

# Jesus to the Rescue

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]      keep that open. We'll look at this together and we'll pray as we do that for God's help. Gracious Father, your word tells us that the grass withers and the flowers fade, but your word remains forever. Father, we thank you that as we have your word open before us this evening and have time to consider it, that we are dealing with eternal truth, truth that stands forever. So we pray that you would seal it upon our hearts, that you would open it up to us, that by your Holy Spirit you would give light to our dark minds and our hard hearts you would soften, that you would open our ears and open our eyes to see wonderful things in your word. Indeed, that we would see Jesus in all his beauty and glory and power and grace and that we would love him. We pray in his name. Amen. Well, I wonder what comes to mind for you when I say the word rescue. Rescue.

I have to say for me it's Paw Patrol. Maybe one or two of you are familiar with Paw Patrol here. Maybe most of them are down in the hall just now. If you've never seen it, don't worry, every episode is the same. All is well in Adventure Bay. But then mild peril strikes. The Paw Patrol is duly informed. Ryder gathers his team of pups in an absurdly high-tech tower. And then they get a breakdown of what the problem is. Is it the evil mayor Humdinger stranded on a boat that he's attempted to steal with his posse of evil cats? Or is it a robot dinosaur rampaging through the town, destroying homes and businesses? Once they've worked out what kind of problem it is, well then they have to decide what kind of rescue is needed. Which pups with which special skills will need to go and what will they have to do to rescue the people of Adventure Bay? I won't spoil it, but needless to say every episode ends in exactly the same way. What do we think of when we think of a rescue?

What kind of rescue is it that we think we need? Of course, we face far more serious situations than ever visit the people of Adventure Bay. War, economic uncertainty, terminal illness, natural disasters, sexual violence. At just a glance through the news headlines this past week, what kind of rescue do we think we need? And what do we need to do about it? We're coming back to Matthew's Gospel in our Sunday evenings up to Easter, and in this section, chapters 14 to 17, Matthew wants us as learners of Jesus to learn what kind of rescue King Jesus came to bring and how we need to respond to his rescue. So far in Matthew, we've seen something of what Jesus came to do. He's been bringing God's kingdom, that is God's good and loving rule, into the world. We've seen that through the countless healings that he's performed. Our passage tonight is topped and tailed with many more healings as King Jesus restores something of the wholeness which God designed for us to have in the beginning. But he's done that all the more so through his teaching, through his words. So far, we've had three long sermons from Jesus, three teaching blocks, where Jesus as King has been setting his followers straight, and to some degree the crowds as well, about what his kingdom is and how we live in it. Now, some have heard his words and taken them to heart. They've taken the crown off their own heads and given it over to him. They've turned and they've bowed to him as their own personal savior and king, and they've begun to live under his good and loving rule. Many, though, have heard him, and either they've missed the point or they've understood something but those who have understood only something, a portion of them don't like what they have heard.

The religious teachers, no less, have called Jesus the prince of demons and have begun already to plan his death. Such was the opposition and the mixed response to Jesus that even Jesus's best supporter, John the Baptist, started to wonder if Jesus really was the promised king from God, the Messiah, or should we be looking for someone else? And in response, we heard Jesus teach repeatedly in chapter 13 that God's kingdom in this age will appear small, messy, slow in coming, but is in fact God's rule breaking into the kingdom of this world and will one day fill the earth, overcome evil, gather God's people, and last forever and ever. And chapter 14 begins with a really stark confirmation of that now but not yet reality of God's kingdom when the very man who wondered whether this really was what he was waiting for, gets cruelly beheaded.

It is coming, John, but not all at once. John needed to hear that before he met his death.

[ 6 : 19 ] When Jesus heard about that, he leads some time away. Our passage begins, when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. Brothers and sisters, a reminder that it does matter to Jesus that his kingdom comes slowly. The consequences of that weighed upon him. But notice how that care is shown for people because now he decides it's the time to reveal the rescue plan to people. What kind of rescue has he come with and what do we need?

