

Matthew Chapter 14 v 13 - 33

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[0 : 00] Welcome to all of you. Welcome particularly to those who are visiting us. Some dear friends from Malaysia. That's a long way to come, but we do welcome you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and some folk from other parts as well. But it's good that we can be together as God's people. It's a great blessing that we often neglect or even belittle the privilege of meeting together and being together as the Lord's people and bringing our praise to him.

When the angels came to the shepherds on that night of the birth of Christ, they said to them, today in the town of David, a savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord.

But Christmas is not about one day, not simply about one event in that sense. Today, for us, Christ has come. Tomorrow, Christ has come. Every today is a day in which we celebrate that a savior has been born, the Messiah, the Lord. But let's sing together our first hymn, reminding us again of that message from God's messengers, the angels, 196. Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight, or all the earth. Let's stand and sing this wonderful hymn of praise.

Christ our King, as we pray together. Let us pray. It's an amazing thing, O Lord our God, that we can come to you and worship you. It's incredible, O Lord, that you are willing to receive our worship and our praise, our adoration and our love. We thank you, O Lord, that there was once a barrier between us coming to you. It was once impossible for us to draw near to you.

Lord, once we could never know you or approach you. O Lord, but now we thank you that because Christ, our King, our King has been born into this world, we can come near to you. We know that that barrier, that hurdle, that wall that separated us from God was our sin, our iniquity, our wickedness. It was our unbelief. It was all of us, of our making, of our doing, of our thinking, of our speaking.

[2 : 46] But Lord, we thank you that though you are truly the Holy God, and though, O Lord, you are the God who hates sin, you are the God who destroys and punishes sin. We thank you that in Jesus, because he took our sin upon himself when he suffered in our place, thank you that he has made for us this wonderful way into your presence. Thank you that he is the way and the truth and the life. Thank you that we have come to the Father through him, for he is the only way, the only way that men and God could be united, the only way that sinners and a holy God could become friends, that peace could be initiated, that war and conflict could be brought to an end, was that you, the Son of God, became human, came into our world, stepped down to us, crossed the breach, as it were, and became one with us, uniting yourself to our humanity in an unbreakable union, in every way living amongst us, in every way sharing in our sorrows and joys, our griefs and our troubles. Only one way were you different to us, Lord Jesus, one way, one unique and one very important way. You have no sin. You never broke a commandment of God. You never did one thing or thought one thing wrong. You never rejected the loving kindness of God the Father and sought to go your own way as we have done. And what a mess we've made of our own lives and of this world and the lives of others, because we think we know better, because we think that we can do it on our own, because we think, oh Lord, that there is no God.

What fools we've been. What fools we've been, oh Lord, to think this way. And yet, oh Lord, we thank you that you came and showed yourself to us. You revealed yourself to us. You opened our blind eyes to see that there is a God, a God who indeed judges sin, but a God who is full of mercy and loving kindness, a God who is willing to pardon. No matter what our sins have been, no matter what our guilt, our shame, our past, no matter what it is, Lord, that still is the mess in the middle of our lives, thank you that because of Jesus and because of all that he's done for us, there is forgiveness for all who will receive it, all who will accept it, all who will come to you and gladly acknowledge that you are the God who saves. Oh Lord, we thank you for the message of the angels. Today, a saviour has been born. Thank you that that saviour Jesus affects every today. And we pray that this morning, as we gather to worship you, may it be again that today we know and rejoice in the coming of Jesus, not only into this world, but into our very lives and our experience, that we may overflow with praise and worship to him and to you, our God, through the power of your Holy Spirit. For we ask these things in Jesus' name now. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you, Martin. Thank you, Richard. If you'd turn with me, please, in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 14.

Matthew chapter 14. If you've got one of the Red Church Bibles, then that is page 981. Page 981 in the Church Bible, or Matthew 14, beginning at verse 13. Beginning at verse 13.

When Jesus heard what had happened, that was the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed those who were ill. As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, this is a remote place and it's already getting late.

[7 : 09] Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food. Jesus replied, they do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.

We have only here five loaves of bread and two fish, they answered. Bring them here to me. He told the crowd to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men besides women and children. Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side while he dismissed the crowd. After he dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone. And the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn,

Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. It's a ghost, they said, and cried out in fear. Jesus immediately said to them, Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid. Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water.

Come, he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me.

Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. You of little faith, he said. Why did you doubt? And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Truly, you are the Son of God.

[9 : 25] It would be good if you could have your Bible open to Matthew 14, where we read just a few moments ago, and we're going to think about these events. Well, if you didn't know already, then I'm pretty sure you do by now, that Christmas is fast approaching.

