

WE'VE ALWAYS DONE IT THAT WAY!

May 17, 2020 ser3936 – God Made Me That Way, Pt3

Before song:

One night a few weeks ago, I was watching a crime show on TV. My wife Gina said to me, "I'm going up to bed and I want you to know that I'm going to be watching TBN and that you may not change the channel when you come up to bed." For those of you not familiar with TBN, it's a Christian TV station that has some great Christian speakers. You see, before I go to sleep at night, if I watch TV, I like to watch something that doesn't involve my brain to have to think and apply what I am hearing because I have been doing that all day. The funny thing was, when I came up to bed a short time later, and got settled in, the irony was that Gina was sleeping. This powerful song, written and sung by Matthew West, came on and captured my heart and mind. Let's take a listen together to "Hope Returns."

Sermon:

There are some powerful statements of biblical truth in this song of encouragement and hope only found in Jesus. The truths apply to each of us, regardless of where any one of us is right now, and what we are going through in our lives.

One of my favorite truths is found in these words from the song:

“And I know it looks like hope is in the grave
But He's still on the throne, so be still and know
That He's still rolling stones away.

But He's still on the throne, so be still and know
That He's still rolling stones away.”

God clearly is on the throne and is sovereign over all that is going on, clearly. We prayed through the sermon series back in January, and through the titles for each of the sermons. We agreed that we would do a series called “God Made Me That Way” and that the title for today's sermon would be, “We've Always Done it that Way.” We had no idea then that we would be in this pandemic, where we would experience restrictions to protect us in how we live, work, connect with others, and worship together. In many situations, what we have always done one way is completely different now. To say God is sovereign is an understatement.

Let's do a quick recap of where we are in this series. Several weeks ago, Pastor Bruce shared with us the truth that God created us with the ability to **choose** as it relates to the sin in our lives. Last Sunday, Angelina Moore shared with us her powerful testimony on our **choice to surrender** to overcome generational sins in our family. Today's sermon title is “We've Always Done It That Way” and we are going to unpack the truth on **intentionally choosing** to do things differently as it relates to sin and what we focus on in our lives.

Let's Pray. God, thank You that You are on the throne and that You allow all things to happen for the good of those who love You and have been called according to Your purpose. Reveal to each one of us today the truth You want us to learn about You and trusting You in new ways. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Throughout scripture, God has revealed Himself to people, and miraculously provided for them when they trusted Him during events or experiences that they have never known before. Today we are going to look at a story of how the disciples responded to a new experience with Jesus and the outcome of their trust.

Turn to *Matthew 14: 22-32*. Let me set the stage for you. Jesus had just performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand and here is where we pick up.

²² "Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd. ²³ After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray.

Pause here and look at what is happening. Jesus models for us what we need to be doing; spending time with the Father in prayer before we do anything and in the midst of everything.

Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it."

I want to pause here again. This story is also recorded in the gospel of Mark and the only difference in the telling of the story is found in *Mark 6:48* where it says, and this one part was added, “He, saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.”

This reinforces the truth that Jesus sees what is going on in our lives. He saw the disciples struggling. He sees us when we are struggling. He sees me when I am struggling. He sees and knows the struggle each one of us is experiencing right now whether it's with sin or with this pandemic. Let's continue and see what happens. Going back to *Matthew*.

²⁵ “Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It's a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.

The disciples had never experienced Jesus walking on the water and therefore didn't know He could. A new situation. A new experience. How often do you and I experience fear in new situations, not knowing how to respond or what to do? We fear the unknown. We fear making the wrong decision.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.” ²⁸ “Lord, if it's You,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to You on the water.

I love Peter here being the risk taker that he was. He said in essence, if it is You Lord, prove it.

How did Jesus respond? In verse 29 **“Come,” He said.**”

Why did Jesus invite Peter to come out to Him, and none of the other disciples? Because Peter asked! Peter wanted to know if it was really Him in the midst of the new situation and Jesus allowed him to experience Him in a new way.

Verse 29 continues: **“Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”**

Notice, Peter experienced the miracle of walking on water towards Jesus in the midst of this storm. However, when did Peter begin to sink? When he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the wind and waves around him. It is the same for you and me in our lives. We will become overwhelmed with our sin or the situations in our lives when we take our eyes off Jesus and don't invite Him into that situation or our struggle with sin. Peter did the same. Peter and the disciples knew the power Jesus had because they had just witnessed the miracle of Him feeding the five thousand. It's the same for us. We too have experienced God's faithfulness and miraculous provisions in our lives and we sometimes fail in the midst of new struggles or situations to remember what He has done and can do.

I recently heard a great quote, and it was probably when I was falling asleep while Gina was watching a speaker on TBN who said, “Whatever we focus on expands in our mind.”

It all begins in our mind. Whatever we focus on expands or grows. Our desire to do right or wrong, which is what we call sin, expands and grows in our minds the more we think about it. Our ability to choose and take action is led by how much time we focus on and think about whatever it is, whether good or bad.

