

He Said "Come"

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[0 : 00] Well friends, if we could turn back to the chapter that we read together in the Gospel of Matthew and chapter 14.

I'd like us to consider this section together from verses 22 to 33.

Perhaps if we were to take a text this evening we could think of the words of 28 and 29. And Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

He said, come. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. He said, come.

So friends, as we find ourselves here this evening, this Friday evening of communion season, we're mindful of the fact that many, if not all of us gathered here or gathered here because we seek to remember the Lord's death until he comes again.

[1 : 18] As we sit here tonight, as we anticipate the gathering together at the Lord's table as his people, the fact is that each and every soul in here tonight is different.

We all come with our own personalities. We all come with our own differences. We all come even with our own levels of faith as it were.

There are some in here tonight who will have a strong faith, who will have no problem coming forward and sitting at the Lord's table. They are assured of their faith in Christ.

While there are others gathered, perhaps tonight, whose faith isn't quite so strong. Those who are perhaps feeling that they ought not to come forward to the Lord's table for whatever reason, perhaps even those who are yet to come forward to the Lord's table, those who are yet to come forward to the Lord's table, but who have not professed his name publicly.

Well friends, whatever your situation is here tonight, whether you lack assurance or whether you are fully assured of your faith, the narrative that we have before us here is one that truly reflects the reality of what it is to be a Christian.

[2 : 47] I'd like us to think of this portion together just for a short time this evening, verses 22 to 33. And I'd like us to think about what's happening here under two simple headings.

And I'd like us to apply these headings to ourselves. We're going to look firstly at this strong faith that we read of. And secondly, we're going to think of this faltering faith, this strong faith and this faltering faith.

Now at this point in the ministry of Jesus, we see that he's just fed the 5,000. His popularity is growing day by day.

He's somebody who is performing great and many miracles. And so there are those who are longing to see him do such.

They are longing to see him improve not only their own lives, but the lives of those around them. And so he's gathering this following.

[3 : 54] But what we see is that as this crowd is following Jesus, their motives are far from genuine.

You see this crowd, they're interested only in the physical. They're interested only in what Jesus can do for them here in the body, here in time.

And so that's why in John chapter 6, when recalling this same incident, we read that Jesus perceived that they were about to come and to take him by force and to make him king.

They wanted him to be their king. And of course, Jesus was to be king. But Jesus wasn't to be the earthly king that these crowds were looking for.

Jesus wasn't to be this king that would sit in some earthly palace on some earthly throne, fulfilling all the temporal needs that these people sought for themselves.

[5 : 04] He wasn't there to fulfill the desires of their flesh. So this was a critical moment for Christ.

Here we have all these crowds blocking around him, and we see that his disciples are there amongst them. Now we know that his disciples were so easily influenced. We know that they didn't really have a strong understanding as to why Jesus was there and exactly what was to happen on Calvary's hill.

And so there he was amongst these crowds, and they were bound to be influenced. They were bound to be carried along with this desire to see Jesus as their earthly king. So Jesus, we read, he perceives. He knows what's happening. He knows that this crowd are acting as a distraction to the cause of Christ, to the real meaning and purpose of him being there. [6:17] They're acting almost as a deflection. That's what Satan does, is it not? He does anything in his power in order to sometimes so subtly thwart the purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see that he tried in his arrogance even to try and tempt Jesus himself. That's what Satan does. He makes the things of this world seem so much more attractive than the things of the kingdom. He makes the things of this world seem so much easier to follow than casting in our lot and following Christ himself.

That's why this road to hell is called the broad road, the road that leads to destruction because it's an easy road. It's an easy road to walk on. It costs us nothing and many tonight are merrily making their way to hell on that very road.

Isn't that solemn? Jesus had a far greater work to do. He wasn't destined to live in some palace, as I said, here on earth.

[7:36] Yes, he would be king, but his kingship would be characterised by anguish, by pain, by suffering.

Jesus would in no way resemble the kind of ruler that these people longed for in order to make the desires the sinful and shallow desires of the flesh.

So here the disciples are, and amongst this crowd Jesus perceives what's happening. So we read in verse 22 that immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him while he dismissed the crowds.

This was for the good of the disciples. This was for their own protection. He knew that they had to go. But yet he doesn't go with them.

