

What sort of man is this?

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[0 : 00] And we'll start by reading our passage at verse 18. Jesus has just delivered the Sermon on the Mount.

He's healed people. And now in verse 18, we move on. Now when Jesus saw a great crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side.

And a scribe came up to him and said, Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

And all of the disciples said to him, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him, Follow me and leave the dead to bury the dead.

And when Jesus got into the boat, his disciples followed him. Behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves.

[1 : 05] But Jesus was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, Save us, Lord, we are 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 the winds and the sea obey him?

And he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes. Two demon-possessed men met him, come out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.

Behold, they cried out, What do you do with us, O son of God? Have you come to torment us before the time? Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them.

And the demons begged him, saying, If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs. And he said to them, Go. So they came out and went into the pigs.

[2 : 03] And behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. The herdsmen fled. And going into the city, they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men.

Behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they begged him to leave the region. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray.

Lord God, as we read these words and as we listen to what you have to say to us, we pray that we will indeed listen with the openness of faith, that we may indeed hear these words.

Many of us have read these words many times before. But we pray they will come to us with something of the freshness and newness which they were first spoken.

I pray you will bless us, Lord. Bless us during these moments. We have come aside from the good things and the bad things. And bless us when we return, Lord, to our normal business, our everyday activities.

[3 : 14] And may indeed these words and the message in them speak to us and change us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. A distinguished Hindu professor of comparative religion came to faith in Christ.

And when he was asked what he found in Christianity, he couldn't find in other religions because, after all, he was a Hindu and he was professor of comparative religion, so he knew world religions very well.

And his reply was invariably, I found the dear Lord Jesus. I found the dear Lord Jesus. And you see, that is ultimately the difference between the gospel and other faiths.

The gospel is not ultimately about Christ. The gospel is Christ, the living word of God. And that's why coming to him is the important fact about the gospel.

Of course, there are certain things to believe, not drawing a distinction, as some do, between the teaching of Jesus and Jesus himself. I mean, that means we'll never know who Jesus was.

[4 : 37] The point is, though, that ultimately it's about a relationship. It's ultimately not about simply believing certain facts. All of these facts have to be believed. It's about knowing the dear Lord Jesus, as the Hindu professor said.

That seems to me, this strand that's running through these three episodes that we've read. And the title for today, it comes really from verse 27.

What sort of man is this? What sort of man is Jesus? And what kind of response do we make to him? So I see, it's not ultimately about believing a set of propositions.

It's ultimately about meeting someone who will change our lives. And of course, there are things to be believed. And as we go on in the Christian life, we're going to explore those more deeply.

And it follows on really from what's said at the very beginning of the gospel, call his name Jesus, for he will save people from their sins. Jesus' authority here in three particular areas.

[5 : 44] And in the first incident, verses 18 to 22, Jesus' authority over people. This focuses on the cost of following Jesus and his radical and uncompromising call to be his disciple.

Now, disciple at this stage in the gospel is a broad term. After all, the twelve are not chosen in this gospel until chapter 10 in our final talk.

In a week or two's time, we'll look at that, the choosing of the twelve. But in the context of Jesus' itinerant ministry, obviously crowds followed him.

Now, some of these crowds will be following simply for curiosity's sake, to see a miracle, and so on. And this was one of the things we noticed last week. But many of them would have a genuine stirring of faith.

Who was this? What sort of a man is this? What is Jesus then saying here? Jesus is saying, first of all, that to follow him will mean insecurity.

[6 : 52] Look at verse 20. Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. That does not mean if you're a follower of Jesus, you have to be on the streets.

It doesn't mean that. What it does mean is that following Jesus is no guarantee of earthly success and earthly security. We have to count the cost.

Jesus is saying, don't follow me unless you realize it's going to cost. Unless you realize, in fact, it's going to cost everything, it's going to cost you life. And notice he uses this title, Son of Man.

It comes from Daniel chapter 7. The Son of Man came, and the clouds of glory set up his kingdom. In other words, Jesus is saying, in this world there will be insecurity.

In this world there will be difficulties. But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, there will be reward. So that's the first thing.

