

PART 9: WHO IS THIS?

By David Fields

Luke 8:22-56

I. Who is this?

Luke 8:22-39

Genesis 1 begins with the Spirit brooding over the waters. In ancient times, "water" often symbolized "chaos", sometimes evil. But as God simply speaks, something happens. What is disordered and formless, it takes shape. God's creative work brings order out of the chaos. Just a word from his mouth and the natural world obeys.

Here we see Jesus doing the same thing. What is chaotic and threatening is turned, simply with a word of Jesus' mouth, to serenity. The storm subsides. A word to the Legion of demons, and the man is sitting peacefully.

But for those who witness these miracles, the storm, the sense of 'chaos', it moves from outside of them – in the waves, or in the man possessed by evil spirits – to inside of them. Luke concludes each story:

"*In fear and amazement they asked on another: "Who is this?*" (Luke 8:25)." Fear and amazement.

Or the townsfolk ask Jesus to leave because they are "*… overcome with fear.*" (Luke 8:37)

This is the same question, "Who is this?" – we heard this asked in the last chapter – after the woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears and her hair, pouring out extravagant love for him, Jesus says to her: "*Your sins are forgiven.*" The other guests began to say among themselves, "***Who is this*** *who even forgives sins?*" (Luke 7:48-49).

Jesus is speaking in a way that only God can speak – to announce the forgiveness of sins like this.

Who is this?

In the next scene, we begin to get some clarity. Jesus is met by a man who possessed by demons. The man has more insight into the spiritual realm than those around: "*When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus,* ***Son of the Most High God****? I beg you, don't torture me!*" (Luke 8:28).

As Luke's readers, we already have insight into this. As we heard in chapter one, Jesus was conceived as a work of the Holy Spirit. The angel Gabriel will say to Mary: "*He will be great and will be called the* ***Son of the Most High***" (Luke 1:32).

And notice how the whole scene ends. The man healed of the evil spirts; he wants to go with Jesus. But Jesus tells him: "*Return home and tell how much* ***God*** *has done for you.*" But then look how it reads: "*So the man went away and told all over town how much* ***Jesus*** *had done for him.*" – Luke 8:39

Take it all together, and Luke is making clear this strange and wonderful mystery that in Jesus, it is the living God himself who is acting. In answer to the question, "*Who is this?*" we are, in a way too wonderful and mysterious for easy language, meeting the God of all creation in the face of Jesus.

"*…this story also poses the question of faith. We will only give the right answer to the question of who Jesus is when we realize that to give it commits us to total trust and obedience.*" – N.T. Wright

But what about you? How do you answer the question: Who is this – who is Jesus? Where are you at? What does my life say I believe about Him?

II. Where is Your Faith?

Luke 8:23-56

A. Jairus and his Daughter – Part One

Notice how Jairus responds to Jesus: he "…came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying." (Luke 8:41). The good news that Jesus brings is good news for "all people."

Jairus knows he needs Jesus. He throws himself at Jesus' feet; at Jesus' mercy.

The whole point of Mary's song in chapter one, that anticipates how in Jesus, God is "casting down the proud" and "lifting up the humble" – the point is so that all people would be in the right kind of humble space to receive the lavish love of God poured out through Jesus.

Jairus doesn't use his status as a leader to make claims on Jesus, or demands of him. He shows his humble submission. His need.

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B. The Woman Who is Bleeding

In Palestinian society, being a woman already marks her as having low status. But more: she's been hemorrhaging for twelve years, making her ritually impure according to the Jewish law. Which also means she has been in social isolation for twelve years – the whole period of Jairus' daughter's life.

But on this day, both this woman who is bleeding, physically, but socially, and financially – the doctors have drained her money and could not solve the issue – on this day, of year 12 of suffering – Jesus is giving her life back.

Not just physically, but in every other regard too. She reaches in the right direction. She places her hope in Jesus. And that, Jesus tells her, is her healing. "*Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.*" – Luke 8:48

Notice: "*Daughter.*" Not just "*woman.*" But "*You belong.*" Daughter. And, by requiring that she put up her hand and say, "It was me," Jesus is ensuring that the rest of the crowd understand that she has been fully restored and healed – so that she can be fully restored to them.

And notice: *all these people are crowding, and touching him, but only she is healed? Why?*

Because she touched him in the faith that it might do something. Which raises a question for us: how can I be reaching out in faith to him? Like, where do I need his healing? And do I trust that he can address my real needs? That's what prayer is really all about. Recognizing that I need Jesus, and I will go to him for what I need.

