

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 21 January 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Christ's Authority over the Deep and Demons

Matthew 8:23-34

In 2023, one of the biggest tech companies on earth ran a TV ad in which they assured their viewers that Apple is committed to fighting “climate change.” As the commercial begins, the leaders of the company (including Apple’s CEO, Tim Cook) are seated around a conference table, and are visibly nervous as they await the appearance of a special guest. Suddenly, they hear a roll of thunder; and then, at the end of the conference table, a woman magically appears; and one of the board members timidly whispers, “Mother Nature”! Yes, my friends: “Mother Nature” had appeared, in the flesh; and she was *not* happy. She was there to demand answers as to what Apple was doing to reduce their “carbon footprint.” The board members assured Mother Nature that they were working toward having a “carbon footprint” of zero by 2030, by doing such things as eliminating all plastics from their bags by the end of 2024; by using 100% recycled aluminium; and by phasing out leather. Furthermore, they boasted that they were operating on 100% “clean electricity” (which, they said, was possible thanks to Mother Nature, and her “powerful wind and sun”); that they were transporting more products by ocean, rather than by air; that they were planting forests in Paraguay and Brazil; and that they had reduced water usage by 63 billion gallons. They then showed “Mother Nature” their very first carbon-neutral Apple watches. After this tense board meeting was over, Mother Nature walked out of the room, and said, “Don’t disappoint your mother!”

This ad shows just how pagan our society has become. Multitudes of people now think of nature as a living entity, which must be appeased by “saving the planet.” To many people, the earth is a literal “goddess.” Perhaps one of the most blasphemous parts of the Apple ad was when Tim Cook greeted Mother Nature by saying, “Mother Nature, welcome to Apple. How was the weather getting in?”; and with a roll of thunder, Mother Nature replied, “The weather was however *I* wanted it to be.”

My friends, there is only *one Person* who controls the earth, the sky, the sea, and the sun, wind, and rain; and it is *not* “Mother Nature.” His name is the Lord Jesus Christ! He is the true and living God, who created all things; and as God, He is eternal, self-existing, and set apart from His creation. Yet, in His incredible love for mankind, He stooped to *become part of* His own creation, by being conceived in a virgin’s womb, and by taking on human flesh, so that He might die on a cross for our sins. Though veiled in flesh, Jesus never ceased to be God; and as God, He had (and still has) *all power* over nature. The Lord Jesus Christ also has all power over Satan’s evil spirits, which control and terrify most of mankind. For those of us who have placed our faith in Christ, we need not fear the powers of nature, nor the powers of darkness, because we serve a God who is absolutely sovereign. That is what we will be talking about this morning, in this message which I’ve entitled ***Christ’s Authority over the Deep and Demons***.

Read Matthew 8:23-27.

I. Christ’s authority over the deep (vv. 23-27)

As you know (if you have been here in the last couple weeks), **Matthew 8 and 9** is all about Christ's miracles. In these chapters, Matthew records nine miracles that Jesus did at various points in His ministry, in order to prove that He is the Messiah, the King of Israel. Earlier in **chapter 8**, we examined the healing of a leper; the healing of a centurion's servant; and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (as well as other townsfolk in Capernaum). These miracles demonstrate Jesus' power over *disease*. Now, in **verses 23-27**, we see Jesus' power over *nature*. At the beginning of this account, we find that Jesus and His disciples had gotten into a boat, and had set sail across the Sea of Galilee, toward Gadara, on the southeastern side of the lake. However, as they were rowing the eight miles to Gadara, a storm quickly arose.

Now, storms on the Sea of Galilee certainly are commonplace. The lake is 680 feet below sea level, with a semi-tropical climate, and warm, moist air—whereas the mountains all around the lake are as high as 2,000 feet above sea level, with cool, dry air. Because of this sharp contrast of height and air pressure, swift temperature and pressure changes often arise, resulting in strong winds which whip through the mountains down to the sea. Undoubtedly, these experienced fishermen had been in *many* storms before. However, this storm was unlike any storm that the disciples had seen before. This storm was so fierce, that they quickly began to fear for their lives. In **Luke 8** and **Mark 4**, we are told that their boat was filled with water, and that they were *“in jeopardy.”* Yet, what was Jesus doing while this storm was raging? He was sleeping! It had been a long, tiring day of preaching and healing; and in His humanity, Jesus was “knackered”! While the disciples were about to die, Jesus was snoozing.

Christian, have you ever felt as though the Lord were sleeping while you were going through a fierce storm in your life? If so, you are not alone. Many of the godliest saints have felt this same way during a moment of crisis. Let's look at an example.

