

Walking with Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 September 2005

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 0 0] Gospel, chapter 13, page 819 in the Church Bibles. And the title this morning is simple, Walking with Jesus. Walking with Jesus.

Whatever the place or the time or the circumstances, when people come around Jesus, when they confront Jesus in his word of the Gospel or among Christian people or even around the Christian church, Jesus himself confronts them.

And that is unavoidable. And every time the result of that confrontation is that it produces movement. Either people are drawn nearer and closer to Jesus or else they withdraw themselves and move further away from him.

Because whenever people are confronted with Jesus and his person, they are confronted with the challenge of his claims, the unique claims that in him alone lies the meaning of life, that in him alone is the fullness of all history, the goal of history.

In him alone is the way of salvation. And no one stays in the same place ever in a confrontation with Jesus.

[1 : 2 3] That's impossible because Jesus forces the issue. We can't dodge it. Either there's a movement towards Jesus with growing understanding of his person and his work, or else there's a movement away.

And there's growing confusion, growing ignorance, and a hardening against him. And it's very salutary. It's no different today than 2,000 years ago when people surrounded Jesus in Judea or Galilee.

Even if you think you can be an anonymous part of the crowd like those people were then, the crowds that followed Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth or out in the countryside when he healed them and taught them and fed them.

Or even if you think you can be an anonymous part of the crowd here this morning in a corner where I can't see you or nobody else can. Well, you're wrong. Wherever you are, you can't hide from a confrontation with Jesus Christ.

And it's not safe to be around Jesus for that reason ever. It's quite impossible. Jesus' presence cannot help but affect people. His challenge changes people always, every single time.

[2 : 3 6] He responds to us depending on how we respond to Him and His words. Yes, of course, He's in control. He is God Almighty. He is sovereign.

But at the same time, He puts firmly in our court the responsibility for our response to Him. When He speaks, He calls us to see, to hear, to understand, to follow, to have faith.

He calls us and commands us. It's a command to be obeyed. And if it's rejected, if it's ignored and scorned, then He calls us to account, always.

And according to our response to His gospel call, we're divided. Indeed, it's His word itself that affects that response by our response to His word in either faith or unbelief.

Do you remember chapter 13, verse 12? Just look at it. Such a key verse for understanding what Jesus' teaching is all about. Just back over the page. What is Jesus doing? Verse 12.

- [3 : 40] He says, to the one who has, when they're confronted with His ministry, more will be given. That's the response of faith that leads on to more and more, says Jesus.
- But on the other hand, to the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. That's unbelief. That's leading away from Jesus. Jesus. Why? Not because Jesus is unfair or unjust or lacking compassion, but because people insist on hardening themselves against Him, on closing their eyes, on refusing to hear.
- Look at verse 15. They've got ears, but they won't hear. Their hearts are hard and dull. In other words, they refuse the command of Jesus Christ.
- They refuse the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And that process, that process of division, is exactly what we're seeing portrayed before us as Matthew's Gospel unfolds.
- As Jesus mixes with the crowds in Judea and Galilee and people all around Him, what we're seeing is that division illustrated in real lives, both in the lives of communities and in the lives of individuals, as they're confronted by the truth of God in Jesus Christ.
- [4 : 52] Look now at verse 51 and verse 52. After Jesus had given all His teaching in the kingdom, He says to His disciples, Have you understood these things?
- They say, Yes. And He said, Therefore, every scribe, every teacher who's been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.
- See, Jesus' parables are teaching all about His kingdom and they force that challenge. The message is that all God's purposes come to their fruition, their climax, their fulfillment in Jesus Himself.
- He alone is the be-all and end-all of life, both now and for all eternity. That's what it means. He and His person and His work is the new treasure that fulfills all the old treasure of God's promises for the future, right from the beginning.
- And the key question, the key challenge is do you understand that? Have you grasped that? Or haven't you? Or rather, will you understand it? Will you submit to Jesus' unique rule in your life?
- [6 : 04] Or will you resist and refuse and reject Him? And that's the key issue. That's what Jesus is doing here. He's gathering around Himself a new community. Those who will submit to His authority, who will rejoice in it, who will understand who He is, what it's all about.
- And they, and they alone, are the true Israel of God. They alone are the true messianic people of God, the church of Jesus Christ.
- Those who hear, and understand, and obey, and follow Jesus. We've come to see already how Matthew structures his book, haven't we? He intersperses the unfolding story of Jesus and His ministry and His death on the cross and resurrection.
- He intersperses it with these five teaching sections about His kingdom. And we've just had the third one in chapter 13. And the next one is in chapter 18 when Jesus is expanding the life of His new community, the church of Jesus Christ.
- And so it shouldn't be surprising that in the chapters that lie between 14 to 17, we see unfolding before us this increasing division.
- [7 : 15] The division between those who will see, who will understand, who will follow Jesus, and those who won't. And it's a terribly sobering picture, isn't it?
- Despite everything that Jesus offers the crowds, despite everything He does for them, despite His compassion for them, we've read about Him teaching them on the shore in chapter 13 again and again.
- Here in chapter 14 He heals all the crowds, He feeds them again, He gives them every opportunity. And yet still, despite that, we see these two ways diverging.

