

What Kind of Man is This

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Matthew 8:23-27 (NIV)

²³Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" ²⁶He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. ²⁷The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

Jesus had taught the Sermon on the Mount. The next day was a long day of healing. The demoniac in the Synagogue was first, then the leper, the Centurion's servant, Peter's Mother-in-Law, and that evening the whole town came to His door to be healed. Mark tells us that when Jesus healed a person, power went out from His body. (Mark 5:30) After that long day of healing, He must have been exhausted. I would have slept in the next morning. Wouldn't you? Not Jesus! He got up before dawn and went to pray. (Mark 1:35) In doing so, He set an example for us. Strength is from the Lord. (Ephesians 6:10) Spiritual needs are greater than physical needs. Spiritual needs must come first.

In that time of prayer, Jesus received instruction from His Father. He knew He had to leave and go to other cities. He didn't get caught up in the public attention, or even in the seeming success of all the healed people. He put the Father's direction above natural inclination. If we are going to be effective for the Kingdom of God, we have to learn the truth that Jesus taught in John 15, "Apart from me, you can do nothing." John 15:5b (NIV)

I hope you are hearing this in your spirit. I find this is one of the most difficult truths to convey. I have well meaning Christians tell me again and again that we should do this or that, or that I should use this formula or that method. If I respond, "God willing", or "if the Spirit leads", there is disappointment as if I were just using a pat phrase to get out of doing what they think should be done. I've been trying to win people to Jesus Christ since I was 16, and I've found one lesson repeated again and again in my life. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty. Zechariah 4:6b (NIV)

If you want to see fruit that remains, be led by the Spirit. There is a reason that we prefer programs and routines. We don't have to have the constant, convicting, and self-quenching presence of Life. Last Sunday we covered the concept of taking up our cross being the acceptance of a death sentence. The strange thing is that Jesus declares that when you do that you will find real life. If you've been longing to see God work more powerfully and with more lasting result in your life, this is the example our Lord set for us to follow. Emptied of self, He followed His Father's direction without leaning upon natural inclinations or routines and formulas that others were following. (Galatians 5:24-25) Take up your cross and follow Him not man or even your own inclinations. (Jeremiah 17:5)

Commented [notes1]: ³⁰At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" Mark 5:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Ephesians 6:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:24-25 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ⁵This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. Jeremiah 17:5 (NIV)

As He headed to the boat the would be followers expressed their “me first” excuses. Jesus was blunt and to the point. He didn’t try to baby them into following or make it easier. He told them it was tough to follow but more important than any other thing. That didn’t go over well with many.

²³*Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.*

Jesus and the disciples got in the boat and headed toward Decapolis. This was region of ten Greek cities on the southeastern shore of Galilee. There were Jews that had settled in that region, but the majority of the audience would be Gentile (non-Jewish). Prophets of old were sent to Gentiles, like Isaiah, Jonah, and Daniel, but in Jesus’ day it was taboo. The Jews didn’t mind if the Gentiles converted to Judaism and went through a ritual cleansing, but there was not a great effort to reach out to them. As receptive as the Jews seemed, they were so steeped in the traditions of men that all they really wanted from Jesus were the miracles He could perform for them. The Gentiles would be another story. We saw that already in the receptivity and faith of the centurion. (Matthew 8:10-12) Satan is aware of the prophecies. He knew it was written that the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles. (Isaiah 42:6)

²⁴*Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.*

There exists today a mural of a first century Jewish boat and even the remains of one that was uncovered recently in the mud on the record low shores of Galilee. About 27 feet long and 6 feet wide, it had a quarterdeck in the stern. (Mark 4:38) Under that quarterdeck, one could store the nets without fear of damaging them by stepping on them. What a great place to sleep. Out of the splash of the waves and brightness of the sun, on the comfort of the nets you could catch a nice nap.

What is Jesus doing nodding off during the day? Well, I’ve just told you how little sleep He got the night before. Mark tells us that Jesus had preached off the ship before they departed. (Mark 4:1) Jesus was a man in every way, but without sin. When a person stands before a group of people and speaks their adrenaline begins to flow. Afterward, we become quite tired. I don’t know a single pastor who doesn’t take a Sunday afternoon nap. Add that onto the lack of sleep from the night before and you can understand that Jesus would sleep through a storm.

Galilee is situated in a deep crevice of the earth. It is 680 feet below sea level. The mountains to the West form a funnel for winds blowing eastward and dump all the wind out upon the lake. In one of my trips to Israel we had to postpone our boat ride across Galilee because one of these storms had come up.

