

Jesus is in control \* Luke 8:22-39

February 24, 2018 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

A few years back, a band called Casting Crowns recorded a song that resonated with a lot of people who were going through some very tough times. It starts off like this -

I was sure by now  
God You would have reached down  
And wiped our tears away  
Stepped in and saved the day  
But once again, I say "Amen", and it's still raining.

As the song unfolds, you see that the songwriters are using the imagery of a storm to talk about the experience of trials in our lives. And the song pictures someone in the midst of trials, who's waiting on God, expecting Him to act and yet He's taking longer than expected. It's the sort of experience that might make a person wonder if God is really in control of this thing, whatever it is. I mean sure, God is in charge of all things, and yet, maybe somehow this particular thing is beyond His control?

Is that possible? Is there anything beyond God's control? Luke has an answer for us and so let's go to see what he says. Luke 8 and we're going to start at verse 22.

Now there's actually two stories here – verse 22, down to verse 25 – let's call that 'Episode 1' – 'Jesus vs. the storm' and then verse 26, down to verse 39 – let's call that episode 2 'Jesus vs the demons.'

These work together to help us answer our question – is there anything beyond God's control?

So Episode 1 – Jesus vs. the storm.

22 One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." So they all went down to the shore and clambering into the boat that was there. A lot of people suspect that this boat belonged to one of the disciples because, remember before their call to follow Jesus, many of them were fishermen. And chances are good that the boat they climbed into looked a little like this.

Back in 1986, drought around the Sea of Galilee caused the water level to drop and two fishermen discovered this boat in the water. When they recovered it and tested it, they found that it came from the first century AD about the same time that Jesus lived, leading some people to call it 'the Jesus boat.' Now there's no proof that Jesus ever rode in this boat, but it does give you a sense of the kind of boat Jesus would have sat in. The Jesus boat or 'the sea of Galilee boat is 27 feet by 8 feet across and about 4 ft high.

(27 feet (8.27 meters) long, 7.5 feet (2.3 meters) wide with a maximum preserved height of 4.3 feet (1.3 meters).

Jesus and His disciples clambered up into the boat and they set out.

At first, the waves lapped gently against the side of the boat as they cut through the water, and eventually, Jesus fell asleep, right there in the boat. Chances are good that He had been teaching all that day and so in the gently rocking boat, He fell asleep.

But as they went, the sea got a little rougher. And a little wavier. And a little choppier. And all of a sudden, they had a full-blown storm on their hands. This is quite common in the Sea of Galilee – it's well below sea level and there's valleys to the east that create wind tunnels and cliffs to the west that can cause down drafts and so here, as the disciples are out at sea, the sea whips up one of its patented violent storms. The boat was being swamped, waves pouring over the sides, soaking them all to the bone and they suddenly realized they were in great danger. And remember, these are professional fishermen here all of a sudden scared to death by the violent threat whipped up by the sea. And what was Jesus doing? Jesus was sleeping.

24 The disciples went and maybe grabbed Him by the shoulders and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" And that's almost a little too gentle a word – it literally says – Master, we are perishing. They perceived that they were about three waves away from being destroyed.

And Jesus got up and looked out at the wind and the raging waters; He looked at the wind and waves churning around Him and He said: Quit it.

And the storm stopped. And all was calm.

Just like that. the storm stopped. Not 'it slowly receded.' The storm stopped. The waves stopped. The wind stopped. Somebody glanced over the side of the boat and the water was so clear you could see the fish swimming a few meters beneath them.

And Jesus asked them: 25 "Where is your faith?"

Now on one hand, the disciples did exactly what I would have expected in that situation – they went to Jesus to ask for help. That sure looks to me like an expression of faith. And yet Jesus, who sees our heart's intentions, still asks the disciples: 'where is your faith?' He finds something lacking in their faith. What's going on here?

I think it's this – the disciples feared the storm more than they trusted Jesus. Sure they had a theoretical faith in Jesus, and yet Jesus seemed to perceive through their actions that they were more afraid of the storm than they were confident of Jesus. They needed to apply their faith; they trusted Jesus, they had seen Him wield tremendous power; now they needed to draw confidence from the knowledge that Jesus was both powerful and concerned for them.

I found Frederick Bruner really helpful here – he writes "There is something moral about faith; it is often a form of courage, and its absence is cowardice. We learn that faith is not simply a passive acceptance of truths, a weak resolution that 'just believes.' Faith is often pictured in the Gospels as a courageous confidence that Jesus is equal to the occasion" (Bruner, 399).

And I think that in this situation, Jesus sensed that His disciples weren't sure that He could save them. And so He asked them 'Where is your faith?'

Now apparently, that's not the question that the disciples were really focused on, because Luke tells us that they had a question of their own -

"Who is this?" The disciples asked, "that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him" (Luke 8:22-25 NIV).

Now I have to point out that at this point, the disciples still aren't entirely sure of who Jesus is – they've been travelling with Him and listening to Him teach and watching all the wonders He does, but they still haven't come to the point here where they become convinced that Jesus IS the Son of God – the Messiah. Last week's message, from chapter 9, technically happens after the calming of the storm – I just brought it forward so we could start Lent with Jesus setting Himself toward the Cross and calling us to follow Him – but really that hasn't happened yet in chronological time and so the disciples here are just piecing things together and starting to realize the significance of who this Jesus is.