Two ways. Some there are who simply refuse to understand. They will not. And so they determined for themselves a path of stumbling in blindness and ignorance on the road to unbelief.

But of course there are others, Jesus' disciples, His followers, who despite many perplexities, many things they don't yet fully understand, nevertheless they are led by Jesus in a journey of faith and understanding.

[8 : 25] And the message for today couldn't be more pertinent. It's been that way ever since those days and it's still that way today.

The challenge and the choice that Jesus gives to men and women, to communities, to all the world is exactly the same today. And He says to us, which road are you on? Which road?

Towards or away? Going on with me or forcing yourself away from me? And in these verses that we read this morning, Matthew is portraying before us in dramatic fashion these two paths and He's saying to us they represent the responses of people and communities to the unique claims of Jesus Christ, to His Lordship over our lives.

And He's saying to us today, as you leave this church building, which path are you on? Will you be more blind? More ignorant? More unbelieving about Jesus and His call?

Or will you be seeing more? Will you be believing more? Will you be trusting more in Him and moving on with Him? That's the question Jesus is asking us in these verses. Well, let's look then at these verses we read at Matthew's message for us as He expands, as He illustrates these two paths for us.

[9 : 51] The path towards Jesus in increasing faith, another path away from Jesus in increasing unbelief. And first, there are these two accounts, aren't there, in chapter 13, verses 53 to the end and the first 12 verses of chapter 14.

Two accounts that clearly show us stumbling in blindness and ignorance. The path away from Jesus. And the message is clear, it's tragic, but it's unmistakably true that there are those who, despite being given every opportunity to hear the message of Christ and His salvation, sometimes with extraordinary privilege, sometimes with the incredible patience of the Spirit of God, nevertheless, there are those who force the message of God to be withdrawn from them.

The light of Christ cannot and will not shine any longer because of the darkness of willful unbelief. That's the message.

This section divides in two and first of all in verses 53 to 58 we see the reaction played out in terms of the crowd. Do you see that? And then verses 14, verses 1 to 12 of chapter 14 give us a close-up of the individual.

The same thing happening in one person in Herod. as he's confronted with the message of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, as he wrestles with it in his troubled conscience. And of course, human societies and human nature hasn't changed that much in 2,000 years.

[11 : 25] These two pictures that we see before us are being played out today, here in Glasgow and all over the world. Look at verses 53 to 58 then.

Here we see a community rejecting Jesus en masse. He has a privileged community. Extraordinary privilege. Look at verse 54. He taught them in their own synagogues.

Here's the people who have week by week perfect preaching, perfect doctrine. If ever there was going to be a revival, surely it was going to be in that place, in that synagogue. But no, it doesn't seem to work like that, does it?

And actually, that ought to be a warning to us who think that if we could only have things perfect in the church, we'd have revival. Now, what's the reaction here? Well, verse 54 makes it clear they recognize something unique about him, his wisdom, his great works.

But look at verse 55. What did they say? Well, who does he think he is to talk to us like that? Well, we've known Jesus all our lives. We grew up with Jesus. Jesus has been part of our community since as long as we can remember.

[12 : 34] We're not going to treat him as special. He's certainly not unique. Why should we listen to him? Why should he tell us what to do? What a cheek! Verse 57, they took offense at him.

