

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE HISTORY OF LITTLE-FAITH.

A Sermon

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“And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”—MATTHEW xiv. 31.

THERE is only one word in the original for the phrase, “O thou of little faith.” The Lord Jesus virtually addresses Peter by the name of “Little-faith,” in one word. I do not suppose that Peter had ever before dreamed of that name as applicable to himself. Possibly he had thought in his heart that his faith was strong even to assurance. When so lately he had seen his Master feed the multitudes with a few loaves and fishes, and had helped to gather up twelve baskets of fragments, he felt that his faith was equal to anything. He who could feed so many with so little, could do any kind of wonder; and how could Peter, brave, honest Peter, ever think of doubting his Lord? O brethren, we do not know ourselves! We fancy that we are rich and increased in goods, and, lo! in the time of trial we discover that we are naked, and poor, and miserable. Those who are strong in faith to their own thinking, may soon be brought into circumstances where their confidence will be grievously shaken. All is not gold that glitters, neither is all faith that speaks bravely. Peter is strong in faith on board the ship, strong in faith even as he walks the waters; but that unexpected gust of wind, which came howling down from the mountains, took him aback, staggered him, and caused his faith to reel. Then the waters yielded under his feet, and as he began to sink he discovered his own weakness, and had his discovery confirmed by the verdict of his Lord, who himself surnamed

him *Little-faith*. Let no man think of himself beyond his own experience. Experience is the true gauge; and he who boasts of an untried faith is puffed up with vain glory. Stretch not your arm beyond your sleeve, lest it be frost-bitten. He who glories in himself deceives himself. It is not an easy thing to endure the humiliation which must follow upon the collapse of untried confidence. Rest assured, brethren, that between here and heaven we shall need every ounce of faith that we have; and that whenever we feel too sure of our own strength we are making sure of that which is frailty itself. Self-confidence is but the froth on the top of the cup; it is not the pure juice of the vine of truth. When a man begins to be secure in himself he will court temptation, he will rashly venture upon needless experiments, and in the end will need to cry in plaintive accents "Lord, save me." Learn, then, on the threshold of the text, that we are not as strong as we think we are, and that, when we are most brave and daring, we may not be quite so far removed from fear and trembling as we imagine. Alas! that unbelief should mar even Peter's faith. Let him who thinks that he can walk the waves take heed lest he sink beneath them.

In Peter's character there was a singular mixture of the strong and the weak: he rose to excellence and sank to littleness. Yet, why should I speak of this as singular? for we ourselves are made of much the same materials: in us also are mingled the iron and the clay. The best of men are men at the best. Since the old nature remains though the new nature is born in us, there is in our soul a conflict between holiness and sin, faith and unbelief, strength and weakness. We walk the waters like our Lord, and anon we sink like doubting Peter. The Christian man is full often a mystery to himself, and therefore, it is no wonder that he is a mystery to other people. Note how Peter speaks: he cries, "Lord, if it be thou"; a speech which, if it be not censurable, is by no means praiseworthy, after his Lord had said, "It is I." Hear him again: "Bid me come unto thee on the water." Here is courage almost blazing into rashness; and yet there is a measure of obedient deference, for he will not attempt to come unless he is bidden to do so. He will risk his life if he has but his Master's permit. What diverse qualities meet in the same man! He proposes a rash venture, and yet is prudent enough to ask his Master's permission.

See him walking the waves, and admire the strength of his faith! Could *you* do this? Anon see him sinking because a fierce blast has blown in his

face. Do you marvel at his unbelief? Would you have done better? He that knows himself knows that doubt dogs the heels of confidence. The Canaanite of distrust is still in the land, and shows himself ever and anon at unexpected turns. Where the fairest flowers of faith, and hope, and joy do bloom, the deadliest serpents of mistrust and suspicion may yet be lurking. Abraham, that father of believers, yet sinned twice by distrust when he did not own Sarah to be his wife.

