

Unsinkable – Focus Matters

10/10/21

Matthew 14:22-33

Sunday AM

In honor of the fall classic – do you know what is considered the hardest activity in sports? No, it's not blocking a penalty kick in soccer or pole vaulting – although both are hard; nor is it trying to hit a golf ball straight – which is impossible. And although true, the hardest thing to do in sports is not *staying healthy!*

According to science, the hardest activity in sports is trying to hit a fastball. In fact, the physics are insane. A pitcher stands 60'6" from home plate, throws a ball 2.86" in diameter at a avg. velocity of 95+ mph to a hitter holding a cylinder bat 2.75" in diameter – who has only 150 milliseconds to decide when/where to swing as the ball takes less than 10 milliseconds to travel thru the hitting zone – it's literally the blink of an eye. And if that's not crazy enough, to hit a ball on the sweet spot requires the hitter to make contact on the bat on a spot smaller than a dime. CRAZY!

So, to hit a baseball, (1) thing is absolutely imperative – ***you have to keep your eye on the ball – and your head in the game*** – and the same could be said about life, faith, and following Jesus! *We have to turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full into His wonderful face.*

Such was the case for Peter that incredible evening on the Sea of Galilee when he was learning how to keep his eyes on Jesus and his head in the game.

*After dismissing the crowd, Jesus had the disciples get into the boat to go on ahead of Him to the other side. After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night, He was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves b/c the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. They cried out in fear, "It's a ghost." Then Jesus said, "Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." Peter replied, "Lord, if it's you, command me to come to You on the water." Jesus said, "Come." Then Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately, Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. Then Jesus said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Matthew 14:23-33*

In case you're just joining us, we've been in a study learning how to navigate the highs/lows of life w/ an **unsinkable faith**. So far, we've learned (1) *we must see Jesus for who He is instead of seeing Him only for who we want Him to be.* (2) *the CL life is walking step-by-step and hand-in-hand in the presence, power, and provision of God in the everyday moments of life.*

Then last week, we learned that life/faith are more about our **CALLING** than our *convenience*, more about our **CHOICES** than our *challenges*, and more about our **CONVICTIONS** than our *circumstances*.

As we were wrapping up last week, we also took time to focus on the difference b/w **faith/doubt**. If you recall – **doubt** is being pulled apart in (2) different directions or ruled by (2) opposing masters – whereas **faith** is to be guided/directed by single certainty of conviction.

This doesn't mean that faith has to be **perfect** (b/c it will never be), but it **MUST** be **fixed/focused**.

*Since you've been raised w/ Christ, **set your hearts** on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Focus/fix your mind** on things above, not on earthly things.* Colossians 3:1-2

I think of the word **fixing** in Hebrews 12:1-3:

I didn't say that great southern word – **fix'in**. As in we *fix'in* to go on a trip or momma's *fix'in* dinner. I said fixing – as in to set one's focus on someone/thing.

**fixing** – *to turn your eyes from what's **uncertain** to set them on what is **certain** so you might walk **straight***. It's setting your focus on what worthy of your trust.

I believe we have a wonderful example of this idea here in this event w/ Peter/Jesus on the Sea of Galilee.

Look again at the **TEXT** – *Then Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately, Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. Then Jesus said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

While we have a clear picture of what's happening here, **there's still much left to the imagination**. How fierce were the winds? How choppy the waves? How reluctant was Peter? **How engaged was Jesus?**

Sure, I'd imagine Peter was anxious; yet I'm certain Jesus was cheering him on by saying something like – **"Pete... keep your eyes on me and your head in the game. Don't look down! Don't look around! Fix your eyes on Me!"**

And for however long Peter focused on Jesus, he walked on the water. Whether it was for 10-20 ft., Peter defied nature/gravity to walk on water. But then, like so many of us, the wind/waves – or maybe just the realization of the moment – caused him to turn his focus from Jesus to his surroundings.

Personally, I believe there is a reason Matthew wanted us to hear about this event – it's b/c God wants us to learn a **big lesson** – so long as Peter focused on Jesus, *on what was certain*, he walked; but the moment he was distracted, he sank.

**Let me say it another way** – when Peter walked in the *power, provision, and presence* of God – his faith worked; yet the sec. he trusted in his ability/ingenuity – he sank. **WHY?** B/c God never intended for His people to live the Christian life independently of Him.

How do we fix/focus our eyes on Jesus? **Hebrews 12:1-3**

*Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles – and let us run w/ endurance the race marked out for us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author/perfector of our faith. Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so you will not grow weary or lose heart.*

F – **FOLLOW** the Example of Godly Believers

*Since we're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses*

To **fix our eyes** on Jesus begins w/ receiving great encouragement from **the saints who've gone before us** and **from those who walk beside us**.

Whether it's one of the patriarchs, one of the disciples, or some other hero in the faith **in this great cloud of witnesses**, the saints who've gone before us – who've run their race, and counted their cost – they are Divine mentors for us. Listen to Paul's word to Timothy:

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there's in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but to all who've longed for His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8*

**Paul set an example for us all** – and this is why being God's Word is so important. We learn from the saints before us how to engage/follow God.

**But we also have one another** – and our calling is to serve to help each other to thrive in our faith by *spurring one another along towards love/good deeds* – towards intimacy/service w/ God.

