

Look Up and Live

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Scripture Reading: John 1:29 "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Not long ago, I gave a sermon entitled, "Lord, Save Us! We Perish!" That is the prayer that is always answered. That story, you remember, had to do with a difficult night on the lake for the disciples. Well, today I'm going to talk about another difficult night on the lake with another very important lesson.

Our main story for today is found in Matthew 14 starting with verse 22. Turn with me if you will to Mt 14:22.

"And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.
And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.
But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.
And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.
And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.
And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.
And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.
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?
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."

The event that we just read about took place shortly a very wonderful and exciting day in the life of the disciples. They had just witnessed the awesome miracle of Jesus feeding the 5000 (plus women and children) from a boys lunch. And Jesus had asked them to head for Capernaum in the boat and the Bible tells us that He went off by Himself to pray.

They waited for Jesus for awhile, but as it grew dark, they finally had to leave without Him. They should have been filled with faith and hope after the great events they witnessed that day. But they were growing impatient with Jesus and they murmured among themselves because they had not been allowed to proclaim Him King. He was to receive a coronation all right, but it wasn't quite what the disciples expected, and at this point, they knew nothing about that particular coronation.

And so as they murmured and complained among themselves creating their own problems, the Lord was about to give them a real problem. God often does this when men create burdens and troubles for themselves. It reminds me of something parents often say to their children when they cry over nothing: "You stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about!" Parents often say that when the crying is just whining and complaining. Well, believe it or not, God is the same way! So if you are whining and complaining, watch out! You might just get something to really cry about! And so the storm comes. Now they've really got problems. Suddenly they're not complaining anymore.

They fought against the storm for hours and they finally gave themselves up for lost. Yes, this story is very similar to the other story that we talked about where Jesus fell asleep in the boat. But on this occasion, Jesus was not with them in the boat. The disciples had given themselves up for lost. In the darkness and in the storm, they finally realized their own helplessness, and they longed for Jesus to be with them. This was the other lesson they had to learn. Their first lesson was not to murmur and complain and create problems that didn't exist, but rather to keep their faith and hope up. Their second lesson was for them to realize at every moment their total dependence upon God.

Little did they know it, but Jesus was watching over them as a mother watches over her children. These men were to be the light of the world. I told you once about a time when Ellen White was out on a boat and a storm came up and she had a vision where God told her, "Sooner would every drop in the ocean dry up than for you to perish, for God has a work

for you to do.” Well, God had a work for these disciples to do too. When they finally prayed for help, it was given them. Why do we often save prayer as a last resort? That should be the first thing we do!

Suddenly they behold a mysterious figure approaching them upon the water. But they don't realize that it is Jesus. In fact they think is an omen of their destruction. The One who has come to help them they count as their enemy. How many do that today? People often blame God for all of their troubles. Remember Jacob thought he was wrestling with an enemy and it turned out to be an angel? There are probably other examples of this phenomenon in scripture. But we must move on with our story.

Finally the disciples realize that it is Jesus, and Peter calls out to Him, “Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.” And He said, “Come.”

So Peter steps out of the boat and looking unto Jesus begins to walk. But he takes his eyes off Jesus, looks at the waves, and begins to sink. The name Peter means rock, but right now, he's a sinking rock. Then he utters what is probably the shortest prayer in all the Bible, “Lord, save me!” as he looks up again at Jesus. And as I have mentioned before, Jesus always answers that prayer. The Lord Jesus reaches out his hand and pulls Peter up, saying, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” And as they stepped into the boat together, Peter was just a little embarrassed. He couldn't say, “Hey guys! Did you see that? I walked on water!” No, No! He was quiet and had no reason to boast, for through his unbelief and self-exaltation, he nearly lost his life. But what do we learn from this? That we must constantly look unto Jesus. We are constantly dependent upon Him every moment of our lives. It is in looking unto Jesus that we are saved. “For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:12.

Don't we often do what Peter did? We are supposed to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and we focus on our problems instead of the solution! To quote the Desire of Ages, chapter 40, “When trouble comes upon us, how often we are like Peter! We look upon the waves, instead of keeping our eyes fixed upon the Saviour. Our footsteps slide, and the proud waters go over our souls. Jesus did not bid Peter come to Him that he should perish; He does not call us to follow Him, and then forsake us” “Fear not,” He says; “for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire,

thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." Isa. 43:1-3.