Peter's mixture of unbelief was not to be justified, nor may it be used as an excuse for ourselves. We shall speak of it as a matter of fact, but not as an example, for it was an improper and unreasonable thing. Peter could not answer the Lord's question, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" "His doubting was without ground or reason. If he believes at all, why does he doubt? The unbelief which makes faith little, is to be confessed as a sin, and mourned over as such; it would be wrong to regard it as a mere infirmity, and invent excuses for it. The truth is that the Christian has no cause for doubting his Lord. The whole course of the Lord's dealing is calculated to inspire confidence. He has done nothing to create a suspicion of his love, or truth, or power. If we never doubt till we have cause for doubting, our life will be rich with faith. It is concerning little faith, and its faults and its unreasonableness, that I have to speak at this time. May God grant that all the Little-faith family may be helped to stronger confidence. May the Holy Ghost bless the word, and enable many a Ruth to pick up those handfuls that are let fall on purpose for the feeble folk who glean in these fields.

I. Our first topic will be LITTLE-FAITH'S HISTORY. It is sketched in the story of Peter. We are each one apt to act over again the part which Peter played in this narrative.

Little-faith is a true disciple, though a faulty one. Not the littleness of the faith, but the faith itself is the gift of God. None but God could make a grain of mustard seed; none but God can give even the least particle of living faith. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, however feeble it may be, is a fruit of the Spirit of God, and a token of the new birth. I may say of Peter on this occasion what the Lord Jesus said of him at another time, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Even the faith which can get no further than to touch the hem of Christ's garment is the work of the Spirit of God: even that faith which cries, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine

unbelief” is, as to its existence, though not as to its infirmity, the creation of the most High. Wherefore let us note that Little-faith is born in the new Jerusalem, and is an Israelite indeed; hence it has about it that immortal life of which our risen Lord has said, “Because I live, ye shall live also.”

Very early in its life *Little faith has great longings*. See it in Peter’s case. He is on board ship with his brethren, while Jesus is yonder upon the waters; and Peter is so earnest to come at his Lord, and be with him, that he is ready to plunge into the sea to reach him. Why could he not wait as the others did? His immediate duty was in the ship with his brethren; but his vehement desires carried him above common-place toiling and rowing. Strong faith exhibits patience where Little-faith is in a hurry. It was well to have longings for Jesus; but it would have been wiser to have waited while the Lord came walking over the sea to the ship. The quiet, self-possessed Christian has deep longings for his Lord; but he has the assured conviction that his Lord will come to him if he continues faithful to his present duty, and therefore he waits upon the Lord. Little-faith, like Martha, runs to meet Jesus; but Strong-faith, like Mary, sits still in the house. Little-faith is feverish after immediate joy. Little-faith wants to be in heaven tomorrow. Little-faith would convert the world before the sun went down, and she grows faint because her zeal has not fulfilled her wish. Little-faith must pluck the promises while they are green, she is not content to wait till they become ripe and mellow. Yet I love her longings, and I would to God that all men had them! However mistaken pressing desires for spiritual joy may be, they are things which some of you feel, which make you cry, “Oh that I knew where I might find him!”—you may thank God for them. Those who have greater faith know that they have found their Lord; they know that he is as the sun which cannot be hidden; they feel his warmth, and rejoice in his light; yet the keen hunger after Christ which goes with Little-faith is an admirable thing, and the Lord himself hath blessed it. I rejoice in the blossom of the apple-tree; it is not so valuable as the fruit, but it is exceedingly beautiful; and, even so, the eager longings of a trembling heart after the Lord Jesus are full of loveliness and fragrance, and are by no means to be despised. It is the nature of Little-faith that it should be of a thirsty and eager temperament, and hasty to make a dash for present fellowship with Christ.

