

Who Then is This?

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[0 : 01] Well, good morning. Good to see you all this morning. It's good to be back here at Brunfield. I think anyway, it's the first time that I've ever met anyone who names their plants, but I guess that's an Italian thing, is it? It's all right. I got a bit of Italian blood running through me as well, but never named any plants yet. But Graziella, was that it? Graziellina.

Is that like little thank you or something, or what is it? Graziellina. Grace is a name. That's good. All right. I won't find out the rest of your plants' names just now.

Okay. Time's marching on, so let's turn to Luke chapter 8. If you have a Bible, go to Luke chapter 8, where I understand you've been walking with Jesus through Galilee this morning, chapter 8. We're going to look into two different occasions in the life of Christ here in Luke chapter 8. There are so many of these in the Gospels where Jesus really does stun people with the reality of who He is. I think that's probably, if you want a big picture of the Gospels, I think one of the major themes of the Gospels coincides with what I think seems to be the major theme of God's revelation in all the Bible, which is Him, how great He is. I think that's really what glory is all about. It is about something to do with the expression of the greatness of God. And so that theme just runs through all of the Bible.

And particularly, you would expect to see it so much in the Gospels, because the Gospels are just accounts of the life of God as a man. So you would expect to see just the greatness of who this man is, God in human flesh, right the way through the Gospels. And you're not disappointed. You see that it's right the way through the Gospels here. Jesus, again, stunning His audience by the things that He does. The first incident takes place, we're told, verse 22, on a certain day that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, let us cross over to the other side of the lake. And they launched out. But as they sailed, He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in jeopardy. And they came to Jesus and woke Him up.

[3 : 06] saying, Master, Master, we're perishing. Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water.

And they ceased. And there was a calm. But He said to them, where is your faith?

And they were afraid and marveled, saying to one another, who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water.

And they obey Him. Way back at the beginning of the Bible, we're told that Satan employs a tactic. We don't quite know yet exactly who this is in the form of the serpent back in Genesis chapter 3. But we find out as the Bible story unfolds that it is Satan.

[4 : 12] And he is employing a tactic there that proves to be overwhelmingly successful. Dethroning God ultimately in the hearts of men by tempting them to doubt.

To doubt. To doubt in this instance, God's word. And to doubt, I believe, an extension of that, the greatness of His character.

So we are, in a sense, our word. We're as good as our word. Right? We even say that about people. He's as good as His word. And we mean that He's got character.

And so God's word is always tied in with God's character. God's word is always tied in with God's spirit. It always disturbs me when people describe churches as, well, you know, this church has the spirit and this church has the word.

And, you know, people go around this church to get a bit of the spirit and then that church to get a bit of the word. It never works that way. All these things have always been and will always be just intricately joined together because that's who God is.

[5 : 17] But back in the garden, Satan tempted the man and the woman to doubt the word of God and the greatness of His character. And ultimately, then, the faith and dependence that the man and the woman had on God when they were created were replaced with doubt and self-reliance.

And without wanting to be too overly simplistic here, I'd like to suggest to you that the rest of the Bible story, including the gospel, is a revelation of God's design to turn human beings back from doubt and self-reliance, which we're good at, and I'll hopefully make that point as we go through this story, to turn us back from doubt and self-reliance to a life of faith and dependence on God. Isn't that what the gospel is designed to do? Because I'm not born trusting in God. I'm not born depending on God. I'm born with a very, very keen sense of self-dependency and desire for self-fulfillment.

Is that not fair? When I cried as a baby, so I understand. I wasn't crying because people weren't getting saved. Because I wanted more people to depend on God and I wanted to know God more. I was crying because I had a need and I wanted it fulfilled. And as a young child, when I threw tantrums and I screamed and I yelled, I wasn't screaming and yelling because I wanted the church to grow.

[7 : 09] I was screaming and yelling because I wanted a toy or I wanted a nap or I wanted something. It was just a very, very keenly felt sense of what I wanted. That's how I'm born.

That's how we're all born. And the very point of the gospel is for God to transform that sense of self-reliance that we're born with and that we live with.

And if nothing happens, that we will die with. Is that fair? We'll die with that same sense of self-reliance and doubt if God doesn't do something to change us.

Wouldn't it be great if somewhere along the line we could just kind of get like a doubt inoculation every year? Wouldn't that be great if we could just go somewhere and get a jag and that would be it?