He doesn't join them in that boat. He doesn't join them as he had done so many times in the past. What does he do? Instead we read that he goes to the mountain to pray.

[8:50] He goes to the mountain to pray. At this very point this was his greatest priority. There was nothing more that weighed on his heart more heavily than to come to his father in prayer.

When the crowds were here making demands of him that he was never ever going to meet, he went and he prayed. When he feared for his disciples he prayed.

And then he remains, we read in prayer for hours. It would have been about seven at night or eight in the evening when Jesus would have come to this mountain to pray.

And then he would have remained till the early hours of the morning praying to his father. What an example. Of course Jesus is our greatest example.

What an example to us tonight that prayer would be our greatest priority as a means of worship, yes, as a means of strengthening us and enabling us to go on.

[9:59] He had to come to his father to pray. He could see what was going on around him. He could see that the cause of the kingdom was at risk and so he comes to that throne of grace and he tells us, does he not elsewhere, that we are to do the same, that we are to watch and to pray.

Why? Let's we enter into temptation. Friends, that is to be our priority each and every day as we find the crowds of this world seeking to take us this way and that, seeking us, seeking to draw us into their shallow worldly ways.

We are to watch. We are to pray. We are to ask the Lord to keep us, to keep us from falling, to keep us from bringing shame upon his name and upon his cause.

Jesus himself elsewhere says in the Lord's prayer, lead us not into temptation. This is serious stuff. This is to be upon our lips each and every day.

And while we see that the disciples are at sea, they're at sea and they're battling against the waves. We read in verse 24, but the boat by this time was a long wave from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

[11:37] Now in any normal trip across the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, the boat wouldn't have traveled any more than perhaps a mile or two from the shore, yet here we see that they're far

from shore.

And in John's Gospel itself, we learn that they're perhaps three or four miles out from the shore. These men had been rowing for the same amount of time that the Lord Jesus had been praying, but as they row, they're being tossed about on these raging seas.

They're in trouble. They're in serious trouble. Yet it was Jesus who had asked them to go out on this boat.

We've just said that he was protecting them. He was leading them away from this crowd. But here they are in the middle of the ocean and in the middle of the lake rather and their lives are at risk. Why? Why did he ask them to go into a sea that was so rough and difficult to negotiate? Why didn't he come with them?

[12:49] Had he completely left them? Had he completely abandoned them? We see elsewhere in Scripture, another instance of the disciples being on rough seas and becoming afraid.

But in that instance, they have Jesus with them. He's asleep and they wake him up and they ask him to help them to calm the storms.

And he does so. But not now. Here it would appear that they're all alone. We all know what that feels like, don't we?

In life we have similar experiences just like the disciples here. We see that we are being led into providences, perhaps providences that we believe the Lord and self has led us into, called us into. Yet as we find ourselves at the center of these providences, we find that they're so difficult. They're so hard. And as we find ourselves in the center of these difficult providences, as we have that bitter cup to drink from, we can ask why?

[14:02] Why has Jesus left us to flounder on our own? How can this providence be of any good to anyone?

We've all been there. Perhaps you're there tonight. You just cannot see why you are where you are. And the Lord seems so far from you.

You feel abandoned, lost, sinking, submerged by the waters of this world. By this time it's the fourth watch, which would have been about between three and six in the morning.

These men would have been physically and mentally exhausted and drained as they sought to keep this boat afloat. They thought they were alone.

They thought perhaps even that the end for them was nigh. They thought that Jesus himself had lost sight of them and just when they are at the end of their tether, there he is.

[15:12] And in the fourth watch of the night we read, Jesus came to them, walking to them on the sea. Just picture the scene.

Where they've been fighting for their lives, desperately trying to retain control of this boat. The wind howling, the sea spraying in their face.

And then they are out of nowhere. They see this figure walking towards them on the sea. Now remember they're three or four miles out from shore.

So there's no way that they thought that perhaps this was someone wading in the waters just to help them. This was someone who was walking on the sea, coming towards their boat.

And of course at first they're terrified. We would be terrified would we not if we saw someone walking towards us on the water. And so they cry out, it's a ghost.

[16:10] They think it's a spirit. They think it's an apparition appearing before their very eyes. And immediately Jesus speaks.

Take heart he says, it is I. Do not be afraid. Here was their saviour. He had left them after all.

