

# Trusting Jesus Through the Storms

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Preacher: James Ross

[ 0 : 00 ] Amen, this is God's Word. So right at the outset, we are reminded here that the real Jesus, while on earth, confronted!

And often individual lives are affected by evil and by sin. And it needs explanation. You know, when we see on our news coverage week after week of the Epstein files, Epstein Island, and the horrendous abuse and exploitation, or when we think of empires old and new, we think of the atrocities, the ugliness of modern war and conflicts.

We need to reckon with evil. There was that great hope at the start of the 20th century that science and technology would lead us onwards and upwards into some kind of utopia.

But what we discover is that all our technology without God is not getting rid of evil and in many ways is just creating new forms of evil that previous generations didn't grapple with.

But then not only do we see externally the reality of evil in the world, the consequences of sin and the fall, we often see it in our own hearts as well.

[ 1 : 43 ] It was Solzhenitsyn in the Gulag Archipelago who caught it so well when he said the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart and through all human hearts.

He could sit there in a prison camp in Russia and acknowledge that while he was being in prison, still the problem of evil was within himself and within us all.

And so the real Jesus believed in the reality of evil. He believed in the devil and demons and the forces of evil. In the first century, the worldview for Jewish people and indeed pagan people was that there were forces in the world that were beyond our ability to see that we're good.

There were angels, those who were bad, evil, there were demons. Jewish understanding, it was such that they said these forces are not equal and opposite, that God is sovereign, that God is in control, but the forces of evil are real, but they are limited.

And that was the worldview that Jesus inhabited. That's what Jesus believed, by conviction. It can be very tempting for us to kind of write these passages off.

[ 3 : 08 ] It was a product of its time. We have better explanations. We have better understanding of mental health or medical issues. We can minimize evil.

Perhaps we're just not sure what to do with it, but Jesus believed by conviction in the reality of dark forces. He knew the devil's work.

Jesus himself has already faced temptation in the wilderness and passed the test. Jesus has come into the world profoundly aware of the spreading disease of sin.

Remember, he is God's agent of creation. He made it in the beginning and it was very good and free of sin. And we know from the New Testament that Jesus came on a mission to destroy the works of the evil one.

And so it's important that we don't miss this because if we miss this, we miss who the real Jesus is. And we miss vital truths for our life.

[ 4 : 07 ] Because what we learn from this passage is that because the real Jesus does have power over evil and can bring the healing of evil, we can and we should run to him for mercy.

So we're going to think about a couple of things together. First of all, we're going to think about the power and the horror of evil that we see in this story.

So as I said, Matthew has a stripped back presentation. You can go to Mark 5 or Luke 8 and you can see more of the awful details filled in. But even here in this basic presentation, we have a portrait of a demon-possessed man as if he's being eaten alive from the inside out by evil.

Matthew shows us in a few short verses that evil is destructive. The picture that we get of these men in verse 28 is that of people experiencing a living death.

Two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. What do you want with us, son of God, they shouted.

[ 5 : 20 ] Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? They've been robbed of their identity. The demons are shouting at Jesus, what do you want with us?

They've been overwhelmed by a force greater than themselves. And again, it's important that we understand evil can't be understood merely in human terms and it can't be met with by merely human resources.

And again, our societies have been trying and trying really hard. But I think we can see no amount of education or moral improvement or modern medicine or chemistry can address the depths of evil. And rather, what's happening, I suppose, as the modern world, it still looks to deal with evil, but it's cut away realities of the supernatural.

On the one hand, it's not given us a better world. The news is still as sad and desperate as ever. But in cutting out God from the picture, it doesn't give us the resources that we need to understand what we see and to have hope beyond what we see.

[ 6 : 36 ] Because this portrait of these men remind us that here is a real force that is above and beyond human explanation. And we should never underestimate it.

And when we find ourselves crying out against evil and longing for the end of evil, and who doesn't do that and who doesn't want that, we are recognizing there is a real problem.

A real problem that we haven't been able to fix. And it reminds us, as God's people, that we have and we need a real savior. That part of that, an essential part of the good news of the coming of Jesus is that he comes to confront and to defeat sin and evil in the world and in our hearts.

But this story reminds us that evil is destructive. It also reminds us that evil is dehumanizing. It makes us less than we were made to be.

How do we see it in this story? Well, perhaps before that, we go back to Genesis. Remember Genesis, we've been in chapter one. You and I and every person, we've been made in the image of God.