So that's episode 1: Jesus vs the storm. Now why does Luke tell us this story? What does he want us to know by telling us about this? Luke wants us to see: Jesus is sovereign over the natural realm. The wind, the waves, the whole of the created order, is under Jesus' control.

Onto episode 2 – Jesus vs the demons.

26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. They're not in Judea anymore Dorothy – they are in Gentile country now – so this story foreshadows the reality that Jesus' ministry is not just for Jews, but Gentiles too.

27 When Jesus stepped ashore, He could hear a loud noise, a person crying out in pain and confusion at the same time. And all of a sudden, this man came lumbering towards Him, stark naked, raving mad, covered in dirt and grime and sweat. Jesus saw in an instant what was going on – this man was possessed by a demon.

Apparently he'd been possessed by a demon for a long time. It had seized him many times and even when his friends and family tried to help him, the demon pushed them away. Then the authorities got involved and they chained him up but this demon gave him crazy strength so he could rip through the chains, no doubt at great cost to his skin I'm sure. And he ended up out in the wilderness, out in the tombs, wandering around with the dead, and totally cut off from the land of the living.

And Jesus saw this and said to the demon 'Get out.'

The man / the demon cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" (Notice, the disciples have just

asked – who IS this? But the demons know EXACTLY who it is – this is the Son of the Most High God). (You don't mess around with Him).

30 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

Now I've always assumed that He's asking the demon's name, but it struck me this week – what if He's asking the MAN his name? Jesus knows that this man has been at the mercy of this demon for years at a time – the demon has driven him away from his family, away from his friends, away from everything that makes him uniquely him, and I wonder here if this is Jesus making a first step in restoring this man's identity. He asks him – 'what's your name?' 'These demons don't define you.'

But of course the demons think they do and so they make him blurt out - "Legion," ... because many demons had gone into him. 31 And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

Not even demons want to go to Hell.

32 A large herd of pigs (Gentile country) was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission.

33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

Now if you're like me, you've probably wondered before – 'why did Jesus cause this mass destruction of the pigs? Wasn't there some other way to do it?' – and it struck this week – 'wait, Jesus didn't cause the pigs to run off the cliff – the demons did.' What does it say? Jesus allowed the demons to come out of the man and enter the pigs; it was the demons who caused the pigs to go for a swim. ("Jesus is not responsible for the action of the swine... It is their demonic possession that brings destruction" (Bock, 777). It is the destructive nature of the demons to harm their hosts – just as they drove the man into the wilderness, they drove the pigs into the sea.

Of course, to the average observer though, it probably looked like Jesus and I wonder if this was a dirty trick played by the demons to make people turn against Jesus – verse 34 -

34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35 and the people went out to see what had happened.

When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were [amazed! What a powerful act of God to free this man from the clutches of evil!] That's not their reaction, is it? They were afraid.

They were more comfortable with this raving demon destroying the man's life, than this deliverer who cast out the demons.

36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.

37 Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. They saw the limitless power of Jesus at work and wanted nothing to do with it. And so he got into the boat and left.

Before He left though, He had a talk with the man who had been set free.

The man begged Jesus to let him go along with Him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him (Luk 8:26-39 NIV).

What a testimony – this man was lost for years – socially ostracized, physically oppressed, no shelter, no clothes, no sanity – and yet now, here he was, totally free and restored to life. And what was his response? Let me come with you. Let me be your follower. And then of course Jesus shows him and us and you don't have to be walking behind Jesus to be His follower – Jesus wants His followers to be all over the world, telling the world what God has done for them. And that's what the man does.

Now what does Luke want us to see in this account? Jesus is sovereign over the supernatural realm. There is no demonic power that can overcome Him.

#### ASIDE

Now at this point, some of you are probably wondering what role demonic powers play in our culture, and I need to address that without going too far down a rabbit trail. That's not the main point of this portion of Scripture, but it's worth a brief aside. When it comes to talking about the supernatural realm, it's easy to go to the extremes – imagining that demons don't exist at all, or finding demons lurking in every shadow.

The Bible – is clear that supernatural powers exist, that demons exist, and they oppose the purposes of God.

I think CS Lewis was onto something in Screwtape Letters; there he imagines that demons will use whatever strategies are effective in keeping people from God and in some cases, and especially some cultures which are very aware of the supernatural realm, that means possession and outright attack.

In our culture though, I think that we are so distracted by wealth and property that demons don't need to outright show themselves; they've done a great job of making the pursuit of the almighty dollar a great distraction that keeps people from following Jesus.

But you know what, if you do ever find yourself faced with some sort of demonic attack, let me say this – it can't touch you.

Peter writes - through faith we are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation... (1 Peter 1:5). No demon can touch you.

Because

...the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

And Jesus is actively at work, protecting you as you focus on Him in prayer.

