

Forgetting Leads To Doubting

Matthew 14:22-33
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Have you ever noticed the relationship between forgetting Christ and falling into some besetting sin? When our recollection of His power, His mercies, His faithfulness, and His truth are pushed back into the deep, dark recesses of our memory, we are far less likely to turn to Him when we are overwhelmed by some temptation. But dear ones, to enjoy Christ, to commune with Christ, to meditate upon Christ throughout the day is to be ready and to be prepared for the most difficult trials of faith.

A forgetful hearer is in no condition to do battle with the enemy of our soul. A forgetful hearer is like the soldier that has fallen asleep on the job—he's not ready for the surprise attack. The Disciples of Christ had just witnessed Christ multiply the bread and the fish in order to feed the five thousand, and within 24 hours they had forgotten Christ—forgotten His power, His faithfulness, and His mercy. Dear ones, today let us learn that this same dreadful sin of forgetfulness will make us ill-prepared to face the trials and temptations in our life as well.

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (I) The Prayers of Christ Our Priest (Matthew 14:22-24); (II) The Power of Christ Our King (Matthew 14:25-33); (III) The Forgetfulness of the Disciples (Mark 6:52).

I. The Prayers of Christ Our Priest (Matthew 14:22-24).

A. After the Lord had miraculously fed the five thousand by multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish, He immediately compels the

disciples to leave, and quickly disperses the crowd that had just witnessed this amazing miracle (as we see in Matthew 14:22). Why does He do so? He would surely have had a very captive audience after such a miracle.

1. One reason was no doubt due to the lateness of the hour and being in a wilderness area. For by this time, it was very close to nightfall, and they needed to be heading home (Matthew 14:15). Although that might explain why the Lord quickly dispersed the crowd so quickly, it does not explain why He immediately constrained the disciples to leave.

2. The parallel passage (in John 6:14-15) provides another reason. The multitudes that witnessed this miracle saw in Christ one who could lead them to victory over the Romans. They were about to take him to Jerusalem in order to set Him up in Jerusalem as the political and civil King of the Jews, who would set the Jews free from Roman tyranny. However, this was not the nature of Christ's kingship or kingdom. So the Lord sends His disciples away before they are caught up in this movement (to which they were already predisposed to some degree).

a. Dear ones, Christ came to establish His kingdom and rule in the hearts and lives of people by means of His Word and Spirit—by means of preaching and teaching the Gospel of salvation. How did kings and nations come to submit themselves to Christ in the past (as in Scotland), and how will they do so in the future? Not by raw political force, but by the power of the Spirit through the effectual preaching of the Gospel. In the millennium, there will be an effectiveness in Gospel preaching that we have never witnessed, and the Lord will employ the persuasion of preaching and teaching rather than forced conversions at the point of a bayonet to bring the nations unto Himself (Romans 1:16).

b. That is not to deny that it is the responsibility of the magistrate to uphold the first four Commandments of God by suppressing the outward manifestation of heresy, idolatry, blasphemy, covenant-

breaking, and Sabbath-breaking. However, it must always be remembered that it is by moral persuasion, rather than by raw force that people come to Christ. There is no real conversion where there is no voluntary submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the Word, sacraments, and prayer are always the primary means to bring a biblical reformation to the nations of this world.

3. But our text provides us with another reason why the Lord sent His disciples ahead of Him by boat. The Lord sent them ahead of Himself in order that He might send them into another trial of their faith. Whereas in Mathew 8:23-27, the disciples were tested on the Sea of Galilee in the midst of a great storm while Christ was in the boat with them, they are now tested by another great storm on the Sea of Galilee while He is in the mountain praying for them. The Lord who stilled the sea and silenced the waves could have altogether prevented this severe storm which the disciples were about to face. But He is not only teaching His disciples the right doctrine, but teaching them to apply it to their lives.

a. Dear ones, intellectual knowledge of doctrine without practical application of it in our lives is not true knowledge. It may be accurate knowledge of the truth, but true knowledge of doctrine affects the whole man (for example, one who will not forgive his brother or stand ready to do so when there is repentance does not really understand the forgiveness of Christ).

b. How do you know that your children truly understand what you are teaching them? When they can by rote memory cite for you the correct answer? No, when they begin to show evidence of their understanding in the way in which they live (for example, you know your children understand the importance of prayer when they initiate their own secret worship without having to be told or reminded).

B. The Lord knew what He was sending His disciples into, and He

went into the mountain to pray for them that their faith would not be destroyed by this test. Perhaps the disciples thought as the wind and the waves began to pick up in intensity, “Oh no, here we go again, and this time the Lord is not even with us. What will happen to us this time?” But though He was not physically with them, they were not out of His sight or removed from His care (according to Mark 6:48a). Here is the loving intercession of Christ our Priest.

