

Jesus Walks on Water

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is from Matthew 14, verses 22 to 36. Jesus walks on water. Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.

After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, while he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from the land, buffeted by waves because the wind was against it.

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

But Jesus immediately said to them, Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid. Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water.

Come, he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me.

[1 : 21] Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. You of little faith, he said. Why did you doubt? And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Truly, you are the Son of God. When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret.

And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all who were ill to him, and begged him to let those who were ill just touch the edge of his cloak.

And all who touched it were healed. Matt, thanks for reading.

It'd be a great help to me if you could have a Bible open, just to follow that story as we look at it again. And it's on page 981 in the church Bible.

[2 : 22] So if you've got a church Bible in front of you, just grab that and turn to page 981. And we're going to look at that together. But let's ask for God's help. It's our custom as a church to look at sections of the Bible and just see what God is saying.

And we need God's help to do that. So let's pray. Mighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you for your power, your holiness, your compassion and grace.

And we thank you for this opportunity to have an encounter with you. So we pray this morning that wherever each of us stands with you, whatever we believe, that you would make yourself known to us here.

Would your spirit open our ears to hear your voice. Open our eyes to see Jesus. And open our hearts to respond rightly to him. For we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, this morning's events, Matthew chapter 14, they make us think about fear. And we have a strange relationship with fear.

[3 : 29] Some of you will find a kind of fear exhilarating. So you enjoy activities and sports that bring you close to the emotion of fear.

You know, if you enjoy surfing, climbing, skydiving, getting a sense of fear is part of the thrill that you're looking for. But when it comes to everyday life, we're quite double-minded about fear.

On one level, fear is a horrible thing, isn't it? And I don't know if you can remember points in the pandemic where you had a tangible sense of the fear spreading around people.

I remember going just before the lockdown to buy a computer and being in a computer shop. And the shop assistant being really scared that they were still at work.

And realizing that they were scared to deal with me because they just wanted to be at home. Maybe you can think of other unpleasant experiences you've had of fear. I remember I was living in London when the 7th of July terrorist bombings happened.

[4 : 29] And the next day I was on the, or it was two days afterwards, I was on the underground after the bombing. And I was in a carriage. And in the next carriage there was a bag.

And no one knew whose bag it was. And when the train stopped, people just ran from the train, from the next carriage. And as we saw people running from that carriage, everyone ran to get out.

There was this panic spreading from fear. It's a horrible thing. At the same time, there is a good kind of fear. I've got three kids. And there are times when I want them to learn to have appropriate fear.

I want them to have appropriate fear of busy roads. I want them to have an appropriate fear of a stranger who approaches them. Sometimes our fear is a really helpful way of understanding potential danger and taking action.

Now when it comes to God, there is a right kind of fear and there's a wrong kind of fear. Just as I was drying off, we sang a song, Amazing Grace.

[5 : 33] It was written by John Newton who was a slave trader and then became a Christian. And he wrote these words about God's grace. It was amazing that God would show grace to him.

And I don't know whether you noticed or remember, but one of the lines in that song was, It was grace that taught my heart to fear. And grace my fears relieved.

There is a right way that we can be taught to have a fear of God and then to overcome that fear. And we're going to see those kinds of fear at play in this encounter with Jesus this morning.

It's an extraordinary event, a unique event, written for us by Matthew, who was one of Jesus' closest followers. He was a tax collector who came to follow Jesus. And he was one of the twelve disciples, the closest followers of Jesus.

And he shares with us this event as one of the kind of events that transformed the lives of these men and women who followed Jesus. Now before we get to the lake, it's worth noticing that Jesus has just dismissed a crowd.

[6 : 39] He does that in verse 22. He tells the disciples to get into the boat and he dismisses the crowd. And then he, verse 23, dismisses them. He just had a huge crowd with him.

He taught them and fed them thousands of people. And then he dismissed them. And we know from a different writer, John, that it's because the crowd was so amazed by Jesus, they wanted to make him into a political conqueror.

They wanted to make him a king by force. And Jesus is resolute in his rescue mission that he is on. That's not why he came, to be a political conqueror.

