

“In Fear of Greatness”

Matthew 8:23-34

9-30-18

Many people struggle to live lives of reverent obedience and confident faith because they have an eclipsed vision of Jesus—they just see a partial Jesus. Yet a proper and wholesome vision of Jesus should result in worship and awe. It should cause us to quickly bow to supreme authority in our obedience and press us to the edge of our frail humanity.

So what is your vision of Jesus? If I were to ask you who Jesus is, you would likely give me the right answer: He’s the Son of God and Savior of the world. But when you think of Him, what does your mind’s eye see? Many see the image of a gentle Shepherd who is loving and compassionate. You may see Jesus on the cross. And those are good and right images, but is that all that He is; just a meek and mild person thought to be harmless? He is also the divine warrior and Judge of Revelation who will tread the winepress with the fierce wrath of God and rule the nations with a rod of iron.

In Revelation 1, when John caught a sight of the risen Christ in His glory, He “fell as His feet like a dead man.” What did John see? **[Rev 12-17]** John’s reaction is consistent with others who also encountered the Lord in a similar way. For example:

- **Job:** “I have heard of You...but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6).
- **Isaiah:** When he saw a vision of the Lord on His throne said, “woe is me for I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips...” (Isa 6:1-5).
- **Peter:** Peter’s response to the miraculous catch of fish was to fall down at Jesus’ feet saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8).
- **Transfiguration:** When Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, “His face shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light”—blazing glory!
- **Gethsemane:** (Jn 18:6)
- **Paul:** On the road to Damascus saw the risen Christ and fell to the ground, blinded by the glory of Jesus (Acts 9).

What I want you to see that there is something overwhelming about the presence of Jesus that is completely consistent with the terrifying presence of God in the OT. When God descended on Mt. Sinai to give the law to His people, He descended with fire so that the Mt smoked and quaked violently while the people heard the sound of a trumpet with thunder as the Lord spoke. God told the people not to approach the mountain lest they die. “All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, “speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.” Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin” (Ex 19-20). My friends, the very majesty and terrifying power and holiness of the living God is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ.

This is the remarkable mystery of Jesus’ glorious complexity. There were times when notorious sinners experienced perfect love, acceptance, grace, and freedom in His presence. Yet at other times when Jesus revealed a measure of His greatness in a way that unveiled His glory, it left even His friends overcome with the fear of God.

As we return to our study of Mark 8, we are about to catch a glimpse of the glory and greatness of Jesus that causes people to be overcome by fear as He demonstrates His authority not only over sickness and disease as we saw earlier, but also His authority over the forces and laws of nature and His authority over the demonic forces of the spiritual world.

[vs. 23-24] Its important for you to understand that this was no small storm. When vs. 24 says it was a *great* storm, it uses the *megas* from which we get the word mega. This was a mega storm. The waves are coming over the boat filling it with water as it is being thrown about on the sea. What’s even more striking than the violence of the storm is that Jesus is sleeping. By now He has to be soaking wet, while the boat is being jarred around by the waves, yet He sleeps.

There can only be two explanations for this. The first is that Jesus was exhausted from the previous days of ministry long into the night, combating

the Pharisees, healing the sick, teaching at length.¹ But I believe there is another reason. I know that I get the best sleep when I feel there is nothing to worry about.

Certainly Jesus has the deep underlying peace that nothing could happen to Him apart from His Father's hand. In Psalm 4:8 the Psalmist said, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety." Jesus nap in the bottom of boat not only captures the human frailty He experienced when He was exhausted, but also captures His unshakable peace of knowing that His father had all things in His hand, including His life that the raging storm.

But the disciples in vs. 25 are having quite the opposite reaction. They are scarred to death! Out of desperation they wake Jesus saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" Vs. 26: "He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Notice here that Jesus does not rebuke them for bothering Him with their prayers while He's sleeping. Rather He rebukes them for being bothered by fear. "Why are you afraid?" Notice that Jesus' response to their fear was to question their dwindling faith. *Fear grows in the absence of faith.* I am fearful and I worry when I fail to see that God is greater than my circumstance. Fear takes over when we take our eyes off of God and allow our vision to be consumed by our circumstances.

That's not to say that there is not real danger in the storm. There is. People die in storms, but God's purpose cannot and will not be sunk by the weather. I don't think Jesus rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith because they doubted His ability. After all, they cried out for Him to save them. Rather, Jesus rebukes them for failing to recognize that because God's purposes would be fulfilled in Christ as the Messiah, no storm sent by the hand of God would allow His own purposes to be destroyed.

The epitome and climax of God's purposes for all time and eternity is in that boat in the person of Jesus Christ! Do you think its going to go down?! The disciples failed to realize that nothing could threaten the life of Jesus apart from God's hand, and so they began to fear the storm more than God.

