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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] The title I've given to this message this morning is a matter of trust and wonder.

I want to suggest to you that there are three stages that Simon Peter goes through from the outset of this passage to where it closes at verse 11.

We see something significant that has taken place. As we look at those stages, I want you to ask yourselves where would you put yourself?

Which stage would you consider your life to be at this moment? That's something that we can ponder upon this Sabbath day and ask the Lord's help to know where exactly we stand, where are we in the spiritual pilgrimage, where are we in matters of trust in the heart and the things of God.

The first stage I would suggest is our waiting stage. We see this in verses 1 and 2. It says on one occasion while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gnasseret and he saw two boats by the lake but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

[1 : 29] Simon Peter isn't introduced by name at this point but he is one of the fishermen who is there at the lake shore. He isn't there, I would suggest to be there to hear Jesus.

We learn from the passage that he's been out all night with his other partners in the boat and they had caught nothing. And when you're living hand to mouth catching nothing for a whole night's endeavour is demoralising.

And so Simon Peter's emphasis at this point is this opening of this chapter is on his livelihood, how to provide for he and his family, his household.

So he was cleaning the nets, preparing everything, doing what he can to in the hope that this next night's fishing would go that much better.

I wonder where you stand this morning and the reason to coming to church. Maybe you're here because it's important for your spouse and you are tagging along but for you you're still feeling on the fringe of things, you haven't really seen the fullness of who Christ is, the significance of what he's done on the cross.

[2 : 47] And maybe just at that point of some understanding, some flashes of clarity and yet at other times it just seems not so relevant, not speaking to our hearts.

And this is a period, I would suggest, is a kind of waiting period, learning, sitting at the feet of Jesus, trying to understand not only where we are in relation to him but the purpose of life, what's...

At this stage we are just a baby Christian, there is some understanding but we haven't really moved on from the infant milk, we're still drinking the milk and being nourished bit by bit by that but yet to grow into a sense of trust and confidence in who God is.

The story I told earlier about Claudia, she was 20 years old when the story took place and from a Christian family, she was part of a Christian union in La Paz University and yet for 20 years she walked the streets through La Paz and kind of oblivious to the huge social needs around her.

She was from a well-to-do background and she didn't feel any sense of responsibility to those around her until God grabbed her attention that morning and spoke to her.

[4 : 30] So she was in that waiting period until she discerns the still and quiet voice of the Lord. For Simon Peter, it's not his first encounter with the Lord Jesus back in chapter 4, we look at verse 32.

This comes to Cappanum, Peter's hometown and he goes into the synagogue to preach and it says in verse 32, they were astonished at his teaching for his word-possessed authority.

And Simon Peter was there as part of the gathered people worshipping on the Sabbath. Verse 36, we see after Jesus' preachers, a man possessed by an unclean spirit and Jesus orders the evil spirit to come out of the man.

And it says in verse 36, they were all amazed and said to one another, what is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out and reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

And after that gathering in the synagogue, Jesus comes back to Simon Peter's household where his mother-in-law is in bed with a high fever and Jesus heals his mother-in-law.

[5 : 58] Many are brought to that household to the door that night, people with illnesses, people with, with evil spirits and Jesus ministered to each one and sent them away whole and well and in their right mind.

And Simon Peter saw all of this and we too, we can be in church Sunday by Sunday coming to the prayer meetings and being involved in other church activities.

And there can be, you know, that stage where we are just at the beginning, the starting and you know, we need to be built up and we hear, we understand, we can believe at this stage if I was to use a football analogy, it's like at the stage such a person is on the reserve bench, on the substitute bench wearing the team's strip but they're not part of the field of play, they're part of the team but their time hasn't come, they're on the touch lines, they haven't been called upon to the pitch.

Well the second stage is one of being willing. In verse 3 of chapter 4 it says of Jesus, he's getting into one of the boats which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land and he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

It's no coincidence that Jesus kind of homes in on Simon Peter, Simon Peter thinks perhaps it's coincidence that he's there. Jesus is hard pressed, there's a crowd moving in wanting to hear his every word, maybe wanting to touch him, some with diseases wanting to be healed and he's got his back to the water and there's nowhere further for him to withdraw and so it's for a very practical reason he forgets into a boat, I can put a wee distance from myself and the big crowd that has gathered and speak to all easily just across a few yards of water.

