

What Kind of Man? Lord of Nature
From the Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe"
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Presented to Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ
On Date - Sunday, August 29, 2021

Introduction

It was an evening in the year 1971. Television viewers in America sat down to watch their favorite TV shows. During one of the commercial breaks, they were treated to the following scene: A woman dressed in a white gown walked through a serene forest. She wore a crown of flowers on her head. She greeted the trees. She spoke with the flowers. The animals all looked up to her.



The woman was Mother Nature.

Out of nowhere came a hand with a small plastic container. The hand offers the little container to Mother nature. She dips a finger into it and takes a taste of what's inside. She says, "Ah, it's my delicious, sweet, creamy butter." A voice says, "That's Chiffon margarine, not butter ... Chiffon's so delicious it fooled even you, Mother Nature."

Suddenly, the previously very pleasant woman gets a stern look on her face. The skies grow dark. Everyone who lived through the 70s in America knows what she says next:

"It's not nice to fool mother nature."

Suddenly, there's lightning and thunder and rain. If you try to describe it like I just did, it sounds a little odd and scary. It's actually funny the first time you see it. They had trained animals that did cute things like make faces and cover their heads.

As a quick note: Chiffon Margarine was made out of things that are considered somewhat unhealthy today - So, it disappeared from store shelves in the early 2000s.

But back to our topic...

Mother nature. Have you ever wondered, "Why is nature often pictured as a woman?" In the world I grew up in, that's always been the case. In other cultures, and other times though, nature has appeared in different ways. Nature, when it's viewed through the eyes of different people groups through the ages, has been seen as more complex than we might think.

There's the part of nature that contains fields and forest - They're often portrayed as women - goddesses in fact.

Then, however, there's the side of nature that can get nasty. There are volcanoes. There are storms. There's thunder and lightning (very, very frightening, to quote the old song). These are more often represented as men - Again, as male gods ('god' with a small "g").

Here's an interesting fact: Almost every religion in the world that has multiple deities has a god of Thunder. The Norse gods had the well-known Thor. You don't want to make Thor angry. Doing so might result in being hit by his lightning-powered hammer.

The oldest religion in the world that is still practiced today is Hinduism. They have over 330 million registered gods. One of the oldest is Indra, God of lightning, thunder, and storms. He was also the king of the Hindu gods.

We've been studying the life of Jesus lately. Today, with television, we can travel the world in seconds. During the lifetime of Jesus though, India and northern Europe were far away. Closer to home, the Romans were in charge. Their collection of gods included one called "Jupiter". He was the chief god and along with that, came control of storms and lightning.

Today, we think of storms as being the product of chance. We live on a big planet. It's complex. Its weather is complex, so storms come and go. You just want to avoid them when you can.

But could there be something more? Could the ancient people of the world have been on to something?

We're in our series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe." We're working our way through the book of Matthew. Let's read our story for today.

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (Matthew 8 :23-27)

Indeed - What kind of man is this? This is where we're getting the title to our current sub-series. When people saw Jesus, they asked, "What Kind of Man is This?" Today, we're going to learn that Jesus is:

Lord of Nature.

Let's find out why.

We're about to examine one of the best-known stories in the Bible. If you've been in churches for a long time, you've likely heard it. In fact, you've likely heard it more than once. Today, we're going to be looking at it differently than you've likely heard it before. We'll start by breaking apart this passage of Scripture. And we'll ask, ***what's going on?***

I. What is going on?

Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. (Matthew 8:23)

We learned in our last few sessions that Jesus was surrounded by crowds that were growing very fast. Today, people who want to be leaders like crowds. However, Jesus seemed to feel that the crowds were growing too fast. He wanted to go somewhere where the crowds could be left behind. It seems he wanted to spend some time concentrating on a small group of dedicated followers, so he decided to go someplace by boat. That would prevent crowds from following on foot.

How big was the boat? There were no ocean liners or tour boats available on the sea of Galilee as far as we know. On one occasion, some archeologists in Israel found the frame of an old boat from that day. It's on display today in a museum. This may be like the boat that Jesus travelled in. It's about 27 feet long and seven feet wide. You can probably fit twenty or so people in there. That number included the crew. So, there's room for Jesus and a small group.

Question: Why would Jesus leave big crowds and concentrate on only a few people? Answer: Sometimes a few people who truly believe are better than an army of people who don't. Jesus was beginning to build an army. He was going to have a small number of well-trained people at the core.

Let's read more:

Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. (8:24(a))

We're told here that a storm came. It was a "furious" storm. In the original language, the word here is also used when describing earthquakes. That means it was violent storm. It was so violent, that waves were sweeping over the boat.

The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by large hills. It's not unusual for those hills to focus wind onto the water. So, you get something called a squall, a sudden, violent storm.

Let's add something to the story. This story is told in two other Gospel accounts - Both Mark and Luke also tell the story. Let's see how Mark describes it:

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side. (Mark 4:35)

So, Mark gives us an extra detail: It's evening. The sun is going down. That means it's getting dark. When the boat started out, there may have been some light to guide them. The moon and the stars can be very helpful at night. Although they didn't have electricity, in the early evening a lot of towns along the shore would be burning oil lamps for a few hours into the evening. All this meant a sailor could get his bearing from looking at the sky and the shore.

