

Truly He is the Son of God

Matthew 14:13-36

Mark Vroegop

13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15 Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." 17 They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." 18 And he said, "Bring them here to me." 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. 26 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. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

28 And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

34 And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick 36 and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

I love it when I come across a familiar concept that takes on new meaning. For example, I just completed a wonderful book on Reformation Church history called "The Unquenchable Flame" by Michael Reeves. I learned that in the 1500's secular humanist philosophers began to question many accepted teachings of the church, and they ridiculed theologians for asking irrelevant questions such as "How many angels can dance on a head of a pin?" and "Could God have become a cucumber instead of a man?" The theologian who asked such questions was a

theologian named Duns Scotus, and he became a symbol of being an idiot. And anyone who followed him was labeled a Dunsman or a Dunce.¹ Isn't that interesting?

Here's another: Ever heard the phrase "hocus pocus?" It is used for superstition or magic, right? Well, it is came to mean that because of the Catholic Mass was given in Latin, a language that most people and even many priests didn't understand. The people sitting in the pews heard *Hoc est corpus meum* (This is my body), and they heard "hocus pocus." Because the church had built a language barrier for people, it made the sacrament nothing more than superstitious exercises – a bunch of hocus pocus.² I love it when I can get new light on familiar things. That is what I hope happens this morning.

Our text contains two of the most well known Sunday School stories in the entire Bible. As well, they show us a very familiar thought: Jesus is the Son of God. My aim today is to shed new light on a familiar concept through some familiar flannel graph stories. I hope that you will see them in a new light, and that you will be even more in awe of who Jesus is.

The Beauty of the Nearness of Jesus

Matthew has been showing us the unbelief of people who encountered Jesus. His family, the city of Nazareth, Herod, and many people in the crowds did not accept who Jesus claimed to be. But in this passage, Matthew shifts the focus of the narrative lens. Our text is simply about what happens when you are near Jesus, the Son of God. We find that nearness to Jesus puts you on the front row to some amazing things!

There is a beauty when Jesus is near. We see that there is no better place to be than to be with Jesus. If Jesus is with you, miracles happen because, after all, he is the Son of God. Matthew gives us three pictures of what happened because of the personal presence of Jesus, and from those three pictures, we'll draw three principles:

1. There is always enough when the Son of God is near

After Jesus heard the news about John the Baptist's beheading, he attempted to retreat by boat from the crowds in order to get to a desolate place (v 13). However the crowds heard where he was going, and they followed him. When Jesus' boat landed, there was a large group of people who were waiting for him.

In classic Jesus form, he was not annoyed that his get-a-way didn't work. Instead, he had compassion on them and healed their sick (v 14). Apparently Jesus did this work for some time, and the disciples grew concerned that the people needed to be dismissed so that they

¹ Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame – Discovering the Heart of the Reformation*, (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 34.

² Reeves, 19.

could leave and get something to eat in the surrounding villages. We are not sure about their motives. Maybe the disciples were tired and hungry. Maybe they were just planning ahead. But what comes next was shocking to them.

Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." John 6:6, a parallel account, says that this was a test of the disciples. Jesus saw the needs of the people, and he commanded that the disciples do something to meet these needs. They saw the need as well, but what Jesus told them to do appeared impossible to them. Therefore, they said "We have only five loaves here and two fish" (v 17). This small amount of food was likely a small meal that a concerned mother had packed for her son (John 6:9). According to John's account the bread were barley loaves, the kind of bread that poor people ate, and they would have been about the size of dinner rolls.³ The fish would have been dried or smoked. In other words, this was barely enough food to provide for one person. It is all they have, and it is very meager. It was not going to be enough.

What Matthew records next is the turning point of this story, and it rings with great power: Jesus said "Bring them here to me" (v 18). What an important statement this truly is! Jesus commanded something that seemed impossible, and it was impossible until he said, "Bring them to me." Verse 19-20 captures a beautiful moment:

"Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied"

Don't miss any of this because it is all important: a basic meal, a look to heaven, a blessing, a distribution from Jesus through the disciples, and complete satisfaction. What a beautiful picture! But that isn't all. There was an abundant provision for the people.