Dr. W.M. Christie spent many years on the shores of Galilee and reported this story about some skeptics.

A company of visitors were standing on the shore at Tiberias, and, noting the glassy surface of the water and the smallness of the lake, they expressed doubts as to the possibility of such storms as those described in the gospels. Almost immediately the wind sprang up. In twenty minutes the sea was white with foam-crested waves. Great billows broke over the towers at the

Commented [notes6]: ¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

¹¹I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
Matthew 8:10-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ⁶“I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,
Isaiah 42:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ³⁸Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”
Mark 4:38 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ¹Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge.
Mark 4:1 (NIV)

corners of the city walls, and the visitors were compelled to seek shelter from the blinding spray, though now two hundred yards from the lakeside. —*Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)*

Interesting how God can put an end to our doubts, isn't it?

²⁵*The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"* Their fear is probably based on knowing families that had lost a loved one on the lake. In addition to that, they thought of the depths of the lake as the realm of the dead. They referred to it as the abyss. Jesus will speak of tying a millstone around the neck of someone who offends a child and throwing them into the lake to be drowned. (Matthew 18:6) Other than crucifixion, they couldn't imagine a worse death.

Isn't it interesting that when Jesus begins to reach out to the Gentiles this storm suddenly came up, and not when He was alert and ready, but when He slept? J. Vernon McGee suggested that this was an attempt of Satan to snuff out the life of Jesus. After all, Satan is referred to as the Ruler of the kingdom of the air. (Ephesians 2:1-2) And who will greet Jesus when He arrived on their shores, but a demon possessed welcoming committee. (Matthew 8:28)

Our battles and difficulties in life aren't always of satanic origin, but when we set out to be an instrument of God to the lost, you can count on Satan protecting his property. Many of our battles are just part of living in a fallen world. Some are just because we haven't learned to keep our flesh on the cross. But some are Satan's efforts to protect the area he claims. In any storm in life, whether of supernatural or natural origin, we need to do what these disciples did and call out to the Lord. (Romans 10:13) The disciples must have called out with hope but in the absence of real faith. Though the words are right, the heart was faithless, yet Jesus still honored their request. You don't have to be perfect to ask for help. You just need to recognize where help comes from and ask. (Psalm 121:2)

What storm are you enduring at the moment? Some of them can last quite awhile. We should learn from this story. It isn't just that Jesus did a miracle 2000 years ago, it is that He is the Master of matter then and now and always. Just as Satan attempted to cause the disciples to fear and doubt, he will do the same with you. He will bring your greatest fear and threaten you with it. God allows this to happen to help you become victorious over your fears. (1 John 4:18) With Jesus present in our boat, we should be fearless. Instead of screaming, "Jesus, wake up! We're all gonna die!" We just say as the disciples did in Acts 4:29-30, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." What a difference in the disciples before and after Pentecost! It wasn't that threats and temptation were gone. They increased, but filled with the Spirit they realized the presence of Jesus is reason enough to have peace in the storm. Jesus promised we would have storms, but He promised to be our peace in the midst of the storms. (John 14:27) Is it enough for you to know that Jesus is in the boat?

Satan is not responsible for all of our storms. Sometimes God allows calamity to overtake us like a storm to turn us back to Him. (Hosea 5:15) The writer of Proverbs

Commented [notes10]: ⁶But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Matthew 18:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. Ephesians 2:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ²⁸When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. Matthew 8:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹³for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ²My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalms 121:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ¹⁸There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27 (NIV)

warns us that this is because we have refused to listen to God's instruction to us. (Proverbs 1:27-29) We could have avoided the disaster if we had only listened to the Lord's rebuke. But in our text today, I agree with McGee that this was the attack of Satan upon Jesus as He headed to the Gentile region. Still, God used it to increase the faith of the disciples.

²⁶He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

Jesus seems surprised at their lack of faith that resulted in fear. They had seen the miraculous catch of fish and the miraculous healings. They had seen before that He is the Master of Matter. Jesus is the Master of His own creation. Yet, they were in fear of their lives. The Author of life was right there in their boat. How faithless to fear!

Who is in your boat? If you have asked Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, you have Jesus more intimately with you than those disciples did in their boat. His presence is reason not to fear. If needed, He can speak to your storm. Why are we so fearful? Are your finances running out? Is your health failing? Is the threat of legal action impending? Who is in your boat? Is He the Master of Matter? Is He Master and Commander? You can cry out to Him like the disciples did. He understands if your faith is faltering, but remember you have more evidence than they did.