- [7 : 54] It will mean insecurity. And the second thing it means is his claims are overriding. Verse 21, even before family. Now, it's important we don't misunderstand this.
- Very often it's said that Jesus is anti-family. Now, if you read the Gospels, to find teaching about the family, you'll be very surprised.
- Doesn't Jesus say somewhere that whoever follows me and does not hate father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, is not worthy to be my disciple.
- Jesus is not telling us to hate our loved ones and our families. Jesus is saying, if the choice comes between our most precious possessions and our dearest people, he must have the priority.
- Actually, for some people, this is only too easy. I can't remember, one author actually, I can't remember who it is now, when he's talking about these incidents, says he imagines the group of disciples puzzled and Judas licking his lips in joy, thinking, oh good, that means I don't have to bother about my family.
- [9 : 17] You see, that's not what Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying, my claims must be first. He must be first in our lives. You see, as C.S. Lewis said, it's not the greatness of our love for our families, but the poverty of our love for Christ that is usually a problem.
- So Jesus is saying here, look, if you're going to follow me, count the cost. It's not easy. It's not the easy option. It's going to count the cost.
- And we must put Christ at the center of our decision making, at the center of our lives. Jesus' authority over people. Come, follow me, as he says elsewhere.
- And elsewhere, he's going to say, whoever follows me must take up his cross. But what right does Jesus have to demand this? And that seems to me the point of this second little episode in verses 23 to 27.
- Jesus' authority over creation. You see, if Jesus has authority over creation, that means he is the creator.
- [10 : 30] That means he created humanity as well. And that means, therefore, he has a right to demand this of humanity. None of us have a right to demand this kind of thing from people.
- But Jesus, as the creator, the one who made us, has that right. What sort of man is this? And it focuses on who Jesus is.
- This is a nature miracle where he is asleep during a storm, and then he rises and quells that storm.
- And it's also a story about faith. Verse 26, O you of little faith. Now, as I say, his disciples here are not simply the twelve.
- They're a group of people particularly associated with him. Later on, once the twelve are chosen, there's going to be another episode, longer episode, of stilling the storm where Jesus, in fact, walks on the lake.
- [11 : 35] But the disciples' faith is not yet mature. They're not clear exactly who he is. Indeed, we went to chapter 16 of this gospel before Peter says, you are the Christ, you are the promised Messiah, you are the Son of the living God.
- And their faith is growing. And this is an episode that helps that faith to go, what sort of a man is this that even wins and see, obey him?
- You see, already, Jesus had done wonderful things. He had healed lepers. He had cast out demons. He had spoken with unparalleled authority.
- We are told, at the end of chapter 7, he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes. But others had done that. Elijah and Elisha read their stories in the Old Testament, the books of Kings.

They had done all these things. Indeed, they had even raised the dead. But, one thing that only the Creator could do is to tell the waves thus far and no further.

[12 : 46] And that's the whole point about this story. Throughout the Old Testament, the sea, the raging sea, is not just the physical body of water on our planet.

Although, if you looked at Earth from space, you'd be more inclined to call it water than Earth because water covers so much of the surface of the planet. It's also a symbol of the power of darkness, the power of evil.

Only the Creator can control. So, what sort of man is this? He has the right to demand our allegiance because he speaks with the voice of the Creator himself.

I think it's very important actually to see this. When Jesus says, O you of little faith, it's not so much a stern rebuke. It's a, it's once again following on from the give up everything and follow me.

Basically, faith is something that has to grow. Faith is not a static deposit we are given at the beginning of our Christian life and then that's it. Faith is something that ebbs and flows.

[14 : 01] And the important thing is ultimately not our faith. The important thing is who or what we have faith in. People often say, Oh, I really rely on my faith.

Do you? I don't rely on my faith at all. My faith comes and goes. My faith blows hot and cold. If I relied on my faith, the kingdom would never come.

It doesn't depend on our faith. Faith is necessary. Faith opens the way for the power of God. But it's not faith itself that matters.

It's who we have faith in. And the continual emphasis throughout the Bible is not so much on our fickle faith but on the unchanging faithfulness of God.

And I think that's so important. It doesn't mean we don't need faith but it does mean that we don't, we are not ultimately judged by faith.

[15 : 00] We are ultimately saved by grace and grace gives to us that faith to open the door. So, Jesus' authority over people.

Jesus' authority over creation. And in the third episode, The Demon Possessed Men, Jesus' authority over the realm beyond the unseen world.

Jesus has authority over people. He has authority over creation. What about the unseen world? I'm not calling it the supernatural world because the Bible doesn't talk in those terms.

It doesn't talk about the natural world and the supernatural world. It talks about the seen world and the unseen world. They are both real. They both matter.