"And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children" (Matt 14:20-21).

Jesus on an extremely taxing day saw people through the eyes of compassion, commands his followers to meet the needs of the crowd, and then he meets the needs by multiplying the meager elements of a boy's lunch into an overflowing and satisfying abundance. There's always enough when the Son of God is near.

Living on this Truth

There are so many beautiful things that come out of this passage for us to consider. This is more than a good Sunday School story; this applies directly to our lives in wonderful ways:

³ Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 378.

- **Jesus is our provision.** The story is a beautiful reminder that Jesus does more than just create provision; he **is** the provision. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5), "I am the door" (John 10:7), "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), and "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). The Apostle Paul said, "he himself is our peace" (Eph 2:14). Jesus "entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats or calves by means of his own blood, thus securing eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12). Five loaves and two fish take new power because Jesus is there.
- **The presence of Jesus creates satisfaction.** This text is loaded with symbolism – from the provision of manna in the wilderness, to the Lord's Supper, to the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19:6-10. But Matthew wants us to see the beauty of what happens when Jesus serves as the host: you want nothing else (Psalm 23:1).
- **He empowers what He commands.** Jesus always provides what we need to do his will. He takes our meager, earthly resources, and he empowers them. He takes our naturally sinful hearts, and he transforms them. Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:13 – "For it is God who works in you, both to **will** and to **work** for his good pleasure." St. Augustine said it this way: "Command what you will; and give what you command"

Through the Brookside Initiative, Pastor Dale introduced me to Pastor Mike Bowling of Englewood Christian Church, a great urban ministry in the Brookside Neighborhood that has a vision for redeeming entire neighborhoods by buying houses, fixing them up, and then having believers move in. Their vision is grand. Some time ago I heard Mike say something that really struck me. In the context of talking about the resources needed for their vision, he said "Englewood Christian Church has everything we need in the people of Englewood and in Jesus Christ; we lack nothing to do God's will." How true! We lack nothing!

That leads us to our second familiar story: when Jesus walked on the water.

2. There is protection when the Son of God is near

Jesus completed his ministry to the crowds and returned to his original plan: to get away to pray (v 22-23). He was alone, and the disciples were out on the boat in the Sea of Galilee. The text tells us that a storm developed on the sea, and the disciples were "a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them" (v 24).

Now you have to get this picture in your mind in order to feel the full weight of this moment. The disciples were probably in a boat that was about 25 feet long and could hold 12-15 people. They were 3-4 miles from shore, and they had been battling this storm for approximately nine hours. The situation was very precarious. Additionally, storms were spiritually associated with divine retribution, punishment, or the presence of evil. So they were afraid.

Somewhere between 3:00 – 6:00 AM Jesus began walking on the water to his disciples. The waves were crashing, the wind was howling, and the men were in a fight for their lives. When Jesus is close enough, they see him, but they mistake him for a ghost (v 25). The result was that they were terrified (something deeply disturbing the mind) and they cried out (a shriek), “It is a ghost!” I’m sure that they thought evil was coming for them!

Jesus speaks to reassure them. He says “Take heart; it is I” which means to be of good courage or to be of good cheer because it was him. He then commanded them to stop being afraid. Peter, as he often did, was first to speak for the group. “Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water” (v 28). Now this was a very interesting thing to say, but Jesus commands him: “Come” – one word pregnant with power!

We are not told how far away Jesus was, but it seems that Peter walked some distance and had nearly made it to Jesus when his focus shifted. The text says “when he saw the wind, he was afraid” (v 30). When his attention moved from Jesus who had bid him come to the circumstances around him, he began to sink. Therefore Peter called out, “Lord, save me!”

Now Jesus could have rescued him by speaking or stopping the storm, but instead he “reached out his hand and took hold of him” (v 31). Jesus grabbed Peter, held him and rebuked him: “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” Jesus was chiding Peter for allowing the circumstances of his life to eclipse the personal presence of Jesus.

