Why Did You Doubt?
Matthew 14:22-36

ETS: Jesus asked Peter why he doubted in the midst of the storm.
ESS: We begin to doubt God when we allow fear to cloud our vision of God's ability.
OSS: I want people to stop doubting God's ability.
PQ: Are you doubting God?
UW: Reasons

ME

<u>Is it safe to say that we all struggle with doubt?</u>

We doubt our **decisions**:

- Was that the right thing to do?
- Was that the right thing to say?

We doubt our **abilities**:

- Can I do this?

We doubt our **future**:

- Can I earn enough for retirement?

We doubt **people**:

- Will they stand by me?
- Do they have my back?

- Will they be honest with me?

According to Merriam-Webster,

- Doubt is "to call into question the truth of something:
- Doubt is to be uncertain."

Doubt Drains You!

- Drains you of your **energy**
- Drains you of your **zeal**
- Drains you of your **focus**

Doubt Damages You!

- Causes you to **distrust others**
- Causes you to **distrust yourself**

WE

<u>Have you ever doubted when it comes to God?</u>

- Maybe at one point-or even now-you doubt if God exists?
- Maybe you don't doubt God exists, but you doubt if God cares

Both doubts are likely centered around your experiences!

- Life has happened and you wondered WHERE is God or WHY God allowed something to happen

- **The result: Doubt!**

You may be struggling with doubt because God **isn't making any sense** to you.

Paul Borden, *"Doubts in Belief,"* states: "Recently I heard of a man from **Jordan**, a Christian who came to the United States, went through seminary, even got his doctor's degree in theology. He and his wife then went back to Jordan, to their homeland.

As a result of the Gulf War and the aftermath of that war, for the first time Jordanian after Jordanian after Jordanian is coming to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. And that mission field that had been so barren is becoming a tremendous harvest. So much so that a month ago, this man and his wife came back to the States to recruit more people and money to help them with the job.

While they were here, his wife went to the doctor and found that her throat was filled with **cancer**. Now he's in the States trying to see what they can do to keep his wife alive. Meanwhile. there is no one over there to work with Jordanians. He said. "God, that's stupid. That is dumb. That doesn't make sense."

You may be struggling with doubt due to a **change in circumstances**.

Recently I heard of a Christian man who, about six months before retirement, was laid off, and the company finagled it so he lost all his benefits. He had prayed, "God, I want to be a good husband. I want to be a good father. I'm going to go to church. I'm going to spend my life serving you," and six months before retirement, whatever security he had was taken away.

Now he says, "God, that's not fair! I don't know if Christianity is worth it!"

GOD

Turn to Matthew 14

The last few days had been a **roller coaster** of **emotions**.

It all began with the news that **John the Baptist**, who was Jesus' cousin, had been **beheaded** by Herod the King.

- Why didn't Jesus stop that from happening?
  - Was Jesus unable to stop the beheading?
  - Did Jesus really care about His cousin?
  - Does Jesus really care when His followers suffer?

These questions were enhanced by Jesus' reaction to the news of the beheading!

- When Jesus heard the news, it obviously affect Him because He wanted to **get away** and spend some time in **solitude** and **prayer**.
    - *But the time away from people didn't last long.*

Soon the **crowds** of people caught up with Jesus and His disciples.

- Jesus, feeling compassion for the people, begins to heal their sick. However, the day is nearing the end.
- For the Jews, **3 pm** was the begi**n**ning of **evening** and so it was time to send the people home so they could eat.

But Jesus tells the **disciples** to **provide** the **food** for the people!

What follows is the famous story of the **feeding of 5,000**.

- Jesus does the miraculous and feeds 5,**000 men** (not to mention women and children) with five loaves of bread and two fishes.
    - To top off the miracle, there are **12 baskets** full of **leftovers**!

What a roller coaster!

