

Luke 8:22-39

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[0 : 00] We are looking at, it's page 865 in a Pew Bible. We are looking at verses 22 to 39 this morning.

Last week we saw Jesus teaching about the power of His Word, and today we'll see His Word in action doing its work, its powerful work. So let's read together Luke chapter 8, beginning at verse 22.

One day He, that is Jesus, 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 awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, Where is your faith?

[1 : 20] 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.

[2 : 26] 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 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. Well, this morning's passage is not exactly a walk in the park on a beautiful spring day.

[3 : 45] It's not pleasant advice given to well-adjusted people with lots of future potential. This morning's passage is about when life goes off the rails, hurtling out of control, heading toward destruction, overwhelming, unmanageable, chaotic.

In that situation, what difference does Jesus make? Now, some of you might say, my life isn't perfect, but it's going pretty smoothly right now.

I don't really need that kind of divine intervention right at this point in my life. But think about how suddenly and unexpectedly trouble can come upon us.

A routine doctor's appointment results in a worrying diagnosis, which calls for tests and treatments and more tests and more treatments and missed workdays and mounting hospital bills, complex medical decisions, and a disrupted family life.

Or a seemingly stable marriage flares up in angry conflict, mistrust and miscommunication and accusations and defensiveness, and now there's talk of separation or even divorce.

[4 : 56] or a pleasant drive along the shoreline, interrupted by a repeated ringtone or a stream of text message alerts announcing that a loved one has been in an accident or been arrested or worse.

Our external circumstances can change with hardly a moment's notice, and suddenly we can feel like we're sinking into confusion and helplessness. We're struggling to keep our heads above water, blown and tossed from one side to another.

But it's not just our external circumstances that can change suddenly and unexpectedly. It's also our internal world that over time can become unmanageable and chaotic and overwhelming.

Maybe you have anger and frustration that comes from feeling powerless and voiceless, disrespected, unheard, beaten down over and over again.

And every once in a while it erupts outwardly in rage. Or you contain it and suppress it in bitterness. Maybe it's anxiety or depression hangs over your life like a fog that won't lift for days or months or even years.

[6 : 23] Perhaps it mixes with self-pity or it morphs into self-sabotage or even suicidal thoughts. Maybe it's an addiction to drugs, alcohol, pornography, sex, even food.

You know it's not good for you, but you still feel the cravings. And whether you indulge them or not, you never feel satisfied. You always want more. Maybe you've been in and out of rehab programs and outpatient treatment and group therapy and one-on-one counseling, but you keep feeling the pull and you keep being drawn back into your old habit.

This morning we're looking at two stories. The first one describes an external circumstance, a raging storm on the lake that threatens to tear the boat apart and drown the disciples.

It comes upon them suddenly and unexpectedly. The second story describes a raging storm inside a man, an internal chaos that threatens to tear his very humanity apart.

This morning I want to look at three things. I want to look at the nature of these storms. I want to look at Jesus' authority over the storms. And third, I want to look at our response to Jesus.

[7 : 40] So first let's look at the storms in turn. Both of these stories begin, verse 22 and verse 26, with references to sailing across the lake.

Verse 22, Jesus says, let's go across the lake. Verse 26, they complete their journey across the lake. Verse 37, they return. So this whole section is a unit, across the lake and back.

Now the journey across the lake begins peacefully, uneventfully. Perhaps they're tired after a long day of teaching, Jesus teaching the crowds, Jesus even goes to sleep, but then a storm arises.

Notice the strong language that Luke uses to describe this storm. A windstorm came down on the lake. Now that's literally a good description. The Lake of Galilee is seven miles long or seven miles wide by nine miles long.

It's pretty large. And it's 700 feet below sea level. But 30 miles north, there's a 10,000 foot tall mountain, Mount Hermon. And so the air currents coming from the mountain surrounding the lake can often come down onto the lake and create storms that appear seemingly out of nowhere with little warning.

[8 : 56] The boat was filling with water. They were in danger of drowning. The waves were raging. Now remember, Jesus' disciples, several of them were fishermen. Okay?

These were not inexperienced tourists prone to hysteria. They knew how to keep a boat afloat. But here they were, crying out like babies, Master, Master, we're perishing.

We're going to die. It's all over. It's like Psalm 107 describes it. They mounted up to heaven. They went down to the depths. Their courage melted away.

They reeled and staggered like drunken men. They were at their wits' end. The storm threatened to tear apart the boat and drown them forever in the sea. They were facing an external circumstance beyond their control and they were absolutely terrified and there was nothing they could do to stop that storm.

