

Master over Nature and Evil

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[0 : 00] We're going to start with a quiz today, actually. So please have your hands on your buzzers. It's going to be a quiz about fears, a phobia quiz.

Are you ready? Okay. I'm going to start with something easy. I'm not sure I can even pronounce all these correctly, but anyway. First one. What are these fears? First one.

And I'm asking people to put up their hands. Can we go to the next fear? Okay. Who's that? Who went busy? Okay, Jeff, what's arachnophobia? Sorry?

Fear of spiders. Okay, very good. Next one. Acrophobia, I think, is the fear of heights. Is that right? Yes. Okay.

Next one. Nyctophobia. No. No, that's necro, I think. Fear of darkness. Nyct, night.

[0 : 56] Okay, next one. Nyctophobia. Yes. What did he say? Fear of germs? Yes. Is that what he said? Fear of cheating?

Yes. Okay, this last one. Antikyphobia. I think it's how it's pronounced. Isn't it, Stephen? More letters. Okay, anyone? This is probably the hardest.

It's actually, I think, quite a big fear. Common fear. Fear of failure. Okay. Must be the Greek. Something to do with failure. Anyway. Well, that's it for the quiz.

And as you know, it's not that I knew any of these. I looked it up on Google, just like Stephen's doing. But the thing that surprised me was that how many fears there are. And not only how many fears there are, that on the page you can see that was like top, it said the top hundred fears, right? Which means there are actually more fears than that. And so the thing was that not only are there a lot of fears, but there are enough people having those fears that actually it justifies giving a name to these fears.

[2 : 00] Who knows? There might even be a fear of taking quizzes. Now, the truth is, I think not all fears are bad, are they? We all have them, and often they keep us safe.

So we don't, for example, fall off the cliff. We don't wander onto the middle of the eastern freeway. We don't play with fire, things like that. But then there are other times where certain fears actually paralyze us.

And so the question is, how do we tell when they're good, and how do we tell when they're bad for us? Well, in our passage tonight, we find that people, we find people becoming fearful.

And the things that provoke fear in people, in the first incidence, it's the disciples of the storm. And then in the second, it's the people of the Gerasenes, as they see a demoniac being healed.

But in each case, the thing or the person that causes them to fear is actually Jesus himself. And in particular, it's when he reveals himself to them, so that they realize who he is.

[3 : 13] So let's turn to the first of the two miracles in verses 22 to 25, where Jesus reveals himself to be the master of or over nature. One day, it says, Jesus said to his disciples, let us go over to the other side of the lake.

So they got into the boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke him, Jesus, saying, Master, Master, we're going to drown. He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters. The storm subsided, and all was calm.

Where is your faith? He asked his disciples. And in fear and amazement, they asked one another, who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.

Now, don't be mistaken into thinking that because this is a lake, it's a calm body of water.

Elsewhere in the other gospels, it's actually called the Sea of Galilee. But more importantly, this lake, I've never been there, but I've been told that this lake is being flanked by mountains.

[4 : 25] And so it actually creates a wind tunnel that can whip up a storm suddenly without warning. Now, as seasoned fishermen, I would have thought the disciples would be prepared for this, and yet they were petrified.

Now, it could be that the storm was fiercer than usual. Maybe it was because of the boat, which was a small one that was taking water. But amazingly, whatever the reason, Jesus remains asleep and untroubled by the storm.

Now, again, we don't know why. Maybe he's just really tired. Maybe he's just a very heavy sleeper. But in their desperation, they finally wake him. And actually, in Matthew's gospel, we actually have more detail than this.

We have the disciples pleading for Jesus to save them. And then in Mark, they actually wondered aloud whether Jesus really cared for them. But by waiting until this time to intervene, what Jesus has done is given the disciples, or rather given us the chance to see the disciples' faith being tested.

But when Jesus finally acts, I think the thing that amazes me is the ease with which he does it. There is no hocus-pocus, you know, or the waving of a magic wand, but he simply gets up, rebukes the wind and the raging waters, and the lake is calm at once.

