

What a SOUL NEEDS

We know a lot about how to care for our bodies. Our diet and exercise habits are well-informed. But what about our souls? Most problems are soul problems. Your soul is your deepest you—and God loves your deepest you. How do we take care of our souls? We need to nourish our inner lives and become people whose hearts, minds, wills and bodies are integrated and whole. This summer, we look to the middle chapters of Matthew to discover what the soul needs to find health and peace—resting in the hands of a God who loves us.

A SAVIOR • Matthew 14:22-33 • Tim McConnell • June 18, 2017

How do you find help? If you feel sick, I hope you have a great doctor. If your teeth need help, you have a dentist. If you have a bad hair day, there should be an expert in the house able to help you out. Maturity, wisdom, smart living is not about never needing anything. It's about knowing where to go to get the help you need when you need it. Like the four-year old in London a few months ago who was smart enough to use Siri to call for emergency help. "Hey Siri!" Some would like to train their cats to dial 911, but you can't trust cats. It's important to know who to call. When your soul needs help, who do you call? How do you find help?

I spent a year in Oxford studying philosophy and theology. It ended with a master's thesis I had to defend orally before a panel of Oxford professors. The thesis was called "Salvation in Plotinus and Origen of Alexandria." I compared a great Greek philosopher and a church father on what it meant to be "saved." As I walked in to sit down, one of the professors was walking in with me. Oxford professors are very intimidating. They still walk around in gowns and you're always scared half to death to talk to any of them because you have no idea who they are. They might be the world's foremost scholar. This one turned to me and said, "Oh yes, McConnell. I was very curious about your thesis. I would have thought Plotinus had no need for a savior." What do you say to that? What he meant, and he was of course exactly right, is that to the Greek philosopher's mind it is an embarrassment to look for a savior, to look for an outside source for help or rescue. They figured the universe had given them all they needed to find peace, and it only required disciplined and complete thinking to rectify behavior and find peace for the soul.

I'd say that same sentiment is present today. We hear it in a thousand ways. A grown woman shouldn't have any need for external religious moral dictates. A real man saves himself—he doesn't go looking for a savior. An intelligent person handles their own spiritual business. Only a weakling needs a savior. Listen, it takes strength to face the truth. The fool is the one who seeks no help where help is required. No, Plotinus may have been a pretty smart cookie, he may have been the sharpest knife in the drawer—but Plotinus needed a savior. Every one of us does. A soul can't survive on puffed up pride and false confidence. A soul just won't rest on that. It won't. If we are truly seeking what a soul needs, well, a soul needs a savior. A soul needs Jesus. Why? Because without a savior we are stuck in our sin.

Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Or Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned." We often concentrate on sin as a crime against God—a crime of disobedience against God's righteousness for which God's justice demands retribution, sending Jesus to the cross to pay the penalty you and I could not—and so it is. But do you also think about sin and its effects on your life today? Sin is absolutely corrosive to your soul. It is not just disobedience to God, it is self-destructive. In 1 Peter 2:11 we read, "Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul." Our disobedience, our disordered desires, our sinful consumptions, they insult God sure, but they also corrode our own souls. Our souls have a built-in desire to seek harmony and integration, wholeness. Sin disintegrates what the soul wants whole. That's why David in Psalm 32 didn't just say, God was mad at me when I sinned. He said, "...my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long" because his sin waged war against his own soul, until... "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalm 32:5) Sin disintegrates what the soul wants whole, but grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ puts it all back together again.

You may be tempted to make it on your own. You may think maturity means growing up past the need for a savior like Jesus. You may think the best way to deal with your mistakes is to clean them up yourself and ask no help. Let me tell you, a soul needs a savior. One is not a fool who seeks help where help is needed. The fool is the one who perishes, silent, in pride, refusing the help of the only One who could save them.

Peter gets out of the boat today, and we get to see just what it means to have a savior for our souls. What does it look like to step out of a boat? Can you imagine? Put yourself in this scene. It's late at night, stormy, dark, and you are just seasoned enough of a fisherman to know that the situation you are in is actually life threatening. Then along comes Jesus—you see this figure coming toward you standing on the water and the waves. You think you recognize Him. But there's no boat under Him; He's just moving along there like He's walking through the park. Where's your heart now? What's going on in your soul now? Jesus says three things in the storm: "Take heart. It is I. Do

not be afraid." Have courage. Don't be afraid. "I am." That's the same phrase translated as "It is I." I am. You see, it's not whether or not you have faith that matters, it's the object of your faith that matters. "I am," says Jesus.

Peter is bold. He's not sure, but he's bold. "If it is you..." See, he's not sure. "'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'" (Matthew 14:28) But only if it's you. Jesus calls the bluff! "Alright. Come on then." Then Peter, wet and cold, in a boat that's tossing and turning in the waves, in the dark, in the rain, in the wind, he lets go of the wooden seat he was clinging to and stands up. His friends are amazed as he moves toward the edge, he lifts his foot and starts leaning out over the edge. He throws his foot over the side of the boat! Can you imagine this? Talk about your whole life in the hands of Jesus. Talk about, as we said last week, "risking it all on the dare that Jesus is It!" Talk about casting your life into the hands of Jesus. This is total commitment. This is whole-self discipleship. This is the riskiest thing Peter had ever done—the riskiest thing you and I could ever imagine doing. There's kind of a resignation to it, isn't there? I could drop to the bottom of the sea right here. This could be his last moment on earth. But it's also the safest place Peter could ever be, the safest place for his soul. Why? Not because of what is going on inside of him, or around him but because of the One who stands before him. The One who called his name. It might seem crazy to step out of a boat in the sea in the middle of a storm at night—but stepping fully toward Jesus when He calls is the safest place you can be and the most settled place for your soul.

