

God is Here

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[0 : 0 0] and back together to the chapter that we read in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 14, and we'll read again from verse 22.

Gospel of Matthew, chapter 14, from verse 22. And 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 mountains by himself to pray, and when evening came, he was there alone. But the boat by this time was a long way from the land and 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 they 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 so on down.

[1 : 1 1] And immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Take heart.

It is I. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. This chapter that we read, the 14th chapter of Matthew, is full of the greatness of Jesus' power.

He fed 5,000 men, as well as their wives and their children, with just five small loaves of bread and two fish.

And when they gathered the leftovers up, they had 12 baskets full, more than they started with. At the end of the chapter, when Jesus visits Gennesaret, the people looking for healing, they only have to come and touch the hem of his garments.

And they are healed. They are made whole. But it's the middle one of the three events, the three miraculous events in this chapter, that I want to consider with you this evening, where Jesus and where Peter together walk on the waves.

[2 : 2 7] Now, after Jesus had fed the multitudes, John, in his account of the event, there are differing accounts, there are separate accounts of this event in the Gospels. And each Gospel writer brings his own flavor to this event, this happening.

And John says that perceiving, Jesus perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king. Jesus then, he withdrew himself to the mountain by himself.

The people thought that in Jesus, that in this man, that they had found the perfect leader who could give them whatever earthly thing they desired.

Maybe they thought that through him, they could replace the wicked King Herod, that they could maybe even drive the Romans out, that they could perhaps rebuild the nation of Israel as it had been in the time of David, a mighty superpower, the military equal of any or all of its neighbors round about.

But that's not the kind of kingdom that Jesus came to establish. Jesus later himself rebuked these people by saying, you are seeking me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of your fill of the loaves, because their stomachs were full.

[3 : 52] They didn't understand Jesus' message. They didn't understand his purpose, even though they were impressed by his miraculous powers. They missed the point.

So Jesus took himself off up into the mountains to pray in solitude. And while he did that, he sent his disciples on ahead by boat.

But things, as we read, things didn't go so well for the disciples. And as we read our passage, we saw that the disciples remember his closest friends, those who were nearest to him in his earthly ministry.

They become caught in the grip of a fierce storm. They find themselves in that storm, tossed about in an open boat during the darkest hours of the night, because they had been commanded so to do by the Lord to cross the Sea of Galilee.

These men are doing the will of the Lord. They're doing what Jesus told them. They're following his command, doing what he wants them to do. And yet, we see them struggling.

[4 : 59] We see these men in fear of their lives, under the burden that following the Lord's command has brought them. And try as they might, it looks like they can't make any headway in the face of these rough seas.

They're in darkness. The wind is in their faces. It's blowing them back. The mighty waves are crashing over the sides of their boat, swamping it and soaking them.

And these poor 12 men are stuck in a storm, in the fear for their very lives, and unable to find a way out. Let me ask you this evening, friends, have you ever felt like that?

Have you ever found yourself stuck at the epicenter of one of life's tumultuous storms? And no matter how hard you try, no matter what you do, it seems that you can't make any headway.

Well, friends, believe it or not, we all have times like that. It may seem like the storm that's battering you will never end. And you may be asking God, what's possible good can come from what you're going through?

[6 : 17] Perhaps you're even reaching a point where you're thinking that before you came to Christ, there was never anything like this in your life. Nothing happened to you like this before you turned your face to follow Jesus.

Well, if that is you this evening, friends, there is good news for you tonight. Directly from the Word of God. Straight from the mouth of Jesus Christ himself.

Take heart. God is here. There is no need for worry. We were in Amsterdam a number of years ago.

And we were lucky enough to visit a diamond factory. And in the factory, we visited the workshop where the skilled craftsmen worked to bring out the beauty of these precious stones.

Now, the diamonds, I don't know if you know about this, but the diamonds in the polishing process, they start as rough little stones that you wouldn't give tuppence for. But as they're brought hard against the grinding wheel, in the hand of the skilled craftsmen, as the sparks fly, then the hidden beauty of these stones is revealed.