[5 : 56] Jesus is the master in his domain, isn't he? As though he was just rising from his bedchamber, he gets out, and he finds a few of his servants quarreling the wind and the wave, and he just tells them, shh, and they obey.

And please remember that Jesus wasn't a superhuman. He didn't have extra muscles. He didn't have a powerful breath like Superman, you know, to blow and stop the wind or the waves. In fact, that would just increase the wind and the waves, anyway. But he didn't have any of those things. He was just a human being, physically just like us. And yet, the winds and the waves obey him.

Why? Not because of his strength, physical strength, but because of who he is. The power in his words is solely due to his identity.

Now, for the disciples, this was probably all a bit too much to take in. It's true that they've probably seen Jesus do miracles before, but this is on an entirely different scale.

[7 : 03] It's often like how, you know, children are with their parents, aren't they? When they're really little, all they can see of their parents is them playing with, you know, at home with them all day. They sort of don't have a sense that actually mom and dad, you know, have more responsibilities than that.

That, you know, they might go to an office and do important things at the office. They may wonder, for instance, why, you know, dad and mom dresses up every day and then heads out the house with this important bag in their hands.

But there's just no sense in what they get up to, is there? Until perhaps one day, they turn on the TV and then they see mom making a speech on TV. Or they see a photo of their dad in the papers.

And then they realize, wow, dad and mom must be famous or something. They must really do important work. And then suddenly, they sort of see their parents in a new light, don't they?

They begin to wonder who mom and dad really are, besides being their parents. Well, I think for the disciples, this was a bit of an aha moment for them.

[8 : 10] You see, when you read the Old Testament, including the psalm that we read today in our first reading, it is only ever God that calms the waves and stills the storm.

The parting of the Red Sea, the River Jordan, these were things that only God could do. And when God appeared to Israel, He did so in a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud.

Or perhaps at the temple in a cloud of dark smoke. He may even send His mighty and fearsome angels. But for God to be like them, a human, walking and talking with them, eating, even snoring at the back of a boat, never.

And so I think even though the disciples had begun to see Jesus as a special person, the extent of their imagination was that, you know, He's probably just a special prophet or a healer or wise teacher.

But certainly not God. That would not have really computed in their brains. And even as they had woken Jesus, I think they would have thought maybe that all Jesus could do was bring the boat under control or something and then somehow steer them to safety.

[9 : 29] They wouldn't have thought that what He would do was stand up and speak to the wind and waves and then get them to stop. Now I know many of us have read this story many times and sometimes we can get a bit blasé, can't we, as Christians?

We might even get a little arrogant because as a society, we think that we've come a long way, haven't we? We've done so much to, as it were, tame nature.

And we think that as long as we put our minds to it, work together, that, you know, the sky's the limit and all the problems we have, we'll be able to tackle. So we've already put a man on the moon, haven't we?

And Elon Musk has promised that he'll get us to Mars soon. We've even built power stations to harness the wind and the waves. And so we sort of begin to convince ourselves that, you know, maybe we too are like masters over nature.

Except we're not, are we? I mean, just this week, the cool change that came through on Wednesday, we did not even have the power to delay it by one minute, did we?

[10 : 38] And when it came, I don't know about you, but near my neighborhood, we were at the mercy of the winds. There were leaves and branches falling. A lot of power lines, I think, around Melbourne came down as well.

And we were actually powerless, weren't we? Just a cool change, which comes in every week or thereabouts. We were powerless to make any difference to its effect. You know, all we could do was mop up afterwards.

Which is why I think as we look at this passage, what Jesus did is simply amazing. Because he controls nature with his mere voice. And it's little wonder then that the disciples reacted with fear and amazement and asked, who is this man?

Who is this? That even the winds and the water, they obey him. Now, interestingly, we see that there is no answer immediately. Instead, what we read is that they come ashore in the region of the Gerasenes.

