossing Lake Tiberias in the dead of night when they saw something absolutely weird - a 'form' walking towards them on the water. They were scared stiff and cried out in fear, but Jesus told them to relax, as it was only Him!

Peter, quick as a flash shouted out – if it is You, invite me to come over to You. Jesus simply replied, "Come".

Peter got out of the boat and found the water like concrete! He started thinking – "I must be crazy" or something like that because the wind was still howling in his ears, and so he took his eyes off Jesus and started to sink. He had to cry out for Jesus to save him, which of course Jesus did immediately, and they both returned to the boat.

Please notice – All the disciples were in the boat. They all saw and heard Jesus, however, only Peter took the risk to go to where Jesus was.

I believe if you asked the other disciples about that day, they would reply something like this – Oh yes, I remember that day. The day Peter made a fool of himself big time. We were all in the boat on our way home. Jesus came by and was about to join us but Peter had to make an issue out of it. He wanted to walk on water. We told him not to be so silly. Jesus was coming towards us and would be there in the boat with us very soon. So we told him, 'Stay in the boat, He'll be here in a minute. But no, Peter jumped out, started sinking and made Jesus rescue him right in front of our eyes. Oh yes, I remember that day!!

But what if we ask Peter? "Wow, do I remember that day? We were all in the boat – scared out of our wits seeing this apparition coming towards us. Then Jesus said it was Him and for us to relax. I said, 'If it's You, invite me over'. He said, 'Come'. So I jumped out of the boat and then had one of the biggest shocks of my life. The lake went all hard and I could stand up and walk on it. My, that was scary and when I rationalised about it, I started sinking. I cried out for Jesus to save me and He did straight away. Then we walked back together on the water into the boat. Amazing – none of the other disciples ever walked on water, but I walked on it twice – on the way to Jesus and after He picked me up, we walked back to the boat together. Do you know – I wouldn't have missed that experience for all the world!"

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Lesson 2 continued: Peter – Walking On Water!

Yes, Jesus didn't say, "Come, Peter", He just said, "Come" – so any and all the disciples could have done so if they had wanted to – but they didn't! They wanted to take the quiet and 'safe' approach. Peter realised that faith is often spelt R.I.S.K.

Peter would say to us today...

You have to get out of the 'boat' to walk on water. Never forget ALL the other disciples were in the boat –but only I had the thrill of walking on water – and I did it twice!

Whenever God calls you to do something for Him, regardless of how impossible it seems – just do it. You will never ever regret it. (If you do it often enough, you won't even need to go bungy-jumping!!)

Prayer

Father, it would be so much easier if You just performed the miracles before I have to do anything. However, I now realise that I would miss out on so much excitement and blessing if You did! Please give me more opportunities and courage so I can experience more miracles in my life, but may I remember that they are always for Your glory. Amen.

Additional readings

Exodus 14:1-31; 2 Kings 5:1-14; John 21:1-12.

Questions

Why does God want us to 'step out in faith' before He sends a miracle?

Why do we want to stay within 'familiar' boundaries?

What would cause you to 'risk' your life for God?

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Lesson 3: Peter – “I Don’t Know Him”

Reading

Matthew 26:69-75.

Be prepared to ‘own up’ to being a disciple of Jesus!

When Jesus told His disciples that Passover night that they would shortly run scared of owning up to being His followers, Peter replied that no matter what the others did, Jesus could count on him to be true to the end. Indeed, he even went so far as to say that he would die before denying Jesus.

Jesus looked at him, almost incredulously and said, “Before the rooster crows and announces a new day, you will have disowned me 3 times!”

This is just another example of Peter’s impetuosity. For sure enough, after Jesus was arrested and taken to the Chief Priest’s house, Peter followed and was allowed into the courtyard. However, he hadn’t been there long when he was challenged as to being a follower of Jesus. He denied it. Then someone else remarked that as he was a Galilean, he must be a friend of Jesus. Again he denied it and moved away into the shadows but not before someone who was also in the Garden remarked they had seen him there. That brought forth the most vehement denial! And, yes –The Rooster Crowed!

Peter looked at Jesus and Jesus looked at Peter. Then Peter went out and broke down. How the mighty was fallen! Broken and devastated.

Yes, we all say we are followers of Jesus whilst the going is easy and we are among friends but what about...? The pressure will come on us eventually and we will either crumble like Peter or stand strong. Do you enjoy telling others that you are a disciple of Jesus, or do you ‘hide’ your faith under a bowl and hope it never gets out? Jesus is worthy of our allegiance and we should be prepared to be recognised as one of His servants. It’s the way of peace and assurance rather than fear and doubt. Often the first step to following Jesus is to be baptised in Water!

Peter would say to us today...

I wish I had never let Jesus down! It was the blackest and most traumatic time in my life. I loved Jesus but was so overwhelmed by all that was going on. I cracked. And then He turned and I saw His face. I shall never forget that look in His eyes! It remained with me for the rest of my life.

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Lesson 3 continued: Peter – “I Don’t Know Him”

Prayer

Father, please make me bolder in my spoken witness for You. But please help me relax and be gracious at the same time. And please give me the discernment to know that when I speak it is because You have already prepared the ‘ground’. Amen.

Additional readings

Mark 8:31-38; Romans 1:8-17; 1 John 2:15-29.

