

Jesus & Nature

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[0 : 00] It's Luke chapter 8, Jesus calms the storm, verse 22. One day Jesus said to his disciples, Let us go over to the other side of the lake.

So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke him, saying, Master, Master, we're going to drown. He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters.

The storm subsided, and all was calm. Where is your faith? he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement, they asked one another, Who is this?

He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him. Thanks be to God. Right.

[1 : 01] Well, good morning. Lovely to see you all this morning. My name is James, and I'm the assistant minister, is that right, at St. Silas. And it's a really joyous occasion, isn't it, today, being here for Idris' baptism.

So an especially big welcome to all Jonathan and New Liz friends. It's lovely to see you all this morning. You're in the right place. So let me pray for us before we start and look at this passage. Lord, we thank you for your word. Please speak to us through it now. Amen. Well, if you're new to St. Silas or you're visiting this morning, we've been going through, in Sunday mornings at St. Silas, a little series in Luke chapters 7 and 8 entitled, Jesus and His Salvation.

And that is not that Jesus is being saved, but we're thinking on the salvation that belongs to Jesus and that He alone can offer.

That Jesus is uniquely suited to save is shown to us by the disciples' reaction in our reading this morning. So we read there in the second half of verse 25, we see, In fear and amazement, they asked one another, Who is this?

[2 : 25] You see, what concerns and astonishes the disciples here is the supernatural act that Jesus has done at the end of verse 24.

And I'll just read that for us. He got up and rebuked the wind and raging waters. The storm subsided and all was calm.

And so the disciples asked one another, Who is this? He commands even the winds and water and they obey Him. You see, the problem that Jesus' disciples faced then and that Luke's readers were facing in their day is the same that faces us this morning as we sit here and listen to this reading in Luke this morning.

And that is, what are we to make with Jesus' supernatural acts? So as we're sitting here this morning, we might read this and we might think, well, that was just something they did back then. Luke's audience and Jesus' disciples, they were more superstitious. They needed to explain stuff in certain ways. They were more primitive. They were used to the supernatural.

[3 : 40] That was how they explained things. But we, we're different. We're enlightened. We're wiser. We're more rational. It's harder for us to accept the supernatural.

But what is wrong with this thought is that Jesus' disciples were just as skeptical over and surprised by the supernatural event as we are today?

So Luke describes them as fearful and amazed. And they say, who is this? And why is this?

It's because the events that happened, the events and actions of Jesus that were just as unique then as they are today, because Jesus is just as unique then as he is today.

You see, here is the point. To miss or disregard the extraordinary uniqueness of the supernatural in the Bible is to miss the point of this passage in Luke and is to miss the entire point of the Bible.

[5 : 00] You see, when we read the Bible, the Bible is really just one long argument making one big point. What do I mean? Well, I'm going to take you back to Sunday school and you're allowed to

shout out the answers if that's alright.

So how does the Bible begin in Genesis 1 verse 1? Anyone? In the beginning, God. Right, so Moses writing into a world filled with pagan religions and lots of little local tribal gods begins his account of creation of the start of all human life with one big creator gone, God.

And then moving on a little bit, we think of Exodus. And I know we looked at that in growth groups last year. Well, you guys did. I wasn't here then. But we remember, why does Moses send the plagues in Exodus?

Can we remember? Maybe that's a higher grade question. Can we remember? Anyone? Well, I'll give it to us. So that you may know that there is no one like the Lord your God.

And then we think of the giving of the law at the high point of Judaism. And we read in Deuteronomy 6 verse 4. Hear, O Israel, the Lord, the Lord your God is one.

[6 : 22] That is, he is alone. He alone. He alone is God. And then we think of Isaiah 40. Martin's going to be preaching on Isaiah 40 this evening.

And we read that verse there. To whom will you compare me? Oh, who is my equal, says the Lord? Men are like grasshoppers and the kings of the earth are like dust. God is incomparable.

You see, the point that the Bible is making is that God is big. He is unique and extraordinary. He is incomparable as creator. And as we read through Luke chapters 7 and 8, we see Jesus saving people in unique, extraordinary, supernatural ways.

And here in this passage, we see Jesus' extraordinary, extraordinary authority over creation as its unique creator.

[7 : 28] But why does the Bible make such a big point about the extraordinariness of God? And if God is so extraordinary and unique, why do we reject Him?

You see, the issue is not just that we reject the supernatural, but that we reject a supernatural and extraordinarily unique God.

And when we reject Him, it's not just that we reject God, but that we reject Him and we worship something else. So what is worship?

Well, worship is simply to give our worth to something, to esteem or treasure the object of worship, to make it worthy of us living for it, to make that thing the thing that's going to give us joy and satisfaction and happiness in life and give us meaning in life.

And to worship something is, well, really simply to serve it. So you see, our hearts are made for worship. They are made to serve something.

[8 : 38] So it's a bit like romantic love. A boy meets girl, sparks fly. And what happens, you end up finding yourself saying the most ridiculous, outrageous things, don't you?

I'll do anything for you. You're my everything. You're the reason for my existence, my all. And we think of those Barry White songs. And why do we do that?