**Thus, your life, example, and calling matter.** As you look to others, others will be looking to you. So, while Jesus is the only perfect standard, *it means the people we select as our faith examples to emulate need to be able to pick Jesus out of a line-up.*

I – **INSPECT** Your Actions, Attitudes, and Ambitions

*let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...*

**IOW** – regularly *audit* the intentions of your heart by ***checking*** your motives, by ***evaluating*** your thoughts, and by ***monitoring*** your actions. B/c it matters!

***No one can win the race of life if they're encumbered by the things of this world.*** Can you imagine an Olympic sprinter trying to race against other sprinters carrying someone/thing on his back while the other sprinters get to race uninhibited?

Sin/worry aren't our friends. They ***weigh*** us down, ***trip*** us up, and ***tear*** us apart. They kill, steal, and destroy.

God urges us to take responsibility for our attitudes, ambitions, and actions by bringing them into the light of His grace so they won't trip us up or weigh us down.

**throw off** – to remove/let go of what can inhibit your ability to run. **It's choosing holiness over heaviness.**

*W/ minds alert/sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus is revealed at His coming. As obedient children, don't conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who called you is holy, be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, b/c I am holy." 1 Peter 1:13-16*

X – **EXERCISE** Pursuing God's Word and Will

*let us run w/ endurance the race marked out for us...*

Last week I shared that apart from salvation, the chief blessing God has given to us is a Divine purpose and calling. That is, if you're a child of God, He wants you to know/live out His will marked out for your life. To exercise God's will requires we live in accordance w/ His Word. God's will has **TWO** aspects to it:

(1) God's **GENERAL** will is found in His Word. In Scripture, God tells us about who He is, who we are, and how we can know/serve Him. In Scripture, we find everything we need for life/godliness.

If we will follow/live out His general will, then God will reveal His **SPECIFIC** will for our lives.

Our job in experiencing God's is to run our race w/ endurance. **IOW** – we are called to live in daily pursuit of God's will by seeking first His rule/righteousness.

**The key idea** is **endurance**. To run w/ endurance is to walk in alignment under the influence/direction of God. Instead of pursuing life according to my ability, ingenuity, and desire, I pursue life under the guidance of the H.S. This requires a Divine intentionality of **seeking** first, **submitting** fully, and **servicing** fervently.

E – **EMBRACE** Walking Intimately w/ Jesus Daily

*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author/perfector of our faith. Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God...*

**fixing** – to take your eyes off what is uncertain to focus on what is certain – so you can walk in a straight line.

- Focus on His **PERSON** – b/c Jesus is the author and finisher of your faith.
- Focus on His **PASSION** – b/c only the cross is sufficient to pay in full the debt of your sin.
- Focus on His **POSITION** – b/c He is sitting at the right-hand interceding on your behalf.

This means we must to prioritize following Jesus above all else by *seeking to know Him to be like Him*.

*But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. I consider everything a loss b/c of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus as my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things and consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in Him..., I want to know Christ in the power of his resurrection and in the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death... Philippians 3:7-10*

Such a faith doesn't occur thru spiritual osmosis but only thru determined, diligent pursuit and surrender.

D – **DWELL** on the Cost of the Cross Frequently

*Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so you will not grow weary or lose heart.*

**IOW** – When you grow tired/weary, don't forget what it cost God to give you His grace/forgiveness.

**consider** – to take a full account or to count the cost.

*Jesus said to them, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Luke 9:23-25*

I recently read of a missionary on stateside assignment sharing w/ a local church about the 1<sup>st</sup> time he assisted w/ a baptismal service in the African bush. He shared that he had met w/ the (3) men trying to explain the symbolic nature/meaning of baptism, but he wasn't sure they understand him. So, when his fellow pastor took (3) men to the center of a shallow river to take them under the water, they were both quite surprised when each of the converts arose from the water's ecstatic, w/ raised hands, jumping/shouting w/ for joy. It was only later, when they were discussing what it meant to be "buried w/ Christ thru baptism into death, and raised to walk in the newness of life – they realized that these men thought baptism was going to kill them! As the local church chuckled at the story – the missionary asked, "***If you thought baptism would kill you, would you be willing to get in the river?***"

**Point** – Remember often to count the cost of the cross.

So, how do we fix our eyes on Jesus – how do we keep our eye on the prize and our head in the game?

- **Follow** the Example of Godly Believers
- **Inspect** Our Actions, Attitudes, and Ambitions
- **Exercise** Pursuing God's Word and Will
- **Embrace** Walking Intimately w/ Jesus Daily
- **Dwell** on the Cost of the Cross Frequently

## **TAKEAWAYS**

God has given us Divine mentors and fellow believers to spur us along in the faith if we will engage them.

I am responsible for keeping in check my actions, attitudes and ambitions.

God's Word is vital to experiencing God's will – and nothing most essential than your daily walk w/ Jesus.

Allow the cross to be the defining truth in your life.

## **NEXT STEPS**

1 Spend time this week in your quiet time or with another person discussing these GROW questions.

**G** – What are your biggest distractions in life?

**R** – Read **Hebrews 12:1-3**. What is the necessity of Scripture with regard to fixing your eyes on Jesus?

**Q** – Read **Hebrews 10:19-25**. What is the link b/w church and a person's spiritual health?

**W** – Commit new and afresh to spend time each day this week with Jesus in His Word and in prayer.

2 Take the list of distractions above and spend time praying and reflecting on how to turn your eyes from your distractions to trusting God for direction.