

September 25, 2022

JESUS' AUTHORITY OVER HIS ENEMIES

Luke 8:22-56

(3 of 11 in a series through Luke 7-15)

As the man grabbed me by the shirt and proceeded to speak to me harshly, I had never been so relieved to that point in my life. I was in seventh grade, and we'd just finished my physical education class, which consisted of seventh through ninth graders playing volleyball, basketball, or whatever sport our teacher had told us to do that day. Then, after sweating like crazy and smelling like a bunch of junior high boys, we'd all go to the locker room and get ready for our next class. Most of the time that consisted simply of changing our clothes, spraying on cologne, and convincing ourselves that we'd smell quite good the rest of the day. And this day was going like any other—for a while.

I'm not really sure exactly how it happened. A freshman boy looked at me and made some smart remark, and I—in utter foolishness—answered in turn. I guess I'd hoped nothing would come of it, and it'd just be a couple of junior high boys acting like jerks only to go on with their days as if nothing happened. But that didn't happen. After my response, the kid looked at me and said, "What did you say?" I chose not to answer—not sure what I thought that would accomplish—and soon he says, "Do you want to fight me?"

Of course I didn't. Not only was the kid a couple of years older than me (which makes a big difference when you're comparing junior high boys), but I've always been a bit on the thin side, and, well, this confrontation was not going to go my way. And though I again refused to answer him, the group of boys all started backing up to form a big circle around us. I'm not sure why, but in public high schools in Kentucky in the late 80s and early 90s, everyone would always circle up in excitement if it looked like a fight was going to take place. But only seconds after this scene started to unfold, my teacher burst into the locker room, saw the two of us in the middle of the circle, grabbed us each by the shirt, and made some threatening remark like, "The two of you better not have been planning on fighting, and if I ever see you two causing trouble . . ." well it wasn't pretty. But though he was grabbing my shirt and threatening me, as I mentioned, I'd never been so relieved. I wanted to vindicate myself ever-so-briefly by telling him that I think I was the only kid in that locker room *not* wanting there to be a fight. But I said nothing because I was just so thankful he'd come into that locker room at that moment.

What brought me such comfort in that moment was at the very second where it seemed like everything was out of my control and escalating against me, here had come someone with the authority and power to change everything. And he *had* changed everything. He spoke and it was done. His mere presence carried an authority that I desperately needed to enter into that sweat and cheap cologne laden locker room that day.

As we consider our text today, what we see is Luke compiling a few stories where Jesus' presence and authority changed everything. And Luke doesn't choose stories where things were

just kind of bad or mildly threatening. He chooses the worst of the worst. He focuses us on a storm that had experienced fishermen terrified, a man terrorized by a multitude of demons, a woman whose illness was so bad and chronic that no doctor could help her, and a little girl who actually died. And in each circumstance, Jesus steps in, demonstrates his authority and changes everything. It seems that Luke has chosen this compilation of stories because he wants us to see just how powerful Jesus is and drive us once more to respond to him appropriately.

Therefore, what I want to do this morning is walk through these stories, showing us first and foremost Jesus' authority over these great threats, and I also want us to see the response each of these stories demands from us. So, let's start where Luke starts where we first see Jesus' authority over a storm at sea.

Jesus' authority over a storm at sea

Luke opens this section by telling us of a day that Jesus got into a boat with his disciples, saying, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake" (v. 22). So, they set out to do just that. However, while they were on the water, a windstorm settled on the lake, the boat started taking on water, and they thought they were going to die. And when we say that, it's easy, perhaps, for us to say that they may have been overstating the danger in their minds. But a decent number of them were actually experienced fisherman and would have been on that lake several times in multiple storms, no doubt. So we're probably on safe ground to say that this was an especially ferocious storm.

Now, during all of this, Jesus was sleeping in the boat. So as they grow more and more afraid, the men decide to wake Jesus, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing" (v. 24a). And Luke tells us that Jesus awoke and "rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm" (v. 24b).

Luke also tells us that Jesus rebuked his disciples, saying to them, "Where is your faith?" (v. 25a). But I want to set that statement to the side for a second and focus on their response to Jesus. We are told that they were afraid and marveled and said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" (v. 25b).

One reason they're appropriately overwhelmed and asking who Jesus can be is because there are multiple places in the OT where the Scripture makes clear that God specifically shows his power in a way unlike any other in that he alone directs the storm and sea. For example, in Psalm 106:9 we're told that the Lord "rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry," and in Psalm 107:25 we're told that the Lord commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts the waves of the sea and also in verse 29 that he makes the storm be still and the waves of the sea hush.

So what we have in this text is Jesus doing what God alone does. No wonder the men marvel. I mean, if we were to witness someone simply speaking to a storm and making it completely calm down and go away, I'm sure fear would grip our hearts as well. Who in the world is this man

we're standing beside, we would ask. And on top of that, they know that this is an act that only God is supposed to be able to do.