And so he dismisses them and he gets into the boat because he needs, he sent the disciples into a boat, he hasn't got into the boat, because he needs them to grasp things about him and why he came.

The next thing to notice before we get to the lake is that it's Jesus who sends the disciples onto the lake into a storm.

[7 : 43] So have a look at verse 22. Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side. Then by verse 24, just have a look, the little numbers are verse numbers.

Verse 24, the boat was already a considerable distance from the land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. And this kind of storm still batters the Sea of Galilee today and batters homes around them.

What happens is they get a great wind that they call the whistler and it comes shooting through onto the Sea of Galilee. And even today with modern naval techniques, it's very dangerous to be on the sea or even living by the sea when that happens.

Well, here we have this treacherous storm front and the disciples are right in the thick of it in a little boat. And they got there by obeying Jesus. So when does Jesus catch up with them?

Well, have a look at verse 25. It says, shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them. That's a long time in the dark, in a storm. It's good to remember that because when we're in a stormy situation in our lives, when we go through something that's difficult, something that makes us afraid, we might take a wrong turn when it comes to thinking about God.

[9 : 03] We might think, there can't be a God for me to be going through this. Or we might think, I must have done something to offend God and he's punishing me by putting me through what I'm going through.

Well, what does this scene show us? It shows us that sometimes Jesus sends his friends into a storm to work through it for their good. Sometimes Jesus sends you into a storm to work in us for our good.

So we move on to the lake and we've got three points this morning. They're on the sheets, if you'd find that helpful. Inside the notice sheet, you can see the three points as we look at what happened. And our first is that we would recognize the Lord who stands above the chaos.

In the ancient world, the violence of a sea storm was a very prominent reminder that we're not in control of this world. The sea was a symbol that our lives are at the mercy of uncontrollable forces.

We sometimes still talk like that today, don't we? So if our lives are going well and someone asks us, we might say, oh, it's plain sailing at the moment. When things are challenging, we might say, I'm in choppy waters.

[10 : 17] But when things get really difficult for us, we could say, I'm all at sea. I'm all at sea in my life. And a big question for each of us to ask ourselves is, do you acknowledge that reality in your own life?

That your life is at the whim of uncontrollable forces? Some of you will not appreciate that yet in your life. I used to work in London as a lawyer kind of 20 years ago now.

And it was a young person's place to work and live. Everyone around me was healthy. You didn't see older people. You didn't see many families. And it can lead to this sense that some of you might have in your life at the moment, that you've got your life under control.

It can even mean that when you meet somebody who is struggling in life, someone who is all at sea, you find yourself thinking, where did you get things so wrong?

You must have done something really wrong to get yourself into this chaotic mess, into this fix. And then as life goes on, you realize that's just normal life.

[11 : 23] That happens to everybody. Whoever you are, sooner or later in life, waves will crash into you and you'll be blown off course. You know, your parents get older and they have health scares.

You get older. You have seasons where you get health news about your own life that you wish wasn't true. You have experiences where you wake up in the morning and for a moment you've forgotten the diagnosis and then you remember that you have it.

You can be the victim of a crime, of fraud, of injustice, of someone out to harm you. You can be overlooked for a job unfairly or miss out on a home that you wanted.

There can be financial hardship. You can find that you face addiction. If you have children, you then find you're only ever as happy as your least happy child once you've got children.

And you begin to realize that the world can be a frightening place. It's a chaotic place. And we saw that in the pandemic. It was a very helpful lesson for us from COVID. The way our lives had to change because there were forces beyond our control.

[12 : 29] We've got people in our church family who've had to leave everything behind in Ukraine. People who moved very recently from Hong Kong and thought they'd always live in Hong Kong but have felt they've had to leave.

A man in our church family who had to flee Iran and leave everything behind one night. We've got economic uncertainty for all of us, an energy crisis. There's lots of uncertainty and chaos and we live in an age of anxiety with lots to fear.

Well picture these disciples in a wooden boat buffeted by massive waves in the dark. Blown completely off course by this gale force wind.