- On the one hand, Jesus' cousin is killed and Jesus responds to the news by wanting to get away from it all.
    - THEN, in an act of compassion, Jesus heals the sick and miraculously feeds over 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes.

Over 5,000 people have been fed and it is evening and Jesus sends everyone home…

Matthew 14:22–24 (HCSB) "Immediately He made (literally commands) the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds

- He tells the disciples to get in the boat and leave the scene while He dismissed the crowds
    - **Disciples:** Jesus wants us to get everything ready to go because we've got to get going. It is getting late!

[23] After dismissing the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone.

- I'm sure the disciples could see what was going on as they were starting to row away!

- Disciples: We are not too far out, Jesus can still swim out to us!
- Disciples: Looks like Jesus is going up on the mountain, but I'm sure He'll come right back down.

[24] But the boat was already over a mile from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them.

- But Jesus doesn't come down off the mountain!
  - Now, doubt is probably setting in!
    - They are "over a mile" away—that's a long way to swim!
    - They are starting to battle a storm—which would make swimming to the boat difficult.

RECAP: The disciples are in a boat rowing to the other side of the lake.

- The crowds are going home.
- Jesus is going away from the shore to a nearby 'mountain' to pray.
- It is getting dark.
- A storm has whipped up
- They are more than a mile from the shore!

PROBLEM: Jesus **did not** tell the disciples HOW He was going to meet them.

- Maybe that is why Jesus had to "compel" the disciples to get in the boat and leave—**perhaps they did not <u>understand</u> how Jesus was going to get to the other side of the lake in any reasonable amount.**
- After all, the lake they are going across what we call the "Sea of Galilee" and it is **12 1/2 miles long, and from 4 to 7 1/2 miles broad!**
    - I am sure the disciples did not understand exactly HOW Jesus was intending to meet up with them on the other side.

BUT THAT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF WHAT THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND!

<u>Why do we Doubt?</u>

Fear Fuels Doubt

For some reason, we think that *we must understand everything* in order to believe it.

- If things happen in a way that *we do not understand*, we begin to doubt God.

- For instance, a young Christian mother is tragically killed in a car accident.
    - We don't understand why God allowed that to happen so we begin to doubt God's love for us.

- A godly Christian man, who has served faithfully in the church, is suddenly stricken with cancer.
    - We don't understand why God allowed that to happen so we begin to doubt God's ability to take care of His own children.
- A couple that has wanted desperately to have children finally has a child only to find out it is mentally retarded.
    - We don't understand why God allowed that to happen so we begin to doubt God's kindness.
- Two jets fly into the World Trade Center and thousands suddenly lose their lives.
    - We don't understand why God allowed that to happen so we begin to doubt God's ability to control evil.

On and on we could go as to reasons why people, good people, godly people, Saints, can start to doubt God.

The disciples are now rowing across the lake.

- The boat is full with the 12 disciples so it wasn't going to be a quick trip!
    - This was going to take time.
- To make matters worse it was dark!
    - They did not have headlights!

        - The only light they had was moonlight, starlight and maybe a torch or two.
            - But before long, they lost the moonlight and starlight to storm clouds.
- Even worse, they are battling a storm!

In **Matthew 8** the disciples had encountered a terrible storm—worse than this one—in which they feared for their lives.

- They awoke Jesus, who had been asleep in the boat, and He rebuked the wind and the waves and the lake became completely calm.
- **Matthew 8:27** states: "The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (NASB)

<u>WHY was Jesus allowing this storm to occur?</u>

- Jesus knew the disciples were out on that lake—He sent them out there!

<u>WHY wasn't Jesus stopping the storm?</u>

- He could stand on the mountain and command the storm to stop!

Matthew 14:25-26 (HCSB) "Around three in the morning, He came toward them walking on the sea.

Timeline:

- The 5,000 are fed sometime around 3 pm
- Disciples commanded to leave by Jesus 5-6 pm?
- Now: 3:00 am
    - They have been battling the waves for several hours!
        - They are exhausted!