Then suddenly, Peter is walking. If your faith is in Christ, if Christ is your companion, there can be peace in the middle of torrential downpour of events and errors and attacks and sufferings and waves and wind and tears and all else. Peter stands on water. Not many can say that. Then, just as suddenly, Peter sinks and we must ask, what shifted? What is different? The wind and the waves are exactly the same. The sea is no different than it was when Peter stepped out in faith. Jesus is no different. He's the same Jesus He was when He called to Peter to step out. If anything, Peter can see Jesus a little more clearly than he did before. What changed? The shift was in Peter's soul, in his heart. It says he "saw the wind." Now you can't see wind, really. I was driving in my car with one of my boys and said, "Look at that music playing." My smart...smart...child said, "Dad, you can't see music." Thanks, boy. Peter saw the wind. Take it as 'perceived.' Fine. Didn't you perceive it before you got out of the boat? Peter's soul, mo-

mentarily founded on the certainty of a full and pure response to the call of Jesus on his life, Peter's soul shifts to another foundation for just a moment. Slip! Bad moment to choose to switch foundations. But it happens.

Now Peter gets the opportunity to say the most important thing he has said so far. Verse 30, "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out" the most important thing he could possibly say, the most important thing you or I could possibly cry out, here it is: "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30) Lord, save me. This beats, "If it's You." This beats, "If it's Your will." Lord, save me. That could be the most important prayer you ever pray. Prayer doesn't have to be eloquent; it doesn't have to be ancient and ritualized. It has to be genuine. From the heart. From the soul. From deep inside, Peter cries out, "Lord, save me." And he meant it! Only a fool keeps sinking when the help is right at hand. Only a fool says, "A grown man saves himself" when he's about to go under in the Galilean sea. When life is taking you under: "Lord, save me."

So, here is the picture of your soul in the hands of Jesus. Last week we said, the first step to a healthy soul is to entrust it to Jesus. Most problems are soul problems, but soul health is possible because God loves your deepest you. But it takes giving your whole life over to Jesus. That's the cost. Out of the boat. Over the edge. On the water. Not my will, Lord, but Your will be done. The life I now live by faith. Look at Peter, knee deep in the waves, with his hand in the hand of Jesus. That's what a soul needs. John Calvin wrote: "For as the surest source of destruction to men is to obey themselves, so the only haven of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever he leads. Let this, then, be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God." The first step—to abandon ourselves. Out of the boat. Or pastor Bryant Kirkland, in his book *Home Before Dark*: "A man learns to live more fully only when he learns to die daily into the confidence of the Savior's care." That's what a soul needs. Knee deep in the waves, with your hand in the hand of Jesus.

Jim DeJarnette led our staff chapel last week and shared the story of Horatio Spafford. Spafford was a successful lawyer and property investor in Chicago when the Great Fire of 1871 took his wealth along with his 2-year old son. Ruined, he planned to return to Europe with his family, but in a last minute change of plans he sent his wife and four daughters ahead on a ship. The ship sank. His four daughters drowned. He

received a telegram from his wife that simply read, "Saved alone." As he traveled on another ship over those very waters, Spafford, in his grief and tears and prayers, was inspired to write a hymn: "When peace like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know; It is well, it is well, with my soul. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed His own blood for my soul." It is well with my soul. It's more of a battle cry than an honest assessment. It is well with my soul. In the middle of the pain, and the waves, and the wind, and the tears, and the injustice, and the unfairness, I *know*, I *declare*, I *know* on what my soul is founded, I know on Whom my soul is founded, in Whose hands my soul is kept. It is well.

A soul needs a savior. You might think you don't. But I want to tell you today, weakness is not calling on a savior. Strength is not pretending to be okay when everything is disintegrating, when from the soul outward, in concentric rings, everything is flying to pieces. Strength is calling out to the One who can save your soul. Peace is possible even in the rough waters, but only as that peace comes to you from the outside. If I'm in the water and waves, and the water and waves are the problem, my flailing around only makes more waves. A soul needs a savior. We have a savior. "Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" (Matthew 14:33) Don't sink down any deeper. Don't let your soul go under. The Savior is here. "Lord, save me."

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STUDY GUIDE

"What a Soul Needs: A Savior" Matthew 14:22-33

Start It

- For Father's Day, our Men's Life Ministry was given the gift of zip-lining in Manitou Springs. There is a lot of trust involved in hooking into a suspended line and screaming across a 100-foot deep canyon—and I do mean 'screaming.' I do a lot of rock climbing and am now pretty accustomed to wearing a harness, but I can still remember the very first time I put on a climbing harness and leaned back over the edge of a rock wall in North Cheyenne Canyon to repel down to the floor below. That's all in.

Study It

- Read Matthew 14:22-33. Does this story seem strange? Why is this in the Bible? Is it an adventure narrative, the harrowing account of one man's brief dance with death? Or is it something more?
- Read Matthew 14:22-24. Why do you think Matthew notes that Jesus "made" them get into the boat? Could it be that these seasoned fishermen knew a storm was coming? Why might Jesus do this?
- Read Matthew 14:25-27. What are the three commands Jesus yells to the disciples as he walks toward them on the water?
- Read Matthew 14:28-31. What is behind Peter's initial question? Did he know it was Jesus? Why did Peter begin to sink? What do you learn from that?
- Read Matthew 14:32-33. What is the disciples' response to the event? What would have been lost if Peter stayed in the boat?
- If "God loves your deepest you" and your deepest you is your soul, how does this story illustrate God's care for your soul?

Pray It

Lord Jesus, Your voice calms the seas, the waves obey Your command. When I am in the throws of life's challenges and trials, when my heart is sinking in suffering and sadness, let me hear Your voice, let me feel Your hand, let me know Your strength to save my soul. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Live It

Send a Bible verse to a friend in need.