One jab in January and then we're kind of soaring on the wings of faith for the rest of the year. The only problem is the Bible doesn't tell that story.

[8 : 09] The Bible tells a story of men and women who are earnest to please God but really seriously want to do well. Some of the songs we sang or was it in your intro slides this morning?

I think that's what you were trying to communicate about the church. Just broken people but serious about faith, serious about Christ, earnest to please God and yet probably if the truth were known for many of us, plagued in many ways by doubt.

From Eve to Abraham, from David to Zechariah, from Peter to Thomas, even John the Baptist succumbs to this one, doesn't he? Luke 7.20 tells us that after John recognizes that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, he still asks, Jesus, are you the one or are we to expect someone else?

One man writes, had the Bible been written by a public relations agency, they would have eliminated that verse. It's not good PR strategy to admit that one of the cabinet members has doubts about the president.

I'm sure there may be a lot of folks nowadays that have doubts about the president and won't go there. You don't let stories like that get out if you're trying to present a united front.

[9 : 31] But the scriptures weren't written by personality agents, they were inspired by an eternal God who knew that every disciple from then on would spend time in the dungeon of doubt. Could I suggest to you that perhaps, suggest to you, this is up for grabs, okay, but could I suggest to you that perhaps the real point of this little story here in Luke 8 isn't how flimsy the boats were in Jesus' day or how quick you could get caught up in a storm on the Sea of Galilee if you're not careful.

I'm not even sure, and I say this carefully, that the main point here is how powerful Jesus is in being able to still the storm, although that is a main point here. However, I wonder if, along with this amazing revelation of the deity and the majesty of Jesus in this passage, Luke is not trying also to get us to see how rotten we are at trusting God, but how faithful God is at delivering us.

Now that's just a thought, but I'd like to try and develop that thought as we go through here. I don't think the whole purpose here is just to see how great Jesus is, because Jesus could have just kind of flown in the air, turned into a big flaming star, and you know, I mean, that would have done it for these guys, right?

But it's not. The story here, as is the whole story of the gospel, is entwined with humanity, isn't it? The gospel works with just real life human beings, and part of the real life deal here is how quick these guys are to doubt.

How easy it is for them to doubt the Lord. Where is your faith, Jesus says in verse 25? Or, why are you so timid?

[11 : 23] How is it that you have no faith? That's how Mark records it in his gospel. Or, oh, men of little faith, Mark's gospel says. And so guess what?

That being the reality that we struggle with faith, the faith life is not an easy life, is it? It's a great life, it's a great life, but the faith life is not an easy life.

I find it hard to keep going when I've never yet met Christ face to face. And so I'm challenged to give up everything, all my dreams, all my goals, all my personal aspirations.

God challenges me to give all those up and I've never yet seen him face to face. That's not easy. It's worth it. And it's the way that God has designed for us to be reunited to him through Christ by faith, right?

By grace you're saved through faith, but it's not an easy life. And knowing that to be the case, God sends a storm. You'd think, in a sense, that the last thing doubting people really need is a storm.

[12 : 41] You'd think they need a cuddle, right? Or a pat on the back. But he sends a storm. He knows what he's doing to help the disciples develop their faith.

Isn't that interesting? Peter says, 1 Peter 4, verse 12, Don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal that comes upon you to test you as though some strange thing were happening to you.

But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. Jesus had said, we're told in the story, Jesus had said, get in the boat and we're going to the other side of the lake.

How did the song go that we sang this morning, My Lighthouse, My Lighthouse? How was the bit about he's going to lead us safe to shore? Right? I just thought it was really good. Somebody's been either doing their homework, okay, in putting the service together this morning or God's just kind of overrun the whole thing and done what he wanted to do anyway.

Jesus had said, get in the boat because we're going to the other side of the lake. And off they go across the water and we're told that somewhere along the line, Jesus falls asleep. Just another great reminder that Jesus was God, yes, but he was human.

[14 : 13] He's tired, he's weary, falls asleep. Soon as he falls asleep, it seems, there's this, verse 23, this fierce storm arises.

This fierce gale of wind descends on the lake. Matthew uses the word, okay, the terminology that Matthew chooses to use, the words are megas seismos.

That's the two Greek words that he uses and you can almost figure out what he's saying, right? Megas seismos. Megas seismic. This is a mega seismic storm.

