



## BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Congregation of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

PO BOX 552 • BELLVILLE • 7535  
 LINGEN STREET • BELLVILLE • 7530  
 TEL: 021 948-2417 / 021 948-2529  
 FAX: 021 948-2419  
 e-mail: bellville@presbyterian.org.za

# Faith and Doubt

**Matthew 14:22-36**

~ Brent Russell ~

- Did your mother ever say to you no **four-letter** words in this house
- Did anyone ever have their **mouths rinsed** because you used a four-letter word?
- Have any cruel parents here ever done that to their kids?
  
- I have somewhere a **photo** taken on the day of my first swear word
- I was 2 years old and running through the garden with a **hose pipe**
- A **tripped and fell** spraying myself with water
- “**OH sugar**” I said much to the **disappointment** of my gran
- And to the **embarrassment** of my mother
- Well I want to share with you a Christian version of a four-letter word
- A word we **don't talk about** much in the church
- A word that makes us **feel powerless**
- A word that **brings us to our knees**
- A word that we talk about only when we think no one is listening
- A word we speak only of in **hushed tones**
- In fact we sometimes feel that if we even say it out loud God may wash our mouth out with soap
- Or perhaps he will even zap us with the proverbial lightning bolt zzzzapppppp

- **The word is - Doubt**
- **We don't often here doubt spoken of from the pulpit**
- Or in fact many other places in the church
- And if we do it is often in **demeaning terms**
- **So much so that we dare not talk about our doubts and our fears with other for fear of being scorned**
- I want to read from Matthews gospel a story about Peter
- Poor Peter the man who does everything wrong
- We know that he **denies Jesus** three times
- We know that he is told "**get behind me Satan**" by Jesus when he does not want Jesus to leave
- So let us read

***Matthew 14:22 - 36***

- Here we come across a classic case of doubt
- Poor old Thomas was stuck with the label for all eternity
- **'Doubting Thomas'**
- **But Peter was as bad - if not worse!**
- So here we have poor Peter looking and probably **feeling a little bit like a cat having had a bath**
- **Wet, bedraggled, humiliated and dejected**
- **And perhaps today you find yourself in the same place**
- **Dejected and humiliated because you doubt**
- Let me share that I am **not a great Greek scholar**
- I need **lots of books and some time** to make heads or tails of it
- And I often find it **quite meaningless when a preacher so self righteously** proclaims "Well in the original *Greek* this means" to show off his great academic skills

- I have not great *Greek* academic skills but you need to know this about the *Greek* word for doubt
- What I can tell you that there are some different words used in the Bible that mean to doubt
- The English translation loses some of the differences, but they are quite fundamental
- **And I want to share them with you because they fundamentally change how we approach doubt**
- **Both with regards to ourselves**
- **With regards to others**
- **But most importantly with regards to Jesus**
- **So let me share with you some ideas**

### ***To simply not believe is simply not acceptable***

- When the Bible speaks of doubt we recall passages like
- **James 1:6** - But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.
- Or
- **Mark 11:22** I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.
- Or
- **Matthew 21:21** Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done.
- Do these passages sound familiar
- **Do they reinforce for you the guilt and inadequacy of your faith**

- Are these passages like **a stake being driven through your heart** - tearing away at your spiritual self worth
- **Destroying your confidence in Jesus**
- **Making you doubt the very faith that will save you?**
  
- When you read passages like this do you wish you were like other Christians
- Super faithful who believe without doubting
- Who seem to have this faith that can move mountains, heal people and even bring the dead to life
- Do feel faithless when you are confronted by the Bible in these extracts
- What will God say about this...?
- **Will he destroy me...does this mean I am no longer his child?**
  
- **Well the word used in these passages is Diakrino**
  
- It means literally to not believe
- **It refers to someone who has NO faith**
  
- These passages refer to those who **Pray to God as a cop-out**
- **People who pray only when they are in trouble or when they want something**
- I don't really believe in God. But just in case he is there I am going to pray maybe he will help me win the Lotto...
- They use God as a **good luck charm** or as a magic wand for health and wealth
- The kind of people who live their lives not believing in God but when the plane is about to crash all cry out "Oh my God"
- To have this type of unbelief is simply put unacceptable in God's eyes
- **To Diakrino is be an unbeliever**
- Someone who will not inherit eternal life
- **A person who is spiritually blind and has no faith whatsoever in Jesus**

## ***Doubt within faith is OK***

- Peters story I believe hits very close to home for many of us
- We so much want to do well for Jesus
- We want to be spiritual giants
- Men and women of great faith - people who stand firm in Jesus
  