[26] When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and cried out in fear.

But then in the midst of the storm came the ultimate thing that they **did not understand.**

- There out in the middle of night in pitch blackness, suddenly a **lightning strike illuminates** the water and they see a **man walking** toward them on the water.
- Then **another lightning strike** illuminates the sky and He's **getting closer**!!
- Then another lightning strike illuminates the sky and He's getting even closer!!

Suddenly, this boat full of **grown men** begins to panic!! <u>Wouldn't you?!</u>

- Boom, a flash of light and there He is!
- Boom, another flash of light and there He is!

You've got to admit, it's just **not normal** to see a man walking on the water out in the middle of the lake miles from shore in the middle of the night.

When we get in situations we **don't understand** we get fearful and **Fear Fuels Doubt!**

IF you find yourself doubting God, it may be because of Fear!

- You may be afraid of what the future holds for you physically.
- You may be afraid of what the future holds for you financially.
- You may be afraid of what the future holds for you socially.
- You may be afraid of what the future holds for you concerning your job.
- You may be afraid of what the future holds for you concerning a place to live.

We tend to doubt God when we **don't understand** what is happening around us: **Fear Fuels Doubt!**

The disciples are scared to death. They think there is a ghost out on the water. Jesus, seeing their fear states "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

Only Matthew's account records what happens next.

Matthew 14:27-29 (HCSB) "Immediately Jesus spoke to them. "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."
28 "Lord, if it's You," Peter answered Him, "command me to come to You on the water."
29 "Come!" He said.
And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus.

WHY Do We Doubt?

Faulty Focus Fuels Doubt

The flying Wallendas are perhaps the world's greatest family of aerialists and tightrope walkers. ... Karl Wallenda's had a capacity for concentration on the intention, the task, the decision to walk across the tightrope. However, Karl Wallenda eventually fell to his death while walking a tightrope without a safety net between two high-rise buildings in San Juan, Puerto Rico. ...

Why? Later, Wallenda's wife said that before her husband had fallen, for the first time since she had known him, he had been concentrating on falling, instead of on walking the tightrope. He had

personally supervised the attachment of the guide wires, which he had never done before.

Faulty Focus Fuels Doubt

You have got to give Peter some credit.

- There are only two people who have ever walked on water—**Jesus and Peter**!
- Peter **tests the supposed Ghost's claim to be Jesus** by telling Him that he, too will walk on the water if so commanded by Jesus.
    - Jesus commands Peter to come.

In an act of **pure faith,** Peter gets out of the boat.

Peter is doing what none of the other 11 are willing to do.

- We often "blast" Peter for his failure to keep focused on Jesus, but we forget that there were **11 other men** who were too **afraid** and **doubted** the supposed "Ghost's" claim to even step out of the boat!

Too often Saints are **paralyzed** by their **doubts** about God.

- They are too paralyzed to get out of their **comfort zones**.
    - Even though they were in a storm, the **boat** promised **a <u>false sense</u>** <u>of safety</u> that the

other **11 disciples** were willing to gamble on rather than step out in faith.

- As a result, **not one** of the other **11 disciples** ever experienced walking on water!

The disciples had the wrong focus!

- Their faulty focus KEPT them from walking on water!
  - Faulty Focus because they were more **focused** on their **fear** than faith.

<u>Are we any different?</u>

- Think back to the incident before this one—the feeding of the 5,000.
  - **Verse 15** tells us that the disciples came to Jesus and said "The place is desolate, the time is already past, so send the multitudes away that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."
    - <u>What was the FOCUS of the disciples?</u>
      - NOT on the fact that Jesus, the Son of God was with them, but on their surroundings.
        - All they could see was the combination of a lot of people in a remote place without food.

- They had faulty focus which led them to doubt that a crowd of 5,000 could be fed!