Jesus and Peter made their way to the boat, and as soon as they stepped inside the boat the winds ceased. Verse 32 tells us what happened next: “And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God’” (Matt 14:33). They couldn’t help themselves! They are in awe of his power, and they break into worship. This is the natural response of those who have come face-to-face with who Jesus is. The presence of Jesus means the kind of protection that leads you to worship.

Living out this Truth

So what do we do with this story and its implications for our lives? How do we take this from a flannel graph to real life? Let me suggest the following:

- **Storms are by divine design.** Nothing that happened in this narrative is by accident. Jesus was alone by design. The disciples are on the lake by design. A storm, controlled by God, arrives by design. The disciples struggle, and Jesus doesn’t come to them for 9 hours. And all of it a part of God’s plan. Nothing is out of control. “Even the winds and waves obey him.” William Cowper, in the classic hymn *God Moves in Mysterious Ways*, says

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread

Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

- **Jesus creates safety in the midst of storms.** The safest place for Peter to be was next to Jesus even though the storm was raging. Peter's action of coming to Jesus was radical but it was safe because he was simply obeying the voice of master of the waves and the seas. The Psalmist said, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me" (23:4). The writer of Hebrews reminds us of this truth when he writes: He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Heb 13:5-6)
- **Believers are offered ultimate spiritual protection in Jesus.** One of the greatest promises given to us is that "I am sure that that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present or things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). There is nothing more dangerous than being a sinful creature in the presence of Holy God who is your judge. And there is no safer place in the universe than to be "in Christ" and having the alien righteousness of Christ legally given to you.

So you see that a simple Children's Sunday School story has beautiful, practical implications for our lives. The nearness of Jesus means that there is great protection. And there is no greater nearness or protection than what is offered to us in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

There's one final and brief story that highlights the beauty of the nearness of Christ.

3. There is power when the Son of God is near

Matthew 14 ends with the right response. Verse 34 tells us that Jesus and his disciples completed their nine hour tour and landed at Gennesaret, a city on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. The people in the city did three things: 1) They recognized who he was, 2) They spread the news about him and 3) They brought to him those who were sick.

Finally someone got it right! Someone understood both who he was and what he could do. But there is even more here. The people in this city were filled with great faith. They believed that Jesus had the power to heal their sick, and they implored him to simply touch the fringe of his garment. The word "implore" means to call someone near. It means to beg (Mark 5:10) and to urge (Heb 13:19). And this was what they did to Jesus. They were literally begging him to come close enough to their sick so that they could just reach out and touch him and be healed.

The final verse is packed with hope and power: "And as many as touched it were made well." Every desperate person who asked for Jesus to come near and touched him was fully healed.

The city's right understanding of who Jesus was, their aggressive action of bringing the needy to him, and their calling of him to come near brought incredible healing.

Living in light of this truth

There was power when the Son of God was near. They knew who he was. They brought their needy people. He healed them. This is what the Son of God still does today. Living in light of the truth is extremely important because it captures the essence of the good news offered to us in the Bible. This is how a person is saved. This is how a person is granted forgiveness. This is how a person receives Christ.

It all begins by recognizing who Jesus really is. This is Matthew's goal – that you would see clearly who Jesus is and then respond to him. Recognizing who Jesus is means that you believe that he was the Son of God, that he lived a sinless life, that he died on the cross to pay for sins, and that he rose again from the dead. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9-10).

It also means that you understand your need. Like the people of Gennesaret, you know that you need someone else's help. However our problem is not physical sickness; it is much deeper than that. Our real problem is indwelling sin. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). Sin is our problem and the only one who can solve it is Jesus.

Living in light of this truth also means that you believe that Jesus can take your sin away. You believe that he provide the once-for-all payment needed to atone for your sins. Salvation comes to those who look to Jesus and implore him to save them. The Philippian jailer implored Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" And Paul told him the one truth that could instantly change him (and you) forever: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

So here it is! The one truth that can radically change your life now and makes all the difference in your eternal destiny: Do you want Jesus to be near you? Do you want him to change you? Do you want his death to count for yours? Do you want God to consider you righteous through the death and resurrection of Christ?

He truly is the Son of God. He is sufficient. He is eternally safe. He is Savior!

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