

Storms, Sinking and Salvation

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

Matthew chapter 14 from verse 22. Matthew chapter 14.

Matthew chapter 14.

Matthew chapter 14.

Matthew chapter 14. Amen. God. Amen. This is the word of God to us this afternoon. Let's again draw near to him in prayer.

[1 : 5 4] Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, as we bow now in your presence, we come as those who need you and who need your grace. You know everything that every person in this building has come into this building with, every weight and every burden that we can put on a good front, that we can try and make it appear as if our lives are all together. But you know everything about us. You know the very number of hairs on our heads and you know the secrets in our own hearts. We're told in your word that the secret things belong unto the Lord and that means there is nothing that we can hide or conceal from you. And therefore we lay our burdens before you in the full and certain knowledge that as we draw near to you, you are the God who draws near to us. And as we cast our burdens upon you, we are given the promise that you care for your people. Indeed, you tell us in your word that you carry them and you carry them all the way from the womb until they become grey-headed. You will never leave them and you will never forsake them. Remember those who are unwell today, those who are maybe dealing with very trying providences with their health right now. You know them, those who are maybe in this place, those who are caring for loved ones who are suffering and ill and those who aren't here today because of ill health. We commit them all into your hands asking that you might lay your hand of healing upon them, but even more that your grace would indeed be sufficient for them. We remember also those who are housebound, those who are once a very active part in the life of this congregation, but because of the fragility of old age, or maybe because of fears over this pandemic that we are living through, are unable to come out as they once did. And we pray that you would meet them today with your own all-sufficient grace. We remember others too, though, who have perhaps made a conscious decision not to be here. Those who were once involved in the life of this congregation, those who were once full of joy in the Lord and could say that joy in the Lord and his salvation was their strength.

But for whatever reason, they have found themselves wandering and wavering. You know them, O Lord, and we pray that you would speak to them in this situation and in the places and spaces in which they find themselves today. We remember this congregation, O Lord, and we thank you for it. We thank you for our friend, for our brother, Roddy John, who has ministered in this place for so many years, given of his time and given of his energy. And we ask and we pray that you would be with him now in his retirement, that you would bless him over in Ness, that he would know your love and your care and your keeping, especially as he has increased responsibilities with his own sister. And we pray, O Lord, that he would know your love being poured out in rich measure into his heart. And we pray for this congregation now in their time of vacancy. We pray for the elders and for the deacons. We pray that you would give them the grace to support and lead the congregation through this time. We remember the interim moderator, Ian Thompson, asking that you would be with him and that you would be with the congregation during this season and that they would know your leading, your guiding, your directing to a man and an under-shepherd of your choosing. And that this congregation would see days of blessing, days of spiritual growth and indeed numerical growth that will follow. Bless, O Lord.

And we pray that this congregation here would be a great beacon for your glory on this northern tip of this island and that people would know that Christ is proclaimed in this place and that people encounter the one who is the living and risen saviour as they gather in this place, as they worship in this place, and as the people of this place go out into their community with the good news of salvation.

Bless us now as we focus on your word together. Father, when we acknowledge our need of your grace as we do so, for we can so often find ourselves distracted. We find ourselves thinking about work. We find ourselves thinking about school.

We find ourselves thinking about families and loved ones. We might even find ourselves thinking about the Sunday lunch. So many things that can keep our minds off the one thing that is needful.

[6 : 35] But we pray now that you would enable each and every one of us to be still and to hear your voice speaking to us through the pages of your inspired word by your spirit. And all this we pray in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Well, friends, before we focus on the word of God together, let's sing again in the words of Psalm 86. Psalm 86 and sing in verses 8 down to 13, which is our prayer as we come to focus on God's word together.

Lord, there is none among the gods that may with thee compare, and like the works which thou hast done, not any work is there. All nations whom thou made shall come and worship reverently before thy face, and they, O Lord, thy name shall glorify. Especially verse 11. Teach me thy way and in thy truth, O Lord, then walk will I. Unite my heart that I thy name may fear continually. The psalmist felt the need to ask the Lord to help him teach him his ways and his truths. And therefore, as we sing this psalm together, we are taking the psalmist words in our lips and we are asking that the Lord would enable us to be taught his truths so that we might walk in his ways. We'll sing verses 8 through to 13 Psalm 86 to God's praise.

