

**Jesus Shows What Kind of Man He Is**

Matthew 8:23-27

*by Rev. Michael G. Lilienthal*

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, increase our faith. Lead us to see you as you have revealed yourself, as God made flesh, as the Savior from sin. Help our unbelief and fear, and direct our eyes always to you. You have given us your Word for this purpose, so direct us to read and hear it in faith, to the strengthening of that faith. In your name we pray. Amen.

Hymn: *ELH #219*—“Lord, as Thou Wilt, Deal Thou with Me”

You of faith, little or great,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:7, ESV). Amen.

Text: Matthew 8:23-27

<sup>23</sup>When he got into a boat, his disciples followed him.

<sup>24</sup>Suddenly a terrible storm came up on the sea, so that their boat was covered by the waves. But Jesus was sleeping.

<sup>25</sup>They went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to die!”

<sup>26</sup>He said to them, “Why are you afraid, you of little faith?” Then he got up, rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a complete calm.

<sup>27</sup>The men were amazed, saying, “What kind of a man is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!”

*These are your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

(John 17:17).

Let us ask this question: “What kind of man is this?” What kind indeed? No normal man can command the wind and the sea, so that they actually *obey* him. In Shakespeare’s play, King Lear commanded the storm in his madness:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!  
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
 Till you have drench’d our steeples, drown’d the cocks!  
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,  
 Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,  
 Smite flat the thick rotundity o’ the world!  
 Crack nature’s moulds, an germens spill at once,  
 That make ingrateful man!<sup>1</sup>

But he accomplished nothing but to appear as a madman. But here before us is no madman. “Jesus was sleeping” as the storm raged. And when he awoke, he “rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a complete calm.” So yes, “What kind of man is this?” Jesus reveals himself as **a man who is also God**, and as **a man who has come to repair broken creation**.

### I. A Man Who Is Also God

It’s a common theme today to read this text as an allegory. We think that the disciples stand for us, the boat stands for the church, the sea stands for the world, and the storm stands for the various storms and difficulties of life. Tell me if this moral doesn’t sound familiar: “Just as Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, so he calms all the storms of life and brings us his peace!”

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<sup>1</sup> *King Lear* III.ii.1-9.

Here's the problem with that interpretation, aside from the fact that this is *a literal history and not a parable*:

Jesus, in fact, does *not* always protect us from the storms of life, at least not in any sense that corresponds to the shape of the narrative in [this text]. In Matthew's account, Jesus *makes the danger go away*. The disciples do not die, nor does the boat sink. But in genuine Christian experience, both individually and corporately, the church's Lord often allows the danger to remain, even prevail.<sup>2</sup>

This text is, in fact, *not* about how Jesus protects us through all the dangers of life. Does he? Yes, for Jesus himself said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28, ESV). But if that is the message we get from this account in Matthew's Gospel, we start to get self-centered, we start to think that we must be rescued from every danger, we think it's all about *us*. Here's the shocker: did you know the Bible isn't about you? It's about Jesus.

And what does it tell us about who Jesus is? On this occasion, "he got up, rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a complete calm." This really begins to demonstrate the extent of Jesus' great and majestic authority: "The one who has healed and cast out demons by means of a word (8:8, 16) now *rebukes* the winds – and they obey him, so that a 'great calm' (8:26) replaces the 'great storm' (8:24)!"<sup>3</sup> We are confronted with a Jesus who manifests divine authority over nature, over wind and sea: that this is indeed the power of God himself is proven by how the Psalms describe the

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<sup>2</sup> Gibbs 443.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 445.

Lord as one “who stills the roaring of the seas, / the roaring of their waves” (Ps. 65:7, ESV), and praises him: “You rule the raging of the sea; / when its waves rise, you still them” (Ps. 89:9, ESV). Jesus, by stilling the great seismic storm, proves that he is God almighty in the flesh. He is a man who is also God.

We can see in this also a paradox: how can a man be also God? But Jesus is! Notice where we find him toward the beginning of this account: “Suddenly a terrible storm came up on the sea, so that their boat was covered by the waves. *But Jesus was sleeping.*” He was *tired*. God doesn’t get tired, does he? God doesn’t sleep? In fact, in Sunday School you probably laughed at the foolish idolatry of the Israelites when Elijah mocked them about Baal: “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened” (1 Kings 18:27, ESV). It’s laughable, because we know that God, the true God, is no weakling like humans, needing to sleep, or to use the bathroom, or getting lost in thought, or going so far away he can’t hear us.

But now, hear this: “*Jesus was sleeping.*” And folks, he was really sleeping. He was dead asleep: The storm was raging around him, “so that their boat was covered by the waves,” but Jesus slept on through it soundly. Based on the mockery of Elijah, we might expect to have to change our thinking on one of two things: either God *can* and *does* sleep, and is in fact weaker than we know, or Jesus is *not* God.