Okay? So you get the idea that it's big. It's big. So the disciples aren't being wimps here. You know, it's not that the boat is starting to rock a little bit and they've never been, you know, they're fishermen.

A lot of these guys, they know what it's like to be on the water. So they're familiar with storms. So for these guys to be freaking out, for these guys to be freaking out is big.

[15 : 16] Is big. The Sea of Galilee, 680 feet below sea level. It's surrounded by hills, some of which are almost 2,000 feet high above sea level.

The temperature and pressure changes because of all of that result of the climate in the area along with the kind of geography of the lake caused some cracking storms. It was just kind of a storm center.

Really, it was perfect for storms. Perfectly suited because of where it was for some great storms. And they're in one. And the water is coming in and the faith is draining out.

Isn't it? They're in one. It's a big storm. And they're starting to doubt. These are storms. We have life storms. And as we have life storms and we feel the water's coming in, it's very easy to feel the faith draining out.

Is it not? Anybody in a storm right now? We've been in a bit of a storm in our family here for the last five years and we're weary. We're weary. We're tired. Our patience has run very thin.

[16 : 22] We're very human. God is showing us even more how broken we are and how easy it is in those circumstances for us to begin to doubt. And so they wake Jesus up saying, Master, we're perishing.

Now what are they forgetting? What are they? Well, they're forgetting that Jesus is in the boat with them. They're forgetting that it's not been all that long, if you read before this account, that he's healed the centurion servant, that he has raised the son of the widow of Nain from the dead.

But they're also forgetting that Jesus had said, let's go to the other side of the lake. How quick I am to forget that God has promised me that not only am I his treasured possession in Christ, Ephesians 1.14, and his beloved child by adoption, John 1.12, and his precious bride by faith, but how quick I am to forget that he is never going to leave me or forsake me and that he is going to lead me safely to the other side.

So being aroused, verse 24, he rebukes the wind and the surging waves and they stop and it becomes calm and he says to them, where is your faith?

It's not that they can't have faith, it's that they're looking at the wrong thing. My greatest need when I get caught in a doubt storm, I think, is a fresh recognition of the power of God in the person of Christ, isn't it?

[18:08] Many years ago, I had a breakdown and I was out of work for almost a year and one of the things that God used during that time in my life was the Gospels, the life of Christ, just walking with Christ and walking with Christ and listening to Christ and observing how he lived and what he said.

So glad you're going through Luke's Gospel just now. It's a great place to be when doubt storms hit, turning my doubt and self-reliance back into faith and God dependence.

Well, that's the first scenario. The second scenario here in Luke 8 brings a different kind of challenge to the whole faith issue, but it's still a challenge to us, to faith.

This time, it's in the life of a demon-possessed man. So we'll pick it up in verse 26. And then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee.

And when he stepped out on the land, okay, so that's just a reminder that they had reached the other side, okay?

[19:22] So it's just kind of a continuation, really, of the last story. But when he stepped out on the land, there met him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time.

And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?

I beg you, do not torment me. For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man.

For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles, and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness.

Jesus asked him, saying, What is your name? And he said, Legion, because many demons had entered him.

And they begged him that he would not command them to go out into the abyss. Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain, so they begged him that he would permit them to enter them, and he permitted them.

[20:46] Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned. When those who had fed them saw what had happened, they fled and told in the city and in the country.

Then they went out to see what had happened and came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.

and they were afraid. They also, who had seen it, told them by what means he who had been demon-possessed was healed.

Wow. Then the whole multitude of the surrounding region region of the Gadarenes asked Jesus to go, to leave, to depart from them.

For they were seized with great fear. and so he got into the boat and returned.

[22:18] But the man from whom the demons had departed begged him to stay. Begged him that he might be with him.

But Jesus sent him away saying, return to your own house and tell what great things God has done for you.

And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

Now let me say that I find that passage at one and the same time fascinating and frightening.

Fascinating because of the insight that we're given into a world that we can't see. We would never know what's going on here if Jesus hadn't told us.

[23 : 27] And this is fascinating that so often in the Bible God gives us insight into things that we would never know were there or would never know are true or would never be aware of if he hadn't told us.

So fascinating. But I also find that passage rather frightening because this world that we can't see is real and it's powerful and it's very evil.

Paul writes to the Ephesians that our battle is not against flesh and blood. It's not just you think you're fighting all the time against what you can see. And God says in actual fact we have to be really careful not to get sucked into fighting the wrong enemy.