This obviously is precisely the reason Luke includes this story. He wants us to see that Jesus is God the Son. And this is what the disciples had failed to grasp. When Jesus asks them, "Where is your faith?" the question exposes that they should have had faith that they'd arrive safely. After all, Jesus had started this whole journey by saying, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." And if he is indeed the Christ—the *God*-man (which Luke has already established in his gospel)¹—then they should have believed. But obviously they're still struggling to come to grips with who he is.

For us, though, this raises a question, doesn't it? Do we believe Jesus is who he says he is? Obviously if you've never placed your faith in Christ this is a question for you. The Scripture teaches us that the means by which we can be declared righteous before God is not by doing enough good or avoiding enough bad but by placing our faith in Jesus as the one who lived, died, and was raised for us, believing that he is who he says he is and that he is sufficient. And so, do you believe Jesus is the God-man, and are you trusting in him now for your salvation? But it's also a question for those of us who profess faith.

It was the disciples' great fear that provoked Jesus' question. And it may be that you're allowing your life to be one filled with constant fears, anxieties, and fretting. If so, do you believe Jesus is who he says he is? Do you believe that he's the one who upholds the universe by the word of his power, reigns over all at the right hand of God, and accomplishes his purpose of working all for the good of his people? If so, then those things shouldn't characterize us. We should believe in the one who has authority over the storm—and over our lives! And yet that's just the first of the areas where Luke shows us his authority. We also see Jesus' authority over demons.

Jesus' authority over demons

In the next scene, Jesus and his disciples come to the country of the Gerasenes. And as Jesus arrives a man approached him who was being demonized. These demons would cause the man to live as if he were crazy—wearing no clothes, spending his time among the tombs, and exercising great strength and breaking shackles if ever he was bound. And so when Jesus sees the man, it's not the man but a demon from the man who addresses him, saying, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me" (v. 28).

Now, there are a few interesting things about what happens here. First, Jesus doesn't make the demons stop talking when they identify him as "Son of the Most High." The reason that's interesting is because back in Luke 4:34-35 when a demon identified Jesus as "the Holy One of God," Jesus rebuked him, telling him, "Be silent." So why on this occasion is Jesus okay with the demon identifying him as "Son of the Most High God?" Why doesn't Jesus shut him up? I think

¹ <https://cccjackson.org/sermons/luke-1-26-38-who-is-jesus>.

the answer is back up in verse 26 where Luke tells us that this whole interaction was happening in the “country of the Gerasenes,” which is to say a land inhabited by Gentiles. You see, the Jews would have had certain ideas about who the Messiah should be and could easily adopt wrong ideas about him as Jesus is identified as such. We even saw John the Baptist struggling with this because Jesus didn’t come bringing judgment. The Gentiles, however, would have no category for the Messiah, and so to be identified as “Son of the Most High God” in Gentile country would be no one in danger of misunderstanding what kind of Messiah Jesus would be. They simply had no expectations. This may be why Jesus permitted the demon to rightly identify him here.

The second interesting note is the sheer number of demons Jesus is interacting with here. When Jesus asked, “What is your name?” the demon answered “Legion,” and Luke tells us that he said this “for many demons had entered him” (v. 31). Now, we don’t know the precise number, but a legion of soldiers in the Roman army would number about 6,000 men. So, Jesus wasn’t simply interacting with one demon but many, which fits the theme of Luke showing Jesus’ authority over that which would have been the most threatening of enemies to someone lesser than Jesus. So, this is no small encounter. And this leads to the third interesting note. Even this legion of demons knows they are no match for Jesus.

The demons know that Jesus has authority over them and that they will one day be judged, thrown into a lake of fire. This leads them not to try to resist him—that would have been futile—but to beg him to do something with them besides throw them toward the abyss (perhaps a place of punishment as they await the final judgment). Ultimately they request (as they know Jesus is going to make them leave the man) to enter a herd of pigs. Jesus, then, grants them permission, they enter the pigs, and they cause the pigs to run off a bank, into a lake, and drown.

This raises a bunch of questions I just don’t have answers to. Why did they enter the pigs? What did they gain by destroying the pigs? What happened to the demons once the pigs drowned? Again, I don’t know and any attempt at an answer would be mere speculation. But it seems Luke doesn’t want us focusing on those questions as much as recognizing the blessing that happened for this man whom Jesus had freed from their terror.

The text tells us that people in the city came out to see what had happened, and they found this once wild man sitting at Jesus’ feet, clothed, and in his right mind. But instead of praising the Lord, they were gripped with fear (again, understandable in the face of such a display of power) asked Jesus to leave (less understandable). And so Jesus left.

But before he left, this man who had been delivered and was believing in Jesus asked to go with the Lord. But Jesus told him to go back and tell the people what God had done for him, and Luke beautifully notes that he went “throughout the whole city [proclaiming] how much *Jesus* had done for him” (v. 39). This man knew that Jesus carried the authority of God himself. And thus we see Jesus’ authority over demons.