That is actually Gentile country, not Jewish. And it's here that the disciples actually get the answer later on from an unlikely source. So let's keep reading.

[11 : 45] In verse 27, as Jesus steps ashore, he's met by a demon-possessed man or a demoniac. This man, because of his demons, he's been living out in the tombs without clothes, naked.

But on seeing Jesus, he falls to his feet and cries out in verse 28, what do you want with me, Jesus? Son of the Most High God, I beg you, do not torture me.

And there we have it. The answer to the disciples' question. Who is this man? Well, Jesus is the Son of the Most High God. And this is actually the same title that the angel revealed to Mary at the announcement of Jesus' birth in chapter 1.

But as we read, this knowledge isn't coming from the man himself, is it? Rather, it's coming from the demons. It's the demons who know Jesus.

And as we read on, this man was actually possessed not by just the one impure spirit, although that's what it's implied in verse 29, but later on it's revealed that this spirit actually is legion, which means there are many in him.

[12 : 50] And because of that, they have treated him terribly. They have driven him to solitary places. They have stripped him of his clothes and they have taken away his sanity.

And yet, and we see even more their power because it says there that no chains could physically restrain him. Humanly, the demons could not be controlled by people.

And yet, powerful though these demons are, they were actually no match for Jesus, were they?

Again, not because Jesus had more power physically, but again, because of who Jesus is.

And even though they hated the thought of it, they hated Jesus, they hated the thought of having to submit to him, they had no choice but to obey his voice. They had to obey because he was the son of the most high God.

And all they could do really was beg for mercy. That's how much power they had. So compare the power they had over the man and then the power they had before Jesus. And they beg to be sent into a herd of pigs instead of into the abyss.

[14 : 08] Can you see, just with these two incidents, what we see of Jesus? He is the master, isn't he, over nature and he's also the master over evil.

Now notice I didn't say master of evil and I've made the difference there in the outline as well. As though Jesus was responsible for evil, he's not.

Rather, Jesus is the master over evil in that he's not the source of evil and yet evil is still answerable to him. He is sovereign over it so that even the agents of evil like the demons have to submit to his commands.

And so, although we don't always know why God allows this evil to come into our world and take over things, we can draw great comfort from it, can't we?

We can draw comfort from the truth that God is always in control over all things, even the evil in this world. Nothing occurs outside the sovereign will of God, not even evil, not even the power of evil.

[15:17] But I say that more than simply a comforting thought, this is also a truth that we really do need to grasp because the reality is without God, without God, we ourselves actually truly are at the mercy of evil.

Without God, we actually have no hope against evil. Just look at the poor man before Jesus arrives. nothing could be done for him to rid him of his demons.

Now, we may not be possessed like this poor man was, we may not be running around naked or living among tombs, but we don't really realize, do we, often, how we too are under the sway of sin. You know, we think we've got things under control, don't we? It's only a small sin here and there. You know, we can control that. You know, we can put a stop to that if we need.

You know, I think Barnaby Joyce was probably thinking that, you know, when he was first tempted to cheat on his wife. But he didn't see how it actually took control of him and his life and his career even now, probably.

[16:33] As the Prime Minister said, it set off a world of woe, didn't it? But you know, let's not pick on Barnaby because we're not much better, are we? We struggle even to contain our so-called little sins, like holding our tongue or telling the truth or not being jealous or bitter against others.

And if we can't even do that, then what hope do we really have against the big sins in our lives? And yet, I have to say, as we look around at our society and as we hear people speak, there is just that naivety, isn't it, about evil.

We think that we have the power to contain it. You know, either these little indiscretions that we can just stop whenever we want or else, as a society, we think we can bring all the evil under our control.

Whether it's corruption or abuse, we have this dogged belief that, you know, provided there are enough checks and balances in place, provided we empower the weak to speak up, then, you know, we can stop evil from happening.

