



"Faith in the Midst of Storms: Christ's Authority Over Nature and Demons"

Matthew 8:23-34 Expositional Sermon

Context and Background

The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah, the promised King, and focuses on His authority over all things, including nature, spiritual forces, and the human condition. In **Matthew 8**, we see a series of miracles that demonstrate Jesus' power. In verses 23-34, two specific miracles are recorded: the calming of the storm and the healing of two demon-possessed men. These events reveal Jesus' authority over the physical world and the spiritual realm.

Matthew 8:23 (NKJV)

"Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him."

Explanation:

- Jesus had been performing miracles and teaching in Capernaum. After a long day, He decided to cross the Sea of Galilee. He intentionally moved into the boat, and His disciples followed Him, trusting Him as their leader.
- The phrase "His disciples followed Him" shows both physical and spiritual obedience. They trusted Him enough to embark on this journey across the sea, symbolizing their faith in Him.
- The phrase "His disciples followed Him" emphasizes both physical and spiritual obedience, which can be supported by several commentaries that recognize the deeper meaning behind the disciples' actions.
 - **Matthew Henry's Commentary:** Matthew Henry notes that the disciples, by following Jesus into the boat, demonstrated their trust and dependence on Him. This act of following physically—embarking on a journey into the uncertain waters—reflects their readiness to follow Him spiritually, even when the path ahead is unknown. Their following is symbolic of discipleship, which involves both outward actions and an inward submission to His will.
 - Henry writes, "Christ's followers may be sure of His presence with them in all the dangers and difficulties they meet with in their way. He will lead them and will never leave them, but they must trust and follow Him."



- **John Gill's Exposition of the Bible:** John Gill similarly interprets the disciples' following as more than mere physical movement. He emphasizes that their willingness to follow Jesus into the boat, despite the possibility of danger, symbolizes their faith and submission to His authority. Gill points out that the disciples' decision to embark on this journey is reflective of the nature of true discipleship, which requires both external obedience and internal faith.
 - Gill remarks, "It is not enough to follow Christ in word or profession, but in deed; not only spiritually, but also to submit to Him in all circumstances, and follow Him wherever He leads, whether into storms or calm waters."
- **J.C. Ryle's Expository Thoughts:** Ryle highlights the significance of the disciples' action in following Jesus. He argues that their physical following is symbolic of a deeper spiritual reality—the call to discipleship. Ryle underscores that to follow Christ means to trust Him with one's whole life, despite the risks and challenges, which in this case are symbolized by the journey across the sea. He notes that genuine discipleship involves both outward commitment and inward faith in Christ's protection and guidance.
 - Ryle states, "The act of following Christ in the boat is emblematic of the path of true discipleship: a path marked by trust, submission, and the willingness to go wherever He may lead, even into the heart of the storm."
- Thus, the disciples' decision to follow Jesus physically onto the boat serves as a demonstration of their spiritual obedience and trust in Him, as noted by these commentaries. It illustrates the idea that true faith is not merely intellectual or passive but involves a readiness to act and follow Christ in both body and spirit, even in the face of danger.

Exposition:

- The decision to follow Jesus is not always easy. The disciples are about to encounter a storm, symbolizing the trials believers face when they commit to following Jesus.
- The boat symbolizes the journey of faith. When we follow Jesus, we are trusting Him to guide us, even when we face dangers.

Cross-Reference:

- **Matthew 4:19** – Jesus calls His disciples to follow Him, promising that He will make them "fishers of men."



- **Luke 9:23** – Jesus says that to follow Him, one must "deny himself, and take up his cross daily."
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Matthew 8:24 (NKJV)

"And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep."

Explanation:

- The Sea of Galilee is known for sudden storms due to the surrounding topography. The phrase "great tempest" refers to a violent storm that caused the boat to be overwhelmed by waves.
- Jesus, despite the storm, was asleep, reflecting His divine calm and trust in God's providence.

Exposition:

- The storm represents the trials and tribulations we face in life. While the disciples panic, Jesus is at peace, illustrating His complete trust in the Father.
- Jesus' sleep can also symbolize His dual nature as fully human and fully divine. As a man, He experienced fatigue; as God, He was sovereign over the storm.

Cross-Reference:

- **Psalms 4:8** – "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."
- **Isaiah 26:3** – "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You."