The tree is up and the decorations are up. The cards have been written and sent. The presents are all bought and wrapped. It's only the food to be purchased and prepared.

And then the big day will be here. And then it's all over for another year. All the build-up, all the excitement, all the preparation.

Decorations then come down. Presents are either forgotten about or broken or returned to the shops. The leftover turkey is finished off at last in that curry. And we're back to school, back to work, back to the grindstone of another year.

Is that all that Christmas means to us? A momentary flurry of excitement, then back to the grindstone, the drudgery of real life. If that's the case, then is Jesus just for Christmas as well?

[10 : 43] Why did he come into this world and be born? Simply to bring us a few moments of enjoyment. A few moments of escape from the real world.

Or was it something more? Is Jesus just for Christmas or is he for life? Of these next three Sundays, as we lead up to Christmas, I want to take a little time to think about how the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ has impacted our life and impacts our life all year long.

What is it that we're missing if we think of Christmas as just a brief respite in life's circle of monotony? And that's why we're here in Matthew 14.

You may think it's a strange place to go to for a Christmas message, but I hope that as we look at it we'll see again the very reason for Christ's entrance into our world.

The very reason for his birth. The walking on the lake of Jesus is particularly what I want us to think about. Both Matthew, Mark and John all record that extraordinary, miraculous event.

[11 : 59] But what has that got to do with Christmas? What has the miracle of Jesus walking on the water got to do with Christmas? How does it change our low view of Christmas as just merely a break in life, a bright light in the winter?

How does it speak into our daily lives? Well, the conclusion to that event, the conclusion to that wonderful miracle, which is the worship and the words of the disciples, gives us a very clear indication why Jesus was born and why Christmas affects our lives completely throughout the year.

For they said, truly you are the Son of God. That was the unavoidable conclusion that they came to as they witnessed Jesus walking on the lake and the events surrounding it.

And Christmas is centrally, uniquely about God making himself known to us. Christmas is God revealing himself to us, to this world.

God declaring, absolutely, with certainty, with an escapable conclusion, God is here. And so I want to look at the events of this walking on the water.

[13 : 20] They give us a little insight into the coming of Christ and what happened in his coming, but also they bring us to this great conclusion, which I hope all of us will reach, that Jesus Christ is God amongst us.

Prior to this event, we read there in verse 22, that Jesus made his disciples go on ahead of him. They went in the boat. He was left on the side of the shore and he dismissed the crowd after they'd eaten.

And then what happened, verse 23? He went up a mountain by himself to pray. What do we learn there? What do we see there? We see Jesus enjoying intimate communion with God the Father.

Before he reveals his identity to them as the Son of God walking on the water, he spends fellowship and time with his Father in prayer, something that we read often throughout the Gospels of Jesus, going alone by himself to pray.

That's exactly, in one sense, a reflection of what happened prior to first Christmas. Prior to Christ coming into this world, he enjoyed intimate communion with his Father in heaven.

[14 : 43] We have a casting back of the shadow, pointing to Jesus before he came into the world, the eternal Son of God in union, in fellowship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had made it plain all through his ministry and his life to his disciples that before he was born to Mary, he had a presence, an existence in the presence of God.

He says to them in John and chapter 16, I came from the Father and entered the world. Now, as he's looking forward to his death and resurrection and ascension, now I'm leaving the world, going back to the Father.

In his wonderful prayer in John 17, he prays, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Jesus always was God. He didn't become God by being born into this world. He didn't become God by his resurrection. He didn't become God by his ascension.

[15 : 53] He was God from the beginning, and he was in fellowship with the Father and the Spirit. Before he reveals himself to us as God, he existed for eternity past in the blessed trinity of the triune gods.

And then what happens after he's prayed and spent time with the Father? Father, then we have this impossible crossing. Jesus had intimate communion with God, and now he makes an impossible crossing.

If we read the other gospel accounts of the walking on the water, we find that Jesus was around about three or four miles, sorry, the boat was three or four miles away from shore.

It was some distance. It wasn't just sort of just in the shallows there so that Jesus could walk to it. It was miles away, and it was being buffeted by the winds, so the water was rough and full of waves and white horses, and Jesus walked across it.

By anyone who's reckoning, walking on water for three miles is impossible. Even the illusionist magician Dynamo a few years ago, when he walked on the Thames, managed only around about 10 meters, and even then with the help of submerged steps, as you're well aware.

[17 : 19] But the miracle of walking three miles across the water is child's play compared to the vast distance that Jesus crossed from creator to creature, from God to man.

The miracle of Christmas was that the eternal and infinite God crossed into our world as a mortal man in time and space.

