

Jesus: deserving of worship

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[0 : 0 0] The reading is from Matthew chapter 14, verse 22 to 36. Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. But the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

And in the fourth watch of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and said, It is a ghost. And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid. And Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

He said, Come. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid.

[1 : 0 8] And beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me. Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt?

And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, Truly you are the Son of God. And when they had crossed over, they came to the land at Gesenarat.

And when the men of that place recognised him, they sent around all that region and brought to him all who were sick, and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment.

And as many touched it, were made well. Join me in prayer then, just before we turn to God's word. Lord, I pray you will feed us with your word this morning.

Keep us from distractions. Keep us from carelessness in the hearing of your word. Make your spirit work within us, Lord, both to enliven us and to enlighten us.

[2 : 1 9] In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. All right, well, I'm going to start with a once upon a time story. Once upon a time, back in the day, before satellite navigation in cars and in the phones, which is probably cut out, most of the young people are ready, we actually had to send directions to people if they were coming to visit us in Newcastle and didn't know the Newcastle district.

We actually sent them directions. And the directions were always a mix. A mix of some big landmarks and some more specific street signs. Landmarks, of course, being big, are things that they can't miss.

So the sign on the M1 for the link road and then the F1 motel and the sports fields at Wall's End, roundabouts, the Ellamore Vale shops and so on and so forth. So when they saw the big landmarks, they knew they were still going in the right direction.

That then allowed them freedom to look for specific signposts and so eventually they would get to our place. Now, just park that illustration for a minute and I'm going to follow up with a question now.

And hopefully the two combined will help us get back into a study of Matthew's Gospel. It's been 10 months and we've been in Matthew's Gospel and we're sort of picking it up at not a natural break.

[3 : 3 6] But hopefully these two things will get us back into it. So here's the question. When you come to read something like the Gospel, like Matthew's Gospel or Mark or Luke or John, how actually do you read it?

Now that might seem like a very Irish thing to say, but what I'm meaning is how do you actually engage with it? How do you approach it? How do you study it? What are you expecting to find in it? Now, so many Christians, and I have to say sadly so many Bible teachers, seem to approach the Gospel such as Matthew as just a series of stand-alone stories.

And those stand-alone stories really aren't connected any more than sort of, well, to a little bit of a travel log of Jesus through his three years of ministry, almost like a trip diary. Now, the problem with a focus like that is that it often leaves people just digging into individual incidents, trying to find application, trying to find in the details of individual stories something that we can sort of live by. And oftentimes it's reduced to, you know, don't be like this and do be like that, often focused on the characters in the incidents. And all the while doing that, we become oblivious to a big picture that's been a big portrait of Jesus that's been developed brushstroke by brushstroke through each of those incidents.

[5 : 10] So, back to my illustration and bring them both together again. As we move back into the study of Matthew's Gospel this morning after a 10-month break, I want to suggest to you that we really need to be understanding that Matthew has very highly compiled this.

It's very carefully crafted and designed. He's arranged the account of the life of ministry of Jesus like a set of directions. There are big landmark directions, and then there's more detailed signpost directions.

And these two things combine to ensure that we arrive at the right conclusion about Jesus, which is what the biography is all about. And so, Matthew's account of the life and ministry of Jesus is, as I say, carefully organized and compiled.

It steps us through critical pieces of information from time to time, highlighting big landmarks, but then oftentimes just following through with the smaller detailed signposts.

Now, here's the thing, that each of these incidents are stand-alone. That's true, they do stand-alone, but they should never be taken alone.

[6 : 33] Because the narrative is designed as one movement, one big picture, building towards one great conclusion about the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, yes, we read individual incidents, we see them stand-alone, but we must never just take them alone. We must be asking all the time, what is the big picture that has been developed brushstroke by brushstroke through each of these incidents?

So, in summary then, Matthew's account is not about the people that Jesus met. Matthew's account, as is all the other biographers of Jesus, is about the Jesus that people met.

Now, there's a very different emphasis there, isn't there? So, we need to read the Gospels looking for the Jesus that people met and what they learned about Jesus from their actual individual encounters with him, personal encounters with him.

Now, does this really matter? Well, I think it does. It matters heaps. It matters both for our own understanding of and response to Jesus, but I think it also matters for our ability to introduce unbelievers to the text of the Gospels.