Psalm 86 to God's praise. Lord, there is none among the gods that may with thee compare, and like the words which thou hast done, not any work is there. O Jesus, Jesus, the Savior, shall come and worship reverently.

before thy face. O Lord, my name shall glorify.

[9 : 06] the Lord, my name shall glorify. O Lord, my name shall glorify. Take seed in great and works by thee are done, which are to be admired.

which are to be admired. which are to be admired. and thou art for thy self alone. God admire than thou art for thyself alone.

O Lord, my name shall glorify. O Lord, my name shall glorify. the Lord, my name shall glorify. Ah more Oh Oh Oh you Is my my heart, that I thy name may fear continually.

O Lord, I will give praise, and I the glory will.

Ascribe unto thy name always.

[11 : 04] If those are never still ever be, and greatness of excel, and thou deliver.

If there has my soul, I will come and always tell.

Amen. Well, friends, would you turn with me, please, to the words that we read in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 14.

Matthew's Gospel in chapter 14, and we're going to read at verse 30. Matthew 14 from verse 30, we read, But when he, that's Peter, saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. I'll begin with a confession.

[12 : 31] I love the music of the Irish rock group U2. In fact, I love their music so much that I did a presentation on the spiritual influences in their music at the presbytery that your elder Donald had to endure.

It was actually the day I thought I was going to be thrown off the presbytery once and for all, but fortunately that didn't happen. But they have a lot of Christian imagery in their songs, and in one of their recent albums, they included the song Every Breaking Wave, where they sang, Every shipwrecked soul knows what it is to live without intimacy.

Every shipwrecked soul knows what it is to live without intimacy. This afternoon, I want us to consider the theme of sinking faith, as we find it here in Matthew 14.

And we're going to look at it under three headings, a stormy night, then a sovereign visitor, and finally a sinking disciple. A stormy night, a sovereign visitor, and then a sinking disciple.

First, we have the stormy night, verses 22 to 24. Here, Matthew focuses on the storm that the disciples experienced. Matthew begins by giving us the setting in verses 22 and 23.

[13 : 52] Jesus has just fed the 5,000. He had seen this great crowd, and he had compassion on them, and had healed their sick. He had then proceeded to feed them, using only five loaves and two fish.

And after that, they all ate and were satisfied. Jesus now dismisses the disciples and the crowds in verse 22. He remains in control of the situation, and he constrains or compels or forces the disciples to get into their boat, and he instructs them to go to the other side of the lake.

At the same time, he sends away the crowd, whom John tells us were wanting to make him king. They were caught up in the excitement of what had just taken place. And with the disciples and crowds out of the way, Jesus goes up a mountain to pray.

Verse 23, Matthew emphasizes the solitude of Jesus. He tells us that Jesus went up on the mountain apart, and he tells us that when evening came, Jesus was alone.

Jesus wants to spend time alone with his father in prayer. He knows that a mission to the Gentiles, the non-Jews, is about to begin. He also knows that the hour of his suffering and death is drawing ever closer, and as he prepares for these significant events, he spends time alone in prayer.

[15 : 16] Matthew goes on to record the storm in verse 24. Matthew draws their attention to the boat that the disciples were in at the beginning of verse 24. We're told that it was in the midst of the sea.

The disciples are well on in their journey, but there is still a long way to go. There is a long way from the place that they had set out from, but there is also a long way to go to the place that they had set out for.

And the disciples find themselves not only in the midst of the lake, but also in the middle of a storm. Verse 24 again, the boat has been beaten, tortured, and distressed by the waves.

At the same time, the wind is against them. The disciples are in a situation that is difficult, a situation that is dangerous, a situation that is deadly.

Now, friends, as we focus on these verses, we're being reminded that if we are following Jesus, we might well end up in a storm. If we are following Jesus, we might well end up in a storm.

