

PETER Part I - August 8, 2021

by Paula Rumbolt

Matthew 14

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,

24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.

26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."



Today I want to look at the life of a man named Peter. Peter's story is woven throughout the four Gospels, he has a big role in the book of Acts, and he wrote two letters found near the end of the New Testament. I am going to refer to the Matthew passage, which we just read, and focus on the beginning of Peter's journey.

Peter was a fisherman. In Matthew 5, Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and He saw Peter and his brother fishing. Jesus called out to them and said, "Come, follow Me."

At that moment, Peter and his brother left their nets and followed Jesus. This was Peter giving up everything he knew to follow Jesus.

Peter followed Jesus and listened to His every teaching - he soaked it all in. He saw Jesus perform many miracles such as Jesus healing his own mother-in-law, calming a raging storm, raising a dead girl back to life, and feeding well over 5000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish! Peter experienced it all first hand. He literally walked and talked with Jesus.

In Matthew chapter 14, Peter and the disciples had just seen Jesus feed over 5000 people, and, according to verse 22, Jesus made them, or *insisted* they get into their boat and go to the other side of the lake. While on the lake, a storm started up. There was a strong wind and they were fighting against every wave. The disciples were in trouble and the boat was battered.

Let's stop here for a moment. Jesus insisted that His disciples get in their boat and cross the lake, even though Jesus knew there was a storm coming. Sometimes, Jesus leads us into a storm, and that storm requires us to fight against every wave. And, we often feel battered by the storm around us.

Back to the boat. After Jesus had spent some time alone praying, He came walking towards them on the water. The disciples were terrified because they thought Jesus was a ghost.

Sometimes, when I am in a storm, I, too, don't see Jesus clearly at first.

Jesus told them not to be afraid. He said, "Take heart, it is I" or "Take courage. I am here."

When I am in a storm, I can forget that Jesus is with me and I need Him to remind me of His presence.

Peter went to the side of the boat, saw Jesus, and said, "If it's really You, Jesus, tell me to walk to You on the water." Jesus said, "Yes, come."

This was decision time for Peter. He had come to a crossroads in his journey. Peter goes to the side of the boat. Being a fisherman, a boat was his safe, secure, and comfortable place. Did he pause before putting one foot over the side? Did he put both feet over and sit on the side of the boat for a moment? Did he take a step away from the boat but still hold on with one hand? Did he jump right in? While the Bible doesn't say exactly how Peter exited the boat, Peter had to make the choice to leave the security and comfort of what he knew and step out of the boat.

Peter took a few steps on the water on his own. When I first start something new, such as getting up early to read my Bible, or doing a devotion before bed every night, or going to the gym regularly, or not having too much dessert, I can usually get through the first little while on pure motivation. I say things like, “Okay, Jesus, it’s You and me. Let’s do this!” However, it doesn’t take long for the motivation to disappear and I find myself beginning to sink. That’s what happened to Peter. The Bible says, “when he saw the strong wind and waves, he was terrified and began to sink.” Peter took his eyes off Jesus. When he did that, he was not able to walk on the water on his own. It was something he could only do with Jesus.

When I reflect on the number of things I have started and eventually found myself sinking in it, I can clearly see that I thought it was enough to simply say the words and ask Jesus to journey with me. But, it wasn’t. I continuously took my eyes off Jesus, took a look around at how strong the winds were, and I began to sink. Sometimes, I would call out to Jesus and shout, “Save me, Lord” like Peter did, but other times I would just let myself sink, or, and perhaps most commonly, I would turn back to what I knew and get back into the boat alone.

When Peter shouted, “Save me, Lord,” Jesus *immediately* reached out and caught him. While Peter may have hesitated getting out of the boat to walk to Jesus, Jesus never hesitated in reaching out and catching Peter. Then Jesus said to Peter, “You have so little faith. Why did you doubt Me?”

Bam! What a statement! Peter, the only one who had the guts to even get out of the boat, yet was confronted with his lack of faith and asked why He doubted Jesus. You see, Jesus knew the plans He had for Peter. In that moment, Peter was an example to the rest of the disciples, and he is still an example to us today. Jesus knew that Peter’s life would have an impact and He wanted Peter’s faith to grow.

Did you notice that Jesus didn’t get upset with Peter? I mean, Peter had seen all the miracles that Jesus had done, and still had doubts. And, yet, Jesus didn’t get upset. Instead, He took Peter by the hand, led him back to the boat, and the wind ceased. Faith in Jesus calms the storm and brings us rest.

Peter got back into the boat. The difference is that this time Jesus was with him. Jesus didn’t ask Peter to leave all of his comforts behind, walk completely away from the boat, and never go back. Instead, Jesus proved to Peter that He is indeed the Son of God, and that He will be with him immediately. All Peter had to do was *ask*.

If you're anything like me, sometimes, asking is the most difficult part! I can't say that the first thing I do when I feel myself beginning to sink is to call out to God. I am getting better at this, but it takes time to replace self-sufficiency with reliance on God.

Peter reached a moment in his journey, his crossroads, where he had to decide whether he was going to stay in the safety of what he knew *or* take a step towards something new. Staying in the comfort of what is familiar feels easier but it will not move you forward. There is no doubt that the experience Peter had with Jesus that day, changed the trajectory of his life. Peter learned that he could not take the next step of his journey without Jesus.

