

Who Can This Be?

Text: Mat 8:23-27

Suggested Hymns:
158, 164, 414, 426, 397

- 1) His friends are in trouble, but seemingly He sleeps.
- 2) His Despairing Friends Appeal To Him,
And Gloriously He Saves.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 8:23-27, ²³ *Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him.* ²⁴ *And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep.* ²⁵ *Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"* ²⁶ *But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?"* *Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.* ²⁷ *So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

If you were asked to suggest a proper heading for this brief, but striking story, a number of expressive titles might occur to you. But none perhaps would be more appropriate than the exclamation quoted here as having been spoken by the disciples *Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?*

In His dealings with His people the Lord sometimes has ways which to the human mind seem wholly contradictory.

His Gospel-message assures us that for the sake of His Son, our Redeemer, He has become a Father to us, and we are to be His children. But even while His heart-warming words are still ringing in our ears, everything around us apparently begins to go wrong. The devil stirs up trouble against us, our lives are clouded with trials and temptations, and the Father seems soon to have forgotten all about His children.

In the stress of puzzling sorrows we are tempted to cry as David did in Psalm 10:1, *' Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide in times of trouble?'*

And then again, just when it seems that we cannot go on this way any longer and when there is apparently no answer to our praying, there comes the comforting relief of the Lord's sympathetic presence and merciful help. Then we can only humbly and silently marvel at His love and faithfulness, while we at the same time sincerely regret our weakness of faith and our doubting.

The story in the Gospel before us is an instance in point. The disciples in their extremity at one moment felt utterly forsaken by their Lord. In the next moment Jesus stood before them so impressively revealed as their great Deliverer that they were moved to exclaim in the words *Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Who Can This Be, That Even The Winds And The Sea Obey Him? His Friends Are In Trouble, But Seemingly He Sleeps.

The events in our text took place in the early part of Jesus' ministry. The Lord had just spent a very busy day in Capernaum, preaching and healing the sick. In order to secure a few hours of much-needed rest, He gathered His disciples around Him and set out for the shores of the Sea of Galilee, intending to cross to the other side.

Our text now takes up the story. ²³ *Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him.* ²⁴ *And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep.*

Here we can see that the friends of Jesus are in great trouble. Who are the friends of Jesus? These were the men who had heard His preaching. They had been moved to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah, their Saviour. They had heeded His urgent call, *"Follow me."*

It was not long that they had known Him, but long enough to feel that in leaving all to be with Jesus and live their life for Him, they had done the right thing. They had already found Jesus to be a Man worth knowing, a Prophet worth believing, a Saviour worth embracing, a Leader worth following, and a Friend worth trusting.

His friends, are you His friend? Just what do you know about Jesus? What do you think of Him? What is He to you? Can you say, as Luther so well said? *“I believe that Jesus Christ - true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary - is my Lord.*

At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil - not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

All this He has done that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.”

If this is your conviction, your faith, your life, you are His friend, and you may be sure that Jesus is your Friend also.

Remember you need His friendship, and He offers you His friendship. It is His friendship that will save you. Will you accept it? It is certainly a blessed privilege to be counted among the friends of Jesus!

We read in John 15:13-16, ¹³ ***“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. ¹⁴ “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵ “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.***

Who would not embark on any voyage with Jesus in the ship? And yet, the friends of Jesus are in trouble.

There was a storm. It must have been a storm of unusual violence, because even the fishermen among the disciples, who were accustomed to the frequent squalls occurring on this body of water, appear to have become terrified at the present experience.

What was the cause of this violent disturbance? Did the devil, perhaps, try to rob the disciples of the joy of their newly found faith? Were these friends of

Jesus already being made to suffer for their Saviour's sake? Nothing is said to this effect, but neither is there any reason why this should not be the explanation of the present trouble. It would be completely in line with what we know about the devil's character, purpose, and power.

And why should the Lord Himself permit a situation so desperate to arise? Was it not perhaps to test the faith of His friends and to create an opportunity for the revelation of His power and goodness?

Consider these texts. John 11:4, ⁴ *When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."* And John 9:3, ³ *Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.*

Troubles, trials, and persecutions, these come to every Christian on his voyage across the sea of life. History shows that this has always been the case. The Bible teaches that it will never be otherwise.

We read in Psalm 34:19, ¹⁹ *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.* Acts 14:22, *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."* 2 Timothy 3:12, ¹² *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

Some of these experiences come on us in the ordinary course of events simply because we live in a world corrupted by sin. Others are brought on by certain misdeeds of ours or are caused directly by the devil himself. All of them are heightened and multiplied by "*the old Evil Foe,*" who fiercely hates the children of God.¹ Remember how the devil attacked Job. We read of the warning in 1 Peter 5:8-9, ⁸ *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* ⁹ *Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

Troubles are also aggravated by the evil plans of the children of this world. We read in John 15:18 & 20, ¹⁸ *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ... If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.*

There are troubles that distress body and soul. There are trials that overtake the individual and therefore affect the whole Church. Every age of the Church

has its share of them. And all of this in spite of, or even because of, the fact that Christians have the Lord, the great Helper in all need, with them in the ship.

And what is particularly perplexing is that the Master seemingly sleeps. How could Jesus lie asleep with the turbulent waves tossing the little boat about! It was impossible that He could be ignorant of the extremity in which His friends felt themselves to be.

Jesus knew well what was going on and how the disciples felt about it. He loved them. They had left all to follow Him. They depended on Him. He knew they needed Him. And yet He slept on.

The disciples might have encouraged themselves and each other with the observation that, with their mighty Master with them in the ship, no real harm could come to them. They might have reminded themselves and each other, that in His apparent indifference to the situation, that His intentions could be only good, that Jesus was only putting them to the test, and that soon His help would appear.

