

“Who Then Is This?” (Luke 8:22–39)

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When have you been in awe? When have you literally experienced something awesome?

I was trying to think about this during the week because of the passage that we’re looking at today in the Gospel of Luke. We’re going to see people witness Jesus’ power and become afraid. And what’s interesting is that I don’t know that I’ve experienced awe very much.

I haven’t been in the middle of a natural disaster. I haven’t been in an earthquake or a tornado or a typhoon. I haven’t witnessed the power of nature unleashed and been greatly afraid. The most I’ve experienced is a hail storm and very heavy rains and lightning.

I haven’t been in the middle of a war and experienced the great power of heavy weaponry. I imagine the power of some weapons would produce a lot of fear.

I haven’t been in the middle of a terrorist attack like 9/11. I’m sure being in lower Manhattan on that day was a fearful experience, to see planes go into the Twin Towers and then to see those towers collapse, would produce not only fear, but a strange sense of awe.

Perhaps you’re like me and you haven’t personally experienced something that would drive you to your knees. And I’m sure what the disciples saw Jesus do and what others saw Jesus do was unlike anything they had ever seen. Both followers of Jesus and those who rejected Jesus became afraid when they saw his power. But while the followers of Jesus experienced awe that led them to wonder who Jesus is, others experienced an awe that threatened them, and they chose to reject Jesus.

Today, we’re going to continue to look at Luke 8. In this chapter, Jesus performs four miracles. We’ll look at the first two today and then the next two next week. The miracles show that Jesus has power over everything, from nature to evil to disease and even death.

Let’s look at the first miracle, which we read about in Luke 8:22–25:

²² One day he [Jesus] got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they set out, ²³ and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. ²⁴ And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵ He said to them, “Where

is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?”¹

The story here is rather simple. Jesus told his disciples to go to the other side of the “lake,” the Lake of Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee. They were traveling from the western side to the eastern side, to the region known as the Decapolis, which was a Gentile region. On the trip, Jesus fell asleep. And a storm “came down on the lake.” This wasn’t unusual. The Sea of Galilee is almost 700 hundred feet below sea level. Winds can blow down from the heights of the hills surrounding the lake, and wind can funnel through valleys. When the cool air blowing down the hills meets the warm air above the water, a localized storm can occur. We’re told that there were “raging waves.” The storm was powerful enough to cause the disciples to believe they would die. That must have been a significant storm, because some of the disciples were professional fisherman who knew this body of water well.

So, the disciples wake Jesus and say, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” We get the sense that Jesus is never worried, never out of control. He simply rebukes the winds and the waves, and the storm ceases. Earlier in Luke’s Gospel, we have seen Jesus rebuke an unclean spirit (Luke 4:35) and a fever (Luke 4:39). Now, he rebukes dangerous weather and the weather responds.² And then Jesus turns to his disciples and asks, “Where is your faith?” In other words, “Why were you so concerned? Don’t you know I’m with you? Don’t you know who I am?”

When the disciples witness what Jesus has done, “they were afraid, and they marveled.” Jesus’ miracles have produced fear before (Luke 5:26; 7:16). All the events surrounding Jesus’ birth produced marvel (Luke 1:21, 63; 2:18, 33). This is the only time when we’re told Jesus produced both fear *and* marvel.³

Why would the disciples have this strong reaction? Well, I think if any of us were there and saw a man who was able to tell nature what to do, and nature responded, we would be in awe. But the disciples saw this in a certain context. They were Jewish men. In the Hebrew Bible, the sea was often associated with evil, death, and chaos. (That’s why it’s such a big deal that “the sea was no more” in the vision of the new creation that John sees in Rev. 21:1.) There are also various times in the Old Testament when we’re told that God is the one who controls the winds

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² “Any force hostile to humans can be rebuked by Jesus, whether spirit, disease, or natural forces.” Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 762.

³ *Ibid.*, 763.

and the seas. Psalm 65:7 says that God “stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves.” The result is “that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs” (Ps. 65:8). Psalm 89:9 says of God, “You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.” The prophet Nahum says that God “rebukes the sea” (Nah. 1:4).

The passage in the Old Testament that is closest to what the disciples experience is Psalm 107:23–30, which is worth reading:

23 Some went down to the sea in ships,
doing business on the great waters;
24 they saw the deeds of the LORD,
his wondrous works in the deep.
25 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,
which lifted up the waves of the sea.
26 They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths;
their courage melted away in their evil plight;
27 they reeled and staggered like drunken men
and were at their wits' end.
28 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
29 He made the storm be still,
and the waves of the sea were hushed.
30 Then they were glad that the waters were quiet,
and he brought them to their desired haven.