[7 : 34] This is what trials do to the child of God. Trials are like that grindstone shaping us, polishing us for him, making us, making you the bright gems that he wants for his crown.

In Hebrews 12, the writer says, For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God doesn't promise us that our lives will be easy. The life of faith is no rose-strewn pathway, but remember, he controls all things.

God is sovereign. He is above and in charge of all things. And we have his promise that all things will work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

And God can only keep his promise. This is no cliché. This is no advertising jingle. This is the hard and fast promise from the mouth of God.

[8 : 43] And his promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Yes, and may it be so. Jesus is frank and honest when he says, In this world, you will have troubles.

We mustn't. We mustn't have any delusions about this. There is a cost to following Jesus Christ, to having faith faith in the man from Galilee.

But we must also have hope in these tough times. Because Jesus goes on to say, Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. Jesus walks above the storms of our life.

And as long as we keep our eyes firmly fixed on him during these tough times, he will stretch out his hands. And by his strength, he will lift us up to stand where he is in his strength.

Take courage, my friend, this evening. The storms of life hold many hidden blessings for the child of God. I don't know what kind of storm, what kind of trouble is in your life.

[9 : 51] It could be your health. It could be your family. It could be your work. It could be your finances. I don't know. But God knows.

And I do know that the Lord has a purpose in allowing that storm to come into your life. Because storms are when God comes to us.

Jesus always comes to us in the storms of life. I'm sure you'll know the words at the beginning of Isaiah chapter 43.

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

Because I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Notice that it says when. It doesn't say if you pass through the waters.

[10 : 50] It says when you pass through the waters. In this life, trials, troubles, tribulations will come. You can be sure of that.

So with that in mind, let's look at the passage. And there we see that Jesus made his disciples get into the boat. He wanted to go off into a mountain to pray.

And he made, he urged, he compelled his disciples to get into a boat. And this was probably because these seasoned fishermen, these hardened sailors, they were reluctant to make the trip.

They knew the Sea of Galilee well. They knew all about the sudden storms that could spring up on the Sea of Galilee. And they would also have known that at that time of year, in the late afternoon or the evening, wasn't the best time to be starting out on a journey across the lake.

But nevertheless, they went, and they went in obedience to him while Jesus went up into the mountain by himself to pray. And as evening turned into night, the wind began to blow and the sea began to rise.

[12 : 03] Now as Jesus sat up high on the mountain, Mark, in his version of these events, tells us that Jesus saw the disciples making headway painfully for the wind was against them.

As Jesus was on the mountain talking to his father in prayer with his father for hours, he could see the disciples struggling. His eye was upon them even though it was past dusk, even though there was a distance of miles between them, and even though they couldn't see him, they weren't aware of his eye being on them.

His eye was still on them. They were rowing frantically. They were struggling. They were fighting against the winds, and yet Jesus, although he could see their struggle, he did nothing to change the winds or to ease their passage.

John, in his gospel, tells us that in all the time since they had put to sea, perhaps as much as six or seven hours, they had only managed to travel about three miles from the shore.

And Matthew, in what we read, tells us how precarious a situation the boat was in. It was in the middle of the sea, and it was tossed by the waves.

[13 : 18] Jesus had sent his closest friends on a journey that he knew would be a trial to them. He had sent them into a situation and an experience that would drain them of all of their strength, that would remove all of their self-reliance.

And it was at that point that Jesus, that the Son of God who exercises complete control over the wind and the waves, it was then that he chose to walk on the sea to them.

Why? Why then? Why didn't he come to them sooner? Why didn't he come to them when he saw the storm starting to rise?

Before it got so rough, before these men whom he loved reached breaking point. Well, I believe that it was because Jesus wanted them to first exhaust themselves of every resource, every bit of their own strength, and he did this to teach them to depend, to come to depend on him and him alone.