Little-faith was daring. Early in her life she had intense longings, and they grew so that Little-faith was willing to venture everything to have her longings fulfilled. “If it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water”—thus doth Little-faith cry to her Lord. These are big words, but they come out of a trembling heart. Men often venture all the more because their capital is so small. Souls who are little in faith are often put upon desperate measures to gain hope. O beloved, are there not some of you who would give your eyes and ears, and your very lives, to see Christ, and to taste of his love? You have come up to the Tabernacle this morning feeling that if Christ bade you plunge into the sea to find him, you would think nothing of it. You feel like Rutherford when he said he could swim through seven hells to get at Christ, and think them nothing if he might but lie at his feet.

Those vehement and burning desires within your spirit after your Lord and Master are sharp but exceedingly blessed things: you need not repress them even though they urge you to venture everything for Christ’s sake. Love’s ventures for Christ will end in great profit. What shall it damage a man if he loses the whole world and gain his Saviour? What loss could there be to a man though he himself sank in the sea, so long as his Lord stood there to stretch forth his hand and snatch him from destruction? Little-faith can yet be a true hero when the Lord saith to her, “Come.” It is not the sea she fears: her concern is lest the Lord should frown upon her.

At times Little-faith accomplishes great wonders. Peter, when his Master said, “Come,” went down upon the waters and walked the waves with ease. The Lord puts forth his strength even when we reveal our own weakness of faith. Peter took one step, and then another upon the rolling wave, wondering all the while how ever it could be. Has not your little faith done this? I remember the first step of faith I took, how I wondered at it, and wondered at myself. Have not you also been amazed at yourselves? Do you remember when you believed that God had saved you, seeing you had faith in Christ? Then, though you knew it to be true, you could hardly tell whether you should laugh for joy or cry for fear, when you thought upon the possibility of your being saved in Christ Jesus. You dared to believe that you were adopted in the family of God, and started back as your heart said, “How can he put me among the children?” Do you recollect reading the doctrine of election in Holy Scripture, and that last saying “Surely, I am one of the chosen: the Lord hath loved me with an everlasting love;

therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn me”? Was it not a piece of daring to you? Walking on the water could not have been more venturesome. You stood upright when tempted; you held on, though sore beset by the enemy; you walked towards Jesus, though the way seemed to be on a sea; a high exhilaration upraised your spirit, you rose out of yourself; but yet down deep within there was a latent fear, a half-developed apprehension that your confidence was too good to last, that your joy was presumptuous. In your very heart you were afraid of sinking; and it was no wonder that by and by your fear became matter of fact.

But now comes in another bit of our history: *Little-faith is too apt to look away from the Lord*. Peter, as he walked those billows, took his eye off from his Master, and just then a tremendous hurricane rushed boisterously in his face, and poor Peter was alarmed. He had thought of the fickleness of the waves, but he had overlooked the fury of the wind. When he spoke to the Lord, he said, “If it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water”; and so his faith had reckoned with the water, but it had not reckoned upon the force of the wind. That mysterious and subtle agent took him by surprise. He had forgotten that he had both winds and waves to contend with; and now the wind comes upon him as a new trial; as the blast came full in Peter’s face, it chilled him to the marrow, and chilled his heart too. He heard the wind, but forgot the voice which said, “It is I; be not afraid.” This is the danger of Little-faith. Little-faith at the outset, is scarcely comprehensive enough; it does not take a full view of all the possible dangers and difficulties; and so, when that which it has omitted comes to the front, it is very apt to be sorely troubled. Little-faith, thy hope lies in keeping thy little self wholly dependent upon thy great Lord. If thou beginnest to measure circumstances, it will go ill with thee, poor trembling creature that thou art! What have you and I to do with measuring? There is One that measures with a span the whole world, and weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. With unmeasured faith let us leave ourselves in the hands of our immeasurable God; so shall our souls be kept in perfect peace, stayed on him. I walk the waves; yet not I, but Jesus: therefore will I not look to the winds, but to Jesus; neither will I think of sinking, but see him standing and hope in him.

