

JESUS COMMANDS STORMS AND DEMONS

Luke 8:22-39

Key Verse: *“Where is your faith?’ he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, ‘Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”*

Luke relates two events involving Jesus in today’s Bible passage: the calming of a stormy sea, and the exorcism of the evil spirits of a profoundly demonized man. The first is a miracle over nature, namely, the weather. The second is a miracle within a man, over the work of the devil. Both miracles required the power of God. So they are power miracles. All power and authority belongs to Jesus Christ, who is Lord over all. We who believe, know this. Jesus’ disciples did not yet fully realize this. They had already seen incredible miracles of Jesus: driving out demons, healing a fever, leprosy, paralysis, and even raising the dead to life again. To Luke, these are evidences that Jesus is from God and worthy of our trust. Jesus was not a fake or a fraud or a con-artist. Jesus was the real deal: the Son of God, the Messiah.

So, what does that have to do with me, living 2000 years after Jesus walked the earth? Nothing, if you have no problems, outwardly or inwardly. But if you do have problems or difficulties or struggles or challenges, outwardly or inwardly, then you need to listen to Jesus, trust him, and follow him. No one else can save you.

First, Jesus calms the storm (22-25).

One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and set out. Perhaps Jesus wanted to have some quiet time with his disciples. Or, perhaps Jesus had some discipleship training in mind for this trip. As they sailed, Jesus fell asleep. Jesus was fully human. Jesus worked hard. Jesus was taking a power nap on the boat. The Bible says, “A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.” It is said that storms can arise suddenly on the Sea of Galilee due to the terrain of that area. Recall that four of Jesus’ disciples were known to be fishermen. So, if this situation was serious to them, we know it was a dangerous predicament that they were in. In spite of their boating experience, this was beyond their ability to handle.

Picture this. Jesus asleep during the storm. How is that possible? Of course, it shows that Jesus was really tired. But it also shows that Jesus had no fear, but was sleeping peacefully, like a baby, rocking in a cradle. In Jesus is no fear. If Jesus is in our boat, with us, we have nothing to fear. If Jesus is with us, he will carry us through the storm, safely to the other side.

Recall the prophet Jonah who was asleep in a ship during a storm. Jonah was running away from God’s mission. The storm was sent by God as training for the prophet Jonah. Jesus was not running away from God’s mission. But his disciples needed some training of faith.

The next Bible verse says, “The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we’re going to drown!’” They were truly afraid. In Mark’s gospel, they added, “Don’t you care if we drown?” To them, this was a life or death situation, and Jesus didn’t seem to care. At least, he certainly was not worried. Maybe, they thought, he doesn’t realize how serious this is. After all, Jesus was not an experienced boatsman.

But look at what Jesus did. He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. What Jesus did was not normal, even for a person of faith. What would people of faith do? They would pray. Once on a ship ride across the Atlantic, John Wesley’s ship encountered a storm. Mr. Wesley was afraid. But he saw that a group of Moravian Christians were praying and worshiping peacefully. Their faith really impressed him. So, people of faith express their faith with prayer. This would’ve been a proper expression of faith for Jesus’ disciples.

Of course, we know that Jesus was a man of prayer, expressing his complete reliance on his Father God. But in this case, the Bible does not mention that Jesus prayed. It says that Jesus “got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters.” Now we know that humans don’t have power to control the weather, at least not with current technology. That is something that only God can do. This means that Jesus was exercising divine authority over the wind and the raging waters. It is also unusual that Jesus spoke to the wind and water. Jesus rebuked these forces. Mark records that Jesus said to the wind and water, “Quiet! Be still!” Jesus commanded the wind and the water. Jesus controlled nature.

After calming the storm, Jesus then asked his disciples. “Where is your faith?” Do you realize that everyone has faith? Even atheists have faith. The question is: “In what or whom do you have faith?” Every time I fly in an airplane, I realize that everyone on that plane has faith in the pilot who is flying the plane, the plane manufacturers who made the plane, and the technicians who prepared the plane for their flight. If they didn’t have this faith, they wouldn’t be on the plane. “Where is your faith?” This is a good question to ask ourselves, especially when we feel worried or afraid. I know a woman who gave birth to her firstborn. In the recovery room, just one hour later, she had an anxiety attack. She began to cry saying to her husband, “How are we going to take care of this child?” Her worry after having her first child is understandable. The husband could’ve reassured her with their human situation, which was not bad at all. But he said to her in a mild rebuke, “Have faith in God!” It sounds a bit harsh. But it worked.