What do we need to do? Well, firstly then, let's see, King Jesus has come to Exodus rescue us. Now, I think our passage tonight is one of those passages that shows we know the Bible both too well and not well enough. If you grew up in the church, what Jesus does in our passage tonight is quintessential, classic Sunday school Jesus, isn't it? I reckon even if we went out on the street, even tonight, we would find people who still know that Jesus walked on water, who are familiar with the stuff that we read. I'd love to know by show of hands, though I won't put you through this actually, how many times you've heard these stories preached from this gospel or any gospel, possibly too many times even to remember? We know these stories too well, don't we?

But like so many things in the Bible we don't think we need to hear again, it turns out that that's actually because we don't know our Bibles well enough. So, for example, how many of us thought, as we read through our passage, why are we doing both these bits together, right? Can't he see the headings? Jesus feeds the 5,000, Jesus walks on the water. What's the rush, right? Slow down.

But let me put it to you that it's only when we see all of this together that we begin to see what's going on. So, let me tell you the same story but from a different angle, beginning at the end and working backwards and then tell me what you see. The Lord's people worship him. They cry out to him for rescue to save them. They are terrified but he brings them safely across the sea. He goes up on a mountain. In the wilderness, they are hungry. In his compassion, he feeds them with bread from heaven.

Now, if I asked you, where does that happen in the Bible? Where would you take me? Through the sea, up a mountain, in the desert, where they eat miracle bread. It's the Exodus, isn't it? That's where we would go. More specifically, it's the Exodus rescue. God hits Egypt with 10 plagues or 10 strikes. After the 10th, his people are set free and he brings them safely out, splits the sea in two so they can cross, takes them to himself at Mount Sinai and lovingly feeds them bread from heaven on the way. Now, what Jesus does here and what I think Matthew wants us to see in chapter 14 is that Jesus is doing the Exodus rescue. And just see that with me in the text. Look down at your Bible. In verse 13, he goes to a desolate place, literally a wilderness, where a crowd comes to him. And soon the question of food comes up.

[ 10 : 04 ] His disciples say, this is a wilderness. Send the crowds away to go and buy food for themselves. What are we all going to eat, Lord? Now, his target audience here is the disciples.

Okay, we've seen this before. The Sermon on the Mount, there's crowds on the outside, but the disciples are up close. And Jesus wants them, in particular, to see what he's doing. So he says to the disciples, verse 16, they need not go away. You give them something to eat. So suddenly the question of feeding the crowds gets a bit personal, doesn't it? It's a bit like when you say, oh, so-and-so needs a lift, and someone else says, yeah, can't you give them a lift? Suddenly the problem becomes not someone else's problem. It's my problem now. Jesus does that to the disciples, I think, not because he's expecting them to come up with 5,000 plus dinners, but so that they will be drawn in to see that he is about to do something that they cannot do. Hence why when they say, we have five loaves and two fish, Jesus says not, well, just start handing them out then, but he says, bring them to me.

Significantly, he looks up to heaven where the manna came from, bread from heaven. He says a blessing, then gives it back to the disciples to distribute. Then we read, the disciples gave it to the crowds, and they all ate and were satisfied. Not only that, they took up 12 baskets full of the broken pieces left over. That is, by the way, the number of tribes there were in the wilderness, and those who ate were about 5,000 men besides women and children. So actually it's titled, not by the Bible, but by the human editors, Jesus feeds the 5,000. It's actually wrong, isn't it? Jesus feeds the 15 to 20,000, right?

Now if you were those disciples, what would you be thinking by this point? Who can do things like this? Feeding small towns worth of people in a place where there is no food. And this wasn't, says Matthew, like passing around the bread at communion, right? A little tiny morsel of bread, don't take too much. They all ate and were satisfied. They ate until they were full, and then there was 12 baskets full left over. With our own hands, we gave him five loaves and two fish, and with our own hands, we gave out enough food, and then some to feed thousands. And what happened in between? He did. Jesus happened. We tell the story of the bread from heaven every year, they would say, but now we're living it because of this man. Then once everyone's eaten, Jesus sends them away on a boat while the crowds trickle away. And verse 23, after he dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Now given the disciples and the crowds are no longer there, this is for Jesus himself and for us. Remember, the reason Jesus went into the wilderness was to be by himself. Only now does he get that time as he prays to his father alone. Jesus sought that time, and he needed it.