Read Psalm 44:20-26.

The psalmist's words sound a *lot* like the disciples' words, don't they? Not only did the disciples *inform* Jesus that they were about to perish (which, of course, He already knew); but in **Mark 4**, we are told that they went so far as to say, *“Carest thou not that we perish?”* They actually had the audacity to question whether Jesus *cared* about them! By the way, I would *not* recommend hinting to the Lord that He doesn't care about your problems! Matthew isn't telling us that it's all right to “give out” to the Lord. It's *not* O.K.! Matthew is simply reporting to us that *this is* how the disciples reacted (even though they said the wrong thing)! It's the same way in the book of **Psalms**. **Psalms** is *not* a manual of “perfect prayers,” which we should mimic in every aspect. The psalms are the prayers that David and others prayed to the Lord, often in times of deep distress; yet, their emotional responses toward the Lord were very human and frail. Oftentimes, their prayers reveal lack of faith, and struggles with selfish thinking. Yet, God recorded these men's prayers by divine inspiration (even with their faulty thoughts and wrong emotions), so that we might see what *communication* with Him looks like.

Brethren, God wants us to *talk* with Him! Even though we may say things amiss, He still graciously invites our prayers. He wants us to pour out our hearts, and to tell Him about our fears and woes. He wants us to *rely* upon Him. He wants us to “take with us **words**, and turn to the LORD.” Peter wrote, “***Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.***”

Christian, I don't know what storm you may be going through (or are *about* to go through); but I *can* tell you that the Lord is totally in control, and knows precisely what He is doing. Jesus knew that this storm was going to arise over the sea while they were *en route* to Gadara; yet, He took the disciples out onto the sea, anyway. He did not shield them from the danger: instead, He gave them this opportunity to have their faith in Him strengthened and moulded. Jesus *does* care that you perish, Christian; and He is waiting for you to cry out to Him!

What does it mean, then, when our hearts are filled with fear? What does it mean when we are nearly paralyzed with terror on account of the storms in our lives? Is it *natural* to fear? Yes. But is it *right*? No. God did give us a “fight or flight” instinct, which alerts us of danger, and fills us with adrenalin, and prepares us for action; but when *fear* grips our minds and our hearts, our focus is no longer on the Lord, but on our circumstances. Peter, like all the other disciples, was paralysed with fear when this storm arose; yet, ten years later, when Peter was bound in chains between sixteen Roman soldiers, and faced with execution the next morning, he was sound sleep—just as Jesus was asleep during this storm! How could Peter sleep when he knew that his head was about to be chopped off the next morning? Because he had finally learned the lesson that his Master took him out on the Sea of Galilee to teach him!

The Bible says that “***whatsoever is not of faith is sin.***” That means that *fear of man* (or of circumstances, or of nature, or of demons) is *sin*, because it is not built on the foundation of faith. Fear is just the *opposite* of faith. Fear is also the opposite of *love*. Fear of men, or of circumstances, or of nature, or of demons, *cannot* co-exist with perfect love for Christ. The Apostle John said that “***There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.***” It *hurts* our Saviour's heart when our hearts are filled with fear. Why? Because our fear reveals a lack of faith and love for Him. It reveals lack of *faith*, because we don't believe that He is in control; and it reveals a lack of love, because it shows that we *doubt* His love, and think that He doesn't care!

Do you see why Jesus *rebuked* the disciples for their lack of faith? He said, “***Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?***” Faith in Christ, and love for Christ, are spiritual fruit which should be manifesting in Christians' lives, and *growing* more and more. As you trust Him more day by day, you will be filled with power, love, and a “***sound mind.***”

Read 2 Timothy 1:7.

This story of Jesus' calming of the sea is an amazing example of the *absolute power* of our Lord over nature. As Creator, Christ can do anything that He, His Father, and the Spirit please. By the way, the waves and billows did *not* slowly die down, and gradually return to a calm. The wind not only *stopped blowing* immediately, but the *effects* of the wind (the swelling of the water) disappeared immediately, as well. It was as though there had never been a storm at all! *That* is the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. He created all things; and by Him all things consist!

By the way, did you notice that Jesus "**rebuked**" the wind and the waves? We know that Jesus, as God, has the power to change the course of nature merely by speaking the Word; yet, why would Jesus *rebuke* something that is non-living? This word "**rebuke**" (the Greek word *epitimao*) is the same word that is used when Jesus was rebuking demons, wicked men, and even Peter, when he contradicted what Jesus had just said. These men (and spirits) *deserved* to be rebuked, because they had done or spoken evil. Why, then, would Jesus rebuke the wind and waves, which have no moral nature? While Scripture often does poetically refer to non-living things as though they had personality, it seems that Jesus was rebuking something *beyond* the physical elements—something that was *energising* the elements. What am I saying? I'm saying that it *could be* that this storm was whipped up by the powers of darkness!

