

Luke 8:22-39 - Control Issues

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank you all. Can you pray with me? Father, that's the desire of our hearts, the prayer of our hearts this morning, that you would make us more like Jesus.

Our beautiful, glorious Savior, that as we learn of Him, as we sit with Him, that you would make us more like Him, that we would love the way He loves.

We would trust you the way He trusts you. We would be kind and gracious and merciful and full of grace and truth. Father, would you make us that way, even as we come to your word this morning. Holy Spirit, would you do that work in our hearts. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Turn with me this morning to Luke chapter 8.

[1 : 13] Luke 8 is on page 864 of the Bible in the pew in front of you. We've been gone from Luke for a few weeks now, so let me reorient us briefly as we jump back in.

Luke here is in the midst of giving us his well-researched, well-researched, historical account of the life and times of Jesus. He's been telling us all about the one who has come, whose coming means good news of great joy for all people.

Because Jesus brings a kingdom, a kingdom that upends the world's value system, turns it on its head. A kingdom and a community that pulls outsiders into the midst of what he's doing.

Most recently, Jesus has been teaching about that kingdom. He's been talking about what it means to follow him, to be a part of his community. Through the parable of the sower, reminding us, instructing us to hear his words and do them.

In the rest of chapter 8 that we're going to pick up in the middle of this morning, we're going to see four miracles, four stories where Jesus puts his amazing power on display.

[2 : 28] We're going to look at the first two this morning, the next two next time. But these are stories that Luke tells to reveal more of who Jesus is and to teach us more of what it means to follow him.

Two really remarkable stories, one of which we've already talked about with the kids. As I read, try to put yourself in the shoes of the disciples who are walking with Jesus in these stories.

Notice first what it is that Jesus does and then how people respond to his incredible deeds. Luke 8, we'll start reading at verse 22.

One day he got into a boat with his disciples and he said to them, let us go across to the other side of the lake. So they set out and as they sailed, he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake and they were filling with water and were in danger.

And they went and woke him saying, Master, Master, we are perishing. And he woke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves. And they ceased and there was a calm.

[3 : 35] He said to them, where is your faith? And they were afraid. And they marveled, saying to one another, Who then is this that he commands even winds and water?

And they obey him. Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons.

For a long time he had worn no clothes and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.

When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, What have you to do with me, 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 many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.

Jesus then asked him, What is your name? And he said, Legion. For many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.

[4 : 43] Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.

And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear.

So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away saying, return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.

And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. Thus far God's holy, inerrant, inspired word that we might know him more.

[5 : 59] Amen. I've known for a while that I probably have some control issues. This week I confirmed it scientifically through one of those internet psychological analysis tests that are very scientific and professionally done.

I took one of those and scored it and found out that I scored just at the top of the you might have some control issues range and just below you are definitely a control freak.

Stayed out of that range narrowly. That was a great relief to me. But I do have some concerning tendencies. I can be a backseat driver.

To be honest, since I'm usually the one behind the wheel of my car, a rear view window driver, a windshield driver, telling people in other cars who can't hear me how they should be driving.

Every week I look over the bulletin right before we print it, even though I've already planned the service, just to make sure there are no missing or misplaced commas because that bothers me.

[7 : 12] But, go on vacation with me and this goes to new levels. I go into hyper control mode. I analyze weather forecasts.

I analyze discount days at tourist attractions. Kids eat free nights at restaurants in the city that we will be visiting. All of these things I take into account to construct the perfect trip, not just which days we're going to do which activities, but what time we'll need to be there, what bus we're going to need to catch at which time and at which location to save the most walking and strolling that we can.

All in an effort to have it under control. It can be a bit overwhelming at times to guests on my well-planned military marches, I mean, relaxing vacations that my family enjoys with me.

It's pretty bad, but the comfort is at least I'm not a control freak, right? Officially, not. I just have some control issues.

If you're like me and you have some control issues, I'll tell you from what I've wrestled with this week that this sermon could be particularly painful or it could be in some ways particularly helpful.

[8 : 32] Perhaps both. But even if you wouldn't think of yourself as controlling, we all have control issues in some ways.

We all like to be in control in some areas, don't we? There are parts of our lives that we really want to go the way we really want them to go. And we'll do whatever it takes, won't we?

We'll plan, we'll work, we'll manipulate others, whatever we need to do to get what we want and feel in control there in those areas. And it can be very difficult to run into our limitations and feel life is spinning out of control, can't it?

How do we respond when that happens, when we feel that way, when we realize what we're faced with? The question of who is in control, of who has power and authority in a particular situation, is at the heart of both of these stories this morning.

The first thing that we must see as we come to this is who Jesus truly is. That's what's at issue in these stories. It's the question the disciples ask in the boat after the storm calms down, right?

