

# What does it mean to trust God?

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 09 August 2026

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0:00] So if I didn't get a chance to say hello before the service, welcome. My name's Thomas. I'm the pastor here. Delighted that you've joined us for worship, especially if you're new. I was thinking back recently to the birth of my oldest son.

He, it was a while ago now, but having never gone through that experience before, we didn't know what to expect. And I remember going in and going through the whole process. And he was born. He came out. They handed him to us.

And he was beautiful. And we had this moment of sort of bliss and celebration. But then we noticed that he wasn't crying. And I remember thinking, that's odd. Don't they cry? And then as we looked right before our eyes, he began to change color.

And he went from being a bright pink to becoming increasingly blue. And I remember somebody calling a code. And I remember the room filling with people. And I remember somebody taking him out of our hands.

And I remember us just sort of being off to the side. And it turned out that he had aspirated a bunch of fluid. And after a few days in intensive care, he was released to come home with us.

[1:05] And we're deeply thankful for that. We realize not every family has that outcome. But in that moment, when I was standing in the hospital room next to my wife, who had just delivered our first baby, I remember up to that point in my life, I had never felt so much fear and so much powerlessness.

And that struck me. It stays with me to this day. I had no idea what was wrong. I had no ability to help. I could not protect him.

I could not protect my wife. I felt completely powerless and useless and afraid and weak. And experiences like that, which I know some of you have maybe encountered things like that in your life along the way, they really expose what we believe.

What we believe about God. It's easy to say that you trust God when things are calm and when life is going smoothly. But when the bottom drops out and when it feels like everything's coming apart, what do we really believe about God?

What do we mean when we say we trust God? The disciples in Matthew 14, this account that we just heard, find themselves in a similar situation.

[2:24] They're terrified and they're powerless. I want to look at this because I think it shows us several things that are worth internalizing about what it means to trust God, not in the calm seasons of life, but when things start to come apart.

So if you'll join me, let's pray, and then we will open God's word together. Our Lord, Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. And we thank you that we're not here just to rely on human words or wisdom, but we're actually here to receive your living word.

And that it alone has the power, not just to illuminate our path, but to feed us and to nourish us and to actually change us. And so, Lord, we pray, just as we sang a little while ago, we pray that our hearts would be open and the soil of our hearts would be tilled and softened and receptive to what you have to say.

And we pray this for your good, for our good, but ultimately, Lord, for your glory. And it's in your son's name that we pray. Amen. Amen. So the disciples, if you're familiar with this account at all, in Matthew chapter 14, they've had a very long day because the disciples have just witnessed this miracle, this unexpected miracle.

A bunch of people followed Jesus out into the wilderness and the disciples want to send them home. And Jesus says, no, you give them something to eat. We looked at this last week and they end up feeding thousands of people.

[3:50] It could have been as many as 15, 20,000 people, counting women and children. So they've just seen that. And then Jesus says, I want you to get on the boat and I want you to go ahead where we're going. And I'm going to spend some time praying alone.

And so Jesus leaves them. He sends them out alone in the boat. And so they're out for some time, the scripture says. They spend some time. By evening, they're probably two or three miles at least out into the middle of the water.

And then a storm hits. And it says that the wind is howling. And then Matthew, when he talks about the waves, he says that the waves were tormenting their boat. I don't know if you've ever been in a situation like this where the waves are just slamming into the side of the boat and it feels like they're punching the side of the boat.

Like any minute, the boat's going to get swamped. And it says that they're battling the storm from evening until the fourth watch. And if you know anything about timekeeping in the ancient world, that means they were on the boat battling the storm for about nine hours.

So I've roughly done anything in my life for nine hours. And they're battling a storm for nine hours. And it's worth stopping here and asking, I think, a pretty important question if we want to understand the text.

[5:00] Did Jesus know that the storm was going to come when he told his disciples, actually commanded his disciples to get in the boat and go out in the water? Of course he did.

Right? He's Jesus. He knew the storm was coming. And so you'd think, well, wouldn't we, if he knew the storm was coming, wouldn't he either stop the storm or wouldn't he say, hey, let's hold off and then we'll go in the morning after the storm passes?

No, all he says is, I want you to get in the boat, go to the other side, I'll meet you there. I think there's this realization that when we answer that question and we say, what does it mean?