Now, the moment he took his eye off his Master and thought of the wind, *Little-faith began to sink*. You see him going down; he is ready to

perish; the proud waters prevail against him; he has no power whatever to help himself. I should suppose that Peter being a fisherman, could swim. Why did he not strike out? Mark this, when a man begins to live by faith, if his faith fails him, even his natural ability fails with his faith. He that could swim with no faith originally, will not swim when once by faith he has begun to walk the waters. Should he fail in his walking he cannot fall back on his swimming. "Beginning to sink" is a terrible condition. Poor Little-faith, it never reckoned on this! Deep experiences are all the more dreadful because unlooked for. When Peter left ship-board, and slid down the side of the bark and touched the sea, his first miraculous footsteps so elated him that he hardly thought it possible that he would before long be on the verge of drowning; but now down he goes, like lead in the mighty waters. The billows open wide their great mouths to swallow up poor Little-faith, and down he goes. Is that the condition of any child of God here this morning? I must confess it has sometimes been mine. There was a step, and scarce a step, between me and death. That which bore me up appeared to give way, and the waters came in even unto my soul.

Let me not finish this history of Little-faith without saying that *Little-faith knew how to pray*. Though Peter did not know how to come to Christ on the waters, he knew how to come to him by prayer. Though his faith was not *what* it ought to be, it was *where* it ought to be, for his cry was to his Lord alone. He did not appeal to his brethren in the vessel, but only to his dear Master who stood so firmly on the rolling wave. He did not cry, "John, save me!" but "Lord, save me." It was a short prayer, but it was a comprehensive one. It expressed his need of salvation; it proved his faith in the Lord's will to save him; it owned Jesus to be his Lord, and it tacitly admitted that the Lord could save him; and none else. In his prayer he quits all other hope, and looks wholly and solely to Jesus, crying, "Lord, save me!" His faith quotes what the Lord had done for others in healing, feeding, and saving them, and now he cries, "Lord, save *me!*" He asks Jesus to act as his name implies he would do: he practically says, "Saviour, save me." He appeals to his authority: "Thou art my Lord, and thou didst bid me come; therefore as Lord save thine own servant. Savo me." His short cry is full of force. Let us imitate both its shortness and its fullness. Whenever faith is weak let prayer be strong. When you cannot do anything else but cry, then cry with might and main. If it is less the cry of faith, let

it be all the more the cry of agony. "Beginning to sink," he cried, "Lord, save me." Little children are good at crying, if at nothing else, and so is Little-faith. When Jacob was greatly afraid, he became bold enough to wrestle at Jabbok. Even Little-faith has prayer for its vital breath, its native air. Where there is life, there is breath; and where there is faith, there is prayer. O soul, art thou sinking? Then cry, "Lord, save me!"

Now in this little picture, have any of you recognized yourselves? Do you long for Christ? Would you venture all things for his dear sake? Do you trust him? Have you enjoyed happy moments when by faith you have accomplished things impossible to mere sense? Have you sometimes believed, and in that belief found an upbearing for your spirit that made you more than conqueror? Then, if at this moment there should be a collapse, and your faith should waver, pray unto the Lord. *He* stands fast if you do not. It is your wisdom to cry mightily in this your time of need; and as surely as the Lord liveth, he will come to your rescue. Among all the carcases that should be washed up on the Dead Sea shore there shall never be found the corpse of Little-faith. Though Little-faith had often said, "I shall one day fall by the hand of the enemy," no weapon has yet been forged that can strike its heart, or break its bones. He that believeth even with a little and a trembling believing, is safe beneath the guardian care of the Eternal God. "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

At the end Little-faith will grow to full assurance and will come up into the vessel, yea, unto heaven with Christ. Little-faith shall find its way across the Jordan, and stand in its lot in the end of the days; and perhaps among the most rapturous songs that shall ever salute the Redeemer's ear will be the song of those who were weak and trembling when they were here below, and yet were kept unto the end. Wherefore, have confidence!