But this is the epiphany of Jesus: he is both God and Man. He is a man who needs his rest, who needs to sleep, and who does, in fact, sleep – that is, he is one of us, just like us who grow weak, who cannot keep our eyes open, who sometimes grow so

tired from work and life that we fall into a dead sleep from which even our alarms cannot wake us, so that we sleep in too late, when we should be up and taking care of our obligations. But in *that* man is all the might and authority of God. He takes care of business with ease. It's so simple: "Then he got up, rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a complete calm." The Word of Christ is the power of the Word of God, ruling over all he created. But before rebuking the wind and the wave, he rebuked his disciples: "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" What Jesus demonstrates by this question is, first, that his disciples *should* have known who he was and what he could, and would, do, and therefore should not have worked themselves up with such fear; and second, that he was concerned that his disciples *have* faith, it is important to him.

It is finally, therefore, for this reason that Jesus calms the storm: he is showing his disciples just what kind of man he is: the God-Man who not only has authority to calm a storm, but who "has authority to calm the chaos and restore peace to the fallen creation."<sup>4</sup>

## II. A Man Who Has Come to Repair Creation

There is something that the storm in this account teaches us: It's not about the storms of life, but it's related, in that they all share a common cause. The storms of life and this seismic event on the Sea of Galilee are both the result of our sinful and broken world. St. Paul notes that "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12, ESV). The

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

original sin of our first parents affected all creation. Death came in, and with it, pain and suffering and misery and woe. And more than all this, eternal death and damnation became our lot. The natural state of creation, because of sin, is to be tossed in chaos and turmoil – it is *all* storm and destruction.

God originally created the world to be “very good” (Gen. 1:31, ESV). It was designed *perfectly*. We wrecked it. Maybe not we personally, not at the beginning, but since then, every generation of people, and every individual person, has contributed to the wreck of this once-perfect creation. The storm on Galilee’s Sea is just one iteration of the corruption. The disciples, however, see the symptom, and not the disease: “Lord, save us! We’re going to die!” What an ironic thing to say!

“We’re going to die!” they said. This is true. Without knowing it, the disciples were confessing the truth of what God had warned in the Garden: “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17, ESV). Satan tried deceiving Eve by telling her, “You will not surely die” (Gen. 3:4, ESV). That was proven a lie by the curse placed upon Adam after his sin: “you are dust, / and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19, ESV). “We’re going to die!” cried the disciples, but they were only thinking about the storm.

Likewise, they were only thinking about the storm when they shouted the first part of their cry: “Lord, save us!” or in Greek, “κύριε, σῶσον”! What you don’t realize in English is, the Greek word κύριε was the common word used for the Divine Name, יהוה, the first part of which – *ye* – gets attached to that other Greek word σῶσον into another entire word: Ἰησοῦς. This is the name of Jesus, and the very purpose for which he came:

He is the Lord who saves. But the storm was not the point, as the disciples erroneously supposed.

The disciples were right that they were going to die. They were right that Jesus was their Lord and he could save them. They were right, even to come to him with their plea. But the weakness of their faith consists in this: they were focused on something far too small. They saw this earthly storm, which is only one facet of the greater problem: Jesus' authority-filled miracle in this section "promises that there will come a time when not just storms on the Sea of Galilee will be stilled, but the entire creation will be restored to God's design, to its original submission under the rule and reign of the God who made it."<sup>5</sup>

This was Jesus' whole mission. This is who Jesus shows himself to be. And in this, it was necessary for him to be God made man. Only God had the authority and power to bring fallen creation back into submission. Only a man could take on himself the duty and the punishment of man. Therefore Jesus' work comprised his humbling himself under the pains and storms of life – for we see that not even for Jesus, the most perfect man to live, were the dangerous storms completely removed, but he was arrested, he was whipped, he was scourged, he was slapped, he was mocked, he was pierced with thorns, with nails, with a spear. Jesus died, taking the full maelstrom of this sinful creation upon himself.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

And then came the “complete calm.” “Peace be with you,” said Jesus on the third day (John 20:19, ESV). His peace is the peace of pure and saved life after death has been undone. And here is the dearest irony of all: I said that this account was not about us. It is about Jesus. But *Jesus* is about us: he lived, he died, he rose again, he gives his Word, his Baptism, his body and blood *for us*. We may ask the question the disciples did: “What kind of a man is this?” and we may answer the way Luther did:

I believe that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary; and that He is my Lord, Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death; in order that I might be his own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness; even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.<sup>6</sup>

This is what faith is about, this is what faith holds onto: it holds onto Jesus as he has shown himself to be: true God yet true man, my Lord, my Savior. And our Lord and Savior does everything out of love for us, and in his love he does ask us to “call upon [him] in the day of trouble” (Ps. 50:15, ESV). He wishes to hear our complaints and our fears—but we are blessedly able to bring these complaints and fears to him *knowing* that he hears, not fearing that he will simply sleep through our destruction. This is because Jesus is God, and he is a God who loves and cares for us, for his mission is to save. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> “Small Catechism,” *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, 32.