Throughout Scripture, we are told that God has given angels various levels of ability to control the elements. For example, in the book of **Revelation**, we are told that some angels have power over the winds of the earth, and some over fire, and some over waters; and some have great power in the sun. Satan and his *fallen* angels were created with great powers, too. In **Job 2**, we are told that God allowed Satan to cause a "**great wind**" to strike the house in which Job's children were gathered, so that it might fall on them. In **Job 2**, we are told that God allowed Satan to smite Job with grievous sores all over his body, in order to test and try his faith. According to **Job 1** and **Revelation 13:13**, Satan can even produce fire from heaven, *if* God allow him to do so. However, we must always remember that even though Satan's angels have power to manipulate nature, they can do *nothing* without authorisation from God! *God* is in control of the earth, and the weather; and though He allows nature to operate according the laws that He has established, He can *suspend or alter* the laws of nature whenever He wishes. *Nothing* in nature is a "freak chance." Either God Himself directly did it, or else He *allowed* either His angels, or Satan's angels, to do it, for His own purpose.

The earth is *not* "Mother Nature's," my friends. **It is the Lord's:** and He has all power over it! This means that when you are going through a trial, Christian, you don't need to sit around worrying about whether you are under demonic attack, because *it doesn't matter* whether this is an attack of Satan or not! Whether this trial be directly from God, or an attack from Satan (with God's permission), God is still the one in charge! God uses Satan's attempts to fight Him to bring glory to Himself. It's His ball, His goalposts, and His pitch; and He *will* win!

Now, when the storm was over, how did the disciples respond? They were *exceedingly* amazed, and afraid. Let's take a look again. **(Read Matthew 8:27 again.)** The disciples surely realised by now that Jesus is God in human flesh. They had already seen Jesus heal people of incurable diseases and deformities *by His own authority*; and this alone showed that Jesus is God. However, they had just witnessed a whole new class of miracle. Jesus had stopped a raging storm instantly! Surely they would have heard **Psalm 89:9**, where the psalmist, speaking to God, said, "***Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them***"—or **Psalm 107:29**, which says, "***He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.***" This miracle screamed that *Jesus is God Almighty!* Jesus didn't *pray* for the storm to stop: He *commanded* it to stop! He can do this because He is God!

My friends, the same Jesus who commanded the storm to stop is *still* commanding storms to stop—not only literal storms, but figurative storms. If you do not know Christ as your Saviour, then your life is like a *continual* storm, because you do not have the peace that only God can give you. **Isaiah 57:20** says that "***The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up dirt and mire. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.***" The reality is that we are *all* wicked, because we *all* have a sin nature; however, when God speaks of "***the wicked,***" He is talking about those who have *not* had their sins washed away by the blood of Christ. This leads me to ask an important question: "Have you been saved?" If you haven't, then you are *spiritually perishing* at this very moment; and if you die without Christ, you will perish eternally, in hell. However, there is good news: Jesus came into this world to save sinners. Just as the disciples cried the simple prayer, "***Lord, save us: we perish,***" so *you* can cry out to Jesus and say, "***Lord, I am perishing in my sin; I need your forgiveness. Please save me!***" If you will ask Jesus to save you, believing with all your heart that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for your sins, and His resurrection from the grave, is all that you need to be saved, He will save you instantly; and He will give you *true peace!*

II. Christ's authority over demons (vv. 28-34)

Read Matthew 8:28-34.

Read Luke 8:26-39.

In this account, Matthew shows us *the reason* why Jesus was so intent on sailing to the southern side of the lake. Jesus went to Gadara *specifically* to help two men who were in great spiritual bondage. In fact, *if* that storm was, indeed, generated by demonic activity, it could be that the demons were trying to *stop* Jesus from arriving at Gadara, and freeing these men! It may even be that *many more* demon "recruits" entered these men as Jesus was approaching the shores of Gadara, with the hope that if there were *many* of them, Jesus would not be able to cast them out! This would secure their power over these men, and their stronghold in the

region of Gadara; and, it would discredit Jesus! Jesus hadn't failed to cast out a demon yet; but if there were enough of them in this man, they might be victorious (or so they thought).

