

God holds us fast

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Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0 : 00] Of creation as he showed his power, the bread and the fish multiplying it! And we'll see even more that that's the case as we see his power to walk on the water! And be amazed by that again.

And so we'll stand and sing this great hymn. And then there's another song to follow after that, which we'll introduce in a moment. And then caught him.

You have 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 in Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country.

People brought all their sick. They sent word to all the surrounding country.

[1 : 25] Okay, 34. They sent word to all the surrounding country.

People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak. And all who touched him were healed. Thank you so much, Roger.

So let's just ask the Lord's help as we look at that together. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for what you've already shown us from this chapter this morning.

And we ask now that you would help us as we meditate on this chapter, some more of this chapter this evening. And please do our souls good at the beginning of this year.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So we come to our passage this evening and we're seeing the word immediately as the first word in verse 20T.

[2 : 37] Which means it immediately follows on from this morning. Immediately follows on from where we saw the disciples with the Lord Jesus bringing that fish and the bread to him.

And him making a huge, vast meal out of nothing. And now we see Jesus and his disciples in another scenario.

Jesus is sending them off on the lake on a boat. And he says, go over there. Go over to the other side and I will meet you over there.

I'm not coming on this boat with you. But don't worry. I'm going to come. It's going to be okay. And this is a very normal thing for the disciples to do, wasn't it?

Catch a boat. Many of them were seasoned fishermen. They knew what to do in a boat and crossing the lake. It would all come very naturally.

[3 : 44] And Jesus, we see, doesn't go with them because he needs to do something else. Do you see that in verse 23? He dismissed them and he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Later that night, he was there alone, which I think is probably something we could consider on a whole other evening. Jesus goes by himself to a quiet place and prays, which does seem extraordinary.

Jesus is God. He's just multiplied five loaves and two fish by considerable amounts. Does he really need to stop?

Does he really need to pray? But it's a reminder to us, I think, that he's also human. And that, yes, he does need to stop. He does need to commune with his heavenly Father in prayer.

He does need to rest. But I think that is genuinely another sermon for another day. We're focusing on what happens with the boat and the disciples.

[4 : 52] Verse 24, we see this. Seems they hadn't got very far and they were caught in a storm.

Not a good night for boating, it turns out. And this is similar to a situation they've been in before. But that time, Jesus was on the boat with them. This time, he's left them to it themselves.

But it's okay. Because as we read on, we see that Jesus knows. Jesus knows about this situation. Verse 25, shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them.

But there's a shock. He went out to them, not by boat, not by swimming, not by surfing or paddle boarding or whatever mode of transport you can use on a lake.

No, we see in verse 25, Jesus walked. Jesus walked on the lake. I don't know if you've ever tried walking on water.

[6 : 17] If anybody has been successful, do let us know later. But I believe that we can't. We can't walk on water. And yet we see here Jesus walking on water as if it's dry land.

And it's absolutely extraordinary. And what we must be seeing here is that God is walking on the water. We find Jesus saying these words in verse 27.

Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid. And I think that it is I is significant of him being God.

Very similar words to I am. Jesus is saying here, I. I am here. Doesn't say his name Jesus.

He says I. I am here. God is here. Jesus, God's word who spoke creation into being, is now the creator choosing to walk on the water that he has made.

[7 : 29] And he can do that. He's the great creator. Great, powerful God. Of course he can walk on it like it's dry land. A verse in the Old Testament in the book of Job says this about God.

He alone stretches out the heavens and he alone treads on the waves of the sea. This is something for God to do, walking on water.

God was with his people. God had come close to his people. This morning, Jesus was being revealed to God in a different way.

It echoes back, the feeding in the 5,000, I think, echoes back to the manor in the desert, his people in the wilderness. And there we saw people in a remote place and God, Jesus, providing bread from heaven.

And tonight should remind us of, I think, another event in the Old Testament for God's people, showing his power over the sea when he divided it into two.

[8 : 40] Water is no issue for God. And what a comfort it is to see here in this passage that Jesus, who is God, uses all his power and might to walk closely to his people in trouble.

To say to them, don't be afraid. It's okay. Don't need to worry. I'm here with you.

At night times at home at the moment, as you can probably guess, fairly disturbed, Micah often wakes up crying and on occasion even screaming.