- We want to believe and never doubt at all
- To pray and see miracles
- To pray for the sick and the dying and to see them restored
- We want to have faith that can move mountains
- We have at some point gotten out of the boat like Peter - but then we doubt
- We doubt our God-given abilities- our gifts and talents
- We doubt Jesus
- We question His scriptures
- And like Peter we begin to sink and drown
- We literally begin to drown and choke our spiritual life in the waves of our doubts
- As Peter begins to fear the wind and the waves
- This is not some placid lake we so often imagine in the story
- There is a howling wind and waves that are buffeting the boat
- And as Peter begins to sink he cries out Lord Save me"
- And that is where many Christians are today
- Struggling for breath and crying out "Lord, save me!"
- When Peter calls Jesus IMMEDIATELY responds
- Jesus reaches out and says to Peter "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"
- Why did you DOUBT

- The Greek word here is **distazo**
- It means to have little or weak faith
- **This is not unbelief**
- **This does not mean to have rejected Jesus entirely**
  
- This is doubt that we all go through at some time in our Christian walk
- It is **NORMAL** to have times of doubt
  
- We are so often afraid to admit it
- It is our Christian swear word because to doubt means we have no faith
- To doubt means we are lost
- To doubt means we are weak
- **To admit doubt, we believe is tantamount to admitting we have lost our salvation**
  
- **Every believer - every child of God goes through places of spiritual drought**
- **Times when Jesus seems so very far away**
- **Times when life's storms overwhelm us**
- **We find our heart full of questions**
- **Like Peter we are walking with Jesus but we suddenly get frightened by the storms around us**
- **People die, family members get sick, folk lose their jobs**
- **And we sometimes find ourselves weak in the faith - Doubting**
- **Distazo**
- **And we feel like Peter**
- **We feel like we are about to drown**
- We feel like our doubts are **overwhelming** us
- We will all go through some time of doubting like Peter did
- We need to move on beyond that place

- But to be there is a stage in our faith development that we **ALL MUST** go through
- We need to have to hard times so that our faith can be stretched and increased
- When we are in a place like that we need to reach out and cry out "Lord save me!"
- When we doubt like this **Jesus will not let us drown**
- **He will not ignore our cries for help**
- We may feel like Jesus has rejected us but I promise he has not **nor will he ever leave us or forsake us** - he has promised that in the scriptures

### ***Conclusion***

- Let me share with you a story that will help you understand the difference between
- **Diakrino and Distazo**
- There was a French tightrope walker called **Charles Blondin**
- In **1858** he planned to complete his greatest stunt ever
- He spanned a tightrope across the **Niagara falls** that divide USA and Canada
- And a great crowd came to **watch this daredevil**
- **And he set of with the crowd chanting his name**
- And when he got to the other side after many agonizing minutes the crowd was in awe
- Blondin Blondin Blondin they chanted
- **"Who is the greatest tightrope walker in the world?" he asked**
- Blondin Blondin Blondin they chanted
- **"Who believes that I can get to the other side carrying someone on my back?"**
- Blondin Blondin Blondin they chanted
- **"OK who is going to volunteer?"**
- **And the crowd was silent**

- After some time his **manager** said that he would do it
- They had a long and difficult trip back to the other side
- and after a **number of rests** along the way they finally made it over the falls
- **There are two types of doubt**
- **There are those who are all mouth "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus"**
- **Full of religion**
- **Full of talk**
  
- **No action**
- **No faith**
- **They are doubters because they do not believe at all**
- **When the call comes, Jesus says "Come" they turn away because they have NO faith**
- **But then there are those who take the step**
- **Like Peter did they get out of the boat**
- **They take the step and begin to walk on the water**
  
- **Like Charles Blondin's manager who climbed onto his back**
  
- **Ready to take the journey to the other side**
- **Not with bravado and arrogance**
- **But with fear, with trepidation and yes even Doubt**
  
- **I can imagine the sweat dripping of the managers hands**
- **I can imagine the thoughts running through his mind - will we make it, can he do it, is he really as good as he says he is?**
- **If you like Peter are ready to get out of the boat**
- **If you are ready to get out and respond when Jesus says to you "Come"**
- **Then make the move get out and walk to him**

- Don't sit in the boat and watch - to do that is to ignore Jesus call
- To sit in boat is to diakrino - to have no faith at all
  
- If you have gotten out of the boat
- And if on the way doubt and fear beset you
- Not simple unbelief - but simply weak faith
  
- If you feel like your spiritual life is being drowned by your doubt
- If you are wondering to yourself can Jesus really do this
- Can he really save me from my sin
- Is he as good as he says he is
  
- If you doubt within your faith
- Jesus will not let you drown, he will not ridicule, he will not mock he will not condemn
  
- He will hold out his hand and he will say to you with gentleness and compassion
- "You of little faith Why did you doubt"
- And he will pull you out of the water and save you to eternal life