

# Come to Me

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Date: 23 September 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] This whole idea of why bothering with Jesus sort of simmers away below Matthew 8 and 9. Remember we started this two weeks back. We saw three miracles at the beginning.

In fact, there are three groups of three miracles. And those three dramatic miracles in verses 1 to 17 are followed by Jesus calling people to follow him.

And today, beginning at verse 23, we have another three works of astonishing power and authority. Stilling the storm, casting out demons, forgiving sins.

And they're not just healings. And I want you to see, please, that what's going on here is a clash, a violent conflict.

And the stories are wild and supernatural. And on the one side, there is this churning, snarling, life-threatening evil powers.

[ 1 : 03 ] And on the other side is Jesus. And it's unlike anything else in Matthew so far. In each clash, Jesus demonstrates his matchless mastery.

He marches in as a conqueror. He marches as a victor, as it were, not just to show his great power or that he can conquer evil, but that he's doing it to rescue people who are held enslaved or who are in threat by these things, just as you are and I am too.

And just a little detail about Matthew. One of Matthew's favorite little words is the word behold. It's not a word we use these days unless you're a fashion editor.

Behold. It's a little word, but what it means is look closely. Because Matthew's frightened that as we read his gospel, we're going to skim along the surface and superficially miss what he's really saying.

So four times he says, behold, behold, behold, look very carefully. So let's have a look at these three things, these three works Jesus does, these three conquering things.

[ 2 : 13 ] And the first, very famously, is that Jesus is master of nature. This is the well-known story of Jesus stealing the storm, but in Matthew it has a twist.

It begins in verse 23. In the very verses before it, men had come to Jesus saying, I'll follow you. And in verse 23, Jesus said to one of the men, follow me and leave the dead to bury the dead.

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. Completely unnecessary detail. And if you were skimming along the surface, you might miss it.

But you see, this storm at the sea in this section is about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and why it's worth it. He says, follow me. He gets into the boat. The disciples follow him into the boat, out onto the lake and into the storm.

This is for us. And then the great conflict is immediately on us. The storm arises from the sea. It's traumatic. It's threatening. Matthew calls it. The storm uses the word seismic.

[ 3 : 18 ] Not the usual word for a storm. It's like the wind and the waves are snarling, angry dogs, shaking and biting, pushing the disciples beyond any human help.

And in verse 26, look at this victorious power. I just, you know this. But verse 26, halfway through, he rose, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

Boom. That's the work of God. At creation, it's God who ruled over the waters. When God rescued his people from Egypt, he separated the sea.

Here is Jesus Christ. He doesn't invoke God's name. He doesn't say, oh, Heavenly Father, please, would you calm the storm? He rebukes the wind and the sea himself, and there's a great calm.

And for the first time in the gospel, we have a nature miracle. Jesus just demonstrating his complete and divine authority, not just over disease, but over the elements.

[ 4 : 20 ] He's master over nature. But to demonstrate just how completely in control he does, Matthew tells us that before he gets up and calms the storm, after he's woken up, he deals with the

disciples' lack of faith before he stills the storm.

Do you find that interesting? Storm raging. Boat about to go down. Wake up. Save us, Lord. I'm going to deal with your faith first.

Now, what do they do? The disciples say in verse 26, verse 25, save us, Lord, we are perishing. Is that a good prayer? A very good prayer. Very Anglican prayer.

I've had it many times. But before he stills the storm, he says, why are you so afraid, you little faiths? And as Dan regularly steals my thunder at the children's moment, he's not saying they don't have any real faith.

They have real faith. They asked him to save them. He's not saying it's wrong to be afraid. I think they believe that Jesus can save them, or they wouldn't have asked.

[ 5 : 30 ] They just don't believe that he cares. I think that's the issue. And the circumstances are so utterly overwhelming, to say the least, and they're so fearful because they're so focused on the circumstances, and I would be too.

But they've forgotten who they've got in the boat. And this is important for us because it often feels like following Jesus. We follow him into the boat, and off it goes, plane sailing for a little while.

We're in charge, you know, oars and sails and whatever. But then things start to go wrong. And the winds come up, and the waves come up, and Jesus just seems to be asleep.

And things get worse. And we ask him to help us. We try so hard, and he seems to be doing nothing. And we pray, Lord, I'm in this.