This is something that the Christians often delighted and rejoiced in. In Philippians 2, we have what we think is an early hymn of praise, and it speaks of Jesus Christ, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. When it says human likeness, it doesn't mean that he just appeared outwardly as a man, but rather that he was truly man, so that we could see and touch and feel and experience all our humanity.

The question of how could he have walked across the water is very easy to answer when we accept that he is God the Son. It's trivial.

[18 : 42] It's simple. It's ABC that God could walk on water. For God to suspend the laws of nature. Simple. He created the laws of nature.

Therefore, for him to overrule them is no problem. And Jesus walking on the water, again, is a declaration of his divinity, that he is God. Because when we look at the God of the Old Testament, again and again, he is the God who overrules the laws of nature surrounding the rivers and the seas.

The great exodus, when God's people passed through the Red Sea and the waters were piled up on the side, God was exercising his authority and power, showing himself to be the God of the impossible.

Later, when the people crossed the Jordan, a similar thing happened. Not to mention, of course, his power and authority over waters in the days of Noah. walking on the water, crossing the impossible chasm, impossible to man, possible to God.

Jesus walked on the water, but he crossed from heaven to earth. He came into our world, came to where we are, just as he crossed to where the disciples were in their distress.

[20 : 05] Thirdly as well, when we see here, we see as well, that Jesus identifies himself as Christ. He has intimate communion with the Father.

He makes an impossible crossing, and he identifies himself as Christ. Not surprisingly, when the disciples in their boat, they were rowing, they were hard at it, they weren't really gazing at the scenery at the time, since it was also the middle of the night.

They were trying to make headway against this wind, and then suddenly, as it were, out of the gloom, there is a figure walking on the water towards them. They know that they're nowhere near land, they know that this cannot just be the shoreline, and they are terrified.

The disciples saw him walk in the lake, they were terrified. It's a ghost, they said, cried out in fear. Couldn't possibly be a man. Couldn't possibly be Jesus.

They knew where Jesus was. He was back on the shore. He was back on the beach where they had left him. They didn't recognize Jesus because he was not where they expected him to be, and he was not doing what they expected him to do.

[21 : 22] The vast majority of people in our day fail to recognize Jesus as the Son of God because he's not what they expect him to be. I'm sure you've all had something of the experience where you've been on the phone to somebody, perhaps it's a tradesman or somebody, and you've made an appointment for them to come, and as you spoke to them on the phone, you've sort of got a visual idea of what they would be like, and then when they turn up on the doorstep, there's maybe the tradesman or double glazing salesman, whoever it may be, you open the door to them, and they're not as you expected them to be.

When you spoke to them on the phone, they sounded tall. They're only five foot four. And either there's a disappointment that they're not what you expect them to be, or there's actually a pleasant surprise.

I imagine that's what happens if you go on one of these dating sites. Never been on it? Okay, just do, no, never been on it? They advertise it, don't they? And they say, you know, put in your particulars and send a photograph and so on, but I imagine there's quite a few ladies and gentlemen, when they turn up for their date after the dating site, have a little bit of, well, maybe a pleasant surprise, but possibly an unexpected disappointment that the person doesn't quite fit the profile that they were expecting.

Well, we all have in our own mind an expectation of what God is like. We have our own picture of God. God. Whoever we are, even people who claim to be atheists all think about God.

In fact, they probably think about God more than we do, these atheist people. They seem to have a whole mindset about God and what he's like and what he's not like and then they say he doesn't exist.

[23 : 13] But over the years of our lives, we've built up a picture in our minds as to what God is like and the sort of things he does. We have preconceptions about God but those preconceptions about God are nothing like he truly is.

Some people, there may be the concept that God is like Father Christmas. He's all loving. He's all giving. He's all gentle. But then when they hear about his justice, his hatred of wickedness, his righteousness, well, that just doesn't fit in.

So God can't be like that. Some of us, perhaps we were brought up maybe thinking of God as somebody who's harsh or cruel or nasty.

Somebody who seems to be indifferent and uncaring about the things of this world. A God who is one who inflicts pain. But then we hear about this God of grace and loving kindness and mercy and kindness.

This God who is compassionate and he just doesn't fit. Therefore, we don't accept him. As he truly is. Notice Jesus when he approaches the disciples.

[24 : 26] They were caught out. They didn't recognize him. He was not where he should be. Their expectation of him was not what it was. He says, take courage. It's I. It's me.

Jesus came into this world to declare to the world I'm here.

God is real. And he's here in this world. One of the wonderful names given to Jesus we remember at Christmas is Emmanuel. God with us.

