

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #12 What Do We Think We Know About Jesus?

Scripture Luke 8:22-39

In several of our previous messages, our focus was on the Good News of the Kingdom of God. This was the main theme of Jesus' teaching. According to Luke, His ministry began in His home town of Nazareth and then expanded throughout the region of Galilee. The disciples had numerous opportunities to not only listen to Jesus' teaching, but to observe His actions. They had watched as He restored health and physical well-being to many people and freed many people from demon possession.

After the twelve special companions, who were called "apostles," were chosen, Jesus' teaching focused on their training. He gave instructions about the attitudes and behaviors associated with the kingdom of God — the requirements for being a member of the kingdom. Jesus made it clear that all His followers were expected to adopt a kingdom lifestyle. The early methods used in the spiritual education of the Apostles involved observation and teaching.

Today we are going to learn more about the training methods of Jesus. The time for observation and "classroom" instruction was ending. It was time for the Apostles to have some laboratory experience — time for them to be confronted with some personal challenges. In the passage for today we will note that there was a shift from miracles for the benefit of the general population to actions which were for the benefit of the disciples.

Immediately following the teaching about the soils, which we thought about last week, Jesus proposed that He and the Twelve embark on a short trip across the Sea of Galilee. The purpose of this trip was not explained to the Twelve, but in the context of the Gospel of Luke, we understand that Jesus was going to take their training to a higher, more intense level.

There are four episodes described in the last part of chapter 8. We will think about two of them this week.

Read Luke 8:22-25

When we compare this passage with the parallel verses in the Gospel of Mark (*Mark 4:35*), we discover that this journey began on the evening of the same day that Jesus had healed many people and taught the parable of the soils. And if we back up the events of that day several more hours, you will recall that Jesus had prayed all night, then selected the twelve Apostles, then came down the mountain to heal and teach. I point this out because it explains the exhaustion of Jesus and why He fell asleep in the boat. He had been awake for 36 hours or more.

Let me also explain the context of the storm. The Sea of Galilee is about eight miles wide at its widest point and about 13 miles in length. Under normal circumstances, a journey by boat across the lake west to east would take two hours or so. Sudden storms on this body of water were not an uncommon occurrence. The topography surrounding the lake creates the conditions for sudden weather changes. The water is in a basin 680 feet below sea level. Hills surround the water on three sides. When cool air comes through the hills and mixes with the warm air rising over the water, there can be “whirlwinds” and “raging waters.” These are the words used by Luke.

Several of the Apostles were experienced fishermen. Peter and Andrew, and James and John, for examples, had owned their own boats. They had undoubtedly been in previous storms. On this occasion, when the winds began to blow, they must have done everything they could to protect themselves and to prevent the boat from filling with water, but in spite of their efforts, Luke explains that the boat was “being swamped and they were in great danger.” In their despair and anxiety, they went to Jesus, woke Him up, and said in terror, “Master, Master, we are going to drown.”

I don’t know what they expected Jesus to do. Perhaps they were only warning Him to be ready to swim for His life. Jesus, however, did something they hadn’t anticipated. He “got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters.” The phrase after His command implies that the storm subsided instantly and that all was suddenly calm.

Jesus then rebuked the Twelve with the question, “Where is your faith?” The main point of this episode is wrapped up in that question. I think Jesus intended this experience to be a lesson in faith for the Twelve. He knew what He was getting them into when He instructed them to “go over to the other side of the lake.” He wanted to expand their understanding and confidence in who He was. Yes, they had listened to His teaching and observed His miracles, but they had not yet linked their knowledge to a personal application of faith.

The disciples needed to get beyond their theoretical and abstract understandings about the person of Jesus Christ. The evidence of their very limited understanding was indicated by the question they asked each other, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

Jesus was suddenly a person of mystery to them. Didn’t they already know and believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God? Yes. Hadn’t they already witnessed the power and authority of Jesus on previous occasions? Yes, of course. The point is that their intellectual assumptions about the identity of Jesus proved to be very inadequate in the face of personal danger. Their faith and confidence in Him did not come close to matching their needs. They had not fully believed the truth that He was God in flesh, and in what he had previously revealed about Himself. Jesus and the storm provided a situation for them to grow spiritually.

There are several obvious applications that we, as modern day disciples, can make from this episode. We learn lessons in the midst of storms that we never would learn if life were always calm. This is a good thing if our recognition and appreciation of Jesus is expanded by our difficult experiences. Each incident which challenges us to turn to Jesus is an occasion for spiritual growth.

We need to understand that obedient believers are not immune to storms. The storm described in Luke did not hit the disciples because they had been disobedient but, rather, because they were following Jesus’ instructions. Jesus had a purpose in directing them into the storm. The experience was an opportunity for them to gain a greater appreciation for who He was — an opportunity for them to grow in their faith. In the same way, God may lead us into stormy circumstances for our own good because those are the occasions when we learn more about Jesus than if we had stayed comfortably on the shore.

Storms reveal our inadequacies and break down our sense of self-sufficiency. The disciples undoubtedly thought that they could get the boat from point A to point B. Perhaps they had confidence about their abilities to navigate through stormy conditions. However, they quickly recognized that they were dealing with a situation which was beyond their abilities. Their self-confidence and self-sufficiency was not going to be enough to help them survive. In similar fashion, personal crises help believers to recognize their weaknesses so that they will rely on God's strength. This brings about spiritual growth.