1. Yes, Christ does send you into severe trials and temptations of faith, but He never sends you forth without effectually praying that your faith not fail (compare what Christ says to Peter in Luke 22:31-32). He knows (better than you know yourself) the peculiar weaknesses of your flesh, and He prays that by faith in Him even those trials that tend to reveal your weaknesses will be used to glorify Him and grow you in your faith.

2. This was a most important lesson for the disciples to learn if they were to be effective once He was ascended into heaven. As you face physical afflictions, spiritual attacks from the enemy, financial upheaval, the loss of loved ones, or your own death, do you truly know that Christ is in the heavenly mountain and that He sees your rowing against those contrary winds of adversity, and that He with infinite love and tenderness is praying that your faith persevere and that the trial be used to your sanctification? This is one reason why we can be assured that we who have embraced the Lord by faith alone will never be cast out—Christ’s prayers are always answered by His Father. He ever lives to make intercession for you. Therefore, dear ones, never give up—you can’t lose when Christ is praying for you.

II. The Power of Christ Our King (Matthew 14:25-33).

A. Having seen the ministry of Christ as our Priest, let us now

witness the ministry of Christ as our King. I remind you that most of these disciples were experienced fishermen and knew how to handle the sea, but again the Lord thrust them into a situation wherein all confidence in their own abilities and gifts was dashed against the rocks. Why? So that only Christ might be shown to be their anchor in the midst of such a storm. The Lord not only prayed for them as their Priest, but came to them as their King, in order to subdue the fury of that which threatened to destroy them.

B. By the time the Lord had sent the disciples and the multitudes away, it was dark (somewhere most likely between 6 and 9 p.m., as we observe in John 6:17). About the fourth watch of the night, the Lord appeared to the disciples walking on the water (Matthew 14:25). The various “watches” of the night referred to periods of time in which soldiers were to stand guard throughout the night. The 1st watch was from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.; the 2nd watch was from 9 p.m. to midnight; the 3rd watch was from midnight to 3 a.m.; and the 4th watch was from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m.). The disciples had likely been rowing against this fierce storm for at least six long hours when the Lord finally appeared. And for that entire period of time, the Lord Jesus saw their intense struggle, and was praying for them (Mark 6:48). Why did the Lord wait so long to come to their aid? He waited in order to bring them to the point of a desperate faith as opposed to a mere convenient faith. It was in the fourth (or last) watch of the night in which their deliverance was realized.

1. How often does the Lord come to us in the fourth watch to rescue us from those afflictions and trials that would overwhelm us? His timing is always perfect (even if we might have prayed and wished for his coming to deliver us after a few minutes of struggling). However, dear ones, He is never a second too early or a second too late in rescuing us.

2. How we must cast ourselves upon the Lord and His infinite

wisdom in the trials we face. We may feel battered. We may feel as if we have been deserted. We may feel as if there is no strength left to fight the battle any longer. But here comes Christ, not in the first watch of the night, but in the fourth watch of the night. Here He comes walking victoriously as our King upon the stormy waves, in order to show forth His might and power to grant us His grace in delivering us or in causing us to persevere. Here is the reason why we can never give up and quit as a Christian—the Lord will come to us, even if it is in the fourth watch of the night.

C. The disciples become terrified when they see Christ walk on the water, thinking Him to be a spirit. The word “troubled” (in our English text in Matthew 14:26) is not strong enough. It has the idea of being shaken with confusion. The Lord sends them yet into another stormy situation, wherein they face turbulent winds and waves, and they think they see a spirit passing them by. Needless to say, their fears have by now overwhelmed them. Then come the words of Christ our Prophet: “Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid” (Matthew 14:27). Be of good cheer, or be courageous. Why? “It is I.” Beloved, there is the Word that charms all our fears. When we truly know that Christ, the eternal and almighty Son of God, the Lover of our souls, is with us, fear must flee. For a sinful fear of man or circumstances cannot abide in the presence of Christ the sovereign King (any more than darkness can abide when the light is turned on).

D. At this point, Peter hearing the words of Christ shows forth an amazing faith.

1. Upon hearing that it was Christ and that he need not fear, Peter seeks permission from Christ to come to Him (this would seem to be a sincere act of faith and love on Peter’s part). His faith and love were

genuine, but not yet matured.