The word means to make stumble, to trip up, to fall. You see, they stumbled, they were floored by his claim to unique authority. They refused his deity.

They said, we're not listening to him. He's just a man. He's not God. He's not unique. Why should we listen to him? No, no, no. There's plenty of others just like him.

He may be a good teacher. But we're not having this. We're just going to ignore him. He's just a man. You see how contemporary that is? Nothing's changed, has it? Just the same outside in 21st century Glasgow.

That's our community, isn't it? That's our national community. Oh, we've had Jesus all our lives. We've grown up with Jesus. We had Jesus at school in assembly. We had Jesus in Sunday school.

[13 : 34] We had him in the BB. We had him on Radio 4 on Thought for the Day in the past. Not anymore. But no, not anymore. We're not having this. What a cheek. There's nothing special about Jesus.

We're not going to listen to him. He's just a teacher. He's just a man. He's not unique. It offends us. Our pluralist ears. We won't have it.

No, Jesus will just have to fit in with all the others. He'll just have to take his place along with Buddha and Krishna and Muhammad and Gandhi and Karl Marx and everybody else. He's just a man. Why should we listen to him?

He's not God Almighty. There's no such thing. He's just a man. That's what the BBC documentaries always come up with, isn't it?

Discovering the real truth about Jesus, the Palestinian person. No, he's just a man. But see, Jesus says, no, that's not enlightenment. That's not progress.

[14 : 32] Look at verse 58. What is that? It's unbelief. That's rejection. That's willing blindness to the truth. That is to set your whole community on the path to blindness, to ignorance, to disaster.

Verse 58 is very stark. Unbelief drives Jesus Christ away. He will not do mighty works in regions where unbelief reigns.

Our country of Scotland has been a very, very privileged community. Jesus has taught in our community for hundreds of years. He's taught in our synagogues, our churches.

He's had huge impact in our privileged place for centuries. But so often, willful unbelief has just driven him away.

And now our nation, our cities, are full of empty churches. Our national church is crumbling and falling apart. You only have to sit for an hour in Glasgow Presbytery, which is about all I can manage without having a suicidal wish.

[15 : 42] You only have to sit there for an hour to see it as an institution. It's sinking irretrievably into collapse financially in terms of people and everything else.

It's happening across the board in our nation, in other denominations. Well, what do you expect? When the teaching so often has been plain unbelief, Jesus, oh, he's not unique.

He's just a man. He's not the only way to God. There's enlightenment in all sorts of places these days. We're offended at Jesus. And these are words, my friends, of real warning for our communities today, for our denomination and for our congregation too.

To the church in the United Kingdom, to the church in the whole Western world. If you meet Jesus and his unique claims, his teaching, his lordship, if you meet that with scorn, with contempt, with unbelief, then he will depart.

He won't do mighty works there. That's what happened to the Galilean towns, isn't it? We read in chapter 11. Better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you. That's what happened to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the churches that the apostles evangelized, who ignored the warnings in Revelation 1-3 from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 09] Where are they today? Well, you go to Turkey. See if you can find Christian churches. And that is what is happening today in the Western world.

In the West, which was the great missionary church of the 18th and 19th centuries, sending the gospel all around the world. Scorn, take offense at Christ and his unique lordship and he will depart.

Even that which he has will be taken away, says Jesus. You'll journey into ever greater blindness and ignorance and judgment. That's not me saying that.

That's gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Better listen, hadn't we? But of course, communities are made up of people, aren't they? Individuals as well as communities.

And as well as corporate responsibility for our reaction to Jesus, we all bear individual responsibility too, don't we? We bear responsibility ourselves for our personal dealings with the challenge of Jesus.

[18 : 18] And that's what the first 12 verses of chapter 14 are all about. Here's one individual rejecting Jesus and his gospel. And again, it's such a true insight into the struggles of a man who's challenged by the truth, who wrestles with the Jews, but ultimately who stumbles over the message about Jesus Christ and his authority in our lives.

He finds it an offense, an affront to his pride, to his self-rule. That's Herod. Herod the Tetrarch was his name, Herod Antipas, by all accounts, secular accounts.