[16 : 18] That is what happened to these disciples. Jesus had told them to get into their boat and to make for the other side of the lake, and they had quietly done so and had followed his instructions without the slightest word of complaint.

And now they find themselves in a storm, all because they had obeyed Jesus, all because they had complied with his command. And you know, friends, the same is true today.

Sometimes we meet troubles and trials in our lives and we think, well, this must mean that the Lord doesn't approve of what I'm doing. He's setting up obstacles in my way.

Or sometimes we meet troubles and trials in our lives and we think, I must have done something the Lord doesn't approve of. He's punishing me. He's disciplining me. And sometimes there can be truth in that.

We can think of the prophet Jonah. You remember, he had been given a definitive command, a definitive commission from the Lord to go to the people of Nineveh and to speak against them, to bring the Lord's word to them.

[17 : 17] And Jonah had responded to the Lord's definitive commission with defiant disobedience. He had gone in the opposite way. And the Lord had responded to Jonah's disobedience by sending a storm, a storm that threatened to break up the boat that Jonah was in.

But sometimes we meet troubles and trials. We find ourselves in a storm. And it's precisely because we have followed the Lord's command. Sometimes the Lord decides to use a storm as the schoolroom of faith in the lives of his people.

Sometimes the Lord decides that a storm is the best place to awaken his people to his all-surpassing glory, his all-sufficient grace.

That's what we see here with these disciples. They're in a storm because the Lord wants to teach them something through it. And maybe you are in a storm or you have just come through a storm.

And the very reason why the Lord put you in that storm was to show you something of himself. Maybe that's what the Lord has done with some of us during this pandemic.

[18 : 28] He has removed all the supports, it would seem, to show us something of himself. So today, friends, let's remember that if we are following Jesus, we ought to expect troubles and trials.

If we are seeking to live in obedience to Jesus, we should also expect storms to come crashing in on us, like the wind and the waves that came upon the disciples in their little boat.

But we move from a stormy night to a sovereign visitor. Look at verses 25 to 27. Matthew now focuses on the sovereign Lord whom the disciples encountered. Matthew records the approach of Jesus in verses 25 and 26.

He draws our attention to the approach of Jesus in verse 25. He tells us that Jesus came to the disciples in the fourth watch of the night.

Between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m., Jesus comes to the disciples. They have been toiling in the storm throughout most of the night, and when they are most wearied, when they are most desperate, when they have got absolutely nothing more to give, Jesus comes to them.

[19 : 40] He comes to them at just the right moment. And Matthew also tells us that Jesus came to them walking on the sea. Now the sea in scripture often represents the forces of evil, the forces of chaos.

The sea is a domain over which only God has power, has control, has authority. You see that in Job chapter 9. You see that in Psalm 77. 77, that it's the Lord who is in control of the seas.

And now, here's Jesus coming to the disciples walking on the sea, sovereign over the waves. And it's at this point that Matthew draws our attention to the anxious reaction of the disciples.

Look at verse 26. They see Jesus walking on the sea. Now these men were ordinary men. They were ordinary fishermen.

They knew that no mere human could walk on water. Ration and reason don't allow for this. They were men of the world. And so they come to the only possible, the only logical explanation that there could possibly be.

[20 : 44] And they scream out in fear, it's a ghost. It's a phantom. It's a specter. It's a spirit. Nothing else can explain something or someone walking to them on the waves.

And Matthew goes on to record the assurance from Jesus in verse 27. These men are in a storm and they're tired and they're hungry. And Jesus does the first thing that he always does.

He speaks to them. He addresses their fears. And Matthew tells us what Jesus said to them. Look at verse 27. Be of good cheer. Literally, be of good courage.

Take heart. And he goes on and he says, it is I. Now at one level Jesus is saying, it's me. I'm here. It's all okay. But at another level Jesus is saying even more.

Jesus literally says, I am. Now in the Old Testament, the Lord, the covenant making covenant keeping God is the great I am.