II. I come now to the second head of my discourse, which is an interesting one—LITTLE-FAITH ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE LORD. In my text you will observe the Saviour did not say, "O thou of no faith," or, "O thou of pretended faith," but "O thou of little faith." There are times when we would give all that we have if we could only have our Master's assurance that we have even a little faith. If he does but own that it is faith, then the root of the matter is in us. I would rather have great faith than little faith; but I would rather have little than have great presumption, and mistake it

for holy confidence. It ought to have comforted Peter, even as it did rebuke him, to hear his Lord, who could not make a mistake, acknowledge that he had faith.

In following up this subject, note that little faith is faith, and *little faith is true faith*. A grain of mustard seed has life in it as surely as the tree beneath whose spreading boughs the birds of the air find shelter. A spark is as truly fire as the conflagration which burned down a city. Little faith is not such powerful faith as great faith, but it is quite as true faith. O soul, if thou hast a ray of light, it came from the sun; if thou hast a pulse of life, it comes from the heart; if thou hast any measure of faith, it is the work of the Spirit of God. A pearl is a pearl, though it be no bigger than a pin's head. God's signature is as valid when he writes it small as when he uses capitals.

In Peter's case *little faith was faith with a very solid reason at the back of it*. O child of God, little as thy faith may be, yet if thou believest in Christ thou hast faith most proper and justifiable; in fact, so strong is the ground of thy little faith that the Saviour even asks thee, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" As much as to say, "You have every reason for your faith, but what reason have you for doubting?" "Oh, dear heart, if thou dost come to Christ and cast thyself on him, thou art doing the best and the rightest thing that thou canst do, and none can question thy conduct. Ay, if thou dost even swoon away upon the dear bosom of the eternal love, none shall tear thee off, none shall separate thee, even in thy feebleness, from Christ. He has said that him that cometh to him he will in no wise cast out; who, then, can dismiss thee from his presence? Thou art not presumptuous, thou art not going beyond what is permitted thee when thou dost trust thyself and thine all on Christ thy Lord. Do it again, and do it again more thoroughly, and thou shalt never be ashamed of having done it; nay, it shall be thy glory that thou darest to trust thy Lord. His promise shall never be outdone by thy faith. Open thy mouth wide, and he will fill it. Ask more faith, and he will give more faith and fulfil to thee greater promise; go from faith to faith, and thou shalt receive blessing upon blessing. There is no limit to thy Lord's love; make free with it; there is no reason why thou shouldst hesitate. Christ owned little faith to be faith with a solid reason at its back when he said, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Our Lord Jesus owned little faith because, little as it was, *it ventured all for him*. Peter had thrown himself into the sea to come to his Master, and the Lord recognized that fact. He who ventures all for Jesus and on Jesus, shall not find it to be a losing speculation. Though you dare not say that you have strong faith, yet you give up the world's pleasures, and its sinful gains, and its pleasing smiles, for Christ; you would not deny him for all the treasures of Egypt: well, then, our Lord will acknowledge you as his, and bear you harmless in the end. That little faith, which is real faith, knows nothing of the timidity which haunts the heart of the hypocrite. Little-faith fears lest it should not be accepted at the last, but it is not afraid of being persecuted for Christ's sake. No, let me but know that I am his and he is mine; I will go though fire, and though water, to be with him.

Little-faith, in the case of Peter, *was coming to Jesus all the while*. Peter, when he left the ship, left it to come to Jesus, and for that purpose only. The first step he took upon the sea was towards Jesus, and every other step was towards Jesus; and when he began to sink he sank that way, leaning towards his Master, and crying as he went down, "Lord, save me!" Now, the Lord Jesus always owns a faith which comes towards him, however it may be. If thou hast a faith which looks to thyself, a curse rests upon it. If thou hast a faith which looks to priests, it is superstition. If thou hast a faith which looks to ceremonies, creeds, prayers, and feelings, it will fail thee when most thou needest help. But if thou hast a faith whose eyes are to Jesus, whose longings are for Jesus, whose hopes are all centred in Jesus, whose steps all tend to Jesus, then thou hast a faith upon which Jesus sets his seal, and though he calls it "little," yet he calls it "faith." Be sure that which the Lord himself owns to be faith is faith, even though for the present it leaves thee damp with the brine from which thou art newly plucked.

