

# Sinking In

## Following When It's Frightening

August 27, 2023

Today we're learning how to *follow* when we'd much rather *run the other way!*

Last Sunday we saw how *true serving* is about *saving*; which is brought about by sincere *caring* and *concern* and *compassion*; which may require *confrontation, confession, apologies, forgiveness,* and *restoration*. Sooo ... **Where won't you follow Jesus?** Let me *answer* that for you – for *all* of us, actually. **Where we don't want to go; to face what we don't want to face; to do what we don't want to do!** And it's far more about *situations* and *circumstances* than *physical places*.



Remember when *Peter* put his *foot down* and, not only *refused* to *follow* Jesus, but *tried* to *convince* Him that He had the *destination* all *wrong*?



Jesus began to *show* to His disciples **[in Scripture]** that He must *go* to *Jerusalem*, and *suffer* ... and be *killed*, and be *raised* the *third day*. Then *Peter* took Him aside and began to *rebuke* Him, saying, "*Far* be it from You, Lord; this shall *not happen* to You!" **["You won't need to be raised, if You don't go to Jerusalem to suffer and die."]** But He turned and said to *Peter*, "*Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God,*" – Matthew 16:21-23 NKJ



"How *dare* you say I shall not *suffer*!" **From Peter's perspective, Jesus was going the wrong way** – cuz *Peter* wasn't *paying attention* to the *Scriptures* Jesus *showed* 'em. And, **how can we follow the Lord if we won't even listen to Him?** But, at the *Last Supper*, *Peter* kind of *came* to his *senses*, and:



*Peter* asked Him, "Lord, where *are* You going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, *you cannot follow now*, **[your faith isn't strong in Scripture]** *but you will follow later.*" *Peter* asked, "Lord, *why* can't I follow You *now*? I will lay down my life for You." Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for Me? I tell you the *truth*, before the rooster crows, *you will disown* Me three times! – John 13:36-38 NIV

Which He *sadly, exactly, regretfully, did*. **Because he didn't commit this truth to his heart.**

*Peter* was sitting out in the courtyard, and a *servant girl* came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. But he *denied* it before them *all*. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where *another girl* saw him and said to the people *there*, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." He *denied* it *again*, with an *oath*: "I don't know the man!" After a little while, those standing there went up to *Peter* and said, "Surely you *are one* of them, for your *accent* gives you away." Then he began to call down curses on himself and he *swore* to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken ... and he went outside and *wept bitterly*. – Matthew 26:69-75 NIV

Because Jesus was *right*. *Bitter weeping* is the kind of *crying* when you *hate* yourself rather than *feel sorry* for yourself. So **we must treasure up God's Word in our heart, to prepare our faith for the battle, whenever, and however it comes.** Sooo, **where are you not prepared to follow Jesus?** When does *submission* seem *too risky* – or even *unreasonable* – from *your* perspective?



I've warned you that **sin will always take you further than you want to go, and keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.** But, I should probably *also* warn you that ... **the same goes for Jesus!** He'll also *take you further* than you want to go, and *keep you longer* than you want to stay, and *charge you more* than you want to pay. Which is why we're warned to count the cost to follow the One who paid the price! Cuz **His love is too fierce, and His plan too immense.** So pick your *poison* – or make it your *medicine*. And **prepare your heart with His Word.** And *take heart!* Unlike *sin*, the *places* He's *planning to take you* will *satisfy, gratify, purify, and beautify* you *far more* than our *small, self-centered perspectives* can *imagine ... or desire*. Cuz **He has to crucify us in the process.** Oh, did I leave that *part* out of the *passage*?

