

06/03/12

Marveling at the Power of Christ

- Do you believe that God wants to powerfully minister to your soul in times of need in your life both great and small?...
 - and I'm really not asking how we would dutifully answer that question on a theology exam...but seriously – for just little old you, and little old me – do you think the God of heaven and earth really knows what we're facing at any given moment...and really wants to minister to our souls in ways that are meaningful and life-changing...
- the morning I was preparing this message we received word that Jan Neiburger thought it might be a good time for anyone who was in the area and would like to speak to Lucky (whisper something in his ear)...
 - a note like that is very helpful by the way, because it helps all of us know the best way we can serve in a difficult situation...
 - Lucky has served in the counseling ministry for some time...so Pastor Green and I jumped in my Jeep and headed over there...
 - and in my line of work, I've been in that situation a lot...but it doesn't make it any easier as a pastor...because with someone like Lucky – you're "losing" a friend, a deacon, a faithful member of our church...
 - and that pales in comparison to how this affects Jan and the children and grandchildren and many others...
 - but still, if you've been a pastor in the same place for a long time...there's a lot of different thoughts and emotions running through your mind...
- and after we talked to Lucky for a few minutes...and thanked him for the way he ministered to us in so many ways...we read a passage I often do at a time like this...because when someone's mind is going in and out, we try to use something that will be very familiar...

Psalm 23 - The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

- it was fascinating to watch the impact of God's Word on Lucky and on Pastor Green and me...
 - it was one of those many occasions where the power and comfort of the Word just washes over the room...and washes over your soul...
 - I believe God delights in ministering to His children that way, don't you?...
- I often get a kick how the Lord does that for me individually, or for us as a church in the way the preaching schedule shakes out...
- you may not know – but we lay out the preaching schedule for the following year each December...

- and the process is that we ask our pastors and deacons to try to help us analyze where our church family is at that point – and where the Lord wants us to go...
 - sometimes we seek input from others as well...but that's the way the annual theme is selected...
 - that's the way the various series are laid out...along with what book or books of the Bible we're going to study...
 - and then we plan for the entire year...and it's not that we can't deviate from that...but we generally stay pretty close to what we decided...

- you know that I religiously prepare Sunday's message on Tuesdays...so my habit is to take a peek at what's coming next sometime on Monday – just to start getting my head into it...
- of course this week was Memorial Day, so I stopped over at some point and I took my routine peek...
 - and I just laughed out loud...
 - is it Ok to say to the Lord – sometimes you just crack me up?...
 - [because I do that all the time...]...

- and the reason I say that is especially because of all the pressure and push-back we've been getting about Faith West recently...it was great to see that the very next text in our study is all about **Building Core Strength by Marveling at the Power of Christ.**
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to Luke chapter 8, page 52 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
 - if you've been attending here you know our church's theme this year...is **Building Core Strength**
 - emphasized in verses like - **Psalm 138:3 - On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul...**that's it—core strength...
 - because today in many ways is the official start of summer...that gives us an opportunity to do two things...
 - to assess how far we've come as individuals and a church in the accomplishment of this theme
 - and also to think about how we can use the summer to take additional steps...

- remember our three areas of emphasis...
 - 1. Shoring up foundational areas in our walk with Christ and our church ministries that comprise the basis of godliness and effective community service.**
 - 2. Planning and praying for the construction of Faith West and the successful launch of a cluster of new ministries in West Lafayette.**
 - 3. Preparing for the next round of ministry dreaming as we embark on a new strategic planning process in 2013.**

- so as you think about that...
 - how would you assess how far you've come as an individual and we as a church in the accomplishment of this theme?
 - and also what steps can/should you/we take this summer to keep moving forward in these three areas?