But it's written here for us so that we have another piece of the big picture, because after they've been fed in the wilderness, where do the people go? Well, they go to the mountain. Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet with God as God took his people as his own. Here Jesus does the same. He meets with God in prayer alone on the mountain. Before coming down and crossing the sea to meet with his disciples in the boat, which was a long way from land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

[ 14 : 33 ] Now, of course, the sea does not split open. But when Moses raised his staff over the sea, we read in Exodus, all that night, the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land, and the people walked through the sea. Well, now on another very windy night, the Lord walks through the sea as if on dry land. He came to them walking on the sea.

And then his people do too. Lord, if it is you, asked Peter, 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.

Now, I take it that like the bread and fish, Jesus wants his disciples to be sucked in. To experience something of this rescue for themselves, to get this up close and personal sense of their need and his power. And right on key, as he begins to sink, Peter cries out, verse 30, Lord, save me. Lord, save me. He's in need of a rescue.

And immediately we read, the Lord Jesus reached out his hand and took hold of Peter. And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Not only Peter, but all the disciples, notice, are saved. The Lord saves his people by bringing them safely through the sea. And the final piece of the puzzle, if we need it, is there in verse 33. Lewis in the boat worshiped him, saying, truly, you are the Son of God. Again, who can rescue like this?

And who can do these things? Only one who is worthy of worship, only the Lord, the Son of God, who is King Jesus. Each bit is an amazing miracle in its own right, but put it together, and the point is simply incredible. That Jesus is the God of the Exodus, and that he is doing another Exodus rescue.

[ 16 : 51 ] You know, I take it these miracles aren't recorded for us only to reinforce that Jesus is God, though he is. Matthew's already made that point multiple times. Why show us that Jesus can recreate these miracles, Exodus miracles?

Well, because that is the kind of rescue that we need, and that is the kind of rescue that he has come to bring. See, it's not enough, is it, for Jesus simply to bring God's kingdom into the world and call us into it. Why not? What's the problem? You know the problem. What's the problem with that?

We can't come. We can't come. We're captives in another kingdom. We're slaves of sin and darkness. We live out our days under the shadow of death.

Like the Israelites in Egypt, we can't just leave when we want. Like Pharaoh, the prince of darkness will fight tooth and nail to keep us. The devil will work us to death in his service.

He will not let God's people go. And so, friends, Jesus is not a helpless salesman who came into the world trying to sell his goods.

[ 18 : 12 ] Look at my kingdom. Won't you come in? Please come in. And we are not discerning customers looking around, weighing up our options. What's best for me?

No, we are slaves in a kingdom of darkness until King Jesus came to fight for us, to strike the kingdom of darkness until it let us go, to set our hearts free, to live under his wise and compassionate and loving rule in his kingdom.

In other words, he has come to exodus rescue us because that is the rescue that we need. There are lots of problems in the world, aren't there?

In the news this week, wars, wildfires, grooming gangs, missing people. Lots of rescues are needed. But, friends, what is the problem behind those problems?

It is the fact that by nature, we belong to a kingdom of darkness and we live to serve its interests and obey its rules. We are born as slaves of an evil empire ruled by sin, death, and the devil.

[ 19 : 29 ] Our problem is the mother of all problems. But, brothers and sisters, good news. What good news?

That King Jesus has come to rescue us from the mother of all problems. He has come to break us out of our slavery to darkness, to set our hearts free, to serve a better master, the God who knows us and loves us and who created us for himself.

That is the rescue we most desperately need, and that is what he came to do. He has come to exodus rescue us. And so, again, what kind of rescue do you think you need?

What kind of rescue do you think the world needs? What do you think the problem is? What do you think Jesus came to do?

The story of the Bible is so much bigger than we think, isn't it? Jesus' work, God's rescue plan, goes so much deeper than we dare to imagine. For the world that we know is out there and the heart that we know is in here, that's what he came for, friends.

[ 20 : 44 ] So, what do we need to do about it? Well, since this is the rescue Jesus has come to do, we must trust him with our rescue.

This is the second of our two points this evening. And now, we're not told what the disciples talked about after Jesus had fed a small town with bread and fish, but over the page in chapter 16, we find out that they didn't really get it.

In another boat, they find out they don't have any bread. Jesus says to them, Oh, you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive?

