

# What Sort of Man is Jesus?

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] This morning we're in the Gospel of Matthew, and we're going to be in chapter 8, verses 23 to 27, and if you'd like to turn there now, we'll read in just a moment.
- So Matthew has taken his eyewitness account. He's taken a record of the historical life and ministry of Jesus, and he's crafted it into this literary masterpiece.
- It's an incredible work of art, and every little movement of the story in Matthew's Gospel, it's intentional, it has purpose, it's moving you along to learn something about Jesus.
- So just a quick overview of where we've been and what we've covered. So in the first three chapters of Matthew, it's just kind of an introduction. Now a lot happens, and I don't mean to skim over it, but here's how it's broadly structured.
- You've got an introduction, and then in chapters 4 to 7, Jesus announces the kingdom of God. This is the thing that the Israelites have been waiting for for a very long time, since David.
- [ 1 : 0 0 ] He announces the kingdom of God, and then he goes up on the mountain, and he sits down, and he teaches them. And that's the Sermon on the Mount. It's the instructions of what kingdom life is like.
- So then he comes back down the mountain at the end of chapter 7, and the people are astounded by the authority with which he taught. They said, we've never heard anyone like this before.
- Now the next section is chapters 8 to 10, and we find ourselves in the middle of that just now. And it's broken up into, it's three groups of three stories about Jesus' power and authority coming to bear on the lives of people, because where Jesus goes, the kingdom of God is at hand.
- He brings the kingdom with him. And in between these three groups of three are two little stories of Jesus saying, follow me, and talking about what it means to follow Jesus.
- So now we're going to read chapter 8, verse 23 to 27. And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.
- [ 2 : 0 4 ] And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves, but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, save us, Lord, we are perishing.
- And he said to them, why are you afraid, O you of little faith? Then he rose and rebuked the winds in the sea, and there was a great calm.
- And the men marveled, saying, what sort of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?
- Now there's a lot in this little passage, but the text gives us two questions just right in the story. And so I want to focus on those two questions. I will just take them one at a time, and we're going to kind of interrogate the questions with more questions to understand more about Jesus and the nature of the story.

So the first question is asked by Jesus to the disciples. So they're in the boat crossing this lake, and it's a bit of a journey. It's about 13 miles across, and so it's several hours, and Jesus has fallen asleep.

[ 3 : 16 ] A storm comes suddenly tearing up, and it's swamping over the sides of the boat. They're absolutely terrified. This is not a mild wind. This is a serious storm.

So terrified that they think they're going to die. They're certain of it. We are perishing, they say. So Jesus wakes up, and here's our first question. He says to them, why are you afraid?

Why are you afraid, O you of little faith? So here's how we're going to interrogate the question. We're going to ask a series of other questions. Starting with this, what are they afraid of?

Why are the disciples so terrified? It seems obvious, but it's worth talking about. So even though the lake of Galilee, as Luke's gospel calls it a lake, even though it's actually quite small, in fact, I think we still call it a lake.

In normal parlance, it's a lake. Matthew calls it a sea. Why? Well, for thousands of years, the cultural imagination in this part of the world has always viewed the sea as the embodiment and location of chaos.

[ 4 : 29 ] And by chaos, I mean the unordered, the uncreated of judgment and evil and destruction and calamity, chaos.

All the religions in this area viewed the chief source of evil and catastrophe in the world as the ancient sea, and in it they imagined some sort of dragon or serpent. Now, of course, we're in the realm of mythology, and there's no clue that Matthew believed in some dragon under the waters or anything like that.

But like all the poets of Israel before him, he draws on the cultural imagery around him to make a point about God. So other religions around him had other names for this, Rahab, Leviathan, Teamot, whatever you name it, it was an essential religious and mythological part of the imagination of the culture in Jesus' day.

Many biblical authors poetically take up that imagery, as I said, so Isaiah does it, Job does it, numerous Psalms do it. Jeremiah all over the place, right? Now Matthew is carefully describing this historical event in such a way that makes us think not about a lake and high winds, but about death and calamity and evil itself.