Well, it's ludicrous, isn't it? We do it because we want to cherish something and we want to be cherished in return. We want to give our worth to something and we idealize that person.

We can't help but worship something. You see, John Calvin, the Reformation theologian, what does he say about humans? What does he say about our minds and our hearts?

He says, well, the human mind, so to speak, is a perpetual forge of idols. What is he saying? Well, what he is saying is that every time we think of something, something that comes to mind that you think you need, whatever you think of that you imagine that your mind thinks up, you think, if only I had that, then my life would be complete and be filled and I'd be happy.

[9 : 55] Well, then you make an idol of that thing or you might make a physical idol and that idol is going to give you what you want.

So you think of people, early people back in the day in agrarian societies, what do they need? They needed rain. So they needed rain to grow their crops and survive and that's something that they imagined that they needed.

Well, they did need it. So what do they do? They imagine what a rain god will look like. So they carve out a little god out of wood or stone or bone or whatever and they give him a name.

They call him Baal and he's the storm god and they put a big lightning bolt in his hand because he's a storm god and he's scary. And what do they do? They do stuff to keep Baal happy.

They serve Baal because they think they need rain and he will give them what they want, rain. And we create titles because we think we can control them or influence them to give us the things or the happiness that we want.

[11:05] And we know the truth of this, don't we? So if you're unconvinced of what I'm saying is, well, just go down to the religion rooms in the Victorian Albert Museum down in London if you go down there.

I know it's a far way away. Maybe you've been to London once or twice. But you walk into this room and there's row upon row of little idols, thousands and thousands and thousands of little idols for every sort of thing you could ever imagine.

Well, the fertility one, the honey one. I really like honey in my toast in the morning. I'm going to make a honey god. Or all sorts of little idols for things that they wanted. Because we think that if we make an idol and we give it stuff and we serve it, it will give us what we want, whatever it is.

You see, the essence of what Calvin is saying is this, is because we think up idols, that is, we make them and we forge them, they're really just projections of our own imagination of whatever it is we think up.

They're just a projection of our own fears and needs and wants. They're really just, well, projections of ourselves made in our own image of ourselves as little gods.

[12:28] And when we serve them, we are really just serving ourselves. And we all do this, don't we? And so we think about the ancient man, the agrarian man.

He thinks up something, he's something he needs, he makes the idol, he gives it what he wants, he serves it so that the idol will give him what he wants. And the more he wants something, the more he is desperate for it, the more he's going to sacrifice to it.

but he is really only serving his own desire for that thing. You think of an enlightenment man, you think of someone who doesn't believe in gods, who's rejected anything supernatural.

Everything that is what life is about is only the things that I can see and touch. There's nothing else in life than that. And when I die, that's it, I go into the ground and I disintegrate and I disappear.

And what are they going to live for? What is she going to live for? How is she going to live? She's going to live for the here and now and for her own desires and her own wants.

[13:36] And whenever she has a relationship or relationships in life and interactions in her life, the equation that she's always using at the back of her mind is how can this person serve me?

How can I get what I want? Well, it might be in increasingly more gentle and sophisticated ways because you've learnt that, well, there's certain ways of doing things to get what you want that are going to work and there's certain ways that just aren't going to work really.

But she's still serving herself, doing stuff to get others to serve her so she can get what she wants. What about the person who thinks that, well, everything is relative, all gods, all religions are equal. What matters in life is how you express yourself, that you're true to your own internal desires, that your own experience is going to be the thing that defines you.

So I'm just living out my internal desires. It might be abhorrent, terrible to someone else, but my self-expression and my individualism must be served and who are you to tell me that I'm wrong?

[14:51] Others must serve my own desires and my own truth as I'm serving them. You see, each of these is the way that we set ourselves up as little gods to be served by others rather than serving the great, big, extraordinary, unique God of everything.

And anytime we worship something or someone that is not this extraordinary God, the God of the Bible, we sin. So here's how the pastor Tim Keller puts it.

He says, sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a good thing, more than God. Whatever we build our life on will drive us, will ensnare us. sin is primarily idolatry.

You see, it's not that worship is bad, but that worship of the wrong thing is terrible. So when Jesus asks his disciples in verse 25, where is your faith?

He's not commenting on their absence of belief, but he is asking them, in what have they placed their faith if not in him?

[16:13] And well, Jesus might ask this because they had seen Jesus raise the dead. His disciples had heard his teaching on taking him at his word.

They knew that he was the one who alone could forgive sins. They had heard that he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah, that he was God's king forever. In his presence, they had seen healings, exorcisms, sight restored, cripples able to walk again, the deaf here, widows giving their only sons back to life.

They had seen the compassion and kindness of Jesus. They had seen the good news of his kingdom being proclaimed to the poor. And that all of this, all of these things they had seen, had

pointed to him, to Jesus, as God's good king forever.

But when by word he calms the storm, they are fearful and amazed. So he asked them, where is your faith?

[17 : 21] You see, worship of the wrong thing is terrible because it leads us away from the one person who's uniquely deserving of our worship.