In fear and amazement Jesus’ disciples asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.” I love this response, because it is so realistic and true to human nature. They didn’t say, “Wow, did you see that? Cool Jesus!” They were gripped with holy fear. Jesus could not just heal the sick, or give life back to the dead. Jesus commands, controls and calms storms. No force or power can prevail against Jesus, for Jesus is Lord of land and sea.

Are you facing any storm in your life? Do you feel or think that you might drown? Where is your faith? In whom or what are you trusting?

Second, Jesus rescues a demonized man (26-39).

After the storm subsided, they sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, across the lake from Galilee, on the eastern side. It was Gentile territory. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. Luke describes the man. For a long time he had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!' For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized the man, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

This is perhaps the most descriptive Bible passage of a demonized man. Notice a few things. He hated to be around people. He was driven to solitary places. In this case, he lived in a graveyard, where dead people are buried. He had no one to talk to; no friend. He was also violent. Though he was arrested and chained, he broke free. He did not live in a house and he did not wear clothes. He preferred to live like an animal, rather than a human being. Notice also, his spiritual discernment. He knew who Jesus was: the Son of the Most High God. He seems to want help, for he came to Jesus. But he's afraid of Jesus and yells at Jesus. He thinks Jesus is going to torture him. He has a skewed view of Jesus.

Are there people like this today? Do demons exist? M.Scott Peck was an American psychiatrist who converted to Christianity. He wrote a book called, "People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil." I want to share a few significant insights from a summary article of his research that are relevant to our Bible passage.

Initially he believed, as with "99% of psychiatrists and the majority of clergy" that the devil did not exist. Eventually, after having been referred several possible cases of possession and being involved in two exorcisms, he was converted to a belief in the existence of Satan.¹

So he was convinced that the devil is real. He also taught:

Most evil people realize the evil deep within themselves, but are unable to *tolerate the pain of introspection*, or admit to themselves that they are evil. Thus, they constantly run away from their evil by putting themselves in a position of *moral superiority* and putting the focus of evil on others.

One of his views was that people who are evil attack others rather than face their own failures.

Some characteristics of an evil person are: self-deceiving, consistent in destructive sins, and have an intolerance to criticism.²

So what can we learn here, which actually agrees with the Bible? For one thing, evil and the devil do exist. We see that pride and self-righteousness are key characteristics at work in an evil

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M._Scott_Peck#People_of_the_Lie, accessed 7/9/22.

² *ibid*, accessed 7/9/22.

person. So, rather than remaining in pride, self-righteousness and self-deception, we must admit we are evil, confess our sins, and turn to Jesus to find healing, forgiveness and freedom in Jesus Christ.

These findings echo the acts of random or targeted violence that we hear about in almost every news report, including this week's July 4th shooting in Highland Park. This was an extreme example of the work of demons. So imagine how many people are harassed, tormented or driven by demons, making them feel angry, empty, lonely or bitter, and causing them to do harm to themselves and others. We need Jesus. We need deliverance from evil and sin. When we do not admit and confess our sins and come to Jesus for deliverance and healing, then we become instruments of evil and wickedness. We all need Jesus our Deliverer, our Rescuer, our Healer.

So how did Jesus help this man, whom no one could help? Jesus asked him what seems to be an odd question: "What is your name?"