And they embody for us that sense of being crashed into by forces beyond our control. So how does Jesus fit in with that kind of chaos that the world hits us with?

Well have a look at verse 25. Shortly before dawn Jesus went to them walking on the lake. There's no sandbank under the water.

[13 : 35] They're way out in the deep. This is no clever trick. These disciples knew the Sea of Galilee well. Several of them were seasoned fishermen. And Matthew and the other gospel writers are really clear this was a unique event.

Only two people in human history have actually walked on water. And they're both here in this scene. Some of you will be thinking isn't this a stretch to believe this?

Doesn't science disprove this kind of thing? But Matthew and the other writers of the Bible they don't record things like this for us because they think it's repeatable or normal or scientifically possible.

They report it for exactly the opposite reason. That because they knew as well as we do that this is impossible in the ordinary course of events. When something like this happens it shows us that something unique and supernatural is going on.

Here in Jesus was God stepping into our world. And when God stepped into our world to make sure that we wouldn't miss him he demonstrated who he was by doing unrepeatable things.

[14 : 42] We'd expect a man who was God to do things like that. And I don't know about you but I find it reassuring that when you look at how the disciples respond it's exactly as we would have responded.

So have a look at verse 26. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake they were terrified. It's a ghost they said and cried out in fear.

Now that folks is instinctive superstition from the disciples. They think it's an apparition at first. And you can see why. Just imagine what it must have been like for them.

In the dark before dawn. Perhaps with a bit of starlight or moonlight to go by. Why? Enormous waves crashing into the boat. They can't make any headway. And they spot a human figure coming towards them on the water.

It would have been terrifying of course. And as we think about fear. Maybe at this point we would see that's an appropriate fear isn't it? They're quite right to be afraid of the chaos.

[15 : 46] They're also right to be afraid of a figure they see. Who is so out of this world. He can stand on the chaos. I don't know whether you've ever thought about Jesus like that before.

That when you think about meeting him. And seeing the kind of power he had. An appropriate response for all of us would be fear. Fear at the power.

But as we think about their fear. At the chaos of the storm. And at the one who stands over the chaos. What Jesus says next is absolutely key. So look at verse 27.

But Jesus immediately said to them. Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid. If you're going to remember one thing. From this talk and this chapter of the Bible today.

It's those eight words of Jesus. To them and to us. As he stands above the chaos in their life. And in our lives. He moves towards us. And he says take courage.

[16 : 49] It is I. Don't be afraid. So that's what to recognize. What we see next is how to respond. So our second point. Is come to the Lord.

Who can drive away your fear. The spotlight moves now. From Jesus on the waves. To Peter in the boat. In verse 28. Lord if it's you.

Peter replied. Tell me to come to you on the water. It's a fantastic reaction isn't it. Here is. Heart on your sleeve. Speak before you've thought about it.

We might have shouted. Please come and help. We're about to sink. Peter says. Let me have a go. Amazing. And Jesus response is no less surprising.

Verse 29. Come he said. Then Peter got down. Out of the boat. Walked on the water. And came towards Jesus. It's absolutely amazing.

[17 : 49] And Jesus looks to treat each one of us like this. In a sense. That he says to Peter. Come. Even before Peter's worked out really who Jesus is. He's not going to work that out yet.

For some time. In Matthew's account. And for us. Even before we've worked at who Jesus is. Before we've got our lives sorted. Or our picture of him sorted. He invites us.

Come. Come to me. All over the world today. Jesus is calling people to come to him. And we heard earlier didn't we. From Jamie and Chris and Ellen. That they came to look at Jesus.

And it's been quite a journey for them. To get to today. It hasn't all happened at once. But they've spent time listening to Jesus. Exploring who he is. And in that time.

Come to see. So Peter is walking on the water. Eyes on Jesus. And then he loses his bottle. So have a look at verse 30. But when he saw the wind.

[18 : 48] He was afraid. And beginning to sink. Cried out. Lord save me. When he had his eyes fixed on Jesus. He had faith in the goodness. And the power.

Of the one who stands above the storm. And he could walk. On the water. But then he let himself. Look away from Jesus. At the frightening danger. He could see around him. And his faith in Jesus.