He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an *offense* to Me, for you are not *mindful* of the things of *God*, but the things of *men*." Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. – Matthew 16:23-24 NKJ

What do you *think* that *they* thought He was *thinking*? Because, at that point, they don't know about the cross like we do. So they *gotta* be thinking, "He *can't* mean a *cross-cross*." Cuz we *try* to *convince ourselves* that He *can't* mean whatever *scary* thing that *deep down* we *think* He *means*, whenever **the path that leads us to life, passes through suffering and death ... by crucifixion no less!** Keep in mind, however, that **He died for our sin;** whereas **we must die to our sin.** So our cross is very *different* from *His* cross. But it's *still* a *cross to bear*, because **we must die to self.** So, is that what you signed up *for*? "No; I just want to go to heaven." Well, as Jesus said: *He's the Door!* The *only way*, and *truth*, and *life*; and *no one* comes to our Father any *other way*. (1 Jn 14:6)

"My sheep listen to My voice; **in My Word** ... and they *follow* Me." – John 10:27 NIV

And it's *not* like His *sheep* have a *choice* in the *matter*. Cuz He *also* said:

"Whoever *serves* Me *must follow* Me" – John 12:26 NIV

"But whoever *loses* his *life* for *Me* and for the *Gospel* will *save* it. – Mark 8:35-36 NIV

"And anyone who does *not* take his *cross* and *follow* Me is *not worthy* of Me." – Matthew 10:38 NIV

So, **how much are you willing to risk for Jesus?** Will you *follow* when He *takes* you *further* than you want to *go*? And *remain* when He *keeps* you *longer* than you want to *stay*? And *give* when He *asks* for *more* than you want to *surrender*? **We prefer to play it safe with our faith.** But, Jesus *hates* that. And He won't *allow* it. Because it *prevents* us from building *trust*. So, **how often do your fears overpower your obedience?** If you're anything like the rest of us: *too often*.

But don't worry; **Jesus has a way of scaring us straight.** We'd likely be *shocked* to see how many of the *scariest moments* in our lives thus far were *allowed*, if not *arranged*, for the *eternal best of all involved*. Remember when Jesus *commanded* the boys to *cross the lake*, to face a *terrifying storm*, only to then be *terrified* by Jesus' *power* and *authority*?

[Jesus] gave *orders* to *cross* to the other side of the *lake*. ... Then *He* got into the *boat* and *His disciples followed Him*. Without *warning*, a *furious storm* came up on the lake, so that the waves swept *over* the boat. But Jesus was *sleeping*. The disciples **[finally]** went and woke Him, saying, "Lord, *save us!* We're going to *drown!*" – Matthew 8:18, 23-25 NIV



**Seems their terror finally forced them to turn to Him as their only hope.** And so:



He got up, *rebuked* the *wind* and said to the *waves*, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and **[the waves collapsed flat, and]** it was *completely calm*. He said to His disciples, "*Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*" They were **[still]** *terrified* and asked each other, "*Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!*" – Mark 4:39-41 NIV



It's *only* us *free-willers* who *don't*. Which is why **He purposely places us in the path of storms.** He's *teaching* us. He's *training* us. He's *strengthening* us. He's *developing* us. And that *requires* the *storms of life*. And so, **He justifies, He sanctifies,** and **He terrifies.** Remember when *Jonah* went the *opposite direction*, when the Lord sent him to *go* and *try* to *save his enemies*? So:



The Lord *sent* a *great wind* on the *sea*, and such a *violent storm* arose that the ship threatened to *break up*. – Jonah 1:4 NIV



Because **that's what it often takes to get our full attention.** And our *attention* pleases Him. And:

The Lord does whatever *pleases* Him ... *on the seas* and *in their depths*. ... He *sends* the *lightning* with the *rain* and *releases* the *wind* from His storehouses. – Psalm 135:6-7 NLT

Remember the *2nd time* He *sent* the boys *out* on the *same lake* to face a *similar storm* *all alone*?