And this happens all the time. It happens in life. It happens in offices. It happens in communities. It happens in families. And it happens in churches. Where we get sucked into in a similar sense bamboozled by the enemy to fight the other guy.

Not him but to fight the other guy and to fight the wrong enemy. You've got to be really careful. God tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood. The real issue, the real fight, the real battle, the real warfare that we're to fight particularly as those who belong to Christ is the enemy.

[24 : 54] Not the rest of the body. Not those that we're intimately linked to by faith. But so often we take our eye off the ball again and we fight the wrong enemy.

Our battle is not against flesh and blood. It's against the rulers, the powers, the world forces of this darkness. This stuff is real. It's here. People think that somehow just because we close the doors of the church, we keep the evil forces at bay.

We don't. We do that, what we'll see in a minute, by resisting them, not by just closing the doors. In fact, sometimes I think Satan does some of his best work right here among believers, just causing disunity or distraction from opportunities that we have to grow and to feed and to be built up and strengthened and a real powerful force for God in the world and in this city.

Sometimes I think he does some of his best work here by holding us down and distracting us from the real goal and the real purpose that God has called us to as followers of Christ.

Sometimes I think he does some of his best work here. We think, oh no, Satan's out in the pubs and the clubs and the brothels and all. That's the lust of the flesh that almost just takes care of itself.

[26 : 15] It almost just self perpetuates. Be careful, be careful, be aware. Yes, it's fascinating to see beyond the veneer of just what we can see and sense with our five senses.

There's more. Yes, it's fascinating, but it's also very frightening. These are world forces of darkness, spiritual forces of wickedness, Paul says, in heavenly places.

The Bible tells us that demons can do many things. They can exhibit superhuman strength. They oppose the purposes of God in the world. They're incredibly subtle and crafty.

They promote idolatry. They promote false religion. They deceive and move the nations. They afflict people physically. They possess people. They're invisible, but they're capable of manifestation.

They have supernatural intelligence. They cooperate with one another. They slander God before men, but they also slander men before God. They have access to the thoughts of believers.

[27 : 20] They blind the minds of unbelievers. They accuse, they pervert, they bewitch, they degrade, they attack, they tempt. They even disguise themselves as being good. Angels of light.

Those are all things and there's more that the Bible tells us Satan and his demons do. So whatever you do, don't be fooled by the fact that you can't see them. They're as real as you are, but equally don't be intimidated by them.

Don't be intimidated by them. I remember, I'm sure it was John Piper, I remember him sharing in a conference once, you know, just about growing as he's grown as a believer, he's grown to respect the power of the enemy, but not to be afraid of him.

And then he just kind of told a story and he said, you know, he imagined himself just kind of waking up one night with some kind of green-looking, ugly, goblin kind of creature at the foot of his bed, just, you know, kind of waking him up in the middle of the night and maybe his first response was a bit of shock at this thing in his room, this presence that was there, you know, just ugly looking creature.

And he thought, you know, once I gained my presence of mind, I think I would just say, and? Yes? Can I help you? Because that's about the best they can do.

[28 : 58] Don't be intimidated by them because greater is he who is in you than he that is in the world. Don't be fooled by the fact you can't see them, but don't be intimidated by them.

The New Testament epistles, and I don't have time to go into demonology this morning, but the New Testament epistles, which I believe should be read in a very unique way, distinct in a sense from just the Gospels.

We're not to take all of our marching orders necessarily from the Gospels. That's an historical account of the life of Christ, there's many lessons to learn, there's many commands to obey. But by and large, the New Testament epistles are the marching orders for the church.

They are the marching orders for the church. And the New Testament epistles give us one primary bit of direction when it comes to dealing with Satan and his cohorts. Do you know what it is? Resist. One primary bit of information. One primary directive. Resist. Because the greatest weapon, it seems, that Satan has against us is temptation.

[30 : 18] So I guess if I wake up tonight and there's some green kind of goblin looking creature at the foot of my bed, I want to say, and? It seems as though the greatest weapon he has against us is temptation.

And if we resist, think about this, if the greatest weapon is temptation and I resist, where does that leave him? Powerless.

Powerless. That's the whole point. Matthew 4, 11, Jesus resisted Satan's temptation in the wilderness and we're told that the devil left him.