Commentary Insight:

- **Matthew Henry** points out that Jesus' sleep signifies His deep humanity, as well as His sovereign control over all creation. Despite the storm, He remains undisturbed, knowing that all things are under His authority.
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Matthew 8:25 (NKJV)

"Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!'"

Explanation:



- The disciples, in their fear and panic, wake Jesus, acknowledging Him as "Lord" and pleading for Him to save them. Their cry, "We are perishing!" shows their desperation and recognition that they need divine intervention.

Exposition:

- This plea reflects the human condition—when faced with overwhelming circumstances, we cry out to God for help. Even though Jesus was with them, the disciples' fear overtook their faith.
- The disciples' appeal to Jesus as "Lord" shows that they recognized His power, yet their fear indicated that their faith had not fully matured.

Cross-Reference:

- **Psalm 107:28-29** – "Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still."
 - **Romans 10:13** – "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."
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Matthew 8:26 (NKJV)

"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."

Explanation:

- Jesus rebukes the disciples for their fear and lack of faith. His question implies that fear and faith are mutually exclusive—faith in Him should have driven out their fear.
- After rebuking the disciples, Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea, and immediately, there is a "great calm." This illustrates His divine authority over creation.

Exposition:

- Jesus teaches the disciples (and us) that fear stems from a lack of faith. When we trust in Jesus' power and presence, we have no reason to fear, even in life's storms.
- His command over nature shows that He is the sovereign Creator. Just as God spoke the world into existence in Genesis 1, Jesus speaks and the winds and waves obey.

Cross-Reference:

- **Psalm 89:9** – "You rule the raging of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them."
- **Hebrews 11:6** – "But without faith it is impossible to please Him."



Commentary Insight:

- **John Gill** notes that Jesus' rebuke was not just of the physical elements but also a spiritual rebuke directed at the disciples for their wavering trust in Him. Their lack of faith was the real issue, not the storm.
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Matthew 8:27 (NKJV)

"So the men marveled, saying, 'Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?'"

Explanation:

- The disciples are left in awe of Jesus' authority. Their question, "Who can this be?" reveals their growing realization that Jesus is more than just a teacher — He commands creation itself.

Exposition:

- This verse highlights the gradual revelation of Jesus' divine identity to the disciples. They are coming to understand that Jesus is not just a man but the Son of God, with authority over all creation.
- Their marveling reflects the appropriate response to God's power — worship and awe.

Cross-Reference:

- **Job 38:8-11** — God speaks to Job about His authority over the seas, echoing the divine power Jesus demonstrates.
 - **Mark 4:41** — A parallel account where the disciples also question, "Who can this be?" after witnessing Jesus' authority over the storm.
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Matthew 8:28 (NKJV)

"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."

Explanation:

- After crossing the sea, Jesus arrives in the region of the Gergesenes (or Gadarenes). Immediately, two demon-possessed men confront Him. These men were so violent that people avoided the area altogether.



Exposition:

- This encounter contrasts the storm on the sea with the spiritual storm inside these men. While the sea was raging externally, the demons had created an inner storm in these men.
- The mention of "tombs" signifies their alienation from society and life. In biblical terms, tombs represent uncleanness and death, which is where the demons had driven these men to dwell.

Cross-Reference:

- **Mark 5:1-5** – A parallel account of this story, which focuses on one demon-possessed man but gives greater detail about his condition.
 - **Ephesians 2:1-3** – A description of humanity's spiritual condition before salvation, enslaved by sin and under the power of the enemy.
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Matthew 8:29 (NKJV)

"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?'"

Explanation:

- The demons within the men immediately recognize Jesus as the "Son of God." They are aware of His authority over them and the future judgment they will face.
- Their question, "Have You come to torment us before the time?" refers to the final judgment when all evil will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

Exposition:

- The demons' recognition of Jesus as the "Son of God" highlights the spiritual reality that even the forces of darkness know and fear Him.
- Their fear of torment reveals the certainty of their future judgment. Jesus' presence exposes their ultimate defeat.

Cross-Reference:

- **James 2:19** – "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!"
- **Revelation 20:10** – The final judgment of Satan and his demons.