Once more, the Master acknowledges this faith; for, *before long Little-faith came to walk with Jesus on the sea*. I think I have seen a picture of Peter sinking and Christ stooping to save him; but I wish that some eminent artist would paint the two walking together in peace, Peter and his Lord. What joy to think that Little-faith, once drawn from the deep, stands on those foaming waves side by side with the great saving Lord! Now is Peter conformed to his Lord. Now is the servant clothed with the might of his Master. We have aforetime seen the Son of God walking in the lire

with the three holy youths, and now we see the obverse of the medal—a saint walking on the water with the Son of Man. Is it not a splendid, reassuring truth that Little-faith can grow to act like Christ? The day shall yet come when the Lord shall have so strengthened Little-faith that the things that the Lord doeth shall Little-faith do also, and the word shall be fulfilled, “Greater works than these shall ye do; because I go unto my Father.” You tell me that you cannot rejoice today; but Jesus will see you again and your heart shall rejoice. You cannot go forth to Christian service, for you are lame through spiritual weakness; but the day cometh when the lame man shall leap as a hart. The Healer of his people will lay his hand upon you, and make you “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” You have a greater consciousness today of your inability in yourself than you have of your ability in the Lord; but it shall not always be so; the time will come when in rapt fellowship with him, by the strength of his grace, you shall be in this world even as he is, and that glorious life which in the person of Christ trod on the sea as though it were a sea of glass, that same life shall be in you, so that you shall overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.

I feel right glad to have even a little faith. I am truly sorry that it is so little when I know that my Lord deserves all possible confidence; but yet I am glad that it is given me to believe on his name, for it has brought me near him, and will bring me yet nearer, and will by and by bring me to be with him where he is, and to behold his glory. Thus I have shown you that our Lord acknowledged Little-faith. He did not break the bruised reed, nor disown the infant faith; but he called it faith, answered its prayer, and made it to stand with him in fellowship of power.

III. In the third place, I want you to notice LITTLE-FAITH’S DELIVERANCE. Little-faith began to sink, but it was only a beginning. The sinking did not end in Peter’s drowning, but in his Lord’s saving. The text saith “beginning to sink”; and truly that is the whole matter. None of God’s people shall go beyond “beginning to sink.” We may be “ready to perish,” but we shall not actually perish. Our steps may be “almost gone,” but “almost” is not “quite.” A man may be near death, and yet live; he may begin to sink, and yet be saved. Friend, it may be that for some time you have been “beginning to sink”; but you have not sunk yet. Not yet are you consumed, not yet is the Lord’s mercy clean gone forever; not yet hath he

forgotten to be gracious. Oftentimes “beginning to sink” with us. is with Christ beginning to stretch out his hand. The beginning of a clear sense of our own weakness, is often the beginning of the display of the power of God.

Little-faith received its deliverance *wholly from the Lord*. As I have already said, it was not Peter’s swimming that got him out of his trouble, nor was it any revival of Peter’s faith which did it, but the Lord came to the rescue, and proved his power to help at a dead lift. So shall it be with thee, O trembling heart: in the hour of thine extremity God shall appear for thee. The Lord will provide. Out of weakness thou shalt be made strong; for he hath said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

It was of the Lord, and therefore it was *immediate*. Will you kindly note that word in the text, “and immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand.” Before he rebuked him for his little faith, he delivered him from his perils. O Little-faith, thou hast but to cry, and the Lord will help thee. Do not thou delay thy crying, and he will not delay his helping. The Lord may let the matter proceed some considerable distance till we think it is all over with us; but in the nick of time he will appear for our deliverance. At that dark moment when we read our own death-warrant amid the roar of the tempest, the prompt relief of the Lord of love will arrive. No wings of cherubim can be more swift than the Lord’s right hand when he means to draw his people from great waters.

