

3. There's No-one Like Jesus: The kind of man he is

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[0 : 00] Well, we continue in our series in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 8, today, and if you'd like to turn up the passage with me, you'll find it on page 813 in our Big Bibles, Matthew Chapter 8, and I'm reading the short passage from verse 23 to 27.

Matthew Chapter 8, verse 23. And when Jesus got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves.

But he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, Save us, Lord, we're perishing. And he said to them, Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?

Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?

This is the word of the Lord, and may the Lord God add his blessing to it. I want us to begin today at the end of the passage. In fact, I want us to begin with that great question that is raised in verse 27.

[1 : 21] What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him? Now, Matthew, the evangelist, is a consummate artist, a skillful teacher.

And he puts in a question like that, to act on his readers in much the same way that a piece of grit will act on an oyster. It gets into the oyster system and causes an irritation.

It's the kind of question that demands an answer. What kind of man is this? We sometimes rather naively think of the evangelists as being little more than reporters or recorders of bare facts.

But they're very much more than that. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were grown men, and they'd been devoted followers of Christ for many years before they actually sat down to write their gospels.

And they were men with a message. They were seeking to persuade their readers that to follow Christ is the only important and really good thing that a person can do.

[2 : 18] And that equally, not to follow Christ is the very worst thing that a person can do. So these men were not indifferent to the response of their readers. Now, if Matthew, having written his gospel and maybe having a number of copies of it about himself, if he were to meet one of his friends in the street, a Jew who wasn't a Christian, he might press a copy of the gospel into his friend's hands and say to him, Now, you must read this, Yehudi.

It's a matter of life and death. You need to know the truth about Jesus of Nazareth. Do I? Says Yehudi. You do indeed, says Matthew. It's most important. So a little bit later on in the day, when Yehudi gets home, and perhaps when his wife is not watching him, he opens out the document and he begins to read from the top.

And he almost has apoplexy at the very first verse. Because there Matthew has written, The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Has Matthew taken leave of his senses? Says Yehudi. How can that man Jesus, who was crucified all those years ago by Pilate, how could he possibly be the Christ and the king in the line of David?

But as he reads on, Yehudi finds Matthew being even more outrageous. Jesus conceived by the Holy Spirit, called Emmanuel, God with us, the king of the Jews, worshipped by wise men from the east, said by John the Baptist to be the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and then this voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved son.

[3 : 52] Now, do you see how the grit is getting into the oyster's gullet? The question that Matthew is forcing upon his reader is the question, what sort of a man do we have here?

What kind of man is it who can command the winds and the sea and be obeyed by them? Well, let's turn to the passage and we'll try to draw out some of the details. You'll see in verse 23, he gets into a boat with his disciples.

And if you look back to verse 5, you'll see that they're at Capernaum, which was at the, or still is I think, at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. Then at verse 18, Jesus gives orders to go over to the other side of the lake.

And then verse 28, when they do get to the other side, they're in the country of the Gadarenes. Now, if you look at the Bible Atlas, you'll see that Capernaum, the journey by water from Capernaum across to the country of the Gadarenes would only be about five or six miles as the crow flies.

But if you were to walk around the edge of the lake, it would only be a walk of maybe eight or nine miles. But the little group of disciples and Jesus were tired and Capernaum was a fishing village.

[5 : 01] There were lots of boats there. So it was easier just to get into a boat and to sail those few miles across. In fact, Jesus was so tired that he was asleep within a few minutes. And it was while he was asleep that the storm struck.

Now, what I'm about to say next may seem a little bit fanciful and I wouldn't want to press it too hard. But it may be that the storm is an assassination attempt by the devil.

Now, I say this for two reasons. First, we know that the devil is fiercely active during Jesus' public ministry. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that he does battle with Jesus right at the beginning of his public ministry in the wilderness, the temptation scene.

And it's the Holy Spirit who arranges the battle. So we read in Matthew chapter 4, verse 1, then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Now, the devil tries every trick in his theological book, as you know, but he simply can't master Jesus, so he eventually withdraws. But Luke, in his gospel, adds the ominous detail that the devil departed from Jesus until an opportune time.

[6 : 15] It's a bit like Arnie Schwarzenegger saying, I'll be back. And we're very conscious of this gruesome battle between Satan and the Lord Jesus as the gospels unfold.

So, for example, in Matthew 12, Jesus pictures Satan as a strong man who's guarding his property until such a time as an even stronger man comes along and overpowers him and dispossesses him.

Now, Satan's objective was to do anything he could to stop the cross from happening. It was the cross that would disarm Satan and force him to yield up his prey.

