

**What Kind of Man is This?**  
(Matthew 8:23-9:8)

The question I'd like you to think about this morning is, "Are you a believer or an unbeliever?" It's not always easy to know. After Jesus fed the 5000, He sent His disciples home in their boat while He stayed on the unpopulated shore of the Sea of Galilee to spend time alone with His Father and then Jesus walks home - across the surface of the lake. The disciples haven't made much progress because of the wind and the current and when they see Jesus walking on the water, they freak out and think He's a ghost. Jesus says, "Calm calm down, it's Me." Then Peter does something remarkable. He says, "If it is You, command me to join You out there on the water." Peter believed that if Jesus commanded him to do something, Jesus would supply the ability to do it. Do you believe that anything Jesus commands He will also enable you to do; that apart from Him we can do nothing but that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me? That's what a life of faith in Jesus looks like. Jesus tells Peter, "Come on out," Peter got out of the boat and began walking toward Jesus like a toddler taking his first steps toward his parents - and probably with the same silly grin on his face - until he noticed how big the waves are once you get out of the boat and that what he was doing is impossible and Peter begins to sink. Just before he goes under he prays the shortest prayer in the Bible, "Lord, save me!" And Jesus pulls him up and says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matt. 14:31) Now was Peter a believer or an unbeliever? He was the only disciple who got out of the boat, taking a step nobody else took. Peter trusted Jesus until he didn't and that's a great picture of us. We're believers in some situations and unbelievers in others. There are times I trust Jesus and there are times I don't - all in the same day. In fact, if I could hear Jesus audibly, I wonder how often I would hear, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

If you are just getting acquainted with Christianity, one thing you'll discover is that Christianity is not a religion but a relationship; getting to know Jesus better and better and trusting Him more and more with every aspect of life as we move increasingly from unbelief to belief. That's why Hebrews 11:6 says, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God for he who comes to God must believe that God is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*" Why is it impossible to please God without faith? I must have faith to come to God. 1 Tim. 1:4 says that "*...the provision of God - everything that God has for us - is by faith.*" God works in the lives of those who expect Him to work. Paul writes in Gal. 2:20, "*I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live by Christ who lives within me and the life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" We begin our relationship with Jesus by faith and then we grow in our relationship with Jesus by faith. So a better question to ask is "Am I moving from unbelief to belief or from belief to unbelief?" There are a lot of folks in America who call themselves Christians because they trusted Jesus in the past, asking Him to come into their life, to forgive their sins and to take them to heaven - but not because they believe in Him today. For them living as a Christian is more about attending meetings and keeping rules than about trusting Jesus each day. Peter's experience is a great reminder that faith is always dynamic, never static. There are times I believe and times I don't. And I am not growing in my relationship with Christ unless I am choosing to trust Him each day. So how do I keep moving from unbelief to belief? The better I know Jesus, the more I'll trust Him; and the more I trust Him, the closer I'll follow Him and that's Matthew's point in the passage we'll look at today. I entitled this morning's message, "*What Kind of Man is This?*" Matthew tells three consecutive stories of people in awe of Jesus because He does what no other man can do. He controls the uncontrollable, redeems the unredeemable and forgives the unforgiveable. Today I want to look at our journey from unbelief to belief and how believing the truth about Jesus transforms us.

Matthew 8:23-27 is about how Jesus controls the uncontrollable (Matt. 8:23-27) *"When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; (Most of Jesus' disciples grew up around the Sea of Galilee yet none has ever seen a storm like this one. Hurricane force winds, rowing like mad to get to top of a wave the size of a mountain before it breaks; only to face the even bigger wave which follows; this is the scariest situation these guys have ever been in) "...but Jesus Himself was asleep. (Do you ever feel like Jesus is asleep when you need Him most? There's no sense of His presence, no peace that passes understanding, no supernatural courage; you just feel alone and abandoned. The disciples are fighting for their lives and Jesus is asleep. "And they came to {Him} and woke Him, saying, "Save {us,} Lord; we are perishing!" He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" (Jesus doesn't correct them for asking for help. Jesus rebukes their panic and unbelief. "Why are you so scared? Where is your faith?) Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. (Now His disciples get really scared. Mark tells us that they became very much afraid. Jesus scares them more than the storm did.) The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Matt. 8:23-27) Who is this man who controls the weather, who does what only God can do? Notice that the antidote to fear is greater fear. The more I see who Jesus really is, the less in awe I will be of the things that normally would terrify me. That's what Jesus meant when He asked, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith? You were never in any danger because I was with you and I control what you cannot." The disciples didn't trust Him because they really didn't know Him. That's why they are surprised and in awe. "What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"*