Of course, Peter was one of those disciples who had **faulty focus on land;** however, in this case on the **stormy sea**, Peter—at least for an instance—**focused** his **faith** on Christ.

If the story had ended at **Verse 29** our perception of Peter would be quite different!

- **Verse 29** states: "And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus." (HCSB)

Because Peter's focus was on Christ, he got "out of the boat."

- He stepped out of a boat that was rocking under the force of the wind and the waves.
- To step onto calm waters would be one thing, but to step onto rolling waves is quite another!

Because Peter's focus was on Christ, he actually **walked on water**!
What an experience that must have been!

- It would be like walking on the **moon**—indescribable.

Notice WHERE Peter's FOCUS was as he began to walk on the water—it was **on Jesus**.

Verse 29 states that Peter "Came toward Jesus."

As long as he was focused on Jesus, as long as he was focused on walking toward Jesus, Peter was all right.

- It doesn't matter if the waves are beating against you *if you are focused on Jesus.*
- It doesn't matter if the wind is blowing against you, *if you are focused on Jesus*.
- You can get out of the boat— *if you are focused on Jesus.*
- You can walk through the storm— *if you are focused on Jesus*.
- You can stand where people sink— *if you are focused on Jesus.*

As long as Peter was focused on Jesus, he was making it through the waves, through wind, and to the Savior.

- Sure the **water** was **beating** against his **legs**,
- sure the **wind** was **blowing** his **hair**,

- sure the **lightning** was **flashing** all around,
- sure the **thunder** was booming,
- sure the **people** behind him were **terrified**,
- sure his **friends probably** thought he was **crazy**,

But Peter walked on water!

- Was Peter a **rich** man? No.
- Was Peter **royalty**? No.
- Was Peter a **Billy Graham**? No.
- Was Peter a **brilliant, educated** man? No.

Peter was just a simple, uneducated, fisherman. Yet he walked on water!

- WHY? Because he DIDN'T have FAULTY FOCUS

Matthew 14:30-31 (HCSB) 30 But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid. And beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out His hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, *"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

Jesus asks a question of Peter that He often asks of us today.

- Perhaps Jesus is asking this very question to you right now.

- Perhaps you are in the midst of a storm in your life, the emotional, financial, social or spiritual waves are battering against you.
    - Jesus is calling to you in the midst of the storm. You began strong, but now you are doubting.

Jesus' question: *"You of little faith, why do you doubt?"*

Things are going the way you thought they would.

- God is not responding the way you though He would.
    - This is not how you think life should be. In the midst of your confusion, doubt is creeping in.
- In your mind you are starting to wonder if God is really God.
- In your mind you are beginning to wonder if He really cares for you.
- In your mind you are beginning to doubt God.

Jesus' question: *"You of little faith, why do you doubt?"*

HOW do you Combat Doubt?

Trust God

Why did Jesus walk on the water?

- *You might say, "Because they were on the water and He was on land so He had to get out there to them somehow."*
    - *But couldn't Jesus have made provisions for a boat? Sure.*

Why did Jesus walk on the water?

- *Was it to make great **flannel graph stories** for Sunday School?*

Why did Jesus walk on the water?

- *Was it to do some **amusing trick** to astound the disciples?*

Why did Jesus walk on the water?

I believe that the answer can be found in **Jesus' response** to the fearful disciples in **verse 27.**
Here the disciples are **scared to death** because they think they are seeing a **ghost**, but Jesus calls out to them and states: "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

- Jesus identifies Himself by saying "It is I"

When God revealed Himself in the **Old Testament** He would refer to Himself as "I am."

- For example, when God revealed Himself to Moses in **Exodus 3:14** He said: "I AM WHO I AM"; "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' "
    - By God referring to as "I am." He was telling Moses that He is the **self-existent, absolutely capable** God of the universe who was able to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage.

When Jesus tells the disciples who He is, He **doesn't say** *"It's Jesus"* or *"It is your Rabbi*."

