

Matthew 14:22 onwards (Wednesday evening prayer meeting)

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[0 : 0 0] we're going to turn to the first of these readings to Matthew chapter 14 and we'll take up the reading once again from the beginning it's at not the beginning of the chapter but the beginning of a reading on verse 22 verse number 22 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 when you read this passage what do you see if you were to think of one word that described the passage from 22 to 33 what would that word be if I asked everyone in here this evening to give me a word the first word that comes to them when we read this passage I reckon we would all or most of us would have different words because we all connect with the bible in different ways the bible is a personal book and we have different personalities and different needs we have different backgrounds and upbringings we have different experiences in life and so the bible is for us slightly different in the way that we connect with it for example the might you some of you might come with the word power because there is something extraordinary about the power of Jesus over the water when he can walk on the surface tension of the water and he doesn't go under someone else of course related to that might get come up with a word miracle because it is a miracle and then others might focus on the second part of the passage which is Peter's attempt to walk on the water his momentary act of faith until he started sinking and so you might come with the word weakness or deficient faith we all connect with the bible slightly differently but I wonder as we read this passage how many of us if we were asked to choose one word it would be the word Jesus because that's what this passage is about that's what explains the power and the authority and the miracle it explains Peter and it ties up the whole of the passage together and if we fail to see the majesty and the glory of Jesus in this passage then we're definitely not reading it right even although we naturally may want to home in on one particular aspect of it what is at the center or who

is at the center of this passage is jesus and his miracle is a display of his majesty and his glory not just his power but his majesty and his glory glory because what you see here is the glory of god the god who owns the universe the earth belongs to the lord that's what we've just been singing and all that it contains and it's because the earth belongs to the lord ultimately that god can do with that whatever he wants and so no we don't just see a power in jesus we see the majesty and the glory and the ultimate authority over the earth the wind and the waves and the sea but tonight i would like us to be a little bit more personal than that not to go too much into the theology of the passage and there is a huge amount but i want us to relate and connect with the disciples as they try to get their heads around what was happening on that night you see it's easy for us because we know the passage we've read it a million times we know the end of the story we know all the stories in the gospels so for us there's no surprise in the passage but for us for them it was a terrifying experience but it was one in which jesus revealed himself to them in yet another way all the way through the gospels that's what you get you get jesus making himself known for who he is the son of god and why he came into the world that's what the gospel is all about and faith is when that revelation of jesus takes hold upon us and draws us to himself that's what faith is faith does not begin with us it begins with jesus and i think some people go wrong in this respect when when you ask them do you have faith they instantly look at themselves they start with themselves but when it comes to faith i must not be the starting point if i am i won't find anything but if the starting point is jesus then faith is the reaction to his revealing himself to me a reaction that compels me and draws me and pulls me to himself that's what faith is it starts with jesus revealing himself that's why it's important for us tonight to start with jesus and to see how he reveals himself to those poor ignorant disciples on that stormy night poor because they're no better and no worse than you or i would ever have been we would have been the same and exactly the same position just as terrified just as confused i want us to see first of all how jesus emerges from the initial darkness and how that helps us to understand the experience that a person like you and me has in our understanding of jesus which begins often in darkness and confusion doesn't it they had no idea what they were looking at for them they saw first of all a shadow in the mist a shadow in amongst the raging storm and as that shadow emerged and as it became clear to the disciples that what they were looking at was the shape of a man it for them it could not possibly be true they had never seen a man walking on top of the water and he was coming towards them which made it even more terrifying for them