But now a storm blows up. The sky grows dark. You can't see the shore anymore. All you see is wind and rain in your face, and water coming in over the side of the boat. Here's a terrible, life-threatening situation. How does Jesus react to this?

But Jesus was sleeping. (Matthew 8:24(b))

Jesus was a very hard-working guy. He just finished a long day of helping all kinds of people. The ship starts out on calm water. There's a nice, gentle rocking motion. Nice, gentle rocking can be very relaxing. So, Jesus takes advantage of a peaceful, quiet moment to take a nap. He's sound asleep - So sound asleep that he doesn't notice that the gentle rocking has become violent. He doesn't see the waves and water coming over the side of the boat.

How do the others on the boat react to this?

The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" (Matthew 8:25)

You can summarize the reaction of the disciples with one word: Panic. They're terrified. They're sure they're going to drown.

Now, understand: The first four disciples were Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Do you remember what they all did for a living? They were fishermen. These men grew up on the water. They were experienced with strong conditions on the lake. For them to be afraid, this must have been one terrible and very unusual storm.

Now, here's where something very interesting happens. The disciples, many of whom were fishermen, were terrified. They had no idea what to do. So, they wake up Jesus. Let's ask: Do they say, "Jesus, wake up - we're going to rescue you. We all need to jump overboard"? No, they call out to Jesus, "Save us!"

Up to this point, the disciples saw Jesus do two things: Heal people and cast out demons. These were amazing feats, but let's say they were limited. They involved a few people and a small area. For the disciples, it involved watching while other people were involved.

This was completely different. This was big. For the disciples, this involved **them** – not someone else. And this was sudden - It happened fast. It was so big and so sudden that everyone ran out of resources. Nobody knew what to do.

So, something has happened here. It has forced everyone to the end of their abilities. It has forced everyone to the end of their knowledge. The disciples have all reached the end of their personal experience. As far as they can see, they are in terrible danger.

At this point, something remarkable happens inside of all these men: Their desperation has brought something to life. All at once, they look over to Jesus and they realize: “He can do something about this. Jesus can save us.” So, they cry out to him for help.

What happens?

He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. (Matthew 8:26-27)

Jesus responds this situation with two rebukes. One is a gentle rebuke for his disciples. He says, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” His rebuke contains a rhetorical question. What is the implication? There is no reason to be afraid.

This rebuke was likely a surprise to a group of men who were watching their ship sink. Then, Jesus explains: He says they’re afraid because they don’t have much faith. Faith in what? The faith that Jesus calls for has two parts. Jesus is about to show one of those two parts with the second rebuke: **He rebukes the winds and the waves.**

“Rebuke”. We mentioned that this story is also told by Mark and Luke. In each case, the same word appears. Jesus didn’t just make some sort of vague gesture into space. He didn’t wave his arms and stop random forces of Nature. He spoke to the forces of Nature. He accuses the wind and the waves of misbehaving. He essentially says, “Hey, winds and waves, chill out! What’s the matter with you?”

In doing this, he does something that’s very different from any other prophet of God.
- He speaks, and the forces of Nature obey.

Compare this to Moses when the Red Sea parted. Normally, that story is described as “The time that **Moses** parted the Red Sea.” But that’s not the case. Let’s read about what happened.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. (Exodus 14:21-22)

So, when the people of Israel needed to pass through the Red Sea, Moses didn't part it. It says "...the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind" (Ex. 14:22).

When his followers were in that boat, **Jesus** spoke to the wind and the waves. At his command, they became completely calm. Jesus didn't do what prophets did. Those prophets called to God, and God responded by doing things. Here, Jesus is the one who did it. And as with other miracles that Jesus did, the result was immediate.

The men in the boat realized that something incredible just happened.

The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (Matthew 8:27)

Maybe this was so fantastic that the disciples couldn't put it all together just yet. But we who know the whole story do know. What kind of man is this? He's not just a mere mortal man. This is God visiting the face of the earth. He is powerful. He is the Lord of Nature. He has the power to command the elements of the universe, and they obey him.

We said a moment ago that Faith would involve two things. The first is faith in the person of Jesus and his power. The other involves something we learn when we read the story over in Mark.

38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (Mark 4:38)

Again, we get another detail. The disciples were panicking, and each one likely yelled out separate cries for help. The cry that Matthew focuses on is, "Do you know what's going on?" With Mark, the question we hear is, "Do you care?"

The answer is: Of course, Jesus cared. And again, Jesus immediately came to the rescue of his friends.

Let's answer our first question: What is going on here? Jesus leads his followers into a boat at a time when the sea is clear and calm. A terrible storm quickly arises. The storm is so bad, experienced sailors are terrified. They're all pushed to the end of themselves. And when that happens, something inside of them awakens. They realize that Jesus can help them, so they cry out. They cry out even though it looks like Jesus is unaware of what's going on. They cry out even though it appears that Jesus doesn't care. But Jesus knows exactly what's going on. And he does care. So, he does something no other great prophet could do. He uses power that could only come from God visiting the face of the earth. He uses that power to instantly calm a raging storm.

