

“The Active Nature of Faith”  
(Matthew 14:34-36)

What difference should faith make in our lives? If we have really come to know the true and living God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and if we truly believe what He tells us in His Word, how will it affect the way we live? What will we do differently than others, and what will be the difference in what motivates us to do these things? I think we would all agree from the many examples in God’s Word that faith makes a rather significant difference. It changes everything a person does and the reasons for which he does them. As we saw this morning in Hebrews 11, it allows us to see and embrace the promises of God, even though those promises are far off. It also causes us to love God and desire Him with all our being. It makes us want to walk in the ways of God because of that love, and to glorify Him. Faith makes a difference. It is the evidence that we are new creatures and that we are a part of the new creation, and since we are a part of it, that we will reign with our Lord forever and ever in the new heavens and the new earth that He will one day bring to pass. Our text this morning is one of the many examples of how faith will change a person’s behavior, at least it is by way of analogy. It’s really not clear how many of these people we read of were converted or not, but when we look at the things they do when they see and recognize Jesus, we can at least see some of the things that we as Christians should be attempting to do in the spiritual realm for the glory of God.

Matthew now continues his Gospel by telling us what happened after Jesus stilled the wind and the waves on the Sea of Galilee. He and His disciples continued on their journey until they came to land at Gennesaret. Gennesaret was a town just Southwest of Capernaum. In the Old Testament times, it was called Chinnereth or Chinneroth. Like Capernaum, it was situated on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is why sometimes this Sea was called the Lake of Chinneroth or Lake Gennesaret.

In chapter 13, Jesus spoke His parables of the kingdom from a boat just off the shore of Capernaum. After this, He traveled to His hometown of Nazareth and spoke in their synagogue. But when He heard about the death of His relative John, He withdrew from there and went back toward the sea. He got into a boat and went to a lonely place to find rest and solitude. It was here that He taught and healed and fed the five thousand. But after He sent His disciples away to teach them a valuable lesson in the middle of the storm, He then returned to this town which was only a few miles from His home. Jesus was always moving forward in His service to His Father. Wherever He went, He did good to as many as He could, healing them and teaching them concerning the kingdom. Obviously, there is a very good lesson for us here, as we seek to walk after Him.

Matthew writes that when the men of Gennesaret recognized Jesus, they immediately sent word into all the surrounding region in order to gather together all who were sick. Now how did they know who Jesus was? Certainly, the word about Jesus was spreading everywhere by this time. There weren’t very many people who hadn’t heard about Him. But remember also where Gennesaret was. It was only a few miles from Capernaum, the place where Jesus lived. Jesus had spent a lot of time there. He had taught in their streets and performed many miracles in that place. This is why Jesus said earlier they would have the greater condemnation, because after hearing and seeing all that they had, they still rejected Him. Certainly if all of this was going on in Capernaum, it couldn’t have been kept secret from this neighboring town. With all

that Jesus said and did there, how could they not know who He was.

It's interesting to note that there was another Jewish community on the other side of the lake, called Gadara. This was the place where Jesus earlier had delivered the man who was possessed with the legion. These Jews did more than hear about the miracles of Jesus. They actually saw them for themselves. But when they did, they didn't call others to come to Him. Instead, they asked Him to leave. The problem was they didn't see their need of Christ. But the people of Gennesaret did, and so they went out to gather people together to come to Him. Christ is glorified when we see our need for Him and come to Him for help. We should never think that we are bothering Him when we need His help and come to Him. He wants you to come and confess your dependence on Him.

Now notice something else about the people of Gennesaret. When they recognized Christ, they didn't keep the fact that He was in their town a secret, but began to send for all who might need His help, at least His help to make them well. Now it's true that there isn't any indication here that they went out to find people to listen to His teaching. As a matter of fact, Matthew doesn't indicate that He taught them at all. But this shows us that they at least trusted Jesus enough to believe that He could make the sick well, and they acted on that. A person can only trust Jesus as far as he knows Him. Maybe if they had known Him better, by God's grace, they might have entrusted their souls to Him as well as their bodies, and would have brought those who were well physically, but had the sickness of death in their souls. Perhaps they did. But I hope you see that the same is true of us. We can only trust Jesus to the extent that we know Him, and we will only offer Him to others to that same extent. Do you know Christ as more than the healer and sustainer of your body? Do you also know Him as the healer of your soul? This is how you must know Him, if you will truly know Him at all. And this is also how you must know Him before you can offer Him to anyone else for the good of their souls.

Now this was a day of opportunity. Jesus the miracle worker, Jesus the healer was in their town. It isn't everyday that Jesus comes to the very place you live. And so they sent word out to gather the people to Him while there was still time. They appeared to have at least enough concern for others to want to see their bodies made well. What a wonderful opportunity for their neighbors: to be made well, to be made whole again. But how much greater would it have been if they had seen that their souls also could be made whole, that they could escape the judgment of hell for their sins and be brought safely to heaven? This is what Jesus was really bringing. This is what He was really offering to all men. He would have given them life, if they would have only repented and believed. This is what Jesus still brings and offers to us this morning. The Bible tells us that today is the acceptable day, today is the day of salvation. If you hear His voice, call upon Him while He is near while it is still called today, before the door of salvation is closed forever for you. John tells us that Jesus came into the world, but the world did not know Him. He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him. They loved the darkness more than the light. But to as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:10-12). Jesus is here with us this morning. He offers us His salvation. If you have not received it, but hear Him calling you, reach out by faith and receive Him.