And when he does that, you sort of know he's upset. He feels troubled. Where is he? What's going on? Who's here? And so we have to go into his room and we go, shush, shush.

And sometimes we need to pat him to reassure him we are there with him in the room. It's okay.

We're near. And then he settles. And that feels like what it was for the disciples here.

[9 : 56] They were in trouble, on the waves, on the sea, full of fear, didn't know what was going on. And then they get this reassuring voice of their God, of their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, saying, it is I.

I am here. Don't be afraid. And that's a wonderful picture of what God does with all his people. For us who know the Lord Jesus ourselves, we can be assured that he is with us.

He is close to us. We don't need to be afraid. Even when the winds and waves in life are crashing around us, God is close to his people.

There's these wonderful words in Isaiah. Forgive me, I haven't written down where they were from. But I think we know them well. Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.

I have summoned you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sleep over you.

[11 : 10] And Jesus is showing that those words of the Lord himself are indeed true. When his people are out on troubled waters, he indeed is with them.

And when I read those words from Isaiah, I always think of our dear sister that we know well, Katie Fry. I remember several times going to see her after her accident, and she would always open up those words with me from Isaiah.

Because she took comfort. Though there were so many things going on for her then, so many uncertainties, she knew that her God was with her in them.

And we too can know when there are many uncertainties that we may very well face through this year.

God is with us. God is close to his people. And we're assured of that in this passage. God is close to his people.

[12 : 42] God is close to his people.

God is close to his people, isn't it? The lengths that God goes to for his people. God walks on the water. Secondly, God invites people to walk with him.

Verse 28. Have a look there with me as the story continues. Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water.

Here is Peter. Here is Peter. Perhaps at this point, just without thinking too much. Lord, I want to walk on the water with you. And the wonderful thing is, Jesus says, yeah, come.

Come. Come walk with me. And as Peter looked at Jesus, he walked and he came towards him. And it's just remarkable.

[14 : 03] Peter got to do something no other ordinary human being could do and walk on the water in this incredible way. But then things change. But then things change. And it feels like they change quite dramatically in this passage.

Verse 29. He's walking on the water. Verse 30. He sees the wind and the waves. And he's afraid. And he begins to sink.

And he cries out, Lord, save me. Instead of seeing Jesus, the one who is God, walking on the water with his people, he then looks at something else.

He looks at the trouble around him. And he begins to sink. And it strikes me as a bit of a stark illustration of ourselves. I know certainly of myself.

Because if you come to the Shappala household at the end of far too many Sundays, after I've been preaching the wonderful things in God's words, even things about God being with us in dark times, the light then goes off and fear enters my mind.

[15 : 22] Fears about what might happen during the week. Fears about what might happen during the night. Fears about what might happen to Becky and Micah. Fear for others that I've chatted to you through the day.

I have a natural tendency to fear and to worry. Like Peter, I know that I look far too quickly at the winds and waves around me, even on a day where we've been focusing on the Lord Jesus.

And I feel like I'm beginning to sink again. And this verse shows what many of us do. We too often put fear over faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And how we really need to keep looking to Him by faith. We might not understand with the things around us which are crashing in on us.

And we want to look by sight at the things around. But the call is to look to Jesus by faith, isn't it? To keep clinging to Him. Keep crying as Peter does.

[16 : 30] Lord, save me. Lord, help me. I need you. Because Jesus has invited us to walk with Him.

He invites sinners to come and find in Him their Lord and Savior and to journey through life with Him. He invites us to find in Him His strength and power at work within us.

We heard this morning, He even does that with our limited resources, doesn't He? We have so little. We are so weak, really. But He's still very pleased to take us and use us and help us.

But then we so often focus away from Him and focus on limited things about ourselves. Limited things that are around us.

Limited things in our families. And our faith feels very, very weak. And we need to find ways to keep doing what the author to the Hebrews calls us to do and fix our eyes on Him.

[17 : 49] The author and perfecter of our faith. How we need to consider the all-powerful and almighty God who walks on water.

Who has come close to His people. How we need to consider Him who has endured the cross for us and for our salvation.

How we need to fix our eyes on Him rather than fixing solely on the circumstances around us. I don't know what's around the corner for any of us in this new year.