Well, apparently Jesus sometimes sends us into the storm. Apparently that's what he was doing. He was sending them into that storm for a reason.

And I think that's hard to swallow because I think commonly, especially among, you know, with all due respect, American evangelicals, there can be this assumption, and I remember hearing this and coming across this around the time I came to faith near the end of my time in college, that if you give your life to Jesus and if you trust Jesus and if you follow Jesus faithfully, you know, there's even lots of songs out there in the Christian worship world that sort of seem to say, well, Jesus is then going to, he's going to satisfy all my needs.

[6:26] And if I trust him that life is going to be rich and full, and there's this sense that when I start following Jesus, life should get easier. Suffering should be reduced, right?

The amount of time I spend feeling satisfied and feeling energized and motivated should go up, right, because I'm following Jesus. And isn't that the blessing that I should expect, following Jesus? I would suggest that, according to this passage, that is not what it means to follow Jesus.

What we see here is that the disciples are in the storm precisely because they obeyed Jesus. I want to qualify storm. When we talk about a storm, we're not talking about just any suffering in life.

We're not talking about just any. What we're talking about is a situation where obedience, where trust is hard. It's a situation that you find yourself in where following Jesus and obeying Jesus is costly.

They're obeying Jesus, and as a result, they're in the middle of the storm. That's what a storm is. And when you're sitting on a beach on a sunny afternoon, it's easy to say you trust God.

[7:36] When the wind and the waves are tearing the boat apart, it's a very different story. And so what we see here is that storms actually create opportunities. They create opportunities for our faith to grow and to deepen.

They create opportunities for the superficiality to be stripped away. They create opportunities for simple answers to be abandoned.

There's a stage of growth for many Christians after you come to faith where simple answers work. But then you reach a point where you find yourself in a storm and none of the simple answers work anymore.

And you have to abandon those. And you often find on the other side of that an understanding of God and how God works that is far more nuanced.

That there aren't easy answers to every question. And that there are some things at the heart of our faith that are deep, unfathomable mysteries. Storms create opportunities for our too small view of

God to be blasted apart and displaced by a much bigger and truer understanding of who God is. [8:44] So storms bring those kinds of opportunities into our lives. And, you know, if you read all the great saints and mystics throughout church history, they all understood this. Teresa of Avila, writing in the 16th century, talks about the qualities of people who are most spiritually connected to God.

And that's something we all, that's something I want. And you think, well, what, do they read their Bible every day? Do they pray every day? Yeah, I mean, probably there's things like that. But here's what she says. Here's, just as other people prize gold and jewels, so these persons prize and desire trials. For they know quite well that trials will make them rich. Rich. That's worth sitting with for a while. That's worth contemplating. Is that something that I could affirm and agree with?

So sometimes Jesus sends us into the storm because there are things that we can only learn in the storm. There are qualities in us that can only be brought out on the far side of adversity.

[9:53] So he does it because he wants us to become more like him. But here's the comfort in this. He sends us into the storm, but he never sends us alone.

So the first point is, sometimes Jesus does send us into the storm, but he never sends us alone. We see the disciples, they spend hours battling this storm.

They're exhausted. And then they look out over the dark water and they see this figure walking toward them. And I just love this because it's such a human response to the situation, you know. Up to this point, they've not been afraid. You know, they spend a lot of their life around or on the water. They kind of know how to handle themselves to some degree. But then when they say Jesus walking toward them on the storm, then they're terrified, right?

And they're not terrified of the storm. They're terrified of Jesus because they think he's a ghost, which was a very common superstitious belief back in this day. And then Jesus speaks.

[10:53] And you can imagine him, his voice coming to them across the water in the darkness. Do not be afraid. It's me, right? Don't be afraid.

Take heart. And so what we see here, the second point is this. Yes, Jesus sends us into the storm, but Jesus also meets us in the storm. And that is often where we have our most powerful encounters of Jesus.

This is an incredibly powerful encounter. It's a life-changing encounter with Jesus. The question for us is, if Jesus is the kind of person, the kind of God, who is willing to meet us in the midst of a raging storm, can we recognize the presence of Jesus in the midst of the storm?

Because as we see, Jesus draws near to the disciples. The storm has so overwhelmed their perception that they not only fail to recognize him, but they mistake him for another threat.