Now that we know what happened in this passage, we can ask a second question: What does this mean for us today?

II. What does this mean for us today?

To answer this, we need to understand something:

In every life, we face storms.

Have you ever felt like you were in a storm? Have you run into things that made you feel threatened? Big things? Things that you couldn't control? Things that you couldn't overcome no matter how much you thought about it? Problems you couldn't fix no matter how much you threw at them?

Maybe you feel like you're facing a storm right now. If you've ever felt that way, or if you feel that way now, you're not alone, because at some point, we all face storms. All through human history, people have faced physical storms. Rains, wind, lightening. Storms in the least get in the way of our plans. In the worst, they destroy things. Here's something to remember: Those storms become a symbol of everything in our lives that is out of our control.

Here is the message from Jesus:

- He is bigger than any storm.
- He is bigger than any storm because he is the Lord of Nature.
- He is bigger than anything Nature can throw at us.
- That means he is bigger than anything other people can throw at us.

Knowing that everyone will face storms in their lives, we then ask:

What do you do when you face a storm?

What did the disciples do when they faced a storm? They panicked! They tried to figure out what to do. They threw everything they could at the problem. But, when they were at the end of their wits, they realized they needed to go to Jesus.

Here's another question for us: Why not go to Jesus first? Why not go to Jesus at the first sign of trouble rather than wait until the waves are overflowing the boat? Jesus is the Lord of Nature. That means he has the power to help. And remember, Jesus cares. That means, he wants to help.

We need to have faith. Faith in what? Faith in the things we've been discussing for years together. Faith in God's Power. Faith in God's Character - He's loving and generous.

Jesus had faith in his Father. Do you remember what Jesus was doing when the storm arose? He was sleeping! He knew that God had a plan for him. He knew that God would protect him and provide for him until the day that God was ready to take him up into heaven. That allowed him to get some sleep.

Friends, God has a plan for you. As long as God wants you on this earth, he will protect you and provide for you. On the day that he wants to take you home, you will go into the arms of Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean get sloppy. That doesn't mean get lazy. It means have faith in Jesus.

That brings us to another question:

Why would God make you face a storm?

As we said, God has a plan for you. Some of that plan involves having you do things. But some of that plan involves having you become some things. ***He wants you to grow in your faith.***

Remember, prior to this point, the disciples could sit and watch while others showed faith. The Roman Centurion, for example, had faith, so his servant could be healed from a distance. Faith is easy when all you have to do is watch other people practice it.

But then there comes the day when it's time to get into the boat. On that day, ***you*** will get into the boat. If you get into the boat, you will face the storm. When you face it, you will need faith. Faith in God's power. Faith in God's character. And here's the point: ***Your faith will not grow until you use it.*** Your faith will not grow unless it's put to the test. As bad as storms can be, sometimes they're a gift. A gift that calls us to grow.

Know that when you get into the boat, one of three things will happen. First, God may show amazing power and save you immediately. That's what happened in our story.

Second, God may also call you to weather the storm. He may call you to patiently wait while the winds blow, and the waves smash against the side of your little vessel. During those times, know that Jesus is right there in the boat with you. He's there at your side.

In each of the two situations we've just discussed, you will arrive at your destination someplace on this earth.

There is a third possibility: God may also call you to the last voyage. The winds will blow, and the waves will come. The boat will arrive at its destination, but the destination is someplace not of this earth. Know that on that day, you ***will*** reach your eternal home - a place of unimaginable beauty where you will live with Jesus and all his followers forever.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

We all face storms in life. On a calm day almost 2,000 years ago, Jesus told his disciples to get into a boat. Their calm trip turned into a test of faith when a furious storm almost sank the ship.

Sometimes, Jesus calls us to get into the boat. Sometimes, Jesus calls us to face the storm. Be ready. Be ready to face the storm with faith.

As a final thought, sometimes God makes you face the storm to force you to come to him and not someplace or someone else. You may have wondered, "Why did we spend so much time at the beginning talking about Mother Nature and gods of Thunder?" Because in the days of Jesus, that's where people went during a storm. When they were frightened by Nature, those who lived in the pagan days of northern Europe prayed to gods like Thor. Those who lived in India prayed to gods like Indra. The Romans and Greeks of Jesus' day prayed to Jupiter and Zeus. Like he's done many other times in history, God has shown his people that he is far greater than any of those so-called 'gods'. He is the one true God. He created the earth and the skies with a word. He commands the winds and the waves with a rebuke.

Believe me, there are lots of places you can go when you're facing problems other than Jesus. The world is full of distractions. But be warned: the gods of this world are limited and fickle.

Go to Jesus when things are going wrong. And by the way, why not go to him first?

What kind of man is this? We've learned today that he is the Lord of Nature. Make him the Lord of your life. Trust him when you face the storm.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net