and they were they were freaked out this there was something unnerving and there would be for any one of us there would be something deeply unnerving if we were in a boat and we saw the figure of a man walking on top of the water it would terrify us and first and it's interesting isn't it that instinctive reaction is superstition you see they were just as superstition as superstitious as our society is our society for all its atheism and for all its skepticism is naturally superstitious and you see that in many different ways and it's interesting that they immediately thought that it was a ghost it was a spirit not entirely sure what they meant by that but we know that the jewish people were really superstitious in those days they believed in all kinds of stuff going on and it was and it's quite clear that that's the kind of background that the disciples had but in any case for them this was something that they couldn't explain and something that just didn't make sense you don't have to be a physicist to know that it doesn't make sense for a human to stand on top of the water and not go under it was as impossible for them as it is for us with our knowledge of physics and surface tension of water and weights and masses and gravity and all the rest of it that go into the equation it was just as impossible and just as absurd for them it really they they were just they were dumbstruck they just couldn't believe what they saw and if they could they would have been a hundred miles away if they had been on land they would have ran but they couldn't they were stuck to where they were which meant that they had to just wait and see what was going on and for many people the emergence of jesus has a similar effect upon them they can't understand this gospel this bible it's something that terrifies them and confuses them something that just doesn't make sense and it doesn't add up to them and maybe there are people here this evening you can look back over your life and there was a time when you were just as terrified and just as driven away by the gospel as tonight you're driven to the gospel you were repelled by the gospel just as tonight you are compelled by the gospel for you the gospel was the last thing on your mind perhaps you hated it perhaps you hated any notion or any any suggestion of reading the bible or going to church or or any of these the kind of things and yet somehow or other tonight in the course of time you have turned and you have come to a living knowledge of jesus christ you're not particularly able to explain it maybe except by the power of god you can't help it there's something taking hold of you something you're not you've not resisted it or maybe you did it first but tonight you are here because you want to be here because you want to hear more of jesus and you want to be encouraged because jesus has filled your heart you've come to an understanding of what he has done and so i hope we can see that this story is a progressing story story that begins with confusion and darkness and mystery just like our own experience and yet one which has which ended up with the disciples worshiping god in jesus christ what was it that made the difference between this confusing sight in front of them and where they were at the end of the passage well i i believe it was this more than anything else it was the word of jesus that's why i stopped at verse 27 it is when jesus said take heart it is i do not be afraid that things changed from sheer panic to cautious relief

in the disciples the sheer panic at seeing something that just they couldn't make head or tail of and something that terrified them to something all of a sudden in which the penny dropped of course that's the explanation that's the only rational explanation that there possibly could be and it was one which didn't only just make sense it was one that filled them with joy because this was a Jesus they knew and loved and followed so that was the you can't describe how these men must have felt when they heard the voice of Jesus take heart it is I do not be afraid you see but it's the same with us it's the voice of Jesus that makes the difference between the confusion in not understanding the gospel and the faith in which we follow Jesus what's made the difference it's the word of God the Bible has made the difference the gospel in which we have come to understand who Jesus is and what he came to do the word of Jesus and faith is always connected to the message of the gospel you cannot have faith without it being connected to the message of the gospel faith is like a rope that's floating on the sea by itself but if you have a ship and if you have a man in the water struggling to survive who's fallen off the ship the rope is what connects the man to the boat by itself the rope is useless but if it connects a man who's drowning to the boat who's there's somebody on the boat that can that can pull him in then the rope is essential that's what faith is it's always connected to the word have you ever stopped to think of how many times in the New Testament the word the message is emphasized Jesus said Jesus said he who has ears let him hear in Galatians when Paul was reminding the Galatians of how it was that they came to faith in Jesus in the first place he says this did you receive the spirit by works or by hearing by faith hearing God's word is essential to faith in fact faith is when God's word is absorbed by us into our hearts in such a way that it elicits that response of willing obedience to his word to his command what is he says in Romans faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ Acts chapter 19 when they heard the word they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and it was the same here when Jesus said it is I do not be afraid that's what meant everything to them it meant it everything fell into place and it's the same as we listen we're trying to make sense first of all of the gospel and maybe just we we can't at first until we start laying hold upon the message of the gospel the reason why Jesus came into the world and we do that by looking and by understanding that Jesus was the son of God having come into the world to die for us by giving his life on the cross but when Jesus issued that word that encouragement it is I take heart do not be afraid

