

Grace and peace are yours through our Lord Jesus, the Son of God. Amen.

Who is Jesus? Who is this guy? People gave many answers to that question while Jesus was on earth, preaching and teaching. Jesus had friends and followers. Jesus had enemies. Who is this guy? Some said, "Liar! He deceives the people." Some said, "Lunatic! He's out of his mind." Yes, there were people who actually said that. Some said, "Lord!" Would it surprise you that even Jesus' friends and followers, or disciples the Bible often calls them, even they gave different answers at different times? Just in this section of the Bible, the disciples at one point said, "He's a ghost!" One said, "He's the Lord!" By the end they are worshipping saying, "Truly, he is the Son of God!" How can the same people say such different things? How can the same people have such different reactions? I'll be honest. I used to self-righteously scold the disciples so often in my mind. Why didn't they get it? Why did they doubt? But as time goes by and I'm more honest with myself, I identify more with the disciples, my differing answers at different times, my different reactions, sometimes indifference. Who is this guy Jesus? And notice how you answer that question leads to different reactions.

There's one reaction that's not in this part of the specific verses we read, but that helps explain how these verses begin. Jesus had just fed over 5000 people with five slices of bread and a couple of fish probably the size of sardines. The popular reaction was, "This guy is great! He'll feed us. He'll take care of us, make us rich and healthy and happy! We are going to follow this guy!" That lasted only as long as they got what they wanted. When popular opinion drives the answer to the question, "Who is this guy?" When popular opinion says, "We'll follow this guy as long as he gives me what I want," there will only be fickle following. Jesus didn't want fickle followers. So he dismissed those crowds. He had his disciples get on a boat. Jesus spent time alone in prayer, it seems like all night. Can you imagine? Jesus spending all night in prayer, by himself, when he could have been surrounded by adoring crowds. That's another sermon.

Let's get back to Jesus' closest friends, his true followers. Even they allowed their circumstances to change their answer to the question, "Who is this guy?" They are on their own boat, on a familiar lake, that's just a few miles across, rowing all night, at least nine hours, and the storm is so bad, they can't make it even a few miles. The wind was against them. The waves were beating against their little boat, slamming the sides over and over, bashing their oars as they make no progress.

Don't we often feel that way? I'm not making any progress. It's cancer! Wave slam! Cracked vertebrae! Wave slam! My financial advisor has so many terms for losing money. Headwinds! Wave slam! Three year's of gains lost in three months! Wave slam! Was finally even, then job loss. Finally getting some traction on the 401K, then hours cut! Wave slam!

As the waves continued slamming, as the disciples continued rowing, as this has been going on all night, sometime between 3am and 6 am, so maybe as it's darkest before the dawn, or maybe just as some darkness is starting to break, a figure is walking, on the sea, walking on the sea? What would you think? What is this? Who is this? The disciples said, "It's a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

"It's a ghost!" One answer to this question, "Who is this guy?" And one very natural reaction: fear! And maybe that's your reaction. Jesus is this spooky guy, who lingers around, trying to catch me in sin. He's this ethereal essence, lurking, watching, waiting until I screw up and then bang! There he is, scaring my

soul with my sins.

How did Jesus answer this reaction of fear? "Take heart!" Have courage! Be brave! Be strong! He doesn't address the fear first. He tells them, "Have the opposite reaction. Be brave. Be strong." Why? How? It is I! It is I! That seems like a pretty simple sentence, but when those disciples heard it, wow! It is I! The way Jesus said those words, the specific words he used, were not the way people said it. Not the words people used. It is I! These words, in this way, were reserved for God! For the LORD himself. One time, when Jesus said these words in this way, people wanted to stone him, because Jesus was calling himself God! It is I! It's not a ghost! It's God! I am not a fickle phantom. I am the Lord, who does not change. I am the God who is continual love. I am the God who rescued you in the past, the God who keeps his promises, the God who sent me to be your Savior. Yes, there really is all that in those words, "It is I," spoken in this way, "It. Is. I."

Stop being afraid. Take heart. Peter did! Peter got what Jesus was saying. Peter had those words, in that way, ringing in his ears. It. Is. I. Peter went from saying, "This guy is a ghost," to saying, "This guy is the Lord!" "Lord!" he says. "Lord! If it is you, and not a ghost, if it is you, and not a figment of our tired minds, if it is you, then I know you can command me and I can walk on water!" Really? Walk on water? You can command me and I can walk on water? What? Let's examine this for a second. If Peter were demanding some miracle because he had no faith, the rest of the Bible and Jesus' own words would indicate, Jesus would not have done it. But Peter wasn't asking from a place of no faith. Peter wasn't demanding Jesus do as Peter said. Peter was taking heart, taking to heart the words of Jesus. It is I! Peter wasn't being afraid. Peter was taking courage. Peter was being so brave, so bold, he believed. Peter believed, "If Jesus, the Lord, commands me, I can walk on water!" And Peter did! Peter walked on water at the Lord's command! Peter stepped down from the boat and walked on water.