[ 7 : 52 ] We have been made to know God, to express loving obedience to God, freedom to enjoy God, to enjoy all the goodness of creation.

And mankind originally was created free of sin and free of shame. And so we get this beautiful picture of humanity by God's design in Genesis 1.

But once that fall into sin comes, that beautiful, perfect image is defaced. It's the masterpiece upon which graffiti has been scrawled as evil makes us less than we were made to be.

Now, how do we see that in these men? Think about the impact on their lives physically. Here are two men so violent that no one could pass that way.

Their lives are out of control. Spiritually, they're living in the tombs. That is an unclean place.

[ 8 : 58 ] It is the place of death. When we're told that they came out to meet Jesus, this isn't the warm welcome and kind hospitality.

This is confrontation. This is lining up on the battlefield against God's king. And socially, we see the impact.

No one could pass that way. No one would dare to come near. Their uncleanness, their violence, has left them isolated from the community.

So in these two men, we get a devastating portrait of the horrendous power of evil and sin as it works on a person's life.

And truly, the parallels can be drawn with our own experience of sin. We will likely not find ourselves as far down the road as these men, but I imagine we can recognize something of their experience in our own stories.

[ 10 : 07 ] Do we know the feeling at times of being out of control? Perhaps our anger is out of control. Perhaps we have habits and patterns that we would love to change, but they seem to master us.

There is a writer called Becky Pippert who makes the point that what we love the most, we lose ourselves to. That might be work, that might be money, that might be hobbies, but all of those things, if we give ourselves to them wholeheartedly, they pull away at our freedom.

We lose control to other things. Maybe we know the feeling of being unclean. Maybe we resonate with Adam and Eve in the garden as they're aware of their sin and they feel shame and they want to hide.

Dark memories and actions. The shame of our sin or being sinned against. Evil in many forms that presses upon us that can leave us feeling dirty and unclean and worthless.

And then there's the isolating power of evil. We recognize that sin brings with it a fracturing effect in the universe. Go back to the Garden of Eden.

[ 11 : 32 ] We'll get there in a few weeks. We'll see the damage done to every relationship. As soon as sin comes in, there is a breakdown in the marriage relationship between Adam and Eve.

There's now the thorns and thistles and toil. The relationship with the creation is spoiled and they are hiding from their God because they have sinned against him. Do we know something of our own sin causing problems and fractures in our human relationships?

Can we look back with regret at breakdowns and losses because of it? That's why we can feel far from God.

And so this picture of the dehumanizing effect of sin and evil, I think when we look in the mirror we can see its effect in our own life at times too.

Sin is also presented here as deceitful and deceptive. The Bible tells us the devil is the father of lies. And we see something of that lies and deception in verse 29.

[ 12 : 47 ] Listen again to the demons. What do you want with us, son of God? They shouted. Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? What we are seeing in Matthew chapter 8, what we see in Jesus' mission is that he is God's Messiah King.

He has been appointed for a work of deliverance. He comes on this mission of mercy and grace that runs wider and deeper than any sin, than any evil.

But what do the demons do? The demons would have a focus for these men in their grip only on the holiness of Jesus. And so their lies and deception is don't come near to Jesus because he will condemn you.

He is holy and you are not. And so you need to keep your distance. Coming near to Jesus will be destructive. The demons know the true identity of Jesus.

They know that he is the son of God. They understand that he has authority over them. But they hate Jesus. And they hate the work of Jesus.

[ 13 : 57 ] And they don't want the restoring ministry of Jesus to take place. And evil lies about Jesus. People are deceived and blinded.

Jesus is ultimate and true good and freedom and joy. But how many of us know people who would say that Jesus is the exact opposite? The truth we discover in the gospel is, yes, Jesus is the holy God.

Yes, Jesus is our ultimate judge. But he came not to condemn the world, but to save the world. And he is full of mercy. And in running to Jesus, well, that's the way to hear the word of mercy and healing.

So as Matthew records this little story, this confrontation with the forces of evil, as we look real evil in the eye, as we reckon with its power, its destructive power, it makes us actually ready to appreciate and to value more of the wonder of Jesus and his deliverance.

B.B. Warfield, in, I don't know if it was an essay, called Jesus Only, it wrote that it belongs to the glory of Christ, that his salvation enters into every region of human need and proclaims in all alike complete deliverance.

[ 15 : 37 ] John chapter 3, verse 16, the most famous verse in the Bible, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

God loved the world. And the world there is that idea of the world system lost in sin and evil and rebellion against its creator.

