

Jesus' Power over the Natural

Scripture: Matthew 8:23–27

Code: 2260

INTRODUCTION

A. The Fall into Sin

When God created man, He ordained him to be king of the earth. But when man fell into sin, he was dethroned, losing his right to rule, as well as the majesty and glory of an innocent earth. God immediately cursed the earth, and as a result, its control fell into the hands of the usurper, Satan, who is called "the prince of this world" (Jn. 12:31), and "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4). How did that affect man? It brought sickness, pain, death, difficulty in human relationships, war, sorrow, injustice, falsehood, famine, natural disaster, and demonic activities. Those consequences have plagued the earth ever since.

B. The Future of Salvation

The Bible also unfolds for us a glorious redemptive plan: God is not only redeeming man; He is also restoring man's environment as well by reversing the curse. In order to accomplish that, God will come to earth twice: the first time to redeem man; the second time to redeem the earth and the universe. At His First Coming, the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross and rose from the grave for the redemption of man. The second time, He will come in blazing glory and establish a thousand-year (millennial) Kingdom, which will be followed by a new heaven and a new earth. God will ultimately bring about a universe with no sorrow, tears, pain, sickness, death, disease, difficulties, disasters, or demons. In His coming Kingdom, everything will be glorious forever, because the curse will have been reversed. Everything we know of as a curse will be changed in the future: things that blight man's existence and steal his joy, things that take away from the dominion that God intended him to have will be done away. The Bible even says that we will reign forever with Christ.

C. The Futility of Society

As we look toward the redemption of the earth in the coming glorious Kingdom of God, it becomes obvious to us that man can't effect that change. We are limited in the things we can change in our environment: We can try to deal with some of the problems, but we can't eliminate them--we don't have the power. We may be able to shoot off rockets into space, and build all kinds of machinery and equipment; yet still we pollute our environment. A medical doctor once told me, for everything in medicine that we solve, we create six other problems that must be solved. So the faster we seem to be progressing, the more we actually get behind with resulting complications. Man cannot bring about a renewed earth; he cannot eliminate the curse--he doesn't have the power. As clever as we are in dealing with energy sources, we still cannot harness and apply that power to changing our environment.

D. The Force of the Supernatural

If the earth is going to be changed and there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth, then that will have to be done by somebody far superior to any man. In fact, that power is not only beyond man; it is inconceivable to him. We can't imagine the kind of power it will take to reverse the curse, any more than we can imagine the kind of power that God had to have had to create all things in the beginning and uphold His creation.

1. God's Power Recited in Scripture

a. Psalm 62:11 -- "...power belongeth unto God." b. Job 26:14 -- "...But the thunder of His power, who

can understand?"c. Psalm 79:11 -- "...the greatness of Thy power...."d. Nahum 1:3 -- "The LORD is...great in power...."e. Isaiah 26:4 -- "...in the LORD GOD is everlasting strength."f. Psalm 65:6 -- "Who by His strength setteth fast the mountains, being girded with power."g. Psalm 63:1-2 -- "O God, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee; my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee...to see Thy power...."

2. God's Power Revealed in the Savior

a. Explained What kind of power does God have? To a certain degree, it is visible to us through what God has created (Rom. 1:20). The Lord has the power to recreate the earth and reverse the curse. And I believe Jesus came to show us that power. He came into the world to declare that He is God the Son and that He has the power to bring the Kingdom of God to a cursed earth. He came to show that He is the promised King and Messiah who could give back sovereignty to man by restoring the earth and eliminating sin. Jesus had all the necessary credentials: Matthew 1 informed us that He had the right genealogy--He was of the line of Abraham and David. In Matthew 2, He had the right birth--He was born of a virgin. In Matthew 3, He had the right baptism--He was affirmed by the Father and anointed by the Spirit. Then in chapter 4, He had the right test--the temptation scene showed His power over Satan. In Matthew 5-7, we see that He gave the right message--He confirmed the Word of God with absolute authority. That brings us to Matthew 8, where He is shown to have the right power. That theme carries over into the next chapter, where we read, "...ye may know that the Son of man hath power..." (v. 6). The primary purpose of the miracles was to show that Jesus has power. The miracles were foretastes of Kingdom power. When Jesus healed the sick, He was giving a preview of a glorious Kingdom where there would be no sickness. When He raised the dead, He was giving a preview of a glorious Kingdom where there would be no dying. When He calmed the waves on the sea, He was previewing a glorious Kingdom where natural elements would never be out of control. When He cast out demons, He was previewing a Kingdom where there would be no demonic activity at all. When He spoke the truth, He was previewing a Kingdom where there would be no lies but only truth. When He manifested His holiness, He was previewing a Kingdom where there would be only righteousness. Everything He did declared to man, "I am the One who can reverse the curse, and restore sovereignty to man in a glorified eternal Kingdom."