This is kind of a cosmic storm. So that's why the sea is mentioned at the beginning of our story as Christians and at the end of our story.

[ 5 : 57 ] So in Genesis one, all the way back at the beginning, we see the spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters, and it's out of the chaos waters that he creates, that he brings life, that he orders the unordered.

That's creation, that's the beginning. And all the way at the end of our story in Revelation 21, the first verse says, then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

The sea was no more, because at the end of our story, there is no more death and destruction and calamity. So that's the kind of imaginative background to why Matthew is writing about the sea in this particular way.

So that being said, it actually becomes more terrifying, not less. So I can understand why the disciples are scared. But that leads me to my next question. Why isn't Jesus afraid?

Well, if you've seen the movie *The Princess Bride*, which is a great movie, there's a scene, maybe one of my favorite scenes where it's called *The Battle of the Whits*, and it's a battle of wits between Wesley, the good guy, and Vasini, the bad guy, or one of the bad guys.

[ 7 : 19 ] And Wesley has two goblets of wine, and he kind of turns his back and he adds some poison. And Vasini has to choose which cup, the wine, which cup doesn't have the poison and drink it.

They both drink, and the winner comes out alive. That's the premise of this Battle of the Whits. Now Wesley has built up an immunity to the poison, and so of course he adds the poison to both cups, and he'll come out fine either way.

But both of them portray this incredible confidence in this scene. They're both just kind of smiling and calm, unrattled, unflappable, right?

Vasini has an overconfidence in his own intelligence, an overconfidence in his powers of deduction, and of course you can guess how the story ends if you haven't seen it.

Now what kind of person is fearless and confident in the face of death? I would suggest two kinds. The overconfident fool and the master of the situation.

[ 8 : 23 ] Now Jesus is no fool, and in this situation he is not afraid because he is the master of the situation. He is in complete control.

Now the disciples aren't in complete control, right? They're being tossed about by the waves and the sea, and they feel as though they're drowning. And in fact it looks like they are drowning, or at least in imminent danger.

So wasn't their fear reasonable? Why does Jesus kind of give them a little lecture and say that they have little faith if their fear was so reasonable?

Well fear doesn't always equal little faith. Not all fear is bad. There are some very healthy fears. I'm afraid of poisonous snakes.

I think that's a very healthy fear. But here's the thing. Here's why Jesus says they have little faith. Look at verse 25.

[ 9 : 23 ] Save us, Lord. The disciples knew Jesus could save them, but they didn't think he would save them.

They didn't doubt Jesus' ability. They doubted Jesus' willingness. Do you see that? If they had no faith, they would say, hey, wake up.

Do you know of anyone who could save us? Little faith says, wake up, Lord. You can save us, but I'm really scared you won't. But great faith.

Great faith says, Lord, you can save us, and I trust you with it entirely. Now just a few stories before, this was preached on very recently. Jesus encounters a Roman centurion, and the centurion is, Jesus praises his faith and says, I haven't seen faith like this anywhere in Israel.

Why? The centurion understands Jesus' authority and power and Jesus' heart. The disciples understand Jesus' authority, but they don't understand Jesus' heart.

[ 10 : 34 ] Do you doubt Jesus' heart toward you? Do you doubt his willingness to move toward you with healing and power?

This is the man who, he reached out and touched the leper in the beginning of chapter 8. He didn't have to. He could have cleansed that leper with a word.

He touched the leper because that's his heart. He wanted the leper to know the love and compassion of Jesus. This is the man who healed the centurion's servant.

Remember the centurion is the oppressor of Rome, of Israel. They're the enemy. They're the bad guys here. Jesus had the compassion to, without hesitation, to heal the servant of the centurion.

Jesus went in to Peter's house and took the fever from his mother-in-law. And then huge crowds brought demon-oppressed people and sick people to him.

[ 11 : 35 ] And he spent all this time and energy healing and healing and freeing from oppression because that's Jesus' heart.

