

What Sort of Man Is This?

Matthew 8:23-9:8

Please turn in your Bible's to Matthew 8. I watched with interest and some worry the track of Hurricane Irma last weekend as I have very dear friends who live in Florida. I've lived through a hurricane, living in South Florida, as Hurricane Andrew roared through in 1992. As Hurricane Irma made it's way towards the Caribbean and Florida, I came across a quote on the power of hurricanes from the book *The Perfect Storm* by Sebastian Junger. It's the story of seasoned fishermen trapped in a hurricane off the coast of Maine in 1991. Junger writes, "*A mature hurricane is by far the most powerful event on earth; the combined nuclear arsenals of the United States and the former Soviet Union don't contain enough energy to keep a hurricane going for one day. A typical hurricane encompasses a million cubic miles of atmosphere and could provide all the electric power needed by the United States for three or four years.*" As we'll see in a moment from our passage, the miraculous and authoritative word of the Lord Jesus Christ brings great calm to real storms in people's lives – but that's not the point of these stories.

Two weeks ago we began studying Matthew 8 by looking at the first of three cycles of miracles Matthew records for us. I think it's helpful to review some of the purposes we looked at regarding why Jesus did miracles during His earthly ministry **First, miracles are a confirmation of Jesus' message and the Apostle's preaching.** Hebrews 2:1 says, "*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*" **Second, Jesus' miracles are given to persuade people towards belief that Jesus is indeed the long awaited Messiah who has come.** John 20:30 says, "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" **Third, Jesus' miracles often point to His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as the Messiah.** Matthew told us this truth summarizing the first cycle of miracles he cites in Matthew 8:17, "*This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah; 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.'*" The New Testament writers often see in Jesus' miracles His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy regarding the Messiah. **Finally, miracles are an attestation, a confirmation, a substantiation, or a verification, of Jesus' divine character and person.** Miracles are one of the ways that we see that Jesus is God incarnate, that He is the God-man, that He is deity. This second cycle of miracle stories Matthew gives us drives this point home powerfully.

As Matthew records these miracles for us, fear plays a major role. In the story of the storm on the Sea of Galilee we see the fear of the disciples. In the story of the Gadarene demoniacs we see the fear of demons and the people, and in the story of the paralytic brought to Jesus by His friends, Jesus confronts the greatest fear of human beings. And in all these stories, Matthew's purpose in telling them is to show the Lord Jesus Christ's absolute and total authority over the fears we might face in life.

We'll look at each of these stories and explore how they connect to our lives. In Matthew 8:23, Matthew gives us a story that demonstrates **Jesus' Authority Over the Natural World.** "*And when he 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 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 winds and sea obey him?'"*

As I said when we looked at the miracle stories Matthew gave at the beginning of chapter 8, the miracles themselves are not the focus but serve as the backdrop for the larger purposes Matthew has to teach us about who Jesus is and what His mission is. This again is carried through in these three miracle stories as well. The parts of this first miracle story read like a Hollywood script. Jesus has had an intense night of ministry, confronted two

would be disciples on the demands of discipleship, and now gets in a boat to go from the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee to the eastern coast and a region called the Gadarenes. In other words, Jesus is moving from Jewish land to Gentile land. Along the way, Matthew says **a storm of biblical proportions arises**. The Sea of Galilee lies between 600 and 700 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills and mountains. This makes for quick and violent storms suddenly arising on the sea. Matthew describes the fishing boat Jesus and the disciples are in being swamped by the waves crashing over to the point that these seasoned and hardened fishermen believe they are going to die. Almost ironically, in their moment of desperate and lifesaving need, **sailors seek a carpenter for help**. Matthew uses three words in the original language so the disciples are literally saying to Jesus “Save, Lord, perishing.” The staccato nature just emphasizes the dire position the disciples find themselves in.

Jesus is sleeping in the hull of the boat, a reminder as Jesus said to the would-be disciples we looked at last week, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Jesus gets up, and gently but purposefully, admonishes His disciples for their little faith. Jesus is not upset at the level of their faith, the disciples have faith, because they place as much confidence in Jesus as they think He can accomplish. But it is little faith, because it is deficient to the task at hand. We might imagine Jesus goes to prow of the boat, waves and wind crashing and whipping all around, and Matthew says Jesus gave **a simple rebuke to the wind and astonishingly the creation immediately obeyed**. That’s impressive, but notice how the disciples respond, instead of saying wow look at what this man can do, verse 27, *“And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”* **And that is the point of the story – Jesus is God over creation**. As good Jewish men, students of the word of God, the disciples knew that only God is able to direct the wind and the waves. Psalm 89:9 says, *“You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.”* Again in Psalm 107:29, *“He made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were hushed.”* The creator God alone has authority over His creation. This is the point of the story Matthew lived through and learned, increasing his faith that Jesus indeed is the long awaited Messiah who has come.