Help me in this. Help me in this. At least I'm bailing, Lord. You're not doing anything. It's biding your sweet time. And I think all of us fall into these circumstances.

[ 6 : 34 ] I mean, some of you might be feeling that right now. You're toiling away and toiling away and toiling away, and the waves just getting worse and worse and worse, and you're bailing. Where is Jesus and his power? Does he care? Don't you find it interesting?

In the book of Ephesians, in chapter 3, just before the passage Margaret read, that the Apostle Paul is writing from prison in Rome. He could be executed.

He's not interested, writing to people in Ephesus where it's not easy to be a Christian. He writes out a long prayer for them at the end of chapter 3. He doesn't pray they'll get good jobs and not be persecuted.

He doesn't even pray for himself that he'll escape death. What he prays is that God would strengthen them so that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith, so that they might know something of the dimensions of God's love, so that they would be filled with all the fullness of God. Isn't that amazing? And here's the thing on the lake. Even though they are little faiths, Jesus puts forward his power to deliver them.

[ 7 : 42 ] And he continues to do so. Even when our faith is little, he puts forward his mastery and his mercy when we don't understand, when we're all over the place.

And he does it so that our faith will grow, that he will dwell in our hearts, and that we'll be filled with all the fullness of God. And what's their response to his care and his power?

Well, the last verse of that little section, 27, they say, What sort of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? Which in the original is, where's he from?

And I love the honesty of this. You know, if I was writing the Gospels, I would be tempted to say, We all bowed down and we said, You are the Son of God in the flesh with the power of God to save, and by your power and love you saved us.

But Matthew doesn't tell us that. And I think it's completely understandable that they've missed the boat on this one. It's only later, after Christ has saved you, that you realise what he's done, that he's perfectly worked, his perfect power in perfect timing for you.

[ 8 : 55 ] We understand so little of his saving power and kindness, but what we do know, that he alone is worth following into the boat. He is conqueror over nature. Secondly, verses 28 to 34, He's the master over evil.

This is an amazing section. And it's a direct confrontation between Jesus and the power of the devil. And you notice as it was read, the disciples slip into the background. Jesus goes to the other side of the lake.

It's a Gentile area. It's unclean for Jews. It's called Gadara. There are pigs nearby. Unclean. Two demon-possessed men among the tombs.

Unclean. And there's such a wildness and a violence to this clash. The men are driven to inhuman raging and violence under the power of the demons.

They live amongst the graves as though they're already, they're kind of already dead because they're cut off from all social fellowship and interaction. And they exercise a local reign of terror. [ 9 : 58 ] You see in that first verse, so fierce no one could pass that way. And the scene's like this. It's like they're vicious dogs on the leash, snarling and growling and biting and spitting, but at the same time under control.

They capitulate before this divine power. Incidentally, if you have difficulty with the idea that demons can be, or the devil can be a personal force, back in Matthew chapter 4, Matthew himself distinguishes between physical diseases, mental disorders and demon possession.

Just sometime you should look at that. What disturbs the reign of violence and raging is the simple presence of Jesus. In verse 28, he's deliberately gone to this terrible place for the reason of saving and rescuing these two men.

And he does it with matchless mastery. And in 29, the demons cry out. And in the original, it's a blood curdling scream. What have you to do with us as son of God?

Have you come here to torment us before the time? The deepest instinct of the demons is to drive Jesus as far away as possible.

[ 11 : 14 ] They want nothing whatsoever to do with him. They want no contact. They want no closeness. So they scream and they beg and they rage and they pray at the same time.

And they want nothing whatsoever to do with him because they instantly recognize him to be the son of God. Which is exactly what Satan called him back in chapter 4.

And exactly what God the Heavenly Father called him at the baptism in chapter 3. And it's not going to be under chapter 14 for the disciples to confess this. And it's exactly what the scribes and the Pharisees accused Jesus of on the cross.

If you're the son of God, come down. And then it's exactly what the centurion who crucifies Jesus confesses when Jesus dies. This is the son of God. It is a supernatural recognition of who Jesus is. And it's given willingly and wonderfully by those who have faith in Christ. And it's forced and unwillingly given by Satan and the demons. And the recognition of Jesus as the son of God terrifies the demons.

[ 12 : 19 ] Not just because Jesus has power, but because Jesus has been appointed as judge. It's like, you know, when you turn over a rock and there are scorpions and spiders underneath.

