

Jesus: LORD of Nature and Demons

It may be difficult for us, as Americans, to understand the importance of listening carefully to a lord or a king, but Jesus has been emphasizing that in His case to hear Him rightly is literally a matter of life or death. To hear King Jesus rightly means that we are graciously invited into the Kingdom of God where we now have the privilege of living for something much greater than our own selfish pleasures – it means that we now are enabled by God’s Spirit to live for God’s glory and enjoy Him forever so that we might once again bear fruit for God with patience (8:10, 15). The very purpose for which we were created will now be fulfilled in us who hear Jesus so that, as He is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all, then we too might bear His light so that others may come in and see the Light (v. 16, 18). Further, those who hear Jesus’ words and live by them will be His “mother and brothers,” His own precious family whom He loves and cherishes (v. 21). But it is only when we will see Him face-to-face that we will most truly understand the importance of listening carefully to every word that proceeds from the mouth of our LORD and Savior, Jesus.

But how do we know that listening to Jesus is the right choice for our lives? After all, there are many voices vying for our attention in this world. How do we know that siding with Jesus is not a huge mistake by which we will end up losing all that we could have lived for in this life?

Through the next set of stories, Jesus will demonstrate His authority over all the forces which threaten to destroy our lives. First, we will see Jesus unique power over the forces of nature – those forces of nature when they become hostile toward us (vv. 22-25), then His authority over the realm of personal evil itself – when the realm of Satan invades and manifests itself in our world (vv. 26-39). He then will display His power over disease and death, which stands opposed to living life to the fullest (vv. 40-56). The full authority of Jesus will be finally and fully demonstrated when sinners will nail Him to the cross leaving Him to die a terrible death and yet with the full authority of heaven and earth He will, in victory, remove the sting of death forevermore for all who trust in Him. Once the disciples of Jesus see that not only does divine, Kingly power reside within Jesus to do these things, but that He has authority to transmit that same power to those He chooses (9:1-17), they insightfully confess that He is in fact “the Christ of God” (9:20) – He is the Messiah, the King of God’s Kingdom.

So the next few stories are vitally important to demonstrate to all who have eyes to see that Jesus is in fact worthy of hearing Him and living by every word that proceeds from His lips. Jesus doesn’t ask you to blindly follow Him. He demonstrates for you His worthiness of your full and complete trust in Him. It of course only by the divine work of the Holy Spirit who will

confirm in your hearts what you are about to read if He so chooses, but He does so not without a demonstration of Jesus full kingly authority over all that threatens your life with destruction.

Jesus' Authority Over Nature (vv. 22-25)

We begin with Jesus on the move again with His disciples. It is as if Jesus has appointment on the other side of the Galilean lake, but no time with Jesus is ever wasted (v. 22). Even during the intervening journey to the other side, Jesus has something important to show His disciples. As they set out across the lake, Jesus decides to take a much needed nap (v. 23). It is never a good idea to fall asleep while setting out on the Lake of Galilee. That lake is notorious for sudden, deadly storms raging with little to no warning. But Jesus sleeps not so much for Himself but to demonstrate what it looks like to be completely confident in the LORD of the wind and waves.

It is at the moment that Jesus is fast asleep that a terrible wind stirred up the waves, filling the boat with water, unsettling the disciples (v. 23). Remember that several of the disciples were fishermen and had most likely been in this situation before knowing just what sort of danger they were all in (v. 23). They were terrified thinking that they were certainly not going to live through this. Many of you this morning have probably experienced such a harrowing experience that it was as if your whole life suddenly flashed before your eyes and you thought in a moment that this was it – the last minute of your life.

At least the disciples rightly knew who to turn to in this frightening moment – they cry out, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” (v. 24). They most likely did not understand the full important of calling Jesus, “Master,” at this moment but that title will one day be filled up completely when they finally see Him raised from the dead.