The disciples would have known these passages. They would have known that only God can make the storm be still, only God can hush the waves of the sea. And here before them is this man, this miracle worker, who was just taking a nap, and who now summons the power of God. That's why they ask, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” They had a hard time processing that a man could have this divine power. Jewish people were not expecting that God could become a man. If Jewish people were making up a story, they would never have God become a man. Despite a couple of prophecies that hint at this (Isa. 9:6–7; Mic. 5:2), they couldn't imagine it was possible. If we were Jewish people living in Jesus' day, and we saw what he did, we would be afraid and we would marvel. We would wonder at who Jesus is.

From this miracle, we see who Jesus is. He is God. And we see that if Jesus is in our boat, so to speak, he will lead us to safe harbor. He will ride through the storms of life with us, and he

can deliver us through them. That doesn't mean we won't face danger and even physical death. But Jesus has power over even death, and if you are with him, there is no need to fear.

Before I move on to the next miracle, I want to say something about miracles. A lot of people can't believe they're true. They say, "We know miracles aren't true, therefore, the Bible can't be true." But what if the Bible is true? "Well, we know the Bible isn't true because it reports miracles." This is arguing in a circle. Some skeptics say, "I won't believe in miracles unless there is evidence for them." But there is evidence for miracles in the Bible, and they reject this evidence. There are also many reports of miracles throughout history in different times and places. Miracles are reported today. But skeptics conveniently ignore all of this evidence. It's like they're saying, "There's no evidence for miracles except the evidence that I don't want to count as evidence, which doesn't count because it didn't occur in a science lab." Which is like saying, "I don't believe in murders because I've never seen one, and they don't occur in police stations where they can be studied by homicide detectives."

Miracles are by definition rare. They are not regularly occurring. There's no way to set up an experiment that will produce a miracle. The chances of a miracle happening when scientists are waiting to observe it is about zero. But that doesn't mean miracles haven't occurred. As I've said before, I've never seen a miracle occur. And I've never seen a murder.⁴ But I've heard reports of both, and we've experienced the effects of both. All of are alive because of the effects of a miracle. The fact that the universe emerged out of nothing is a massive miracle, and we all have life because of the miracle of creating biological organisms out of chemical "dust," out of basic elements of carbon into very complex, intricately designed biological systems.

So, miracles are rare. They are signs that show that God is there, and that he is doing something particular. I find no reason not to believe in miracles. And Jesus performed this miracle to show his followers his true identity.

Let's move on to the next miracle story, which has some parallels with the first one we've seen. We'll go ahead and read verses 26–33:

²⁶ Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

²⁷ When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who

⁴ I suppose I have seen at least one murder on video: John F. Kennedy's assassination, captured on the famous Zapruder film. However, extreme skeptics could doubt all video, claiming the video was doctored in some way to misrepresent the truth.

had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.”²⁹ For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.)³⁰ Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him.³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.³² Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission.³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

Jesus and his followers arrive at their destination, on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. Given the fact that Jesus told his disciples to sail across the lake, and then encounters this particular man, drives out his demons, then leaves to go home, he must have had this specific purpose for this trip in mind. If you think about it, that’s another proof of Jesus’ deity. How else could he know about this man if he didn’t have access to the mind of God?

At any rate, there’s a man who has been possessed by many demons. He didn’t live at home; instead, he lived among tombs. He was apparently naked. We’re told that people tried to restrain him with chains, but even those chains couldn’t hold him, and he was driven into the desert, the wilderness, by a particular demon. All of this is strange, but it’s loaded with meaning, which I’ll get to later.

Jesus commands the demon to come out of the man, at which point the demon tells Jesus to go away and not to torment him. It’s interesting that the demon knows who Jesus is. He knows that Jesus is “Son of the Most High God.” And it’s ironic that the demon doesn’t want to be tormented, since the demon had been tormenting this man.

Jesus then asks the demon his name, and the answer he get is “Legion.” A legion was about six thousand soldiers, which means that there were many, perhaps thousands, of demons who had tormented the man. And these demons begged Jesus not to send them into the “abyss,” which is basically what the book of Revelation calls “the pit” (Rev. 9:1–2, 11; 11:7; 17:8). Basically, they don’t want to be sent to hell. They see “a large herd of pigs”—the Gospel of Mark 5:13 says there were about two thousand pigs—and they ask to be sent into them. So, Jesus gives the demons permission to go into the pigs, and when they do, the herd of pigs rushes down into the lake and drown.

