

Who Commands Winds and Water?

Psalms 107:1-3, 23-32; Luke 8:22-39 (ESV)

March 13, 2005

“Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” “Who...is this, that he commands even winds and water?” “Who...is this?” No wonder the disciples were afraid. They kept following him. But they were afraid. Who is Jesus? Therein lies the question. This is a question of identity, reality, and truth. This is the question of our lives. Note that this first question is not “Who do you think Jesus is?” This first question is not “Who do you believe Jesus is?” Those are not unimportant, but they are secondary. We will get to them in a moment. Correct answers to those depend upon correct answers to the first question. So, let us deal with first things first.

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“Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” “Who...is this, that he commands even winds and water?” “Who...is this?” Who is Jesus? For starters, for the premise of the question, he is the one who commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him. Anyone who has read the book of Genesis would know that God created heaven and earth and all that is in them by the sheer power of his word. Anyone who has read the book of Job would know that the LORD controls the winds and water by the sheer power of his word and that no mere man could do so. Anyone who has read the Psalms would know that the LORD commands the winds and water both to storm and to calm by the sheer power of his word and that the LORD also delivers his people by the same means. So the scriptures are clear that winds and water obey God and that they obey God alone. God commands them through his word. In that Jesus Christ does the same, commanding them with his word so that they obey him, there is no other conclusion than that Jesus is God, God himself with us, God himself for us. That is who he is.

This is the answer. This is the right answer. This is right knowledge. But it is not yet faith. Here is where we begin to make the transition. Knowing is important. Knowing is necessary. But knowing is not enough. The second part of today's reading makes that clear. "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?'" The demons knew exactly who Jesus was. The forces of evil had completely correct knowledge of his identity. But right knowledge did not help them. Right knowledge did not save them. Right knowledge did not make them good. It was not enough. It was not enough for them. It cannot be enough for us.

How then do we move from knowledge to faith? Obviously, we have to start with knowledge. We cannot move from knowledge to faith without having knowledge, without knowing. We have to start with knowledge. This is important, because Christian faith is not a matter of believing in what we do not know. We do not worship "Whom It May Concern." We do not worship the great Spirit in the sky. We worship the God and Father of Jesus Christ. That is to say, we know that God is the Father of Jesus Christ, and we know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. To say that Jesus is the Son of God is another way of saying that he is God. We know that God is eternally the Father of the Son and that the Son is eternally he Son of the Father. Jesus is God with us and God for us. This we know. It is a special kind of knowing. But it is a real knowing. Without this knowing there is no Christian faith. Without this knowing there is no Christianity.

How do we move from this knowledge to faith? The move from knowledge to faith is both the work of the Holy Spirit and the act of the human will. The move from knowledge to faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, which is to say that it is the result of the power of God at work within us, because faith is not a human possibility, faith is not a human accomplishment, faith is, in fact, a gift from God. At the same time, and viewed from another perspective, the move from knowledge to faith is an act of the human will, which is to say that God does not treat us like sticks and stones or winds and water. He does not force us to believe. He invites us to believe. He encourages us to believe. He entices us to believe. He woos us to believe. He calls us to believe. He loves us to believe. He gives himself to us in Jesus Christ so that we might believe. So, we are back to faith as a gift. It is not something we can accomplish. It is not something for which we can claim credit. And yet, it is the deepest possible act of the self, an acknowledgment of reality, an

act of worship, a commitment of trust. God gives this faith to us by eliciting this faith from us.

What is this faith to which we are called, to which we are invited, to which we are summoned, to which we are drawn, and which, finally, we are given? John Calvin defines faith as “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”¹ Faith is not only knowing that Jesus is God, but it is also knowing in Jesus that God is good toward us and for us, doing for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. The content of this knowing of the benevolence of God is the gospel, “the freely given promise in Christ,” which is to say that the gospel provides the content of this knowing, so that the gospel leads us to faith. Faith, then, is not only a kind of knowing held in the mind but also a kind of knowing held and cherished in the heart. Faith is not a disinterested knowledge or a neutral point of view upon which all would agree. Instead, faith is passionate knowledge, love, trust, appreciation, and commitment, available only to those to whom the Holy Spirit has revealed God in Jesus Christ. That is the faith toward which this knowledge is headed.

“Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” “Who...is this, that he commands even winds and water?” “Who...is this?” Who is Jesus? The disciples asked the right question, but they could not yet put together the right answer. ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?’” The demons had the right information, but they had the wrong question and the wrong attitude. We are in the privileged position of overhearing both. The danger is that we will extract from them only ignorance and a bad attitude, the worst of each. The people who saw what Jesus had done to the man who had the demons were afraid, and they asked Jesus to leave. They failed to follow. They sided with the demons. That is not what we want to do. But the blessed opportunity, the wonderful possibility, the invitation being held out to us is that we receive both the right knowledge and also the right attitude, both knowing that Jesus is Son of the Most High God and also standing in awe of him, in wonder at who he is. To know both that Jesus is God and also that God is with us and for us is a powerful, joyful, life-changing kind of knowing. To know both that Jesus is God and also that God is with us and for us is saving faith. To know both that Jesus is God and also that God

¹John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. from the 1559 Latin ed. by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., in *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), cited by book, chapter, section, and, in parentheses, volume and page, 3.2.7 (1.551).

is with us and for us is to believe what the Bible says and to act upon that belief. To know both that Jesus is God and also that God is with us and for us is not merely to be a student of religion but actually to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

In a few moments, a young family will stand before us and do just that. The father will reaffirm his faith in Jesus Christ. The mother will profess her faith in Jesus Christ. And on the basis of their professions, they will present their infant son for baptism. In acknowledgment of the prior work of the Holy Spirit within them, this young family will commit their lives to Jesus Christ and commit their son to Jesus Christ. There is no better reason to live. There is no better way to live. And in their public professions of faith, they also give all of us the opportunity to reaffirm our own faith. Do not let this opportunity pass you by.

“Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” “Who...is this, that he commands even winds and water?” “Who...is this?” Who is Jesus? This is the question of our lives. Jesus is the “Son of the Most High God.” Jesus is God with us and for us. This is the high and sacred knowledge which we have received and which we proclaim to all the world. Who, then, are we? Who are we in light of this knowledge, in light of this identity, in light of this truth and reality? We are the ones to whom Jesus has come. We are the ones to whom God has come. We are the ones with whom God is and for whom God is. We are the ones for whom Jesus suffered and died. We are the ones for whom God raised him from the dead. We are the ones called to faith. We are the ones called to life. We are the ones called to follow Jesus. Of course we are afraid! But let us not fail to follow.

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

© Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, Pastor
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
1627 Monument Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23220
www.grace-covenant.org