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## **PETER DIDN'T SINK!**

Years ago I heard about a minister who spent forty minutes preaching on "Reasons Why Peter Sank." He brought out some good points like: Peter should have kept his eyes on Jesus instead of the stormy water that surrounded him. But much of the sermon was of a negative nature as though Peter sank. But the fact is: **PETER DIDN'T SINK!**

Someone may say, "Wait a minute! The Bible says that Peter sank!" Does it? Let's look at the scriptural account and see exactly what it says (Matt. 14:25-32 NKJV):

"Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.' And Peter answered Him and said, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.' So He said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, HE WALKED ON THE WATER to go to Jesus."

Plainly enough, Peter did walk on the water! If he only walked five steps and then failed, at least he walked on the water for a while more than the eleven who stayed in the boat and didn't even try! But did he sink after this? No!

"But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and BEGINNING to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him...and when THEY got into the boat, the wind ceased."

Notice the Bible does not say that Peter sank! It says, "...and *beginning* to sink." There is a vast difference between *beginning* to sink and being SUNK!

While the scriptures do not exactly describe how Peter got back to the boat, I can't seem to picture Jesus having to pick him up and carry him piggyback style. I like to think that after Peter put his hand in the hand of the Man from Galilee, his faith was strengthened and together "they" walked on the water to the boat.

Peter has been criticized in sermons because he "followed afar off" but seldom is anything mentioned about those who did not follow at all! Some fled the area altogether!

Though he made mistakes, there was something in him that was to become powerful in the hands of God. That "something" was his zeal. Zeal is a wonderful thing if it is channeled right.

There was the night when Peter cut a man's ear off. As a "great multitude" came looking for Jesus of Nazareth to have him arrested and killed, he said: "AM HE." His words were so powerful that the crowd "went backward and fell to the ground" (John 18:6).

As they scrambled to get back on their feet, up stepped Malchus, a servant of the High Priest. In his zeal, howbeit misguided, Peter drew out his sword and cut the man's ear off! It has been speculated that Peter was probably not aiming at his ear that he was ready to cut his *head* off! But Malchus leaned his head sideways to dodge Peter's sword, and only his ear was cut off. To say the least, Peter's actions were crude and unorthodox, but at least he did *something!* He did not just stand there and do nothing.

This same enthusiasm was demonstrated when Peter told the Lord he wanted to get out of the boat and walk on the water! Who had ever heard of such a thing? None of the other disciples made this request. But Peter had a zeal, an adventurous faith and this made him a leader. He jumped out of the boat to go to Jesus.

Peter has been criticized for his failure to continue walking on the water but not much is said about the other disciples who never even tried.

There have been people who tried to do something for God, and (seemingly) failed. But wouldn't it be better to try to do something, than just stay in the boat and criticize? Those who don't try, thinking they may fail have failed already.

Peter wanted to walk on the water to go to Jesus. Jesus said, "Come." Had he put it off or made excuses, he would have never walked on the water.

Suppose Peter had called on the other disciples, suggesting they have a "panel discussion" on the matter. They would

have probably told him to stay in the boat! They might have asked each other: "Is there any *scripture* for it? What if he jumps out of the boat and *fails*? What if he drowns? What will we tell his wife? This story will get back to shore. He will look like a religious fanatic, and reflect on *us*. Let's play it safe and tell him to STAY IN THE BOAT!"

On the other hand, they might have reasoned: "What if he jumps out of the boat and *does* walk on the water. This story will also get back to the shore. People will think *Peter* is God's top man. This might not look good for the rest of us. I think we better tell Peter to stay in the boat." (That there were times when a competitive attitude surfaced among the disciples is evident. Luke 22:24).

**Either way—be it success or failure—they would have probably told Peter to stay in the boat!**

We should ask ourselves the question: Would I rather be a "Dry-Boat-Rider" or a "Wet-Water-Walker"?

As a young preacher I brought a message similar to this, encouraging people to "jump out of the boat" (as it were) and go to Jesus. A man who heard that message believed God was dealing with him about entering the ministry. Some years later our paths crossed, and he was now pastoring a church in southern California. He told me it was my message that inspired him to take that leap of faith!

"We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). By faith Abraham went out not knowing where he was going (Heb. 11:8). One day he said to Sarah, "Pack up Honey—we're moving!" She asked, "Where are we going?" He said, "I don't know, but we are going." They had homesteaded there in Ur of the Chaldees. But "by faith Abraham...went out, not knowing where he was going." He looked for a city "whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8-10). In the process, he became the FRIEND OF GOD (James 2:23). How awesome!

When Jesus got into the boat, *the storm ceased*. So today, Jesus can speak peace to the troubled storms in *our* lives. As a hymn writer from years ago phrased it:

**Blessed quietness, holy quietness—  
What assurance in my soul!  
On the stormy sea  
He speaks peace to me.  
How the billows cease to roll!**

As the storm ceased, another miracle occurred, one which sometimes goes unnoticed. The disciples had rowed "about three or four miles," and so were in the "middle" of the Sea of Galilee (John 6:19; Mk. 6:47). "And IMMEDIATELY the boat was at the land where they were going" (John 6:21). This was supernatural—faster than a speeding bullet!

Both Elijah and Philip experienced supernatural transportation (2 Kings 2:11; Acts 8:39,40). But here Jesus and the disciples—and the *boat* itself—were transported three or four miles in an instant!

After the resurrection of Christ, Peter went fishing in this same body of water—the Sea of Galilee—and caught "one hundred and fifty-three" large fish (John 21:11). Then follows

the noted passage in which Jesus asked him: "Do you love me more than these?"—more than these 153 fish. Because this is an exact number—153 (not "about 153")—some believe this number must have a deeper meaning, an idea which has given rise to considerable speculation:

Some believe there were 153 nations at the time. Since the gospel was to go to all nations, the 153 fish are taken as a type of the nations. But that there were exactly this number of nations at the time is doubtful.

In his commentary on Ezekiel 47, Jerome wrote that Greek zoologists had recorded 153 different kinds of fish, thus the 153 fish represent men of all types who were to receive the gospel. But it is now known that there are more than 153 types of fish.

Some believe Jesus called not only one group of "seventy" to preach the gospel, but *two* groups of seventy—"seventy *other*" (Luke 10:1). If there were two sets of seventy, this would make 140. Add to this the 12 apostles, plus Jesus Christ, the apostle of our profession (Heb. 3:1) and the total is 153!

Cyril of Alexandria broke the number down as follows: 100 equals the fullness of the Gentiles, 50 the remnant of Israel, and the three, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to get 153.

Augustine used a mathematical approach, pointing out that 153 is the total of all numbers from 1-17 (1 + 2 + 3 + 4, etc.) added together, and then gave various theories about the number 17.

Another view is based on the numerical value of the name *Simon*, which is 76, and that of *ichthys*, the Greek word for fish, which is 77. Added together, these total 153.

My personal opinion is that these theories prove nothing one way or the other. While it is not impossible that there was some special meaning regarding the number 153, it is also possible this was simply the number of fish Peter caught!

But, regardless, the point is clear: Peter and the others who had caught fish would now be going forth to be *fishers of men*. After he was filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Peter had the experience of preaching one sermon which brought about the conversion of 3,000 people. His shadow passed over people who were hopelessly sick and they were healed "everyone." He raised the dead. He took the gospel to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. He was used of God.

May we, as Peter, jump out of the boat—out of the boat of doubt, excuses, and discouragement. May we walk on the water to go to Jesus. And even if we should "begin" to sink in our efforts to be used of God, Jesus will be there—close enough to take our hand. Together we can walk on the water and NOT SINK!

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