

"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 14, and we're going to read from verse 22 to verse 33.

We've been singing in Psalm 8 of the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man, the one who's crowned and honoured with glory and love, and we're going to read of the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, as he reveals his greatness, his glory, as the divine Son of Man, Son of God.

As we read from verse 22, immediately he, Jesus, made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side while he dismissed the crowds.

Jesus has just completed, as it were, another miracle. He's fed the 5,000 men plus the women and children. And after he dismissed the crowds, he went up in 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.

[1 : 10] 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's 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's you, command me to come to you on the water.

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

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

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased, and those in the boat worshipped him, saying, truly, you are the Son of God. May God add his blessing to that reading from his word as we particularly focus on this.

[2 : 19] These great words we've already mentioned to the children that we've heard in the reading was that I pray you will take to heart, to take heart and not be afraid because the one who speaks to you in your hearts, in your souls is the Lord Jesus.

And four points I want to address to you this morning in regard to this wonderful episode in Jesus' life and in relation to his dealing with the disciples.

But first of all, we see in the passage the solitude of Jesus, Jesus and his own Jesus praying to the Father on his own because Jesus must be alone with his Father even at that particular point in his ministry.

We'll look at that more closely. And then secondly, to look at the solace of Jesus. In other words, the comfort that Jesus brings to troubled hearts, whether troubled, terrified hearts on the Sea of Galilee 2,000 years ago or even to such as ourselves today.

And falling on from that comfort that Jesus brings to look at the salvation that Jesus gives when he cries out, you come to me. He said these words to Peter.

[3 : 34] Of course, these words that speak of that greater deliverance, the salvation that Jesus brings in his rescue of sinners from the power of sin.

We'll again look at that more closely. But of course, as the disciples recognized in Jesus when they saw his power and authority, so I pray that you'll recognize in Jesus that power and authority that's his as the Son of God.

So we look at the sonship of Jesus. You know, in this mad, crazy, self-obsessed, individualistic world that we're living in, this world where the gospel of the Lord Jesus is more and more ridiculed, where love for one another is very much at a premium, and the voice of woke intolerance is heard so loudly and so shamelessly in our media and our political life and even in the church itself.

We need to be reminded again and again that God is sovereign, that the church, that the Lord's people need to hear the voice of our Lord and Savior and need to hear that voice again and again, particularly the voice of Jesus as we're hearing so much this morning.

Take heart, it's I, don't be afraid. Because these were words that Jesus spoke to a terrified group of disciples, and they reckoned that they were in extreme danger.

[5 : 05] Yes, it was the wind and the waves that certainly frightened them. It wasn't as on another occasion when they feared they were going to drown, but certainly the conditions weren't exactly perfect for crossing over the Sea of Galilee.

But they were so much more afraid when they saw Jesus walk to them in the water. We're told in the passage they were terrified. They thought that they were seeing an apparition, a ghost. But Jesus calmed their fears with words of reassurance, words of comfort, words that were directed to the disciples to give them peace.

These were words concerning himself. And these are words that we're going to look at the more closely this morning. So that you, so that all of us here this morning, will know that rest that you find in Jesus and Jesus alone.

And so be encouraged with what you're hearing Jesus speak to the disciples as he speaks to you and speaks to me. Speak words spoken to give that peace that passes understanding.

[6 : 16] And I pray that as you hear these words again, that you'll respond to them. You'll respond to them by faith. And you'll take heart. Because these are words of command. That you'll take heart.

And you won't be afraid of all that you see around you. All the anti-Christian words and actions and that mindset that grieves the heart of every Christian.

But listen to the word that Jesus gives when you hear contrary words coming into your heart, even to your mind. Take heart. It's I. Don't be afraid. And be assured he's never going to leave you.

He's never going to leave you as an individual. He's never going to leave you as a church. He's never going to abandon you to the sin and evil of this tempestuous world around. And so let's focus our hearts, our minds, our wills this morning on our Lord Jesus Christ.

The more we see him in his power, in his authority over creation, in his grace, in his forgiveness, and to see what Jesus is saying, he's saying to you, yes, speaking to you, speaking to me and all our weaknesses.

[7 : 27] Because we can be afraid of what we see around us. And we will be afraid when we take our eyes of the Lord Jesus, when our eyes should be fixed on him.

But in saying all these things, what do we find? What do we find when we read of Jesus, that first word immediately in verse 2, immediately after the miracle of the feeding, as it's known, the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

In fact, there were probably more than 20,000 people there when Jesus fed that number with a few, a small amount of bread and fish. Well, that great number of people, that crowd that had been fed, they'd fixed their eyes physically on Jesus.