b. Expressed The New Testament makes it clear that Christ has divine power: 1) Matthew 9:8 -- "But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, who had given such power unto men." 2) Matthew 10:1 -- "And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease." Those two kinds of miracles are the only ones that the apostles had power to perform. They were never able to do miracles that dealt with nature--only Jesus did those. 3) Matthew 28:18 -- "...All authority [power] is given unto Me...." 4) Mark 9:1 -- "And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There be some of them that stand here, who shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." What was Jesus talking about? He was telling His disciples that some of them would see Him transfigured into His kingly splendor. That occurred a few days later when he was joined by Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. 5) Luke 4:32, 36 -- "And they were astonished at His doctrine; for His word was with power.... And they were all amazed, and spoke among themselves, saying What a word is this! For with authority and power He commandeth the unclean spirits...." 6) Romans 1:4 -- Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead." 7) 1 Corinthians 1:24 -- "...Christ the power of God...."

Matthew is showing us that Jesus Christ has power over every facet of the curse: disease and death, Satan and demons, natural elements, and everything else; therefore qualifying Himself as the rightful heir to the earth--the King of kings and Lord of lords. Of the nine miracles in Matthew 8-9, we have already seen the first three, which dealt with disease. The next three show His power over natural elements, the supernatural world, and sin. All of those marvelously picture His power. Matthew presents a format of three miracles and a response. The response of the people to the first set of miracles is recorded in

verse 18 to 22. The first group was thrilled with Christ's power. But when Jesus told them about the difficulties they could expect, they went away. Now we move into the second set of miracles, which will end with a different response. Let us set the scene:

I. THE PARTICULARS (vv. 18, 23-24)

A. The Departure of the Disciples (vv. 18, 23)

"Now, when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave commandment to depart unto the other side.... And when He was entered into a boat, His disciples followed him."

1. The Following Described

The pressure of the crowd had reached a point where Jesus could no longer effectively minister; so He made a decision to leave the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, a lake thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. Jesus was tired after a full day of healing and teaching. It was late evening by the time His little boat left the shore by Capernaum to sail to the other side, and it was accompanied by several other little boats, according to Mark. Such boats were common in an area that was dependent upon fishing.

2. The Followers Defined

By that time, Mark and Luke tell us Jesus had already selected the twelve disciples, and it is very likely that a portion of them were in the boat with Him. But the reference to the disciples following Him indicates that many others were following Him as well. Disciples is a broad word. The context determines how it is to be interpreted in the New Testament. By itself, the Greek word *mathetes* only identifies one who is a pupil, learner, or follower. Some believe that it refers to a second level Christian who has a higher category of spirituality. In other words, there are plain Christians, and then there are disciples, the super saints. But you cannot make the word mean that.

a. By Context¹) Matthew 5:1 -- "And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was seated, His disciples came unto Him." What disciples? Some people think that Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount to the Twelve. But that sermon is a message on salvation, and it assumes that those listening may not have believed. Hence, in that context, "disciples" simply means "learners." It identifies a multitude of people who were interested in what Jesus had to say. Their level of commitment was undetermined at that point.²) Matthew 8:21 -- One "disciple" said in effect, "I'm not going to follow You until my father dies." The implication is that he didn't go with Jesus, but turned around and went home. Being a disciple only meant that one was a learner, not necessarily a committed believer.³) John 15:6 -- Christ said that any branch that did not bear fruit would be cut off and thrown in the fire. There were some disciples who were connected with Christ, but had no fruit of righteousness--nothing to mark true salvation--and were therefore separated from Christ. They were followers, but they weren't believers.⁴) Matthew 13:18-23 -- There were four types of soils, or disciples, that were following Jesus. Only one soil enabled the seed to mature and become productive. One was real; three were not.⁵) Matthew 10:22 -- Jesus said that true disciples endure to the end. On that basis, Judas showed that he wasn't a true disciple. There were many who learned from Jesus, but just because they were called disciples doesn't mean that they were believers. The word in itself only indicates that people were attracted to Jesus' teaching and were listening to it.^{b.} By Category We could reduce all disciples into four categories. First of all, there were...¹) The Curious Curious disciples followed Jesus in fascination. They were intrigued by what He said. But when Jesus said to them, "Unless you are willing to affirm My total lordship in your life you cannot be My disciple or enter My Kingdom." Not willing to make a full commitment to Christ, "...many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (Jn. 6:66).²) The Committed In contrast, the Twelve showed that they were more than just followers: When Jesus asked them, "Will ye also go away?" Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Jn. 6:67-69). In other words, Peter said, "We're not the kind of disciples who are just curious; we're the kind who are committed."