- In his commentary on **Matthew 8:29**, J.C. Ryle delves deeply into the spiritual significance of the demons recognizing Jesus as the "Son of God" and fearing His authority.
 - Ryle explains that the demons, by asking, "Have You come to torment us before the time?" acknowledge that their power is limited and that they operate under God's sovereign control.
 - Two key points: the demons know that a final judgment is coming, and they cannot act without divine permission.
- Ryle emphasizes the reality of spiritual warfare, affirming the existence of the devil and his ongoing attempts to harm mankind.
 - However, he reassures readers that Jesus is the ultimate deliverer, capable of breaking the chains of Satan.
 - Ryle reflects on the fact that the demons could only affect the herd of swine because Jesus allowed it, further proving His authority over all spiritual forces.
- This account is a vivid reminder that Christ's power over evil is absolute.
 - As Ryle points out, the demons' fear of Jesus illustrates His role as the Redeemer, who will one day fully judge and destroy the works of Satan

Matthew 8:30-31 (NKJV)

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

Explanation:

- The demons, knowing they are about to be cast out, ask permission to enter a nearby herd of pigs. This request shows their recognition that they cannot act without Jesus' authority.

Exposition:

- The swine represent unclean animals according to Jewish law (Leviticus 11:7). This highlights the spiritual uncleanness of the demons and their desire to destroy and defile.
- The demons' request underscores the sovereignty of Jesus over the spiritual realm. Even the forces of darkness need His permission to act.

Cross-Reference:



- **Job 1:12** – Satan must ask God's permission to afflict Job, demonstrating that all spiritual powers are under God's control.
 - **Luke 22:31** – Jesus tells Peter that Satan has "asked for" him, showing that Satan's authority is limited.
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Matthew 8:32 (NKJV)

"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."

Explanation:

- Jesus grants the demons permission with a single word, "Go." Immediately, they enter the swine, causing the herd to rush into the sea and drown.
- This dramatic event demonstrates the destructive nature of demonic forces. Their ultimate goal is to bring death and destruction.

Exposition:

- The drowning of the swine serves as a visual representation of the spiritual destruction demons cause in human lives.
- Jesus' authority over the demons is absolute. They obey Him instantly, showing that even the forces of evil are under His control.

Cross-Reference:

- **John 10:10** – "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."
 - **Colossians 2:15** – "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."
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Matthew 8:33 (NKJV)

"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."

Explanation:



- The swineherds, terrified by what they witnessed, fled to the city and reported the incident. They told the people not only about the pigs but also about the miraculous deliverance of the demon-possessed men.

Exposition:

- The response of the swineherds shows that the power of Jesus was undeniable and fear-inducing. They were more concerned with the loss of the pigs than the salvation of the men.
- This highlights a theme seen throughout the Gospels: some people are more concerned with material loss than with the spiritual healing and deliverance Jesus offers.

Cross-Reference:

- **Luke 16:13** – "You cannot serve God and mammon."
- **Acts 19:23-27** – The riot in Ephesus, where people were more concerned about losing money from idol-making than about the truth of the Gospel.

Matthew 8:34 (NKJV)

"And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region."

Explanation:

- Instead of welcoming Jesus, the people of the city asked Him to leave. Despite witnessing a great miracle, their fear and concern over material loss led them to reject Him.

Exposition:

- The rejection of Jesus by the city reflects the tragic reality that many people, when faced with the power and authority of Christ, choose to reject Him. They prefer the comfort of their earthly lives over the transformative power of Jesus.
- This event serves as a warning: when confronted with the reality of Jesus' power, we must decide whether to embrace Him or reject Him.

Cross-Reference:

- **John 1:11** – "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."



- **Mark 5:18-20** – In a parallel account, the healed man desires to follow Jesus, but Jesus sends him to testify in his hometown.

Commentary Insight:

- **William Barclay** comments that the people's request for Jesus to leave shows their inability to grasp the significance of His power. They were more concerned with their economic loss than the spiritual gain of the men being delivered.

Conclusion and Application:

- **Faith Over Fear:** Jesus calls us to trust Him even in the midst of life's storms. When we focus on His power and presence, fear dissipates.
- **Authority Over Evil:** Jesus has absolute authority over both the natural and spiritual realms. We can trust in His power to deliver us from every form of evil.
- **Rejecting or Receiving Jesus:** The people of the Gadarenes chose material wealth over spiritual healing. Each of us must decide whether we will embrace or reject Christ when confronted with His power.