That's who he is. He can't help himself, but do that because it's deep down. That's the heart of Jesus. His impulse, Jesus' inclination, is toward compassion and deliverance, not towards anger and frustration.

In other words, your weakness and your need moves Jesus toward you. It doesn't push Jesus away from you. I wonder if you believe that.

So here's a little bit of a rhetorical question that I'm going to answer anyway. How much faith do you need to be saved? Because salvation is really what we're talking about here. We're talking about the gospel through a story.

And he calls them people of little faith. So how much faith do you need? How much faith is enough faith? Maybe we are those of little faith.

[ 12 : 44 ] But here's the good news. You are not saved by the size of your faith. You are saved by the object of your faith. In other words, it's not about how hard you believe.

It's about who you look to in the storm. Keller pointed out once in a sermon on Exodus 14, I think it was 14.

He said, you know, when the Red Sea was parted and Israel's walking through and you've got these towers of water on either side, surely you had some Israelites who were, you know, maybe jeering at the Egyptians and rejoicing and confident in God and the salvation that he brought on them.

And some other Israelites who were probably thinking, I am certainly going to die in the waters right now. But they were all saved. The ones with great confidence in God and the ones with barely any confidence in God who were barely hanging on, God saved them all.

Because we are not saved by the size of our faith. We are saved by the object of our faith.

[ 13 : 54 ] Now some people talk about, well, some people view, some commentators view Jesus' comment about little faith and asking why they're afraid. They view it as a rebuke.

I don't think it is. Here's why. Look at verse 26. And Jesus said to them, he said to them, why are you afraid, O you of little faith? Then he rose and rebuked the winds in the sea.

Have you ever rebuked someone while lying down? It's not a very authoritative kind of rebuke inducing position. And it says clearly, then he rose up.

It's a little thing, but I think it matters because, you know, Jesus rebuked the sea, but I think he was treating his disciples with incredible gentleness. Jesus understands faith is a gift from God.

God portions faith out to us. And he's not belittling them for the amount they have. I think he's encouraging them further up and further in. He's building their faith.

[ 14 : 52 ] He's strengthening their faith right now. That's what walking with Jesus. That's what following Jesus does. Now of course the story progresses and, you know, he rebukes the winds and the seas and they just suddenly go still and calm and peaceful and silent.

And their response, it says the men marvel. They marvel at him. Now marvel is not the language of the light. This isn't the sort of word you would use in Disneyland, right?

You know, you're, you're marveling at the wonderful roller coasters. I don't know. I've been to Disneyland in 20 years. But this is the language of, well, some time ago I went with William, a seven-year-old.

We went up the Salisbury Craigs and I, I don't do well with heights. I do not do well with heights. But I walked up to the cliff's edge, I think 43 meters up, something like that.

And I looked, I looked over and I caught my breath and I marveled because it's at, it's at the same time terrifying and incredibly beautiful and wonderful.

[ 16 : 06 ] And it, marveling is, is those two things coming together. It's, it's beauty and terror kind of mixed up into, into one. They marveled at Jesus.

And then they, they asked the second question. So I said earlier that there's, there's two questions in this passage. The first one, why are you afraid? Asked by Jesus to the disciples.

Now the second question, the disciples ask among themselves, what sort of man is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?

What sort of human is this? Who can do that? Well, Matthew ends the story right there. He doesn't answer the question directly, which is brilliant because he's inviting you and I to ask of our own, of ourselves and of each other the same question.

We need to wrestle with this text and ask ourselves, what sort of human is this? Now, if you're familiar with the story of Jonah, it would be a reasonable assumption to say Jesus is a Jonah-like human, right?

[ 17 : 21 ] Because in the story of Jonah, he's, he's a prophet and he's on a boat in the sea when a storm comes up and the sea is, is still.

The storm is abated and Jonah, we find during the storm, he's asleep in the boat. So it would be reasonable to assume that Matthew is saying that Jesus is like Jonah.