And they scurry around with the light. But Jesus' very presence as the judge there is torture for the powers of evil. And they tremble in the presence of the judge.

It's almost as though they're experiencing the fire already. Because they know that the coming of the son of God is the beginning of the end. Because it is the work of the son of God to deal with evil. And they beg Jesus to cast them into the pigs in verse 31.

And in this whole episode, Jesus only says one word in verse 32. It's the word go. Notice his complete control again.

Jesus doesn't pray to the father. Father, would you do this? No, no. Jesus says the word. Jesus, he executes a form of judgment with this word. Now why?

[ 13 : 36 ] Why do the demons ask to go into the pigs? And why does Jesus allow it? I don't think it's just because demons love death or because they hate God's creation.

I think the demons' purpose in this is devious and deceptive. They want the people of this region to curse Jesus just the way they do.

And the way they're going to get people to curse Jesus is because of their loss of income from the pigs. They want the people of Gadara to reject Jesus and drive him away.

And the reason Jesus allows it is not as a kindness to the demons, but to test the people of Gadara. To see whether they value people over pigs.

Whether they see Jesus' victory and salvation over their money. Now, Matthew is a money man.

[ 14 : 35 ] And it's very interesting to me how he does this. You see, if Satan doesn't take direct possession of a person with demons, one of the best ways he has of working in our hearts is gripping our hearts with greed and money.

So here are three little questions out of this passage to test what kind of grip Satan has on your heart. Number one, here is a question to ask yourself. Are you greedy or not?

If you think you're not greedy, the devil is well on his way with you. If you know you are greedy and avaricious and covetous at heart, Christ is having his way with you.

Second question. Is the idea of putting Christ first before your financial interest crazy? I don't mean whether you give occasionally, but the reality of, for the sake of Christ, saying no to financial gain and yes to financial loss, does that make you squeamy thinking about it?

Or do you think that's a small thing, no sacrifice really? Or thirdly, do you care more about the price of pigs than the precious people who are heading to the graveyard?

[15:54] You know, you hear about Jesus' work amongst the tombs. You want to support the work of salvation and his judgment. Only if it costs a pig or two.

It's very exposing, isn't it? And here we are, the people of Gadara, in verses 32 and 34, their reaction is exactly the same as the demons. They beg Jesus to leave.

They want nothing more to do with him. They want him to go away as far as possible. It's a great irony, isn't it? You know, even in asking him to go away, they recognise his power, his healing, saving power.

They are not moved one millimetre by compassion for these two men who are now in their right mind, who've literally been rescued from captivity to the grave. They don't care that the one standing before them has power over Satan and death.

Their hearts are so focused on profit, they hate the idea of Jesus coming between them and their profit. And so they demonstrate the depth of their slavery to Satan by driving Jesus away. Jesus, champion over nature, champion over evil.

[17:01] And thirdly and finally, Jesus reveals himself as master over sin. And here we come to chapter 9, verses 1 to 8, and twice we get the little word behold, because we think sin's not a big deal.

But actually, this is the point of the passage. Jesus does do a healing here, Peel's the paralytic guy, but it's a picture and demonstration of a deeper blessing of sins forgiven.

You see, if you read through this passage, with an average group of people, we think the storm and the demons, that's where the action is. But the storm and the demons are temporary.

Whereas what's going on with sin is eternal. And the great clash and the great snarling enemy of the people of God and of your soul and mine is sin itself.

So in verse 2, a group of friends bring to him a paralysed guy lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Take heart, my son.

[18:05] Your sins are forgiven. Isn't it lovely that Jesus will bless other people because of our faith? You know, children and grandchildren are blessed by the grace and faith of their parents.

And what better way to bless our friends than by bringing them to Jesus tied to a bed? That was just a little bit of humor injected there. See if you're still with me.

They want his restoration, but Jesus wants something more wonderful. He says, Take heart, my son. Your sins are forgiven. Not that his sins have caused this problem. But Jesus sees an evil far deeper than physical paralysis.

This is very important. Again, Jesus does not say, God forgives your sins. Jesus says, Your sins are forgiven. It's an action where he's actually doing the forgiving at that very moment.

So, if you would pick up your service bulletin for a moment, turn back to page five. I just want to...