He was a ruthless man, a cruel man, a vile monarch. He was a minor ruler. He was the son of the Herod who tried to have Jesus killed. He was made ruler of just one of the four territories that previously had been ruled by his father.

He was a stooge of the Romans. Josephus tells us that he desperately all his life tried to get the title of king, but was never allowed it. And that tells you, I'm sure, a great deal about Herod.

But look at verse 2. Here we see this man, this self-styled monarch in a state of fear and agitation. His reaction to Jesus isn't the same as the townspeople, is it?

[19 : 35] They say, oh, he's just a man, we'll ignore him. But Herod says, no, he's a ghost. It must be John, come back from the dead to haunt me. That's why he's got powers. Clearly for Herod, the thought of Jesus was very unnerving.

It was a power over him. It wasn't something he could ignore. It was interfering with him. It was disturbing his conscience. He couldn't sleep at night. He can't ignore Jesus.

So most likely, he wants to destroy him. To silence the challenge just as he silenced John's challenge. That's probably why verse 13 says, Jesus withdrew.

No doubt to get out of Herod's territory, lest what happened to John would happen to Jesus too. You see, John's fate is the key, isn't it? Do you see verses 3 to 12?

It's a little parenthesis taking us back in time, explaining why Herod felt this way, explaining why this was his reaction. The story here is a bit abbreviated. It's a longer account in Mark's Gospel, chapter 6.

[20 : 35] You can read it, but the point here is very clear. Do you see verses 3 and 4? John, you see, had been confronting Herod about his immoral sexual behavior, about his illegal marriage. He'd taken his brother's wife.

My goodness, that's a sure way to cause trouble, isn't it? Suggest anybody's sexual preference might be wrong. Or wicked. Did you notice this week that poor old Pope Benedict has finally got out of his honeymoon period?

Suddenly all the press that were beginning to say, well, old paparazzi is quite nice after all. Now they're down on him like a ton of bricks. Why? Well, because he's having a clamp down in the seminaries. And they're not going to have practicing homosexuals admitted to their seminaries.

Boy, if you want to get the wrath of the press and the wrath of society on your head today, say something about people's sexual preference. Well, that's what John the Baptist was doing to the king, you see.

And so, urged on by Herodias, by his incestuous wife, he puts John in prison. If you read Mark chapter 6, it's very clear that Herodias was the driving force.

[21 : 42] She had the real grudge against John. She wanted him dead. But Herod, although he hated John's exposure, his rebuke, nevertheless, he was captivated somehow by John's message.

He feared him. And yet he knew somehow or other there was something right. Mark 6, verse 20 says, when he heard John, he was greatly perplexed. And yet, he heard him gladly.

Of course, you see, that's exactly what happens, isn't it? when we are confronted by Jesus and his claim on us. There's something wonderfully attractive. There's something so appealing.

There's something captivating in Jesus Christ. And yet, at the same time, there's a terrible challenge. There's a moral challenge for our will because he shakes us to the core and if we hear him, we understand that to have him, well, it's going to turn our life upside down.

We're going to have to accept change. So we want the message but at the same time, we don't want the message. We want to hear but we also want to silence it and kill it dead. And that was Herod.

[22 : 49] Verse 5, he wanted to kill John but he feared the people. You see, he was a weak man. So many tyrants are, aren't they, when you take their guns away. Remember the pictures of Saddam Hussein after his capture?

But, in the end, his weakness and his self-interest and his pride forced him into a corner, forced him into a decision and his ego and his reputation and his appetite, no doubt, for too much drink and too much female flesh dancing the belly dance.

Well, it meant that the decision was made and the decision was kill the messenger, silence this disturbing message of the gospel. It's a deeply pathetic story, isn't it?

The story of a weak and feeble man who stumbled over his own ego and was aided and abetted by a strong and powerful dominant wife. It's all too common, isn't it?

Many ways. He is an individual who's pulled in two directions by the challenge of the gospel and the demands it makes on his life and yet he's unwilling to give up his hold over his own life for the truth of the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 02] He tries to hedge his bets, you see, he tries to keep in touch with a bit of religion. Well, I'll just keep John in my prison every now and again. I'll have a listen and I'll keep in touch with religion that way.