Maybe you can relate to that experience. Maybe you've been there. Maybe you feel like you are there in the middle of a storm that's not your responsibility and out of your control and there's really nothing you can do to change the weather and you feel like it's going to break you apart.

[10 : 11] But that's not the only storm in this passage. Look down at verses 27 to 33. In some ways, an even more terrifying storm. Luke introduces us to a man from the city who had demons.

And you might think, well, if he's from the city, why isn't he in the city? Well, Luke tells us, the second half of verse 27, he's not living in the city because for a long time he's been running around naked and homeless and living in the graveyard.

Now, the graveyard back then was not like a modern cemetery. Peaceful, dignified, freshly cut grass, nicely arranged flowers.

The graveyard back then was a series of limestone caves on the hillside that were used to temporarily store dead people's bones. It was considered unclean, the kind of place you avoid as much as possible, sort of like a toxic waste site or an abandoned housing project with windows boarded up and broken glass all over the road.

That's where this man was living, a place unfit for human habitation. And furthermore, this was Gentile territory. The country of the Gerasenes was where foreigners lived.

[11 : 28] It was the wrong side of the tracks, the wrong side of the lake. And that's why they were raising pigs. Pigs were unclean in the eyes of the Jews. Most likely, they were raising pigs in order to feed the Roman occupying armies who intimidated and oppressed the Jewish people.

You see, this is a place where no respectable individual, let alone a religious leader, would ever choose to come and hang out. If you notice, the Pharisees have been present in almost every story that we've looked at over the last three months.

The Pharisees, the scribes, the lawyers, the teachers, they've been criticizing Jesus, they've been observing Jesus, they've been sometimes talking with Jesus, and here, they're nowhere to be found because they would never dare go there.

It's that kind of place. When the man saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down and started shouting at him, Why are you messing with me, Jesus?

I beg you, don't torment me. He recognizes Jesus' authority, but he resists it at the same time. It's like a drug dealer doing his business on the corner who looks up and sees the narcotics squad approaching from all directions and shining their spotlights in his face.

[12 : 45] And he says, No! I know who you are. You're out to get me. I don't want to see you. You're my enemy. In verse 29, Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to leave.

And in verse 29, Luke gives us a little bit of a glimpse into this man's past, into his history. He says, Many a time, the demon had seized him, overpowered him, taken control of him.

People tried to lock him up, but he could never be contained. He would break the chains and isolate himself in solitary places. Verse 30 tells us it wasn't just one demon, it was a legion of demons.

A legion was a Roman military unit of 5,600 men. This man was inhabited by an army of demons. Now, some of you might be asking, Well, what exactly is all this about demons?

Is that just a primitive way of speaking about what we know to be mental illnesses? The answer is no, or at least not always. The New Testament distinguishes between sicknesses, including things like epilepsy, which are not always attributed to demons.

[14 : 01] It distinguishes between sickness and demonic activity. So not all physical or mental or emotional disturbances are caused by demons, according to the Bible.

But according to the Bible, demons are real. There are evil spirits, and they can and do oppress and attack people. But consider what it would have felt like to be this man, just as he's described.

Once he had a family and a home. Now he is alienated and homeless, finding shelter in caves full of dead people's bones.

Once he would have had friends to eat and drink with. Now he's broken off all his relationships. He's destroyed them all. No one seeks out his company. Once he interacted freely with people in society.

Now they just try to lock him up. And he breaks the chains and scares them off. Once he felt like a human being. Now he lives like a wild animal.

[15 : 12] Once he wanted to live, and now he just wants to die. No one cares about him. And even if they did care, no one could help him. These are the storms that Jesus confronted.

Both externally and internally. But what we see in this passage is that Jesus is Lord. He has authority over the storms. He's the master and commander of the storms, both externally and internally.

And at one level this is deeply comforting. Consider Jesus' response to the storm on the lake. Unlike the disciples, Jesus wasn't confused.

He wasn't fretting. He wasn't afraid. He wasn't despairing. even in the midst of the storm. And sometimes that truth in itself can be a comfort.

The next time you're anxious and restless about something that you can't control and you're not responsible for, ask yourself, is my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the ruler of all creation, the commander of the wind and waves, is he sitting up in heaven wringing his hands and biting his nails and anxiously waiting?

[16 : 34] Of course not! And so speak to yourself with that truth. I have a Savior who knows me and cares for me and even though I feel completely overwhelmed by anxiety, I can't sleep, he is watching over me.