[8 : 14] So Simon is asked to participate and he's glad to put Jesus' use his own boat and it's a challenge to be engaged and maybe this engagement comes about somebody challenging us to come and help out with, you know, maybe a children's outreach, a holiday club, perhaps come to the prayer meeting which perhaps not been in the habit of going to and somebody encouraging you to step up the game, get more involved and you know this is the second level of being willing and it goes on to a second challenge because when we get back to the text in verse 4 it says that when Jesus had finished speaking he said to Simon, put out into the deep and let Daniel nets for a catch and now we see Simon now with kind of the rationale of a fisherman, he knows his industry, he knows how the time of day to go fishing in the brightness of the Palestinian sun you go fishing at night, not in the middle of the day and what

Jesus is asking him to let down the nets for a catch in the middle of the day just does not make sense and you can hear it in Simon's reply, he said master we toiled all night, we took nothing, that's the time when you catch fish and this is a lean season, you know, he's thinking we're preparing our nets for another session this night and hopefully it's going to be better but you know this is ridiculous going out in the middle of the day and so there's that voice of rationale and we can all associate it with it because sometimes we feel challenged, disturbed, our peace has taken away, we feel a sense of prompting to speak to someone to put our name forward to help out, you know maybe we're going to be a speaker in the holiday club, maybe respond to being part of this team Lewis to go to

Costa Rica and on part there's a sense of excitement and then suddenly there's the reality check and think well I don't speak Spanish, never been there, what am I going to do, I've got no cross-cultural experience, this is absurd, this can't be for me and there's all the kind of human rationale and then the expense of going and think well wouldn't it be better to send the money and help with the church there rather than me go, well I say not because the Lord calls people, it's through relationships that the Gospel is made known, it is lived out, it is expressed, the very fact of going is an expression of love and concern for people that have a half light of understanding what the Gospel is and our presence in going brings that understanding.

So Simon Peter says this but at your word, halfway through verse 5, but at your word or the NIV says you know, but because you say so I will let down the nets, because you say so.

This takes trust doesn't it and a sense of confidence in who Jesus is. Simon Peter is struggling with that rationale, I know best about fishing, Jesus he's got a carpentry background, why would I believe and trust in going to fish in the middle of the day.

[12 : 18] Think also about his reputation, there he is in his hometown, probably the whole town is out on that shoreline and how's Simon Peter going to respond, is he going to let down the nets in the middle of the day and make himself look absurd, is he going to put his reputation on the line and there is that real struggle going on within him.

But the breakthrough comes when he says, but at your word, but because you say so I will. And this brothers and sisters is crucial for the Christian life, if we don't get to that point of being able to trust in the confidence and the faithfulness of God then we will never progress further, we will always remain in the lower category, in the lower stage.

It takes faith doesn't it, it takes confidence in God's promise, we don't see the outcome, Simon Peter isn't assured his nets are going to be filled with fish, but he's prepared to take it because he's seen enough of Christ, his preaching with authority, his healing those with diseases, his ability as like a prophet to deliver those that possess by demons.

And he says because you say so I will let down the nets. And this comes brings us to this final section and it's a section of that I call wonder.

And this is where there is all the excitement of the Christian life and the excitement comes when we rest our reputation on God's faithfulness and we move forward despite our own natural inclinations and thinking you know maybe this isn't such a good idea.

[14 : 34] But moving forward with a sense of urgency and confidence recognizing the spirit is pushing us forward we need to discern yes the lens never be a people so discerning that we never ever recognize the stuck quiet and still voice of the Lord.

The needs to be that openness the needs to be that reckoning that the God that we read of in the pages of scripture is the same today speaking to us and we need to be listening we need to be ready to heed his voice.

And look what happens verse six when they had done this when they had followed Jesus's instructions they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking verse seven they signaled to the partners in the other boat to come and help them and they came and fill both the boats so that they began to sink.

Imagine that so many fish that the nets were breaking and they're heaving it up and they think oh this is just too heavy to get on one boat they call over the other boat and between them these I don't know how many fishermen there were four maybe more they're hauling this huge net that was straining under the weight of this catch and the gunnels of the boat are dipping under the waters of the lake and it's extraordinary catch.