[21 : 47] In Exodus chapter 3, he tells Moses that his name is I am that I am. And he tells Moses to go to the people of Israel and to say to them, I am has sent me to you.

And here is Jesus. And he's calling out to the disciples in their storm. And he's saying here, I am. I am is here. It's a declaration of deity.

It's a declaration of divinity. And he closes by saying, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Why? Because I am is with you.

Now friends, as we focus on these verses, we are being shown who Jesus really is. Matthew is skillfully presenting and portraying Jesus as the sovereign Lord. He's the one who comes to his people in their distress.

He's the one who walks on the water. He's the one who is the great I am. He's the one who is fully man, but he is also fully God, fully divine. He is the Lord.

[22 : 50] And there is nothing in all creation that isn't under his sovereign control, not even the wind, not even the waves. In a sermon preached in 2004, John Piper said, Jesus is supreme in every admirable way over everything, over galaxies and endless reaches of space, over the earth from the top of Mount Everest, 29,000 feet up to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, 36,000 feet down in the Mariana Trench.

He is supreme over all plants and animals from the peaceful blue whale to the microscopic killer viruses, over all weather and movements of the earth, hurricanes, tornadoes, monsoons, earthquakes, avalanches, floods, snows, rains, sleet, over all chemical processes that heal and destroy cancer, AIDS, malaria, flu, and all the workings of antibiotics and a thousand healing medicines.

He is supreme over all countries and governments and armies, over all Al-Qaeda and terrorists and kidnappings and suicide bombings and beheadings, over all nuclear threats from Iran, Russia and North Korea.

He is supreme over all politics and elections, over all media and news and entertainment and sport and leisure, over education and universities and scholarship and science and research and over all business and finance and industry and manufacturing and transportation and over all the internet and information systems.

As Abraham Kuyper once said, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Jesus Christ who is sovereign over all does not cry, mine.

[24 : 26] Friends, do you believe this? Do you believe this? Do you believe that the one who is laid in Bethlehem's manger and crucified on Calvary's cross is the one who rules and reigns?

Do you believe that he is the great I Am? Do you believe that he is the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God? Do you believe that he is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the one who is holy, holy, holy and the fullness of the earth is his glory?

Do you believe that one day every politician, every president, every prime minister will have to bow the knee to him and even now he is sustaining the breath in their lungs? Do you believe this?

Do you believe that even although Nicola Sturgeon and Boris Johnson woke up this morning they did so only because the Lord allowed them to do so? Do you believe this? C.S. Lewis famously said, a man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher he would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he's a poached egg or else he would be the devil of hell.

You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God but let's not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

[25 : 50] He is not left that open to us he did not intend to. But you know as we focus on these verses we're also being reminded of what this sovereign Lord says to his people in all their storms.

He comes to his disciples and he says to them take heart it is I don't be afraid. And that is what this strong sovereign supreme Jesus continues to say to every people every person in every storm.

he comes to them in the storms taking place in their homes and he says take heart it is I don't be afraid. He comes to them in the storms taking place in their schools and he says take heart it is I don't be afraid.

He comes to them in the storms taking place in their college or university and he says take heart it is I don't be afraid. He comes to them in the storm taking place in their workplace.

And he says, take heart, it is I. Don't be afraid. He comes to them in the storm taking place in their hospital ward. And he says, take heart, it is I. Don't be afraid.

[26 : 58] He comes to North Tolstoy Free Church on Sunday the 9th of January. And this congregation is saying, what are we going to do in a vacancy? How are we going to find a minister? How are we going to survive through a pandemic?

And he says, take heart, it is I. Don't be afraid. He comes to them in every storm. Comes to them in the storm at the end of their lives. The storm that every one of us must face.

And he says, take heart, it is I. Don't be afraid. My friend, whatever storm you might be facing today. Whatever storm you might be going through today as a Christian.

The Lord says to you, the sovereign Lord says to you. Take heart, it is I. Don't be afraid. But we move from a sovereign visitor to a sinking disciple.

Look at verses 28 to 33. And Matthew now focuses on the sinking faith of one of the disciples. Matthew draws our attention to the walk of Peter in verses 28 to 31.