Questions

Why are we so scared to admit that we are Christians?

Why is it impossible to be a *secret* disciple of Jesus Christ?

Why is it so exhilarating when we tell others about what Christ has done for us?

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Lesson 4: Peter – Run To The Tomb!

Reading

John 20:1-9.

Look at the evidence!

Peter and John knew Jesus had been taken down from the Cross and laid in the tomb. They knew He had died. Jesus was dead. His body had been taken down from the Cross and then carried by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and buried in the new tomb on Joseph's property. The Authorities had asked for the Tomb to be sealed in some way and guards set over it to stop anyone stealing the body.

However, Mary Magdalene had come and told Peter and John that the Tomb was empty. She had gone there with spices to embalm the body. But on arriving at the tomb, she found it was too late – the body had gone.

Peter ran towards the tomb. He was in a hurry to find out for himself what had really happened, because Mary's report seemed very strange. Why would anyone want to steal the body? What had happened to the guards?

And Mary had said that strictly speaking the tomb was NOT empty! Sure the body had gone – was missing – but there was something in the tomb! The grave clothes that had been wrapped around Jesus' head and body were still in the tomb! Peter just had to see that! He had to try and work out what it all meant and the best place to start was where he had last seen the body and then try and make sense of Mary's report.

He came to the place and went straight in. No hanging around – straight up to the 'problem'. And there it was or rather there they were. The grave clothes.

They were lying just as if the body was there but were 'collapsed' on the stone shelf. So the Body had not been stolen. It had mysteriously 'disappeared'. No one in their right mind would have stolen a naked dead body! Why take off the grave clothes if you were stealing it? You would leave traces of fingerprints on the clothes. If you took the burial clothes off, why would you leave them, and more particularly, why would you leave them lying just as if the body was there?

It didn't make sense. The only thing that made sense, however strange it was, was that Jesus must have left the tomb of His own freewill and under His own power.

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Lesson 4 continued: Peter – Run To The Tomb!

Peter would say to us today...

It's O.K. to have doubts. I had doubts, so I went to the tomb and saw the evidence. You can trust what I say – I am an eyewitness to the truth. I saw an empty tomb – except for the grave clothes – and later saw Jesus 'in the flesh'! You can trust the evidence, too!

Prayer

Father, I am so grateful that my faith in You is based upon Truth. Not on someone else's ideas nor is it based upon 'wishful thinking' but solidly grounded upon the Truth. Thank You that it is NOT about rules and regulations but a relationship with You, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Your Son and My Saviour. Amen.

Additional readings

2 Peter 16-21; Hebrews 1:1-9; Colossians 1:15-23.

Questions

Why is it so important that Christianity is based upon historical facts?

How is it that eyewitness accounts of events can differ?

How can we help our friends be exposed to the Truth of the Bible? (What about inviting them to an *Alpha* Course?)

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Lesson 5: Peter – Follow Me!

Reading

John 21:1-25.

The most important thing in life is to Follow Jesus!

Just imagine being Peter – he was the one who had vehemently denied knowing or being a friend of Jesus. You have been wrestling with all the events over the last few days and can't quite make it all out. So you return to what you know is safe – to fishing!

Then He turns up again! First of all, He told them to throw the nets on the other side. He always seems to do that – it's almost a signature greeting with Him! And there was a huge haul of fish. John realised at once that it was Jesus. When he explained it to Peter, Peter grabbed some clothes and jumped into the lake and walked through the surf towards Jesus. He stopped short. Not really afraid to go on but shocked at what he saw. Instead of making a driftwood fire, Jesus had deliberately made a charcoal fire. Why did He have to do that? Peter denied Jesus in front of a charcoal fire – and Peter didn't appreciate the chilling memory.

When they had finished eating, Jesus started talking directly to Peter. Do you love Me? He asked. In fact He went on to ask him three times! 3 times! Exactly the number of times Peter had denied Him! Then Jesus went on to warn Peter that one day he would die the death of a martyr. Peter's immediate response was – And so what about John? Jesus replied, don't concern yourself with John; you must follow Me!

Yes, Jesus was concerned for Peter. He knew his denial was because of his humanity and out of a sense of self-preservation. But He also knew his heart, how much he really loved Jesus. So He orchestrated the day to forgive Peter his past. Yes, fully forgive him – all 3 times! He also took that moment to establish him as a leader of His followers. He took that moment to remind Peter that the only person to whom he was responsible was Jesus. Neither was he to compare his role with others – he was just called to Follow Jesus and complete the work God had given him to do.

Peter would say to us today...

Jesus is worth following. He picks us up when we fail. He smiles on us when we frown and He loves us all the time. There is NONE to compare with Him. Following Jesus is the most exhilarating experience anyone can ever have. Don't worry about others – you must follow Jesus.

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Lesson 5 continued: Peter – Follow Me!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I hear Your call to me again – Follow Me! Please help me remember that nothing else matters. Please give me the courage to follow, regardless of the inconvenience or the cost. Help me remember that it is through following You alone that Your Kingdom can be established upon the earth. Amen.

Additional readings

1 Samuel 15:1-23; Matthew 7:13-27; Hebrews 12:1-13.

Questions

Why does the enemy want us to stop following Jesus?

What are the things in your life which could 'get in the way' of you following Jesus?

Why is following Jesus the most important thing in our lives?