you notice thirdly that that word elicited it commanded a faith response and the faith response was from peter and peter said lord if it is you command me to come to you on the water and jesus said come now i have to confess to you first of all i do not know why peter wanted to step out of the boat onto the water i don't understand why he said this and i guess without having access to his mind we don't know what i do know is what's in front of me that what peter wanted to do was what jesus wanted him to do do you understand what i'm saying on the one hand when peter discovered that this was jesus his response it was almost like a kind of instinctive response it wasn't a wrong response at all and i know that because jesus wanted him to do it he said lord if it is you tell me to come to you on the water and jesus said come so on the one hand you have a desire a wish in peter and on the other hand you have a command from jesus to do the same thing peter wants to come to the water to jesus on the water jesus wants him to come to him on the water that is what is abundantly clear in this passage peter's wish is jesus command and that's the way that faith works god when he works in a person's heart he works in that person so that they want to love him they want to take him as their savior they want to live for him they know that they're never going to do it perfectly they know they're going to fail and fall and they're going to sin and they know that they're they don't know what's in front of them and yet what they want more than anything else is to listen to jesus words and to do what he is saying to them and we're not talking about the major things the life-threatening things at the moment jesus is not at that stage yet in a few years time jesus is going to tell peter to give his life for the lord but he's not at that stage yet he can't cope with that yet he's only at the very beginning we're only talking baby steps at the moment and yet they're steps of faith whatever steps the lord tells you to do they're baby steps and yet they're steps of faith like do this in remembrance of me and am i talking to somebody this evening and that is exactly what you long to do because of what jesus means to you because of what he's done in your life because of the change that has taken place in your life and yet perhaps you're not sure and there's a thousand voices calling in your head telling you not to take that step but that doesn't change the fact that you want

[20 : 25] to go to the table is it not interesting that the very thing you want to do is the very thing that jesus commands you to do is that a coincidence i don't think so because the way that god works in a person is to change that person's desires you don't like the things that you used to like you now like the things that god likes and that's what faith is all about you maybe can't understand how this has happened in your life and you may be afraid to in case six months from now you wake up one morning it'll all be gone is that right and six months from now you might think well what a fool i was to sit at the lord's table to think i was a christian i'm now going to follow someone else because i've become more convinced i'm i'm no longer convinced that jesus is the son of god i'm no longer want the gospel i want something else and because of that you're afraid to take that other step long ago i'm going to tell you something and i hope you understand the illustration it's a bit of a risky illustration but i hope you understand it and i think it's clear enough and i think it's a powerful one it's always stuck with me for 30 years this has stuck with me one afternoon i was a student way way back 32 years ago and this was in the late 70s and in the church we went to in bon accord there were about six or seven other christian students and we were all going to get married at the same round about the same time and we all knew each other really well and we happened one day to find ourselves in the same room we're in this guy's this flat and like students do started talking and we used to do loads of things together it was fantastic time just like it is nowadays i guess and we used to meet together for this that and the next thing anyway we were in this room on a saturday afternoon and we began to talk about how we were all feeling about getting married it's one of these only times when men actually expose their feelings it doesn't happen very often but we were all we all started talking about how we were feeling about getting married and there was all kinds of discussion going on it was really interesting and one person said this he said you know he says what i'm afraid of that a month after i get married i'll be walking down union street and i'll see this other girl and something will go click within me and there was silence nobody knew what to say nobody knew the answer i guess because everybody was afraid of the same thing until another guy who had remained silent up until this point he spoke and he said that happens to me all the time but i'm still going to marry helen because i love her the fact that i'll get tempted doesn't change the fact that i love helen and he's still married to helen 30 years later and it's the same with us the fact that you'll be tempted away from christ should not stop you from committing to christ

of course there'll be times when we'll have all kinds of have to battle with all kinds of temptation but right now the question is do you love christ that's what he asked peter do you love me he's saying he's not saying are you guaranteeing me that your love will be absolutely perfect he's not saying that christ never asks us that if that was the case then none of us would be here tonight it's the same with repentance repentance is actually quite an interesting subject isn't it because what is repentance repentance is when we turn from from sin to god and a lot of people think that it's a momentary experience when once and for all we turn from a life that is sinful to a life that is in obedience to god however nobody can say lord i guarantee you i will never commit that sin again none of us can do that i can't you can't and yet the lord accepts us on the basis of what christ has done and at the same time as accepting us he gets to work in us to make us to make us more like himself and as we become more and more like jesus then we begin to discover more and more sin in ourselves and we take it all the time to jesus sometimes we're too late in taking it to jesus sometimes we're too we're far we're far too long i should say in taking it to jesus but nonetheless the fact that you will be tempted should not stop you from making that step of faith because it's what jesus is asking you to do in the following verses jesus reveals himself finally in mercy and in grace verse 28 when you read peter said to him lord if it is you command me to come to you on the water and 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 and beginning to sink he cried out lord save me jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him saying to him oh you of little faith why did you doubt and when they got into the boat the wind ceased now i'm asking you the same question as i opened up with when you read that passage what do you see what do you go away with if you were just to read that passage what would you go away with if i was to ask you tonight what's the lesson in these verses how many of you would say oh well the lesson is the danger of taking my eyes off jesus how many of you would say well i'm warned afresh that i must keep my eyes on jesus and it's only by keeping our eyes and if peter had kept his eyes on jesus he would have remained where he was and he would have continued to walk on the waters because his faith failed him that he sank is that what you think the message of these verses is i'm not denying for a moment that that's exactly what happened but that's not the message of these verses you go out that door and all you think about is peter and his failure what does that give you it gives you nothing it only reminds us that we are no better than he is and if any of you think you can live the christian life by warning