We know that You speak the truth."3) The Convinced These were the disciples who were intellectually convinced. Nicodemus is a classic illustration: Having listened to what Jesus said, and having seen what He did, Nicodemus came to Him by night and said, "You must be from God." He was intellectually convinced, but he didn't believe in Christ in the fullest sense then because he didn't forsake all to follow Him.4) The Clandestine There were some disciples like Joseph of Arimathea, who kept their belief a secret. In its broad usage, the word disciples can include Peters, Judases, Nicodemuses, and Josephs, as well as many others who would flee the first time things got tough. The word doesn't signify anything specific. So, all categories of disciples were following Jesus, and He was about to put on a display for them that was absolutely beyond belief.

B. The Storm on the Sea (v. 24)

1. The Crisis (v. 24a)

"And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the boat was covered with the waves..."

Traveling in relatively small, open boats without any protection, Jesus and many disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee. That sea is actually a lake several hundred feet below sea level. Its water empties into the Jordan River and is carried southward to the Dead Sea, which is over one thousand feet below sea level. When cool air from the West and from Mount Hermon in the North collides with warm air above the Sea of Galilee, strong winds are forcefully drawn down the ravines and valleys that border the lake. Such a condition can create incredible storms in a very short period of time. Once those winds hit the cliffs on the eastern shore, they begin to swirl and whip in the little sea basin, often coming without any warning at all. I will never forget my own experience of getting on a boat in Capernaum when the water was like glass. But by the time we reached the middle, there were white caps billowing everywhere, and water was breaking over the bow, drenching people in the stern.

In the dark of night, "there arose a great tempest" (Gk. *seismos* = "a great quaking or shaking"). The Greek word used in the accounts of Mark and Luke is different; it means, "a whirlwind or storm." The indication of the text in the exclamation "behold" is that the storm was an unusually severe one. In other words, those fishermen had seen lots of storms, but not one like that.

2. The Calmness (v. 24b)

"...but He was asleep."

Anybody who could sleep through that was obviously very tired. That speaks to me of Jesus' humanness. He was so tired, even a storm couldn't wake Him up. Of course His sleeping was a part of the divine plan, as was the storm that was tossing the boat like a cork on the ocean. And while the Creator of the world was peacefully asleep, the boat was filling up with water (Mk. 4:37). We see here the reality of Christ's humanity as well as the fearless confidence He had in His Father's care. Oh, that we could live like that! We get tossed around by circumstances, begin to mistrust God, and panic. The heart of Jesus was perfectly calm in His peaceful assurance of God's care.

The sailors did everything possible to keep the boats afloat. Realizing the futility of their efforts, they finally came to Jesus. Now when sailors ask a former carpenter what to do in a storm, you know they are in a lot of trouble.

II. THE PANIC (vv. 25-26a)

A. The Request (v. 25)

"And His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us; we perish."

1. Examined

Mark records a statement that is just as terse: "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" (4:38b). In desperation, they cried, "We're drowning out here; wake up!" Amazed at such apparent indifference, the disciples were not so much convinced that Christ was God as they were merely hoping that He was. But that was where God wanted them. Sometimes the Lord has to make us desperate to get

our attention; doesn't He? They had run out of human resources. Now they needed a divine solution. They hoped that the miracle worker who could heal sickness could also handle the sea. They had fear mixed with faith. If they would have had total faith, they would have been like Jesus-- confident in the Father's care.