Now, as you can see, these men were in serious shape. Today, these men would have been committed to an institution. They would have been said to have serious "mental health" issues. However, these men's "mental health" problems were not the result of any physiological problem in the brain. These men were inhabited by demons—and not just a few, either! When Jesus asked the demons their name, they said, "**Legion**"! (To put it in perspective, a Roman legion consisted of 4,200 infantry, and 300 cavalry!) Were there really *that* many demons in these men? We don't know; but there were doubtless hundreds of them.

My friends, demons are no joke. Satan and his angels *hate* mankind; and they are doing everything they can to keep men in spiritual darkness. Their mission is to steal, kill, and destroy man, because man is the crowning jewel of God's creation, and the object of His love! Matthew says that these men were *chalepoi*—"exceeding fierce." This is the same word that is translated as "*perilous*" in **2 Timothy 3:1**, where Paul prophesied that in the last days, "*perilous times shall come.*" The times in which we are now living truly are "*fierce,*" because many people today, just like these two men of Gadara, are walking around demon-possessed (or *oppressed*). The presence of demons in our society manifests in many ways. For one thing, many people today **are obsessed with death**! Movies, video games, and all forms of entertainment are filled with violence, murder, and glorification of suicide; and abortion and euthanasia, instead of being regarded with horror, are regarded as acts of compassion, instead of murder. Why? Because the LORD says in **Proverbs 8:36** that "*All they that hate me love death.*" So it was with these two men. They literally lived in "*tombs*"; and in **Mark 5**, we are told that they **cut themselves with stones**. They **loved death**, because their minds and hearts had been utterly twisted by the demons that they had invited into their lives. Not only that, but these men **went around naked**. What does *this* tell us? It shows that Satan loves to degrade men and women by getting them to take their clothes off! After Adam and Eve sinned against God, and realised, for the first time, that they were naked, they were filled with shame; however, the more Satan controls people, the more they lose the shame of nakedness. (The actors and actresses in Hollywood who take their clothes off for the big screen show, by their perverseness, that their father is the devil!) The demonic activity in these men also shows itself in that they were **fierce and ungovernable**. The more Satan controls a person, the more unruly he is. The anarchy that we see in our world today is one of the many signs of just how much people have opened themselves up to the devil!

Now, this leads to an important question: "*How does one come to be possessed by demons?*" Well, first of all, we need to realise that those who are *not* saved, and *not* indwelt by the Spirit of God, are already very vulnerable to Satan's attacks. In **2 Timothy 2:26**, we are told that lost people are in "*the snare of the devil,*" and that they are "*taken captive by him of his will.*" However, even lost people have a certain degree of merciful protection from God—

until they open themselves up to the demonic. **Sexual immorality** (whether it be fornication, pornography, adultery, homosexuality, or incest) is a wide-open invitation for demons to come into one's life. **Drugs and alcohol** are a wide-open invitation for demons to come in. **Occultic things** of all kinds (whether it be overt witchcraft, or seemingly "innocent" things such as horoscopes, tarot cards, Ouija boards, Dungeons and Dragons, Pokémon, or Harry Potter novels) are wide-open invitations for demons to come in and take control. We don't know what these men's past was; but somehow, they had opened themselves up to the devil.

Now, please notice how the demons reacted to Jesus when He approached them. **(Read Matthew 8:29 again.)** The demons knew *exactly* who Jesus is, didn't they? They knew that Jesus is "***the Christ, the Son of God***"—the One who had cast them down from Heaven 4,000 years earlier! Notice also that they were *very afraid* of Jesus! Luke says that they begged Jesus not to cast them into "***the deep***." The word "***deep***" is translated from the word *abusson* (from which we get "abyss"); and this word refers to the unfathomable depth called "the bottomless pit," where all demons and unsaved men will one day dwell. Not *all* demons dwell in the abyss *right now*; only a *portion* of the demonic kingdom is currently there. The demons that we read about in **Genesis 6**—the demons that seduced the daughters of men before the Flood, and had children by them, in order to corrupt the human genome—*those* are the demons that God sent to the abyss early. The *rest* of the demonic kingdom is currently roaming the earth, with the intent of deceiving and destroying as many of the human race as they can. However, the day is coming when Christ will return to this earth to set up His 1,000-year Kingdom; and when He does, Satan and his demonic crew will be cast into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years! Ultimately, after the destruction of this sin-cursed universe, Satan and his demons will be locked up in the bottomless pit *forever*!

Read Isaiah 24:17-23.

Read Revelation 19:11-16, 20-21 / 20:1-4.