It leads us away from Jesus Christ. And instead we become curved in on ourselves and we serve and worship ourselves.

See, what happens when we serve ourselves through idols is one of three things. Either that idol is going to crush us, it will enslave us, and we want that thing so badly we'll give to it more and more and more and more and our desire for that thing will become overwhelming, and we will destroy our lives running after that thing, serving ourselves.

Secondly, or that idol will crush us, or we will crush the idol, sorry about that. The weight of our expectation placed on that idol will crush it. It will become too much to bear.

We'll place so much expectation on that idol that the idol will be crushed. And we see this all the time in romantic love, don't we? Or thirdly, we will crush others when we worship idols.

[18 : 33] You see, when we worship and serve an imperfect idol, we will see people imperfectly, and we'll not see them as people to be loved, warts and all, unconditionally, and pointed to the one who is deserving of all worship, but as the object to serve our ends, and to serve us.

God is un-created. But you see, what this passage, is that God alone is the extraordinary and uniquely deserving of our worship.

And what will it mean for us that God alone deserves our worship? Well, it will mean that unlike gods, unlike idols that have been created in our image to serve us, God is uncreated.

No one ever created God. He is creator, and he created everything. We are his creatures, and as creator, he has a unique knowledge of his creation.

There's nothing about God's creation that God doesn't know. What will it mean that God's unique and extraordinary? Well, it will mean that he is the creator, and because he is creator and outside of creation, he is extraordinary, he is supernatural.

[19 : 53] And he's uniquely situated to receive worship. You see, God is the happiest person in existence. There's nothing that you can do that will make him more happy, and there's nothing that you can do that will make him less happy.

He is unchangeable. We can't crush him with our worship and petitions. Try him. He won't, and he won't crush us. Come to me, and I will give you rest.

My burden is easy. And my yoke is light. It will mean that when we worship him, we will love others perfectly.

It will mean that his wisdom and ways are perfect. It means that we're going to have to trust God, even when we can't see why.

Well, I was walking into church the other day, and I saw the snail walking on the concrete, away from the garden, into the middle of the road. And I was like, what are you doing, son? You're walking into oblivion.

[20 : 58] And it struck me that, well, we're a lot like that snail, aren't we? We're plodding along, determinedly feeling our way, however snails walk, I don't know, slurp maybe, and we're heading the wrong way.

We need someone big outside of us to be able to rescue us and see how we should be living. See, life is complicated, it's difficult. And the only way we can see the way through the tricky bits of life is by trusting in God.

It will mean that Jesus, God being big, will mean that Jesus has the ability and power to rescue us and save us more fully and completely than anyone else can or will.

Every one of us here is born a sinner. sinner. But because Jesus is God, he is not a sinner. And therefore, he's uniquely suited to forgive sins.

It will mean that Jesus knows us more intimately than anyone else does or ever will. He is involved with us. He cares about us in a way that no one else can. I don't know where you are today spiritually, but Jesus does and he gets it.

[22 : 17] It will mean that Jesus loves us and cares for us more than we could ever imagine. Jesus is so big. Everything in creation it is. He's perfectly happy in himself.

He's satisfied in himself. Everything in creation is his. He doesn't need or wants anything from us, which means that he is for us in a way that no one else is.

It will mean that in calming the storm, he is he shows that he has conquered evil. He has conquered all the balls in creation and in our life.

He is bigger than any of the so-called storm gods that might be on the horizon for us. And because of that, we have nothing to fear. So how does this happen?

How can we know this? How can we know Jesus like this? Well, towards the end of Jesus' life, as he was about to enter into Jerusalem, where he would go to be crucified, his two best friends, James and John, they came to him.

[23 : 23] They said, Lord, can we sit on your right and left in glory? Well, when the other disciples heard about this, they were outraged.

They were indignant over this. And so Jesus called his disciples together and he said to them, you know, well, you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles, that is the world rulers, how they lord it over their subjects?

Not so with you. For even the Son of Man, that's Jesus' favorite way of speaking about himself, did not come to be served, but to serve others.

And to give his life as a ransom for many. You see, idols and little gods will want us to serve them. We want others to serve us when we set ourselves up as many gods.

We want others to serve us. But Jesus says, rather than you serving me, I have come to serve you. In my kingdom, whoever wants to become great among you must be servant of all.

[24 : 39] And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. You see, to have Jesus as God is to be served by him, by the most powerful person in existence.

Jesus asks us to come to him empty-handed and he will serve us. There's nothing we could bring that could make him love us more, that could make him do more for us, and there's nothing that you could do that can make him love you less.

See, when Jesus died on the cross, he took the punishment that our sins deserved for ignoring God and setting ourselves up as little gods and expecting others to serve us as if we were like Jesus when we were nothing like him.

And in dying, he showed us what real worship looks like and what it means that he is so extraordinarily big in serving you and in serving me.

Father, we thank you that you're a big God, that you're unique and extraordinary.

[25 : 52] We thank you for sending your son to come and seek and save the lost and to serve us. We thank you for this. In Jesus' name.

Amen.