He knows the end from the beginning. He is not anxious. He is not restless. Jesus simply spoke a word to the wind and the raging waves and they ceased.

They obeyed his command. They listened to his voice. The result was one person's words, a mysterious, supernatural calm that testified both to the sovereign power of God and to the deep peace and security that belong to those who follow him.

In Isaiah 43, God says to his people, do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. And we can know that that promise is true if we've looked to Jesus in faith because he has linked his fate with ours.

[18 : 05] He's with us in the boat. He's promised, I will never leave you, never forsake you. If we perish, he perishes with us. And that's why ever since the early days of Christianity, the church has been symbolically represented as a boat like Noah's Ark in the midst of the flood.

You can even see that idea reflected in traditional church architecture. If you look up at the ceiling, it's basically like we're sitting in an upside-down boat.

And that's why the main part of a traditional church is called the nave, which is from a Latin word *navus*, which means boat. If you're with Jesus in the boat, he's with you.

And he's your protector. And he's your refuge. And he'll carry us safe to the other side. And consider also the comfort of Jesus' response to the storm inside the man.

Jesus confidently approached this man who everyone else was terrified of. Maybe some of you can relate to the man in the graveyard.

[19 : 24] Maybe you've burned bridges over and over. You've sabotaged countless friendships. You've alienated family members and former spouses.

You've destroyed everything that once was yours. And your life feels like a hollowed, emptied-out shell. Or worse, perhaps you feel like you've been invaded by hostile forces.

Maybe you've opened yourself up to evil spirits. Maybe you've felt the dark spiritual forces oppressing you. It's a miracle you're even in church today, but even though you're in the building, you feel ashamed and worthless and unredeemable.

If that is you, you are not too far gone for Jesus to come near. You are not too messed up for Jesus to heal and restore.

Jesus does not stand far away at a distance looking at you with disgust or disdain. Jesus does not wait for you to make yourself more presentable. He approaches you with fearless confidence and with saving grace.

[20 : 32] Verse 36, Luke says, the demon-possessed man had been healed. That same word can be translated saved or made whole.

If Jesus could save and heal and restore this man, surely he can save and heal and restore you. However disturbed and afflicted and restless and alienated you may be, however full of anguish and rage and fear and hatred you may be, however deeply you have been locked into self-destructive patterns that you can't seem to stop, however much you've hurt other people and broken past relationships as this man certainly had, Jesus is stronger than all the forces of evil that afflict you, stronger than all the resistance you hold inside you and he has come to set his people free.

this man is an extreme example in an extreme situation. But the whole story is simply a picture of what it means for anyone to become a Christian, to pass from death to life, from fragmentation to wholeness, from restlessness to peace, from alienation to everlasting union with Jesus Christ.

Look at the extent of the change that took place inside this man. At the beginning of the story, he had many demons. At the end of the story, the demons were gone.

At the beginning of the story, he wore no clothes. At the end of the story, he was clothed with dignity and honor. At the beginning of the story, he fell down and shouted at Jesus in the posture of an enemy.

[22 : 23] At the end, he's sitting at the feet of Jesus in the posture of a disciple. At the beginning, he was alienated. At the end, he was accepted. At the beginning, he was out of his mind.

At the end, he was in his right mind. Is there anything Jesus can't do? Now, I know the transformation doesn't always happen immediately and completely like it seems to happen here.

Even in this story, there's resistance. The demons didn't immediately leave the moment Jesus appeared on the scene. It took some back and forth.

Maybe you're still resisting Jesus' authority over your life at some level. Surrender to him today. Today. He's the rightful Lord over all creation.

He's come to reclaim you, to restore in you the image of God that you were created to bear. His grace is greater than your sin. His redemption and the hope that he has for your future is greater than all the mess you have in the past.

[23 : 39] Now, I know that for some of you, it's so hard to believe those truths because your sin seems greater than God's grace. Your past seems bigger than God's redeeming power.

your addiction seems to define you more than your identity in Christ. Your shattered relationship seems so far from ever being rebuilt. But I pray that today that you would see Jesus, the persistent and victorious and merciful Savior, and that you would believe and trust in him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Jesus' authority over the storms can be a deep comfort. But before we go on, we also have to admit that Jesus' authority over the storms can be deeply unsettling as well.

Notice how both Jesus' disciples in verse 25 and the people of the Gerasenes in verse 35 responded to Jesus' authority.

authority. They were afraid. Same words, both of them. What was so unsettling about Jesus' authority in both instances?