Do you see why the demons were *afraid* of Jesus? The Bible says that Satan "believes" in God, and trembles, because he knows that his day of judgment is coming. Satan would *love* for us to believe that he and his demons will "reign" in the Lake of Fire, and that they will be mocking and tormenting people: however, this passage shows that they will be doing nothing of the kind! The demons will be "***tormented***" in the Lake of Fire, just as *unsaved men* will be tormented! Satan and his demons know Scripture; and they undoubtedly knew, from **Isaiah 24**, that when the *Kingdom of Messiah* begins, *they* will be locked up in the abyss! These demons probably feared that Jesus was about to set up His Kingdom, and that *they* were going to be cast into the deep a little bit early!

Now, why did the demons ask Jesus to go into *pigs*? Well, for one thing, Satan and his demons love to hurt, torment, and destroy God's creation. They *especially* love to indwell and torment men; but since they could not hurt these two poor men anymore, then they wanted to destroy some *other* thing that God had created (in this case, the pigs). Undoubtedly, the demons also wanted to stir up anger against Jesus. They knew that if Jesus allowed them to go into the pigs, then they could *destroy* the pigs, and thus get the people of Gadara angry against Jesus for destroying their profits. This raises a question, though: Why did Jesus *allow* the demons to enter these pigs? For one thing, pigs were one of the unclean animals which God had commanded the Jews not to eat; and if the owners of these pigs were *Jews*, then Jesus was bringing financial loss upon them, as a warning to turn from their sin. Also, Jesus probably allowed the spirits to go into the pigs in order to show that Satan and his demons are no joke! If these demons could cause 2,000 pigs to commit "suicide," then what would they do to *men*?

Before we close this morning, I would point out the *response* of the people of Gadara. Did they *thank* Jesus for freeing these poor men, and for breaking the stronghold that the demons had had in their region for years? No! They told Him to go away! Their profits had been lost; and they were *not* happy about it! Never mind that a man who had once been grievously tormented by demons was now sane: all they cared about was that *money* that was lost. So it is with most people today. Most people couldn't care less that Jesus sets people free from the prison house of sin, and that He restores a "*sound mind*" to those who were oppressed of the devil. All they care about is the things of this world, and their status in society. "Why, if I become a Christian, everyone will laugh at me; and I might even lose my job, or business prospects!" To this day, most people are still saying, "Go away, Jesus! I don't want you!"

You know, *that* is the most chilling part of this story! The most frightening part of this story is not the part about the demoniacs' running around naked, or their living in tombs, or their breaking chains and cutting themselves; the scariest part of this story is when the people *told Jesus to go away*. The people had decided that they didn't want the Light of the world, because He made them afraid and uncomfortable. Thus, Jesus didn't try to force Himself upon them: He simply went away. The *madmen* had been saved from their sin; but the "sane" people *remained in their sin*. In reality, *they* were more insane than the madmen! Only a fool tells Jesus to go away! They didn't think they needed Jesus. They literally loved *swine* instead of loving Jesus! So it is today. People love their *sin* instead of loving the Saviour!

Now, what about the madmen? What became of them? We don't know what became of the first man; but we do know that the *other* of these men was so grateful to Jesus, that he was ready to follow Him wherever He went! However, that wasn't what Jesus wanted him to do. Jesus commanded him to go home to his family, and to tell them "*what great things God hath done unto thee.*" In the book of **Mark**, we are told that this man published his testimony throughout Decapolis. (Decapolis was a region of ten cities on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, which extended all the way to Damascus. It was a *large* region!) This man was so

thankful to Jesus, that he literally couldn't keep his mouth shut! So it should be with every child of God! We who are saved should want to tell *everyone* about the Jesus who has all power over the deep and demons! We should yearn to tell everyone the news that *Jesus saves!*

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask: “Are you saved? Do *you* know that your sins have been washed away, and that you are on your way to Heaven?” You don't have to be possessed by a thousand demons to be on your way to hell; all you have to do is ignore Jesus' sacrifice for your sins. Whether you have hit bottom morally, or are a “moral” and respectable person, you still need Jesus, because *you are a sinner*. Jesus came to save sinners; and He is offering salvation to you today. Won't you let Him come into your heart? In simple faith, *ask Him* to save you; and He will! If you know Christ already, I would ask, “Which of the two former demoniacs are you like—the one who was saved, but didn't say much about it? Or the one who went all over Decapolis to tell people that “Jesus saves”?” Should your witness for Christ be lacking, let Jesus fill your heart with love for Him; and should your faith be wavering, be still and know that Jesus Christ is God, and that the wind and the waves obey Him!