

One tribe of native Americans had a unique practice for training young braves. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, he was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Until then he had never been away from the security of his family and tribe. But on this night he was blindfolded and taken miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of thick woods. By himself. All night long.

Every time a twig snapped, he probably visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. Every time an animal howled, he imagined a wolf leaping out of the darkness. Every time the wind blew, he wondered what more sinister sound it masked. No doubt it was a terrifying night for many.

After what seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his utter astonishment, he beheld the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was the boy's father. He had been there all night long.

Isn't this what God sometimes does for you and I... To test our faith... we suffer through a certain difficulty as though we are all alone... But once morning comes... and the rays of sunlight begin to illuminate our forest... we recognize that God was with us the whole time. You would think that we might remember that lesson... but eventually another crisis strikes out at us... and it takes until morning for us to remember our first lesson. ... God is always present with us. God's presence is unseen... but it is more real than life itself.

Our passage this morning attempts to make those nights shorter and shorter for us. ... The point of today's passage in Matthew is to prepare us for these times... so we don't panic.

Missionary Oswald Chambers said:

It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God's grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics. The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

Two weeks ago... we saw that when Jesus had finished His Sermon on the Mount... the crowds were astonished at His teaching... because He was teaching them like one who had authority... and not like their scribes." Then as we opened chapter 8... last week... in Matthew's Gospel... we saw that same authority is put into action as Jesus rules over sickness... nature... demons... and death. ... We had to stop before we finished Matthew 8. We will pick up where we left off... but before we continue in it... I'd like for you to understand... what Matthew's point is... in telling us about these events of Jesus' miracles.

Matthew shows us that Jesus possesses absolute power and authority... and He is always present with us. ... This is great news for anyone who is familiar with sickness... or has struggled with any kind of disaster in their life!

I read a shocking statistic this week... but maybe you saw this coming... The National Cancer Institute reports that one out of every two people...

who are born in the United States today... will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lifetime.

Although there have been many wonderful treatments... and in some cases (cures)... Cancer is still a very fearful disease. So... whether it's cancer... other types of disease... forest fires... earthquakes... tornadoes... foreign invaders... or death... Matthew wants us to see that Jesus has authority over it all. ... And once we see this... then it's only logical to conclude that Jesus has authority over our lives as well.

In last week's passage... we saw that Jesus has authority over physical sickness... and also over His disciples. ... Here is what we will be seeing in today's passage...

1. Jesus has authority over disaster.
 - a) The point of the story: Jesus is God.
 - b) The promise in the story: You will never be alone.
2. Jesus has authority over demons.
 - a) The demons have fear because of their belief.
 - b) We often have fear because of our unbelief.
3. Jesus has authority over sin.
 - a) Jesus' authority penetrates to the root of all suffering, which is sin.
 - b) Our ultimate need is never physical; it's always spiritual.
The good news of the kingdom: Jesus will forgive you of all your sins. Forgiveness is God's greatest gift because it meets our greatest need.

We begin with “Jesus has authority over disaster.” ... In this brief and miraculous account that we are about to read... we’ll see that Jesus has authority over calamitous storms ... (We have all faced catastrophic circumstances in our lives – our own personal storms - and we will certainly face more.) ... Many sermons on this passage... will therefore launch into extravagant promises about how Jesus will calm the storms in your life. As the question usually goes, "*What storms are you facing in your life—in your marriage, in your home, or in your health?*" We are then assured, "*Jesus will calm those storms.*"

The only problem is that's not the point of this story. The point is much deeper than that, which becomes obvious when you pay attention to the question the disciples ask at the end of the story in verse 27: "What kind of man is this?—even the winds and the sea obey Him!"

Matthew 8:23-27

The Sea of Galilee is an unusual body of water. It is relatively small (13 miles long, 7 miles wide), but it is 150 feet deep, and the shoreline is 680 feet below sea level. Sudden storms can appear over the surrounding mountains with little warning, stirring the water into violent 20-foot waves. The disciples had not foolishly set out in a storm. They had been caught without warning, and their danger was great.