Listen, God doesn't need to still the storm to fulfill his purpose. In fact, He sent the storm to fulfill his purpose. If you are in Christ, walking with Christ, God's purposes will be fulfilled whether he causes the storm to rage or whether He causes the storm to be stilled. *The point of this story is not that God will quiet your storm (though He can, and we take great comfort in that). The point is that God's purposes are not subject to the storm. Rather the storm is fulfilling God's purposes because He is sovereign over the storm.*

Storms don't just happen:

- Ps 148: Fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfill His command
- Job 37 "To the snow He says, 'fall on the earth;' And to the shower and the rain, 'be strong.' ...By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen fast. He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter His lightning. They turn round and round by His guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. Whether for correction, or for his world, or for lovingkindness, he causes it to happen."

So why did God send this particular storm? To bring the disciples to a point of crisis, to bring them face to face with the true significance of who Jesus is.

Regardless of the disciple's weakness of faith, Jesus responds to their cry for help. Vs. 26: "Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, it became *perfectly calm.*" Guess what word Matthew uses here. The same word he used earlier—*Megas*. It became mega calm.

Now notice the reaction of the disciples in vs. 27: "The men were amazed, and said, '*What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?*'" We know from the gospel of Mark that their amazement had a sense of fear. Mark says, "They became very much afraid." Do you want to guess what His choice word was? *Megas*. They became mega fearful. Why? Because they suddenly recognized there was something greater to fear than the storm: the One who sat in the boat with them, who had authority over the storm.

¹ Cf. Matt 8:20 – "...The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

Notice that though the disciples have no less fear after Jesus stills the storm, their fear of circumstances had been transformed to the fear of God. Did the disciples fully understand all of this? Probably not because the passage ends with their question, “What kind of man is this...?!”

Now don't you think that that would be a pretty important question for Matthew to answer for us? Well he does. He answers the question by telling another story. **[vs. 28-34]**

The dominant theme throughout chapter 8 has been that of Jesus' authority. So far we have seen His authority over sickness and disease. We have seen that His authority takes precedence over every other relationship, including family. We have seen His authority over natural world (weather), and now Matthew reminds us that Jesus has authority over the supernatural (demons).

In vs. 28 Jesus and His disciples encountered some demon-possessed men who lived among the tombs and were so extremely violent that no one could dare approach them or pass by. This is an important detail because it indicates that the demons had dominant control of that area. We know from Mark's gospel that the demons identified themselves as Legion, a term that represents thousands (Mark 5:1-20).

As Jesus approached the demons cried out, “what business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have you come to torment us before the time?” There's our answer. The demons knew precisely what kind of man Jesus is, and they announce it. He is the Son of God in the fullest sense. They know that He is the one who will pronounce their doom and cast them into the Lake of Fire at God's appointed time (Jude 6; Rev 20:10). On that day of judgment, they will not have anymore power to resist Jesus' authority that they do in this passage.

The demons don't resist or challenge Jesus. They beg for Him to cast them into a nearby herd of swine (31). The point that I want you to see here is that they know they are powerless to disobey Jesus' command. They once dominated this area, but now they are completely subject to Jesus' authority.

If fact, Jesus' authority to deliver these men from a legion of demons was so astonishing that the whole city came out to meet Jesus and implored Him to leave. We know from Mark's gospel that their primary motivation was fear. They had already had to deal with the frightful ordeal of demon-possessed men living just outside of town. The last thing they wanted was a greater power to fear. So unfortunately, they plead with Jesus to leave. They have an eclipsed vision of Jesus. They fear His power. Perhaps they fear the loss of more of their livestock. But they fail to see His love that set two men free from the bondage of Satan.

When we put these two stories together, here's the conclusion we come to: ***Jesus should be revered with the fear of God because He has divine authority over all things as the Son of God.***

In other words, *the One who has authority over disease and the forces of nature and demons, ought to have unchallenged authority over our lives.*

And if He has rightful authority over all people, how much more should His authority be unchallenged in the hearts of those who know Him, Love Him, and trust Him, those who call Him Lord.

The good news is that this Jesus who has authority over the winds and waves, the One who has the authority to cause demons to flee, also has authority to forgive sin as we will see next week. All who come to Him, come under the shelter of His loving authority—and no one can snatch them out of His hand! (John 10:27-29).

Your response to Jesus will be determined by your relationship to Jesus. While all of us should regard Him with the fear of God, it will be only fear (and judgment and wrath) for those who don't know Him on the last day. But for those who trust in Him and come under His authority to forgive their sins, the cross transforms their fear to awe and worship and love.

Where do you stand with Jesus?

Where is His authority challenged in your life?