Because at the cross, followed by the resurrection, Jesus would achieve the forgiveness of our sins and would break the power of death's hold on us. So, to return to Matthew 8, verse 24, it may well be that the devil caused the storm to arise so that he might perhaps be able to snuff Jesus out before the victory of the cross could be achieved.

And look at the verb that's used there in verse 26. Jesus rebuked the winds and the sea. The same verb used of him when he met demon-possessed people. He rebuked the demon and sent it out, cast it out.

[7 : 28] So, to rebuke the forces of nature suggests that there is something demonic about them, at least in this instance. But a second reason why we might be right in seeing the storm as an assassination attempt is to think of what the sea represents in the scriptures.

The sea represents the forces of chaos and destruction. Now, certainly the Lord God made it, but it seems to be the lair of anti-God energies. So, for example, in Daniel, chapter 7, verses 2 and 3, do you remember Daniel has a vision and four great beasts which threaten the life of God's people arise out of the sea.

Or listen to these words from Job, chapter 38, where the Lord is humbling Job and showing him something of his majesty. He says to Job, Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors and said, Thus far shall you come and no farther and here shall your proud waves be stayed.

The power of the Lord's voice stops the waves. That's what he's saying to Job in chapter 38. Think of King Canute speaking to the sea. He was a non-starter, wasn't he?

There's only one voice that can stop the waves. Or think of the book of Revelation, chapter 21, where the new creation is being described and in the new creation we read, There is no more sea.

[9 : 02] So in the new world, that violent anti-God force will simply have been eradicated. So when you bear in mind the devil's fierce antagonism towards Jesus and the way in which the sea represents chaos and destruction, it may not be too fanciful to think that this was a fierce attempt by Satan to assassinate Jesus.

Well now after that rather lengthy introduction, let me just make two brief points. First, the disciples are with Jesus in the storm.

Now I put it like that because there's a popular piece of what you might call Christian mythology which says that to be with Christ means that storms don't come your way at all. That if he's with you, you're protected from them.

Do you remember the old children's chorus with Jesus in the boat? I'd sing it if I knew the tune, Ruth, but I've forgotten. With Jesus in the boat, you'll be safe from the storm. Safe from the storm, safe from the storm.

With Jesus in the boat, you'll be safe from the storm. How does it end? To we come sailing home? I know. Some of you know it. Anyway, as I say, popular Christian mythology.

[10 : 12] That's what I would call really something that's only half true. You think of these disciples. They were being battered by the storm. That's why they turned to Jesus and woke him up.

Verse 24 tells us that the boat was being swamped by the waves. And verse 25 shows us that they really thought their last moment had come. Save us, Lord. We're perishing.

So they were feeling the full blast of the storm and they were very much afraid. When I was a little boy, I was given my first Bible and it was an illustrated copy of the authorised version.

I guess the illustrations were put in to ignite a child's interest. But I can still picture the illustration of this particular scene. There's Jesus standing up in the boat.

There's this little fishing boat with a tattered brown sail. And the disciples are cowering in a corner with their hands up like this as the waves sweep over them. And their faces are covered with a sense of abject terror.

[11 : 10] They were feeling anything but safe in the storm. Jesus was with them but they were being battered and they were miserable. Now, many of you folks have been Christians for years.

And I'm sure that you would testify that you have been battered by storms although the Lord Jesus has been with you. Some of you, I'm sure, are in the eye of some storm at this very moment.

You may feel as if Hurricane Ike is battering at you and your life. Health problems, physical or mental, family problems, financial nightmares, maybe something else that only you and the Lord know about.

But it's very painful and you feel that you're in danger of going under, perishing. Well, this is part of the Christian life. The disciples were with Jesus and Jesus was with them but they were suffering dreadfully.

Now, the relief came in the end and we'll come on to that. But in the meantime, they were suffering acutely. And look at it like this. It's possible that if Jesus had gone around the lake shore on foot and the disciples had gone across by boat, perhaps the storm might never have blown up at all.

[12 : 26] If this incident was an assassination attempt, it was Jesus who was being attacked and the disciples just happened to be there. They got caught in the crossfire. Which perhaps explains why some Christians suffer more of life's sorrows than people who are not Christians.

those who are with Jesus may attract the enemy's anger precisely because they belong to the Lord. Think, for example, of Mrs. Palin in America who's running for vice president at the moment.

I don't know very much about her but she's clearly a professing Christian and she's prepared to stand up and be known unashamedly as a believing Christian. It wouldn't surprise me at all if she is subjected to a lot of vilification and misrepresentation in the coming months simply because she is prepared to stand for Christ.

So let's draw a certain encouragement from this. To be in the boat with Jesus is to be with him in the place of danger and therefore we mustn't be surprised when some force ten gale blows up in our faces.

To be a Christian is not to be protected from the storms but it does mean that Jesus is with us in them. Now second Jesus has the authority to still the storm and one day he will.