One of my seminary professors... Dr. Carl Laney... explained that the Sea of Galilee was prone to violent storms because of the hills surrounding it forming wind tunnels... which could stir up a storm in a hurry... as it did here. He said usually around 4:00 in the afternoon... those winds come

onto the Sea of Galilee and whip up sudden violent storms. They even have a name for these storm-producing winds - the “euroquallo.”

At least four of Jesus’ disciples had a vast amount of experience on this sea. They were on it every day for most of their lives. They knew all about the euroquallo. ... But what happened here... that Matthew records for us... Was much more than the euroquallo. ... Remember that these experienced fishermen thought that they were perishing... Even THEY were panicking! ... This was professional assessment. If it was a big enough storm for these experienced... tough... hardened... and seasoned sailors... who were out on their own waters... to say... “We are perishing!” – then that was an unusually violent storm.

But here is an amazing fact! Don’t miss it! ... With the storm lashing the ship... Jesus was asleep!

Here was a great storm which tossed the boat around at will. The boat must have been taking on a lot of water... which meant that Christ would be getting wet. ... Yet He slept on!

This unusual sleeping demonstrates heavenly tranquility more than anything else. ... Storms in your life... may appear to be getting out of hand... but God is not panicking. ... He has things under His control.

As experienced sailors... the disciples knew this storm’s danger. ... What they did not know... was that Christ could control the forces of nature. We often encounter storms in our life... where we feel God can't or won't work. ... When we truly understand Who God is... however... we will

realize that He controls both the storms of nature and the storms of the troubled heart.

Matthew 8:26

Have you ever thought that Jesus was being UNREASONABLE here in rebuking them for being afraid...? I mean... common! The storm was so violent that the assessment of the professionals who knew those waters very well... was that they would not make it through. I would be in a panic – and so would you! What is wrong with them fearing for their lives...?

In order to answer that... we need to understand this scene in the greater context. ... Jesus had just given the Sermon on the Mount. What was that about...? - The Kingdom of God. Jesus had then begun to show them that He was indeed the King of this new Kingdom... which the world had not yet recognized.

When they said, “*We are all going to die!*” – that included Jesus... the King! ...After showing them that the Kingdom is at hand... and that Jesus is the King... and then as Jesus demonstrated this truth by performing miracles... these men now (what?) ... They deny it! ... “*We are all going to die. Jesus, You’re going to die. Therefore the Kingdom will not happen. It is all going down with this ship!*” ... Not only was this a tremendous lack of faith. It was quite an insult to Jesus, Himself.

After Jesus calmed the storm... look at the disciple’s response in verse 27...

Matthew 8:27

The disciples were good Jewish men, and they knew that only God (Yahweh in the Old Testament) is able to direct the wind and the waves.

Psalm 89:9 (ESV)

You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

Psalm 107:29 (ESV)

He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Jesus' disciples marveled because they began to realize that the man in the boat with them was not just a man. God Himself was in the boat with them! **That's the point of the story: Jesus is God.** The authority that belongs to God is the authority that belongs to Jesus.

Having seen the point of the story... we also need to see **the promise in the story.** ... The promise is not that all the storms in your life will end soon. ... The Bible does not guarantee this... nor can anyone else. ... Your cancer may not go away... and that struggle in your marriage may not end this week... or even this year. ... As a believer... your confidence is not that these storms will end very soon... but that in the midst of the storms in your life... you will never be alone. ... God Himself... in the person of Jesus Christ... will be with you every step in the midst of the storm.

Faith is not confidence that trials won't come your way. ... Faith is confidence that no matter what wind and waves come your way in this world... the God of the universe will be right there in the boat with you. ... His power and His presence will see you through. ... Christian... you are not alone... and ultimately you are safe in the presence of the One who has ultimate authority over all disaster.