And have you ever noticed that this is what fear does to us? Right? When you lock in on the things that you're worried about or afraid of, when you're ruminating on the things that cause you fear and anxiety, that tends to narrow our world.

[12:03] It tends to narrow our perception. And it primes us to recognize and to perceive other things as being threats. So it's like it creates this filter where if I'm in the threat detection mode, I'm going to tend to see lots of things as threats, even things that aren't threats.

Even somebody that might be trying to rescue me, I'm going to see that as a threat. And that's exactly what we see with the disciples. So this is why a crisis can make one person feel closer to God than ever.

And the same crisis can lead another person to believe that God has completely abandoned them. Right? It deepens one person's faith and it leads another person to deconstruct and abandon their faith.

Right? Because you can become so consumed by the diagnosis or the conflict or the financial pressure or the future that you can't control that you struggle to recognize Jesus even if he's standing right in front of your face.

And what we've, some of us have experienced this, the same person can experience both in the same day. Right? You can go through something in the morning and you're like, that was so faith-building and that was so encouraging.

[13:12] And then by that late afternoon you have another experience and you're like, where is God? Like, I pray, I never feel God's presence. And that can be over the course of about eight hours. Right? So if you ever feel that way, I want you to take comfort from this passage.

Even though the disciples fail to recognize Jesus, that does not stop him from coming to them. He still comes. His presence with them in the storm is not contingent on their ability to recognize him. So if you ever feel this way, take heart. Even when we fail to see Jesus, he is always with us. It's our ability to recognize Jesus that will make the difference in how we experience that storm though. And so it does matter. And the problem is that our perception is simply fragile. And it's because our perception, the way we make sense of things, hinges on our attention, what we pay attention to. If you know anything about the research on attention, that really attention functions like a spotlight. Your attention is like a filter, like to go back to the earlier image.

[14:25] So the point is, we don't see everything. You only see what is in the spotlight, what you're paying attention to, and you tend to not see everything else.

So there was a really famous Harvard study done on attention where they brought a bunch of people in and had them passing basketballs back and forth and had different color shirts. And they tell participants to count the number of passes between these people and these people.

And at the end, they bring them together and they say, well, how many passes were there? And most people get it right. And then they ask the real question of the study, did you see the gorilla? Yeah, yeah. It turns out, right in the middle of the video, a person in a gorilla suit, full-size gorilla suit, comes out and kind of dances around on stage and then leaves.

And the vast majority of participants say, what gorilla? It was right in front of your face. Why didn't you see it? I wasn't paying attention to it. Imagine how your perception of reality changes depending on what you're paying attention to.

What is in that spotlight and what is outside of that spotlight in the dark. And how does that change the assumptions you make about the world, about threats in your life, about what you can trust, about the character and nature and presence of God in your life?

[15:34] It can radically change depending on what you're paying attention to. So whatever holds our attention determines our perception of reality. You know, big tech companies know this.

That's why they spend billions of dollars trying to figure out how to better capture our attention. And just to reflect on that for a minute, the average person these days spends about 49 hours a week engaging with social media in some form, meaning engaging with the content that the algorithm delivers, which means we're spending 49 hours a week on average being formed by that content. In other words, it's determining what we pay attention to. The algorithm's single purpose of its existence is to figure out what you tend to pay attention to and to give you more of that. So what's in the spotlight and what's outside of the spotlight?

And if I'm spending 49 hours a week consuming like hyper-politicized rhetoric or self-optimization life hacks, then what is my natural assumption going to be and what is my natural ability going to be when it comes to seeing Jesus in my life?

And I'm not going to see him even if he's right there. So what we need to do is to think about what am I paying attention to and how is that shaping my ability to sense and experience the presence of God in my life?

[16:54] I can't be on my phone all day and then fire a signal flare up to heaven and be like, well, where's Jesus? I just can't. That's unrealistic understanding of the limitations of my own attention, right?

How do we keep our attention focused on Jesus so that we will be able to recognize his presence in our lives? Well, the church has always relied on things, tools, practices like scripture, like prayer, like coming and gathering for worship at least once if not multiple times a week.

All of that is designed to retrain our attention to experience Christ's presence. We're not invoking the presence of we're not, that's a pagan understanding. He's here with us.