[28 : 00] We can begin by noting Peter's request and Jesus' response. Verses 28 and 29. Peter has just seen Jesus and just heard Jesus.

And he now blurts out, Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you. He literally says, Lord, since it is you, bid me, command me to come to you on the water.

Peter loves Jesus. And he just wants to be where Jesus is. He's not content to remain in his boat if Jesus is somewhere out there on the waters. So he calls out, Lord, since it is you, bid me come to you on the water.

And Jesus replies, come. What music for Peter's ears. Jesus has just said, come. And Peter steps out of the boat and he starts walking in the water toward Jesus.

But we also see Peter sinking in Jesus' salvation. Look at verses 30 and 31. Peter's been walking on the water. He isn't far from Jesus when all of a sudden he sees the wind.

[29 : 05] Sees the sea spray. Sees the crashing waves. Sees the boat bobbing up and down. Hears the howl of the gale. Hears the roar of the sea. Feels the breeze on his face. Tastes the salt water on his lips.

And he becomes afraid. You know, if Jesus had started to sink, then Peter would have reason to be afraid. If Jesus had withdrawn his invitation to come, then Peter would have reason to be afraid.

But Peter becomes afraid for only one reason. He takes his eyes off Jesus. And he starts to sink and he cries out, Lord, save me.

And in that very moment, Jesus reaches out his hand, takes hold of Peter, saves him from drowning. And he asks, O you of little faith, why did you doubt? And Matthew goes on to draw our attention to the worship of the disciples in verses 32 and 33.

Matthew tells us when Jesus and Peter got back into the boat, the wind ceased. Verse 32. He doesn't explicitly say that Jesus calmed the storm.

[30 : 11] But we know from Matthew chapter 8 that Jesus can command storms with just a word. That he calmed a storm one night when the disciples were with him. So there was a great calm.

And now as Jesus steps into the boat like a king would regally step into his chariot, the wind ceases. And Matthew closes by saying that the disciples worship Jesus, saying in verse 33, truly you are the son of God.

They've seen him walking on the water. They've heard his words, take heart, reside, don't be afraid. They've watched him rescue Peter from drowning. They've witnessed Owen cease as soon as he steps into their boat.

And all they can say is truly, you are the son of God. They are putting Jesus in the highest possible category that they can conceive of. They are saying that Jesus is uniquely related to the one true God.

They are beginning to see that Jesus is indeed Lord. And he is Lord of all creation. You know friends, as we focus on these verses, we've been given a picture.

[31 : 16] And it's a picture of what happens when faith falters. Look at what happens to Peter. One minute he's looking to Jesus and he's walking on the water.

And the next minute he's looking at the wind, succumbing to fear, sinking beneath the waves. And you know the same can be true of us, can't it? Jesus is the great object of our faith.

The one who calls each of us to come to him. And the writer to the Hebrews tells us that we live the Christian life. We run the Christian race looking away from everything and looking away from everyone.

And looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. But sometimes we can take our eyes off Jesus. We start looking around us rather than at him.

And we soon find ourselves sinking and in peril. And you know that can happen even after we've made a good deal of progress in the Christian life. Isn't it amazing that Peter walked to within touching distance of Jesus.

[32 : 23] And then he started to sink because he took his eyes off Jesus. Perhaps you know today that you're sinking because you've taken your eyes off Jesus.

I fully believe that COVID has done a hard work in some of the Lord's people. I fully believe that some of the Lord's people who were so active and so involved in the life of their churches before COVID.

Took their eyes off him during that time. And found themselves beginning to sink. And maybe there's someone here today. Who knows that they're sinking.

Or perhaps you know someone who's begun to sink. Because they took their eyes off Jesus. Faith can falter. But these verses also give us a wonderful picture of the faithful Savior who doesn't falter.

Look at how Jesus responds to Peter in these verses. Peter is sinking and he's crying out, Lord save me. And Jesus doesn't walk away in disappointment and disgust.

[33 : 35] Neither does Jesus say, Come on man, pull yourself together. You can do it. You can try a little harder. He immediately reaches out his hand and takes hold of Peter.