J.C. Ryle, the Bishop of Liverpool, says, the same eye which saw the disciples tossed on the lake is ever looking at us. We're never beyond the reach of his care. Our way is never hid from him.

[14 : 43] He knows the path that we take and he's still able to help. He may not come to our aid at the time that we like the best, but he will never allow us utterly to fail.

He will always come at the right time to uphold his people. Jesus sees us and he will not forsake us. To help us learn about Jesus' sufficiency in our lives, we will experience trials.

Situations that will make us struggle. Situations, experiences that leave us feeling as if we're getting nowhere or even as if we're going backwards and then just almost when we're at breaking point, when we feel that we can do no more, he comes and he comes walking above it all.

And he does this to us because he loves us. He wants us to wean us away from our reliance on ourselves and he wants us to learn to lean on him alone.

His strength is made perfect in our weakness and in his strength our way is better. Now notice in the chapter that we read that it was the very thing that the disciples feared.

[16 : 04] This was the very thing that the Lord chose to reveal his power to them. And look at how Jesus came to them. He came to them in the face of the darkness.

Jesus, it says, came to them in the fourth watch of the night. During the darkest hours of the night. Somewhere probably between about three and six o'clock in the morning just before dawn breaks.

The darkest hour they say is always before the dawn. So Jesus came in the darkest hour of the night just before dawn breaks. And Jesus came then to them, to his fearful, struggling disciples, and he came walking on the water.

Well you may feel this evening friends like you are in darkness. And you may be wondering where Jesus actually is in all of what's going on around you.

You may be facing the darkest, the most difficult, the most terrifying days of your life. But remember friends, God's eye is always upon you. And his promise is that he will never leave you or forsake you.

[17 : 14] Even in the darkest, bleakest hours of life, God is still in control of your life. Psalm 139, we sang it there.

Even the darkness is not dark to you, says the psalmist to God. The night is as bright as day. The darkest hours of this life cannot hide you from the face of God.

He is there. He has his eyes on you. He sees your struggle even when you cannot see him. Even when you are not conscious of his presence in your life, his eye is on you and he sees you, friend.

These disciples, they were in a fight for their lives. They were beaten by the waves. They were struggling against the storm. These men, seasoned, hardened, experienced fishermen, though they were, they were terrified for their lives.

And when they thought that all hope was gone, when they thought that they were doomed, Jesus came walking on the waves. there are times, friends, when we feel like we have lost the battle with the storm that's raging in our lives.

[18 : 26] But remember, my friends, always remember that just as surely as the Lord is in control of the blessings that come into your lives, he is also in charge of the storms that come into your lives.

He might not keep you from going into a storm. He might not keep you from an experience that makes you struggle and strain and that terrifies you and drives you to the very edge of your reason.

But he will preserve you in that storm. And Jesus came, he came on the face of darkness and he came on the face of the deep.

The very thing, the very thing that the disciples were terrified of, the raging sea, this was the very thing that God used to come to them.

What a testimony. What a testimony of God's power that was. He wasn't telling them that the storm wasn't fierce. He wasn't telling them that they weren't in difficulty.

[19 : 35] He wasn't telling them that they weren't in danger. No, he was telling them that he was greater than the storm. And this is the message that he gives to you tonight as well, my friend.

No matter what you are facing in life, Jesus is greater than any storm that you may be facing. I know that's difficult. And I know that may sound trite.

But if you will be patient, if you will wait on him, if you will call to him in prayer, he will come to you. And you will see that your own storm, the thing that drove you to the edge of your senses, will be the thing that is used by God to make himself clear to you.

The very thing that you fear will be what finishes you, is the very thing that he will use to come to you. Don't fear these storms of life, my friend.

They have been designed by the Lord as a means of bringing himself closer to you. You are gold, refined, in the fire.

[20 : 45] And storms are when God reveals himself to us. When Jesus did come walking on the water, the disciples didn't recognize him. They thought he was a ghost.