When Jesus is awakened, with complete composure and confidence in God’s sovereignty, He speaks to the wind and waves, as He did the day He brought them into existence, and they obeyed the voice of their Master immediately. **Psalm 104:6-7:**

Psalm 104:6-7 ⁶ You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. ⁷ At your rebuke they fled; at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.

But the language here is even stronger. Jesus doesn’t simply speak but rebukes. Jesus doesn’t simply suggest but commands and the raging winds and waves suddenly stop and everything in the disciples’ world returns to perfect peace and calm (v. 24). But Jesus knew this the whole time, that is why He could sleep while the disciples’ world was turning upside down and inside out.

Throughout the Old Testament, Yahweh is described as absolute sovereign over the seas (**Jb. 38:8-11; Pss. 65:5-8; 77:16; 89:8-9; 104:6-7; 106:9; 107:23-32; Nah. 1:4**). **Ps. 107** is especially beautiful:

Psalm 107:23-31 ²³ Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; ²⁴ they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. ²⁵ For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. ²⁶ They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; ²⁷ they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. ²⁸ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ²⁹ He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. ³⁰ Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. ³¹ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

Psalm 77:16 says:

Psalm 77:16 ¹⁶ When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled.

In that sudden moment, the disciples realize that their fear was misdirected. Truly they had nothing to be afraid of with Right Man at their side. It wasn't the raging storm around them that they should have been afraid of, but the LORD of the Seas who was lying next to them in the boat. When Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith, Luke tells us that now they were truly afraid – their eyes were opened and now they are truly seeing who Jesus really is. As they marvel at what Jesus has just done they say among themselves, "Who is this that He commands even winds and water and they obey Him (v. 25)?"

The way the Gospels are written, you the reader should be asking yourself, "Who do you say Jesus is?" Clearly throughout human history, even among the Greeks who believed in many gods who controlled the weather, no human being ever had authority like this to command the weather at will. That is why the Greeks and the Romans, and many pagans before them, created the whole panoply of gods who controlled the weather in the first place. It was because the ancient world feared the weather, that no man can control, that they created a system of gods and sacrifices in hopes that they could manipulate the gods to give them favorable conditions to live their lives securely. But here is the One who has authority in Himself, not merely over other men, but even over violent nature which threatens to destroy human life. He merely speaks to the winds and the waves and they do what He tells them.

After Jesus is raised from the dead and is about the return to His Father in Heaven He makes you an incredible promise. As He sends you out into the world, after everything He has

finished and given to you, He declares, “Behold, I am with you even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). He has poured out His Spirit upon you and given you His Word and Sacraments to comfort you in life’s storms. What can this fallen world throw at you knowing that you have Immanuel at your side that you should be afraid of? Is there anything that can harm you with Jesus at your side that He doesn’t ordain for your welfare? Hold fast to Him and every word that proceeds from the mouth of your King – follow Him and you will not be afraid of whatever comes your way.

Jesus’ Authority Over Demons (vv. 26-39)

But Jesus isn’t finished yet with the lesson of the day. As readers, we now know why Jesus earlier wanted to go to the other side of the lake (v. 22). When they finally arrive on the southeast shore of Galilee, they are greeted by a man possessed with many demons (v. 27, 30). The Gerasenes were heavily populated by Gentiles, which explains the large herd of pigs which are nearby (v. 32, 34). As a man possessed of many demons, we the readers suddenly wonder if Jesus is about to once again be tested, as when Satan tested Him in the wilderness (cf. 4:1-13). Instead, we find a man in an extremely pitiable condition. He is described not as a man but as a beast. He wanders around like a beast wearing no clothes. Rather than living in a house like a man, he makes his abode among the dead (v. 27). Many have tried to constrain him in the past with no success (v. 29). Further, he had been in this beastly condition for a long time, which tells us that no one has been able to help this man who has suffered for so greatly (v. 27). What a pitiful condition when one who bears the image of God has come to be possessed of Satan’s evil forces. But isn’t this truly the condition that all mankind suffers? Maybe the powerful display of Satan’s possession of man isn’t as dramatically visual as this man suffered but Paul describes all of us being born into this same condition:

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Here, we learn much about Jesus that his sheer presence does what no other had been able to do before – the demon possessed man is suddenly subdued and falls prostrate before Jesus’ feet (v. 28). Merely seeing Jesus is enough to bring order out of chaos. Seeing the pitiable condition of the man – note the incredible love of Jesus for the man whom all others had cast away to the tombs of dead men (v. 29). Where many others had failed in the futile attempts to constrain the man – with Jesus no such difficulty stands in His way (v. 29). Jesus now confronts the demons themselves.

We should not be shocked that the demons know perfectly well who Jesus is. They have had a long history with Jesus, going back to the earliest days of creation when they chose to follow Satan in his rebellion against God. James tells us that the demons believe and shudder at the profession that God is one (**James 2:19**). They not only rightly identify Jesus as the Son of the Most High God but they are rightly afraid that He possesses all power of heaven and earth to condemn in their end-time judgment to the abyss, even before the expected time of their condemnation (**vv. 28, 31**).

Even as the demons beg Jesus not to torment them, Jesus demonstrates that He is in the One who is in control. Rather than answer their request, Jesus commands the demons to give up their name by which Jesus will now direct their destiny. Their name is “Legion,” which reflects the military might of the Roman occupying forces along with the cruelty of their practices (**v. 30**; Nolland, 414).

The demons continue their imploring of Jesus, knowing that their destiny is completely in the hands of the One who holds their entire existence in the palm of His hands (**v. 31**). They know that one possibility is that they will now be confined into the abyss by which their evil deeds of possessing humans will be constrained (**cf. Rev. 9:1-2, 11; 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:4, etc.**). Knowing that Jesus is intent on freeing this man as their playground, they see a herd of pigs and beg Jesus to cast them into those dirty beasts instead (**v. 32**). Now, many have wondered at this moment why Jesus permits their request to be cast into the pigs rather than assign them to the place prepared by God for their eternal torment. Why doesn't Jesus free our world from this handful of personal evil so they will no longer be able to treat more humans as their playthings? Well, it is clear that Jesus still has a purpose for them to roam about in our world seeking whom they may devour (**1 Pet. 5:8**). Demons have freedom to torment human beings not by their own power or authority but at the direct authority of the King of the universe who uses them for His sovereign purposes alone.

When Jesus finally casts the demons into the herd of pigs, we see the kind of cruelty they could have brought upon the man had they been permitted to end his life (**v. 33**). The following responses are priceless. First, we find the man who had been troubled by the demons now sitting calmly and in his right mind at Jesus feet – fully restored into the image of God – rightfully hearing Jesus as a new disciple (**v. 35**). Second, the people were rightly afraid – seeing God acting in their midst – and like Peter before them, beg Jesus to depart from them (**vv. 35, 37**; **cf. 5:8**). Jesus departs from them because the time of the Gentiles has not yet come (**v. 37**). But he doesn't leave them without a witness, which one must wonder what kind of ministry he must have had among his fellow countrymen as he told many what Jesus had done for him (**vv. 38-39**).

Jesus is LORD and King over all, even the forces in the world that seek to destroy our lives, whether they are personal or impersonal. Nothing can harm you that your Faithful Savior isn't in full authority and control over. He holds your very life in the palm of His hands and loves you completely so that even when He ordains trials and pain in your life you know full well that it is for your good (**cf. Rom. 8:28**). He not only calls you to hear Him rightly but trust Him. You have nothing to fear but God alone and you know that He uses all things in heaven and on earth to conform you into His glorious image for which you have been predestined in His love (**cf. Rom. 8:29**). Nothing in heaven or earth will ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our LORD (**cf. Rom. 8:39**).

Amen!

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