God loved the world. God loved the world. God loved the world. We see in that verse and we see in this story something of the staggering nature of God's love in Jesus, that the perfectly holy one loves the world.

Rebellious and sin sick as it is and as we are. There's nothing in the world, nothing in these men, nothing in us to attract or to deserve God's love and yet God's love comes.

And the love of God is a love so intense that no sinfulness, no evil, no brokenness can ever deter or stop God's saving plan.

[ 16 : 58 ] And so when we come to a little passage like this one in Matthew 8, we're seeing that John 3, 16, love in action as Jesus loves the unlovely, as the Son of God demonstrates the intensity

of God's redeeming love, as we see the power of love to overcome sin and evil and bring renewal and restoration.

restoration. So that as we find ourselves longing for an end to evil, for an end to suffering, and the lives of the people around us or in our world, the story is teaching us once again to run to Jesus. So we thought of the power and horror of evil. Now we need to think about the powerful healing of evil by Jesus. We are probably aware of some powerful freedom scenes.

You've maybe seen at the end of the Second World War, maybe you've seen images of the liberation of concentration camps. Maybe you've watched on TV as hostages have been released who were in captivity for days or months or years.

Perhaps we remember famous rescues, like if you remember the youth football team that was trapped in those underwater caves that were flooding and the attention of the world turned to that great liberation moment.

[18:30] We recognize in those images that when a rescuer comes, everything changes. What was darkness becomes light. What was a situation of death death becomes life.

And Matthew 8 is one of those great stories. Matthew presents Jesus as the great and ultimate liberator. It's showing us both why and how Jesus both confronts evil and brings the healing of evil for these two men and in so doing and gives us hope for our lives.

Because again, what we see in Jesus in this moment is a salvation that is broad enough to cover every evil, every sin, every breakdown that ever afflicts a person.

We see the love of a holy God that overcomes sin. And these men, we don't hear it in Matthew's gospel, but in Luke's gospel, they have this wonderful testimony that they are told to go and share how God has had mercy on them.

And if we were to poll this room this evening, to poll any sort of Christian gathering, we would find Christian testimonies of Jesus rescuing us in different ways, from different depths and darknesses.

[20:01] For some, it would be physical. For some, it would be emotional. For some, it would be rescue in a relationship. It would be a spiritual restoration. And the Jesus that worked in the first century and the Jesus that has worked in our own lives is the Jesus that is still working.

And so we have hope as we think about a world that desperately needs him. Let's notice together the absolute authority of Jesus.

He is the one who can heal. It's interesting, isn't it? The demons know it. They know he is the son of God. They know that he is their appointed judge.

Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? They know they are in Jesus' hands. They know there is a day when they will stand before Jesus and they will be condemned forever.

Jesus is God's appointed judge to utterly defeat and to destroy evil and all dark forces. And they recognize the authority of Jesus.

[21:10] We see it again as the demons are begging Jesus. If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs, what does this say to us? It says those demons understand absolutely who is in control here, whose power is ultimate.

Yes, their power is real, but it is limited. Jesus is in charge. We see that profoundly in verse 32.

He said to them, go, so they came out. That powerful word of Jesus, the evening before it stopped the storm and now it stops the storm in these men's hearts and lives.

In verse 28, we're told where this happens. It happens in the region of the Gadarenes. That's important because it's Gentile territory.

The other great clue for that, of course, is that this community is keeping pigs, which would be unclean for a Jew to do. And so again, here we are being presented with a Jesus who has an authority so great that it doesn't matter which region he moves into, doesn't matter what race he is operating in, no one and nothing can limit his saving power.

[22:34] And that's why we can say to anyone, anywhere, that Jesus is good news for them. Jesus is good news for each of us, whoever we are, wherever we're from.

So we see and we notice the absolute authority of Jesus. It's important, too, to recognize the priority of Jesus. Jesus. Whenever we come to this story, there is always, in a sense, the elephant in the room.

The elephant in the room is the pigs. It's always that thing. Where do the pigs fit? What's happening with the pigs? And I remember speaking about this at a camp and spending most of a bus journey answering questions about pigs hurtling off cliffs and it gets the mind and the imagination going.

So what is the place of the pigs in this story? Well, one place that they have is to make it really clear for us to see Jesus' priority.

We also see that's a priority that's not shared by the town. With the command from Jesus, go, we are seeing that Jesus exercises almighty power and we are seeing that human beings are more valuable than pigs.

[ 23 : 58 ] And we are discovering that Jesus puts spiritual need, human need, before all other considerations. What matters most to Jesus in this situation, in any situation, is spiritual deliverance.