And note the reaction you know Simon Peter hadn't caught anything the previous night he wasn't jumping up and down thinking wow with all this fish maybe I can take life easy for a day or two I can sell all this no he has a sense of being appalled about what has happened.

[16 : 29] This miracle says to him that this man in the boats great teacher that I've seen him to be great healer that he is great deliverer of demons from those that are possessed he is more than all of that there is something dawning in Simon's mind that this is something somebody otherworldly and we see how he falls to his knees verse 8 and he says depart from me for I'm a sinful man oh Lord depart from me for I'm a sinful man did he not at that moment sense the holiness the presence of Christ part of the triune God's in his boat was he not appalled by who he was just an ordinary fisherman trying to walk with the

Lord but one foot in the world and we've all been there maybe some of us that are at that points today are feeling such a gulf between who we are and the magnificence of a God come in person to make himself known to us urging us to come into relationship urging us to trust to follow and Simon Peter is having this Isaiah like reaction you know Isaiah went into the temple he sees the glory of the Lord and he says well is me for I'm a man of unclean lips and I have seen the Lord of glory and he expects to be annihilated because of he unholy has come into the presence of the Holy One and as something of what Peter is encountering here is God in his boats and he is absolutely overwhelmed and he says go away from me Lord depart from me it's a very human reaction isn't it and I don't know if I told you the story before but some of you won't have heard it so forgive me if you've heard it already but when my wife and I were called to interview by OMF the mission that we used to work with we had this interview which I didn't feel went well at all like it was like they had uncovered things about me and I said things which I regretted I had said I thought I'd spoken too much and I just thought there's no way they're going to accept us and we were asked to leave the room while the council deliberated and I just wanted to go home and

I just felt you know who am I to put myself forward to do to serve the Lord and I felt so unworthy so incapable at that moment so inexperienced so rash to put my name forward to to volunteer to go as a missionary and I thought who am I let me just go home let me just tend to just ordinary things there's no harm in doing that and being faithful to doing that which the state of your life that you find yourself in and when we were called back in we had been accepted and my wife's reply was this and I share it with you in case you're at that kind of level as well that she said you know before you accepted Martin and me into OMF we thought the mission was tremendous full of dynamic people motivated people people who are holy people blazing a trail and it seemed the standard was so high until you accepted Martin and myself and it's like the standard was brought right low so that we could be brought in Simon Peter felt I'm worthy and it could have been the excuse no Lord's you know don't have anything to do with me choose someone else for I'm unworthy

I'm a fallen human being unfallible and Jesus knows all that he knew that Simon was going to deny him three times he knew it's ahead of time he said that Satan has asked to sift you but I have prayed for you that your faith may stand and that you will come through this ordeal Jesus knows exactly who he's dealing with when he speaks to you and me it's no barrier to presenting ourselves it was said of Hudson Taylor that he was a man small enough for God to use so just wrapping up just moving into the last part of verse 10 Jesus says to Simon do not be afraid from now on you will be catching men we see Jesus as fully human engaging with us understanding our frailty our doubts our concerns our sense of weakness our sense of sinfulness and he's saying don't be afraid you know from now on you're going to be with me you we engage in my work in my ministry I'll be with you as he reminds the disciples when he leaves them at the time of his ascension you know all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me therefore go and make disciples and surely I'm with you always so the very end of the age and so we have the sense of assurance as we step forward step into deeper waters out into the unknown the unfamiliar that we go because he has called and he who called will go with us here by his grace his power be made manifest through our own weakness people will see more of Christ and less of us because the beauty of the gospel work is getting a glimpse of who Christ is and not seeing the minister behind it and verse 11 is the response it's so simple in these few words it's it says here and when they had brought their boats the land they left everything and followed him you know it seems so compact isn't it you think well where's the kind of the reasoning talking it out let me go away and pray about it let me go and seek the advice of others

I don't know if this is God's calling maybe I just need to take some time out read the scriptures be sure of it and I don't knock those things but they should never be a reason for us to say no God is not calling me when they had brought their boats the land they left everything and followed him it was the only response that they could have wasn't it they they'd seen enough of Christ something of his glory and bring that those fish into the net here was master over his dominion of creation here is the creator in the boat resplendent and holy before whom they felt unworthy and they were caught up with this in the hope the Lord wants us to be with him to do his work there's no argument I want to do it I feel absolute compulsion I need to be with where the Lord calls me to go let me pray father