It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God's grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics. The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

Jesus has authority over disaster, and next we'll see that Jesus has authority over demons. In the following fascinating account, we have a portrait of demons who violently possess two men, yet they are deathly afraid of the Son of God. Knowing that Jesus has absolute authority over them, the demons plead for Him to cast them into a herd of pigs, and He does. It's quite telling that these demons hate and loathe everything about Jesus, yet they are powerless to do anything apart from His permission! Satan can do nothing in this world, and nothing in your life, apart from the sovereign permission of God. Satan is a lion (as 1 Peter 5:8 describes him)... but he is a lion on a leash. ... And God holds the leash. Demons decidedly do not have all authority - Jesus does.

Matthew 8:28-34

I would like for you to notice with me two startling facts: 1) the demons knew the true nature of Jesus, and 2) the demons knew that their time to torment the souls of men was limited.

Verse 29 – “*Before the time*” means before the day of judgment. ...

Apparently even the demons did not expect the Messiah to come in two stages – Jesus' first coming and then later... His second coming.

The demons knew that this was not their final judgment by the Son of God. The demons began their request using the conditional *if*. There was no

arguing with the Son of God. These demons had no illusions about their future as they faced Jesus. Whatever He said would be done.

When the herdsmen fled into the city and told everything that had happened... their report... as is seen in the reaction of the people of the city... was not a complimentary report. ... It was a complaining report. ... You would hope that the people would have been overjoyed that the demon possessed man was now normal... and no longer a threat to society. ... But that is not how most people react. When a person gets saved and quits wasting money on booze and gambling... friends and relatives often do not rejoice as much as they criticize and complain.

Here... we see that "*The whole city*" rejected Christ. This was not just a dissident or two - but the entire town. ... Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount than the popular way is the evil way.

The people were upset because Christ hurt their hog business. They were more interested in pigs than people... in hogs than humans — (Do I dare say this...? ... OK... I will... "Like many whacky environmentalists of our day.) ...

They were also more interested in profit than people — like gambling casinos... who care little about the destruction they are to people... and families... but only care about their profit. ... Evil people do not want Christ around... because He is bad for evil business.

Do you see how passages like this encourage us not to fear? ... We don't have to be afraid of what may happen in this world... because Jesus has authority over it all. ... Many Christians... in the midst of a world of pain and

suffering... live in fear and anxiety and worry... wondering what will happen in this or that situation. ... This tendency to fear is why we must remember the authority of Jesus.

It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God's grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics. The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

Sometimes we lack even the faith of demons, for **the demons have fear because of their belief**. ... They know who Jesus is... and they are scared out of their minds.

But we are just the opposite: **We often have fear because of our unbelief**. If we realized what the demons realize... we would know that we have no reason to fear.

Jesus is the Son of God... with all authority over disease... disaster... and demons... and nothing can touch us apart from His sovereign power and in accordance with His sovereign will. ... We... as followers of Christ... should be - the most secure people in the world. ... And our security... is not based on how big our house is... how good our job is... how stable our economy is... or who our president is.

We are secure simply because we are in the hands of the One who has all authority in the whole world... and because this One with all authority loves us and cares for us. ... God is committed to providing for us in the midst of health issues... natural diseases... demons... natural disasters... and

storms... All of this is good news for followers of Christ. We can trust in His authority over all these things.

Now in chapter 9... this portrait goes even deeper... as we realize that we have only been touching the surface of the real problem. The real problem of everyone of us... is deeper and much more severe than a cancer diagnosis... or an earthquake... or a financial storm.

The incident that we are about to read... is best known for the making a hole in the roof of the house to let the stretcher with a paralyzed man down for Christ to heal him. Matthew... unlike the other Gospel accounts... which tell this story... does not report about this roof incident. But many Bible scholars regard this as the same one as the famous “hole in the roof” narrative.

Matthew 9:1-7

Try to put yourself in this man’s sandals... or on his mat... and imagine what would be going through your mind... when Jesus said... *“Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven...”* *“Say... what...? I didn’t ask for that...! That is not what my friends did all this for...”*

Jesus astounded everyone when He said this to the paralyzed man. ... But Jesus wanted to show that He has authority over sin.