2. Peter actually joins the Lord on the water, and begins to walk toward Him. All is going great as long as Peter's eye of faith is fixed upon the Lord; but when He looks around and sees the ferocity of the wind (and no doubt the waves), when his eyes are taken off of the Lord through fear, he sinks into the depths. In desperation, he cries to the Lord, and Christ mercifully rescues Peter, and brings him back up to the surface in order to walk with him on the water the rest of the way back to the boat. We see the amazing power of Christ that issues forth in rescuing Peter, but also in Peter actually walking on the water himself.

3. Note how tender the Lord is with this doubting Christian. The Lord says to Peter, "O thou of little faith [not great faith—GLP], wherefore didst thou doubt" (Matthew 14:31). The Lord does not leave Peter to perish in his sin of doubt and unbelief, even though he began so well and then fell. Peter had actually walked on the water by means of his faith in the power of Christ. And yet shortly thereafter, he still fell into doubt and unbelief. Is this not the experience of all those who trust in Christ alone for their eternal salvation? But dear ones, do not overlook what is most remarkable—Christ is there to save Peter (and to rescue all Peters, like ourselves, who are of "little faith"). The Lord herein teaches Peter that the only way he can walk on water (that is, tread upon all the adversities and trials of faith in this life) is to walk with the eye of faith on Christ our power, Christ our righteousness, and Christ our salvation.

E. Christ not only wondrously demonstrates His Kingship over all creation by walking on the water (wherein He subdues all things unto Himself), but also by silencing this mighty storm immediately as He and Peter stepped inside the boat (Matthew 14:32). For hours these experienced fishermen had struggled to get to shore, and in a moment the waves and wind ceased altogether. To go from such total chaos to

such a perfect peace, illustrates so graphically the difference between one who is by nature in rebellion against Christ, but by the same power that calmed the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee is brought to embrace Christ by faith (as was the apostle Paul).

III. The Forgetfulness of the Disciples (Mark 6:52).

A. Herein is expressed the root problem which the Lord sought to expose in the faith of the disciples—they had a weak faith because they had a forgetful faith. They did not understand the miracle performed just a few hours before in their presence, wherein Christ had multiplied the five loaves of bread and two so as to feed thousands of people. It was an amazing thing to see (they had witnessed this miracle with their own eyes), but it quickly faded from their memory (showing they did not truly understand its significance). Rather than remembering Christ's miracle, rather than meditating upon Christ's undeserved mercy to the multitudes, rather than applying Christ's amazing power and faithfulness to their present situation upon the stormy sea, they had not laid it up in their hearts and practiced in their lives.

B. Let us consider similar exhortations from the Lord to Israel that they be not forgetful of God's mercy, power, faithfulness, and righteousness in the following passages: Psalm 103:2; Deuteronomy 8:11-20.

C. Is forgetfulness really that grievous of a sin against God? Dear ones, it is the sin of forgetfulness that leads us away from God and into the very sins that so heavily weigh us down. As parents, we may make certain allowances for our children's forgetfulness when they are very young. But there comes a time when forgetfulness is no longer a viable

excuse for not picking up his toys. If you continue to accept his forgetfulness (“But Dad, I forgot”) as a valid excuse for his disobedience, he’ll soon be using it for not taking out the trash (and the excuses will continue from childhood into adulthood). This is the nature of the corruption within us. We naturally seek to justify our sin.

1. Dear ones, forgetfulness in the Christian life is often just another word for neglectfulness. We are forgetful because we are so neglectful and have not put Christ and His mighty works in the preeminent place that He so highly deserves in our lives. Unless there is a physiological problem with that part of our brain that recalls information, we ordinarily remember that which is truly important to us.

2. Have you lately recounted for your children the many mighty acts of God, the many benefits with which you have been blessed (Psalm 78:7)? Are you a forgetful hearer or an effectual doer of God’s Word? Dear ones, we will find ourselves falling into a sea of doubt in our lives in our lives, if we do not remember His truth and works, if we do not meditate upon them, if we do not talk of them with others, if we do not continue to thank Him for His faithfulness. Without a remembering heart—fear, doubt, unbelief, and sin of every kind will likely take advantage of us. The disciples fell, because they did not remember Christ in all of His glory, in all of His power, in all of His mercy, in all of His faithfulness, and in all of His righteousness. You and I will surely do the same if we forget Him.

3. Although we might forget Him, Christ will not forget those who embrace Him by faith alone. Faltering and weak as we may be—He will not forget us (according to Isaiah 49:14-16). He is always praying for us that our faith in Him may not be destroyed. Dear ones, take hope, take courage, for Jesus comes to you even in the fourth watch of the night, saying, “It is I. Be not afraid.”

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