Jesus walked around for three years ministering feeding the hungry healing the sick raising the dead and they still did not recognize him as God because their expectations of him were different to the presentation of Jesus Christ.

They should have recognized him. They had the Old Testament scriptures. They had the promises and the prophecies that spoke about this one who had come and Jesus fitted that description perfectly but they were not accepting of that.

[25 : 40] They had their own preconceptions their own ideas their own false images their own false gods. When Jesus comes they don't recognize him.

They don't see him as he is. Some called him a demon possessed madman. Ultimately in the end they rejected him and crucified him because he was not the God they expected.

Dear friends you and I have to put aside our false preconceptions of God. We have to accept him as he truly is as he shows himself to be.

We have to put aside what our standards of God should be or what he should be like or how he should be involved in our lives. We need to put them aside and recognize that they are wrong. We have to accept the presentation of Jesus Christ as God as he speaks to us and shows himself to be.

The God who does the impossible. The God who comes to us. In one sense God is saying to you Christ is saying to you dear friends even this morning look it's me.

[26 : 50] What you're reading about me it's true. What you're hearing about me is real. Whatever you've heard about me from other people it's not true.

Whatever your parents have told you about God if they've not been Christians or even if they have been it's not. You've got to come back to the source. You've got to come back to the real picture.

Have you ever seen children going to a museum or an art gallery and they've got their crayons and they've got their paper and they draw they try to draw a copy of the picture that they've seen up on the wall.

I'm talking about children who are four and five in reception and they draw their picture and their concept where it may not even be of a picture it may be their picture of their house and their family. Have you seen those things?

Of course as parents we treasure them. They're masterpieces. If we're really honest they don't truly represent the picture that they've seen. So it is dear friends with us but Jesus comes to us and he identifies himself as Christ.

[28 : 09] He didn't leave it for us to make a decision in one sense to have to work it out for ourselves. When Jesus came in the world he didn't say well you know I'm giving you some clues. I want you to be like Poirot and I want you to work out the clues about who I am.

It's not a riddle. It's a presentation. This is God living, breathing, speaking, acting in our world.

Finally dear friends we see that Jesus coming into the world God was to instigate change. This is the thing I want us to concentrate on especially.

He came to instigate change. There's two vital things that he changes and must change, two vital changes that must take place in us through the coming of Jesus at Christmas.

And the first of them is a change in our thinking. We've already touched upon this. We've already mentioned this in the way we conceive and think of God. But we have to change the way that we think. Now many people think that if you become a Christian one of the things you've got to do is stop thinking.

[29 : 25] You've just got to have blind faith. You've just got to accept things without thought, without reason. You've just told something and you accept it. Being a Christian is a leap of faith into the dark.

That's not true. Not true at all. To have true faith in Jesus Christ begins with engaging our minds in serious thoughts. The problem is that we aren't used to thinking.

We aren't used to thinking seriously about things. We're not used to thinking for ourselves at all. I would say dear friends in our present society we tend to accept what we hear without questioning and without thinking.

What we're overloaded with through social media and through the TV and through websites and through books and papers. We just receive all these things and we just accept them. We accept that what people are telling us is true, that they have no hidden agenda.

They have no political axe to grind or theological axe to grind. We just drink in what is presented to us in easily digestible sound bites. And so our opinion is formed by these things.

[30 : 34] As a million and one subjects just bombard and we receive them as Bunyan would say through eye gate and ear gates. Jesus didn't come into this world to brainwash us but to make us stop in our tracks and think about the realities that are beyond our senses.

And to get our attention the Lord Jesus Christ took drastic measures as we see here with the disciples. How was he going to get the disciples to realize and see who he really is?

He'd already fed the 5,000. He'd already healed the sick but they still hadn't grasped that he is God in the world. That he is God in their midst.

How is he going to grab their attention? How is he going to show them without question and cause them to come to this conclusion that truly you're the son of God by doing this?

By instigating a change. And that change begins with our minds but it continues into our living.

[31 : 55] Change in our thinking leads to change in our living. Look at verse 28. Lord if it's you Peter replied tell me to come to you on the water.

What sort of a loony is he? There's Peter in the boat. There's Jesus. Let's say he's 20 metres away. He's called them. It's I. Don't be afraid.

And Peter gets into his head that somehow he can walk on the water as well. How on earth could he have got that idea? What convinced him to think that he could do something so ridiculously impossible?

The revelation that Jesus was the son of God. You see his mind as he saw Jesus as he recognised Jesus for he was in his mind he clicked something changed.