What do we do when our thoughts and focus are not God honoring and affects our trust in and our relationship with God and others? We do what Peter did it verse 30 and cry out, *"Lord save me."*

What did Jesus do for Peter? We finish the story with verse 31:

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "You of little faith," He said, "why did you doubt?"

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

As we just read in Scripture, when Peter cried out, Jesus reached out His hand and saved him. Jesus longs for each one of us to know His saving power and presence in the midst of where we are right now in our lives.

This is one of my favorite pictures of Jesus called The Hand of God by Yongsung Kim:



Notice the look of love on Jesus' face as He reaches down to save us from whatever situation or sin is overwhelming us.

I am a news junkie and I normally like to have it on in the morning and at night while doing things around the house. One morning I heard one of the NBC Today show host say "COVID19 truly brings to the surface man's iniquities." What a true statement. You and I have probably seen this in others, and truthfully, even in ourselves. We have lost control of doing things the way we have always done them. The response to losing that control may bring to the surface sins we struggle with such as anger, impatience, worry, or fear.

Looking at this picture again with me; to me the water and waves represent that from which Jesus wants to save us. What is that for you right now?

Is it worry about all that's going on? Is it worry about not knowing when this is going to end? Is it worry about what the new normal will be? Is it fear about finances? Does the water and waves represent your worries and fear about your employment, about keeping your job, about finding a job? Is it impatience with others? You may be a mom or dad who now works from home and in the midst of it you're having to home school your children and are experiencing major bouts of frustration and inadequacy in trying to do it all. Does it represent the heightened dysfunction of your relationship with your husband or wife, or with your children, because of spending more time together, in close proximity?

You may be a student struggling with not being successful in learning from home and getting the work done. As a student, you may also feel sad and angry that you can't spend time with your friends.

Regardless of the struggle and what is overwhelming you, Jesus longs to save you from it and give you a better focus and new way of trusting Him in the midst of it.

Let me give you some examples from my life. Early in our marriage I discovered I struggled with the sin of anger and quickly realized it was a generational one. Remember, our feelings are neither right nor wrong; they simply show us what's going on in our hearts. It's what we do with them that becomes right or wrong. *Ephesians 4:26* says "In your anger do not sin." In other words, do not scream, yell, curse, or make others feel unloved when you're angry about something.

Unfortunately, that was true for me with my family in the early years and I needed to be saved from this sin. Jesus forgave me for it, and so did my family. This sin was hard to break when pressures were high at home or at work. Gina and my daughters were always walking around on eggshells, not knowing when I was going to blow it again and lose precious moments. In counseling, our pastor shared with me that the only way to overcome is to make the choice and invite Jesus into the situation and let Him change my response, because alone I can't. That means learning to go to God first with my anger and tell Him what I am thinking and feeling. Then I ask the hard questions. Am I wrong? What does He want me to do with this? How does He want me to trust Him with it? It was hard. I made it my prayer every morning to trust Him with what I was feeling and to help me to turn to Him immediately to share with Him those thoughts and feelings when they occurred. Eventually I began to see and experience miracles. Some days I walked on water and others I fell flat on my face when I didn't go to Him first. Gina began to see miracles. I realized that most of what I was angry about was self-centered and sinful and God asked me to give Him those feelings and to ask for forgiveness. Sometimes, the anger was for a good reason, and once I asked God what I should do with it, His approach was far more love-centered than my old approach in my resolutions with Gina, my daughters, and others. I would love to say I no longer struggle with anger. I still do. For instance, I am angered that I can't make plans personally, or as a pastor, because I don't know what we will be able to do and when we will be able to do it due to this pandemic. When I took it to God, told Him how I felt, and what did He want me to do,

He reminded me that He is in control and reminded me of his promise in *Jeremiah 29: 11-13* that's says "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart."

When I turned to Him and cried out in honesty, His hand and heart saved me in the midst of the wind and waves of this pandemic and took me to a deeper level of trust and intimacy.

The wind and waves of the pandemic did not disappear, but my focus did. This is His longing for me and for you.

PLEASE HEAR ME TODAY - If you and I aren't any different, on the other side of this pandemic, as it relates to the sin in our lives, or our trust in Him, then we've missed Him and how He wants us to know Him through this.

Where are you today? What sin, or situation is overwhelming you? Do you want to be like Peter and experience Jesus, His presence, and His power in a new way, or do want to be like the other disciples who never got out of the boat and watched from a distance? If you want to be like Peter, you just need to cry out like he did with "Lord save me"? For those of you who do, He will!

There may be some of you today who are saying, "I want to know God's saving power in my life, but I don't have a relationship with Him and don't know where to begin."

It's as easy as **A, B, C.**

Admit that you have sinned with your choices.

Believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins and choices so your relationship with God can be restored.

Commit your life to Him and make the choice to live for Him daily.

D – Do it today for none of us know if we have tomorrow.

If that's something you want to do, simply pray this prayer with me:

Pray

For those of you who prayed that prayer for the very first time today, congratulations. It is the best life changing choice you will ever make! Please let me know by texting PRAY to 62488 or send an email to bruce@gcccpray.com