So, after we confess our sins Sunday by Sunday by Sunday, morning prayer by morning prayer by morning prayer, then Dan or I, or whoever's leading the service, says the prayer of absolution.

[19:28] Notice, please, it's a prayer. Because we are not forgiving your sins. God is forgiving your sins. So, we say, Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desires not the death of sinners, praise God, but rather they turn from their wickedness and live, has given power and commandment to his ministers, well, that's all of us really, but it's us here and now, to declare and pronounce to his people who are penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins.

The word remission is a medical word today, but it really means freedom from the releasing of the forgiveness of sins. And then we declare, this is what the gospel declares, he pardons and absolves.

One is personal. I've got no more debt. Absolution, no more guilt. He pardons and absolves all them that truly repent and unfriendly believe his holy gospel. Wherefore, we beseech him to grant us, because we're sinful as well, in case you hadn't noticed.

And his holy spirit, that those things may please him, et cetera, et cetera. No, no, Jesus doesn't do that. He says, here I am forgiving your sins.

And the scribes say, that's blasphemy. Verse five. Back in the Bible, put down bulletin, forget shopping list.

[ 20 : 54 ] For which is easier to say, that's interesting. He doesn't come down on the scribes like a ton of bricks. Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise and walk?

Well, of course, both are humanly impossible. But that you may know, that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. Then he said to the paralytic, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And he rose and went home. This is the first time in these three works of power, Jesus is explaining what's going on. In the first episode, when Jesus still the storm, he doesn't explain.

He conquers without explanation. In the second story with the demons, he doesn't reveal why he does it. He doesn't reveal his plan. Now Jesus reveals what he is doing and why.

In other words, Jesus' mastery over creation is for this purpose, for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' mastery over the evil forces is for the sake of the forgiveness of sins.

[ 21 : 59 ] These are not three unrelated, random exercises of power. Because it's going to take the power of creation to make a new creation where sinless people will live. And it's going to take the power of Jesus over Satan to finally rid us of evil.

Because the great clash is with sin. That's why Jesus says the Son of Man has authority on earth. On earth. I think he does that for three reasons.

It's an astonishing claim. He does it for this. Because sin in the Bible is usually a vertical issue against God. But Jesus is saying he can forgive.

You know, if I sin against Dan, if I go out and drive my car and scratch his car, I might hope he just doesn't notice it. But, which is possible.

If I come up to you and say, I'm really sorry for scratching Dan's car, you'll say, go and talk to him. In the same way, sin in the Bible is always against God. By Jesus saying, the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, it's a great claim to divinity.

[ 23 : 06 ] But it's more than that. It's saying something's happening on earth. Because the way sin has to be dealt with and conquered is that it has to be judged and it has to be punished.

And that's why Jesus has come. It's why he submitted to baptism. It's why he dealt with the devil. It's why he performs these miracles of power. It's why he goes to the cross so that he can save his people from our sins.

And on the cross, he takes our punishment instead of us. Storms continue to rage. Demons continue to rage. But our forgiveness can be complete and perfect and eternal now.

And that brings me to the third reason why this on earth is so important. For Jesus to say this is a time-shifting miracle. Because the word forgiveness, that's the word of the judge on the last day. It's the verdict that we wish to hear on the last day. Forgiven, clean, come in. And Jesus is saying, he drags that verdict from the last day and he says, it's now.

[ 24 : 08 ] Authority on earth to forgive sins now. And if you don't believe me, he says, get up and walk and the guy gets up and goes home. Heart-melting stuff, I think.

You know, at the centre of what Jesus is doing, at the centre of our faith, is not sin. It's forgiveness of sin. It's release from sin. And his victory over the storm and his victory over the demons are pictures of what he's going to do on the cross.

And I just, you know, what kind of God would give his son for us to die for those who don't want anything to do with him so that he can treat us not as we have mistreated him, but that he can redeem us perfectly, that he can give us eternal peace, which begins now and continues into the next life where we have face-to-face fellowship with God the Father.

So, brothers and sisters, get into the boat. Hear these words. Get into the boat. And as you do, listen to Jesus again. Come to me, he says, all who labour and are heavy laden with sin.

And I will give you rest, forgiveness. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. And you will find rest. You will find rest for your souls.

[ 25 : 24 ] For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Well, in the light of this, what can we do but bow and pray? So let's kneel and call on God.