He had forsaken them here. He was in front of their very eyes. As JC Ryle puts it, the angry waves became a solid floor under the feet of Jesus.

And when they hear his voice, we see Peter in such a Peter like manner. We see him responding, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

You can just imagine the rejoicing in his heart as he anticipates that perhaps this is Christ.

[17:15] Spurgeon believed, CH Spurgeon believed that Peter here was wrong in speaking these words. Spurgeon thought that because Peter knew that his own name meant the rock, that he should have known that if he was to walk out in the water that he would sink just like a rock.

And so that the Lord for him to go out onto the water would be for the Lord to test him and to show him his ignorance. But yet I can't help but think that such a view is perhaps too harsh.

Peter believed that if this was Jesus, that Jesus would have the power to call him and to uphold him and to keep him on that water.

After all, the wind and the waves and the sea were all controlled by him. They were created by him. We see the power of God countless times. Do we not in Scripture?

We see it in the Old Testament when they see it's parted so that the Egyptians can pass through the waters. We see the power of the Lord when he stops the mouth of the lion so that the life of Daniel will be spared.

[18 : 32] This is nothing to the Lord and perhaps incomprehensible to our minds that are bound at times to the laws of physics. This was nothing to the Jesus who had created the very sea that he chose to walk on.

And aside from this, he was fulfilling his word as he so often does. In Job 9.8 we read, He alone that is the Lord spreads out the heavens and threads on the waves of the sea.

And of course, Peter knew this at least to some extent. So even in this request to Jesus, surely we can say that he is showing great faith.

But yet there's more because in verse 29 we read that Jesus says, Come, come.

Here we have the acid test. Do we not? So easy to speak words. Peter could have been all talk and no action.

[19 : 47] He could have in his bravado on the boat there saying, Well, if this is the Lord, I will walk on the water, not really believing that it was the Lord at all, not really believing that he would have to do this.

But yet that's not what we read. So Peter got out of the boat and walked to Jesus.

No hesitation, no humming or hawing. He did it there. And then when everything else seemed humbly speaking impossible, what does he do?

He trusts. He trusts in the Lord. What faith? That's what faith is. Is it not? It's a substance of things hoped for.

So Catechism tells us it is the evidence of things that are not seen. It's laying hold of that promise that blessed are they that have not seen yet have believed.

[20 : 50] That's what's drawn so many of us here tonight. I wonder if you've heard the voice of Jesus calling you out of the boat.

So aware of times of communion, we have many gathered together, many who have yet to profess their faith in Christ, but yet who are so clearly His.

So I wonder, has He said to you, come? Do you know in your heart that He's calling you in the Gospel and do you recognise His voice speaking to you personally is that you?

Perhaps it is. But perhaps you stay in the boat. Communion after communion. You stay behind the Lord's table.

You know He's your Savior, but still you stay year after year passes, but still you stay. You do not step out in faith.

[21 : 59] But I don't have the strength you say. That is true. You don't have the strength and you will never have the strength if you're relying on your own strength.

But the fact is dear friends, it's only when you step out of that boat that you will be given the strength that you need. It was only when Peter stepped out of the boat that he was upheld on these waters.

He wasn't able to experience the Lord upholding him until he took the step of faith himself.

So friends, what's keeping you? What's keeping you from trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you not believe that He can uphold you?

Do you not believe that He can keep you? After all, He saved you. He's taken you from that fearful pit, from that mighty clay, and surely the least you can do for Him in love for what He has done for you is to take that step in faith and obedience.

[23 : 15] You know, when Peter stepping out of the boat, we see something of the nature of faith itself. Do we not? Because Peter knew Jesus.

This wasn't some abstract head knowledge. He didn't just know that Jesus, yes, was the Son of God. He didn't just know that Jesus could forgive sins.

He knew Jesus personally. That's what faith is. That's what faith is tonight. It's knowing Jesus intellectually in our minds.

Yes, that is true. But He doesn't just stay there because knowing Jesus is knowing Jesus in our hearts experimentally each and every day.

That is crucial. When we know Christ in our hearts, there is that submission, that submission of our will to His, a letting go of our own self-reliance and leaning rather on Christ and His finished work.

[24 : 22] That's surely what we're going to show forth this Lord's Day, that we've been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.

That's what we're showing forth because He died, we now live the emphasis being on Him.

