

Key idea: Jesus has the authority to re-order the natural, the supernatural, the whole human, which displays his identity as God.

1. Putting things right...

Marie Kondo has made a name for herself – and a lucrative business – by re-ordering people’s lives and spaces. Put simply, she helps people tidy up! From her perspective, if you spend time on her website and read interviews with her, she is helping people re-order their worlds so that they bring great joy. From her perspective, she is helping people to put things in their right place, put things right, so that they have the maximum joy possible.

As I read an interview with her in Weekend Australian last week, all sorts of thoughts were going through my mind. In this world that seems so dis-ordered at the moment, I was struck by how much we need to meet the one who doesn’t just tidy up our offices, bedrooms and kitchens – we need to meet the one who re-orders the whole world, from the natural to the supernatural to the whole human being. We need to meet Jesus as he is – God!

PRAY...

2. The authority of Jesus...

Matthew wants his readers to meet Jesus. He is writing about Jesus because Jesus is the heart of the gospel – the good news that God has done exactly as he promised, that he has dealt with the broken state of this world by rolling back the curse of judgement for sin, and bringing his approval. This has all happened in Jesus.

Matthew wants his readers to meet Jesus, so he writes this account of his life – at least a biography but more than that, it is the gospel, the good news.

Matthew has been making sure we meet Jesus as he is, as he works in this world. We have seen the authority of Jesus as the Teacher and Preacher, as he gathered his close followers on the mount, and the crowds listened in. We have seen the authority of Jesus as the Healer, the Saviour, as he deals with the whole package of sin in his daily life. And, we have seen the authority of Jesus as Lord, as the one who defines what it means to follow him wholeheartedly. Matthew 4:23 and 9:35 give us the bookends of this section showing Jesus at work, and the identity revealed in him. The whole picture of Jesus at work finishes with his second large teaching chunk in chapters 10-12.

3. Jesus puts nature right (8:23-27)

Jesus had given the command to his followers to go over the water, to another region. They obey him, and the group sets off across the Sea of Galilee. As they go, nature rears its ugly head – **look at verse 24... READ.**

It is a mega-storm. It is a storm enough to dwarf the boat they are in – presumably a fishing boat that might have belonged to one of Jesus' disciples. As it sinks into the troughs of the waves, it is effectively disappearing.

It is a storm enough to scare the living daylights out of the disciples, some of whom are fishermen – **look at verse 25... READ.**

The contrast with Jesus is striking – he is fast asleep in the boat. He has no worries. They wake him. Their fear is conveyed in three short sharp words: ‘Lord, save, dying’.

Matthew has painted such a wonderful picture for us as the readers at this point. And as Jesus speaks and rises, he is undeniably at the centre of the events.

Jesus speaks first to his disciples – **look at verse 26... READ.**

His words to his disciples mirror his words from the Sermon on the Mount – from Matthew 6:30. It seems that Jesus is drawing to the attention of the disciples the truth that, if you trust Jesus as Lord, and if you are focused on the priority of the Kingdom of God, then what have you to fear? Put simply, if Jesus is your boss, and if the Kingdom of God is your priority, then you will have what you need to be God’s people. Jesus is not deriding their faith, but exhorting them to trust as they say they do!

His words to nature are a rebuke – isn’t that a striking idea? Across the three Gospels written by Matthew, Mark and Luke, each author uses the same word – Jesus ‘rebuked’ nature. He commands the elements to return to their rightful place, to be calm and still before him.

It is such a powerful statement. It is an immediate display of authority. Whether or not, as Leon Morris hints, there were demonic forces at work stirring up the storm – and it is a legitimate observation, given the sudden ferocity of the storm – the display of Jesus' authority is awesome. And the disciples recognize this – **look at verse 27... READ.**

They have never met a type of man as this. They have never met a man who could rule creation as it should be ruled. They have never met a man who can re-order creation, putting it right.

And that is the unmistakable image we have of Jesus here – the man who re-orders creation, putting the disorderly and unruly creation back in its right order. When you consider again who Jesus is – the one promised by God through Abraham's family, the one who will rule the universe from David's family – his rebuke of creation is to be expected. I mean, who else could bring blessing to the world, dealing with the curse of sin which has broken the world, which has broken the world, which has made the natural so disordered?