[9 : 46] Verse 25, what do they say? Who then is this? Who is it? What's his identity? And we're gonna see some really important answers to this question in this text as Jesus demonstrates for us

his power to control things that we can't.

It's really quite remarkable. The first story we talked about with the kids already so I won't belabor it, but remember some of these disciples were fishermen. These were things that of all the things in the world they felt like they might could control.

A boat on a lake was one of them. On this particular sea of Galilee they'd been there. They'd controlled fish and boats and they'd been through storms.

But try as they might on this particular day they're in over their heads, aren't they? They're certain that they're going to die and so in verse 24 they come and wake Jesus up saying, Master, Master, we are perishing.

and he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves and they ceased and there was a calm. That's a pretty quick verse, isn't it?

[11:02] A lot happens there real fast. Jesus wakes up, rebukes the waves and there's calm. Jesus speaks with the only voice to which creation must respond.

the voice of the Creator. Just moments before this we see Jesus' full humanity on display as he sleeps after an exhausting day.

and now we see Jesus' full divinity at the same time demonstrated. In the Old Testament God himself is the one who commands the seas.

It's not unclear. Yahweh is in control of the seas and he in fact rebukes them. He rebukes the sea. Psalm 106 says for instance when the Israelites are leaving Egypt and walking through the Red Sea on dry ground how'd that happen?

Because God rebuked the sea the waters moved back and his people walked through on dry ground so does Jesus rebuke the sea and exercise divine control over creation.

[12:15] So the sea calms and Jesus and his disciples continue on their voyage to the other side of the sea on calm waters. And here as they get to the other side I thought you were looking at a mountain yeah that's a nice screensaver.

That's not an object lesson it's just a screensaver for a moment. But as they go over there might have been some mountains there is a cliff that the pigs are going to rush off of in a minute.

But what happens is Jesus is demonstrating his divine control over spiritual evil. Not just natural world and creation but over spiritual evil as well.

these demons had controlled this man for a long time verse 27 says. But today they've met their match and they know it. There are many of them.

A legion would have been thousands perhaps the name merely indicates many but they recognize these demons do the son of the most high God.

[13:17] They know who he is immediately. It's interesting isn't it that the clearest statement of Jesus' identity the clearest answer to the question who then is this that the disciples ask in the first story in the rest of this who gives the clearest answer?

Demons in a man who's never met Jesus before. Jesus son of the most high God. Then look what the demons do verse 31 they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss and a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside and they begged him to let them enter these so he gave them permission.

The demons came out of the man entered the pigs the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. One of him thousands of them and it's not even a fair fight is it?

They begged they begged and he gave permission and so it happened. The power of Jesus how great is his power on display as the large herd of pigs goes hurtling over the cliff just because he gave his permission.

Then the story shifts back to the man left behind free from this demonic possession now talk about something people couldn't control the people of his town had been working hard on controlling this guy they'd set a guard on him they'd put him in chains and shackles time and again and every time what happened?

[14:57] He broke out and he goes rushing off into the desert again he can't be controlled over and over and over now look at him what happens after he encounters Jesus people went out to see what happened they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus clothed and in his right mind they were afraid and those who'd seen it told them how the demon possessed man had been healed healed referring to this holistic healing all of him he's been rescued everything is different this man this man who was naked is now clothed this man

who ravages through the tombs and lives there is now sitting at the feet of Jesus he's been outside of his mind not thinking straight and now he's sitting calmly in his right mind

Jesus has divine control over tormented people it's personal and individual God alone is able to save and to restore them these tormented people to the people he created them to be that the world and the devil and their own sin has so shattered in them the man himself knows this see how he points this out it's a third clear identification in this one passage of Jesus as equal with God it's in verse 38 the man begs that he might be with Jesus but Jesus sent him away saying return to your home and declare how much God has done for you and he went away proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him it's interchangeable isn't it the man recognizes proclaiming how much

Jesus had done for him is the same thing as proclaiming how much God had done for him the saving rescuing work of Jesus and the saving rescuing work of God are one in the same that's who Jesus is this reminds us of another important aspect of Jesus identity to which all of these power and control things point he's powerful divinely powerful yes but he uses his power to protect and rescue his people we see Jesus power but many of us are pretty skeptical about power aren't we how's it going to be used can I really trust the person who's got this power I'm not sure what I think about that it's vital we see who Jesus is that's that's who he is here in this passage God himself come to save right he protects disciples from certain death defends a possessed man against spiritual evil rescues a tormented man from humiliating and isolating beastliness changes everything for him so a major message in this passage is that if Jesus is the divine deliverer in these situations and from these powerful enemies if he loves to rescue like this how much more so can he and will he rescue you how much more so is he powerful to defeat the enemies in your life to rescue you from what you fear let me just stop and say this is meant to be a great comfort to controlling anxious hearts that one word from