There could be all kinds of unexpected winds and waves ahead that we've got to go through. But here's what we need to keep reminding ourselves of, isn't it? Keep looking to Him.

Keep coming together to help one another fix our eyes on Him. And when we pray for one another in our church family who are going through the winds and waves.

[18 : 55] We need to keep praying that they fix their eyes on the Lord Jesus. For dear Martin and all the struggles that he's going through. What does he need more than anything?

He needs to fix his eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we can pray that. At times I barely know what to pray for him. But we can pray that for him. And that's the most significant prayer we can pray, surely.

Martin Lloyd-Jones, the Welsh preacher, said this. Says it in a really lovely way. We can only conquer our doubts by looking steadily at him.

And by not looking at them. The way to answer them, the doubts, the looking away from Jesus is to look at him. The more you know him and his glory, the more ridiculous they become.

That's why we've got to keep looking at Jesus. That's why we've got to keep seeing how glorious he is. So let's pray.

[20 : 02] And we'll have an opportunity to pray together in a moment. Let's pray that we see more of him and more of his glory this year. And finally we see that God holds us.

God holds us. We've left it on a bit of a cliffhanger here, haven't we, in verse 30. Peter's beginning to sink. So let's read on. What happens?

Verse 31. Immediately Jesus reached out his hands and caught him. You of little faith. Why did you doubt?

He was drowning, but he didn't drown because immediately Jesus reached out for him. The request, the request, Lord save me, was heard by Jesus and he responded.

Jesus kept Peter. From drowning. Jesus held out his hands to hold Peter up. And Jesus does that with us.

[21 : 06] We may feel like Peter, like we have little faith. And we doubt him far too often. But he is the Lord Jesus who holds on to his people.

A benediction we often have at the end of a service is from the end of Jude, which reminds us that God is able to keep his people from stumbling. God is able to hold his people up.

And that comes in the context of a letter where we're told there is much heresy and people are scoffing at Christians.

And it's just hard to keep a hold on the Lord. But a wonderful reminder at the end of it. God is more than able to hold us and keep us and raise us up one day to his glorious presence.

And this morning we saw, again, Jesus is all sufficient. All sufficient to satisfy. Tonight we see that he's all sufficient to hold on to us.

[22 : 10] And he can do that for us for another year. He can do that for dear Martin and his many struggles. He can do that for Julia and Anya looking after their mums.

It's been a rotten day for Julia. We'll pray for her in a bit. They will keep going because of their all-sufficient saviour. For dear Debbie and the pain that she's going through.

So constantly, Jesus is more than able to keep hold of her. And for others that we know, that we're concerned about. And for ourselves.

Perhaps you're wondering, how can I make it through another year? You can because of the Lord Jesus. And in seeing that he is more than able to hold on to Peter here.

And this encounter ends in this way in verse 30T. They climbed into the boat. The winds died down.

[23 : 13] And then those who were in the boat worshipped him saying, Truly you are the Son of God. They have seen again.

Another reminder. Jesus truly is the Son of God. He truly is the one to be worshipped. And we have seen that ourselves today.

This morning and this evening. In these two miraculous encounters with the Lord Jesus in this passage. He truly is the Son of God.

With power to provide for thousands of hungry people with so little. With power to walk on water. Something that none of us can do.

And this is the same Jesus who we look to in 2026. In a moment we're going to sing in worship of Jesus together.

[24 : 10] Which is the right response for us I think. But let me just say something about this hymn. I was looking up the story of it earlier.

He will hold me fast. It was originally written many years ago by the little known hymn writer Ada Habershin.

She was challenged to write a hymn after a new convert had said, How can I keep hold of Christ? And so a song was written by her about that.

In fact she wrote several songs on that subject. And then some years later it's come back into fashion. After a music pastor at a church called Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC. Called Matt Merker. Who was going through a very testing time in his own faith. Struggling himself to keep hold of Jesus. But during that time someone in his church showed him the lyrics of this hymn.

[25 : 14] And they became very precious to him. And then with his own musical skills. And thoughts about how it needed a few more lyrics about the resurrection.

And coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He added another verse. And actually wrote a whole new tune for his congregation in Washington DC to sing.