How do I know if I believe in the Jesus of the Bible? I will refuse to let fear control me. The life of faith is not passive, it's active. I can't submit to God unless I also resist the devil. I can't believe in Jesus unless I disbelieve in everything contrary to what Jesus says and to who Jesus is. That's why the command which appears most often in the Bible is "Fear not." Fear is the opposite of faith. If I'm ruled by fear, I am not ruled by faith because if I fear anything more than I fear God, I am not believing in the God of the Bible. That's why Jesus asks his disciples in the middle of the mother of all storms, "Why are you so afraid? Where is your faith?" The doctor says, "There's something strange on this x-ray we need to check out further." Your boss says, "We have to downsize and unfortunately your job has been eliminated." Your teacher tells the class that each of you will be giving a speech in front of the entire school. Your spouse announces the family is flying to the mid-west to see her mom and you hate flying. Your friends tell you they are all going to jump off the big rock into the lake and if you don't do it with them, you're chicken. Any time we face something unfamiliar and beyond our ability to control, we panic and self-protection becomes more important to us than anything else. That's just human nature and why "Fear not for I am with you," appears so often in the Bible. After Jesus calms the storm, His disciples realize that because Jesus was with them and He controls everything, they should have stayed calm and kept rowing. And if I believe in the Jesus of the Bible, I will go to war daily against my fears. I will not let my heart be troubled nor let it be afraid because Jesus is bigger than whatever storm I'm in. So, one way to tell if you are moving from unbelief to belief or from belief to unbelief is to ask yourself, "What am I afraid of right now? Where is fear keeping me from doing what I know Jesus has called me to do?" For me, it is taking the initiative to engage with every person I have the opportunity to engage with rather than waiting for them to reach out to me. For most of my life, I've waited for people to show interest in me before I show interest in them for fear of being rejected or of looking foolish. If they reach out to me, I'm in control. If I reach out to them, I don't know what will happen. As a result, I've been aloof and unapproachable and I believe this has limited what Christ can do through me more than anything else. But Jesus has called me to become like Him as His disciple and Jesus always makes the first move. He reached out to us long before we reached out to Him. He loved us first. He didn't wait for people to reach out to Him and if I believe in Him, neither will I. People won't see Jesus in me unless they know me and the closer the relationship, the more opportunities Christ has to minister to them through me. That's my current arena where I'm learning to choose faith over fear and giving up control to trust in His control. What's yours? Are you battling fear today or have you surrendered and prefer to stay on shore rather than to get into the boat with Jesus? How will the fact that Jesus controls the uncontrollable shape your life today?

Jesus controls the uncontrollable and He redeems the unredeemable which is Matthew's point in the next story. *"When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, (a predominantly non-Jewish area on the south east side of the Sea of Galilee) two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. {They were} so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way.* (Jesus takes His disciples through the mother of all storms and then on a road through a graveyard nobody else uses and the disciples find out why. First they hear screaming and then they see two naked men, covered in blood and bruises, charging down the hill toward them. These guys were tormented by demons and in their torment, they cut themselves with rocks and lived in the tombs. According to Mark and Luke, the locals had tried chaining them up but they were incredibly strong because of the demons inside of them and broke the chains. That's why nobody took this road any more. These two crazy men couldn't be stopped and they couldn't be cured. The best you could do was to just avoid them. Do you know somebody like that? They seem unredeemable and you've abandoned hope that they will ever change. You just try to avoid them as much as you can. Once again, the disciples are scared to death – until the demon-possessed men recognize Jesus and the attack stops before it begins. *"And they cried out, saying, "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"* The demons recognize Jesus and they're terrified. *"What are You doing here? Are you here to punish us before the time of judgment?"* The disciples just saw the wind and the sea obey Jesus and now they see demons cowering before Him in fear. Who is this guy?) *Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them* (around 2000 pigs according to Mark.) *The demons {began} to entreat Him, saying, "If You {are going to} cast us out, send us into the herd of swine."* The demons know Jesus won't allow them continue to torment these men so they beg Him to let them stay in this area around the Sea of Galilee rather than as Luke records to send them into the abyss – which is called the Bottomless Pit in Revelation 9 and is the normal dwelling place of demons. Apparently these demons would rather live on the surface of the earth – even if it means living in pigs.) *And He said to them, "Go!" And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters.* (People must be easier for demons to control than pigs because when the pigs experience the presence of the demons, they stampede over a cliff and drown in the lake. This story leaves us with a lot of unanswered questions about what does Jesus have against pigs and why Jesus didn't send the demons directly into the abyss and what happened to the demons after the pigs drowned – but that's not the point of this story. The point is that just as Jesus controls nature, He controls the demons as well; and that there are no hopeless cases with Jesus. Nobody is unredeemable. My little brother and I grew up in the same alcoholic home. I became the dutiful son who rebelled behind my parents' back and Paul became the outwardly rebellious younger brother. By the time he was a teen he was already addicted to drugs and had done time in a correctional institution. He joined the Navy and they eventually asked him to leave. Our parents kept trying to help him, giving him money and buying him a semi when he thought he wanted to be a truck driver – which he sold and bought a bigger truck on credit which he eventually lost because he couldn't make the payments. They even purchased a home so that he and his wife would have somewhere to live but he refinanced it to get money for drugs and lost it to foreclosure. For decades I watched helplessly as Paul broke my parents' heart again and again. They both died without seeing him change. In fact, when my mom died, his name was the last word she uttered because it had been so long since she had seen him even though he and his wife lived only a few miles away. He did show up after she died and I begged him to use his half of our inheritance to make a fresh start but his addiction blew through that money in less than a year. Paul was 50 by this time and had been on drugs since his early teens. He looked like a hopeless case. He was convicted again on drug charges but in prison, he met Christ and his life was transformed. Just as Jesus delivered these two men whom everybody else had given up on, Jesus saved my brother. Today he is a counselor for Narcotics Anonymous, is still married to the same woman and loves Christ. Jesus redeems the unredeemable and if I believe in Jesus, I won't give up hope on anybody. You may have a family member like Paul. Don't stop praying for him. Don't give up hope and surrender to despair. You can't change him but Jesus can. You may be in a hopeless situation yourself; you may be addicted yourself or stuck with a hopeless

relationship or health issue or financial situation; but if we believe in the Jesus of the Bible, we will never be without hope because Jesus can change anything; and if He doesn't change it, He can use it for good. If I walk by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me, then I will go to war daily against despair. I will keep on believing that all things are possible for him who believes; that God is working all things together for good for those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. Now there's an interesting postscript to the story. After the pigs drown, *"The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region."* (Matthew 8:28-34) Think about that. These two demon-possessed men were the greatest threat to public safety in the area. No one could control them. The road past the tombs was unused. Yet after Jesus heals these men, the locals beg Him to leave. Why? Both Mark and Luke tell us that the local people were terrified about what had happened; that like the disciples in the boat, they were more afraid of Jesus than they were of the demons. What kind of man is this who commands the spirits and they obey? That's why some of you struggle with whether to follow Jesus or not. You know He can deliver you from the things which are enslaving you but you don't know what He might do then. Following Him means giving up control of my life to someone far more powerful than I am. That's why many people who could believe never will. They don't understand how much He loves us and that brings us to the third story in this passage.

Jesus controls the uncontrollable, He redeems the unredeemable and finally He forgives the unforgiveable. *"Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over {the sea} and came to His own city. And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed.* (Again Mark and Luke supply more details to this story: Jesus is teaching in a house which is jammed with people and when four men bring their paralyzed friend on a stretcher to be healed, they unable to even get into the house. So they climb up on the roof, make a hole and lower their friend on his stretcher down right in front of where Jesus is sitting. None of the gospel writers mention whether the home owner's insurance covered the damage to the roof.) *Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven." And some of the scribes said to themselves, "This {fellow} blasphemes."* (How can anyone tell someone that his sins are forgiven? Only God can forgive sins. By the way, notice the scribes don't say this out loud – but they are thinking it.) *And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? ("Why don't you just come out and ask Me how I can tell this man his sins are forgiven? Why do you keep your doubts to yourselves?"* Jesus is not afraid of doubts and neither are we. We've always wanted Creekside to be a place where people could safely ask questions and express doubts and find answers. And this is especially important if you're young. You are just getting started in your walk with Jesus. You will have questions and doubts. Everybody does. Doubts are not dangerous – unless they are unexpressed. Whenever you have doubts and questions about the faith, ask. If we can't answer your questions, we'll keep looking until we can. Jesus wants the scribes to be honest about their doubts and so do we. So Jesus asks the scribes another question,) *"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'?* (Which is easier to say? It's easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," because who knows whether they really are? It's harder to say "Get up and walk," because everybody will know immediately whether the paralyzed guy walks or not.) *But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--then He \*said to the paralytic, "Get up, pick up your bed and go home." And he got up and went home. But when the crowds saw {this,} they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men."* (Matthew 9:1-8) Once again, when people see what Jesus can do, they are filled with awe and fear. What kind of man can forgive sins? Only those who are sinned against can forgive those sins which means that ultimately God alone can forgive sins. So to show that He can forgive sins, Jesus does what only God can do and heals a paralyzed man. The antidote to fear is faith in Jesus who controls the uncontrollable. The antidote to despair is faith in Jesus who redeems the unredeemable. And the antidote to guilt and shame is faith in Jesus who forgives the unforgiveable. So how do I know if I believe in Jesus? I fight guilt and shame. You're an unusual person if you haven't done things in your life that you're ashamed of. How could I have done that or failed

to do that? And that guilt and shame can prevent you from getting to where God wants you to go. The devil is called the accuser because he loves to remind us of what we've done and cannot fix. He wants to keep us chained to the past. I believe that most addictions are rooted in guilt and shame; that we're just looking for some brief escape from feeling so bad about ourselves – by overeating or drinking too much or watching too much TV or porn or overworking: whatever dulls the pain of regret. But if I believe that Jesus forgives me, I don't hide from my guilt or justify my guilt or wallow in my guilt because when Christ died on the cross, He died for all my sins, past, present and future and that I am holy and pure in God's sight and every day is a fresh start so I forget what lies behind and press on to what lies ahead rather than allowing guilt and regret to cripple me. But have you ever heard somebody say, "I know God has forgiven me but I can't forgive myself?" As if they are more offended by their sin than God is? That's not a sensitive conscience, that's pride. That person believes that what I think of myself is truer than what God thinks about me. I'm not sad that I disappointed God, I'm sad that I disappointed myself. God's forgiveness means less to me than achieving the standard I set for themselves or the standard other people have set for me – and that is idolatry which is making anything more important than God. If you can't accept God's forgiveness which Jesus suffered so much to obtain for you; if regret and guilt continues to control you today; or if you're afraid to try because you might fail again – then you have yet to believe in the Jesus of the Bible. If Jesus forgives me, I have no right to refuse to forgive myself. That's not piety, its pride and I need to repent. If I really believe that Christ has forgiven me, I will forgive myself and I'll forgive others – which is a topic for another day.

So do you see yourself moving from unbelief to belief or from belief to unbelief? The only way to keep moving toward belief is to choose to trust Jesus every day. That's why Paul writes, "The life I live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." Do I live all of life in light of who Jesus is and what He has done and is doing for me? That's what the Bible means when it talks about taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ and walking in a manner worthy of the gospel. The better I know Jesus, the more I'll trust Him and the more I trust Him, the closer I'll follow Him and the closer I follow Him, the more of Him I will experience. So how do I get to know Him better? Jesus reveals Himself in the Bible. The Bible is not about us, it is about Him and whenever I read the Bible, I need to ask what does this teach me about Jesus or God, and then how would I live if I believed this? And then go do that. That's the way we grow in faith. CS Lewis was one of the most beloved Christian writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but Lewis wasn't always a believer. He describes how he slowly went from atheism to theism – from believing there wasn't a God to believing there was, largely through the influence of Christian friends like JRR Tolkien of *Lord of the Ring* fame and other believing faculty members and authors. Lewis tells about coming to faith in Jesus in his book, *Surprised by Joy*: After a late night discussion with Tolkien and another friend, Lewis went to the zoo the following day. Here's how he describes what happened. "I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion.... It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake." That's often what the journey to faith looks like. We don't believe in God or don't know if there's a God and then we meet some Christians and over time, God's existence begins to seem more and more plausible until one day, we realize that we believe. Not necessarily with a lot of drama or emotion but as Lewis describes it, "I was blind but now I see." If that's where you are this morning, tell Jesus. "I do believe in You. Come into my life, forgive my sins, make me the person You created me to be." And begin the great adventure of faith.