The New Testament writer James summed up what I am saying with his statement: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (*James 1:2-3*). [*Peter and Paul made similar statements.*]

Storms cause a distorted view of our problems. The disciples cried, "Master, we are going to drown!" They did not realize that their situation was under God's control. Likewise, we can focus so much on our problems that we cannot see God's influence and control. Jesus was in the same stormy situation as His disciples, yet He was able to sleep peacefully because the Father was watching over Him. If we recognize that Jesus is in our boat, that is, in our lives, then we should be able to live without anxiety when we find ourselves in the midst of difficulties.

The disciples asked each other, "Who is this?" If they had known more fully who Jesus really was, they would not have been so amazed at what happened. Unfortunately, in spite of what they had previously seen, they had no real understanding of how His authority and power related to them personally. We must not be guilty of underestimating our Lord Jesus Christ. In the midst of our storms, we must always affirm two things: God's sovereignty over us and His love for us.

The lack of faith by the Twelve was viewed by Jesus as a most serious problem. His question, "Where is your faith," implied that the Twelve should not have been terrified. They had been provided with more than enough evidence for their faith. They had observed many miracles and learned many facts which should have provided the basis for their faith. Jesus wants all His disciples to have the kind of faith that will carry them through the difficulties of life. We have been given more than enough evidence in the Scriptures to serve as our foundation for faith. I hope your faith and confidence in Jesus will never be in doubt.

The second episode to think about today describes the power of Jesus against the forces of evil.

Read Luke 8:26-39

Although the context of these two episodes are radically different, there are some fascinating parallels and contrasts. In both miracles, Jesus displayed supernatural power. In one miracle, His authority was over the physical world; in the other, over the spiritual world — first, a wild raging sea; then a wild uncontrollable man. Fear is a prominent theme in both passages. Both the disciples and the demons were afraid of impending destruction. There are references to “begging” and “pleading” in both passages. The disciples cried out for help because they were in danger. In the second passage, the demons, the townspeople, and the man all begged Jesus for various favors. In the first set of verses, the disciples didn’t understand who Jesus was. In the second set of verses, the demons had no doubts about the identity of Jesus. The townspeople not only didn’t understand who Jesus was, they didn’t want to know.

The region of the Gerasenes was on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was Gentile territory, not Jewish. “When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man.” Jesus’ presence was sufficient to stir up the demonic forces within the man. It is unclear whether the statements in verse 28 originated with the man or the demons within him, but it is obvious that they clearly recognized who Jesus was — “the Son of the Most High God.”

The possession of the man was unique in that so many demons inhabited him. When Jesus asked the man to give his name, he replied, “Legion,” because “so many had gone into him.” “Legion” is not normally a proper name. It was a Roman military term, representing as many as 6000 soldiers. We don’t know if there were literally 6000 demons in the man or not. The word “legion” was also used in colloquial conversation to indicate an indefinite large number.

This evil force recognized Jesus' authority to exercise judgment on them. Scripture suggests that demons have two fears: first, that they will be without a physical body to inhabit, and second, that they will be cast into the Abyss. Demons belong to the spirit realm; they have no physical structure or means by which to express themselves. The best way of imagining them is to compare them to the wind or flames of fire. That's how Scripture describes them (*see Hebrews 1:7*). Their presence can be felt but there is nothing to grab hold of. Demons must incarnate themselves in a physical entity in order to exert their evil influences. Hence, if Jesus was going to cast them out of the man, they wanted to enter into the pigs. Demons understand that the Abyss represents the place of their final and eternal judgment. Hence they "begged Jesus repeatedly to not order them to go into the Abyss."

It is somewhat surprising that Jesus gave the demons permission to enter the pigs. Immediately, "the entire herd rushed down the steep slope into the lake and were drowned." A short time previously, the disciples had feared drowning in the water, and Jesus had saved them. Here Jesus allowed the demon-possessed herd of pigs to drown. We can conclude that Jesus has the power and authority to protect those who are called, and to judge and destroy what is evil and opposes Him.

Verse 34 indicates that the people who watched over the pigs saw everything that happened. These herdsmen reported what had happened, and soon everyone came to Jesus. They saw the "man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind." Instead of being happy about this turn of events, the people were afraid. They were not fearful because of the drowning of the pigs, but because of the miraculous change in the man who had been delivered from the demons. The encounter with Jesus' power was too threatening for them. The people had a greater fear of the good done by the Son of God than they had fear of the evil done by demons. Because of their fears, they asked Jesus to depart from them.

The demons and the people of that region shared one thing in common: the presence of Jesus made them afraid. The people reacted to Jesus just as the demons had reacted. Both were afraid of the changes which Jesus could produce. Some people find it very uncomfortable to be close to the holy God. They fear what God's power will do to them. Other people want to be transformed by Jesus' power — want to be turned from a path of uncleanness, destruction, and death to a life of health and sanity.

The question we must ask ourselves is “Do we want to come to Jesus and let Him use His power to free us?” Or “do we quake in fear at Jesus' authority and prefer that He go away?” The newly healed man wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus told him to remain behind and testify to what God had done for him. Jesus was not able to have an extended witness among these people, but the man would be a unique “missionary in residence” to his own people. The man obeyed and told the whole town what Jesus had done for him. That’s exactly what disciples are supposed to do.

Some Thoughts for Reflection:

- 1) We must make sure that our understanding of Jesus is correct.
- 2) We must rest ourselves under Jesus’ authority.
- 3) We must allow Him to help us through the storms of life.