It is added, “immediately *he stretched forth his hand*.” It was an instructive action on the part of Jesus, that stretching forth of his hand; as if he was arousing himself to the utmost energy, and reaching beyond himself to rescue his servant. A stretched out hand denotes the exercise of all the power of the person thus acting. In the case of God’s people, it has often been found necessary that he should bring them forth with a high hand and with an outstretched arm. Peter had his exodus from the water as Israel from Egypt. Who is to know the might of God’s arm, if he does not stretch it out? And why should it be stretched out unless there is a need for it? So that our perils produce the necessity for God to stretch out his hand, and thus they turn out to be comfortable means of grace to us. Our necessities are the doors through which the Lord’s great bounty comes to us. If Little-faith did not lift up its cry of dismay, the Lord’s hand would not be lifted up for its rescue.

It is added, he "*caught him.*" Thus the Lord came into personal contact with his servant. See, he holds him up. The whole weight of Peter is on Christ. If Peter sinks, Jesus must sink too; for he will not quit his hold. For the time, Peter and Christ are joined; they have only one standing, and that standing is all in Christ. Oh, Little-faith, thou dost feel a closer union to Christ in thine hour of danger than ever before. It comes to this, that when Jesus interposes to save Little-faith, he bends all his strength to the deed, and takes hold of the sinking one with a grip so fast and firm, that the two must sink or stand together. All the weight of Peter was on Jesus; all the security of Jesus was bestowed on Peter. Little-faith holds Jesus while Jesus upholds Little-faith. A half-hoping, half-despairing soul lays hold on Jesus with an iron grip, and on such a poor feeble one the hold of Jesus is equally tight and strong. He will never let the sinking sinner die when once that prayer has been uttered, "Lord, save me." I hardly know of a more conscious union between a man and Christ than that which is effected when in sinking times the grip of the crucified hand is felt as our sole rescue from death. "Hallelujah, who shall part Christ's own Bride from Christ's own heart?" Who is he that shall separate the most timid and trembling of all the believing company from that eternal hand which is sworn to deliver? "I give unto my sheep eternal life," saith he, "and they shall never perish"; nor shall they, though the heavens and earth shall pass away. The Lord must and will stretch out his hand and catch the sinking one, and grant him the same standing as himself.

IV. I close with LITTLE-FAITH REBUKED. That comes last. After the poor soul is quite rescued, and set on a sure footing, then comes the loving chiding: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" This is such a gentle rebuking that it almost seems to me that the Master might say as much as this to us when we enter Paradise with him. It might not be unkind even there to say, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" When you and I have come up from our dying beds, and left all pain, and poverty, and sorrow, far behind, we shall find ourselves in the golden-streeted city, and the Well-beloved with us, and we shall look back on all the way whereby he led us; and then he may lovingly whisper in our ear, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Look back on thy pilgrim way. There is the Slough of Despond dried up; there is Giant Despair's head on a pole; there is Apollyon bound with chains; there is the river whose chill streams so often affrighted thee,

glittering in the eternal light. "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" You doubted about nothing. You made mountains out of molehills. Where everything was working for you, you said with trembling Jacob, "All these things are against me." Will not our Lord produce a rapture within our spirit while he brings to mind his unchanging love, his immutable truth, his immovable faithfulness? We shall eternally wonder at our own doubts. What if our Lord should say, "Didst thou not come up from the wilderness leaning upon me as thy beloved? Did I ever fail thee? Did I ever give thee a cross word? Say, did I ever leave thee or forsake thee? Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Then we shall sweetly chide ourselves to think we ever had a moment's distrust of our dear Lord, the Bridegroom of our souls, in whom our faith ought to have been constant as the day.