Yet sometimes we're slow to learn, are we not, dear friends? We're slow to learn and we're quick to forget.

Just look at Peter here. Do you know what we look at this narrative even between one verse and the next? Because we see the experience of this disciple of Christ.

We see that scripture never presents the Lord's people as being perfect. There's never an ideal picture painted as to what a Christian should be.

[25 : 23] We see that in Christ and Christ alone. Instead, we see humanity in all its rawness and in all its inconsistencies, not least with Peter.

Because no sooner has he stepped out of the boat in one verse, do we see him in the next as he walks in faith to Christ. Do we see him becoming scared?

We read that when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink. He cried out, Lord, save me.

Lord, save me and that brings us very briefly to our second point, our faltering faith. You see, Peter's spirit was so willing, but his flesh was weak.

And as soon as he saw the wind howling around him, as soon as he took his eyes off Jesus, as soon as he looked to the material things of this world, the things of time and of sense what did he do?

[26 : 31] He began to sink. And you know, friends, that is so true for us. We can start off, can we not, with such great gusto in the Christian life?

When we first step out of that boat in faith, we reflect tonight back upon that day when we did so.

And when we reflect to those formative years in our Christian walk, we can see that we were so full of the Lord.

We were trusting in his promises, trusting in his word. We had such a thirst and a hunger to be under his word, to be with his people, availing ourselves of any and every given opportunity to come and to hear him speak to us.

But yet that didn't last. This time went on bit by bit, perhaps slowly, yet surely, as we went on through the Christian walk, our faith began to falter and fail.

As we made and as we make our pilgrimage through this world, we lose sight of the promises of God.

[27 : 53] We forget those blessed times that we once had. We forget that by God's grace, we took that very step.

And you know, our love for him, it grows strangely dim, does it not? You know, we can look back to those days and we can say, ah, weren't they glorious days, as if these days were somehow not possible today.

Well, friends, the Lord has not changed. It's you that's changed. It's me that's changed. His word is the same. And so what, dear friend, has happened?

Instead of looking beyond the things of this world to that greater world to come, what's happened is we've allowed the things of this world to obstruct our sight, to cloud our view, to block our eyes from seeing the glory of Christ and His word in His people.

That's what's happened. We're so fickle. At one point we can be at the mountaintop and the next in the valley.

[29 : 09] You might be in the valley tonight. All that I'm saying, it might be describing you and you may be hanging your head in shame and you may be asking yourself what has happened.

What's gone wrong? Where's the Lord in my life? You may be lacking that assurance. You may have lost your peace.

You may have lost your zeal for the Lord and His cause. You may have lost sight of the fact that here you have no continuing city instead living only for the world, the flesh and dare I say it, even the devil.

Friends, if that is you tonight, allow me to encourage you to take heart.

Take heart because dear friend, faltering faith is not no faith. Peter's faith didn't completely fail.

[30 : 13] He knew that as soon as he began to sink, his only hope was in Jesus. We read in verse 20, him saying, Lord, save me.

Lord save me. He didn't call on the disciples for help. He didn't try to swim to safety himself. Instead he cries out to that rock that is higher than he.

Lord, save me. So friend, if you find yourself tonight, if you find your love for the Lord has grown strangely dim, or perhaps you are finding yourself struggling in a sea of providence that is not your doing, you cry out to him.

You cry out to him, Lord, save me each and every day you are afforded on mercy's ground. And of course the Lord is so merciful as he not.

Because we read that he doesn't allow Peter to drown in the sea of his own unbelief. He doesn't say, well, you've had your chance. You've blown it.

[31 : 24] No. Instead he's merciful. He's gracious. He's slow to anger. He's abounding in mercy. Yes, we see that he does rebuke Peter quite rightly.

He says, oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt? In other words, can't you see? Can't you see I have not changed? I will never leave you.

I will never forsake you, but you need to keep your eyes on me. And so he throws him a lifeline.

Spurgeon also said that Peter was nearer to his Lord when he was sinking than when he was walking. That's perhaps an interesting thought, is it not?

That it was when Peter was in trouble that he was driven to Jesus. And you know, we can see that perhaps there's some truth in that. And that's maybe why the Lord allows these storms to come into our lives.

[32 : 30] The fact is that when everything is going well, our faith isn't exercised. It's easy to believe in our loving God, to give our all to our loving God, to worship him in his house with all our heart each and every Lord's day when all is going well.