- No, Jesus states "It is I" which is literally the phrase "I am."
    - Jesus answers the disciple's fear by literally saying "Take courage, I AM" is here.
        - In other words, "Take courage, God is here, do not be afraid."

Back in **Chapter 8** when Jesus calmed the fierce storm that was threatening to destroy them, the Bible states that the disciples "… amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (NASB)

- Now in the midst of another storm, Jesus comes out to them walking on the water and proclaims "I AM" is here.

- The reason that Jesus walked on the water was to demonstrate to His disciples that **He is God**.
  - Unfortunately, the disciples missed the whole implication of Jesus' greeting because of their fear.

Note that Jesus **did not reveal Himself** as God on a **mountaintop** where you might have a a **gentle blowing breeze** and **unlimited vision**, but in the midst of the deep waters of a lake, being blown by strong, stormy gusts of wind and where one's vision was blinded by the darkness. It was in the midst of a storm that Jesus revealed, again, to the disciples who He was –God!

Jesus revealed His power again when Peter came out to Him. Peter starts out strong—walking on the water! However, **verses 30-31** states: "But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid. And beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me!" [31] Immediately Jesus reached out His hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, *"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

Notice something here again—*Peter did not pull Jesus down* into the water with him, but *Jesus pulled Peter up out of the water*.

- Remember what Jesus is standing on—water!
    - Jesus is NOT standing in the **boat** or on a **piece** of wood, He is still standing on a **non-structural, liquid foundation**; yet, He pulls Peter's weight up!
        - Jesus was doing the "**impossible**" by walking on the water and now He was **adding the impossible** to the impossible by standing on the water and pulling someone's weight up out of the water!

Only God can do what Jesus was doing! But Jesus was not through revealing His Godhood.

- **Matthew 14:32 (HCSB)** "When they got into the boat, the wind ceased." (HCSB)

Sound familiar? Just like before, the **storm obeyed** the will of God.

- When Jesus got into the boat—**the object lesson was over**.
- The storm had accomplished its purpose—to reveal Jesus' deity to the disciples.

Application: When you go through life's storms you need not doubt God's ability. God can do the impossible.

- He can pull you up out of the sinking waters if you will call out to Him and trust Him for help.
- God will reveal Himself, His power, His authority to you in the midst of the storm if you will listen.

HOW do you Combat Doubt?

Trust God

Jesus is with us in our time of need

Verse 25 tells us that it was not until the "Around three in the morning" that Jesus came out to them on the lake.

- Is it any coincidence that Jesus waited until the 3:00 am to go to the boat?
- After all, why did He wait until they were being battered by the storm to see them?
    - Certainly, Jesus could have come out to them early, perhaps before the storm.
        - You would think it would be easier to walk on the water when it is calm rather than when it is white capping!

But Jesus waits until the storm to arrive.

- Jesus **waits** until the **moonlight** and **starlight** are **snuffed** out by the clouds.

- Jesus **waits** until the disciples are out in the **middle** of the **lake**—in **deep water**.
- Jesus **waits** until the disciples are **tired** from hours of **rowing** against the wind.
- Jesus **waits** until the **thunder** is **rolling** and the **lighting** is **flashing**.
- Jesus **waits** until the **boat** is **rocking** and the waves are **rolling**.
- Jesus **waits** until the **perfect time** to enter into their **circumstances**.

One of our favorite TV shows is called Heartland

- It centers on a family in Canada who run a horse ranch
    - People bring their horses to the ranch because they need to be fixed in some way.
        - Amy is a "horse whisperer" and she has to get the horse to the point where the horse's will will be broken
            - You can't train a horse without first breaking the horse!

You can't grow in your faith without first being broken in your faith!

- You can't learn to trust God as long as you are trying to please God by what you do!

- You can grow in your faith when you have the ability to get yourself out of a situation.

To mature you, God has to break you!