People sometimes say that, don't they? Oh yes, I don't go to church anymore. I like to keep in touch with the church. I pop in occasionally, Christmas, Easter. But no, says Jesus, you can't do that.

God always brings you to the point where sitting on the fence, is no longer an option. And that feast was what tested Herod's true loyalties. And his loyalties were to himself and to his reputation and to his public face.

And so John got the chop. John died. And as one writer says, on that day also, so did Herod's conscience die. And from then on, he was on a road to ruin, and he was on a road to ruin, hardened more and more and more.

He was still haunted by it, yes. And when Jesus appeared, brother, there was fear and terror. He's a ghost. Come to haunt me. It's interesting, isn't it?

[25 : 11] The opposite reaction from the folk in the synagogue in Nazareth. They said, oh, he's only a man. We can ignore him. Herod says, oh, he's a ghost. I'm a silencer. It's amazing how when people want to avoid the claims of Jesus Christ, they'll believe almost anything at opposite ends of the spectrum rather than believing the truth.

And either way, it's just as effective in rejecting Jesus. You can say, he's a man. He's not God. I'm just going to ignore him. You can say, oh, he's a ghost. Superstition, a nagging spiritual force.

I'm going to exercise the might of my life. Destroy it. But verse 13 is very chilling, isn't it? Look at it. Jesus withdrew from there.

Yes, it was a wise and calculated escape from Herod's jurisdiction. But also, undoubtedly, it was judicial.

Every single time in Matthew's Gospel when that word is used, when Jesus withdraws, he is withdrawing purposefully from a place where he has been met with unbelief and hostility and hatred.

[26 : 24] Friends, Matthew is telling us take Jesus seriously. Yes, he is merciful. Yes, he is slow to anger and abounding in love and compassion.

Yes, he holds out his hands in mercy and in opportunity again and again and again. But not forever. Not forever.

When you meet Jesus persistently with unbelief and with deafness and with hardness of heart, there comes a time when he will withdraw forever.

You've set yourself on a path that is stumbling in blindness and ignorance, a path which can only end in unbelief and total disaster. That's what you've done if you meet Jesus in that way.

There's a very chilling verse indeed at the end of Luke's gospel in chapter 23 when Jesus stands before Herod at his trial. We read, Herod was glad to see Jesus.

[27 : 29] He wanted to see and see if he would see a sign from him. But no, there was no sign and there was not even one word spoken to him. Luke says, Herod questioned him at length but Jesus answered him with nothing.

No call, no offer, a wall of stony silence met him and Herod and the soldiers mocked him and treated him with content.

You see, that's the end of that road. It's the road of stumbling and of blindness and of rejection of Jesus. But it began long before then. It began in the challenge of the gospel that came through John the Baptist's words.

And Matthew says, Jesus is serious. Refuse him and refuse his lordship over your life and you're setting yourself on a path that leads only to disaster. That leads ever further away from the grace and mercy of God.

Even that which you have will be taken away. So be warned, don't refuse him who speaks to you today. Don't harden your heart as the psalm says.

[28 : 43] Don't persist in that road to blindness, to ignorance, to loss. No, says Matthew, don't do that. Learn from Jesus. Learn from his disciples.

Not stumbling in blindness and ignorance but the opposite. That's what the rest of this chapter is about. It's about a journey of faith and of understanding.

That's the message of these next two stories. And the message is equally clear that wherever there are people who are however perplexed they are, however unsure, however weak their faith, when they're following Jesus, when they're looking to Jesus, when they're listening to Jesus, he will lead them on.

He will nurture their little faith to make it great faith. He will take their little understanding and make it great and complete understanding until at last they see clearly the true light of truth and glory.

To those who have, more will be given, you see, and they will have an abundance. That's Jesus' message. In contrast to the blindness as to who Jesus is and the unbelief of Herod and the crowds at Nazareth, here in these stories we have two great signs that lead us to the truth, lead us to understanding, lead us to eyes opened with faith.

[30 : 03] They're well-known stories, aren't they? Especially the feeding of the five thousand. And we can say all sorts of things about them. We can't go into them in detail this morning. But what we do need to ask is why has Matthew put them here, in this place, just after these other stories?