What an encouragement that should be friend. If you're a Christian today who has begun to sink. Here is the Savior who is gentle and lowly in heart. And he reaches out his hand to take hold of those who are sinking.

Those who are struggling. Other people may become exasperated with you. Other people may give up on you. Other people may just shake their heads in dismay with you. The elders, the deacons may be a real disappointment to you because they're not really there for you.

I don't know. But here is Jesus. And this Jesus says, I will never leave you. And this Jesus says, I will never forsake you.

My dear sinking friend, you are not alone today. I've known what it is to sink. Peter knew what it is to sink. And I'm sure if they were honest, every elder in this building would be willing to put up their hands and say that they have known what it is to sink.

[34 : 45] But there is a Lord who reaches down and rescues every struggling, sinking Christian who is willing to cry out, Lord, Lord, save me.

What an encouragement. And what an encouragement this should be if you're not a Christian today. You might be holding back from Jesus because you're afraid you're going to let him down.

And today I'm presenting you with a saviour who will not leave you. He will not forsake you. I'm presenting you with a saviour who will not refuse to cry, Lord, save me, when you feel like you're sinking.

I'm presenting you with a saviour who will take you back like he did with Peter again and again and again. I'm presenting you with a saviour who holds celebrations over the return of wandering sheep and wayward sons.

So I ask you today, friend, what is keeping you back? What is holding you back from such a faithful saviour? What is keeping you back? What is holding you back from such a gentle saviour?

[35 : 57] What is keeping you back? What is holding you back from a saviour who will never fall to her? What is keeping you back from stepping out of the boat and responding to his invitation?

Come. Come. Isn't it wonderful, friends, that we can come into this building aware that we are sinking?

Isn't it wonderful that we can come into this building honest enough to know that there will be times when we have sunk and when we will sink? And isn't it wonderful to be reminded that there is a saviour who will never sink and who can reach down and rescue his sinking people?

Well, let's close by singing to his praise the words of Psalm 29. Psalm 29. We're going to sing verses 1 to 4 and then verses 10 and 11.

A psalm that celebrates the Lord's sovereignty over the storms and over the seas. Give ye unto the Lord, ye sons, that of the mighty be, all strength and glory to the Lord with cheerfulness give ye.

[37 : 11] And to the Lord the glory give that to his name is due and in the beauty of holiness unto Jehovah bow. We'll sing Psalm 29 verses 1 to 4 and then the final stanza, verses 10 and 11, to the Lord's praise and glory.

Psalm 29 verses 1 to 5 and then the final stanza, verses 10 and 11, to the Lord with cheerfulness give ye.

Fearful, bless you, and cheerfulness give ye. And to the Lord the glory give, thou to his name is due.

And to the Lord the glory give, thou to his name is due and in the beauty of holiness unto Jehovah bow.

The Lord's voice on the waters is the God of majesty.

[38 : 59] The thunder and on multitudes of water, seteth he.

A powerful voice, say, it is that comes out from the Lord most high.

Let thy soul that bring the darkness blue. Of glorious majesty.

The Lord, bless you, and ever shall.

The Lord will give his people strength.

[40 : 30] And with me is blessed, dear God. Lord our God, you are the one who gives his people strength and the blessing of peace.

And we pray that every person gathered in this place today might have received a word of encouragement from your word today. That those who are in Christ would have been encouraged to remember that even when they may feel like they are sinking, that there is a saviour who doesn't sink, who will never falter, and who remains faithful to his people.

And that if any came into this place today outside of Christ, that they might have been encouraged to approach the one who calls out in the gospel, come. And that they might know that he is the one who will never leave them and will never forsake them.

Allow each of our hearts to have been encouraged today with the reminder that the Lord is indeed the reigning one. That Christ indeed is sustaining the world by the word of his power.

Part us now with your blessing, we pray. And may you bring us again together this evening with a renewed desire and compulsion to worship and magnify your name in spirit and in truth, as we pray in Jesus' name.

[41 : 49] Amen.