Nevertheless, they could not close their eyes and ears to what was to be seen and heard. The angry waves, the howling tempest, and their Master asleep. The conviction of danger and imminent death was so strong within them as to destroy their faith.

Some Christians can tell of similar experiences. In times when their need of the Helper is most urgent, in times of poverty, illness, bereavement, or other affliction, Jesus seems furthest away. They have taken Jesus at His word, have followed Him, and strive to be faithful to Him.

But apparently Jesus is indifferent to the plight they are in. Consider again the example of Job. At times the whole Church passes through similar straits. Where was the Lord, when the ship of His Church, was being tossed about by the storms of the persecutions of the first centuries of Christian history? Compare the times of the Reformation, and of the Thirty Years' War.

Always these experiences are trying, disconcerting, and profoundly disturbing to the faith of the Christians. We ought to be strongest in faith when faith is needed most. It is impossible that Jesus who gave His life for us sinners should forget His promises and forsake His friends.

Why? Jesus is but biding His time in order to give the greater manifestation of His power. He is testing our faith, hoping that we will victoriously weather the trial. We are taught all this in the Bible. Friends come and remind us of it. In fact, we ourselves know it well enough. But how hard it is to forget what we see and hear with our physical senses!

How terrifying to see the walls of our lives falling around us, to feel the ground under our feet tremble and quake! How poorly we stand the test. How disgracefully weak our faith becomes!

And, yes, *Who can this be* is the One who knows that His friends are in trouble and yet apparently sleeps!

2. Who Can This Be, That Even The Winds And The Sea Obey Him? His Despairing Friends Appeal To Him, And Gloriously He Saves.

Firstly, we notice the appeal for help. ²⁵ *Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"*

The disciples give evidence of the weakness of their faith in their appeal to the Lord, not so much in the appeal itself, as rather in the form and manner of it. It was a cry of fear and despair. There is even a hint of reproach in it.

If their faith had been strong, the disciples would have been sure that their Lord and Friend would not forsake them even in their deepest need. They would have been sure that His help would not fail them even though He apparently slept, and in fact, that no real danger existed as long as Jesus was with them in the ship. If their faith had been strong they would have known that in His good time He would deliver them.

And yet, at the same time, the cry for help was really an act of obedience to the Master's will, and it was also an evidence of a faith that still existed. Compare this situation with that of doubting Thomas.² The conclusion was that Thomas answered and said to Jesus, *"My Lord and my God!"* ²⁹ *Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

For a Christian to grow weak in faith, no matter what the circumstance or cause may be, is indeed deserving of censure, particularly if, as is often the case,

such weakness is strongly mixed with irritation at, and criticism of, the Lord's way of doing things.

But nothing could be worse than to abandon hope and trust entirely, and to lose confidence in going *to the Lord in prayer*. We read in Psalm 50:15, ¹⁵ ***Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.*** And in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 ¹⁷ ***pray without ceasing.***

Let the troubled heart heed the invitation, trust the promises set forth in the Word of God, and call earnestly for help.

Secondly, we note that the Lord responds gloriously. Our text says, ²⁶ ***But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.*** The disciples are delivered.

Jesus now censures them strongly, not for the faith still existing or because they called upon Him, but because of their fear and the weakness of faith which they so plainly showed.

It should always be clear to the Christian that doubt and fear are not only injurious to spiritual life, but that they are particularly offensive to God. Weakness of faith is a sin that deserves divine rebuke, and it should be repented of most earnestly. Often, therefore, the Christian's prayer should be the words of Mark 9:24, ***"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"***

But how comforting indeed it is to know that ***A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth.***³

How promptly and effectively the Lord now answers the appeal! The simple, but impressive divinity of this Master of the elements, the quiet, but immensely effective command, the prompt obedience on the part of the raging sea and the howling storm.

It was just like a trainer of wild animals stepped into an arena turbulent with the snarling, roaring, charging, fighting of angry beasts and with a few words of authority stilled the uproar and sent the excited beasts, quieted and cowed, into their respective corners.

Would the disciples ever forget that glorious sight and the relief so promptly and effectively given? Must not the vivid memory of this remarkable experience have furnished them with immeasurable comfort in the later days when the storms of persecution broke over their heads and the little vessel of the young Church was being tossed about by the wild waves of the world's hatred?

After all, they had not made a mistake in following this remarkable Man, and even their weak faith had been gloriously vindicated. ***Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"***

The Lord Jesus is still the great Deliverer of His people. He still hears the prayers of our troubled hearts. He controls the path of our lives. With Him "*in the midst of her,*" the seemingly frail vessel of His Church will triumphantly outide every storm and stress. Look at the experiences of Peter, of Paul, of the divine intervention which ended the early persecutions, and the powerful protection which preserved the Church of the Reformation during Luther's time and after.

Many Christians, too, can tell of wonderful experiences of deliverance out of some sorrow, misfortune, or calamity. These are encouraging and comforting not only to those who have had them, but to the rest of us as well. Try calling on the Lord when next you feel the need of support and help. You will not be disappointed.

And do not fail to thank and praise the LORD for His mercy, blessings and deliverance.

Let those who have always known and believed that Jesus is not only their loving Saviour, but also their merciful Helper in time of need continue to place their trust in Him.

And if there are any who are still without Christ, let them come into the ship, believe in Jesus Christ as their only and real Redeemer, and find Him to be the ready and strong Deliverer out of every trouble.

With Him in the ship of our lives, we shall come safely through every storm and finally reach the port of eternal peace in heaven. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Job 1:6-22, 1 Pet 5:8-9

² John 20:24-29

³ Isaiah 42:3