The scene couldn't be more dramatic. The disciples broke in on Jesus' sleep in the same way men come to Him in desperate situations. They are like the sea captain who didn't believe there was a God, but when he got washed overboard, began to cry out for Him. His rescuers later questioned him, "We thought you didn't believe in God." "Well, if there isn't a God," he replied, "there ought to be one for times like that!" Many of us cry to God in desperation when sickness, disease, death, loss of a job, or marital problems afflict us. Even salvation is an act of God in response to the desperation of a sinner. But often our first cry is like that of the disciples' as recorded in Mark: "Don't you care? We're drowning!" If you have ever said that, you have demonstrated a lack of faith in God. You don't fully understand His love. Many saints of old suffered from similar lapses of faith:

2. Exemplified

a. Psalm 10:1 -- "Why standest Thou afar off, O LORD? Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?" Paraphrased it might read: "God, You're never around when I need you; don't You care?" b. Psalm 44:22-23 -- "Yea, for Thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, why sleepest Thou, O LORD?..." "How can You be sleeping through this when we're dying for You?" c. Isaiah 51:9 -- "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days.... Was it not Thou who hast dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; who hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" The prophet is saying, "Get up God. Don't You see the terrible dilemma of Your people? How can You possibly sleep through that?"

Those responses to trials are not unlike ours. For that reason, we should consider...

B. The Reply (v. 26a)

"And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?..."

1. Examined

You can imagine that some of the disciples might have said, "You've got to be kidding; what kind of question is that? It's the middle of the night, we're in a storm like we've never seen before, and the boat is full of water!" The Greek word for fearful means "cowardly." Revelation 21:8 indicates that cowardliness is sin, in that the same root word is used in the list of sinners who will not enter the Kingdom. In fact, Mark records Jesus as saying, "...How is it that ye have no faith?" (4:40). Someone with such a lack of faith is guilty of doubting God's love and power. If you believe in those two key attributes of God, you can weather any storm, because you know that God cares about you, and that He can handle any situation.

The disciples were questioning Jesus' care and ability to help them. Evidently, their response surprised Jesus, because they had seen Him perform all kinds of miracles (Mt. 4:23-24). He cast out demons with only a word and was healing all that were sick. If the disciples didn't know He cared about human suffering, then they were blind. And if they didn't think He had the power to help them, then they were ignorant.

Isn't it amazing how we can see a demonstration of God's love and power, but in certain circumstances, forget about those things? We witness the wonderful deeds that the Lord has done over and over again, and yet, as soon as something tough happens in our lives, we begin to question His love and power.

The disciples finally learned that they didn't have enough faith, so in Luke 17:5 they said, "Increase our faith." Not long after their request, Jesus healed ten lepers. What a faith builder that would have been! Faith needs constant strengthening. When our faith is "little," we distrust God's ability and loving care, refusing to believe that He can and will provide our needs. That causes us to worry and become fearful. But if we know that He cares about us and is able to help, what do we have to fear?

2. Exemplified

Even if the disciples were drowning, they shouldn't have been afraid, because that would have apparently been God's will and Christ would have delivered them into His Father's Kingdom.

Furthermore, they shouldn't have been afraid because they surely knew psalms like...

a. Psalm 89:8-9 -- "O Lord GOD of hosts, who is like Thee, O mighty LORD? Thy faithfulness also surrounds Thee. Thou doest rule the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, Thou doest still them" (NASB).
b. Psalm 46:1-3 -- "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."
c. Psalm 107:23-30 -- "Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters; they have seen the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep. For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; their soul melted away in their misery. They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distresses. He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed. So He guided them to their desired haven" (NASB). That's an implicit prophecy of what Jesus did. God provided deliverance from the storm in Psalm 107; Jesus did that in Matthew 8. Therefore, the conclusion is unarguable: Jesus is God. If the disciples had understood that, they would have had nothing to fear.

III. THE POWER (v. 26b)

"...Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm."

William Cowper, the English poet and hymnist, penned these great lines in his hymn, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way":

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.
Ye fearful saints fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Mark 4:39 says that Jesus stood up and commanded the storm to be silent. Instantly there was a great calm. Normally, if the wind stopped, the sea would have continued to ripple until the waves had run their course. But when Jesus said, "Hush" (NASB), the sea became as glass, as both the wind and the waves stopped. Now that's power! It's impossible to measure the power of the wind in that kind of a storm, because we don't know how far the storm extended. But in a normal storm, there are millions of units of horsepower generated through wind, and even more if there was rain. Jesus was able to stop that storm with a mere word. Matthew's message to us is that the One who conquers disease also controls nature. He later shows us that Christ also controls the demons, forgives sin, and raises the dead.

Having seen God, how did the disciples react? Because the dictionary says that something portentous elicits wonder or amazement, the final point has been titled...

IV. THE PORTENT (v. 27)

But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

A. Expressed

Mark's parallel account says that when the storm came, the disciples were "fearful" (4:40). And when

Jesus stopped the storm "they feared exceedingly" (4:41). Do you know what's more fearful than being in a storm? Realizing you're standing in the presence of the living God. That must have been awesome! What an experience to know that God was in their boat-- that was far more terrifying than any storm.

