

Beware The Obstacles Of Our Faith
Matthew 14:30-33

Intro: Until you have walked in snow shoes you have never experienced real hard walking. When you put snowshoes on there is a foot strap that connects you to the shoe but the foot straps are only connected to the shoe near the toe of your foot on a hinge like thing. To walk in them you have to pick up your foot, not drag it like we do normally, and the shoe as well completely off the snow to keep from falling.

When walking on flat ground it isn't too hard but when you come to an obstacle, something like a hill or log, it takes extreme strength to not only get the foot and shoe up in the air but you have to get it high enough to get over or up the obstacle. Now just walking in these shoes takes a great deal of leg muscle and can make the ol' leg muscles burn after awhile. So when you come see one of those obstacles looming out in front of you, you think ok it's a hill, trying to psychic yourself up for the pain you know is coming. But the closer it gets the bigger it gets until as you reach it you are not even sure you can overcome it.

In our final look of the text in Matthew 14 and Peter's life defining walk on water we are going to look at obstacles; ***Obstacles Of Our Faith.***

[Read Matthew 14:30-33/pray/dismiss Jr. Church]

You may be facing one of life's big obstacles right now - financially, medically, in your family, your work. And right now you've stopped walking by faith, you're looking at how big that obstacle is - and the longer you look, the bigger it's getting. And the weaker and more paralyzed you're feeling.

That must have been how Peter felt when he ***saw the wind boisterous.*** Know wonder he was afraid, he saw the obstacle and it was too big for him and it paralyzed his faith - froze it in place.

When we are called to step out by faith to accomplish something for the Lord Satan will always through obstacles in our way, obstacles designed to keep us in the boat. If, however, we are aware of those obstacles we can prepare for them and overcome them before they paralyze us freezing us in the boat.

What are the three obstacles to our faith?

I. ***The First Obstacle of our faith is – FEAR***

- A. Peter was fine until, “...***he saw the wind boisterous,*** it was then that “...***he was afraid...***”
 - 1. When Peter saw the wind his focus changed from the ***object*** of his faith to the ***obstacle*** of his faith
 - 2. ***He saw the wind***
 - a. Other than a dust or sand storm can we say we have seen the wind?
 - 1). We can feel the wind
 - 2). We can see it's effects
 - 3). We can't actually see the wind
 - 3. What is going on here is that Peter took his eyes off of Jesus just long enough to see the force of the wind, its effect on the water around him.
 - 4. Peter began to be afraid once he looked at his ***circumstances rather than his Savior.***
- B. The same is true with us isn't it?

1. We decide to do something by faith
 2. Everything starts out OK
 3. Then opposition arises, we suffer some setback – we *See the Wind* – our circumstances
 4. That is when it happens, we lose sight of Jesus – the one who has called us to do whatever it is
 5. We begin to focus on circumstances – setbacks, failures and opposition
 6. Once that happens we begin to rehearse the reasons why we can't do what the Lord has called us to
 7. Our faith is shaken, fear creeps in we can actually retreat from the task.
- C. That ***Sinking feeling sets in*** and rather than continue on – attempting great things for God we begin to sink – we can only see failure
1. That is the natural response to fear – failure
 2. Once Peter saw the wind he began to sink and he went from Boat Potato Hero to Boat Potato zero in a glance
- D. As usually happens once we begin to sink we ***cry out in fear*** –Peter did.
1. Do you know what the number one command in Scripture is?
 - a. It isn't Love God
 - b. It isn't Love Jesus
 - c. It isn't Love your neighbor
 2. It is ***Fear Not***
 3. More than any other command God commands his people to ***Fear Not or be not afraid***