We know Matthew very carefully wrote and arranged the gospel to link the historical life of Jesus and his miracles with the story of God in Israel in the Old Testament. It's very sophisticated and it's very vivid.

So that's all a very reasonable assumption. But actually, I think Matthew is telling us that Jesus is very different from Jonah. And I think he's telling us that very much on purpose.

Here's why. In the Jonah story, the sailors who are terrified of the storm, they wake Jonah up and they say, call out to your God that he might save us.

[ 18 : 22 ] Maybe he'll give us a thought and save. Call out to your God to save us. But in this story, the disciples wake Jesus and say, you can save us.

Do you see the difference? As we read the Bible and study it over our whole lives, you'll never grow past that wonderful privilege.

You'll never have mastered your Bible, which is wonderful. As we do that, we build the sort of familiarity with the story where we read one thing. We say, you know, that's an awful lot like this other story.

And this bit reminds me of that bit over here. And it's good to follow those threads and see to what conclusions they lead you. Now if you follow the thread in the story of Jesus calming the sea to Jonah and you look long and hard, here's what I think you will come to as a conclusion, that the story of Jesus calming the storm is less like a Jonah story and more like an Exodus story.

So let's look at two passages from the Old Testament to demonstrate what I mean. The first is Isaiah, chapter 51, verses 9 to 10.

[ 19 : 42 ] And I'm going to read it and I may interrupt myself and explain some things as we go along. Isaiah 51, 9. Awake. All right, stop right there. I told you I'd interrupt.

Awake. When the people of Israel are in kind of soul distress, right, if they're absolutely despairing at the level of their very life of life, their soul, they often, when they feel that way and God seems far away, like God's not acting, like God's not saving them, they often use the language of waking God up from sleep.

So that's what's going on here. Awake. Awake. Put on strength, O arm of the Lord. Awake as in days of old, the generations of long ago.

Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Again, remember that sea language that we talked about earlier? That's the borrowing, the mythological imagery from surrounding cultures to illustrate a point through poetry here about chaos and calamity.

Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? And here we see that Isaiah is reflecting on the Exodus story. Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea away for the redeemed to pass over?

[ 21 : 12 ] Now our second Old Testament passage that I want to read is Psalm 106, 7 to 10. And then I'm going to read it and then we'll talk about both of them and draw it in.

Psalm 106 starting in verse 7, Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works. They did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but rebelled by the sea at the Red Sea, yet he saved them for his namesake, that he might make known his mighty power.

He rebuked the Red Sea and it became dry. And he led them through the deep as through a desert. So he saved them from the hand of the foe and redeemed them from the power of the enemy.

Now what do these two passages from the Old Testament have in common with each other, first of all, before we talk about their commonality with Matthew? Well, the first thing they have in common with each other is they're both reflections on Exodus.

And they're written many, many years after the event, but Exodus was such a formative event for God's people that from the point of Exodus 14 that Derek read for us earlier, throughout the entire rest of the Bible, that language is taken hold of and used to illustrate points about God over and over again.

[ 22 : 26 ] So they're both reflections on the Exodus story. In Isaiah, the defeat of Rahab the dragon is the poet's way of describing God's power being exerted over the forces of evil and chaos for the salvation of his people when God brought them out from Egypt.

And in Psalm 106, God redeems his people from the power of the enemy by rebuking the sea. That's the first thing they have in common, reflection on Exodus. The second thing is this, both are about the power of Yahweh to save.

Isaiah says very explicitly that Yahweh is the one who defeats the dragon. You did this, and he's addressing Yahweh. And Psalm 106 is a prayer addressed to Yahweh, and it says that Yahweh rebuked the sea.

So this is a really important point. In the Old Testament, the sea is rebuked, calmed, mastered, subdued many times only by Yahweh.

Yahweh is the only one with the power to do that. And by the way, Yahweh is the special personal name of the God of Israel.

[ 23 : 39 ] It's his I am name, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob name. And whenever you're reading your English Bible and you see the Lord in all lower caps, you know, in all capital letters, that underneath that lies the Hebrew word Yahweh.