They cried out in terror, but Jesus came to them with a message of peace and of power. And when he comes to us, when he comes walking on our storm, he brings the same message to us, to me, and to you that he brought to the disciples on that stormy night on the Sea of Galilee.

He brings a message of peace. The disciples were right in the middle of the storm when Jesus arrived and told them to take heart. Now the wind and the waves, did you notice, they didn't stop.

When Jesus came, the wind and the waves were still raging as they had been all evening. The disciples were still fighting hard against storm and wind and tide, but he brought his peace to them.

Take heart, my struggling friend. By his power, the Son of God can bring you peace too, and he will bring it right in the middle of your storms.

[21 : 54] And not only does he bring a message of peace, but he brings a message of power. When Jesus came to the disciples, when he came to them walking above their storm, he said, he identified himself, he said, it is I.

And this is the same statement, this is the same form of words that Jesus used when he said, I am the door. When he said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

When he said, I am the bread of life. When he said, I am the good shepherd. Do you see? He is the I am.

This is how God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. What if they don't believe me? Says Moses. Tell them I am has sent you, says God.

Jesus is using the same words here. Jesus is revealing himself as God here to the disciples. Jesus is telling his disciples, take heart, take courage, God is here.

[23 : 00] And he goes on to say, don't be afraid. Stop being frightened. Stop worrying. Take courage. God is here. Stop worrying.

We should give no place to worry. Corrie Ten Boom, the author of The Hiding Place, she says, worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength.

At the height of our desperation, when we cry out in fear and in terror, when we are eaten up by our worries and our burdens and our sufferings, he comes and he calmly speaks wonderful things to us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ, says Romans chapter 8, shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No. In all of these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

[24 : 20] Take courage. God is here. Stop worrying. And storms are when God lifts us up. Storms are when God lifts us up.

And then in our story we come to bold, brash Peter. I love Peter. Of all of the disciples, personally speaking, I love Peter the most.

Why? Because out of all of the disciples, to me, he seems the most human, the most ordinary, the most flawed, just like me.

He always acts before he thinks. You might say he engages his mouth before he engages his brain. After fishing all night and catching nothing, he was so cheesed off that he didn't want to take his boat back out when he was told to by Jesus.

But he did. He obeyed. And he was rewarded with a massive, net-breaking catch. When Jesus spoke about his coming death, Peter would argue with him to stop, to stop talking like that.

[25 : 33] When Jesus was taken captive by the soldiers in the garden, Peter drew his sword. He was ready to fight against a whole Roman detachment for Jesus' freedom. One man, one weapon against highly trained soldiers.

At Pilate's palace, again and again and again, he strenuously denied that he was one of Jesus' friends to Lecoq crew. And Jesus looked over at him with a look that cut Peter to his very core.

And Peter went out and wept bitterly for his denial. Peter's so like me. Peter's so like us, isn't he? Impetuous.

Yes. Flawed. Yes. Headstrong. Yes. Ruled by his emotions. Yes. But also forgiven. Yes.

And in love with his Lord. Oh, yes. And Peter says, Lord, if it's you. Isn't that interesting? If it's you, Peter says.

[26 : 39] Was he unsure? Well, maybe. Because he was, after all, seeing someone walking on water, a thing that he hadn't seen before. But he had the confidence to go on and say, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

And so Jesus says, come. And so Peter clambered over the side of the boat and there he was, walking on the surface of the water, walking to Jesus.

Now, as long as Peter's eyes were fixed on Jesus, Peter was fine. He walked on the water. He stayed above the waves. But Peter, being Peter, he let his emotions, he let his gaze drift away from Jesus.

He let his emotions, he let his fear, he let his anxiety, he let these things get the better of him. He got distracted from the Jesus who had just asked him to come. And he started looking at the crashing waves and the thundering wind and the storm round about him.

