

The Lord's Power over Nature and His Power over Demons

Matthew 8:23-34

Matthew 8:23-27 - *"Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. ²⁴ And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. ²⁵ Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"*

²⁶ But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷ So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Background Notes

Critics of the Bible have a hard time with the miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ. They try to say that the miracles of Jesus never really took place, and that they're really only exaggerations by the early church. They say that the early Christians changed the real Jesus of history, who was only a good man, into the "Christ of faith," who was God and did miracles.

There are a lot of arguments that we can use to shoot down this heretical attitude and teaching, but consider this illustration: I think everyone would agree that Abraham Lincoln was a good man and did a lot of great things, but do you think that we could change Abraham Lincoln into a miracle worker, and give him divine status? Could we get people to believe that he miraculously fed 5000 people at Gettysburg, or walked across the Potomac River at Washington? Of course not! No matter how gradually we added the exaggerations of Lincoln's life, we would not be able to change history that drastically – no matter when we started the exaggerations!

But critics will say, "People were more gullible back in those Bible days. They would believe just about anything they were told!" Don't let the critics get away with statements like that! Remember – we're talking about intelligent Jewish people who were eyewitnesses to the teachings and miracles of a Man who claimed to be their Messiah. If anything, these Jewish people would have been **less gullible** than people today! Remember this as well: the unbelieving critics of Jesus' day never doubted the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth! This is a well-established historical fact, established from secular historical accounts other than the Bible.

The miracles of Jesus prove that Jesus was who He claimed to be – the promised Messiah and Son of God. In the miracle of Matthew 8:23-27, we see the Lord's supernatural power over the natural world. Only **God** could do such a miracle! No wonder the disciples exclaimed, *"Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (v27).*

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord Jesus has power over nature.

I've been to the Sea of Galilee a number of times, and I don't think that I've ever seen a day go by when there hasn't been good wind for sailing in the afternoon and early evening on the Sea of Galilee. In fact, I have windsurfed on the Sea of Galilee – and once I even had to be rescued because of the high wind!

During certain times of the year big windstorms can arise suddenly on the Sea of Galilee. Winds sweep down from the Golan Heights and whip up big waves very suddenly and rapidly. Fishing boats of the 1st century could easily be swamped and begin to sink.

A few years ago a 1st century boat was found buried in the mud along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is preserved now and can be seen in a museum on the grounds of Kibbutz Nof Ginosar, located on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. For obvious reasons, they call it the “Jesus Boat”! If you were to see the size of this small fishing boat, you would not be surprised that the disciples were afraid when the huge windstorm arose!

Notice how the **full humanity and the full deity of our Lord** are brought out in this miracle. As Man, He was tired. He fell asleep in the boat. As God, He calmed the storm! Throughout the Old Testament we read of miracles where God's power was seen over nature: the dividing of the Red Sea at the time of Moses, the sun standing still at the time of Joshua, the rains being withheld at the time of Elijah, and more. So when we see our Lord's power over nature here in the calming of the sea, it is evidence of His deity. **Jesus Christ is God!**

Does our Lord still have power over the laws of nature? Of course He does! He's the Creator! Here's an example: During World War II, when the British troops had to retreat to safety across the English Channel from Dunkirk, the Lord brought an unusually calm sea and heavy fog to shield the small rescue boats from the German bombers – an answer to **many prayers**.

The Lord Jesus has power over nature. The Lord can control the laws of nature today, and He can answer prayers in reference to nature. However - just because it rained on your beach party doesn't mean that God lost His power over nature for that day! Of course not! God had His good purposes for that rain! The Lord Jesus has power over nature.

2. The Lord Jesus has power over demons.

“When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.²⁹ And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”

³⁰ Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. ³¹ So the demons begged Him, saying, “If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine.”

³² And He said to them, “Go.” So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water.

³³ Then those who kept them fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. ³⁴ And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region” (v28-34).

This miracle is also recorded in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, with a notable difference. Mark 5:1-3 says, “Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. ² And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, ³ who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains...” And Luke 8:26-27 - “Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs.”

Did you notice a significant difference between Matthew’s account of this miracle and the accounts in Mark and Luke? Matthew writes there were **two** demon-possessed men, while Mark’s and Luke’s accounts mention **one** demon-possessed man. Is this a contradiction in the Bible? No! It would be a contradiction if Mark and Luke had said, “There was one - and only one - demon-possessed man...” But they didn’t say that. The answer is that there were two demon-possessed men, but Mark and Luke mentioned only one of them – probably the more outspoken one, or the more violent one - or maybe the one who requested to go with the Lord and the disciples after he was healed. Many times the Gospel writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, selected different aspects of the same event as they wrote. They didn’t copy one another! They were independent writers. In the same way, people today describing the same event will mention different aspects of an event, as they individually saw it unfold. So there will be **differences** in the various Gospel accounts - but **no contradictions!**

In this miracle we see our Lord’s power over the demonic world. Demons are evil spirit beings that are under Satan’s control. However, because God is all-powerful (omnipotent), and Jesus is God, the demons must submit to the authority of Christ.

Notice that the demons knew that Jesus is the Son of God (v29)! In fact, demons are quite orthodox in their belief system. James 2:19 says, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!” But demons are not saved. Matthew 25:41 says, “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...” Demons know their eternal doom (v29).

So then, having faith is **more than having knowledge**. And having faith is **more than believing just the facts** about Jesus Christ, isn't it? **Salvation is more than just believing the facts! Even the demons believe the facts.** Saving faith is putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, because He died for your sins.

Why did the Lord let the demons go into the pigs, so the pigs ran into the Sea of Galilee and drowned? We probably don't know all the answers to this question, but here are a couple of points to keep in mind. The country of the Gadarenes was on the far eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. The herdsmen of this account were probably Jews. But according to the Mosaic Law, Jewish people raising swine would have been considered illegal. Notice that the herdsmen did not find fault with Jesus. They just asked Him to leave!

This miracle certainly teaches that even though God created the animal kingdom, people are more important to God than animals! Do we think like God in this area? Do we consider people to be more important than animals? Are our unsaved neighbors, for example, more important to us than our family pets? These demon-possessed social outcasts, running around in the tombs, were more important to the Lord than an entire herd of pigs. The Lord Jesus has power over demons.

Practical Application

How big is your faith?

The Lord told His disciples that they were men of "little faith" (v26). Why did He say such a thing to them? Because they were afraid during the storm! *"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?"* They were afraid during a violent storm. I think I would have been afraid too! What about you? Have you ever been in a severe storm in a small boat on a big body of water? I remember once I was in a canoe with one of our young sons in the middle of a large lake when a big windstorm blew in. It was a scary experience, let me tell you!

However, the disciples should not have been afraid - because **the Lord was there with them in the boat!** And the lesson for us, if we are believers, is that in the storms of life the Lord is right there with us in our "boat." Certainly that's part of the teaching of this miracle. In Hebrews 13:5, the Lord Jesus said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

Whether it is a literal storm or one of the storms of life, we don't have to be afraid. The Lord is with us! Are you going through a stormy period in your life? In reference to your health? Your marriage? Your family? Your job or business? You don't have to be afraid! The Lord is with you in the storm. He can calm the storm - and He will calm your troubled heart in the midst of the storm if you call on Him. How big is your faith?