[24 : 54] Consider the storm on the lake. Jesus calmed the storm with a word. Surely that is comforting. But he also led his disciples into the storm in the first place.

Did you notice verse 22? Jesus said to them, let us go across to the other side of the lake. Do you think he had no idea what he was getting his disciples into?

And even if you would say, perhaps Jesus in his human nature did not see what was coming, he was living in absolute trust and obedience to God, his heavenly father who surely did.

However you think Jesus' human and divine natures worked together in what he knew and what he was conscious of. The storms we face are not outside of our Savior's control.

The trials we experience do not take our heavenly father by surprise. Sometimes he intentionally steers our ship right in the middle of them. J.C. Ryle wrote in his commentary, if we are true Christians, we must not expect everything smooth in our journey to heaven.

[26 : 11] We must count it no strange thing if we have to endure sicknesses, losses, bereavements, and disappointments just like other people. By affliction, God teaches us many precious lessons which without it we would never learn.

He shows us our emptiness and weakness, draws us to the throne of grace, purifies our affections, weans us from the world, makes us long for heaven.

On the resurrection morning, we will all say with the writer of Psalm 119, it is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

That's why Jesus asked them in verse 25, where is your faith? It's not that they had no faith at all. It's that their faith wasn't yet mature. They weren't yet fully living into it.

The word of God was in them but it hadn't penetrated all the way down deep. And so when they faced a time of testing, they panicked. They acted out of desperation instead of trust.

[27 : 17] They did turn to Jesus in their desperation and that's good. But Jesus is warning them, don't be like the rocky soil that we looked at last week that receives the word with joy but has no root that only believes for a little while and then when trials come falls away.

Storms will come, Jesus says. They're part of the course I have laid out for you. You see, Jesus' authority was unsettling to his disciples.

It was also even more unsettling to the people of the Gerasenes. Verse 37, all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them for they were seized with great fear.

You might say, why did they respond that way? Well, for one thing, a large herd of pigs, a significant chunk of the regional economy had just been destroyed with Jesus' permission.

Why did Jesus have to destroy all the pigs in the process of healing the man? Wasn't that gratuitous violence against innocent animals?

[28 : 34] Or depriving hard-working herdsman of their livelihood? Wouldn't pass with either party, right? What would Jesus do next?

I think we can see at least two reasons why Jesus permitted the demons to destroy the pigs. Number one, to demonstrate the magnitude of the deliverance.

Who would have known, would everyone have believed, that this man had been taken over by a whole army of demons if they hadn't gone and entered the large herd of pigs? If Jesus just drove out one demon, well, there were other exorcists who claimed to do that too.

Or maybe the guy was just crazy and not really possessed. But when all the pigs ran off the cliff into the lake, there was no more disputing the magnitude of what Jesus had done.

But the second reason, I think, is to force the townspeople to clarify their priorities. Which matters more? A large herd of pigs?

[29 : 38] A big chunk of the regional economic assets? Or one lost and tormented human soul? Who's now clothed with dignity, thinking clearly, and sitting peacefully at Jesus' feet?

Jesus cares more about the restoration of one lost and tormented soul than he does about the GDP of downtown New Haven or the United States.

Jesus is willing to empty out your personal savings account without asking your permission in order to carry on his work of redemption in the world. And that's unsettling.

Jesus' authority knows no boundaries. It's deeply comforting, but it can also be deeply unsettling. And so that brings us to our third point.

What's our response to Jesus? We've seen the nature of the storms. We've seen Jesus' authority over the storms. How do we respond to this Jesus and to his comforting and yet unsettling authority?

[30 : 49] We see three responses in the story to Jesus. First, we see the disciples' response. They were afraid and they marveled. Verse 25. This is not a bad response, but it also doesn't get them very far.

Or let's say it doesn't get them all the way to the end. However, they are asking the right question in verse 25 when they say, who then is this? Because Jesus has just done something that according to the Old Testament and according to common sense, only God can do.

Psalm 107, which we read earlier, says, they cried out to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Jesus just did what only God could do. And if you read the New Testament Gospels, you see this happening all the time. Jesus claims to forgive sins, but only God can do that.

Jesus calls himself Lord of the Sabbath, but according to the Bible, God instituted the Sabbath. Jesus calls himself the bridegroom, but that's how God described himself in the Old Testament as the faithful husband to his bride.

[32 : 07] When Jesus says things that only God should say and when he does things that only God has the authority to do, you have to ask the question, who then is this.