[13 : 49] Jesus performed his miracles for a number of different reasons. One reason was to give evidence for his identity as God incarnate. The miracles tell us that here is God in human form and certainly this miracle is a great demonstration of his deity.

A second reason for his miracles especially his healing and exorcism miracles is that they demonstrate his wonderful compassion. It grieved him to see people possessed by demons or disabled by horrible diseases.

He loved to set them free from the power of things that damaged their lives and ruined them. But a third reason for the miracles is that they reveal various features of the new creation.

So when we see Jesus healing the sick raising the dead casting out demons as here showing his mastery over the forces of nature we are being given a foretaste of what the age to come will be like.

In the age to come there will be no sickness no death no powers of the devil no devastating weather events. So when Jesus came 2000 years ago his deeds of power showed us something of the shape of the new order.

[15 : 05] Instilling the storm Jesus demonstrates the beauty and the calm of the world to come. Now we are still living in this world in this period of history when the devil is active the period between the first and second comings of Christ.

In the new creation the sea will be no more but here in the old creation the sea is very much in evidence and is likely to be roused up at a moment's notice.

Therefore Christians just like non-believers are subject to illness sudden death accidents traumas of all kinds. So to return to the disciples question what sort of man is this that even wind and sea obey him?

Let's allow the old testament to answer that question. I want to give you a few quotations from the psalms. There's no need to look these up but I'll read them out loud and clear. So first from Psalm 93 verses 3 and 4 The floods have lifted up O Lord the floods have lifted up their voice the floods lift up their roaring mightier than the thunders of many waters mightier than the waves of the sea the Lord on high is mighty.

It's the divine creator who is more powerful than the storms of his creation. Or this one from Psalm 29 verse 10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood The Lord sits enthroned as king forever.

[16 : 39] Psalm 46 a well-known psalm God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea though its waters roar and foam though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

Psalm 65 speaks of God as the one who by his strength established the mountains being girded with might who stills the roaring of the seas the roaring of their waves.

Or Psalm 89 verse 9 You rule the raging of the sea when its waves rise you still them. This theme comes through again and again.

Or Job 38 which I quoted earlier Who shut in the sea with doors? Who said Thus far shall you come and no farther and here shall your proud waves be stayed? So there's the Old Testament bearing eloquent witness to the one and he's the only one who has the power to still the raging sea.

So when the disciples ask what sort of a man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him the answer must be that this man is the creator of the winds and the sea. No other kind of man could do this.

[17 : 55] It's quite beyond the ability of the likes of you and me to do it. If you want to demonstrate that wait till the wind blows up strongly next go down to Largs or Troon and stand on the shore and give your commands to the sea and you'll soon discover your limitations.

So the disciples in awe and wonder they find themselves looking not only at the man who is their friend and their leader but they're just beginning to realise that he is also their creator indeed their God.

It may also be that as they look at him they find themselves looking at man in his renewed glory. This is the man.

Think of the first man Adam. Before the fall he was a lordly being. God delegated to him not only the power to give names to the animals in Genesis 2 but also in Genesis 1 the authority to fill the earth to subdue it and to exercise dominion over all its living creatures.

Now the fall of man damaged his powers and immeasurably reduced his stature. He became a being marred by sin and under sentence of death. But when Jesus came he came as the second man the last Adam man restored to his former glory with power under God over the created order.

[19 : 17] There's no one like Jesus. The disciples hardly knew the answer to their question at the time when they asked it but they came to understand later and we people with the whole Bible open in front of us can see that the man who stilled the storm is both the world's creator and the perfection of renewed mankind.

So friends Jesus has the authority to still the storm and one day he will still every storm as he rules the new world to which we shall belong if we belong to him.

Indeed if we belong to him we belong to the new world already because we've been born again into it. In the present we still live in this old world and therefore we're subject to its storms subject to the buffetings the harassments of the evil one but let's take courage if we belong to Christ ultimately we're citizens of the realm in which every storm is stilled.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. Our dear Lord Jesus we turn to you as our friend but we know that you are so much more besides.

We thank you so much that Matthew and the other early leaders and apostles were able to perceive and to set out for us so clearly the truth about your identity.

[20 : 55] Lord Jesus we confess gladly joyfully that you are not only our saviour but our God and Lord and that you are a man renewed the last Adam and indeed that we shall be made like you in the world to come.

So our prayer dear Lord Jesus is that you will renew our heartfelt trust in you that you'll help us not merely to be people who endure the storms of life but rejoice in your presence even in the midst of them.

We pray that you'll help us to walk forth with a light step and a happy heart because we belong to the one who stills the storm. We ask it for your dear name's sake.

Amen.