Jesus is the son of God. Nothing is impossible to him. And since he is the son of God nothing is impossible to him nothing is impossible for me. Peter realised that Jesus being God transforms those who put their faith in him.

[33 : 17] He could do something that he had never done before. He could be someone he could never be before because Jesus is God. That's the whole point of Christmas.

That's the whole point. God has come to us to instigate transforming change in our lives as we recognise Jesus as God.

We've been so blinkered. We've been so narrow-minded in our thinking because we've simply been fed what we've been told about Jesus that we have lost the avenues and the horizon that God came to bring.

We fail to see what it is that God wants us to be. We only see the here and the now.

We only see the material and the physical. We limit our enjoyment of this world, including Christmas, to these things, to eating and drinking and talking and watching.

[34 : 26] But Jesus crossed over from heaven to earth to blow our minds with the possibility that life affords with him. And somehow that penny dropped for Peter.

He says, Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you, because I know whatever you say, I can do, I can do. Come, says Jesus. And he begins to walk on the water.

So when people say to you, who was it who walked on the water? Yes, it was Jesus, but also Peter walked on the water. We don't know how far. And like all of us, he wasn't perfect.

And he got worried, and he got scared, and so he began to sink. But he walked some distance before that happened. We hunger and thirst, thirst.

But no matter how much we eat and drink, we're never satisfied. That's because we only feed the body, and we neglect the soul. We spend money and buy all these things that we hope will bring pleasure to others and pleasure to ourselves, but we are never happy, we are never content, we are never satisfied.

[35 : 41] Because we do not receive the free gift, of God, which is eternal life through Jesus Christ his son. And as long as our thinking and our mindset upon Christ and upon Christmas and upon life is this blinkered, narrow, shallow, material way, we'll never walk on water.

And that's what Christ came to do. He came that we might walk on water. He came that we might know and experience the impossible. Peace with God, forgiveness of sins, joy everlasting, life eternal.

It's as if, dear friends, every time we come to Christmas, we're just happy with socks. Oh, these socks, they're brilliant.

Oh, thank you for giving me socks at Christmas. Oh, I'm so delighted with socks. socks. No, we're not delighted with socks. Then why are we delighted with these simple transient things of this world when we could have spaceship?

What's your view of Christ? He's the baby in the manger at Christmas. Jesus. Oh, he's the water walking, life transforming God.

[37 : 19] Notice Peter did, and I want to put it to you. Peter said, Lord, if it's you, I want to challenge you.

I want to ask you, can you say to Jesus Christ, Lord, if it's you, if you are God in this world, if you are God who came from heaven to earth, if you are God who has come to me and is speaking to me now through his word, if you are who you say you are, then save me.

make me to know without a shadow of a doubt that you truly are who you are.

Peter was a bumbling, loud, often got it wrong fisherman who also got very scared and denied Jesus.

But at this moment, he's the bravest man on earth, willing to step out of a boat in the middle of a storm because Jesus can be trusted.

[38 : 41] And I want to ask you, are you brave enough to say, Lord, if it's you, come to me and save me.

Take away my sin. Make me to know, to know, to know, to know that you really are God. bring that change that must be instigated in my life because I'm not going to carry on being happy with socks.

let's pray together. You, O Lord, our God, have been speaking to us through your word and your word is life and your word is truth.

truth. And though there are many voices crying out for our attention around about us, many voices calling us this way and that, offering all sorts of pleasures and joys and fulfillment, Lord, we're old enough in the tooth to know that those voices very rarely, if ever, actually come up with the goods.

others, but you're different. Everyone, Lord, that we read about, everyone that we've met who's put their faith and trust in you has told us that again and again you keep your promises, that when you offer something which sounds to be good, to be true, it is actually true.

[40 : 24] We pray, Lord, that even this morning that as we have seen again the miracle of Christmas, of God coming to us, we pray, oh Lord, that we may be those people who you are changing in our thinking and our living.

I pray especially, oh Lord, for those of us here who've never put God to the test, who've never said with Peter, if it's you, Lord, if it's really you, Lord, then I want to experience and know you.

And I pray that you would grant them that courage and that faith to step out of the safety of their boat, the smallness of their world, into the largeness of your grace.

Pray, oh Lord, that you would put within their hearts that faith to pray, if it's you, Lord, I want to know you, and I want you to save me.

And I pray for each one of us, again, as we draw near to Christmas. Lord, we thank you that we can enjoy so many good things, but Lord, please don't let us be satisfied with these small things.

[41 : 42] Give us a greater, greater longing and desire for more of the big things that Jesus came to bring, and to enjoy them and to share them with those that we meet with.

For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Amen. Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not earthly things, for you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Amen.