4. Why does God command us so often to not fear?
 - a. Fear doesn't seem like the most serious sin of vice
 - b. It isn't one of the 7 deadly sins
 - c. So why does he use it so often?
 5. I don't think it is because he wants us to spare us the emotional discomfort that goes along with fear
 6. In fact the command is used most often to get someone to do something that is going to lead them into greater fear anyway
 7. The reason he uses ***fear not*** so often is because he knows that fear is the #1 reason why we are tempted to avoid doing what God asks of us
 8. Fear is the #1 reason why most of us refuse to get out of the boat
 9. Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie, Chaplain of the United States Senate from 1995-2003, has found that there are 366 "***Fear Not***" verses, in all the various forms (fear not, do not fear, be not afraid) in Scripture. That is one for every day of the year including Leap Year.
- II. ***The Second Obstacle of our faith is – DOUBT***
- A. Fear always gives birth to doubt.
1. In our text Jesus said, as he reached out to grab Peter's hand as he was sinking, "***...O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?***" V. 31
 2. When Jesus cursed the fig tree and the disciples marveled Jesus told them that if "***...verily I say unto you, If ye have faith,***

and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.” (Matt.21:21)

- B. Jesus is telling us that it is doubt that blocks our faith
1. It is said that “Faith unlocks the storehouses of God – doubt locks them back again.”
 2. I have often thought that Mother Teresa was possibly saved, in spite of her Catholic background.
 3. But listen to what new book that has many of her correspondences written over her life time has to say:

“Although perpetually cheery in public, the Teresa of the letters lived in a state of deep and abiding spiritual pain. In more than 40 communications, many of which have never before been published, she bemoans the “dryness,” “darkness,” “loneliness” and “torture” she is undergoing. She compares the experience to hell and at one point says it has driven her to doubt the existence of heaven and even of God.”

4. All the potential blessings her faith could have opened up to her were locked up in her doubt.
 5. It is likely that her works is what she counted on for salvation and not faith in Jesus Christ.
- C. **Doubt is nothing more than unbelief in disguise**
1. Matthew tells us that when Jesus went into his “own country” that He **“...did not many**

mighty works there because of their unbelief.” (Matt13:58).

2. Jesus was hampered by the obstacle of unbelief how much more so us when we begin to doubt
3. Another time the disciples were trying to cure a young man who was a lunatic. When they couldn't cure him Jesus said to them that it was, **“...ecause of your unbelief: ...”** (Matt. 17:20).
4. If doubt locks the storehouses of God unbelief blocks the flow of his power.

The First Obstacle of our faith is – FEAR, The Second Obstacle of our faith is – DOUBT...

III. **The Third Obstacle of our faith is - UNDERSTANDING**

- A. Let me ask you a question; *“How big is your God?”*
1. **III:** When our kids were growing up I can remember playing with them, taking them by the hands and raising them above their heads and saying to them that they were, *“Soooo big!”* As they got older and were able to talk I would ask them *“How big are you?”* and they would respond by raising their hands over their heads and spread their arms apart and say, *“I’m sooo big”* In their minds it meant, *“I am huge”, “I’m enormous.” “In fact there is no telling how big I am.”*
 2. Of course their answer to my, *“how big are you?”* question was not scientific and their answer doesn't work in every context, for example: If your wife comes into you and says *‘how big do my hips look’*, you better not

- through your hands up in the air and answer 'soooo big'. That will not be a good answer.
3. I would tell my kids to say 'so big' because I wanted them to realize they were growing.
 - a. We know that the way they think about themselves matters
 - b. We don't want them to think of themselves as small, weak, and lacking adequate strength to handle the challenges of life
 4. Back to my original question "How big is your God?" "How big is Christ in your life?"
- B. In the middle of the story of water walking we find a very interesting statement
1. There in verse 27, when the disciples first see Jesus walking on the water and he says **"...Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."**
 2. The Greek word translated 'I' is the Greek version of the name God gave to Moses on the mount.
 3. The literal translation of that statement would be, **'Be of good courage, I am [he], be not afraid.'**
 - a. Most English translations add the word 'he' after 'I am' but it isn't in the original Greek
 - b. The disciples, especially Peter, knew what Jesus meant when He said **"I am"**
 - c. Commentator Dale Bruner says, *"This is no ordinary hello in water; it is the divine Lord addressing his needy*