Was replaced. Or displaced. By fear. And he's sinking. But then he does the right thing. And he calls for help to Jesus. Lord save me. And look at where Jesus is.

Verse 31. Immediately. Jesus reached out his hand. And caught him. You of little faith. He said. Why did you doubt?

When Peter looked at Jesus. He saw a man he could trust in the storm. But when he looked at the storm. He was just too afraid. And for us. There are times when we will be afraid.

[19 : 44] By what we can see around us. We will feel that anxiety. That fear. And the encouragement here is. Could you fix your gaze on Jesus. When you feel like that.

If you can do that. He will get you through. And as we see Peter sinking into the water. We see a picture. Not just of fear. But of death. Of being consumed by the chaos of this world.

But Jesus reaches out his arm to Peter. And he takes hold of him. Because we learn in the gospels. That Jesus is the one man you can trust. To carry you through death.

And into everlasting life. How can he do that? Well not long before this. In Matthew chapter 12. Jesus spoke about his own death. And resurrection. And he describes it as a sign.

For the people around him. And he referred back to a prophet. Some hundreds of years before. The prophet Jonah. Who had disobeyed God. And he was on a ship. In a storm. And he was thrown into the sea.

[20 : 45] He said throw me into the sea. Because it's because of me. The storm. To bear the judgment of God. And Jesus said to the people around him. Just as Jonah was three days and three nights under the sea.

And then he rose. So Jesus will be dead. And buried for three days and three nights. And then he will rise. So what's Jesus saying? He's saying he's come on a rescue mission.

For all of us. One day every one of us is going to die. And Jesus came and died and rose again. To smash death to bits. He went down into the waters of death.

He came under the flood of God's judgment. And he came through. So that he can come to each of us. And if we're willing to say to him. Lord save me. He will reach out his hand.

And take hold of us. And he'll pull us out of death. Into everlasting life. So it means if we have faith in him. We don't need to fear.

[21 : 46] So we've heard we're to recognize the Lord. Who stands above the chaos. We're to come to the Lord. Who can drive away your fear. And then let's look at the other disciples. Our third point. Respond to the Lord.

Who can put the world right. So we see their response. When Jesus gets into the boat. In verse 32. And when they. That's Jesus and Peter.

And when they climbed into the boat. The wind died down. Then those who were in the boat. Worshipped him. Saying. Truly.

You are the son of God. Now this is a key moment. For the disciples. It's going to be some time yet. Before they really grasp. Who Jesus is. There's lots of confusion.

But here they make a confession. Of who Jesus is. Because of what they've just seen. He can do. Why is that? Why this miracle? It's because at the very beginning of the Bible.

[22 : 42] Genesis chapter 1. We know that it's God. Who stands above the water. It was the spirit of God. Who hovered on the waters. In the beginning. And in Job chapter 9 verse 8.

We learn again. It's God. Who walks on the waves. To go with that. We need to think about. What Jesus said to them. From the water. So when God.

reveals himself. To the people. Before Jesus came. His people Israel. Through the prophet Moses. Moses asked for God's name. And the name God gave. For himself.

Is I am. I am. God is always existing. Always faithful. He will always be who he is. The great I am. And when Jesus calls out to them.

In verse 27. From the water. Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid. He actually says. Take courage. I am.

[23 : 38] Don't be afraid. He takes on himself. The divine name. He's claiming to be God. And he's demonstrating. That he is God.

And fear is the right first response. To a man who really is God. But when that same man. Comes to you. As he did to them. And calms the storm around them.

So that they're safe. Because he's good. The right response. Is worship. Trembling gratitude. And so that's what they do.

They worship him. With trembling gratitude. And this is a moment. Where we should feel a hand. Come out of the page. That we're reading. And reach towards us. Because if Jesus showed himself.

To be the unique son of God. None of us could go away from here. And ignore that claim. You might be here today. Because you know Chris. Or Ellen.

[24 : 33] Or Jamie. You're their friend. They're in your family. And you see their faith. As something they've got into. And maybe you heard this morning. How they're saying it's helped them. And maybe you're glad for them. But you don't feel it's for you.