But notice again where the people of Gennesaret went to deliver their message: they went to the surrounding district, to their neighbors. They didn't immediately leave where they were and go to the farthest reaches of the world to bring in those in need. They went to their neighbors, because they knew them. They went to their neighbors because they were more concerned about them. They went to them because they would be more likely to listen to them.

They went to those who were near. This is the same community that the Lord wants us to reach: those who are near us. Haven't you ever asked yourself, Why did the Lord put me where He did? Why did the Lord place me in the family He did? Why did He put me in the particular neighborhood He did? Why did He give me the job that I have? Isn't it because He wants us to reach those particular people? Isn't it because He wants us to be a witness of His grace and truth to them? And who better could we witness to? These are the ones we care about more than anyone else. These are also the ones who will take notice of the changes in our lives and will be more inclined to listen to us than anyone else. The Lord wants us to reach them for His glory. He has given to us these many advantages to help us do it. We will certainly gain nothing by keeping Christ to ourselves. There will be no blessing for us or for them by monopolizing Him. In Christ there is enough for everyone. If God has given us the opportunity of receiving good to our own souls through Christ, we should do what we can to bring others to Him so that they can benefit from Him as well. We're the only ones who can, after all. We are the ones who know Him.

And look at how they did this. They became personally involved. They didn't just send word out by courier and tell them to come. They were involved in bringing the people to Him. It's one thing to send a tract or a booklet or a Bible to someone, or to give money to help others evangelize, but it's still another thing to be personally involved ourselves. As I said, there are some who may only be reached through us. We should be ready and willing, then, when those opportunities come, and we should pray that the Lord would give us more such opportunities.

But having seen the character of those who brought the sick to Jesus, let's lastly consider the character of those who were brought to Him. Those who were brought began to beg Jesus that they might just touch the fringe of His garment. They did not try to command Him -- as so many do today, thinking that just because God has promised to do certain things for His children that we can demand that He does --, rather they begged Him, they entreated Him. They realized that they could not demand anything from Him, but could only ask for His mercy. No one can command God. All of us are debtors and beggars. Unless we realize this, we will be more of an offense to God than an object of His mercy. But by their begging, they also showed that they were hungry, that their hearts were disposed to receive from Him. There needs to be a hunger within us for what Christ offers, or we will never come to Him. We must be hungry enough to ask. Jesus says, "Ask, and it shall be given to you" (Matt. 7:7) and James writes, "You do not have because you do not ask" (4:2). Sometimes we don't ask, because we don't really want what He offers. Jesus stands ready to heal, to deliver, to help, to save. But there must be a willingness on our part to receive Him, before we can expect to receive any good from Him. There must also be a willingness in those to whom we offer Christ. We can tell people about Him from sunrise to sunset, but they will never listen unless they are hungry. Only the Lord can put that hunger in a man for Himself. But the only way we or they will know that it's there, is if we invite them to come.

These people also came with humility. Notice that they didn't ask Jesus to touch them, but only that they might touch the hem of His garment. They were not like Naaman the Syrian, who thought that the prophet Elisha would surely come out to him, wave his hand over his leprosy and heal him, rather than sending him to dip seven times in the muddy waters of the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10-11). They believed that if they had the slightest contact with even the very fringe of His robe, that would be enough. It's possible that the people of Gennesaret and its surrounding districts may have heard about the woman with the hemorrhage that Jesus had healed earlier. She also believed that if she just touched His garments, she would be made well,

and she did touch the very fringe of His cloak, and she was healed (Matt. 9:20-21). It was said of Aaron, that when he was anointed with the holy oil, which was a symbol of the Spirit of God, the oil ran down his beard and onto his robe and even to the edge of his robe. This was a picture of Christ, who was anointed with the healing virtue of the Spirit above measure. It symbolized that whoever would reach out and take hold of Christ, even if his faith was so weak that it could only touch the fringes of His garments, that person would be made well. Now this woman was healed in Capernaum, which as we saw was only a few miles away. Perhaps her faith gave them the confidence that if they did the same, they also would be made well. Sometimes our experiences and testimonies of what Christ has done for us can be an encouragement to others also to come to Christ for His blessings. Because of this, we shouldn't be afraid to share our testimonies of the good the Lord has done for our souls. But this also tells us that those who come to Christ must come humbly. Again, we cannot demand anything from Him, but only beg and hope for His mercy.

Now lastly, we read that as many as touched the hem of His garment were cured, were made well. Christ didn't only heal them part way or not at all, as so many today seem to do who claim to have the power to heal, but He made them completely whole at once. This is the same thing He does in the spiritual realm. He doesn't heal in part, neither does He save in part, but He saves to the uttermost those who come to Him (Heb. 7:25). The work that He begins, He will perfect to the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). But He tells us that we must come to Him in faith. We must lay hold of Him by faith. Faith is the only way that you or I or anyone else can touch Jesus. His Word, His Gospel, must be united with faith in our hearts. We must apply it to ourselves by faith. We must depend upon it and submit to it, before we will ever be made whole. Christ offers Himself freely to us, but we must reach out and take hold of Him. If our souls die because of our spiritual wounds, it won't be Christ's fault, but our own. Christ can heal us. He offers to heal us. The only thing that will keep us from being healed is the lack of desire or hunger for His healing. If your wounds have not been healed by the saving virtue of Christ this morning, I would invite you to come to Him now. He stands willing and able to heal you of all your spiritual sicknesses and diseases. But if you are still unwilling, if that hunger is not in your soul, then I pray that Christ would put it there, before you perish in your sins. May God apply His Word to our souls this morning as we need to hear it. Amen.