after warning after warning after warning and i must do and i must do and i must do it's never going to come to anything you're going to despair i'll tell you what the message of this chapter is the message is this when peter failed not if peter failed but when peter failed what did jesus do he reached out his hand and he pulled him to safety again that's the message of this chap that's the christ we must look at this evening and we must remember because it's going to happen to us it probably has a thousand times and it will happen a thousand times more unless the lord comes for us before then that's what the christian life is all about i'm not saying we should be careless in our christian living of course we shouldn't every day should be a day of renewed obedience and determined obedience to jesus because why because we want to obey him but we won't do it perfectly there'll be times when like peter we will listen to those voices and when doubts will come in and when we'll fail to pray to him as we ought and fail to walk and live as we ought what does he do leave us to flounder in the sea and disappear of course not what this passage tells me is that god's grace that's that took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay and set my feet on a rock and left me there no it didn't he established my goings what does that mean it means that the lord accompanies us every step of the way and when we stray we will stray he pulls us back he may not do it overnight he sometimes doesn't do it painlessly sometimes there are lessons in the christian life that can only be learned through bitter experience so be it it's what we need but one thing is sure he restores my soul and makes me to walk in the paths of righteousness my fear tonight is that there's too much attention on peter if you focus on peter you'll never be encouraged if you simply take a warning from peter you go out that door with no real encouragement at all but if you focus on jesus and what he did when peter failed and he was going to do it again and again and again in the same person and in a way he represented the weaknesses of the disciples and indeed the weakness of the whole church he reached out his hand how many times has he done that with you i can tell you he's certainly done that dozens hundreds thousands of times with me that's the christ we love whose love nothing can separate us from who accompanies us from day to day from one day to the next one week throughout the whole of our lives whose spirit sometimes we grieve who sometimes we forsake and sometimes even deny by the way we live and yet nothing can separate us from the love of god in christ jesus and it's because of that that determination in god to keep

us to himself that we celebrate and remember the death that brought us into his kingdom and brought us into that unshakable relationship that unbreakable relationship with himself so on the strength of that we're going to sit if the lord wills at the lord's table to gaze upon the majesty of jesus isn't it an interesting thought isn't it a fascinating thought here we have the glory of jesus walking on the elements taking control of that which belongs to him and that which is his employing the sea transforming it into a roadway for him to walk with ease to his disciples the majesty and the glory of god the unmistakable glory of god and on the other hand we equally see the glory of god in him being nailed to a cross and laying down his life for wretches for hopeless cases like you and like me when jesus said now is the son of man glorified and god is glorified in him that's what he meant he meant his death that as never before god was going to be glorified in his love for sinners enemies his enemies in forgiving their sins by doing all that was necessary in the justice of god to secure them and to purchase them and to bring them to himself when a savior take heart he said it is i do not be afraid these are the words i would like us to leave here with this evening and to go into this weekend take heart says jesus it is i and that's enough that's everything let's pray blessed god we want to reflect now upon the revelation of yourself in the bible through the lord jesus christ we want to reflect oh lord on his power on his majesty and his authority on his incarnation his coming into this world as one of us on his weakness and his eventual death on the cross we want to understand more and more of what that death achieved we want to lay hold upon it with every understanding we have it elicits and draws a response of faith we want to be drawn also to jesus like peter was we know that when we do so we take a risk and if we depend on ourselves we will fall and fail like peter and yet we know that there is no other way you have the words of everlasting life and so lord bless your word to us we pray and cleanse us as we look forward to another communion continue to cleanse us and may this weekend not only be a reminder of what jesus suffered and did for us but may it be a strength to us may it be that another milestone in the way may it be a determination a reminder

oh lord of how we must we must focus our attention seek first the kingdom of god and his righteousness and how we must set our affections on the things above where christ is seated at the right hand of the father bless these days to us then we pray bless our fellowship together and strengthen us in jesus name amen