"*We are never more alive to life than when it hurts – more aware of both our own powerlessness to save ourselves and of at least the possibility of a power beyond ourselves to save us and heal us if we can only open ourselves to it.*" - Frederick Buechner, *The Clown and the Belfry: Writings on Faith and Fiction*

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C. Jairus and his Daughter – Part Two

But in the delay caused by the interruption from the woman on his way to heal this man's daughter, well, someone arrives: "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore." (Luke 8:49).

Here's another feature of faith Jairus has to exercise. He's reached out in humility to Jesus, but now there has been this delay – for a 'non-urgent', non-emergency need of this woman. And in this delay his daughter dies.

Trusting Jesus is an exercise in trusting his timing. And this timing seems the worst possible. But Jesus knows what he's doing.

Jesus tells him: "*Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.*" (Luke 8:50). And, it seems, that's enough. Jairus and his wife follow Jesus into the house, past the laughter at Jesus' suggestion that she's "*just sleeping.*" The crowd knows better. They are right – she is not "*just asleep.*" But what they don't know is who Jesus is. What they don't know is that he is **Lord of Life**. That he can reverse this situation.

D. What is faith anyway?

Pistis is the Greek word we translate "*faith*," but it could just as easily, maybe better be translated as "*trust.*"

Historically, Christians have talked about three components of faith.

1. **"Knowing"** information: Faith isn't "feeling the feels," it's not just "spiritual squinting", not having a vaguely hopeful attitude. It has content. We don't "trust" something we don't know anything about. So Christian faith includes knowing at least something about who Jesus is and what he's done for us.

2. **"Giving Assent"** to that information: "I think this is really real. Like, maybe actually true." For Christian faith, this includes believing that Jesus was a real guy in history, who lived, died, and was raised to life. You have a certain level of confidence that, probably, that happened.

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3. **"Trust"**: "I trust Jesus. I put the weight of my life on him." To "have faith", to "believe" in the way the Bible means it, is to respond in trust and obedience.

Faith – *trust* – is how all relationships function

For some, our answer to the question "Where is your faith?" is going to be:

1. Praying something like: "*I want to experience your love and your life; I open myself up to you today.*" *And then you begin reading the words of Jesus in the Bible – maybe just a chapter a day, and saying, "Help me live this out."*

2. Praying, "*God, I can't see how you're going to work in this chaotic mess in my workplace, but I trust your way – I will be honest, I will be kind, I will generous, I won't gossip. I will be faithful to your way of doing things.*"

3. Showing up to worship on Sunday when I really don't feel it, or when my doubts loom large. But to show up, open my mouth and sing. Lift my hands in surrender. Give deeply of my gifts to serve others. Keep going in the same, faithful direction.

Take a few moments sit with this question "Where is your faith?":

The question for us becomes: "Who is this?" Who do you believe Jesus to be? Do you see in his face the Living God, come for you?

And then the real question comes back to us – the same question Jesus asks his disciples: "Where is your faith?" A real question: Where are you placing your trust?

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Open Up

There's a slang phrase – 'ride or die' – people use to talk about that person who shows you extreme loyalty. You could trust them with anything. Do you have a person you might describe as your "ride or die"? If so, what's that like?

Dig In

1. Read **Luke 8:22-25**. What do you think is the significance of Jesus' sleeping during the storm? What might his lack of anxiety communicate to his disciples? What might that say to us as well?

2. What does Jesus' response to the storm communicate – about his identity? About his love for us? About our posture to him?

3. Read **Luke 8:26-39**. This story runs parallel to the calming of the storm, as Jesus calms the "storm" of evil spirits in this man, and leaves him at peace and restored to his community. He brings "order out of chaos", as only God can do. Taken together, these stories also 'echoe' the Exodus, where God saves Israel "through the waters" of the sea, and then "drowns" the "pigs" – the Egyptian army who is pursing them in those waters. We see the identity of Jesus as "God the Son" in sharp relief as he does what only God can do.

    a. What are your typical responses when you are faced with painful circumstances, with the chaos of life, when faced with the life and death question?

    b. How might that change if we came to see that Jesus really was the one who can bring order out of the chaos, that he really is the one whom the winds and the waves obey?

Pray

The woman who was bleeding took a risk to reach out and touch Jesus with the intention of being healed. Jesus' response is beautiful and telling: "*Daughter your faith*," your act of turning to me in trust and hoping, "*has healed you. Go in peace.*" Reaching out to Jesus in faith does not guarantee a certain result. But Jesus will bless our asking in his own way and his own timing. What do you need to ask Jesus for? Pray for these things together.