Jesus redirects a deadly tornado or every aspect of the natural world God's own creation the spiritual evil that appalls and frightens you both the one inside you and the one outside you in the world around you they all quake before the son of the most high God and his power Jesus loves to heal and transform broken tormented people like you and me if you're stuck in a double life full of deception and you don't know how to get free from it you feel there's no way out maybe you're haunted by pain and scars from the past you just feel so broken and stuck no one can help you Jesus can you're not beyond the reach of his great power and he's demonstrating it for you again this morning come see me let's pray together let's go to him together he loves to rescue you he will use his divine power to protect and defend you even in ways you don't know you need that's who he is you know what probably reveals my control issues more than anything else when I see them and they come out most clearly it's my responses to things that

I thought I had control of that I lose control of it's my anger at the weatherman who missed the storm coming in on one of my vacation days I had planned it's my frustration with my child whose heart stubbornly resisted my incredibly brilliant parenting idea I said earlier we all like to be in control in some areas that's true it's equally true that we all run into areas where we have to admit we're not in control don't we it may be the weather or the hearts of your children it may be a medical crisis that produces deep anxiety it may be the evil in the world that terrifies you for yourself and your family it may be finances and the whims of the stock market that worry you constantly in all of these situations and many others we are not in control are we we've already been reminded that Jesus is in control in all of them but this passage particularly raises the issue of how we respond to that not just do we know that like thanks for the helpful information

[21 : 49] Jesus is powerful and he's in control I knew you believed that Will how do I respond to that how does that impact me how do we respond to him being in control and not us this passage asks more than just are you impressed by his power but do you know who he is and long to be with him see the miraculous power of God when it's on display has one consistent response throughout the Bible and it's fear fear an appropriate thing you might say when the power of God is on display it happens in both of these stories here look at verse 25 oh you can even look up here at verse 25 now he said to them where is your faith and they were what afraid Jesus has just calmed the waters and they are afraid and then verse 35 the people went out to sea and they find this man sitting in front of

Jesus and everything is okay with him now but they were what afraid that fear is natural isn't it you've felt it being overwhelmed overwhelmed at the power of God on display seeing myself as

unworthy and undone before the might of the almighty one we've all felt that fear when we realize our utter lack of control of the medical diagnosis of the negative influences on my kids of whatever it is and I realize I don't control that I've felt that fear it's deep and it's difficult and it doesn't really help to just say stop being afraid quit fearing stop feeling that way now it's a natural fear at recognizing this is out of my control but the question is how will

I respond to that fear that fear can drive me to Jesus or away from him and the difference between those two paths is actually pretty scary here many of you are like me and when you're out of control you tend to turn to self to ratchet down to work harder plan better manipulate the system whatever you need to do manipulate people anything in order to regain control that's your tendency we only trust ourselves so anyone else being in control is scary and so we turn inward and in doing so push Jesus away look how for the townspeople their fear pushes Jesus away they come out to see what had happened they came to Jesus found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at his feet clothed in his right mind and they were afraid and they were told how it happened how he'd been healed that Jesus had done this to him and all the people of the surrounding country having heard these things having heard the description of how this man was healed what do they decide leave

Jesus please get away and leave us alone why for they were seized with great fear they don't deny the power of Jesus they know it but they beg him to leave them alone anyway why they see his power but they remain fearful perhaps that he will disrupt their lives he just sent a huge herd of pigs over the cliff that was somebody's livelihood someone's business that you just destroyed who cares what good you did Jesus look at the damage you cause around here Jesus you're too unpredictable fair enough to make another Narnia VBS plug Mr.

Beaver would say he's not a tame lion you can't control Jesus and that can be scary it's very sobering when you think about what these people are saying to Jesus we'd rather be in control than risk your power disrupting our lives any further leave us alone we would rather be in control than risk your power disrupting our lives any further so leave us alone and Jesus leaves perhaps they realized as their economic livelihood rushed over the cliff that trusting or depending on Jesus would cost them something you might send Jesus away because it's too costly too painful to deal with the sin and the scars so stay away you might send Jesus away because it's too costly to see your business suffer at the hands of others who act unfairly you might send Jesus away because it's too costly and painful to see your kids get hurt while you pray and wait for him to show up and so instead of being in that posture we grasp to get control back do whatever we can because we don't want it hurts to wait and trust see Jesus does deliver here in both these stories doesn't he but the disciples were fearful for their lives for a while before Jesus woke up there were many many days where this demon possessed man cut himself with stones and raged against everyone around him before