And since then it's been sung all over the world. And it reminds Christians of what we've been reminded of in our passage. That even though our faith at times may feel very weak.

The all powerful Lord Jesus Christ who walks on the water. He will keep hold of us. And so this is the hymn that we're going to sing together now.

When I fear my faith will fail. Christ will hold me fast. When the tempter would prevail. He will hold me fast. I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path.

[26 : 22] For my love is often cold. He will hold me fast. I will stand and sing when the music begins. I will stand and sing when the music begins.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[28 : 48] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. It's not that this is expected to do these sort of magic tricks all the time, but rather that it's, as you said, it's a matter of preservation.

[31 : 30] He is the one who has power to overcome whatever is in the way. In this case, it's a matter of mind.

It's a matter of things, perhaps the way to think about it, perhaps the way to think about it is, as I say, it's not that Jesus is expecting us to walk on water all the time, but rather to have faith to do the task that he's got to do the task that he's got to do the task that he's got to do this, but it's a matter of things.

And also, as you're saying, it's a matter of things. And also, as you were speaking, it reminds me, Jesus says somewhere, I think it's in John's gospel about, you'll do greater works than I have done. And I think, and people can correct me if they think I'm wrong. I think that's him saying, you get to hold out the gospel to people.

And someone turning from death to life is surely the biggest miracle that can happen. So, yeah, we're astounded by these great things.

[33 : 08] And people might have all sorts of questions and thoughts about them, but ultimately, showing Jesus is God, and he's the one that you can look to to bring you from death to life.

And we have that wonderful task of telling people about him. And, yeah, those are my rambled thoughts from your reflection. Thank you.

Phil. Thank you. Thank you, Daniel, for the thoughts you brought to us. Thank you, Daniel.

Use a friendly. The walking on the water. Echoes God's al mightiness and his unsearchableness.

Because the when the disciples see him. What's the what the him say about the wings of the wind? He comes on the wings of the wind. He is surrounded by gloom and thick darkness.

[34 : 39] This is Yahweh in his unsearchable, unfathomable greatness. And the Jesus who they see terrifies them.

He doesn't want them to stay terrified, but there is something really so grand and other about Jesus, you know, the side of Jesus that's portrayed here.

And you rightly said that he says, it is I. You know, that's Yahweh's name. And when you put the two together, it's the Yahwehness of Jesus, that he's the one who feeds his people in the desert

and miraculously crosses water.

And it comes out, I think, a little bit more in Mark's gospel, where later on they're bickering about something. And Jesus says, you really didn't understand about the loaves, did you?

You didn't understand. You shouldn't have been surprised. You should have seen who I really am. And is it?

[35 : 52] Does it say you should have understood how? Yeah, Matthew 16, verse 8. Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, you of little faith, why are you talking about this among yourselves, about having no bread?

Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves and 5,000 and how many basketfuls you gathered? Does it say in Mark, how are you so dull? It might do.

But the revelation and the grandeur of who he is comes across, and it's sort of multidimensional, isn't it? He is the comforter, the one who feeds his people, but he is also the one before whom people fall down in worship.

In John's gospel, it's heightened a little bit that when Jesus goes to pray, it says, because he perceived they wanted to make him king by force, he made the disciples get into the boat.

And the idea of people trying to twist Jesus for their own ends, that he'll feed us bread and he'd be a great person for president.

[37 : 11] It just shows us that he is not twistable to what we want. He's, like it says in Narnia, he's not a tame lion. He doesn't just do what we want him to do.

We are his servants. Yeah, sorry, just rambling a bit there. It's very frank here really helpful. Yeah, sure.