We're also reminded in this, however, of our need to testify to others of what Christ has done for us, aren't we? After all, if this man knows he should tell others what Jesus did for him, why shouldn't we? Now, we may be tempted to answer that by thinking we're much different from this man, noting that we weren't tormented by demons, running around naked, and living among tombs. But it doesn't seem the difference between this man and any one of us is as grand as we might think. Listen to what Paul says of believers in Ephesians 2:1-3. He says, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power, *the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience* . . . like the rest of mankind." So, all of us were once following the demonic powers of the devil himself that is at work in the sons of disobedience. I think we underestimate just how helplessly captive we were before God opened our eyes and gave us life. Thus, if this man saw how fitting it was for him to tell others of Christ's work for him, it should no less be true for us. Next, Luke shows us Jesus' authority over sickness.

Jesus' authority over sickness

The story of Jesus' healing sickness is sandwiched between another dramatic story. As Jesus returned, the crowds were waiting for him because a ruler of the synagogue, named Jairus, was seeking for Jesus to heal his twelve-year-old daughter who was dying. And, sure enough, Jesus is willing to go to her, but on his way something happens. There was a woman who had been suffering from a discharge of blood for twelve years, and no one had been able to help her. She'd been to physician after physician, but nothing had helped. And not only did this mean that her ailment continued, but it also meant that she had to live her life greatly isolated, since she would constantly be unclean according to the law.

But this woman believed that Jesus could heal her, even if she were simply to touch the fringe of his garment. And so she works her way through the ground, reached out and touches his garment, and immediately she is healed. At that very moment, then, Jesus stops and asks, "Who was it that touched me?" (v. 45). Now, Peter notes that it would be impossible to isolate any one individual since the crowd was pressing in on him in great numbers and all touching him. But Jesus meant something different. He knew in that moment that power had gone out from him for healing. I also think he knew who the woman was, but he was calling her out to address her healing.

As Jesus' question, then, the woman identifies herself, coming before him, trembling, and falling down before him and letting everyone know that she not only touched Jesus but had been healed. And Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace" (v. 48).

Now, that's odd, isn't it? Why call her out to identify herself if all you're going to say is, "Your faith has made you well"? I think the answer is that because her issue made her unclean—and thus socially ostracized—Jesus wanted to publicly announce to everyone that this woman no longer needed to be avoided. She no longer carried a stigma of being unclean. In other words, Jesus was showing his love and kindness to this one who had believed in him. He was caring for her and providing all that she needed. And so we see not only Jesus' power and authority over a

sickness no doctors could help but also his love, kindness, and compassion toward us. He knows our needs and cares for us. But before applying this further, let's note the last story, where we see Jesus' authority over death.

Jesus' authority over death

The time that this brief interaction with the woman took was apparently enough to allow the girl's sickness to worsen because someone runs up to Jairus right after this, telling him, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more" (v. 49). But before we get a response from Jairus, Jesus tells him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well" (v. 50). And so they proceed to the house.

When they arrive, there is a crowd weeping and mourning, and Jesus tells them, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping" (v. 52). Of course, they laugh at him, knowing that she was dead, but Jesus was sending the message that he was about to bring her to life, just as we might wake someone from sleep. And so he goes into the house, takes her by the hand, and says, "Child, arise" (v. 45). And she came back to life and got up at once, leaving the parents amazed. However, Jesus told them not to say anything, probably so that misunderstandings about who he was and what he was sent to do might not take place among the people. Thus, we see Jesus' authority over death.

But also we see the need to trust our Lord, don't we? Now, perhaps it's easy for us to think that we would have trusted like the woman who touched his garment or would have had even more faith than Jairus in the face of his daughter's death because, well, Jesus was there. But perhaps we need to evaluate ourselves more carefully before expressing this confidence. After all, don't we find ourselves anxious in the face of needing provision and despairing when things turn out differently than we anticipate? And even though Jesus isn't physically standing beside us, we have something better. He is our Lord, and his Spirit indwells us. Thus, we should trust more, not less than those who looked upon Jesus in his earthly ministry.

So much of the Christian life is about trusting the Lord in the face of discouraging circumstances. You trust and obey even though you have no spouse, or have suffered great loss, or are suffering the tragedy of infertility, or on and on. You trust him that it is better for you to walk in obedience rather than pursuing your lusts or the like. You trust him as you give, knowing that he has said that he knows our needs and will care for us as we seek his kingdom. And on and on. As we've noted before, every act of obedience requires faith and trust. And so maybe today our response needs to be to evaluate and see if we are trusting the one who has authority over storms, demons, sickness, and death and who loves us and gave himself for us. If we can't trust that one, it's certainly not because he's proven himself weak, untrustworthy, or unloving. So, if we are struggling to trust, let's repent this morning and look to him once more in faith. And let us demonstrate our faith and trust now as we come to the table. Amen.