[7 : 58] We need to be able to help unbelieving friends who might want to read about Jesus to know how to read about Jesus, how to read these accounts to maximize their understanding of Jesus, how they're meant to be read.

So, with that introduction, let's then refresh our big picture of Matthew's account of the life and ministry of Jesus. So, you need to turn back with me now to Matthew chapter 4.

And I have to confess, I've done something really stupid here yesterday. I had a sheet with all the Bible verses I'm going to reference on it, but I didn't print that sheet.

I printed a parallel sheet somehow or other. I'm not quite sure how I did it, but anyway, the sheet you have this morning doesn't have any Bible references on it. So, Matthew chapter 4, verses 12 through to 17, and verse 23, that's the start of Matthew's account of the formal part of Jesus' ministry.

And at that start, Jesus declares that he was Messiah. He was God's long-awaited, long-promised king and saviour who had come into this world to establish God's kingdom, that is, God's rule over the hearts and minds of God's people.

[9 : 13] And in verse 23, he gives us his MO. He said that he'll be doing it through teaching and preaching and healing. In other words, he would teach about himself and how he would fulfil his mission and he would demonstrate his power to fulfil his mission by undoing the effects of sin through physical healing.

His mission was about, principally about, undoing the effects of sin and establishing God's kingdom and he would demonstrate this as it was developing by undoing the effects of sin through physical healing.

Now, the interesting thing then is that as we track Jesus' ministry through, what we find is there's a growing opposition, massive unbelief, conflict developed, especially from the Jewish religious leaders whom we would have assumed would be the first to recognise and embrace Jesus. but in fact, they came to the conclusion that Jesus was an evil fraud and they came to the conclusion the only option they had was to get rid of him, to murder him.

Things don't seem to be developing as the Lord Jesus thought they might or are they? Well, jump forward then to Matthew chapter 13.

[10:47] In response to this growing opposition and belief and conflict, Jesus teaches his disciples a series of parables, a series of stories that have a sort of deeper meaning into them.

And in those parables in chapter 13, I don't have time to sort of dip into them now, but essentially Jesus is saying, look, in spite of what now appears, be assured that my kingdom is real, has already been established, it will be successful exactly as God intended it to be and it will be worldwide.

In other words, Jesus is saying to his disciples, look, the portrait of me and my mission is still being painted. Jesus said, look, you can expect that as people encounter me, some will just turn up their nose and in arrogant rejection walk away from me.

But at the same time, says Jesus, some people will understand. Some people, the lights will go on and they'll just turn to Jesus and it'll produce great faith.

Then through the end of chapter 13 into chapter 14, I believe Jesus presents a series of very live, what we might call these days immersive experiences, immersive teaching experiences of case studies that prove his point.

[12:30] So immediately after the teaching and parables, he finds himself being rejected in his hometown as Nazareth and the cause of the rejection, this Jesus, he's way too ordinary to be Messiah.

Then, he's rejected by Herod who sees an identification between John the Baptist and Jesus and Herod rejects him because, well, this John the Baptist and this Jesus guy, they're way too fussy about sin and righteousness and I'm not going to have that.

But on the other hand, Matthew records then a series of three miracles.

Actually, much more, it's clustered as three miracles, much more than three in here. Immersive teaching experiences for thousands of random people and his own disciples.

And these three miracles add immensely to the big picture portrait of King Jesus and they result in new understanding, new faith, and new worship of Jesus.

[13:42] So, let's jump into the text then now. What do the teachers about Jesus? Well, very simply, the teachers that Jesus is the powerful Lord of the universe. So, miracles are signposts.

when you say a miracle, it's pointing to something, it's pointing to something about Jesus, pointing to a truth about Jesus. And these signposts here that we're looking at this morning, they're so large that it's impossible to miss them.

It's impossible to misread them. Jesus does, as a matter of course, without fanfare, things that only God could do.

it's that simple. He's not limited by the laws of nature, but in fact has power to control the laws of nature.

And so we start just tracking through the three miracles together very briefly. We've got this massive hungry crowd. The disciples don't know what to do with them.

[14:50] And Jesus calmly suspends the laws of nature so that the finite resource of a few loaves and a couple of fish are extended to feed this massive crowd and still have far, far more left over than they started with.