Can someone run the microphone to our centre? I just wanted to say that that last hymn that we sang just reminded me once again that it's not me that's keeping me it's him that's holding me fast even when I'm going through the dark days which I have done and I probably will do again but it it's him that's holding me fast and I just it's something that's it's sunk in and I'm just so grateful any others shall we pray the troubles around us it's relevant to what we've heard this evening ask that he'd take our limited selves and use us for his glory and when we're thinking about that we mentioned this morning about various building things that we're thinking through as a church we feel very limited when we're talking about these things how could it even happen let's let's bring that to the Lord and ask that he would provide for us what we need thank him through no thank him that though our faith is weak he is mighty and more than able to keep hold of us and people various people come to mind like Martin and Julia and Anya and I'm sure others that we want to lift up to the Lord who are probably feeling weak feeling when the winds and waves feel very overwhelming at the moment I don't know if anybody wants to mention anyone else yeah in Kenya isn't it yeah yeah thank you I've just struck I was mentioning Julia earlier her mum had a fall early this morning or late last night and they have been in

Princess Royal Hospital I don't know if anybody's heard anymore but suspected something broken in the leg area um so we need to to uphold Julia in in prayer in that way and then Dave as well we mentioned last week had a stroke it was a minor stroke um so he is back home and has been told to rest he was hoping to come this morning but but wasn't able to in the end um do pray for Christopher as well he took a an unexpected trip to Ireland this last week um but do pray for him we know he struggles um particularly at this time of year I would have thought and others do struggle at this time of year January can be very hard for people pray that we fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus students it was good to see many of them back this morning um I think many of them got exams and essay deadlines and things at the moment so pray for pray for them in that any any others to to mention yes yes so saying a couple of weeks away yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah and it's only for three months isn't it

So let's lift him up as well. Perhaps there's others. And then the other thing I had in mind was, let's pray that we'd find Jesus to be our all-sufficient Savior who satisfies us and who holds on to us.

[43 : 33] Fab, please do lead us out loud in prayer. We won't shove a microphone in your face. We're small enough gathering, I think, to hear one another, hopefully.

If not, the Lord does hear us. And then I'll close in prayer in about 10 minutes. Phil, could I ask you to lead us off? Is that okay? Lord, we thank you for the things that we've been able to think about through this day.

We thank you for the grandeur and magnificence and the fullness of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We thank you that he is more in every way than we can categorize or define.

But we want to be like the disciples who fell down and worshipped him. Truly, you are the Son of God. We want to remind you, Lord, as if you didn't know of our own weakness and how terribly real for us is the experience of being very encouraged one moment and then almost completely forgetting about it later on.

And we pray that you will enable us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Do help us as we go through, moment by moment, in this new week to keep our eyes on you.

[45 : 05] And we know all too well the wind and the waves, the things that make us feel overwhelmed, the things that make us feel fearful. And it's so easy for us just to get lost in that.

And we pray that you will keep us and in particular keep us looking to the Lord Jesus. And I'd just like to add a particular prayer for Debbie and Billy.

Debbie constantly coping with pain and hopefully none or very few of us face that. But she faces it. And we pray that you will somehow enable us, enable her to have a sense, a very real sense and a strong sense that when through the deep waters, I call thee to go, the rivers of woe shall not flow, but I will be with thee, by trouble to bless and sanctify to thee, I need to express.

We pray that Debbie might hold that. Amen. Amen. Amen. We pray for Julia just now as she looks up to her mum in the hospital and pray that you would encourage her and strengthen her and also strengthen mum to be able to manage all of this and keep them and help them.

[46 : 33] So we just commit them to you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

January and February can be very hard months for some, mentally in particular. And we ask, please, that you would help each one.

And I pray for tall Michael, who often joins us in the evening. We haven't seen him for weeks. And I know he's struggling in various ways.

We pray, Father, please keep hold of him by your grace. We pray for Brother Christopher. We know that he at times really does struggle.

And this is a time of year where he may well do. And we pray that you would help him and sustain him and keep his, would you keep hold of him?

[48 : 09] We pray by your grace. For Jamie, who had a fall on the ice the other day and is at home and struggling with all sorts of things going through his mind.

Please would you have your hand of help upon him. And Father, there must be many more that perhaps go unseen. And Father, we pray that you would help and hold them fast, we pray.

And Father, we're few this evening. But we trust that you, our mighty God, have been with us as we've meditated upon these things.

And we pray that you would take us as few and as weak as we are and use us, Lord, for your glory as we begin this year.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll sing a final hymn together. This wonderful hymn, when peace like a river attends all my way because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[49 : 21] We can say it is well with our souls. And Peter, as he was being pulled up out of the sea, he could say it is well. It is well with my soul. So we'll sing together.

Is it ladies first and then men? Is that going to work with our number? We'll give it a gay.