What's his message? What's the emphasis he wants to teach us in them? And the answer lies in the contrast between the path of growing unbelief and separation from Jesus, of those who reject his message, and the path of growing understanding and faith, of those who hear him and learn, the disciples who are with him.

That's the focus of both these accounts. It's Jesus teaching them, his followers, those who are on the way with him, his path, teaching them to see more about who he is, and teaching them to trust in him for everything, however much they may be confused at times.

So yes, in this first story you can see, verse 13, there is an emphasis on the crowds, isn't there? It's repeated again and again. The crowds follow him. Verse 15, the crowds are needing feeding.

Verse 18 and 19, he feeds the crowds. He has compassion on the crowds. And by the way, in Matthew's gospel, that word compassion is always used of Jesus, of those who are outside his little band.

[31 : 22] His compassion for those who don't yet understand. And this is a wonderful picture of the compassion of Jesus for the lost and helpless. He wants to save them. He wants them to have the truth.

And it's a great picture of the power of Jesus. He's able to save them. And that ought to be a great encouragement to us, oughtn't it? That Jesus wants to save the lost and he has power to save the lost, that he will save the lost.

He will open eyes in understanding. But do you see that in this story, all the focus is actually on the disciples and their understanding. Everything's aimed at the disciples.

He's interacting with them all the way through. Do you see verse 16? He challenges them. They don't need to go away. You feed them. But how are they going to feed them?

Verse 18, well, bring the loaves and the fishes here to me. Of course you can't feed them on your own, you're helpless. But bring your helplessness to me. Oh, that's a different matter.

[32 : 25] And then you see verse 20? They can feed a multitude when they come to Jesus. Jesus alone can give them the power that they lack.

Jesus is teaching them to be totally dependent on him and teaching them that in him there is all the power to understand the gospel, to understand the kingdom of God and to be part of the kingdom of God and its great ministry.

Verse 20, of course, gives a lie to all these pathetic efforts by liberal scholars to explain these miracles away. You know, oh, well, everybody was so taken up with Jesus' teaching that suddenly they lost their appetite and a tiny crumb filled them up.

They didn't need any food. Well, of course, that doesn't give you twelve baskets of leftovers, does it? And I guess that if the disciples were like other students, they probably scoffed a lot by lunchtime. But there's a deeper significance too to this feeding, isn't that right?

It's full of the echoes of the Old Testament scriptures, all to do with the presence of God among his people. It rings of the story in the desert when God came and was in the midst of his people and fed them in the desert with manna and they were satisfied.

[33 : 42] It echoes of the promise of the prophets for the great banquet that would be when God comes to stand on the earth and to be among his people and people of all the earth will come to that great banquet.

And in that day, says Isaiah 25, all peoples will rejoice and say, this is the Lord, let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation. Jesus, you see, in doing this miracle is saying, this is a picture of that, it's a promise of that.

He's saying that trust me and you will see these great things happen. Trust me and you will see the peoples of the earth being fed, their spiritual hunger satisfied, their spiritual thirst quenched.

Again, it's no accident perhaps that these four verbs that he uses, blessing and breaking and giving and eating, reappear again in that last supper when Jesus gave thanks and blessed and broke and gave and they ate.

And what he's saying is, you see, that those who don't meet him with unbelief, those who come to him, those who bring their inadequate resources to Jesus Christ, will see wonders done in their sight.

[34 : 52] And the story of the night time on the lake is just exactly the same. It's the same journey of faith and understanding, just look at it. It's clearly a private lesson. Jesus sends his disciples on in advance.

He wants to focus on them and their little faith and nurture them. Here's these disciples, these followers of Jesus, they've heard so much, they've seen so much.

They're still perplexed, they're unsure, but they're following Jesus, they're still with him. And to those kind of people Jesus says, he'll always give more.

Verse 25, he came to them. He's not withdrawing from them. Verse 27, in spite of their fear, he calls to them, fear not, it is I. Words fraught with significance.

The words, I am, literally, reminding of Moses at the burning bush, the name of the Lord. In his word, he tells them who he is. In his action, he tells them who he is.

[35 : 52] Who can still the storm and walk on the waters? Only the Lord, the God of Israel. He's saying it is I, I'm the God of Israel. You see, when people are following Jesus, he leads them into an ever greater journey of faith and understanding.