So Matthew is actually making a remarkable claim about Jesus. In fact, Jesus is making a remarkable claim about Jesus. Jesus is not just a powerful prophet like Moses.

He's not just acting merely on behalf of Yahweh. Jesus is Yahweh. That's what Matthew is getting at.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has become a man and is in the midst of his people, fulfilling the promise in a way that nobody foresaw.

Jesus is Yahweh, and he has come to bring the kingdom of God into our time and space, and at the heart of the kingdom is this powerful reality, God with us.

- [ 24 : 48 ] So Jesus does not call out to Yahweh to calm the storm because he is Yahweh. So the New Testament many times makes it clear that Jesus is Yahweh.
- I'm not making this up. I'll give you a couple of examples. For instance, in Isaiah 45, Yahweh says, To me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear allegiance.
- But in Philippians 2, Paul lifts up that verse and swaps out the names, and he says at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess.
- Here's another one. Joel 2.32 says, And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh shall be saved. In Romans 10, Paul's talking about Jesus, and he says that everyone who calls on Jesus' name will be saved, and he's quoting Joel too.
- So either Paul's crazy or he's right. He's not crazy. There are dozens of these in the New Testament, and that truth is repeated again and again and again in myriad different ways.
- [ 25 : 58 ] So I won't belabor the point. This is fundamental to our beliefs as Christians. This is not just some good teacher. Jesus is Yahweh himself, the God of the Old Testament.
- He is Immanuel, God with us, right in our midst. Society, even parts of Christian society has tamed Jesus, but Jesus tamed the storm.
- We can't let anything take the teeth, the power out of this. If we take the divinity out of Christ, we take the power to save out of the very gospel.
- Jesus is the God-man, fully God and fully man. So let's not be led into the lie, the horrible lie, that Jesus is just a good example.
- He is the only one to whom we can cry out in a storm. An example never saved you. So Matthew shows that Jesus is Yahweh himself, and he does this by doing what only Yahweh could possibly do.
- [ 27 : 11 ] And he uses the vocabulary and literary imagination of the Exodus to make this point clear to us. So Matthew is pointing us back to the Exodus to learn a couple things that are really crucial.
- Like Israel, we need to be freed. We need an Exodus. Not from Egypt, but from the power of sin and death.
- That's what we've been enslaved to, and the gospel is our Exodus story. But also, like Israel, we need a mediator. God gave Israel Moses as a mediator to go between God and man.
- God said, you know, I'm not going to be in their midst at a certain point, because I might just burn them up. They're sinful. They need to go between. Well, Jesus is the mediator, the final mediator between God and man, and this mediator is God and man.
- As a man, he's caught in the storm along with everybody else, but as God, he's in complete control over it. Only Jesus can stand in the gap, and you know, only Jesus can be caught in the storm of death that plagues us all and come out the other side alive with the power over sin and death.
- [ 28 : 31 ] Only Jesus can do that, and he takes you along with him, because the gospel is our Exodus story. When Yahweh was about to lead the Israelites through the Red Sea, Moses said to the people of this from Exodus 14, 13 to 14, he said, fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of Yahweh, which He will work for you today.
- For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. Yahweh will fight for you. You have only to be silent.
- The only thing Jesus wants you to bring him is nothing. That's it. Empty hands. Just a little faith is enough.

We just trust Him. We just call out for Him to save us. We look to Jesus to save us from everything that ultimately terrifies us, knowing not only that He can, but that He wants to, knowing that His heart is to move toward you with compassion and deliverance.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we stand in awe of who you are.

[ 29 : 51 ] We're in awe of your power and your authority, and we're in awe of your kindness toward us. Thank you for calling us to follow you. Thank you for being worth following.

Lord, help us to follow you boldly and to never hesitate to come to you with our troubles, to never hold back from bringing you all of our need, all of our weakness.

Lord, you said you don't want our sacrifices and our good deeds. You just want us to turn to you in the day of trouble, and you will save us. So we just throw ourselves into your arms believing that.

Amen.