He took his eyes off Jesus and he began to focus instead on the terrifying wind that was tearing through the sail of the boat that was whipping up the water. He filled his eyes and his mind with the huge waves that were crashing around him and beating against the hull of his boat.

[27 : 57] Peter focused on the circumstances in which he found himself rather than on the one who was walking above it all, the Lord of his circumstances.

And so Peter began to sink. Peter doubted. Peter let doubt creep into his mind that Jesus could keep him safe. Jesus who had just fed thousands of men and women and children with a boys packed lunch.

Jesus who had watched the boat in the darkness from miles away as the crew had wrestled with all of their might against the storm. Jesus who had previously shown the might of his power over the wind and the waves when he rebuked them, when he commanded them to be still.

Jesus who had just moments ago invited Peter to get out of the boat and to walk to him across the waves. And in spite of the fact that Peter was actually walking on the water in the face of the storm, Peter began to sink.

His faith shrunk. He lost sight of his trust in Jesus. Doubts crept in. He questioned the belief that he had in Jesus' words and he started to slip under the surface.

[29 : 13] And do you feel like that tonight, my friend? If you do, if this is you, then take a lesson from what Peter did.

Unable to keep himself, to keep his head above the water, what was his response? What did he do? He prayed. Peter prayed.

He prayed harder than he had ever prayed before, more earnestly than he probably thought that he could ever do. From the depths of his being, he cried out to Jesus, Lord, save me.

Have you prayed that prayer? Have you filled your eyes and your mind with the ferocity, with the viciousness of the storms of this life? These bruising trials that come, do you feel them pulling you under?

Have you felt yourself swamped by difficulties, by grief, by hatred, by sorrow, by adversity, time after time after time? Have you felt the poisonous arrows of Satan aimed at your very soul as he tries to drag you down, as he tries to pull you away from the Jesus whom you love, as he struggles to ruin the peace that God has brought into your heart?

[30 : 31] Have you? Have you reached the point where you feel like you're drowning, slipping under, so far gone, that it's as if you're going down for the third time, that there's no hope, no light, no release?

Have you felt that? If that's you this evening, if that's your life, if that's your experience, then call to him with all of your might, Lord, save me.

Are you a child of God this evening? And you want to be closer to Jesus, you want to feel the comfort of his everlasting arms around you to protect you from the bitter bruising that life is dishing out to you?

Do you feel like it's almost one more wave, one more battering, one more deluge, and you'll be gone? Then call out to him tonight, friends, with all your might, Lord, save me.

He sees you, friend. His eye is on you. He sees your toil. He sees your struggle. He sees your pain. He sees your hands stretched out to him as you sink under the weight of your trials.

[31 : 51] And he hears your cry. He hears your call as you shout to him with all of your might from the very depths of your being, Lord, save me.

Don't wait. Don't wait till the storm has passed by to call out to him. Call now. Cry now while the waves are threatening your boat.

Call now while the wind is still blowing hard against you. Don't wait till the clouds disappear. Don't wait till the skies turn blue before you call out to the Lord for salvation and for help and for restoration.

Lord, save me, screams Peter. At the top of his voice above the noise of the wind and the waves. Lord, save me. And Jesus stretches out his hand and he catches firm hold of Peter as Peter sinks and he lifts him.

He raises him. He restores him. He answers his prayer and he saves him from the wind and from the waves and the storm.

[33 : 07] And by Jesus' grace, Peter was able to once more walk above the storm that had terrified him, that was swamping him, that was pulling him under. And in love, in love, Jesus gently rebukes Peter and he says to him, oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?

Why did you doubt? And he's gently rebuking you too tonight, my friends. Why do you take your eyes off me? Why do you worry about the waves and the wind?

Don't you remember? Don't you remember that I control all of these things? Don't you know my power? Am I the creator of the universe? Am I enough for you?

Why do you doubt? And Matthew tells us that they got into the boat. Jesus didn't leave Peter behind in the water.