Did Peter have faith? Yes. Peter was an interesting character. He had faith and he had doubts. Yes it is possible to have a little of both, not healthy, but possible.

And after all of this, how well did Peter learn his lesson? Not very well. Later as Jesus was being led to crucifixion, Peter succumbed to temptation again when he denied his Lord three times. Not until Peter realized his weakness did he realize his need of constant dependence upon Christ.

Most of you know that I teach math at Cinnamon Hills. Our structure there is very different than what you will find in a traditional school. If a student fails a math test, I must test the student again and again and again until he or she passes that test. God tests us daily on our weak points and if we fail the test, we must be tested again and again and again upon that one point until we pass the test.

Desire of Ages says, "Those who fail to realize their constant dependence upon God will be overcome by temptation. We may now suppose that our feet stand secure, and that we shall never be moved. We may say with confidence, "I know in whom I have believed; nothing can shake my faith in God and in His word." But Satan is planning to take advantage of our hereditary and cultivated traits of character, and to blind our eyes to our own necessities and defects. Only through realizing our own weakness and looking steadfastly unto Jesus can we walk securely."

But we can't be too hard on Peter. Don't forget about the other 11 disciples who are like us and refuse to get out of the boat. The Bible says our faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). A favorite trick of the devil is to convince us that we don't have enough faith. However, Jesus said that if we had faith as a grain of mustard seed (Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6), we could accomplish amazing things. We don't need a lot of faith; we just need to exercise the faith we have and it will grow. "Faith is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). The Bible says that every one of us has a measure of it (Romans 12:3), so a lack of faith is not the problem. God merely asks us to exercise what faith we do have.

Now I want to draw some parallels between this story and another interesting story from the Bible, so we have one from the NT and one from the OT. These two stories are very different and yet very related. Many are the ways in which the Lord has sought to illustrate certain truths, and the truth that I am going to talk about has very much to do with your salvation and mine.

Jesus Himself introduced this story to a Pharisee named Nicodemus when Nicodemus asked, "How shall a man be born again? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?" Basically, he really wanted to know how to be saved. And Jesus responded with an OT illustration. He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Now, you remember the story. The Israelites had been murmuring and complaining, much like the disciples before the storm. What were they complaining about? Several things: not enough water, they were tired of the manna, and they were disappointed that they were not allowed to enter into the promised land. And they blamed God and Moses for all their problems.

So God did what He often does. He gave them something to cry about. He removed His hand of protection and the fiery serpents came. The poisonous snakes that infested the wilderness were called fiery serpents, on account of the terrible effects produced by their sting, it causing violent inflammation and speedy death. Do you think that they were complaining about their other problems now? No indeed. All of a sudden, their former problems disappeared.

They even turned back to God. "The Bible says in Psalm 78:34, "When He slew them, then they sought Him: and they returned and enquired early after God." And they came to Moses and said, "We have sinned," they said, "for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee. Pray unto the Lord," they asked him, "that He take away the serpents from us."

So Moses prayed, and God asked Moses to make a metal snake and put it up on a pole, that all who were bitten might look at it and live. The power was not in the snake, of course. It was a symbol of Christ. They were to look in faith, admitting that they were powerless to save themselves, as we are powerless to save ourselves from sin. And we have all been bitten by that old serpent, the devil. All who have ever lived have been bitten by that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan. He was a snake in the Garden of Eden, and he's been one ever since. But when we look to Jesus, he alone can save us. "For there is none other name

under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12. "He is the author and finisher of our faith..." (Hebrews 12:2) It's true that some did not believe that just looking at the brazen serpent would heal them. What happened to them? They died in their unbelief. Suppose someone said, "I've kept the commandments for as long as I can remember. And now you're telling me that I have to look at that silly snake in order to be saved? Perposterous!" This is where so many people get hung up. Keeping the commandments is not what saves us. If keeping the commandments is not what saves, isn't that a liscence to sin? No. "He that saith, "I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him." (1 Jn 2:4) We don't keep the commandments in order to BE saved, we keep the commandments because we ARE saved. If we love Him, we keep the commandments. (1 Jn 3:4) How, then, are we to be saved? "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," so the Son of man has been lifted up, and everyone who has been deceived and bitten by the serpent may look and live. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29 If a person could get their bitten loved ones to just fix their eyes on the snake on the pole, they were perfectly restored. The gospel is really simple. You say that all I need to do is look to Jesus? That's right. You better believe it.