All that we do here is intended to attune our attention to his presence, to help us recognize him coming toward us. This is why monastics structure their life around rhythms of daily prayer and inspired by that as Anglicans we have a wonderful tool in the toolbox for this.

It's called the Book of Common Prayer, right? Developed in the 16th century aimed at this, helping us recognize and attune ourselves to the presence of Christ in our life.

[18:15] Right? So you wake up in the morning and instead of scrolling your email you begin with prayer. You focus on Jesus. Then you go through your morning and you're answering email and you're getting stressed out and following me and then at midday you come back and you refocus on Jesus.

And then you go through your afternoon and you're in traffic and you're thinking about all the things you didn't get done and then in the evening you refocus on Jesus. And then right before you go to bed instead of doom scrolling and stressing about the state of the world you refocus on Jesus.

And again and again and again our attention is pulled away and then it comes back and then it's pulled away and then it comes back and that's the purpose of prayer, right? Because we're humans we can't just constantly attune, right? If we could we wouldn't need grace.

But our attention has to be brought back again and again and again Christ is here he's with you listen. That's the purpose. So you don't have to use the book of common prayer there are a lot of great apps and tools out there but what is your plan?

If you don't have a plan it's a great place to start. Imagine if instead of spending 49 hours a week being formed by the algorithm we allowed the voices and the wisdom of the saints who came before us to have a say in what is forming and shaping and directing our attention.

[19:27] How would that change our experience of a normal Tuesday? So this is the second point so Jesus sends us sometimes into the storm but the good news is he meets us in the storm.

But there's a third and final thing we need to see here that I think is arguably the most important point of the whole text. Peter recognizes Jesus I also love this because it's so how I experience faith.

He recognizes Jesus and he gets this burst of faith. Right? And he says if it's you you know this is kind of a bold request tell me to come to you and I will. He's like I want to do what you're doing. Show me how to do that. I want to walk on water. And Jesus says come on. And imagine what that must have been like. Right? You're out in the middle of the ocean. Have you ever heard the phrase thalassophobia?

It's it's I learned it because I have it. It is it's the fear of extremely deep dark water. So like for me one of my worst fears would be to be like the ship goes down at sea and I'm just out treading water like Titanic style.

[20:32] You know I'm like I'm just kind of floating on wreckage and there's just nothing but like miles of ocean below me. That just makes my knees weak. So imagine now it's not quite that deep in this sea but imagine it's still pretty deep and it's at night and the storm is raging and imagine getting out of that boat.

I mean that took some serious boldness. Peter gets out of the boat one leg then the other leg he starts to come toward Jesus and there's this kind of pregnant moment where everybody's just he's actually doing it right?

But then look what happens it says then Peter got out of the boat walked on the water and came toward Jesus but when he saw the winds right his attention shifts right he's focusing on Jesus and then his attention shifts away and he starts to focus on the wind and the world narrows right and the spotlight Jesus is in the shadows and he's spotlighting the wind and he begins to sink and all he can do is cry out Lord save me he's going down into the water save me right and then so we see right he has this burst of faith but then his faith falters for a moment he's standing on the water but then his attention shifts his faith melts he starts to sink I think this is extremely crucial because if Peter had simply gotten out of the boat and had enough faith and walked to Jesus then really the hero of this story would not be Jesus it would be Peter right and the point of this message which could be preached in any religious institution anywhere would be be more like Peter this is a great example for you to follow be more like him you should have more faith and then you'll be able to do amazing things but that's not what happens this is not a story with a moral that says be more like Peter in this story

Peter fails his doubt actually overwhelms his faith he has this burst of faith but then it melts away and doubt overwhelms him and he starts to sink and he can't save himself and all he can do is cry out Lord save me and then I think this is the most beautiful word in the story immediately immediately Jesus reaches out his hand takes hold of him and lifts him out of the depths right and that's when they really come to see who Jesus is right each of these encounters brings them closer and closer and closer and this happens and they say surely you must be the son of God and they break into spontaneous worship right then and there and so this third point is crucial yes he sends us into the storm sometimes he meets us in the storm but ultimately Jesus is the one who carries us through the storm the decisive moment in this story is not when Peter takes hold of Jesus it is when Jesus takes hold of Peter and this is really the heart of the Christian faith and this is something that we will say again and again and again until it sinks in it is not about the quality of our faith it is not