Only a few hours later, move into the next miracle. Jesus sent the disciples on ahead. He was going to pray for a while and they got caught in what's called a contrary wind on the lake.

In other words, a wind that was swirling. They could neither go forward, neither could they go back. They were aiming to go down. Again, Jesus suspends the laws of nature and just comes to his disciples in the darkest part of the night when their need was the greatest.

he just turned up on the water. And not only that, but in response to Peter, he suspends the laws of nature for Peter.

He says, come on, you want to come over here? Yeah, come on, out you come, jump out of the boat, hope you come. Peter walked on water. And finally, when it's all over, Jesus, they get back in

the boat and suddenly that contrary wind, that storm that ordinarily would take hours to subside, it's all calm.

[16:23] And they safely arrived at the shore. The signposts are unmistakable. King Jesus is a king like no other king.

More than that, King Jesus is God. And in the context of conflict and opposition, then we need to say something like, King Jesus is God and therefore he's not to be messed with.

Such is his power that who in their right mind would think they could oppose or reject or get rid of Jesus and thwart his purposes. more personally, these miracles teach us that Jesus is a compassionate saviour.

He's a sovereign lord, so big out here, but he's also so personal, so compassionate, so immediate as a saviour. Verse 14, 14, if you look in the text, this doesn't often come to the surface when we deal with the feeding of the 5,000, but before he even thinks about feeding them, verse 14, when he went ashore, he saw a great crowd.

What's his thoughts when he sees a great crowd? He had compassion on them and healed their sick. When we just ponder that for a minute, here he is, he's surrounded by crowds and yet another crowd.

[18:04] And Jesus would have known full well that this crowd was really interested in him as a sort of celebrity, but had very little understanding of him as king and saviour. And it would have been real easy, I think, if it had been me, just to get a bit annoyed.

That's a sanitized version. But Jesus had compassion on them. And he healed them. Now what was he doing in doing that?

Well the compassion speaks for itself. But in his generosity and grace, he took this random crowd and he gave them an immersive experience.

immersive teaching experience of his character and his mission. Now, sickness and disease right throughout the Bible is obviously and primarily the symptom of things not being right in God's world, particularly the symptom of the consequences of sin.

And healing therefore was the obvious consequence of the effects of sin being reversed and people being restored to what they were created to be in God's kingdom.

[19:25] Healing, as I said from chapter 4, verse 23, is at the heart, the essence of Christ's mission as Messiah, as God's king and savior. fear. Jump then to verse 34, 36, and I want you to see these two verses as bookends of the three miracles.

Again, it's even more random. They get to Gennesaret and then the all points bulletin goes out, Jesus is here, bring all your sick people and you don't even have to speak to him, just brush against his clothes.

And again, Jesus graciously, generously, healed them. As many as touched his clothes were made well.

See, Jesus has given a signpost about himself. He's highlighting the primary focus of his mission as Messiah, as God's king and savior.

Bookending here with healing. But there's much more Jesus is teaching within these miracles. So go back to the feeding of the 5,000 again. So it's called a desolate place, in other words, a wilderness.

[20:48] So I think very likely that as Jesus fed these people, it would have evoked memories from the Old Testament of God feeding his people with manna, in the time of the Exodus.

You remember back then, they were in a physical wilderness, lost and wandering. Even worse, they were in a spiritual wilderness. They were there in the wilderness because they had rejected God and God said, this wilderness is going to be the death of you.

They were there in punishment because of their sin. And yet, at that point of lostness for his people, he fed them.

He was literally their life. He was their sustenance. Even though his people didn't appreciate the life and the sustenance that he gave them.

I think Jesus is saying to the crowd, I want you guys to remember that story and then remember what was said back then that there would be a new and greater Moses who would come and do that which Moses could only approximate, could only start, could never finish.

[22:06] And I'm he. And I've come to effect a new exodus, a new deliverance from sin and death into new life.

I'm the one that you need to look to to satisfy your spiritual hunger. And in the same way, going into the miracle of the walking in the water, in the same way, Jesus comes to rescue and deliver his people in the context here is scary.

It's the darkest part of the night, somewhere between 3am and 6am. And they're at the end of their own resources. They've battled all night against this squall, this storm, and they're getting nowhere. And they're real danger of death. And worse than that, they're in the common understanding of the day and throughout the Old Testament, water was associated with the chaos and turmoil of sinful world.