Nor did Jesus walk to the boat dragging Peter's waterlogged corpse behind him under the water. Jesus raised Peter up till he stood on top of the water above the waves and the storm and they walked together to the boat and they both got in.

[34 : 38] And he may rebuke us tonight, friends. He may say, why do you doubt? But he still takes us by the hand. He still raises us up.

He still lifts us and he still carries us with his everlasting arms around us and under us, holding us. He doesn't let us go. He doesn't cast us adrift.

He will not let us drown. Underneath are his everlasting arms. Underneath. No matter how far down we go, his arms are still underneath us, still beneath us, below us.

he is willing to go lower to lift us up. Spurgeon talks about the trials of faith that come.

And he tells us how they bring us closer to God. He says untried faith may be true faith, but it's sure to be little faith.

[35 : 42] Faith never prospers so well, he says, as when all things are against it. When calm rains on the sea, no matter how you spread the sails, your ship will not move to its harbour, for on a slumbering ocean the ship sleeps too.

But let the winds rush howling forth, and let the waters lift up themselves, then, though the vessel may rock and her deck may be washed with waves, and her mast may creak under the pressure of the full and the swelling sail, it's then that she makes headway towards her desired haven.

No faith is so precious as that which lives and triumphs in adversity. Those times of faith, these storms that come into our lives, they bring us real depth of experience.

They make us resilient in God. We would never have believed our own weakness had we not had to pass through the rivers, and we would never have known God's strength had we not been supported in the middle of these deep waters.

Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. Take courage. God is here. There is no need for worry.

[37 : 09] And as soon as Jesus and Peter got back into the boat, we read that the wind ceased. The wind ceased. On an earlier occasion, Jesus was roused from his sleep, and he stood up in the boat during a storm, and he rebuked the wind and the sea.

And immediately everything was calm, and the disciples were amazed, and they said, who is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him. But this time was different.

This time, this time they knew who it was. It says, those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, truly, you are the son of God.

The son of God. That's who Jesus is. That's who comes to your aid. That's who lifts you up above the waves, who reaches out to you, and who pulls you when you feel like you're going under.

Take courage. God is here. There is no need for worry. In our trials, in our fears, in our sorrows, and even when our faith shrinks almost to nothing, he is the son of God.

[38 : 25] He remains the son of God, and he comes to us. He comes walking above our storms. Listen to his voice, friends. Lovingly, compassionately, calling out to you.

Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. Take courage. God is here. There is no need for worry. My friends, in this life, there is nothing surer than the fact that you will have troubles.

And these troubles will take you and pry you to the very edge of your reason. Experiences and sorrows that will lead you into the darkest days of your existence in this world.

And these trials, these sorrows, they will come from sources that you may never have expected in a million years. But take heart. He will come to you, walking on the very waves that you fear will destroy you.

Do not doubt. His arms will lift you up, and he will give you the strength to carry on. Take courage. God is here.

[39 : 35] There is no need for worry. It is a struggle, my friends. But he comes, and he comes walking above the waves, and he comes with his arms outstretched.

See what the hymn writer says. I've wrestled on towards heaven, against storm and wind and tide, now like a weary traveler that leaneth on his guide amid the shades of evening, while sinks life's lingering sand, I hail the glory dawning in Emmanuel's land.

With mercy and with judgment, my web of time he wove, and I, the Jews of sorrow, were lusted with his love.

I'll bless the hand that guided, I'll bless the heart that planned, when crowned where glory dwelleth, in Emmanuel's land. take heart, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid, take courage, God is here, there is no need for worry.

Amen, let's pray. eternal father, we bless you and praise you, that in the very midst of our despair, you can come to us, and when we cry out to you, Lord, save me, you hear us, because your eye is upon us, and your ear is open to our cry.

[41 : 09] teach us, father, to trust you, teach us to rest in you, and teach us to take our strength from you and not from ourselves, and to glorify you in all that we do.

For Jesus' sake, amen. Amen.