Do you not remember the five loaves and two fishes and how many baskets you gathered? The miracles gone over their heads. And in lots of ways, the following chapters are kind of tracking with the disciples as they struggle to know what to do with what they've seen Jesus do.

But the drumbeat of these chapters isn't, Oh, you of little intelligence. Oh, you of low IQ.

[ 21 : 51 ] It is, verse 31, Oh, you of little faith. He's going to say that three times in the next four chapters because their problem is not up here that they're not clever enough to get what's going on.

It is down here that they do not trust Jesus to properly rescue them. And that's what this scene with Peter nearly drowning is about.

Again, it's so well known, and it's lost its impact on many of us. We might think Jesus is a bit harsh on Peter, mightn't we? That's what I thought as I read it this week. I mean, you know, how many of us have walked on water?

It was a windy night, and it was his first go. Oh, you of little faith. Why did you doubt? Isn't it natural? It sounds a bit like a teacher with your expectations that are just kind of impossible to meet.

Give him a chance, Lord. But think about the rescue that Peter is part of. It's as if he and the other disciples have been taken back in time. They are reliving the greatest rescue the world has ever seen.

[ 22 : 57 ] The Exodus rescue was their heritage and history, but that day, it became their lived experience. They had put a small lunch into Jesus' hands, and he had given back multiple supermarkets worth of food.

They had been struggling across the sea. Jesus simply walked up to them on the water. So Peter, he gets something of what's going on, doesn't he? Lord, if it is ye, command me to come to you on the water.

He wants it all to be true. He wants to live it, more so than the other disciples. Remember, he probably couldn't swim, less so in open water on a stormy night, but he literally climbs over the side of the boat, puts his feet on the water, trusting it will hold his weight, because Jesus has said so.

There is real faith there, isn't there? But what kind of faith? A moment ago, we asked the question, what kind of rescue?

Not all rescues are equal, are they? A dog once followed us home from the woods because it had lost its owner. So we called the number on the tag, and 20 minutes later, a guy turned up, and he was very thankful.

[ 24 : 11 ] But then he went away, and we've never heard from him again. It's not like we gave CPR to someone in his family, or rescued one of his kids from getting run over.

The response is proportionate to the rescue, isn't it? The bigger the rescue, the fuller the response. Well, Jesus didn't just tell Peter to come to him on the water, did he?

He also said as he stood on the water, verse 27, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid. But what happens? Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus, but when he saw the wind, what?

He was afraid. So the question is, is that a proportionate response to Jesus? What kind of faith does he have?

He trusts Jesus some of the way, doesn't he? But not all of the way. And that is not a proportionate response to what Peter has seen Jesus do, is it?

[ 25 : 15 ] It's not a big enough response to the biggest rescue that Jesus is proving that he can do. Of course, the whole point of the original Exodus rescue is that God's people did cross the sea to safety, but Peter doesn't get there.

He very nearly suffers the same fate as the Egyptians, doesn't he, being swallowed by the waves. Why? Because he didn't trust Jesus not to be afraid when Jesus told him there was nothing to be afraid of.

He trusted Jesus enough to obey some of his words, come to me, but not enough to obey the rest of his words, fear not. Friends, these chapters, the rest of these chapters are here to show us that more than anything, more than anything, that is what we need to be rescued from.

unbelief, little faith, a heart with one foot in the kingdom of heaven, but the other foot trapped still in the kingdom of darkness, a heart that cannot, on its own, trust Jesus all the way, even if it wanted to.

which is why Peter is such an uncomfortably clear mirror for us to look into, isn't he? Because if in some ways we should want to be more like him, in other ways, we're far too like him.

[ 26 : 44 ] And yet, when he is really pushed, as he's sinking, as he's going to drown, he cries out the most important words that anyone could ever say to Jesus, Lord, save me.

Lord, save me. If his first stumbling steps were weak in faith, what he says when he stumbled shows a faith that is big enough for the rescue that he really does need.

And that can be true for us as well, can't it? You know, if you feel like things are getting harder for you, spiritually, that temptation has gone up a gear, or that you have more doubts now than you used to have, or that just the pressure to conform to the world, the lifestyles we see around us, or maybe generally in life, situations that just keep on getting worse, or actually don't get worse, but just stay the same, but they actually get harder to bear as time goes on.