You have all of their stories. You have the testimonies of countless people that have gone before us. You have Hebrews 11, that great hall of faith. You have seen God save you from or see you through this world's problems time and time again. Is there any difference in your current storm?

As I wrote this, I was experiencing a storm that was threatening to sink my ship. But the grace and peace of God, the fruits of the Spirit, have so encouraged my heart that I have complete confidence that the Master of Matter needs to but speak the word and the wind and waves will instantly cease and there will be a great calm or He will see me through it.

Each of us must decide if we really believe this is a faithful recording of an actual event. That takes faith, but it is faith based on very reasonable assumptions.

1. Other disciples relate the same story.
2. If any of them publicly denied the story it would not have taken hold.
3. They had nothing to gain but martyrdom. There was no motive to lie.
4. They did die for the story without flinching.
5. All the details match the actual conditions found in that geography and archeology.

Still, it is by faith that you must decide if this is a true story or a fabrication. The next verse tells us this is not an exaggeration. You must decide how you will respond to this truth.

²⁷The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

I think we would have been just as amazed. One minute we are hanging on for dear life with the spray from the waves smacking us in the face and the next we are sitting in a still boat on a calm lake staring at the man who can order matter and it obeys.

Commented [notes18]: ²⁷when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. ²⁸Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. ²⁹Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, Proverbs 1:27-29 (NIV)

⁸O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. ⁹You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them. Psalms 89:8-9 (NIV)

"What kind of man is this?" Only God does such things! That is really the question, isn't it? (Mark 8:27) Who can speak and demons flee? Who can restore severed nerves with a word? What kind of power lies in a man who can tell the dead son of a widow to get up or command a man to be well on the other side of town? (Luke 7:13-15) What kind of man is this that illness cannot remain when He extends His touch? What kind of man can order the wind and the waves? And just as foreign to me is the fact that He is so shocked at my utter amazement? How is it that He expects me to have more faith and not fear? "What kind of man is this?"

I know Him and yet I still say in awe, "What kind of man is this, all man and yet all God?" About Jesus, James Stewart, a Scottish preacher said, "He brings together in His being a startling coalescence of contortities. In Jesus we see that He was the meekest and lowliest of the sons of men, yet He spoke of coming on the clouds of heaven with the glory of God. He was so austere that they said the demons cried out in terror at His coming, yet He was so genial, winsome, and approachable that the children loved to play with Him and the little ones nestled in His arms. His presence at the innocent gaiety of a village wedding was like the presence of sunshine. No one was half so kind toward sinners, yet no one ever spoke so red hot scorching words about sin. A bruise reed He would not break. His whole life was love. Yet He demanded of the Pharisees how they would expect to escape the damnation of hell. He was a dreamer of dreams and a seer of visions, yet for stark realism He has all of us stark realists soundly beaten. He was the servant of all, washing the disciples feet, yet masterfully He strode into the Temple and the hucksters and money changers fell over one another in their mad rush to get away from the fire they saw blazing in His eyes. He saved others, but at the last, Himself, He did not save. There is nothing in history like the union of contrasts that confronts us in the Gospels. The mystery of Jesus," says Stewart, "is the mystery of Divine personality."

When my children were younger, we'd spend some of our summer vacations at Lake Powell. The first time we rented a houseboat, but those things are just too slow to do any exploring. In subsequent visits, we rented a speedboat. Sometimes we would bring a Japanese tourist with us. When the thunderstorms come, those waves can get pretty wild. When I would power through them to get to a calm canyon, we'd fly from wave to wave. Different people had different reactions. Some would hang on, wide-eyed, white knuckled, hoping for quick arrival to our destination. Others would jump with the waves, sticking their face out to catch the spray of the waves. I guess it depended on how much faith they had in me as a pilot. How much faith do you have with Jesus in your boat? Are you hanging on for dear life, or jumping with the waves? It all depends on how much faith you have in the pilot. Just as easily as He spoke to the wind and waves from that boat on Galilee, He can speak to the wind and waves that are rocking your boat today. But even more amazingly, He can help you to have faith to enjoy the ride.

What is your storm? Who's in your boat? How large is your faith?

Commented [notes19]: ²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" Mark 8:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ¹³When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."
¹⁴Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"
¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. Luke 7:13-15 (NIV)