C.S. Lewis said, you can't just say he was a good moral teacher if he said things like that. A man who said and did things like that, you must conclude either that he was a lunatic, he was out of his mind, or that he was a liar and a deceiver, or that he was the Lord who he claimed to be, God himself.

Who then is this? Have you answered that question? Ask that question until you answer it. Second, we see the garrisoned people's response.

They asked him to depart. Leave us alone, Jesus. Go away. We're afraid of what you'll do next. We don't want you to disrupt our lives too much. Our lives are going pretty well right now.

We don't want to lose any more pigs. Or perhaps, we don't want you to heal any more crazy people. Because then we'll actually have to treat this guy like a human being. And not just try to lock him up like an animal.

[33 : 28] They allowed what was unsettling to them about Jesus to dominate their picture. And in the process, they missed and rejected his incredible offer of saving grace.

But finally, we see the man's response in verse 38 and 39. And that's where Luke ends the story. And Luke wants to end there. We know that this is intentional because it's not strictly chronological.

In fact, this whole story, Luke sort of goes back and forth in time. He doesn't go play by play. He emphasizes certain things by how he tells the story. And he emphasizes at the end of the story this man.

Because in verse 37, it says, Jesus got into the boat and returned. But then verse 38 and 39 leave us with this parting, it's sort of like the parting shot, the last scene in the movie.

The thing that Luke wants to stick in your mind more than anything else, this conversation between Jesus and the man from whom the demons had gone. The man begged that he might be with him.

[34 : 39] This is actually the third time in this story that someone has made a request that has begged Jesus or asked Jesus for something. In verse 31, the legion of demons begged Jesus not to command them to go into the abyss.

That is the bottomless pit, the place of punishment for evil spirits. And Jesus said yes to their request. He gave them permission to go into the pigs instead. Verse 37, the people of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them.

And Jesus said yes. He got into the boat and went back across the lake. But here in verse 38, the best request of them all, Jesus, I want to be with you.

And Jesus says no. Isn't that by far the best request of them all? Doesn't this man deserve to have Jesus answer his prayer more than anyone else in the story?

Doesn't he understand Jesus better and love him more? And yet Jesus says no. Because he has something better in mind. Go home and tell them how much God has done for you.

[35 : 56] Well, he doesn't just go home. He proclaims it through the whole city. He becomes the first Christian missionary to the Gentiles. And the content of his message shows that he knew the answer to the disciples' question, who is this?

Because when Jesus said, go and proclaim how much God has done for you, verse 39 says, he went proclaiming how much Jesus had done for him. He recognized that Jesus has done what only God could do, that Jesus is God in the flesh.

Joel Green put it this way, Jesus gave the former demoniac the very task that Luke would exercise in the writing of his gospel, namely, narrating and proclaiming God's mighty acts, a high and holy calling.

to stay behind for the sake of his family and friends and his city, for all the people who he had formerly tormented and frightened, so that they, for all the people who initially rejected Jesus, so that they too might know the saving and healing and transforming power of Jesus the merciful Lord.

In conclusion, I want you to consider how intentional Jesus is through this whole story. Jesus took his disciples all the way across the lake through a raging storm that almost killed them to a bad neighborhood and an unclean graveyard where no one else would dare to go in order to rescue and redeem this one demonized, tormented man.

[37 : 34] And once he healed the man, he got back in the boat and went back across the lake. Mission accomplished. It was the one thing he came to do. That's how much he valued this man.

That's the length he went to to reach him. Today's Palm Sunday when we remember the intentionality of Jesus and the lengths he went to to come and reach each one of us.

How he rode into Jerusalem and he was hailed as king, but knowing that the crowds who welcomed him would soon turn on him. and on Good Friday how he carried the cross up the hill and hung there for six hours enduring the storm of human rejection and mockery and brutal pain and divine judgment for our sins.

That's how much he loved us. Do you see how far he came for you to rescue you and me?

Brothers and sisters, if you have experienced, if you have even begun to experience Jesus' healing and transforming power, go home to your family, to your friends, to your neighborhood, to the graveyards of this city and tell the world how much Jesus has done for you.

[38 : 56] Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Jesus, we praise you.

We acknowledge you as the Lord. We praise you for the comfort that that gives us when we pass through the waters you have promised.

I will be with you. You can speak to the raging waves. Be still. And we thank you that you can speak to the depths of our souls, the pain and torment and shame and anger and self-destruction.

you can speak to all that. You can speak peace and life and hope. We pray that we might encounter you today either for the first time or at a deeper level.

[illegible]