Well Jesus walking on water. Doesn't tell us everything about him. And his mission. But it does show us. That we do need to stay with him. When I was at university.

One evening. We had one of these. Late night conversations. Me and my mates. I don't know if you've ever got into one of these. It's about two in the morning. Or later. And you start putting the world to rights.

And we got into a conversation. Me and my friends. About who we thought Jesus was. I wasn't a Christian. No one else was. Who was there. Every one of us.

Had a clear idea. About who Jesus was. None of us. Had read an account of Jesus life. As an adult. None of us. Had looked at the evidence.

[25 : 32] But we all were adamant. We knew who he was. I think it's the same in Glasgow today. And yet the reason. These ordinary. Level-headed.

Jewish followers. Became convinced. That Jesus was a man. Who is God. Was because he lived the life. You would expect. Of someone who claimed to be God. He was teaching.

Like they'd never heard before. Still today. Millions of people. Hang on his every word. Here was a character. Like nobody had ever seen before. Full of humility. Compassion.

Courage. Consistency. He loved everyone. Whoever they were. And then later. He would die. And they'd find the tomb empty. And he would appear to them. Alive again.

So that they went out into the world. To spread the news about him. With no fear of death. Anymore. And this morning. We see them in the boat. With trembling gratitude. For they realize.

[26 : 29] From his strength. And from his kindness. Here is the one. That the world has been waiting for. Here is the one. You want to have on your side.

And then dawn breaks. And we see that in action. As the boat lands. So in verse 35. The boat lands. And the people recognize Jesus. And they spread the word.

To everyone they can. That he's here. Let's pick things up at verse 35. And when the men of that place. Recognized Jesus. They sent word to all. The surrounding country.

People brought all. Who were ill to him. And begged him. To let those who were ill. Just touch the edge of his cloak. And all who touched it. Were healed. I just picture what that morning.

Must have been like. Every one of those people. Is a life transformed. A life restored. And Jesus is showing there. The goodness.

[27 : 26] Of being with him. You just have to touch him. And he takes away sickness. You just have to get near him. And he takes away your sadness. And he's doing that to show us.

What the future with him. Will be like. And just as word spread to them. In Gennesaret. That morning. And people had to show the faith. To go and find Jesus. Today.

Word has spread to us. In Glasgow. This morning. So the searching question. For us is. What will we do. With our fear. Will we get preoccupied.

With what we see around us. And look to handle the storms. Of this life on our own. Or will we come to Jesus. As he invites us to. For some of us here.

Lots of what we've heard. This morning. And seen. Will be very new. Could I urge you. To respond. By coming back. We've heard. Ellen. Chris.

[28 : 20] And Jamie. Like Peter. Spending time with Jesus. Before they got to the point. They were at today. Could you come back. And look at Jesus more. We've seen the goodness.

Of being with him. And we've seen that his claims. Are too important. To ignore. Others of us here. We've already seen. Who Jesus is. Like Peter.

We've called out. In our lives. To Jesus. Lord save me. And come to know God. Through him. As we see him. Walking on the water. Could we appreciate.

Afresh. This morning. How good it is. To know him. When we come to him. We still find. We go through storms. In our lives. But whatever waves.

Are breaking against us. If we keep looking at Jesus. Then our faith in him. Can displace. Our fears. And we know. Because he died. And rose again.

[29 : 14] That ultimately. We cannot perish. He will carry us. Through every storm. More than that. He is right with you. Whatever you're going through. Hand outstretched.

And with your eyes. Fixed on him. You will prevail. He's the one. Who stands over the storms. He's the man. The world's been waiting for. He's the man.

You want to be with. And he says to us. Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus.

We praise you. For your power. And your goodness. And we pray that you will draw near to each one of us this morning.

Help us to trust your words. To respond rightly to your invitation. To move towards you. To speak to you in faith.

[30 : 23] Lord save me. And so to keep our eyes on you. That we find that our faith. Drives out our fears. We ask for our good.

And for your glory. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.