What did Peter need to do in order to be saved? Look to Jesus.

What did the snake bitten Israelites need to do in order to be saved? Look at the brazen serpent upon a pole, which represented Jesus.

Jesus said, He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me." Jesus was lifted up on a pole. The snake represented sin and He became sin for us. "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Cor. 5:21) "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," even so was the Son of man "lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:14, 15

We cannot save ourselves. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil." (Jer. 13:23)

We cannot save ourselves, but we still have a work to do in securing our salvation. We must come to Christ at the foot of the cross. "Him that

cometh to Me," says Christ, "I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. But we must come to Him; and when we repent of our sins, we must believe that He accepts and pardons us. We come to Him; and we rely upon His merits as a sin-pardoning Savior. That is our work. And at that point, just like Peter, we can receive all the help we want.

We must look away from self. Jesus is an all-sufficient Saviour. We must not think that our own merits will save us; Christ is our only hope of salvation. "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12.

"Look and live. Jesus has pledged His word; He will save all who come unto Him. Though millions who need to be healed will reject His offered mercy, not one who trusts in His merits will be left to perish." DA ch40

How, then, are we to be saved? By looking to Jesus.

How do we overcome sin?

To all, there is but one answer, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. He takes away our sin. We fill our lives with Christ and His word, and there is no longer any room for sin. "Fill the whole heart with the words of God. They are the living water, quenching your burning thirst. They are the living bread from heaven. Jesus declares, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." And He explains Himself by saying, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:53, 63.) Our bodies are built up from what we eat and drink; and as in the natural economy, so in the spiritual economy: it is what we meditate upon that will give tone and strength to our spiritual nature." Steps To Christ, p. 88

By beholding, we become changed. When I was young, I had a pastor that said, "In order to be saved, there must be a change."

Behold the Lamb of God and we are changed. Hmm. How does that work?

Steps To Christ, ch 3

Christ must be revealed to the sinner as the Saviour dying for the sins of the world; and as we behold the Lamb of God upon the cross of Calvary, the mystery of redemption begins to unfold to our minds and the goodness of God leads us to repentance. In dying for sinners, Christ manifested a love that is incomprehensible; and as the sinner beholds this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition in the soul...

An influence of which they are unconscious works upon the soul, and the conscience is quickened, and the outward life is amended. And as Christ

draws them to look upon His cross, to behold Him whom their sins have pierced, the commandment comes home to the conscience. The wickedness of their life, the deep-seated sin of the soul, is revealed to them. They begin to comprehend something of the righteousness of Christ, and exclaim, "What is sin, that it should require such a sacrifice for the redemption of its victim? Was all this love, all this suffering, all this humiliation, demanded, that we might not perish, but have everlasting life?"...

It is as we behold Him, as the light from our Saviour falls upon us, that we see the sinfulness of our own hearts.

By beholding, we become changed. Here is a law that works both ways. It can work against us too.

By the indulgence of impure thoughts, man can so educate his mind that sin which he once loathed will become pleasant to Him.--"*Patriarchs and Prophets*," p. 459

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature, that by beholding, we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. **The Great Controversy (1888), page 555.**

But we want to focus on Christ. [Steps To Christ, ch 3](#) Let us keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, and He will preserve us. Looking unto Jesus, we are safe. Nothing can pluck us out of His hand. In constantly beholding Him, we "are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 3:18.

So it's not what you do, but who you know. Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Me whom Thou hast sent."

In the interview with Nicodemus, Jesus unfolded the plan of salvation, and His mission to the world. I encourage you to read it and study it. It's in John chapter 3. Nowhere else did He explain so fully, step by step, the work necessary to be done in the hearts of all who would inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Closing Song: Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus, Hymn #290