I realize how bizarre this story is. I think it must have been strange to all who saw it, too. As I said three weeks ago, there are many stories of people being possessed or oppressed by demons today, and there was even a recent article about this in *The Atlantic*.⁵ It seems there were more demons active when Jesus was on the Earth. If Jesus is the Son of God and the devil and demons are real, it makes sense that Jesus would face greater opposition from them.

Why would the demons want to go into the pigs, and why would the pigs then run into the water and drown? I suppose demons need a host, and they thought it would be better to be in animals than bound in the pit, waiting for destruction. Perhaps they just happened to see the pigs, and there were as many pigs as there were demons inside this man. But the fact that the pigs rush to their own deaths shows that the forces of evil are destructive. See what the demons did to the man they were tormenting: they isolated him, caused him to live among the dead, naked and out of his mind, like an animal. Evil is destructive; it leads to death. This has always been the case, and as long as evil is present in the world, it always will be.

What's interesting is that pigs go into the sea. When we looked at the first miracle, I said that the sea was associated with evil and death. It's fitting that the demons would drive the pigs into that place. And in both miracles, Jesus is in complete control. The demons ask Jesus for permission to enter the pigs, and he grants them that permission. I'm sure he knew what would happen next. Jesus is never surprised, never out of control. He truly is the Master.

I'll say a little more about the pigs, but first let's see how the story ends. We'll read verses 34–39:

³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

⁵ Mike Mariani, "Why Are Exorcisms on the Rise?" *The Atlantic*, December 2018. The article can be viewed online: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/12/catholic-exorcisms-on-the-rise/573943>.

The pig herders told everyone what happened, so people came to see Jesus and the man who was demon-possessed. And they find the man changed. He was naked, but now he's clothed. He was out of his mind, but now he's sane. He once was isolated and homeless, living among the dead; now, he's told to go back home. He once was chained, but now he's set free. He once was under the influence of demons, but now he's sitting at the feet of Jesus, which means he is ready to learn from Jesus (cf. Luke 10:39).

This is a picture of salvation. I think the details of this story are true—this literally happened—but they're also full of symbolic meaning. And though the story of this man and the demons is strange, it's really our story. The problem of mankind is that we're separated from God by our sin, by our rebellion against God's rule. We don't live for God. We don't want to. We don't love God the way we should. And as a result, we are spiritually dead. You might say we walk among the tombs. We've left home and we're in the wilderness. We're enslaved and not free. In a sense, we're naked. What I mean is, we try to cover up all our wrongdoing, but God can see all that we've done, even everything that we've thought. Try telling someone else every single thing you've done wrong, and even every thought or desire that you're ashamed of, everything that would embarrass you. If you don't want to do that, you know how terrifying it would be to be exposed for all that you are and all that you've done. Well, God can see all of that. And the Bible says that there will be a day of judgment when all will be exposed before God.

The only way to way to escape that judgment is to be covered, to be clothed. And the only clothing that can cover up our sin is Jesus. If we trust in him, he will transform us. He will remove us from the realm of the dead to the land of the living. He will make us spiritually alive. He will bring us out of the wilderness to our true home, a new creation with him where there is no evil and no death. He will free us from the bonds of sin. He will clothe us with his righteousness, so that instead of God seeing all our failures, he sees Jesus' perfection.

How does this work? Well, think about the first miracle we saw today, Jesus calming the storm. The reason why Jesus can calm the storm of our sin and the condemnation that we deserve is because he entered the storm. If you're familiar with the Old Testament story of Jonah, you might say that Jesus is the true Jonah, thrown overboard into the storm so that those in the boat can be saved (Jon. 1). He was thrown into the storm of God's wrath when he died on the cross, taking the penalty that we deserve for our sin. God cannot abide evil because he is perfectly

righteous. And because God is just, he can't just let evil go. It must be punished. And because God cares for his creation and because evil is destructive, he must destroy evil if the creation is to be healed.

How can God destroy evil without destroying us? Now think about the second miracle we saw today. Evil was transferred from the man to the pigs, who died. In a sense, the pigs were sacrificed so that the man could go free. That's a picture of what Jesus does for us. He takes on our sin and takes on the destruction that comes with it. When he died on the cross, he absorbed the destruction that evil deserves. But unlike those pigs, he rose from the dead, in a body that can never die again. Jesus has power over nature, evil, and even death.