And you feel like you're sinking, and you're going to drown. Well, sometimes we know, don't we, that that is when our need is brought into sharpest focus, when we feel our weakness most strongly, and therefore, when our faith is boldest before we could walk on water, now we're sinking, and we can't help but cry out to Jesus, Lord, save me.

Let me say, friends, if that, if that, if you can relate to that in any way, that Jesus would much rather have you there than living in a state of half-trust, a full-throated, whole-hearted, desperate trust in him to save us, rather than a halfway trust in him that secretly fears that he won't actually get us through it.

[ 28 : 43 ] If you're here tonight and you feel like you're going to drown, you need only crying out to Jesus to save you, and what will he do? Just look at it in verse 31.

Turn your eyes down there. Verse 31, what will he do? Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him. Immediately. He was waiting for Peter to say the words, but when he cried out, Jesus didn't wait a second longer.

Friends, you say the word. You say the word, and Jesus will immediately reach out and take hold of you in all of his compassion and grace and power to save you from sinking and drowning in fear, judgment, and death.

Perhaps some of you sitting here have never cried out to him like that. Perhaps you've never said those words to him before. But with all the tenderness in the world, let me say that that is where you are tonight.

That you are sinking and you will drown, not just in life, busyness, stress, but in fear and condemnation and death and darkness forever.

[ 29 : 58 ] But with those three simple words, prayed from the heart to Jesus, Lord, save me, you will be spared. He will rescue you. Not before you ask, but the very moment that you do cry out to him to save you, immediately, he will.

And so if that's you tonight, don't hold back. Don't hold back. Say it to him. Cry out to him, Lord, save me. Lord, save me.

He will rescue you. He is mighty to save. But really, the challenge, I think, is aimed at those of us who are already his disciples.

Because even if Jesus would rather that we were at the end of ourselves than half trusting him, well, he would still rather that we didn't have to sink before we trust him fully.

Hence, he doesn't commend Peter for his faith, does he? But actually says, verse 31, oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt?

[ 31 : 06 ] Peter got there in the end, but think about it. It's a bit of a functional faith, isn't it, that needs to sink before it properly depends on Jesus, isn't it? The faith that Jesus is looking for here, that the proportionate response to his saving work is a trust that doesn't let go of him on any part of the journey.

A trust that when he tells us not to fear, therefore, doesn't fear, but keeps its eyes firmly fixed on him. Most of us sitting here have seen who this man is.

We know him, don't we? We know him. He is the son of God. And he came to rescue us by his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead from being slaves to sin, death, and unbelief.

So what more does he need to do to convince us that he can be fully trusted every step with the rescue that we need and our world needs? Trust him at all times, oh people.

Our God is a refuge for us. My brothers and sisters, we still need him to save us, don't we, from our faithless fears. We still need to say to him as the man does who will meet in a few weeks, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.

[ 32 : 29 ] We need to ask him to deliver us from hard and stubborn hearts, the parts of us that still, even now, he's set us free, choose to go back to the chains that he's freed us from and live in the way that we used to live.

much more of that in the weeks to come. But now let's pray that prayer, shall we, in our hearts to him and trust him to rescue us.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Gracious and most merciful Lord, we praise you for your power to save, that you are mighty to rescue.

We praise you because you are the God of miracles, the Son of God who came into the world to set us free from everything that we could not set ourselves free from.

Lord, we confess before you that we are utterly helpless to save ourselves, that we could not even respond to your gracious call without your saving grace to free us from our slavery to sin.

[ 33 : 48 ] And so, Lord, from the bottom of our hearts, we cry out to you this evening, Lord, save us. Lord, save us, deliver us from our unbelief. Father, we thank you for the measure of faith that we have and we pray help our unbelief.

Lord, help us to trust you all the way with each and every step. Lord, even this week we commit it to you and we ask that you would help us to trust you, to keep our eyes upon you and not to fear when you tell us that there is nothing to be afraid of for you are with us.

And, Father, for those among us who have never trusted you in that way and who are sinking, O Father, we pray that you would save them, that you would grant them that faith and that they would walk to you and never take their eyes off you again.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.