Let's look at three things Peter did in that moment that we can also do when we find ourselves in stormy weather.

First, Peter took an inventory, or a tally, or mental checklist of all the experiences he had with Jesus up to that point. He concluded that Jesus had been faithful time and time again so Peter believed Jesus was trustworthy.

When we are in a storm, we can also take an inventory of God's faithfulness in our lives up to that point. Reflecting on God's trustworthiness will give us the faith we need to navigate the storm.

Peter tested that trustworthiness by stepping out of the boat. Peter then took another inventory. This time it was of his current surroundings, where all he could see was the storm, the waves, and the strong wind blowing against him. This time he focused on the storm instead of Jesus, and he began to sink.

I would like to be able to say that I never do this, but that would not be the truth. There are times when I look around me and all I see are the waves. I focus on the current situation, instead of focusing on Jesus.

Thankfully, like Peter, we can call out to Jesus and He will immediately take our hand.

The **second** thing Peter did was evaluate his beliefs. When Jesus told him that he had little faith and asked him why he doubted Jesus, I suspect that Peter evaluated, thought about, processed, and contemplated that statement for quite a while - and long after they got back to shore.

We, too, can evaluate our lack of trust and our doubt in Jesus. This is not done to condemn us, but rather to build our faith. For example, every time I drive to my parents place, which is about 19 hours away, I feel anxious and I have thoughts floating around in my head about getting into

an accident or hitting a moose. However, when I look back and see all the times God has protected me from those things, it can bolster my faith and trust that He will protect me again.

The **third** thing Peter did was worship Jesus and say, “You really are the Son of God.” That was Peter admitting his wrongs and realizing that he really did have a lack of faith. He chose to admit that to Jesus right away. Peter knew he doubted, and he confessed his doubt by acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God. Peter had wronged Jesus by his lack of belief. They had spent so much time together. Peter saw miracle after miracle, and still doubted. So, he confessed.

Like Peter, after we have taken an inventory and evaluated our beliefs, we can acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. We can confess our unbelief and lack of faith, and stand firm in the truth that Jesus loves us, will take care of us, and is right there in the storm with us. Jesus didn’t leave Peter alone in the storm, and He won’t leave us there either.

I want to end with the visual of Peter getting out of the boat. Did he hang on to the side or go straight towards Jesus? We are always holding on to something - will we choose to hang on to the boat or hang on to Jesus? Will we choose to hang on to the past or the present? The hurt or the Healer? The safety of the boat or the One who saves us? The miracle or the miracle worker?

What could the boat look like for you and me?

Perhaps, for the one who has not yet put their faith in Jesus, it is taking that first step out of the boat, letting go of sin, and calling out to Jesus.

Perhaps for those who have been a Christian for many years but are finding you don’t have the same spark and joy you once had, it means to let go of the boat and fully surrendering to Jesus. That could mean letting go of past traditions, or church comforts that you’ve been doing for years that no longer hold meaning. Perhaps it means giving up some things we do simply because we’ve always done them.

For some of us, it could mean letting go of addiction, unhealthy relationships, codependency, pride, self-sufficiency, lust, shame, and selfishness. The interesting thing about our boat is that it also holds a lot of good things. Things like, family, friends, love, music, hugs, journaling, grace, freedom, and joy.

As long as I am holding on to the boat, I will never fully reach out to Jesus. Instead, I will stay bobbing neck-deep in the storm, suspended between my boat and my Saviour. It is probably

difficult for Jesus to watch me bobbing along, reaching into my boat for something to temporarily satisfy me, and sinking a little more.

When I let go and call out to Jesus, He will hold on to me and sit in the boat with me as I learn to trust Him more than the comfort of the boat and more than the temporary relief that my habits bring me. Physical things cannot provide emotional and spiritual satisfaction.

When we are in the boat together, I can look into the eyes of Jesus, who does not condemn me, and allow His Word to tell me how loved, valued, and precious I am. Jesus is the only One who can satisfy the deep longings of my soul. Jesus wants to sit in my messy boat with me. Jesus wants to sit in your messy boat with you. He loves you.

This is where we intentionally choose to take the next step. Church traditions, Sunday services, and the comfortable Christian life has been working so well for us up to this point. Now, God is asking us to focus on our relationship with Him. Jesus is right there, standing on the water, waiting for you to let go of what is holding you back and call out to Him.

If you are in the midst of a storm today, I encourage you to follow Peter's example and take an inventory of all the ways God has proven Himself faithful to you over the years. Then, evaluate the areas where you have doubted God. Finally, acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God, that He loves you, He cares about you, and He will immediately take your hand when you call out to Him. You are never alone.

In the boat with Jesus is where we live out the remainder of our time here on earth. This is what being in the boat with Jesus means to me:

- When I'm tired, I rest in His arms
- When I'm sad, I cry on His shoulder
- When I need to talk, He listens
- When I need to hear, He speaks
- When I'm scared, He protects me
- When I feel like I don't matter, He wraps His arms around me, reminding me that I am His beautiful, hand-picked, wanted, masterpiece.

I choose Jesus.