What does it look like to receive all of these benefits from Jesus? What does it look like to trust him, to believe him, to be one of his disciples? Look at the man whom Jesus healed. There was a noticeable change in his life. And not only that, but he sat at Jesus' feet, which is a way of saying that he was ready to learn from Jesus. He was listening to Jesus. And he was ready to follow Jesus. That's what it looks like to trust Jesus. You must learn from him and do what he says. We may not literally have to travel to follow Jesus. The man who was healed didn't travel. He wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus told him to stay and to tell everyone what God had done for him. Perhaps Jesus didn't take this man because he was a Gentile, and Jesus' disciples were Jewish. More likely, Jesus wanted to use this Gentile to tell other Gentiles about himself. Most of us won't have to travel to follow Jesus. Yes, there are missionaries who travel to tell people about Jesus. But most of us will stay where we are, and we have opportunity to tell others about Jesus.

I think there are two more marks of a Christian that this man displays. One, he tells other people what Jesus had done for him. If you have the Spirit of God inside of you, you should want to tell others about Jesus. You should want to tell them the good news about where they can find forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. Two, this man must have realized that Jesus was associated with God. Jesus told the man, "Return to your home, and declare how much *God* has done for you." What does the man do? He returns home and tells "the whole city how much *Jesus* had done for him." He realized that Jesus was doing the work of God, that God was working through Jesus. Perhaps he even recognized that Jesus is God. I don't think you can be a Christian without knowing that Jesus is truly God, the divine Son of God who also became a man.

If that's what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus, we also see a picture of what it looks like to reject Jesus. The rest of the people in the country asked Jesus to leave. Like the disciples in the about, they were afraid, but unlike the disciples, they wanted no part with Jesus. Perhaps that's because they were upset at the loss of all those pigs. For the pig herders, those animals were wealth. There are times when turning to Jesus means losing money. We may feel that we're not able to take certain jobs that we feel are unethical. We are certainly asked to give to the church and to the poor. Becoming a Christian will mean having less money to spend on yourself. Some people don't want any part of that. Some people simply don't want to sit at Jesus' feet and learn. They would rather be their own masters. But they're not free. They are mastered by sin, by desires that lead them away from God. And they will not find forgiveness, rest, and eternal life. They will not be clothed in Jesus' righteousness on that great day of judgment.

So, what do we learn from this passage? One, Jesus is God and he is Lord over nature and evil. God has not promised to stop all natural disasters and all evil in this life. To do that, he would have to completely eliminate all evil in the world. He will do that one day, but if he did that now, it would be too late for anyone to turn to Jesus and find salvation. But Jesus is always in control.

Two, those who are with Jesus will find healing. They will be put in their right minds, to see things as they truly are. Now, you may think, "Are you saying that if I'm not a Christian, I'm out of my mind?" Well, I'm not saying you're crazy, but the Bible does say that when we're not Christians, we suppress the truth about God. God is the ultimate reality, and if we don't believe what is true about God, we're not going to see reality for what it is. So, to come to Jesus is to see things rightly. And those who come to Jesus will be brought safely to port, to our final destination in the new creation. We'll go from wandering into the wilderness to a paradise. Along the way, we may experience all kinds of pain. Unless Jesus returns soon, we will die. God never promised his people they wouldn't experience pain and death. But he promises to be with his people through those things, and to make sure they cross to the other side.

Three, to be a Christian is to be changed by Jesus, to know who he is, to sit at his feet by listening to his word, and to act on what he tells us to do.

Four, if we know Jesus, we will tell others about him. We all should do that. Most of us will never travel to do that. Many of us don't feel like we're good at this. That's no excuse not to tell others. If you feel like you don't know what to say, talk to me. I would love to help you. But

just tell people what you know is true. Ask them about what they believe regarding life and death, why we're here, and what the meaning of life is. Ask them what they believe about God. And then tell them what you believe.

So, if you're a Christian, be in awe of Jesus, yes, but don't stop there. Sit at his feet and do what he tells you to do.

And if you're not a Christian, I would urge you to turn to him. You should be in awe of him and be afraid of what he can do. He says that he will come again to judge the living and the dead—everyone who has ever lived. The only one who can save us on that day and rescue us from the destructive powers of evil is Jesus, who can command even winds and water to obey him. He is the only one who would take our evil and destroy it by taking on our sin, being regarded as sin itself (2 Cor. 5:21), and being crushed so that we could go free.