And at the end of this story, in verse 33, we have a foretaste of the great confession. Surely you are the Son of God. That's what God had said of Jesus at his baptism.

That's what God's voice says at the transfiguration. It's what Jesus himself said when he said, come to me and I will lead you to the Father. It's what the great climax of Matthew's gospel is at the foot of the cross when the centurion, the Gentile, says, surely this is the Son of God.

It's Peter's confession in chapter 16. You see, that is understanding. That is faith. To grasp who Jesus is and therefore what his claim is upon our lives.

And that's the dividing point in the road, Matthew's telling us. Between those two paths that grow further and further and further apart. On the one hand, the path of faith, of trust in Jesus, understanding that he is the unique Son of God.

[37 : 09] And that's the path which leads on to deeper knowledge and understanding of Jesus' presence, of his power, of his love, of his salvation. And the other path of unbelief, which leads only to ever greater darkness.

Until at the end, Jesus can only withdraw. And that's still the fork in the road. That's still the confrontation that Jesus puts in our path today.

Every single time we hear the message of the gospel. However many times we've heard it before, every time we hear the word of Christ, it confronts us. It forces a decision in our hearts, belief or unbelief.

Following on in trust or backing away and rejecting. And so the same question is for every one of us this morning.

will you hear his voice? Or will you insist on closing your eyes and your ears? That's Matthew's question to us today. Just in closing, just notice one last thing.

[38 : 17] And that's this, there's no great difference in moral quality you see between those who follow Jesus, his disciples, and those who rejected him. Do you see the disciples' reaction in this story?

In the feeding of the five thousand, what did they think? What can he do with a few loaves and fishes? You see, they thought he's just a man. What can he do? Just like the Nazarenes thought.

Do you see their reaction in the story of the boat and the sea? What did they say? He's a ghost. Just what Herod thought. But you see, there's every difference in the world between doubts and uncertainties.

And willful unbelief and rejection. Thank God for that, otherwise none of us would be here this morning, would we? There are hard hearts who don't want to hear Jesus' voice, who are willingly hardening themselves in blindness and unbelief, and for them, this passage is a stark warning.

The ultimate end of that path is disaster. Jesus withdraws himself. Even the light which you have had will be taken away. We must be warned. Do not think that you can ignore Jesus ever, even a tiny little bit.

[39 : 33] Do not think you can ignore his challenge on every part of your life. That road is fraught with danger. But on the other hand, there are those who do want to hear Jesus, who do want to hear the truth about him.

And they may have many perplexities, many doubts, many fears, many confusions. Nevertheless, for all such, this passage is a wonderful, wonderful encouragement.

Even in a muddle of weak faith and confusion and perplexity, everybody who calls out like Peter does in verse 30, Lord save me, everybody who calls out like that will be heard.

Jesus loves to lead on that kind of faith. Even weak and little faith, he loves to lead it on to strength and stability and great faith. And he will. He'll lead on opening eyes and opening hearts to the wonderful truth of knowing who he is as Savior and Lord.

And so if there's anybody here today, even perhaps someone who's here for the first time, anybody articulating words like Peter's in verse 28, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you.

[40 : 55] Then you need to know that Jesus always answers that prayer the same way. He says, come. Come to me. Because in his person and in his presence is where all confusions are lifted.

Where all perplexities are taken away. Where we see him as he truly is, the Son of God. Full of power of the world to come, full of the power to save us to the uttermost.

And so he says to us today, hear his voice. Don't let familiarity breed contempt like the Nazarenes. Don't let your reputation or your pride or your reluctance to change your life and your behavior, don't let any of that hold you back.

No. Let the Lord Jesus Christ lead you on. In faith and understanding today and tomorrow and the next day and always. Let him lead you on.

Walk with Jesus. For any other way leads to disaster. But that way leads to life in all its fullness.

[42 : 07] leads to an understanding of the Jesus Christ who is truly the Son of God who has the power of the life to come and has the compassion and the desire to draw all who will listen and will not resist into that kingdom and keep them in it forever.

So hear his voice. Don't harden your hearts. Walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Father, we rejoice.

We rejoice.