~~1 John 5:18 – John writes – the one who was begotten of God (Jesus) keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him (1 John 5:18). Because...~~ Jesus is sovereign over the supernatural realm. (END OF ASIDE).

Now let's come back to Luke and look at the two stories side by side. Big picture kind of thing. By putting Jesus vs the storm and Jesus vs the demons right next to each other, what is Luke telling us? 1 they happened close together in chronological time – but 2. He's telling us that there is no sphere of life over which Jesus is not in control. Put that positively – Jesus is sovereign over every sphere of life. If He is sovereign over the natural realm and sovereign over the supernatural realm, then that leaves nothing outside of His control.

Let's think about that - Jesus is sovereign over the natural realm – we saw that very clearly in episode 1, didn't we? The storm raged on and yet Jesus only had to say 'quit it' and it obeyed Him. Jesus is sovereign over the natural realm.

And Jesus is sovereign over the supernatural realm too. The demons outnumbered Jesus but He was by no means outmatched (Bock, NIVAC, 241). They had to plead with Him – 'don't torture us' – they knew in every way that they were under Jesus' authority. Because Jesus controls the supernatural realm.

So what's the takeaway? How do we live in light of this?

Jesus' sovereignty over all of life is reason for faith and reason for witness.  
Jesus' sovereignty over all of life is reason for faith and reason for witness.

Let's start with the first one.

Jesus' sovereignty is reason for faith.

Let's do a little exercise here – imagine a piece of paper – that represents all of life – and there's probably some THING in your life that's a bit of a trial for you right now. Put a dot on that piece of paper to represent the trial. Now Jesus is in control of the whole paper – can He handle the dot? That's a reason to trust Him, isn't it, because there is nothing that falls beyond His sovereign control. If there's never a situation where He has to say – 'oh, sorry, I can't help you with this – let me put you through to someone who can – then we can put our faith in Him.

But here's the thing. It can't just be a theoretical faith. A faith that trusts when the sun is shining but wilts when the clouds come in. We need to actively apply our faith in the midst of troubles – reminding ourselves – this may be scary, but Jesus is in control. We may feel fear, but faith says confidently: Jesus can handle this.

David Garland writes:

The storm incident reveals how wrong it is to think that following Jesus will bring an untroubled, soothing life... Metaphoric storms can appear suddenly that shipwreck lives and threaten to scuttle faith. What is required to survive them is not the kind of faith that simply believes that something is true but faith that places complete confidence in God's providential care and protection, whatever the dangers. It trusts that even if God does not deliver one from the tidal wave that batters one's life, God will deliver one through it (Garland, 360).

When you run into a trial of any kind, consciously say to yourself – 'Jesus is in control of this; He has already died to secure my ultimate well-being and He is working for good even now.'

Jesus' sovereignty over all of life is reason for faith.

Jesus' sovereignty over all of life is also reason for witness.

That comes through quite clearly in the way the demon possessed man responds to Jesus, doesn't it? This man had been oppressed by the kingdom of darkness for years and then He met Jesus and suddenly he found himself free from the powers of darkness. Jesus triumphed over the supernatural realm and He used His sovereign power to deliver this man who had been oppressed by the darkness. Now he has the privilege of saying 'look how much God has done for me.'

That's not just a picture of episode 2 though, is it? That's a picture of the Gospel, isn't it? We were all oppressed by the kingdom of darkness for the many years that we didn't know Jesus. We followed after our own desires, after the prince of the power of this world. And then we met Jesus. We experienced His redemptive power and suddenly we were free from the powers of darkness. On the cross, Jesus triumphed over the supernatural realm and He used His sovereign power to deliver us out of the Kingdom of Darkness and into the Kingdom of redemption and forgiveness and light.

If you have experienced the redemptive power of Jesus, then you, just like the man set free from the demons, have a story of 'how much God has done for you.'

If you haven't experienced that power, then I encourage you – go to Jesus in prayer and say – Sovereign God, thank You for exercising your authority by dying for me. Forgive my sin and deliver me into the Kingdom of Light. And when you do, 'that's how much God has done for you' – He has restored you to life and made you free.

And that truth is so good and so gracious that it deserves to be heard. We need to share it with others, bear witness to the gracious redemption and the compassionate care that God extends to us every day. Even if we're not using words, our lives should show that we are living as people who have been made new and been set free by God.

Jesus sovereignty over all of life is reason for witness.

Jesus' sovereignty over all of life is reason for faith.

Which is why I think that Casting Crowns song resonated with so many people. It's very honest in that it acknowledges the pain that we often feel in trials. And yet it's rooted in the truth that this storm, whatever it is, is not outside of God's control. And every step of the way, whether it's out of the storm, or through it, God is with us, carrying us with the power and compassion that only a sovereign God could.

And so we can join with them as they say –

And I'll praise you in this storm  
And I will lift my hands  
That you are who you are  
No matter where I am  
And every tear I've cried  
You hold in your hand  
You never left my side  
And though my heart is torn  
I will praise you in this storm

Jesus' sovereignty over all of life is reason for faith and reason for witness.

#### BENEDICTION

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (Romans 15:3).