- church. The gospel of the story is in this great address."*
- d. Jesus intends for his fear-prone followers to understand that this earth is in the hands of an infinite Lord whose character and competence can be trusted.
 - e. In our modern slang language Jesus in saying, *"It's like this, dudes, Courage! I AM! Don't be afraid!"*
4. I am convinced that the way you and I live by faith is a consequence of the size of our God.
 - a. The problem is that for far too many of us our God is way too small
 - b. We are not convinced that we are absolutely safe in the hands of a fully competent, all-knowing, ever-present God
 5. What happens if we try to live our faith with a small God?
 - a. We live in fear and anxiety because everything depends on us – Our mood will be governed by our circumstances
 - b. We will live in a universe that leaves us vulnerable
 - c. We see too many things as being decided by chance not an all-sovereign, almighty, all-powerful, Big God!
 6. When we have a chance to share our faith - we shrink back

- a. 'What if we are rejected or cannot find the right words?' 'It all depends on us'
 - b. 'We cannot be generous because our financial security depends on us'
 - c. We don't deal with relationship problems because we don't live in the security of a Big God's acceptance, we are slaves to what others think of us
7. When we shrink God – or when we create God in our image – we offer prayers without real faith, work without passions, serve without joy, suffer without real hope
 8. It results in fear, retreat, loss of vision and failure to persevere.
- C. **ILL:** One day two pastors were walking along the sidewalk, in a not to great part of town. As they passed by a bar a fight that was taking place inside spilled onto the street, like a scene out of an old Western. Three men were beating up on one lone opponent. He was bleeding and was obviously in great distress.

The two pastors looked at each other and realized they had to do something so they went back to the spot where the fight was taking place and planned to tell the three men, in no uncertain terms that this fight was over. Unfortunately, neither man had much experience in that sort of thing. It seemed they both had missed the class in Bible College that covered how to break up a barroom brawl. They had spent too much time in church to have developed the effective language to intervene in this type situation. All there

experience in breaking up fights in the past had dealt with breaking up fights between 3 years olds in jr. church.

Breaking up a drunken brawl was way out of their league. Yet when they arrived at where the fight was taking place they decided to get out of the boat and do something. They spoke prophetically to them, and then waited for their first experience at a fist fight.

Surprisingly though, the three thugs looked up at them with fear in their eyes, stood up and began to run away. The two men looked at each other and one of them asked *'should we stop them to ask why they were running?'* he wanted to know just what words actually scared them so much. But they chose rather to let well enough alone.

Then they looked over their shoulders and their, right behind them stood a 6'.7" man who had to weigh in at 275 or so, with perhaps 2 % body fat. They never got his name but from that day forward they referred to him as Mongo. Mongo didn't say a word; he just stood there with muscles bulging. He looked as if he hoped the three would come back. This was an area of great competence for him – breaking up fights was his *'spiritual gift'*. He was the bounce from the bar.

Of course at that moment the two pastors attitudes changed. They wanted to yell at the three men running away, *'You'd better not let us catch you hanging around here again!'* They were different men ready to serve and help anyone who needed helping.

They were fearless; why they were ready to confront anyone and everyone who passed by. Their fear and anxiety was replaced by confidence and security. Why? Because Mongo was standing over them. They had experienced a *Mongophany*. They were no longer alone in the fight in the middle of a barroom fight they felt perfectly safe. In fact one man said to the other as they walked away, *'If I were convinced that Mongo was with me 24hrs a day, 7 days a week, I would have a completely different approach to life.'* Of course he isn't and the men, and you an men too, don't need a Mongo with us.

We have one that is bigger, greater than any Mongo could ever be – the great I AM is with me and He says, *'Courage, I AM! Don't be afraid!'*

Conclusion: All of us from time to time are asked to get out of the boat, take a step of faith and just trust the Lord. Unfortunately at the moment we have to step out three obstacles to taking that first step jump in front of us - ***The First Obstacle of our faith is – FEAR which in turn leads to The Second Obstacle of our faith is – DOUBT and all our related to The Third Obstacle of our faith is – OUR UNDERSTANDING, knowing just how big a God we serve***