B. Exemplified

1. By Job

When Job saw God through the circumstances of his life, he said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:5-6).

2. By Isaiah

When Isaiah saw God, he said, "...I am a man of unclean lips..." (6:5).

3. By Daniel

When Daniel saw God, he began to shake and quiver, and fell into a heap in the dirt. His mouth was frozen in dumbness in the presence of God (10:7-9)

4. By Peter

When Peter realized the divine power of Jesus after a miraculous catch of fish, he said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk. 5:8)

5. By Paul

When the Apostle Paul saw God in the form of a resurrected, glorious Jesus Christ, he fell on his face in the dirt and was blinded.

You too would be overwhelmed with God's holiness if you were to stand in His presence. The disciples knew that God was with them, and that reality was terrifying. They were unmasked by the omniscient One who could read their every thought. The next boat trip they took involved a similar situation when Jesus stilled another storm. Matthew 14:33 contains their response: "Then they that were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, Of a truth, Thou art the Son of God." There was no doubt this time that Jesus was the Son of God.

CONCLUSION

Can Jesus reverse the curse? Does He have the power to change the earth and restore the Kingdom? The answer is yes. The song writer has written these appropriate words:

We sing th' Almighty pow'r of God who bade the mountains rise,
Who spread the flowing seas abroad and built the lofty skies.
We sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
The moon shines, too, at His command and all the stars obey.
Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed where e'er we turn our eyes
When e'er we view the ground we tread or gaze upon the skies.
There is not a plant nor flower below but makes Thy glories known;
And clouds arise and tempest blow by order from Thy throne.
On Thee each moment we depend; if Thou withdraw we die.
Oh, may we ne'r that God offend who is forever nigh.

The same Jesus Christ who stilled the sea keeps, the earth whirling in space, and the entire universe in balance. That same Jesus Christ will return one day and set up His eternal Kingdom. Will you be a part of that Kingdom by faith in Him?

Focusing on the Facts

1. When God created man, what did He ordain man to be? What did man lose when he fell into sin? Whose control did the earth fall into? As a result, what are some of the consequences that have plagued the earth?

2. What is the ultimate design of God for the universe?

3. Taking into account man's inability to renew the earth, what is the only way that the curse can be reversed?
4. According to Romans 1:20, how is God's power visible to us? By demonstrating His divine power, whom did Jesus show that He was and what did He show that He was able to do?
5. What were the miracles foretastes of?
6. What were the people called who followed Jesus in the boats?
7. Why can't the word disciple be used to mean a supersaint?
8. Give examples for the four categories of disciples: curious, committed, convinced, and clandestine.
9. What can the geographical and weather conditions around the Sea of Galilee do in a very short period of time?
10. What two things do we learn about Jesus from the incident of Him sleeping in the boat?
11. What did Jesus reprove the disciples for? In effect, what two things were the disciples questioning about Jesus?
12. According to the Old Testament, why shouldn't the disciples have been afraid?
13. What is all that Jesus had to do to calm the storm?
14. From the disciples' perspective, what was evidently more fearful than being in a treacherous storm?
15. Describe the general reactions of those who were found to be in the presence of God.
16. How did the disciples respond the next time Jesus stilled a storm?

Pondering the Principles

1. Of the four kinds of disciples mentioned on page 6, in what category would you classify yourself? Why? There is a progression in the stages of discipleship. Which do you think occurs first? According to the parable of the sower, why do you think one cannot remain an intellectually convinced or a clandestine disciple for very long? What will a committed disciple give evidence of in his life? (Mt. 5:3-12; 13:23; Jn. 8:31) If you are not yet a committed disciple, what is preventing you from being one? Find out if you don't know and make the necessary changes. If you are one, help someone you know who is in one of the other three categories to become more spiritually mature.
2. Are you currently faced with a trial? What do think God may be teaching you through it? Do you think He may just be trying to get your attention so that you can depend more upon Him? After meditating on 1 Corinthians 10:13, commit yourself to trusting Him in the situation at hand, realizing that the test you are experiencing has been made just for you.
3. Think of when you last faced a crisis that showed you didn't fully believe that Jesus cared about you or was able to help you. Meditate upon expressions of God's love and power in Ps. 103:2-6; Jn. 17:10; 1 Jn. 4:8-19; and Jer. 32:17; Eph. 1:18-21; and 3:20. Also, listen to or read the testimonies of how God has worked in the lives of others.

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