That Jesus is most concerned with restoring to health and to relationship with God image bearers. People made in God's image with dignity and worth and value.

Those forces of evil were trying to strip that away and Jesus in a moment restores it. Jesus' priority is to rescue those in desperate need of his mercy and deliverance.

Jesus' priority is spiritual and eternal because as evil is removed, as God's mercy floods in, salvation comes to these men and that's Jesus' priority.

Sadly, as we see, it's not the priority shared by the town. Again, to think about those herd of pigs, what does it represent?

[ 25 : 19 ] It probably represents a significant amount of that community's wealth flying off a cliff. And as the people are told, verse 33, those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this including what happened to the demon-possessed men, then the whole town went out to meet Jesus and when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

For them, they prefer those pigs to the people who were saved. Our story began with a meeting, it began with a hostile confrontation of Jesus, what do you want with us?

The story concludes with another hostile confrontation, the town goes out to plead with Jesus, and we don't want you coming near. The tragedy is that they put their own financial position over the call to put their faith in the Lord Jesus.

While other towns and villages around them were experiencing God's grace as people were being healed, as people were hearing good news, confronted with the real Jesus, as this town said, no, thank you, we don't want you coming near.

Perhaps one way this story can help us practically is to give us a moment to reflect on our own priorities, maybe not as starkly presented as the priorities of this town, but to think about where we devote our own thoughts and energies.

[ 27 : 01 ] If we were to look at our spending, our calendar, our plans, those are good indicators of what we value. Do they reflect the priorities of Jesus? Does it reflect that most important to us is that we are known and loved and saved by our God through Jesus?

And again, to recognize that right now, as God speaks through his word, God and his grace are coming near once again.

and there is a warning of this town, don't be so embedded in the world that you don't let Jesus in and find mercy.

We also need to notice, don't we, the deliverance of Jesus. Another point of the pigs at the end of the day actually is that they are not the point.

the point is the power of Jesus. The point is the healing of the demon possessed men. The point is that with this one word of command, go, those demons hell-bent on destroying image bearers are driven out.

[ 28 : 16 ] What we see is the reality that Jesus, the light of the world, drives out darkness. We see that love conquers hate. we see a dramatic picture of the freedom that Jesus brings as he undoes the curse of evil and sin and so there is physical deliverance.

Maybe we see it especially in the other writers. We will see them clothed and in their right mind.

There is a social deliverance. Now that their violence is gone, now they're not out of control, they can move back into the community.

community and they can move into the community with good news to share. And there is a spiritual deliverance that is so clear to see.

No more are these men unclean. No more are they experiencing a living death. God in Jesus has come near to show mercy.

mercy. We find ourselves groaning and longing to be free and for a world free of sin and evil. And that's a good longing, isn't it?

[ 29 : 29 ] It's a good longing when it makes us run to Jesus. As we recognize he has the power to confront, to defeat, and to bring healing from evil.

But the question remains, how does that deliverance come to us? And for that we need to move on in Jesus' story. It comes as Jesus confronts those dark forces of sin and evil at the cross.

And there at the cross it is Jesus, the son of God, who suffers physically as his body is torn and beaten as the Lord of life dies. There at the cross Jesus suffers socially, he's been betrayed by Jesus, abandoned by the disciples, he walks the road of suffering, alone he is despised and rejected.

And he suffers spiritually as he bears upon himself the full weight of the sin of the world and the wrath of God that sin deserves. As he feels in that moment that sense of being forsaken by the father, he becomes as it were an unclean thing in our place for our sin and for our salvation.

But we know that three days later Jesus will leave the place of death, Jesus will leave the tomb in victory and triumph, his triumph over the spiritual forces complete.

[ 30 : 59 ] And in Jesus' powerful victory of evil over evil there is the promise of healing for each one of us. If like these men we will run to Jesus to find mercy.

And we have the promise of an ultimate healing from Jesus. What will that be like? It's wonderful, isn't it, to come towards the end of the Bible, to come to the closing chapters of the book of Revelation and we see the future hope of the Christian life, of a new heavens and a new earth, of life returned to the garden, now a city, to a world free of sickness and suffering and death and sin and evil, a world forever set free from groaning to rejoice in God's goodness and love forever. So when we see and sense sin and evil, when we experience the sorrow and the suffering of life in a fallen world, let it lead us to the Lord Jesus, our great Redeemer, to find hope and healing in him.

Let's pray together.