And while that is the point of the story, there is also a promise for us – **the promise in the story is that God is with you**. We often take from this story that if we just believe Jesus will end the storms in our lives. That could certainly happen, but the Bible makes no guarantee that it will happen. Your cancer may not go away, your marital struggle may not end this week or even this year, your floundering career may not right immediately, and we can add a whole host of issues and struggle to this list. As a Christian, as a disciple and follower of Jesus, your hope is not that these storms will end very soon. But that in the midst of the storms in your life, you will never be alone. God, in Jesus Christ will be with you in the storm. Faith is not confidence that trials won’t come your way. Faith is confidence that no matter what wind and waves come your way in this world, the God who holds authority in this universe will be with you in the boat. Jesus is God is the point of the story, and that His presence is always with you is the promise.

In verse 28, Matthew moves the story to the non-Jewish country of the Gadarenes; and the point is to show **Jesus’ authority over the spiritual world**. As soon as Jesus and the disciples arrive, Matthew tells us **two Gentile, demon-possessed men, no one can control** come fiercely out of the tombs to confront Jesus. The demons, speaking through the men they’re possessing, have a more developed **understanding of Jesus’ true identity and a clear fear of His authoritative power**. We find in this story that the people in the region of the Gadarenes also **fear Jesus’ power**, as the disciples in the boat did, but they respond not in marveling wonder, but **begging Jesus to leave**. Verse 28, *“And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here 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, 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. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.”*

The whole scene of Jesus banishing the demons into the pigs and the pigs running headlong to their deaths in the sea has given rise to lots of speculation on what's happening here. So often again with the miracle stories, we can get lost in the details. I think this is rather simple. In Revelation, Satan and his demons at the final judgement are cast into the lake of fire for all eternity (Revelation 20:10). I think this scene is simply foreshadowing what is to come. Because overall, Matthew's purpose is to focus us again on a single point – **Jesus is God over the Devil**. God and the Devil are not a yin and yang to one another; two equals seeking to win out over the other. No friends, Satan and the demons are only ever under the sovereign authority of God. These demons hate and loathe everything about Jesus, but apart from His authority, they are powerless to do anything. That is the point of this miracle story, but there is also a **promise in the story and the promise is God values human beings**. We get it that demons would have no value for human life. The gospel writers don't tell us much about the destruction these demons have brought in possessing these men, but we can assume it has brought tremendous shame to their families, has destroyed their own livelihoods, and has resulted in untold pain in their community. So it makes sense to us that the demons don't value human beings. But it's insightful that Matthew points out that the men overseeing the herd of pigs, report what's happened to the pigs, and especially the demon possessed men. But the towns people seem more concerned for their pigs, than that these men have been freed from bondage to demons. Friends, God values human beings, when no one else would do anything for the tormented men, enslaved and possessed by demons, Jesus freed them. God values people, and that's what makes the third miracle story we see in our passage today so powerful.

Matthew has given us a story that speaks to Jesus' authority over the natural world, on the heels of that a second story that demonstrates Jesus' authority over the spiritual world. These two stories are drawing us to the most important story Matthew wants us to see in this section – **Jesus' authority over the salvation of man**. Notice how Matthew has held these stories together by geography. Jesus leaves Capernaum, travels across the Sea of Galilee to the Gadarenes, and **returns to Capernaum, which is Jesus' base of operations during His Galilean ministry**. This is likely a familiar story to many of us, some **faith-filled friends bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus to be healed**. In Mark's gospel we're told the house is so full, the friends have to go up to the roof, peel away the shingles, and lower their friend down in front of Jesus. 9:1 says, *“And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic lying on a bed.”* We've now been through five miracle stories and what we are to expect at this point is for Jesus to touch the man, which will heal him, and then we move on. But Jesus doesn't do that. Verse 2, *“And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.’”* For the first time in Matthew's gospel, we see the **Scribe's oppose Jesus' ministry**. Opposition to Jesus' ministry by the Jewish religious leaders; the Scribes, Pharisee's and Sadducees will only increase. And here in this first picture of opposition we see that the Scribes detect a major issue in what Jesus says. Verse 3, *“Some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This man is blaspheming.’ But Jesus knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, your sins are forgiven, or to say rise and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins – he then said to the paralytic – Rise, pick up your bed and go home. And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.”*

Friends, don't miss this, Matthew has been driving to this point the entire time. **The point of the story is that Jesus is God over our greatest need**. Jesus is not being obtuse in saying to the man your sins are forgiven, Jesus knows the man wants to be healed of his paralysis. But Jesus knows, paralysis is a symptom of a far greater need, and that is the forgiveness of sin. You see, our greatest need is never physical, it is always spiritual. This holds true no matter what type of suffering we are experiencing. If we're suffering as a result of our own sin, the need we address is spiritual – we go to the core of where we are in our relationship with God. On the other hand, if we are suffering simply as a result of living in a sinful world, our ultimate need is still spiritual. We desperately need to know in the midst of our suffering that the Lord's grace is sufficient. That is the point of the story. Jesus is God over our greatest need. And this is the promise in the story - **God meets our greatest need in the cross of Christ**. Some of you are in storms today, perhaps you are in bondage, perhaps suffering from some difficulty or ailment – friends Jesus is the authoritative God you can cling to, and in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ your greatest need, salvation from sin, is freely offered and can be freely received by placing our faith alone in Christ alone.