Notice, dear friends, with regard to this question, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" that it is an *inconsistent* thing for a believing man to doubt his God, or distrust the power of the Lord Jesus. You do believe, and if you believe, why doubt? If faith, why *little* faith? If you doubt, why believe? And if you believe, why doubt? Oil and water will not mix. Oh, how should faith and unbelief unite? Yet they are often found together in deadly warfare. "Oh," said a dear sister in Christ to me the other day, "I cannot doubt my God." Yet she also expressed a fear lest she should be wrong at the last. This was an odd mixture in one who knew so well the glorious gospel; but then we are odd in some way or other. In any case it is not meet that we believe and yet disbelieve. Shall a fountain send forth both sweet water and bitter? Begone, ye doubts! Oh that they would go at my bidding! What business have ye here at the festival of faith? Begone, ye harpies, that devour the bread of the Lord's table, and defile our dainty things! What right have ye to enter the holy abodes of faith?

While doubts are so inconsistent, are they not also most *dishonouring*? Why should we doubt our Lord? Shall it go forth to the world that we cannot trust Christ? Shall it be said that those who are saved by him, nevertheless, say it is hard work to believe him? Hard to believe him who has proven his love by the agony and bloody sweat! My Lord, I will sooner doubt my brother, and doubt my father, and doubt my wife, than doubt thee! My Lord, I will doubt my eyes, and doubt my ears, and doubt the beating of my heart, sooner than doubt thee! I will doubt the laws of nature, I will doubt everything which seems certain. I will doubt the

conclusions of mathematics; but thee, oh wherefore, wherefore, should I doubt thee? Nay, let us hold on to the love of Jesus and cling to him even though he should frown and chasten. Be it ours to trust a scourging God! Yea, say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Once again, how *inexcusable*, is this doubting among you who do believe! The only excuses worth mentioning are these. Some excuse themselves because they desire to be humble. "I dare not think that these good things are true to me, I know that I am altogether unworthy of them, and I am afraid of being proud if I take them to myself." Do you not know, dear friend, that the biggest pride in all the world is doubting God? and it is the sweetest humility to trust in God as a child trusts its father. It is the lowliest action of the heart to say, "These things are good, exceeding good, and I am most unworthy; but then the Lord hath said that he gives these gracious gifts to the unworthy; and, if he had said it, God forbid that I should question him." Who am I that I should venture to raise a doubt about the *bona fides* of the Lord Jehovah? I must, I will cease from all such proud questionings and artful doubtings and be even as a new-born babe, drinking in the unadulterated milk of the word.

I am persuaded that unbelief is sometimes occasioned by ignorance. I pray you, do not let such ignorance remain in you. Be diligent in searching Holy Scripture. If you do not know the Lord, nor know his providence, nor know the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, nor know the covenant of grace, why, then you may be staggered; but learn those things that you may be established.

I have no doubt that unbelief is caused not only by ignorance, but by forgetfulness. We forget the Lord's past mercies. If the Lord has plucked you like a brand out of the fire, cannot he pluck you out of the sea? He that delivered you from the deadly power of sin, cannot he deliver you from every temptation? In fact, the Lord has done more for us already than he ever will have to do for us in the future; for he will never have to die again upon the bloody tree, and he will never have to offer himself again as an atonement for our sin. Nine hundred and ninety-nine parts out of a thousand are ours already. We have only to shut our eyes and open them in heaven, and the rest will be ours. Today is our salvation nearer than when we believed. We are almost home! Within sight of the white cliffs

of the better land! Shall we tremble now? Shall we not begin to rejoice with joy unspeakable? Does not little faith begin to mount into assurance?

You that have not believed in Jesus, I have tried to show you the way of salvation by faith in Christ. You that have believed but tremblingly, I have pointed out to you much that ought to comfort you. And to you who can believe with full assurance, I would say, Guard that full assurance with great care; it is heaven below, it is the beginning of heaven above. The Lord, the Holy Spirit, be with you all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xiv. 13-36.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—191, 739, 733.