

## **Power Over Wind and Spirit**

Matthew 8:23-34

Few things compare to the power of the wind, especially the wind that stirs up a storm on the water. Just think about the damages caused by a severe hurricane, 100 to 150 mile per hour winds creating storm surges of 20 feet or even more.

Catastrophic destruction results. In the worst case, there is the near total loss of entire communities. Otherwise unimaginable destruction of houses and buildings, bridges and roads. We see those pictures every time a major hurricane hits, usually at least one every year.

In that context, with no disregard for that unimaginable loss of life and property, consider our text this afternoon,

v.26-27

So consider power demonstrated by the worst possible hurricane, maybe Katrina. Or much longer ago, Hurricane Andrew or even Camille. Then consider Jesus. “Even the winds and the sea obey him.” And that is what is before us today. The superstorm or hurricane is raging, and Jesus is sleeping.

For us, sleeping would be incomprehensible. The story is told, in a very funny way, by a man in a previous church I pastored, who slept through Hurricane Hugo, we came through North Carolina in 1989. I began my ministry at that church less than a year later, and this was far inland, near Charlotte, NC. But that hurricane intensified as it went inland, obviously contrary to the normal pattern. But this man slept through it all. And then he woke up normally and started out for a day’s fishing trip which he had planned. He couldn’t understand why all the tree branches were all over the road, and only after some time did the enormity of the damage make its full impact on him. After all, he slept

through the whole thing.

So did Jesus, but not in quite the same way. Everything Jesus does is for a purpose in the training of his disciples, and so we have this training session to study today. The lesson is about faith and fear. Being afraid of the storms of life. And the call to faith in the midst of them. So the scene is obvious and easy to understand.

v.23-24

Now, I don’t need to convince you about the relevance of this situation. You understand,

### **I. THE REALITY OF STORMS.**

The reality of life feeling like a hurricane, the circumstances of life feeling like you are in the midst of a typhoon. I think that is precisely the context that Jesus would have us imagine. This event wasn’t just about wind and water, but a lesson of discipleship. A lesson of faith, in the context of fear. And fear is ordinary. We would call it normal. Expect, unavoidable in many ways. And Jesus’ disciples were afraid, according to verse 26. Look at their own words in verse 25,

#### **A. The experience of fear.**

v.25

Even in those written words, you can feel the adrenalin of their fear. You can sense their desperation, and their exasperation with Jesus. You can recognize their awareness of their danger, and fear is a normal, self-protecting reaction. The danger was imminent, for according to verse 24, the boat was already being swamped by the waves. Humanly speaking, they were going under. Who wouldn’t be afraid?

No doubt, many of you can identify with that situation? Either

right now, or at another time in your life? I know some of you can identify, right now. I know others who could describe a period of your life this way, as could I. You know what it is to fear in the circumstances of life in which you find yourself. You know what it means to be afraid, and that fear can take many forms. We often call it stress, with many other clinical and psychological labels. Sometimes, it could manifest itself as insecurity. For some people, fear is hidden by pride and self-promotion. It could show up as nervousness, or compulsiveness, or any sort of mood-altering experience. It could simply be the fear of the unknown, the fear of what is uncertain, or the fear of what is new and different, uncomfortable. Fear comes from the sense of danger, and the inability to protect yourself. The inability to handle the situation, to resolve the problem whatever it might be. The inability to fix it. And we proud and self-sufficient human beings like to think that we can fix anything.

But that is all in vain, isn't it? Fear that exists in your heart will eventually become dominant, and eventually, it will ruin your life. The root problem of life, in so many ways, is nothing less than fear. So, you are in a boat out on the water, and a great storm arises. Your boat is filling with water, and sinking. That's the situation Jesus uses to teach his disciples about,

### **B. The experience of faith.**

It comes in the form of a rebuke.

v.26

Sometimes, I suspect, those words come across harshly to people today, "O you of little faith." We are so unused to direct correction, and therefore we are prone to hear those words as condemnation, and rejection. But a godly rebuke is such a useful tool for Jesus in his training of disciples, and these words are so direct yet actually, so gentle. He is willing to identify their

problem, as he does for us, without withdrawing his love nor his compassionate interest in their well-being.

It is similar, isn't it, to what we studied in,

Mat. 6:25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

I believe we have much to learn about being able to receive such gentle rebukes in the spirit and context of love, and this rebuke is clear. Such fear is contrary to the exercise of faith. And such fear, ultimately, can be done away with if we would but walk by faith and not by sight. If we would but live in the power and presence of God, depending entirely upon him and not upon ourselves. "O you of little faith," "Why are you afraid?"

So please hear these words today, please hear Jesus speak

those words, with all the gentle compassion of our good shepherd. Please be willing to listen for those words when you do fear, and turn to Jesus for your help without fear. None of us will ever get there, perfectly, in this life, I am quite sure, but that is the goal. That is the pursuit for which you strive.

I could go back to the charge given to Joshua,  
Josh. 1:8 “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.  
9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

Do you see what goes along with this rebuke of Jesus? Do you see what goes alongside this call to faith in putting away fear? “The Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” That’s how faith is built. That’s how fear is driven away, with this conviction and experience of that precious truth and reality of our lives as beloved children of God, that God is faithful to never leave us.