[28 : 08] Jesus healed him and in those moments of waiting in our fear we often choose to stick with ourselves and our own desperate efforts at control don't we instead of running to Jesus I love that question Sally Lloyd-Jones puts in Jesus mouth we read with the kids did you believe your fears instead of me the fears are there they're natural did you believe your fears instead of me Jesus says that's a decision we face in each and every situation we're in it's not a one time thing he says to the disciples again here a question he's asked before where is your faith he knows they have faith where is it here where are you placing it right now in this moment in this crisis where are you placing your faith it's in your fears again isn't it you're believing your fears again instead of me remember you know who I am you've seen it you can trust me but he asked him again where is your faith here remember who

I am all powerful God bring your faith back and place it in me what's the situation in your life today where God is asking you where is your faith okay so you believe he's the all powerful son of God that Jesus is the one who's in control how is that impacting your response to this failure to this diagnosis to this crisis to this child how's it showing up here God is calling us to run to Jesus listen there are legitimate dangers and evils that are acknowledged in this passage they're legitimate in this world and there's an entirely good all powerful trustworthy deliverer for you who ultimately gives his own life to rescue us he's so committed to that he gives himself up for it so God's calling us to take our fear and to run to Jesus

I love the picture of this and the man who's now defined as the one from whom the demons had gone he's sitting at Jesus feet and what does he ask what does he ask of Jesus he begs that he

might be with him they might stay with Jesus Jesus is leaving they've asked him to leave he begs to be with them and you might say well of course right he's not desperate to be in control anymore he just wants to be with Jesus but ask yourself how's that going to go where does Jesus go if he's going to be with him according to this passage he goes into dangerous storms into hostile territory where you encounter demons and terrifying people fearful places Jesus goes but the man from whom the demons have gone trusts no one not even himself the way he trusts the one who has rescued him have you seen

Jesus not merely as an impressively powerful person but truly as one you can trust the divine deliverer who is for you who rescues you and protects you when you know who he truly is you just want to be with him don't you you want to be where he is whatever it is if he's there with you it'll be okay that's what he's made us for to be with him he's created us to be people who run to him with our anxiety and cast it on him because he cares for us and isn't it so sweet when we finally do cast our anxieties on him and know his care he's created us to be parents who who plead on our knees with him for our children that we love because he loves them too and isn't that a great comfort that he does he's created us to be people whose fear leads to faith who relinquish control fearfully but joyfully because we found the one who truly is in control is safe to trust that's what he's created us for that we would be those who have fears we're weak fear will come he's created us to have fear that leads us to faith in him one last thing in this passage because many of us are really not sure it's safe to trust him we don't deserve for him to be safe do we after what we've done what we've said about him what we've thought about him

I've rejected him too many times I couldn't possibly ask again most commentators see Jesus leaving when the townspeople ask him to leave them as a warning a warning that if you reject Jesus he may walk away and leave you on your own and it certainly is true that sometimes God leaves us to ourselves until we come to the end of ourselves and our control we're willing to trust him but I think actually Jesus is up to something a little different here something more gracious something more persistent in what he set out to do this is part of the good news of great joy for all people that Luke is telling us about Jesus has already taken the initiative to go across the lake to a Gentile region in case the pigs didn't tip you off to the fact that it's a Gentile region that's where Jesus has come it's a place that's unclean there are tombs all around

[34 : 42] Jesus has come across there and the only thing he's gotten to do is to interact with this crazy demon possessed man he's come all the way over there to rescue him to people who are unclean to a place that wasn't for him and rather than let this healed man follow him back across the lake as many others have done to this point after Jesus heals them Jesus has another job for him what does he tell him verse 39 Jesus sends him away and says return to your home and declare how much God has done for you and he does that proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him perhaps because they're Gentiles there will be less confusion over the people's expectations of a Messiah maybe that's why this is different but listen to what he tells him go back home go back into the town to all those people who all of them just begged

Jesus to leave them and do what be a constant reminder a living witness of the power of God and the salvation found in Jesus Jesus sends people he's rescued even to those who've rejected him that they might hear about him he sends his witness to the town who has sent him away that's how safe he is to trust maybe you've sent him away before and he's calling to you again this morning he's pursuing you again today because he loves you he wants you to trust him today and in the situation you're in right now maybe you're used to trusting Jesus but letting go of control here has been hard maybe that's what he's doing again this morning calling you to trust him showing himself to be powerful loving and worthy of that trust let's pray

Jesus we thank you that you pursue us even and especially in our fears that you want us to see you and to trust you thank you that you created us for that that you've always designed for that relationship to be there and thank you when we push away that you push even harder towards us that you don't leave us alone but that you move towards us to rescue you're glorious we can't put into words the glory of who you are and the ways that you have loved us might we trust you again and might we even love as you have loved us work in our hearts by your spirit we pray in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host) and out than again as a part of the house say sure to see as oh