It's easy to do that, friends. His strong faith is often only strong because at one point it was faltering. You know, we see this in another story relating to the sea in the book of Jonah. The Lord had called Jonah to serve him in a very specific way. But what does he do?

He runs in the opposite direction. Of course, we can never run from the will of God in our lives. So in trying to run from the will of God in his life, Jonah is brought to an end of himself as he's tossed overboard into the sea and he finds himself in the belly of that great fish.

What does he do? Well, he does the only thing that he can do. He calls out to the Lord for deliverance and the Lord hears his prayer.

[33 : 52] You know, it often takes such things to turn us from relying on ourselves, to relying on Christ, to stop looking at the waves, but rather look at the one who controls the waves.

I wonder what kind of faith you have tonight. Great faith, faltering faith.

Perhaps you have no faith because there are those perhaps in this church tonight. We've never even got into that boat to step out.

We do not know what it is in any way to put their trust in the Lord. I wonder is that you? Well, friend, if it is, can't you see the solemnity of such a state?

Does it bother you? Does it make you lose sleep tonight that you could close your eyes here in time and wake up and I lost eternity?

[34 : 59] Does it? Or do you just carry on? Carry on regardless in your own strength. You've got it sorted. You've planned out your life.

You know what direction your life is going to take. Well, you don't because your friend, your life even tomorrow is not promised.

You know, to you, Jesus says, come also. He says, come. He says that all who come to him, he will in no wise cast out.

What you do, so dear friend, when you put your trust in him, dear believer, your faith may be small, but he tells you to come as well this Lord's day.

Come to his table. Come, he says, and I will strengthen you as you feed upon me in my word.

Come.

[36 : 01] And even if you are here today and you are yet to profess your faith for the first time, but you are his, he tells you also to come.

He puts his hand out to you and he asks you, he bids you to come and he tells you, I will be there, I will strengthen you and you will then know that blessing that follows obedience.

So dear friends, we pray that for all of us as we seek to remember his death until he comes, that we will always be mindful of the fact that we do not come to his table clothed in our own righteousness, in our own good works, but we come clothed in that cloak of righteousness that has been bought for us, bought for a price.

And we do so sitting at his table, surrounded and clothed with that glory that is not our own until he comes, where a glorious inheritance is ours dear friend, and we pray that all of us would be enabled by his grace to lay hold of it by faith.

Amen. Let us join together in prayer. Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, we thank thee this night for the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, a gospel that never seeks to disguise the realities of what it is to be a pilgrim here on life's journey.

[37 : 47] And so we pray this night for any who are perhaps struggling along the way, perhaps who are those even who are backslidden in their hearts, those who do not know what it is to truly look to Jesus and be carried by him day by day.

We pray that thy spirit would anoint them from one high, open their eyes once again so that they would look upon thy glory and thy majesty.

And we pray especially for any here who are yet to profess thy name, whether through a lack of assurance or unbelief that they too in jukewash by thy grace would be found at the table of the King, partaking of those glorious tokens of thy provision for them by faith, until thou dost come again.

Lead us in guidance, we ask, and forgive us for Christ's sake. Amen. Well, friends, we can conclude our time of worship now, and we can sing to God's praise from Psalm 16.

Psalm 16 in the Scottish Psalter, and we can read from verse 8 of the Psalm.

[39 : 07] Psalm 16, reading from verse 8 of the Psalm. Before me still the Lord I set, sith it is so that he doth ever stand at my right hand, I shall not move it be.

Because of this my heart is glad, and joy shall be expressed, even by my glory and my flesh in confidence shall rest.

We can sing down to the end of the Psalm now to God's praise. Before me still the Lord I set, sith it is so that he standing to sing.

Before me still the Lord I set, sith it is so that he doth ever stand at my right hand, I shall not move it be.

Because of this my heart is glad, and joy shall be expressed, even by my glory and my flesh in confidence shall rest.

[41 : 18] Because my soul in grain to dwell shall not be left by him, nor will I give my hope to him.

I only want a thousand to see. The will of me show, the battle of life, of joy, there is full store.

Before thy face, hath I right hand, our pleasure shall hermore.

In our eating and in our drinking, and in our fellowshiping one with another, we would do all as unto thyself.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with you now and forevermore.

[43 : 21] Amen.