- I think our passage today can really help us...read Luke 8:22-56...
- we're talking this morning about **Building Core Strength by Marveling at the Power of Christ.**

- with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 areas in which God's power is especially on display.**

I. Jesus' Power Over Our Circumstances

- the passage begins by Luke saying...
- **v. 22 – Now on one of those days...**
- there's no way to know how closely if at all this is connected to what we studied last week
 - the matter of cultivating our hearts like good ground, so we are ready to receive the Word of God in a way that it will produce fruit 100 times as great...along with the opportunity to be a bright light to those around us because we "took care how we listened..."
- but there's no question about the fact living like that requires power—strength – the very issues we're talking about this year...
- so they all get in a boat and Jesus suggests that they go to the other side of the lake...
- and that's a very important exegetical point because...

A. The Lord orchestrated this event.

- **v. 22 – ...and He said unto them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake."**
- not of this caught Him by surprise at all...would we all agree to that?...
- I think we make a mistake if we don't factor that into what's occurring...because we're so used to getting ourselves in jams because we're careless or we simply can't know what's going to happen...
- quite a few years ago our family was vacationing down at Lake Cumberland in KY...
- and we had decided that we would try to do something a little bit extra nice on our last day down there...so we rented a pontoon boat to cruise around the lake...
- and when we woke up, the weather was a little iffy...and I went back and forth on whether we should even go...
 - but eventually I decided it would probably be OK...
 - so we loaded the kids up and I thought, well—the boat has this aluminum canopy thing – so if it rains a little bit, we're fine...
- we started cruising around the lake...and pretty soon the sky got really dark...and the wind started whipping around...and I decided we needed to head back...being the wise family leader I was...
 - and then the sky just let loose...
 - and immediately the waves picked up, and it was raining so hard...
 - and I'm trying to get to the closest shore, but the wind was blowing so hard we just weren't getting anywhere...and I look at my wife and my kids huddled under a blanket thinking – this was a really bad idea...
 - by that time it was so dark and windy and rainy it was hard to even see...and the rain hitting that aluminum canopy was maddening...
 - but that was nothing when the hail started...and you know how hailstorms are kind-of cool when you're inside your house watching it pile up in the yard...
 - they're really not that funny when you have your family in a lake as big and deep as Cumberland...
 - finally we made it to a little cove and there was no place to get out of the boat but at least we were somewhat shielded from the wind...and I thought we would be OK to wait it out there until I heard this...Steve...Steve...Steve...from the other side of the boat...
- and Kris was pointing into the water and there were these little snakes bobbing all around the boat as if they were really hungry after that storm...

- and I realize when we're sitting in a comfortable auditorium, it's hard to picture this kind of a storm...but remember...several of these men were seasoned fishermen...and when they were this afraid – that must have been some storm.
- but this is a far different than a father who made an unwise decision and endangered his family...
- this is actually an event that Jesus knew in advance and led His disciples there anyway...
- and one of the take-aways is...

- v. 24 – They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, Master, Master, we are perishing! And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm.

- see, sometimes we believe the best life is one that's free from storms – Jesus believes it's one where His sovereign hand allows storms so we can learn more about His power.
- now there's one other important piece of this story – and this is why it's so valuable to read passages like this in a Harmony of the Gospels – because Mark explains that part of what they were saying...

- Mark 4:38 – Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on a cushion, and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, so you not care that we are perishing?"

- do you see the difference?...not just – "we're perishing" – but – "you don't even care..."

- so Jesus gets up and...

- v. 24 - ... and He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm.

- I like what Mark includes...**Mark 4:39 – And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly still.**
- don't you love that – someone powerful enough to tell the wind to hush up and it does...

- then He looks at His disciples and...

- v. 25 – And He said to them, where is your faith?...

- I wonder...

C. How many times has Jesus had that same question for you? for us?

- where's your faith?...

- now – what could they have said that would have been better than this?...
- just about anything, huh?...

- how about – Lord, please show us your power...
- or, Lord – we believe, help us with our unbelief...
- or, Lord – help us to have ears to hear what you've taught us before?...
- help the fruitfulness of faith grow in us because we prepared our hearts well...
- help us to be bright lights, even to one another...