Heb. 13:5 “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

“I will not fear,” that’s faith. Faith built upon what God has promised, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” That’s the faith to which we are called. Not self-help or self-reliance. Not a cold-hearted or Stoic sense of a stiff upper lip. Not a denial of the reality of trouble, as though life should be sugar-coated with superficial sentimentality. No, the goal is real, genuine, deeply-rooted and abiding faith that God’s promise is always and

perfectly true. “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

However, from our perspective, he might be sleeping. At least, that’s the situation the disciples found themselves in. And with Jesus’ gentle and loving rebuke comes a display of his power, a display intended for their encouragement and for ours.

### **C. The power of Jesus.** v.26b-27

Even winds and sea obey him, perhaps the two most unmanageable forces of nature to this day. Wind and sea, both of which exert their power with absolutely no ability on our part to control them or harness them. But Jesus can. He performs a miracle, and act of supernatural power. And he does so for the very obvious reason of teaching us about that power.

So think about this. Jesus woke up, and with a word, calmed the sea and the winds. That is his power. Now, consider your own circumstances. The wind and water may continue to rage, but Jesus’ power remains. The same power of the same man who was awakened by his disciples in that boat is at work in your lives as Christians. The same word would come to you, challenging you to live by faith not by sight. And the same encouragement is ours. This man, this Jesus, exerts his power over the winds and the sea such that they obey his very word. And Jesus exerts that same power on your behalf, in the midst of the storms of your life. That’s not a guarantee or a promise that all your troubles will go away, but it is the assurance that you can trust him in every way, living by faith rather than by fear. Even the winds and the sea obey him.

And so do the demons. Even the devil recognizes Jesus’ power. And the next account in Matthew shows us,

## II. THE REALITY OF THE DEVIL.

v.28

Let me describe even more fully the effect of the devil as he possessed these two men by means of his servant-demons. Mark's gospel makes reference to just one demoniac, but gives us more detail.

Mark 5:2 "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, 4 because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. 5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones."

All of that emphasizes a very powerful reality of the presence of evil, evil personified by the presence of demons who were the direct and immediate servants of the Devil. As Matthew puts it, they were "so fierce that no one could pass that way."

Notice what they say to Jesus, these demons.

v.29

This is a very helpful passage when it comes to understanding the devil, because we get a insightful glimpse into the extent of,

### A. The knowledge of the devil.

What does the devil know about God? A lot. He knows Jesus is the Son of God, at least the demons address him by that title. And if they don't speak with respect and honor, they certainly exhibit an enforced submission. They are speaking from the position of the inferior, the one in lower rank, subservient to a

master. And though Jesus calls him the "son of man" to disclose something publicly of his identity, here the title is clearer a recognition of his deity. And his authority. "What have you to do with us, O Son of God?"

Again, Mark's gospel adds additional insight.

Mark 5:6. "When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. 7 And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.""

James puts it this way,

James 2:19 "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!"

So the Devil and his demons know the one, true and living God, the Most High God. And they know that they stand under his judgment.

v.29b "Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

What time? Surely they understand, the time of judgment! The time of their destruction, the time of their ultimate and eternal accountability. The time predicted and determined by God when he promised redemption to Adam and Eve after the fall,

Gen. 3:15 "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

The seed of the woman would conquer the seed of the serpent, and crush his head. Jesus would win the victory over Satan.

Rev. 20:7 "Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and

Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. 9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. 10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

These demons knew what was coming, and they knew it awaited an appointed time. And they feared that Jesus would bring their condemnation before that time, so they pleaded with him as condemned criminals. But they knew all along of his power, and of their own inferiority.

### **B. The inferiority of the devil.**

The inferiority of the devil is shown forth so pointedly here. The description is almost comical, though the literal sense of these words is actually quite terrifying. Just look at what happened.

v.30-31

I might put it this way, this superiority of Jesus over the devil, Psalm 110:1 “The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” 2 The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!”

Or this way,

Ps. 2:6 “Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.” 7 “I will declare the decree:

The LORD has said to Me, You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to

pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ ”

So Jesus reigns as king of all kings, then as we read in Matthew 8. And now.

1 Cor. 15:25 “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”

The devil is inferior. Able to cause grave trouble, no doubt. Just look at those pigs, rushing over a steep bank and drowning in the water. Just look at those demoniacs, before Jesus freed them from Satan’s bondage. Great power, but absolutely and completely inferior to,

### **C. The power of Jesus.**

v.32-34

Interesting, isn’t it, that not all the people were impressed by Jesus’ power. Certainly not the owners of the herd of pigs who died. But what shows forth here is the power of Jesus the Son of God. And these miracles are here to attest to that power, to validate his divine nature and authority. Over the wind and the evil spirits.

Let me bring all of that back to the experiences of your own life. Think again about the circumstances of your own life, those things which cause you to fear. And as you see Jesus in the midst of any storms, trust him. Life by faith, waiting upon him and depending entirely upon his power and his strength. And listen to these words, receiving them with a warmth of faith that will encourage each and every one of his true disciples,

John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”