Now, again, don't mishear me, please, because I'm not suggesting we then, you know, just be fatalistic and let evil run amok. Checks and balances are good, and we should do what we can to do good instead of evil, but we do need to realize as Christians, don't we, that these things that we think we can do to stop evil, they are really band-aid solutions, aren't they?

[17:59] That without God to deal with us and our total depravity, not least the evil in each of our own hearts, there is really no lasting solution to evil, because only Jesus has mastery, and He showed that not just by banishing demons, but by dying on the cross.

And so, the Apostle Paul says in Colossians chapter 2, when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us.

He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And then, having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

You see, you can banish demons from one person, maybe, but they'll just come up and turn up in another person, wouldn't they? But only when Jesus laid down His life for us did He truly set all of us free, because He released us from the bondage of sin, the debt of guilt that actually imprisons us and makes us subject to evil.

And only Jesus can do this, because He was the perfect Son of the Most High God, the Master over evil. Well, so these are the two miracles then that reveal who Jesus is.

[19:42] And I guess the question that follows that is how are we to respond in light of such knowledge? Because as the demons show, you can know who Jesus really is and yet still not respond in the right way, can you?

Well, as we look at the last five or six verses, we actually find two responses. So the first, in verses 34 to 37, we have the response of the people of the town who fear Jesus but ultimately reject Him.

so as the pig herders, I think maybe that's what they call it, they run back to tell the town of this, the people come out to see for themselves. And they were indeed amazed at the sight of this man healed.

It's sort of far beyond their imagination that something like that could happen. But then when they realized it was Jesus who did it, fear overcomes them of Him. Why?

Because they realized the power that Jesus must possess. And yet, strangely, what do they do? They asked Jesus to leave.

[20 : 47] In fact, in the other Gospels, they pleaded, is the word, for Jesus to leave. Now, why would they do that? Some people think it's because Jesus was threatening their possessions or livelihood.

If Jesus could easily take away their pigs, then what else is Jesus capable of? you see, they thought, yeah, demons are bad, but at least powerful though they are, we can consign them just to the demoniac and we can send him out of town, keep him away.

But Jesus, what if He wants to have authority over us and our town? That would be a great threat to our way of life, wouldn't it? And in a sense, they were right in that when Jesus comes, He does want to have authority over our lives.

He wants to be our king. That's the very definition of what it means to rule over us. And if Jesus is the master over nature and evil, then He wants to be our master as well.

So, really, for those of us here who are not yet Christians, let me say this to you, or even if you're Christians, don't think that following Jesus is easy.

[22 : 02] No, it will be costly because God seeks authority in your life. But then don't make the mistake of thinking that you'll be worse off because you submit to Jesus.

Because when Jesus rules over us, He does so to bless us, not to harm us like the demons did. He wants to shine His light in our lives and drive away the dark of sin, even the demons so-called that lurk within us.

You know, it might be our addictions or our bitterness, our resentment that we still harbor, all the selfish ambitions that we hang on to. Jesus has come to set us free from them. But it is costly because we actually have to look at ourselves and be honest about ourselves, humble ourselves, and receive the authority and rule of Jesus.

And then it requires us to give up the things that really harm us and hurt us. But the thing is that Jesus will never force us to do it. Because if we tell Jesus to leave us alone, then as the people did, He would.

The wind and the waves may obey Him, even the demons might have to obey Him, but Jesus will never force us to obey Him. Not until the final day at least.

[23 : 19] God's will be saved. Because Jesus' goal is to save us. And that can only happen by faith. And faith, by its very nature, cannot be forced or coerced.

Well, that brings us to the second response, that of the saved man who put his faith in Jesus and became a witness for Him. Now, unlike the people, He was a willing disciple of Jesus.

And we get a picture of that, of Him in verse 35. It's a beautiful picture. For we find Him seated at Jesus' feet, just like a disciple. He's dressed, that is, His shame is covered over, and most of all, He's in right mind.

Healed, restored, and saved. The word actually in verse 36, which we've got, I think, cured in the Bible, that word is actually translated either as healed or saved as well.