- now, what happens next?...

- we go from Jesus' power over circumstances to...

II. Jesus' Power Over the Unseen World.

- you can imagine the disciple's fascination with the man, and especially Luke as a physician...
- and his condition illustrates how...

A. Satan always comes to destroy.

- v. 27a – met by a man possessed with demons
- v. 27b - who had not put on any clothing for a long time
- v. 27c – was not living in a house, but in tombs.
- v. 29 – For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard, and yet he would break his bonds and be driven by a demon into the dessert.

- if you want to think about the kind of situation that would be completely hopeless – this is it for sure...
- can you imagine being part of this man's family?...[please no "you haven't seen my uncle John" jokes]...
- picture how the disciples would have responded to this scene as it unfolded...
- it's one thing for Jesus to tame a storm – but a man like this?...

- but what does Luke want us to be sure we understand – Jesus handled this...well, handily...and part of the point is...

B. Jesus and Satan have never been on equal terms.

- do we all understand that?
- v. 28 - ...**What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.**
- v. 31 – **They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss**
- v. 32 – **Now there were a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and the demons implored Him to permit them to enter the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.**

- don't you get the feeling as you read this that it's like a bully who has been picking on someone smaller and then that person's big brother shows up?...
- and all of a sudden the equation has changed and the bully realizes he's in trouble really quickly...kind of like Eddie Haskell when Mr. Cleaver came in the room – well, hello Mr. Cleaver, and how are you today?...

- and don't you love how this part of the passage ends?...with the reminder that...

C. Jesus is in the business of changing lives.

- v. 35 – **they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind...**
- v. 36 – **Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon possessed had been made well.**

- **Ephesians 6:12 – For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.**

- and the point of this section of the text is – Jesus is powerful enough to overcome any aspect of the unseen world.
- that's why John would later write – **I John 4:4 – You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**

- this is one of the issues that has made some folks in our town upset with us...and now I'm speaking more broadly than demon possession...but just anything about any of us that might not be in line with Scripture...
- now, the argument builds when we get to the end of the chapter, doesn't it?...

III. Jesus' Power Over Matters of Life and Death

- one of the things I like about God's Word is that it doesn't simply provide straight propositional statements – nearly as often as that truth is explained and illustrated through real life events.
- and this story is about as touching as it gets...

A. The sting of death is profound apart from Christ.

- **v. 41 – And there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus' feet, and began to implore Him to come to his house; for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying.**

- are you picturing this scene in your mind?...
- all of a sudden a discussion about the power of Christ takes on a completely different sense of urgency, doesn't it?

- and then, there's this interruption in the story...or is it an interruption?...
- because this woman comes with some kind of a blood disorder...and she had suffered with it as long as Jarius' daughter had been alive...
- and in her faith she reaches out and just touches Christ's garment – believing that will be enough to heal her...and she was right...

- **v. 44 – came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped.**

- and Jesus says – who touched me?....
- and you can imagine – there's this throng trying to get to Jairus' house – the urgency is intense...and Jesus asks who touched Him...it's like – who hasn't touched you?...

- **Luke 8:47-48 - When the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. And He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”**

- the point is...

B. Often faith comes in surprising packages.

- the comparison is obvious...
- Jesus had to ask these big strong disciples – where is your faith?

- but here's a woman – just imagine the physical exhaustion that would come from fighting a blood disease for 12 years...yet what does Christ say to her?...

- **v. 48 - And He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”**

- does that give you hope this morning?...you might say – I'm no spiritual giant – I've never really going to learn about the power of God...
- also please keep in mind – God wants you to learn more about this...
- **Ephesians 1:18-19 – I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.**

C. Don't let laughter and ridicule deter your walk of faith.

- v. 52-53 – Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her; but He said "Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him, knowing that she had died.

D. It's not over, until Jesus says it's over.

- v. 54 – He however, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Child, arise!" And her spirit returned, and she got up immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat.