

## Matthew 8:

What a fascinating week! Of course there are plenty of people who are bored stiff and deeply cynical about politics, but as Christians we are called to be concerned for our nation and this last week a whole range of issues of national importance hang in the balance. Not only do we have a hung parliament, but it has happened at a moment of financial difficulty unprecedented, some say, since the war.

This is also the week when the German cabinet agreed to pay 22.4 billion euros to Greece in an attempt to save the euro-zone from meltdown. No-one knows whether it will work. Today Germany goes to the polls and Angela Merkel is likely to be severely punished for a decision which 80% of Germans opposed. Who knows what Europe will look like in a year.

And then there is the “potentially unprecedented” environmental disaster unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico as oil continues to spill into the sea. For a moment we have almost forgotten our soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, the slow burning crisis of global warming and who knows what else.

A good number of wise commentators suggest that our actual situation is a good bit better than many other moments in the last fifty years. But our mood is definitely more anxious. In 1997 40% of Britons agreed that “Britain is becoming a worse place to live”<sup>1</sup> but today that figure has risen to 71%.

How should Christians respond? This morning I want to suggest to you that we should respond with confidence.

### **Bible makes extraordinary bold claims**

God is sovereign over everything

Over nations and politics

Over nature itself

Over yours and my individual life

Not in a way which presently eliminates evil

One day all evil will be eliminated

Meanwhile God has set a limit on evil, and will not let it thwart his ultimate good purposes.

“trouble may come but you are eternally safe”

This week I have been meditating on Psalm 46

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<sup>1</sup> Prospect Magazine, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/how-britain-has-changed-since-1997/>

It portrays the turbulence of the world.  
Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;

But it also portrays the power of God who controls all things by his  
word.

he lifts his voice, the earth melts. (Psalm 46:6)

And it describes the response we should have

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted  
in the earth.” (Psalm 46:10)

### **Many people say “I can’t believe that”**

#### **I reply – “step back for a moment. Look at the big picture.”**

Who would have believed that an insignificant pastoralist living nearly  
four thousand years ago would become “the father of many  
nations”?

But that is what God promised Abraham – And today Abraham is  
looked to by millions upon millions of people around the world as  
the father of their faith.

Who would have believed that twelve rural peasants living two  
thousand years ago would be the foundation on which a global  
movement of Christian disciples would be built?

But Jesus said that is what he was going to do through his disciples,  
and today nobody can deny that he was telling the truth.

As the prophet Isaiah says

See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring  
into being I announce them to you.” (Isaiah 42:9)

The Bible presents a great coherent story of the whole of history –  
which still stands

God’s word has been proved true in the grand sweep of history

Nations may be in uproar, kingdoms may fall, but the word of God  
stands forever.

So when the Bible says to Christians

... that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the  
future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will  
be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans  
8:38–39)

We can believe it!

That is the background we need as we approach Matt 8:23ff

### **What we have learned so far**

Matthew written to people who felt marginalised, and tossed about by  
forces much greater than themselves

Sets out to show that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was  
exactly what the Old Testament had predicted.

From chapter 11 onwards Matthew explains that the Old Testament  
expected him to appear weak  
expected him to be rejected and crucified

But in Matthew 8-9 he is establishing the underlying truth – Jesus is  
unstoppable.

In our section this – Jesus wields all the sovereign power of God.

## 1. Jesus wields all the sovereign power of God

### **Over nature – vv23-27**

A dangerous storm arises – v24

The sea stood for all forces opposed to God – uniquely terrifying.

But Jesus is asleep!

No doubt tiredness – but also complete calm of a man in control.

The disciples show some faith – but it is “a grasping at straws” faith  
“save us we are going to drown”

Jesus wakes and WHILE THE STORM IS STILL RAGING rebukes  
them

Please sort it out Jesus – we can discuss the weaknesses in my faith  
later.

- But that is not the way he works – we must learn in the storm, before it is taken away.

Then with a word he calms the storm. V26b.

In the OT God controls the forces of nature by his word

Now Jesus does.

- There is nothing that will come upon you that Jesus cannot subdue with a word
  - Volcanoes can be extinguished as easily as a smoking candle
  - Politicians can be thrown into confusion by the tiniest whisper from his mouth
- You may find yourself in a storm
  - Jesus may appear to be asleep – but he is in control.

### **Over spiritual forces of evil – vv28-34**

Two madmen approach Jesus – v28

Behind this madness are spiritual forces of evil

Demon possession in the form that Jesus meets it here – not common in  
our culture

Behind all disorder and violence lies the Devil.

He loves to stir things up any way he can – and these two men are in  
his grip.

Jesus response – with a word drives the Demons into a herd of pigs –  
v32

Why into the pigs? Not clear.

Powerful visual witness to his intention to destroy all evil.

- Evil is defeated – there may be many battles to come but D-Day has happened and now it is only a matter of time before VE-Day – final victory.

### **Over our salvation – 9:1-8**

A paralysed man is brought to Jesus – but Jesus speaks about forgiveness – v2

Focussing towards our ultimate problem

Nature will be subdued – God will finally create a new heaven and a new earth

Evil will be subdued – God will finally banish Satan eternally

“But will I be a part of that?” – we need forgiveness

Forgiveness is the prerogative of God – hence Jesus get accused of blasphemy – v3

But Jesus proves his claim by making the man walk – v6

- Your ultimate need is God’s forgiveness
- Jesus can forgive all your sins

## 2. Reactions

### **Timidity – 8:26**

“Why are you such wimps?”

### **Amazement and confusion – 8:27**

### **Hostility – 8:34**

They had lost a significant amount of their wealth

“Begged him”

The Centurion – begged to help

Now another gentile group – beg him to go away.

### **Awe and worship – 9:8**

- To people not yet following Christ
  - Not uncommon to ask him to go away – costly, threatening, demanding.
- To Christians – are you going to be timid?
  - What intimidates you?
    - Other people’s opinions of you?
    - Financial insecurity?
  - What is God calling you to do?
    - Not necessarily the grand gesture
- To the church – what is God calling us to do?
  - My calling – to help you be people who worship Jesus in awe.
  - Our calling
    - Reach out to “the peoples of East Oxford and the world”
    - To nurture and disciple rock solid Christians
    - To produce leaders – who will shape the future for Christ.
  - Enormous obstacles
    - Finance
    - Hostility from people
    - Our own sinfulness