I want us to stop there for a moment. Make sure we all caught that. Peter walked on water. If you've heard this story you are probably more familiar with Peter fearing and sinking. But not just yet. Peter walked on water. The pictures from the Bible history book show Peter sinking. But why not show the picture of Peter walking. On water. Toward Jesus! Peter went from fear to faith. Peter was courageous and his courage was rewarded with walking on water. Do you see what this means? When your answer to the question, "Who is this guy?" is, "He is the Lord!" Jesus has the ability to command you to do anything. And you can do it. Even walk on water. Wow!

If only Peter had stayed in that place of faith and fixed his eyes on Jesus. Didn't take long. Seconds it seems and Peter saw the wind instead of seeing his Savior. The wind was strong. Peter was weak. Peter went back to fear. Began to sink, was in a desperate situation, near death, about to drown. Doesn't that sound just like us! Fear, faith, fear. We ride this roller coaster. Fear, faith, fear! At times feel like we are about to drown, in debt, in depression, in daily grind, near death with health and bills and I just can't do this anymore, sinking in sins of selfishness and self-righteousness and solutions? Slim. None.

That's when our answer to this question, "Who is this guy?" Really matters. And here's where Jesus takes Peter back to the top. Peter cries out, "Lord, save me!" Who is this guy? Lord! My reaction? He saves me! He saves me! Only he can save me! I can't save myself! I'm desperate! I'm drowning. I'm depressed. But Jesus is the Lord! He can save me! And he does save me! The Lord didn't merely speak to Peter and command Peter to pull himself up out of the water. The Lord reached down, stretched out his hand and took hold of him. Here's the movie moment. Picture the loving extending of the hand. See the life saving sigh of relief as Jesus' hand takes hold of Peter, hear the music rise as Jesus performs another

miracle and pulls Peter out of the water, saves him.

Do you remember your movie moment, when Jesus reached out his loving hand, plunged you into the water of baptism and pulled you from your desperate despair and saved you? Maybe you were too young to remember. Maybe there wasn't a rising crescendo of music in the church or over the hospital speakers, but there was a rising crescendo of chorus in heaven, an angelic choir rejoiced. One more rescued! One more saved! One more soul washed clean by the hand of Jesus.

Those same hands of Jesus stretched out another time, onto a cross and even though he was the Lord, he let himself be nailed, to take away your sins. He put his heart on the line, so you can take heart. He let himself suffer, so you not just can be saved, but are saved, forever, from all, for eternity. Jesus stretches out those same hands, to you, handing you his body, handing you his blood and saying, for certain, "Your sins are forgiven! Go in peace!"

I know there will be doubts. I know there will be moments when you hear Jesus say, "You of little faith." I know there will be times that fear/faith roller coaster is down in the depths. But then remember. He's the Lord! He saved me! He's the Lord! He can command me and I can do anything he commands. I can't think of a time he commanded me or you, to walk on water. But anything the Lord commands me, he gives me the power to do.

Who is this guy? A ghost to be afraid of? The Lord, to save me and command me? What about the third reaction? The Son of God? Look at the miracles they had just seen, over the past several hours. They had seen Jesus feed over 5000 people, with a small snack and these disciples got to hand it out and collect the leftovers, which were more food than they started with. They had seen Jesus walk on water! Walk on water! They had seen their good friend Peter, walk on water, walk on water! They had seen Jesus extend a loving hand and save Peter from certain drowning, all while Jesus continued walking on water. They had seen the wind stop. Suddenly. Completely. All these miracles! No wonder the only answer they could give was, "Truly, you are the Son of God!" And with that answer, what other reaction would they have than worship? They fell on their knees and fell on their faces. They didn't care if they looked foolish. This guy is worth it! They didn't care if no one else did this. This guy is worthy! You see those words, "worthy," and, "worth it," in the word, "worship?" That's what worship is, worship is saying, "Jesus is worth it! He's worth my time, on the one day I can sleep in. He's worth my sacrifice. He sacrificed so much more. He's worth my money. It all came from him in the first place. He's worth my courageous confession. He's the Son of God. For real!"

So what's your answer? Who is this guy? A ghost? To be feared? The Lord? To save me and command me? The Son of God? To be worshiped? What's your answer? Who is this guy? Who is this guy? Amen.

Truly Jesus is the Son of God! Amen.