But, does Jesus have authority over this unseen world? And of course, this unseen world has visibly erupted into our world here. And in the ancient graveyards beside the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Galilee was surrounded by an ancient graveyard and very often there were small anterooms or caves at the front of these which gave protection of a certain sort against the weather.

[16 : 15] And, once again, the focus is on Jesus and the response. and first of all, the contrast between the demons and the disciples.

The demons know exactly who Jesus is. The disciples don't at this point. The demons know who he is and they notice, yes, what have you to do with us, son of God?

Have you come here to torment us before the time? The theology of hell is totally orthodox. We are told the letter, James, the demons believe and tremble.

They have no doubt who he is and they know about eternal judgment. But, you see, that knowledge does them no good at all because they remain unrepentant and hostile.

See, the disciples' faith is small. It's a mustard seed but it's going to grow. These demons' knowledge is never going to make any difference because knowing who he is, knowing his power, they still remain hostile.

[17 : 27] Now, it's very important to realize that later on Jesus is going to talk about the sin that cannot be forgiven and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The sin which is the sin of consciously, deliberately, persistently rejecting Christ even when we know who he is. Over the years many people have said to me, I'm afraid I've committed the unforgivable sin.

The answer to that is, well, you obviously haven't because if you had committed the unforgivable sin, you would not be afraid because the essence of the unforgivable sin is not that God will not forgive but that you will not accept forgiveness.

It's not a case that come to God in real repentance and want to be forgiven, he turns us away. It's a case of persisting deliberately, consciously in sin.

Remember, there's different types of sins. There's sins that we commit because we are careless, negligent. There's sins we commit because we're weak. We want to do better, but we succumb.

[18 : 42] there's also deliberate, persistent sinning. And even that can be forgiven if we come to Christ. After all, remember the dying criminal at the end of the gospel story who after a life presumably of sin and rebellion then came to Christ.

So, you see, the point is the demons know but do not believe. The disciples, or at least some of them because some of them are going to turn back, have an imperfect knowledge and yet they are prepared to be open.

And this is also a story about priorities. Now, verse 30, a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance. The demons begged him, you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.

So, they came out, went into the pigs and rushed down, the gadarean swine, as they're often called, that rushed down into the water. Now, it's a puzzling little story in many ways.

After all, if you'd been the owner of the pigs, you would scarcely have been delighted at this episode. The point is, the crowd there preferred pigs to people.

[19 : 58] They were more interested in their own herds than they were in these demon-possessed men being healed. and they did not want a Christ to challenge their way of life.

Verse 34, Behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. They had nothing of the sort.

They begged him to leave the region. Their whole way of, you see, if they accepted who he was, or even began the journey to accept who he was, then their whole way of life would have to change, their priorities would have to change.

And that's where, of course, these stories link together. The first story is authority over people. But these people, at the end of the chapter, won't accept him, won't believe in him, and want to get rid of him.

And then his authority over creation, his authority over the unseen world. Jesus, and the question therefore is, what sort of a man is this?

[21 : 03] think about it for a moment. We know the story. But if we'd been around at the time, as this man comes along, he speaks with unparalleled authority, he does wonderful things, that's fine in itself.

And then he says, look, give up everything and follow me. That is very, very disturbing. And unless we have convictions about who he is, unless we believe that he has the right to command, unless we believe because he is the creator, that he can bring about his purpose.

It's like the heart of the Old Testament faith is, my help is in the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Unless we believe that he has power over the unseen world, the world of which we are afraid, then we're never going to believe him.

You see, the point is, as I say, Jesus himself forces us to make these decisions, he places himself right at the center of the story. Someone said Jesus came not so much to preach the gospel, but there might be a gospel to be preached.

Now, we won't want to push that too far. He did preach the gospel, but the point is, if he had not come, there would be no gospel to preach, no fulfillment of scripture, and no radical change.

[22 : 29] And that's what these stories are about. As the kingdom advances, and as the kingdom breaks into sphere after sphere of human life, and beyond it, Jesus is saying, then, as he says, now, follow me.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, these stories disturb us as they disturb the people at the time. And yet, these stories which bring disturbance also bring healing.

Those stories which challenge us also bring us strength and encouragement. And those stories which seem so strange are stories about the one who is the way, the truth, and the life.

And so help us to follow him daily and all the days of our life. In his name. Amen. So may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us, and all whom we love now and always.

Amen. Amen.