Bible scholars debate why Jesus asked his name. Some suggest that Jesus was identifying or calling out the demons in the man. That's possible. However, personally, I don't think Jesus was trying to find out some information about the man that he didn't already know. Rather, I believe Jesus was trying to help the man come back to himself, to his true identity. The man was not a demon. He was a man made in the image of God, for a good purpose, to love God and to love people. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

It has been said, "*A person's name is to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language.*"³ At a recent wedding in our church, I saw someone I hadn't seen for over 10 years. I was embarrassed that I forgot her name, so I said, "Oh, hi!" I had to ask someone privately to remember her name. Then, when I saw her a bit later, I addressed her by name. Don't you like to hear your own name, especially when others say it? Jesus cared about this man. Jesus wanted to be his friend, when no one else even wanted to get near this man. Others just wanted to shut him up and lock him up. Others avoided this man like the plague. People ran in the other direction when they saw this man. But Jesus loved him. Jesus wanted to know him. Jesus wanted to help him. Jesus was willing to risk personal harm, insult and injury to be near this man. What a Friend we have in Jesus! Amen?

So, did the man tell Jesus his real name? Actually, no. He was still in self-deception. "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. The demons in the man were terrified that Jesus was going to send them back to hell, where they belonged. Even demons are terrified of Satan. Satan is no friend, even to demons.

Jesus made a somewhat strange deal with the demons. The Bible says: A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. Mark tells us it was about 2000 pigs. Wow, that's about 20 times the number of this worship service. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and Jesus

³ Attributed to Dale Carnegie, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/capitalbusiness/career-coach-the-power-of-using-a-name/2014/01/10/8ca03da0-787e-11e3-8963-b4b654bcc9b2_story.html, accessed 7/9/22.

gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

Why did Jesus bargain with these demons, rather than just sending them to hell. I can think of two reasons. One is that the devil requires a ransom. Or, said another way, sin demands a sacrifice. The whole Jewish sacrificial system was designed that animal sacrifices were given to atone for human sin. But Hebrews tells us that the blood of bulls and goats cannot ultimately take away sin. Only the Lamb of God, the perfect Son of God, who gave his life on the cross for us—Jesus Christ of Nazareth—can take away our sins. Eternal thanks and praise to Jesus our Redeemer!

So one reason I can think of is that sin demands a sacrifice. The other reason is related to the first: one soul is precious to God. One human soul is worth more than a huge herd of pigs, even if it represented the entire economy of that area. Jesus was willing to sacrifice anything for this tormented soul. Jesus ultimately gave his life for us sinners, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God, to purchase us by his blood and make us his own. Thank you, Jesus.

There's one more very important truth in this story. The man was given a new life by Jesus. He was free. Jesus set him free from the torment of demons. Now he was a new man in Jesus Christ. But the townspeople didn't recognize that. They saw Jesus as a threat to their society. Jesus destroyed their pig industry. Jesus' healing of this man freaked them out. So they begged that Jesus would leave their region. And, where Jesus is not welcome, he doesn't stay. So he left.

As he was leaving, the healed man had a request: he begged to go with Jesus. He loved Jesus. He had no other friend like Jesus. He knew he owed the rest of his life and soul to Jesus. He volunteered to be Jesus' disciple. But Jesus had other plans for him. Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." Jesus wanted him to bring glory to God and healing and restoration to people, even many of the people he had hurt and damaged. So the man went away and told all over the town how much Jesus had done for him. Jesus was his Mighty God. Jesus was his Powerful Deliverer. Jesus was his Wonderful Savior.

So what can we learn here? We see that Jesus saves us for a purpose. It is to thank and praise him and give him glory. This is actually the chief purpose of our lives. What is our chief purpose? It is to glorify God and enjoy him forever (Westminster Confession). Jesus doesn't save us so we can just enjoy the benefit of salvation and eternal life and the blessings of being a child of God. He does so, so we can tell others, that is, to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1Pe 2:9). Jesus has given all who believe in him a new identity as a chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, God's own special possession. This is his amazing, wonderful and marvelous grace to us! What is your name? Do you know who you are, who God created you to be, who Jesus redeemed you to live as? You are no longer a slave to sin and fear. You are a child of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Today we heard Jesus' words: "Where is your faith?" Is your faith in Jesus Christ? Are you trusting him? We also heard Jesus' question: "What is your name?" Jesus died to set us free from our

sins and guilt and condemnation, and make us children of God, with a new identity in him. Jesus is truly our Best Friend Forever. Jesus also sends us to others to proclaim what he has done for all people—all those who admit and confess their sins and turn to him in faith. Will you go and tell what he has done for us—what he has done for you?