- Breaking you means that God waits until life seems **dark**, the waters of **life** are **deep** and the waves are **crashing** in on your life.
- Breaking you means God waits until you are thoroughly **exhausted** from **trying** to make it on your own to the shore.
- Breaking you means God **allows the storms** to come up in our lives to teach us.

Can God stop the storm? Certainly.
But God sometimes doesn't stop the storm because He wants to teach us things we would never learn in calm circumstances.

- However, you can always rest assured that Jesus will be there for you when you need Him.
    - He will never let you down.
        - When you reach up that hand in desperation—looking to Him to help you through—He will grab your hand.

God tells us in **Isaiah 43:2 (HCSB)** "I will be with you when you pass through the waters, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you.

You will not be scorched when you walk through the fire, and the flame will not burn you."

Why did Jesus walk on the water?

- To show His disciples that the **very thing they feared** (the sea) was only a **staircase for Him to come to them**.
    - Often we fear the difficult experiences of life (such as surgery or bereavement), only to discover that these experiences bring Jesus Christ closer to us.[1]

Unless you allow God to break you, you will never grow in your faith!

- The breaking process is difficult
- The breaking process can be years in the process
- The breaking process will push you to your limits.

If you read the Book of Acts, you will see these same disciples acting NOT in fear but in FAITH!

- These same disciples could not be shut down when they start preaching about Jesus
- These same disciples could not be stopped when they faced persecution for Jesus

[1]Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1989. *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Mt 14:22). Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

What changed?

- God totally broke them through a process of many events
  - In each event where he was breaking them, He'd reveal His power and authority to them.
  - **Matthew 14:33 (HCSB)** "Then those in the boat worshiped Him and said, "Truly You are the Son of God!"

After the resurrection of Christ, these men (and women) who were broken by Christ became fearless in the face of battle, sickness, and persecution.

God was breaking the disciples!

- Jesus had to total change their way of thinking
  - This incident was part of that process

WE

Doubt Drains You!

- Drains you of your **energy**
- Drains you of your **zeal**
- Drains you of your **focus**

Doubt Damages You!

- Causes you to **distrust others**
- Causes you to **distrust yourself**

Doubt Derails You!

- Doubt keeps you from stepping out in faith
- Doubt keeps you from realizing your full potential

If you want to…

- **Enjoy close fellowship with God**
  - You have to trust God during the breaking process!
  - You have to be "Crucified with Christ"!
- **Be used by God**
  - Don't doubt God as you go through the breaking process

<u>What would it look like if ALL Saints didn't live in doubt?</u>

- Wouldn't be **drained**, but alive
- Wouldn't be **distrustful** of God, but trusting
- Would be **afraid** to step out in faith, but would step out in faith

Do you want to live…

- Distrustful
- Drained

- Damaged
    - THEN, live in doubt

If you want to experience a **relationship** with God…Trust

Salvation

If you have a relationship with God, but want intimate **fellowship** with God…Trust

Are you doubting God?

Perhaps your circumstances have been stormy.

- You have been feeling the waves of life crash against your soul.
- You feel overwhelmed and exhausted.
- You are tired of rowing against the wind.
- You have been wondering where is God.

The reality is, God is at work in your life breaking you so

- You can experience **intimate fellowship** with Him
- You can experience **Christ living** through you
- You can experience **His power** in your life!

God is saying "Take Courage, it is I, do not be afraid."

The question is NOT Is God here for me?

- The question is: "Are you looking for God in the midst of the storm?"

The disciples were not looking for Jesus in the midst of the storm—that is why they did not recognize Him. They weren't expecting Jesus to meet them in their hour of need.

Are you doubting God?

- Have you been doubting God's ability to see you through the storms of life?
- Have you been doubting God's ability to teach you something through the storm?
- Have you been doubting God's concern for you?

God is saying "I am here, do not be afraid. Keep focused on me. Trust me. Learn what I want to teach you. Keep walking on the water!"