So, it wasn't just a physical healing or transformation. It was a spiritual one as well. And now, Jesus, as He steps back into His board, the man comes up to Him in verse 37, and He begs to follow Him.

[24 : 31] What a difference in the begging, isn't it, between the first begging and the second. Now, He wants to follow Jesus. And it's quite interesting that every disciple so far, up to now in Luke, Jesus has called them to follow Him.

But here we have a Gentile who He Himself asks of Jesus to go with Him. Now, I think the reason why Jesus taught him not to come was because it was not the right time yet for a Gentile to follow Jesus.

But instead, Jesus does not reject Him, but He sends Him out as a missionary, He said. He says, return home and tell how much God has done for you. What a great honor, don't you think?

Is this the first man to be sent out by Jesus, even before the twelve were? And He's sent to the Gentiles, even before the Apostle was, Apostle Paul was.

And it's not hard to see why the man responded as he did, because here was someone who had absolutely nothing in life, and God, Jesus came and gave him life. And this is in contrast to the town people who clung to what they thought were precious in their lives, when Jesus had so much more to give them.

[25 : 42] Now, the one response we don't have is that of the disciples, actually. All we have is their reaction of fear and amazement, back in verse 26 or 25.

And Luke saves their responses, I think, for the end of the gospel, where we see them meeting Jesus again. But Jesus, in the midst of their fear, He asked them this very question in verse 25. Where is your faith? And I think for us tonight, that is our question as well. That's the same question that Jesus gives to us. Where is our faith?

You see, when we are faced with life's uncertainties, fear is a natural reaction, isn't it? We fear things and people because of the power they have over us.

You know, like our boss, like David's not here today, the traffic officer, when he pulls up next to us with his flashing lights. We fear their sanctions, don't we?

[26 : 44] He doesn't do that, David? No, he doesn't. We also fear death and sickness and loss of job or failure. What's that again? A tiki phobia. We fear all these things because they bring us pain and suffering.

They have the power to change our lives dramatically. But when we are afraid, friends, the thing we must realize is that there is one more powerful than all these fears.

And that one is God. That man is Jesus, who is the master overall and therefore can take away those fears and deal with them.

That is why Jesus' comfort, even though it is in a form of a rebuke, in the midst of the disciples' greatest fear was this. Where is your faith?

In other words, when they were fearful, what Jesus asked them to do was, trust in me. It wasn't the solving of the problems, the calming of the psalm. What he wanted them to do was, trust in me.

[27 : 51] Put your faith in me. Because I am the one who will shield you and save you. Whatever harm or evil may come your way. So, friends, remember the next time you are afraid, whatever the cause might be, don't think you need to pluck up the courage to overcome that fear.

Don't think you need to self-talk your way out of those fears. Instead, the very first thing you do is to look to the one who is greater than these fears. Look to Jesus.

Many of you may remember the original Jurassic Park movie. You know, the one Sam Neill and Laura Dern, I think, and the kids were desperately trying to escape from the raptors.

And then they get to this part of the movie or the museum when they seem to be cornered. There seems to be no way of escape. And then this happens. I want to turn up the volume a bit to scare me.

Okay, that's it. There's the other raptor there that he gets to as well, but I didn't. Friends, why don't I show you this movie? Well, Jesus is like the T-Rex.

[29 : 22] Those raptors are our fears, but Jesus is bigger and more powerful than all our fears combined. And the thing is, though, even though he's powerful and we should rightly fear him, he's unlike the T-Rex in that he's not going to turn around and then eat you instead as well.

Because Jesus loves us and cares for us. So let's fear him and let's put our faith fully in him whenever fears come upon us and even when there are no fears in our life.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for sending your son Jesus to walk this earth and to show us a glimpse of his power and glory. We are amazed that demons, disease, the wind and the waves were obedient to him.

But thank you most of all that he is the Lamb of God who takes away our sin and conquered evil by his death on the cross. Help us to fear him and to put our faith fully in him.

In his mighty name we pray. Amen. Amen.