In fact, sailors believed that the whitecaps actually were evidence of evil spirits in the waves in the sea waiting to grab hold of sailors and drag them down into the abyss of death.

[23 : 31] death. These guys were terrified. Experienced sailors, they were on their home patch of the Sea of Galilee, but they were terrified.

And again, throughout the Old Testament, the idea repeatedly is that the Lord comes to rescue his people. And the picture of the sea and the turmoil of the sea is often used as a picture of God's compassion and commitment to his people in this world of sin.

And Jesus, verse 27, comes to them in their point of need, delivers them from almost certain death into perfect safety on land.

That's the movement. And in one short sentence, verse 27, he teaches them so much in the midst of that immersive experience of fear and terror.

Verse 27, he says, three things. Take heart or be of good cheer. It is I, or that can be taken literally as I am. Do not be afraid.

[24 : 49] Now, that little phrase take heart, be of good cheer. Jesus uses that three times. It's used three times in the Bible, each time by Jesus. In Mark chapter 9, verse 2, and these were the references I should have on your page, but Mark chapter 9, verse 2, Jesus says to the guy who is paralyzed, brought before him, be of good cheer.

Why? Your sins are forgiven. In John chapter 16, verse 33, on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus says to his disciples who were in torment and totally traumatized and confused, Jesus says to them, be of good cheer.

I have overcome the world. In Acts 23, verse 11, in a vision to Paul, when Paul's life was under great threat, the Lord Jesus, I believe, appeared to him and said, be of good cheer as you have witness to me in Jerusalem, so you will witness to me in Rome.

Now, in each of those cases, the context is Jesus undoing the effects of sin and building his kingdom. Sin would not have, sin or sinful people would not have the last word in God's world.

God's saving purpose in Jesus would. Then the next phrase is, it is I.

[26 : 24] Jesus identifies himself, it is I, or, as I say in the Greek, it could be I am. And I'm going to run with that for a moment. You're probably already guessing why. Jesus says to his disciples in the terror of having exhausted their own resources and facing almost certain death.

I am. Do not be afraid. You remember the first context of that? Moses was saying, Lord, what the heck are you doing?

You're sending me to rescue your people from Israel. That is a humanly possible task. People won't even listen to me. It's so ridiculous. What will I say to them? Just say, I am sent you.

In other words, I am the power that makes the humanly impossible possible. Actual. So I think what Jesus is trying to say to his disciples here is, the same God who rescued his people from Egypt from a picture of bondage and sin, humanly impossible, same God who did that, is before you now to rescue you in your point of need.

To rescue and deliver you from fear of death into the good life of security. But it doesn't stop there even more.

[28 : 00] When Peter is there before the Lord and suddenly becomes aware of his own circumstances, his trust in the Lord falters and he starts to go down.

When he starts to see a situation in terms of his own ability and resources starts to sink, once again, Jesus graciously reached out, reassured Peter by grabbing him tightly and encouraging him to trust more.

It's almost as if Jesus is just having a little bit of fun with the silliness of what Peter's done. That is, that Peter, having experienced the power of Jesus to suspend the laws of nature so he could actually walk in the water, then couldn't trust Jesus to keep him safe while he was doing it.

I think maybe that's really what Jesus is saying to Peter. Come on, Peter. I can do this. Trust me to do that. Jesus wanted Peter to learn that his understanding of and confidence in Jesus was too small.

Twice in one day, in one day, Peter had witnessed the power of Jesus over the laws of nature. [29 : 30] Unlimited power. And twice in one day, he had witnessed the compassion of Jesus to save, to heal, to deliver his people into safety. Yet he faltered.

See, Peter couldn't apply the theory or what his eyes saw in one situation to his own circumstance. That's essentially what it comes back to. Yeah, I can see it out there and that's wonderful out there. Wow, how great is the Lord. I'm sinking. Where do I go from here? Where do I go from here? And I think we're like Peter.

This is really all about Jesus. But just allow me one comment here. I think like Peter, our problem is so often not that we're outrageous in our expectation of Christ, but that we're just not confident enough.

Far too untrusting. We look at our circumstances and we just think, wow, they're too awful for Jesus to protect us and deliver us from.

[30 : 58] And so, my friends, the only fitting response to King Jesus is total worship. You look at verse 33. And those in the boat worshipped him saying, truly, you are the son of God.