Jesus *made* the disciples get into the boat and go *on ahead* of Him to the other side ... **[and]** went up on a *mountainside* by himself to pray. When *evening* came ... the boat was *already* a *considerable distance* from land, *buffeted* by the *waves* because the *wind* was *against* it. **[So He waited and]** During the *fourth watch* of the *night* **[3:00-6:00 am]** Jesus went out to them, walking *on* the *lake*. When the disciples *saw* Him ... they were *terrified*. "It's a ghost," they said, and *cried out* **[likely to the Lord]** in *fear*. But Jesus *immediately* said to them: "*Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.*" **[This is all Me]** "Lord, *if* [i.e. *since*] it's You," Peter replied, "*tell me to come to You on the water.*" **[Cuz if Jesus commands it, it's doable!]** "Come," He said. Then Peter got down *out* of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But **[Jesus cranked things up; and]** when he saw the *wind*, **[lit. the wind's might]** he **[took his eyes off the Lord, and]** was *afraid* and, *beginning to sink*, cried out, "Lord, *save me!*" *Immediately* Jesus reached out His *hand* and *caught* him. "You of *little faith*," He said, **[ask yourself]** "*why did you doubt?*" **[How much wind is too much wind?]** – Matthew 14:22-31 NIV

Jesus has *gotta* be *proud* of Peter. In the *first* storm, He called them of “no faith”, but *now* Peter’s of “little faith”. Like a *dad* calling his son: *little man*. Go *Peter!* Whether He’s *sending* ‘em into a *storm*, *amping up* the *wind*, or *appearing* as a *ghost*, **He’s purposely doing what a loving Savior does with little free-willers who tend to forget to cry out to our Father: giving ‘em a reason!**



Don’t write off the *ghost-thing* to *superstition*. The *first* terrifying storm ended on a *hillside shore* where a terrifying legion of *screamin’ demons* possessed a *heard* of *suicidal swine*. **If this sea ghost is Legion, it’d be just another journey with Jesus!** So give His *boys* a *break*. They don’t know *what to expect!* Except that **He’ll do all He can to help us to find the end of ourselves.**

Cuz we *almost always* need a *little nudge* ... or a *big nudge*. Cuz **we tie His hands till we surrender to His will and cry out for help.** And it’s not *enough* to just *cry out* to Jesus in the “no faith” boat; that’s a *good start*. But eventually **you gotta take courage and ask Him to lead you to leave the boat to come to Him on the water.** Imagine *Peter* taking that *first crazy, heart-stopping step!* After that, it’s an *ongoing matter* of keeping your *eyes on* Him and *crying out* to Him the *moment they drift from* Him. **Ever walk confidently on water ... when it’s ice ... till you hear it crack?**



Even if you *know* it’s plenty *thick* to support your *weight*, there’s just a *natural reflexive terror* that *courses* through the *veins!* That happened to me many times on the *slough*. Including *once* when I *fell through*. This is what **it’s like to be led by the Lord to all the confrontation, and confession, and apologies, and forgiveness, and restoration He expects – demands – from His followers.**

**Faith is all about taking that first step, building confidence, and keeping your eyes on Jesus and crying out when you hear the ice crack.** All He needs are *little mustard seeds* of *faith*. Because, **the critical factor in faith isn’t its size, but its object.** Focus on Jesus and you’ll remain *faithful*. Let your *eyes wander* and you’re *sunk*. Peter’s only *problem* was that he *let* the *wind* *distract* him from the *One* who *made* the *wind*. I don’t *blame* him. I’ve *stepped* out in *faith*, many times, and *heard* the *ice crack*, and had that *sinking feeling*, and *took* my *eyes off* Jesus. But then, that’s all *part* of the *master plan*. *Matthew*, who *never* got out of the *boat*, also wrote:

And when *they* climbed into the *boat*, the *wind* died down. – Matthew 14:32 NIV

**Jesus could’ve calmed the water before Peter walked on it.** But, where’s the *fun* in *that?* Or the *triumph?* Or the *growth* or *gain* or *glory?* **He wants to walk us through the storms.** Because, with Jesus, **it’s all about the adventure of training and stretching and testing.** I wonder if Peter *looked* at the *others* and said, “I’m of *little faith!*” Face it: **you can’t play it safe and follow Jesus.** He won’t *allow* it. You’ll never *build trust* or *develop* your *faith*.

So, **where won’t you follow Jesus?** How *much* are you *willing* to *risk?* Peter would *call* it “*leaving the boat*”. Jesus *calls* it, *just* another *day* on the *job*. So **don’t let fear overpower your obedience.**

**Get out of the boat. Take a walk on the water. And have a little faith.**