Ephesians 6, we're told twice to stand firm and in verse 13, we're told to take up the full armor of God that we may be able to resist in the evil day. James 4, verse 7 says, resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Do you know where he'll go? He'll go and find somebody else who won't resist. But if you resist, he has no other recourse than to leave you alone because he can't do anything else.

[31 : 31] In 1 Peter 5, 8, be of sober spirit, be on the alert, your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, always ugly, always big, always ferocious, always mean.

He prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to resist a picture of that. Oh, it's awful. But resist him. Firm in your faith.

We defend with the word, we resist with the will. We defend with the word, we resist with the will, being strong in the Lord and the strength of his might.

So let me just finish by again suggesting to you the gist of the story here. There's a lot of different intricacies you could dive into, do that in your own time.

Let me just pull back for a minute and suggest as we finish just the gist of the story here. I don't think the main point here is how powerful possessed people are, or how horrible demons can be to people, or how fast demon-possessed pigs can run down a hill.

[32 : 41] I think the point is, again, how rotten we are at trusting God, but how faithful God is at delivering us.

And I draw this conclusion from the way that the account ends with the contrast between the people of the region who can't wait to get rid of Jesus.

They want him to go. the contrast between them and the man who's been delivered, who can't help but want to be with him.

He wants him to stay. Verse 34 says that when the herdsmen saw the pigs and what had happened, they took off like a shot into the city.

They started to spread the word. The demon-possessed man was apparently well-known. People had seen his behavior. They knew of his crazy, secluded existence in the tombs. And when they arrived back, verse 37, the people of the surrounding country, they're gripped with fear and they don't ask Jesus to stay.

[33 : 44] They ask him to leave. And then there is a striking contrast between them, verse 38, and a delivered man who begs Jesus to stay or to let him certainly go with him and to be with him.

And Jesus says in verse 39, No, I want you to return to your own house and tell what great things God has done for you. And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

We're not given interestingly the history of this guy. We don't know how he grew up. We don't know what caused him to become demon possessed. We don't know why he's a target.

We don't know what it is that goes on in his background. We don't know what his relationship to God was. We don't know any of that about this guy. And I find that interesting because as a kind of counselor, I'd like to unpick all the stuff that maybe I think may have led to this guy going a bit mad

and just kind of, you know, falling into this situation that is so awful for him now.

We're not told any of that. All we're told is his response to Jesus. That's all we're told. That as Jesus delivers him from the demons, he wants nothing more than Christ.

[35 : 07] And I think that's really, when it comes to this kind of spiritual warfare, I think that is the most significant thing. Whenever somebody calls me into a situation where they think there's some kind of demonic activity, the first thing I bring with me isn't a, you know, a smoke incense kind of thing or holy water or anything.

the first thing I bring with me is the gospel. The gospel. Because what I understand from the Bible is that when Jesus comes in, the devil goes out.

When Jesus comes in, the devil goes out. It doesn't mean that we stop being targets from an oppressive sense, but certainly from a possessive sense.

The gospel is your greatest weapon. I know how rotten it feels to doubt. Believe me, I do. I know how rotten it feels to feel weak in faith.

However, I also know how amazing it feels to believe. Don't you? I know how amazing it feels to believe, to trust, and to know that God's faithfulness in delivering me from my doubt is one of the greatest things that he has ever done for me.

[36 : 18] So that I can go and you can go now and do everything we can to help others know. That's what Jesus told this guy to do.

Just go back to the city and tell them all of the wonderful things that God has done for you. I want to leave here today, and I hope you do too, just refreshed, reinvigorated with a vision to go and reach this lost city for Christ.

Tell him all the wonderful things. Not all at once. Not all at once. It's a little bit here, a little bit there. Don't dump everything on your neighbor when you get home today, but the next opportunity that arises, just tell people about Jesus, all the wonderful things that he's done for you.

Let me pray. Father, thank you for the account that's been preserved for us here that I'm sure has many, many, many things to teach us. But one of the greatest things is we're brought face to face with our own reality and weakness, propensity to lack faith, but also just with the great faithfulness of God in delivering us from our enemy, establishing us in Christ.

And Lord, we pray that we would be like this man and that we would want to be with you, but also that we would want to go where we have to go to tell others about you.

[37 : 48] Help us to do that, I pray, with a fresh sense of urgency and faith today. In Jesus' name, amen.