Now, my friends, the focus of this miracle is not, I believe, that Jesus walked on water. That's significant. Nor is the focus, and especially not the focus, is that Peter walks on water. That's incredible as well. Nor is the focus of the miracle that Jesus calms the storm. The ultimate focus of the miracle is that all this immersive teaching experience, all the learning, all the new understanding of Jesus, overflows into worship.

Because that's the only appropriate response to understanding Jesus as they've experienced him in these moments.

They've seen him as a sovereign Lord with limitless power.

[32 : 25] They've experienced him personally as a compassionate Savior and King. There can be no other option.

Jesus has shown himself to be God. And ought to be worshipped. And we can see how that develops, can't we?

Because initially, we have terror. But terror is replaced with confidence and trust and security. And what's the difference? The actions of Jesus. And so, terror being replaced with confidence and trust and relief and thankfulness, that is an expression of worship.

As Peter learned from the hand of Jesus, that having enabled him to walk on the water, that he would be able to keep him safe while he was walking on the water, that new aha moment would overflow in worship.

[33 : 45] As Peter developed a greater confidence and a greater trusting and dependence on the Lord Jesus. And likewise, when we get to Gennesaret, I don't know whether you've ever thought or not, but I've pondered it a fair bit this week.

Why did Jesus allow the crowd, as it were, to set the agenda for them? Why didn't he chastise them for bringing these hordes? We're not told they sought Jesus' permission.

They just saw, well, there's Jesus. Come on, guys, bring your sick. They'll get healed. It seems a bit arrogant. It seems a bit presumptive, doesn't it? Is that the right word? Whatever. Fill it in the right word if that's not the right word.

It just feels a bit off. And yet Jesus doesn't chip them for that. Why? I think I've come to the conclusion.

This might be right, might be wrong, but this is what I think. I think their actions were an expression of worship. They clearly didn't understand everything about Jesus, but they understood enough to know that they wanted their actions to be commensurate with what they did believe about Jesus.

[34 : 56] And so they brought their sick to be healed, trusting him to be the one who would heal them. That is an act of worship, an expression of worship. And all of this together, then, is real-time evidence that Jesus' kingdom is being built in the hearts and minds of countless thousands of people.

Random people, special disciples. Makes no difference. For people who encounter Jesus, the Jesus they meet changes their lives forever.

And draws from them worship. I just want to finish with just a very brief challenge then. Everybody worships something.

The definition of worship in that sense is that everybody ascribes ultimate value to something or someone. That's what it is to be human.

We worship. So, the question then becomes, what shapes and drives your worship? Worship. If you're a Christian, then we're told in Romans chapter 12 that worship is a whole of person, whole of life, response of thankfulness, confidence, and trust in Jesus.

[36 : 28] There is no other adequate response if we approach Jesus as Savior and Lord.

So, I say to you again as a Christian, what shapes and drives your worship? If you're not a believer here this morning, and chances are we've got quite a few who aren't yet believers here this morning.

There's no point in saying that you understand who Jesus is. That you appreciate what Jesus came into the world to do.

That makes no sense if, having said that, you then continue to be king in your own life. Or you continue to give your worship and allow it to be shaped by someone or something other than Christ. See, true understanding will be expressed in coming to Jesus. Recognizing your great need.

[37 : 43] Recognizing your sinfulness. Recognizing that he alone is the one who can save you and deliver you. Recognizing his compassion and his desire to do that. And then living your life under his control.

Back to those who are Christians this morning. Well, the evidence of growing faith and confidence in Christ is better worship.

Now, we need to be really careful today when we say we're looking for better worship. I would say to you this morning, better worship is not about new hyped up experiences.

They may have a part. But that's not essentially what better worship is. Better worship will be the result of studying God's word. And seeing the power and loving concern of Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

That will overflow in better worship. As you express greater love for. Greater commitment to.

[38 : 54] Greater service of the Lord Jesus. Pray with me again, please. Very simple prayer.

Lord, help us to hear your words. Keep us from hiding from them. Keep us from excusing ourselves before them. Burn them deep into our hearts and minds.

And bring us to you for forgiveness as we need forgiveness. And new worship as we desire to reflect our thankfulness to you.

In Jesus' name. Thank you.