about the quantity of our faith it is about the object of our faith the object of our faith is all that matters so you might have a weak and trembling faith that feels like it is barely stitched together but if you place that weak and stitched together faith in the hands of a strong savior that's enough that's all you need because it's the savior not the strength of our believing who saves us and this is a good reminder that this is not just a story about surviving difficult circumstances in our lives it is about that and all of this applies to that but this actually is pointing to something beyond itself this is a story that points us to the heart of the Christian faith which is the good news of the gospel because the larger story of scripture tells us that we are all caught in the midst of a storm a kind of spiritual storm it says that we're all sinking beneath powers we cannot defeat right what the bible calls sin and death that we're all caught in that and we can't rescue ourselves and if it's left up to us to do that our faith is going to falter right our commitments are going to be abandoned we're going to be pulled under and what this tells us is that Jesus is not the kind of being who stands away at a safe distance shouting instructions to us you know do more of this stop doing that right that's not who we're dealing with we're dealing with a kind of person who enters the storm who descends into our suffering and death this is really what you see on the cross you see

[25 : 29] Jesus allowing the waters to close over his head and then through his resurrection resurrection the reason the Christians celebrated when they realized what had happened that first Easter is because they realized what it meant he has broken the power of death he has overcome he has stilled the storm and so now in because of that everyone who cries Lord save me is met by his saving hand immediately right when you cry if you've never done that before and you were to pray that right now just in your mind Lord save me I'm ready immediately Jesus takes hold he's not waiting for you know well a little more show me you really mean it as soon as you cry out he takes hold and if we believe these things they will transform how we experience storms I want to come back to that quote from

Teresa of Avila can you imagine being like those people that she talks about the people who prize and desire trials the way other people prize gold and jewels I mean that may sound fanciful that may sound idealistic I think it's possible the next time you find yourself in a storm that's an opportunity to take some of what we're talking about and to try to put it into practice to recognize and to say okay if I'm in this storm I have to at least ask is it possible that Jesus has allowed this to happen has allowed me to come to this place because there are things that he's wanting to do in me sometimes my wife and I will use the phrase I feel like Jesus is taking me to school it's like he just kind of shows up and says it's time to go to school class is in session and I'm like it's the middle of the summer and he's like not on my calendar and he's like let's get to it you know there's work he wants to do in my heart there's work he wants to do in my life sends me into a storm right and so you ask is it possible that I'm in a storm right now because

Jesus has called me to be here and then you draw comfort from the fact that that can only mean one thing that Jesus wants to meet me here in a new way he wants me to encounter him here in maybe a way that is deeper maybe a way that like I said before requires me to let go of some of the simplistic aspects of my faith maybe it draws my attention to an area of my life where I've been actively resisting him but he's wanting to do something he's wanting me to encounter him in a new way and ultimately I realize me getting through this thing is not going to hinge on me having what it takes right I think for a lot of us men maybe women as well I think we have these deep fears that can surface do I have what it takes or am I worth loving am I worth does anybody care about the fact that I'm in this you know and ultimately it's not about us getting it right he will still every storm in our life sometimes he saves us by calming the storm sometimes he saves us simply by sustaining us through it you know

Johnny Eric Santata who the woman who was paralyzed from the neck down I just I've drawn so much inspiration from her over the years and one of her phrases that always stays in my mind is sometimes God allows what he hates in order to accomplish what he loves there are things that God is wanting to accomplish so sometimes he saves us simply by sustaining us through that hard thing but ultimately what scripture says is through the resurrection Jesus is going to save us from every storm the wind will one day cease the waves will one day stop tormenting the boat he'll wipe away every tear all things will be made new and on that day Christ will bring his people safely home let's pray Lord may may these words sink in what is of you Lord may it may it sink deeply especially for those of us who might be in a storm right now Lord we pray for not just human wisdom or pat answers

Lord we pray for encounters encounter this story is about encounter and so for those of us who may be in the midst of a storm I pray Lord that there would be the opportunity to encounter you right to experience your presence in ways that change us deeply Lord I pray that through these experiences I think of Peter years later writing his epistle telling his people don't be surprised when the trial comes upon you as though to test you Lord may we not be surprised may we see in these even these hard experiences of our life may we see your love and your mercy may we encounter you afresh we pray this in Jesus name Amen