God gives many good things... but forgiveness is God’s greatest gift – because it meets our greatest need. ... You can get to heaven in spite of having a horrible disease... but you cannot get to heaven without forgiveness of your sins. Spiritual healing is more long-term and has a

much higher priority in God's plan... than physical healing. That is why we don't send missionaries all over the globe (at great cost) and say... "*Trust Christ and all your cancer will be gone...*" ... The idea that by trusting in Jesus... you will receive health and wealth – is no gospel at all! The gospel is much greater than that. ... Rather... it is... "Trust in Jesus... and you will be made right with God. ... No matter what you have done against God... no matter how sinful your past or present might be... God is gracious... and through Christ... He will wipe your sins away."

The text does not tell us that this man's illness was due to some sin in his life. It may... or may not have been. But the truth is... that all suffering is ultimately caused by sin in the world. Jesus is showing that His authority is deeper than an authority over illness. His authority goes to the root of all illness.

When the Scribes scoffed at Jesus' authority to forgive sin... the scoffing was in their thoughts. Jesus knew their thoughts. God knows all of our thoughts.

Matthew 9:5-6

No one can see if sins are forgiven or not. It is not OBJECTIVELY verifiable. But they can certainly see if a person walks or not. A healing that is based on the forgiveness of sin... is objective proof.

The scribes thought that sin caused illness. Therefore... a healing could only take place... if the source of the illness was removed. ... So... Jesus sets them up. "*If I can remove the source of this man's illness (by*

forgiveness of it) – then you should expect to see no more evidence of this sin... (his illness)”

Jesus commanded the man to rise, pick up your bed, and walk... was given to one... who at the moment of the giving of the command... could not fulfill the command. But notice this: (It is usually true of all God’s commands)... God gives us the power and ability – to do the command at the very same time!

The point I want you to see is this: Don’t ever complain about God’s commands being too hard for you. If God gives the command – He also gives the ability – even if it has never been part of your history.

Matthew 9:7-8

It was irrefutable proof. The critics could not deny the miracle. The miracle showed that Jesus has authority over sin. But the critics still did not believe in Christ.

Evidence does not always produce faith... or belief. ... Evidence WILL shame unbelief... but it doesn’t always reverse it (turn it into faith.) Evidence shows how belligerent unbelief really is.

Look what this audience did with the evidence of Christ’s authority.... Look at the final phrase of verse 7... “*and they glorified God, who had given such authority to... (who?) – “men”!* (plural... not singular... they did not see that God gave it uniquely to Jesus... but God gave it to men... Jesus and others... Jesus does not have a unique authority.) ... The word “men”

speaks volumes about their response! They completely missed the Deity of Christ in the healing and forgiveness.

Here was power and authority no one had ever seen before. ... Anyone who could do such things obviously had to be from God. But even the religious crowd of Jesus' day missed the point.

Jesus has authority over illness and storms. And He has authority over the root cause of everything that might threaten your harm.

When we think of Jesus' authority... we should not think of it as an impersonal... lifeless power. That is not the picture we have been seeing here.

Look again with me at verse 2... of Matthew chapter 9...

Matthew 9:2

He calls him... "My son"... or "My child..." This tender reference shows how Jesus' authority was exercised with compassion.

Jesus loves us deeply. His showcase of authority is not selfish... it is selfless. ... But the proud reject Him. The scribes and the Pharisees (as well as the crowd who refused to respond right to the evidence) rejected the King and His unique authority.

The same thing happens constantly today – even in our conservative Evangelical churches. ... There is a pride that rejects His authority. It is a spirit of self-sufficiency... that scoffs with a disbelief that they truly need Jesus. ... Even when a calamitous storm strikes. ... Many hear the Word

of God every week... yet they refuse to humble themselves before Him and trust Him. ... That is a foolish response to Jesus... and it's ultimately dangerous.

What about you... will you humbly and gladly submit to the authority of Jesus? How will this affect the way you handle the next storm or struggle with sin... that enters into your life...?

It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God's grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics. The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.