They'd seen that miracle, the multiplying of the bread and fish. So 20,000 plus people having fixed their eyes physically on Jesus, Jesus with that great crowd.

But what do we find immediately after that miracle? We see solitude. We see the solitude of Jesus. Now, there are other accounts of what happens there in Galilee.

[8 : 37] And we're just going to stick to Matthew's account for the moment. Well, just stick altogether in Matthew's account. Because what we see here in the solitude of Jesus is his relationship with his Father.

This is Jesus, the eternal Son of God. And he must commune with his Father. He must commune with them in prayer. And Jesus wants to be alone. He wants to be alone.

I mean, yes, he's been with that great crowd. But he's dismissed that crowd. He sent them home. In fact, he's even dismissed his disciples. He sent them to go across the Lake of Galilee.

And when he's dismissed all that number of people, what do we read? He goes up that mountain to be utterly alone in prayer. Now, of course, there'll be other times when Jesus craves the company of his disciples, particularly Peter, James, and John.

And he'll crave their company, whether it be in prayer or on the mountaintop when he's transfigured. But at this time, he must be alone with his Father in prayer.

[9 : 41] He needs that solitude, that intimacy with his Father. As we said, he's been with great crowds. And even before being with that great crowd, he wanted rest.

He was needing rest. And he's still got much to do in his short, compressed ministry. But in all the busyness of his ministry, he still has to be alone with his Father.

Now, we're not told what he prayed there on that mountain. Of course, there are other prayers of Jesus that we do know, the words that he prayed. We don't know here that Jesus' prayer with his Father on this occasion was secret.

But the fact remains here that he had to pray, that he must pray, and that he must pray one-to-one with his Father. And of the sinless Son of God, if he needed that solitude, if he needed that intimate time of prayer with his Father, then what about you?

What about each one of us in being with our Heavenly Father in prayer? We may well say that it's a discipline that so many of us have lost in our practice as Christians.

[10:55] The secret place, the quiet place, the quiet time alone with our God, with our Father. But it's that time alone with your Heavenly Father that's going to revitalize your heart, your soul, your mind as a Christian.

Now, we hear a lot these days about revitalizing the church. And of course, that's all to the good. It's all necessary. But do we hear at the same time the clamor for revitalizing our prayer lives?

Revitalizing a true spirituality that shuts out the world, that knows that intimate fellowship with God in prayer? Because if we're to be the more like Christ, then we've got to be men and women of prayer, of disciplined prayer, of active prayer, and these times of prayer that you have in fellowship one-to-one with God.

Yes, it's so important to have these times of fellowship at home, with families, with loved ones, a prayer meeting. What about your prayer time one-to-one with God?

Now, having an intimacy with God, just as Jesus had that intimacy in prayer with His Father, it doesn't mean that somehow you're going to remain apart from others indefinitely.

[12:22] You know, as if you're some kind of medieval hermit that lives alone and doesn't see anyone and doesn't commune with anyone. But no, that's not what we're seeing here. You pray alone in order the more to love God and your neighbor.

And yes, you'll leave from your time and place of prayer to return to your family and friends and your neighbors and your responsibilities, just as Jesus, after He prayed in the mountainside, He returned to be with His disciples.

He went from the mountain to the water. And He did that to reveal His power, to reveal His authority, and to give them that solace, that comfort, as we see in the events from verse 25 to 27. We're told that in the fourth watch of the night, in other words, between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m., Jesus comes to them walking on the sea, the Sea of Galilee. And we remember what we read when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea.

They were terrified and said, It's a ghost. And they cried out in fear. But immediately, Jesus spoke to them, saying, Take heart. It is I. Don't be afraid.

[13:35] You know, just picture in your mind there are disciples rowing across that lake, something they would have done many times. And they've not made much headway because the wind's been against them.

But we're told, verse 25, as we read there, it's between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m., a very dark time. Maybe the light's just coming in as the morning comes.

But Jesus is coming towards them. And it's obvious that He's been walking some distance from the shore to where the boat is. And the laws of gravity are being suspended as Jesus walks in the water.

Jesus is showing His authority over His creation. It's certainly very dark as Jesus does this. And the disciples see this faint figure approaching them.

And they're terrified. But notice, we've already seen that first immediately in verse 22, but again we see that Jesus does something. Verse 27, immediately He calls to them not to be afraid, but to take courage because He says, It's I.

[14:42] And when He says, It's I, this is exactly the same designation used of God in the Old Testament when God made Himself known as I am.

Exactly the same. It is I, I am, the same words. But of course, we need to look more closely at what Jesus does to show His solace, to show His comfort. Comfort to those who are afraid.

Not just to the disciples, but to you and to me who need the encouragement of Jesus' Word towards us, even when we're afraid of so many things. Well, let's look more closely then at what we read

here.

And something that really strikes you is the matter-of-fact way that Matthew writes about Jesus walking on the water. See that in verse 25. And again, this tells us, I mean, if you need evidence of the divine power and authority of Jesus, well, we see it here.

Because for Jesus to walk on the water was as normal for Him as to walk on dry land. I mean, the lack of density in the water, that was no barrier for Jesus to tread safely across the Sea of Galilee because Jesus had formed that sea by His Word of His power.

[16:05] I mean, there's nothing impossible for Jesus to do. Why? Because He is who He is. Through Him, the world was created. He's the creator of the universe. He's the almighty one.

He's the all-powerful one. So let's never, ever minimize His power. Not even minimize His power over creation. Because that power speaks of His sovereign control over all that He's made.

For example, we read of that in Psalm 94, verse 9. He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see? In other words, God who made the organ of the ear to hear. Well, if He did that, well, He must, God must hear. And God must hear then the cries of His people that cry out unto Him. And God who made the eye, He must see and see you, see me, see you in His grace and see you in all your need.

and just as Jesus revealed His grace and power, His provision for His disciples when He heard them, when He saw them in their terror, when they were crying out to Him in fear.

[17:17] Well, it's the same Jesus who gives to you as He hears you, as He sees you in your need. And He gives you that great solace, that great comfort. And He gives you that calm to your troubled souls as you hear Him speak these words to you.

Take heart, it is I. Don't be afraid. But let's just hone in on these words that Jesus speaks here in the original language that Matthew used to write His Gospels.

Just one word, take heart. You can translate it in lots of different ways, actually. Take heart, be of good courage, be of good cheer, be of good comfort. Well, whatever way you translate that single word, the meaning's clear.

Because the disciples are being encouraged so that their terror ceases, comforted with the knowledge that Jesus, who speaks to them, Jesus is with them.

Even in that strong wind and the boat being tossed from here to there and the darkness of the night and what they thought they saw was a ghost in the water, Jesus is telling them, listen to my voice.

[18:26] Look beyond what you perceive to be danger and don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged, but encouraged because it is me, says Jesus.

And this is the same Lord Jesus who calls to you to hear His voice. Yes, even amidst all the darkness that we're living in and through the darkness of the world around us, even through that darkness, see Him.

See Him in all His glory. See Him in all His power. And don't be afraid. Know that the one who cried out to the disciples, it's I, is the same Lord Jesus who's calling to you, it's I.

Of course, these are more than simply just words. These are words that reveal who Jesus is. The one who gives solace, the one who gives comfort to the weak, to the fragile, to the perplexed, to the sad, to the sorrowing, to the troubled in heart.

He's calling you, even whispering to you in your heart. He's whispering these words to you. It's I, it's me. Well, hear Him say these words to you because He hears you, He sees you, and He knows you.

[19:45] And I'm not just speaking to you as individuals, but listen to what Jesus is saying to His church, to the community of His people, to His flock.

You know, many years before Jesus uttered these very words to the disciples, the very same words of comfort were given by God to His people Israel when Israel was going through a particular time of distress and in their existence.

You read these words in Isaiah 43, verses 1 to 3. Listen to them and hear the echo that Jesus gives to these words. But now, thus says, the Lord who created you, O Jacob, who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, well, there's the disciples passing through the waters. We know in our own experience, passing through so many, as it were, deep waters.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned. And the flame shall not consume you.

[20 : 52] For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. And you can hear it in Jesus' words. You can hear the echo of these words that were given to Israel all these centuries before.

It's the same words that Jesus speaks to his disciples. It's the same God who speaks to you these words of utter reliability. And it's a command, remember, the command not to fear when you're passing through the waters of adversity.

Listen to the comfort of the promise of Jesus that he gives to you when he says, I am with you. Jesus who says, I am. I am the Lord.

You know, when God spoke to the Israelites, I am the Lord your God, the people of Israel. Jesus is saying these same words. I am. I am with you.

And these words of comfort that have really run through the history of the church. and these words that are going to remain until the Lord Jesus returns, when his salvation is fully realized.

[22 : 03] It's that salvation that we even see here referred to in the case of Jesus saving Peter when Peter thinks he's going to drown. But of course, even what Jesus does for Peter, looking forward, speaking of the salvation that Jesus gives to all who trust in him, as we see there from verse 28 to verse 32, where we see Peter saved.

It tells of the salvation that Jesus gives. Again, just picture the scene that Matthew gives us here. As you know, Peter was the impulsive disciple.

And it's him, of course, who calls out to Jesus. If it's you, well, the word is more since it's you. Since it's you, command me to come to you. I mean, Peter knew that, yes, he could have that confidence in Jesus, that even in that stormy water, even in the act of walking in the water, Peter knew he would be safe when Jesus calls him to himself.

And in recognizing Jesus, Peter had that faith to step out of the boat and to walk to Jesus because, of course, without faith, no one can come to Jesus. And, well, Peter knew as he walked out, went out that boat, he knew, at that moment anyway, he was safe.

Safe from drowning. But then, of course, even when he starts to sink, he knows that only Jesus can rescue him, can save him. And he's crying out to Jesus, save me. And Jesus reaches out his hand and he saves Peter, he rescues Peter.

[23 : 45] And I think we can say on the one hand, you're seeing here what we might call an acted parable, an acted parable of salvation in the Lord Jesus.

We're seeing here Jesus saving someone, Jesus rescuing someone from destruction. But we can also say this that on another level, there's a picture too here of the ongoing salvation that Jesus gives to you and to me in these particular times when we doubt his presence, when we doubt his love, when we even doubt the salvation.

You know, when your faith is weak or when you're looking to circumstances rather than looking to the Lord Jesus alone. And maybe in these times of difficulty, times of trouble, you only see the sweeping waves of turmoil and you forget the one who's above these circumstances.

And you know, in these times when I doubt, when you doubt his abiding presence, it's these times when he calls out to you, oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt?

Even now, Jesus calling you to listen to these words, oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt? Why did you doubt my being with you always? Why did you doubt that I'd be your protector always, protector from utter destruction?

[25 : 11] why did you doubt my love for you? And when he calls to you with these words, in love, he'll reach out to you. And he reaches out to you with his nail-pierced hands.

And in reaching out to you, as he reached out to Peter, he holds you. And he keeps you from drowning in despair. And he raises you to walk with him in that piece of his presence.

presence. Why? Because he loves you. Because he cares for you. Because he's Lord, because he's the eternal Son of God. And it's to him that you give glory and praise to you.

As we see the disciples here giving praise to God, giving praise to the Son of God, the Lord Jesus. As we read there in verse 33, and those in the boat worshipped him, saying, truly, you are the Son of God.

And these disciples, they'd witnessed the power of Jesus. Let's summarize what they saw. He'd walked in water. He revealed his power over creation.

[26 : 18] He'd kept Peter drowning. He showed his grace and his mercy, even when Peter's faith weakened. And even when Peter and Jesus got into the boat, the waves, the wind ceased immediately.

Jesus had revealed his power. He showed that he truly is the one whom he claimed to be. These disciples witnessed that power and presence of Jesus, and as a result, they worshipped him. And for the very first time in their collective being with Jesus, they referred to him as the Son of God. Truly, you are the Son of God.

No mere man, the Son of God. Now, yes, we know that a long time after this, their faith would waver. Peter would deny Jesus before Jesus restored him to himself, the risen Jesus, restoring Peter.

But there, at that moment, in that boat, you hear that affirmation of faith in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, and therefore, in recognizing Jesus as the Son of God, he's to be worshipped.

[27 : 28] And if the disciples in that boat, if they could say of Jesus, truly, you are the Son of God, can you echo these words?

I mean, you too have seen, by faith, you've seen his power, the power of Jesus. You've seen his love towards his disciples. You've seen his grace. You've seen the difference that Jesus makes to those who know him and trust in him.

Would you join with these disciples and worship Jesus? And share with these disciples in echoing these words, truly, you are the Son of God.

Because, you know, in referring to Jesus as the Son of God, you're saying, yes, Lord, you are the one whom you said you are. You're the divine one. You're the eternal one.

You're the great one. You're the one who's worthy to save. Well, he's calling you to come to him in faith. He called to Peter, come to me. He's calling each one of you, come to me.

[28 : 33] If you're not yet a Christian, not yet a believer in the Lord Jesus, he's calling you, come to me. If you're a Christian yet have these times of doubt and lack of assurance, again, Jesus calling you, come to me.

Oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt? So hear the voice that Jesus is uttering to you to come to him in faith and not doubt him, not doubt him for one second.

And when you heed that call and come to Jesus, you will hear him call out unto you to take heart. It is I and don't be afraid.

Take these words to heart now and take these words to heart eternally. Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Our heavenly Father, you who have loved your people with that eternal love, may Lord, that love have reached to the hearts and the lives of every person gathered here in worship, whether in the building or from home this morning.

And for those who will maybe watch on later, may they hear, not the preacher, but hear the Lord, the Savior, tell them to come to him and not doubt, to come to him to be of good courage and to know that Jesus is the one who alone can save and save to the uttermost.

[30 : 01] So hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. Hear us as we cry unto you. In Jesus' name. Amen.