4. Jesus puts the super-natural right (8:28-34)

Jesus and his disciples reach the other side of the water, and it really is the other side, in every sense of the word. As you scan the description Matthew gives of the scene that greets you, as an original reader, there is an undeniably dirty feel to this place, an other-worldly sense. The 'region of the Gadarenes' was a non-Jewish region. The men that meet them are 'demon-possessed'. They emerge from the graveyard. They are violent and abusive.

And, in the background is a large mob of pigs – everything about the scene proclaims ‘Unclean! Dirty! Disordered!’.

The two men recognize Jesus – **look at verse 29... READ.**

We have already seen that Jesus has power over the demons – remember that evening scene after Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law? But here we see it expressed more completely.

These demons know Jesus – they don’t have to ask, ‘What kind of man is this?’

These demons know the authority of Jesus – did you see the way in which they view their relationship with Jesus and the time that they have, in verse 29? They know that there is ‘the time’, the moment when the authority of Jesus as king over the universe will be displayed. They know that at that ‘time’, they will be vanquished once and for all. They fear that Jesus has brought that final moment of their existence – their ‘torment’ – forward to the present. In essence, they know that they are confronted by God-in-the-flesh.

They beg Jesus – **look at verses 30-31... READ.**

Jesus responds – **look at verse 32... READ.**

It is a simple command. It is meant to recall for us, as readers, the same command that Jesus had spoken to their boss, back in Matthew 4:10. There, Jesus was tempted to display his identity in alternative ways. Here, he just displays his identity: he has the

authority to re-order, set right, the supernatural. And so, the demons are cast out, the pigs are affected, and the two demoniacs are, presumably, set right and re-established as humans.

The swineherds run to the nearby town – **look at verse 33... READ.**

We don't know what the swineherds said. But the way the language seems to work, they told the town 'everything, and also what had happened to the two men'. Knowing humans, and the occupation of these men, it is not hard to imagine that the dominant theme is economic – 'The pigs are gone! Oh, and by the way, those two blokes who used to terrorise the town at the cemetery, they are ok now'.

The result is surprising – **look at verse 34... READ.**

That is not the result you'd expect. Jesus has just re-ordered the supernatural world, in a small area. Jesus has just displayed, here and now, the power that he will display on the last day of the world. Jesus has just set the demons in their right place, returned two men to their right place, and made the area safe again. And the townspeople ask him to leave?

I think a clue is offered by Matthew in his writing. It is striking that in verse 31, the demons 'begged' Jesus, and in verse 34, the whole town 'begged' Jesus – it is the same word. It is almost as if Matthew wants us to see, as readers, that the townspeople were happier with the state of affairs with the demons, and with their pigs, than they were without the demons and without their pigs.

They are seemingly happier with their dirty and disordered world, so long as the pigs are present, than with the re-ordered world, where two men are restored, the safety of the road is restored, and the demons are banished.

5. Jesus puts the whole human right (9:1-8)

Jesus listens to the townspeople – that is amazing, isn't it? – and he heads back over the water. When he reaches his hometown, he is met by a very different welcoming party to the one he had just met in the Gadarenes – **look at verse 2... READ.**

A paralysed man is carried by 'some men', on a mat. Jesus 'sees' their 'faith'. And he pronounces a remarkable verdict – he pronounces that the paralysed man is forgiven his sins.

It is remarkable on so many levels. On our purely human level, it is remarkable because it is not what we expect, nor what we assume the paralysed man desired. It is remarkable because Jesus has just demonstrated something the demons knew – he had the power of the eternal verdict and he can pronounce it now, in this day and age. It is remarkable because this man's are forgiven at this immediate point. It is remarkable because, weaving all these truths together, Jesus has completely revealed his identity: he is God in the flesh.

Think on that... If sin is 'the attitude and action that says, 'I am God and God is not'', and if sin is committed against God alone (cf. Ps.51:4), then the only one who can state, 'your sins are

forgiven' must be God. Jesus has just displayed the very thing his name, and coming, are concerned with – remember the angel's words to Joseph in Matthew 1:21?

It is exactly the conclusion that those watching make – **look at verse 3... READ.**

The scribes, the religious lawyers, are grossly offended by Jesus' revelation. It smacks, to their minds and hearts, of 'blasphemy', of violating the authority and significance of God.

Jesus, ironically, then displays his goodness – **look at verses 4-7... READ.**

As the paralysed man was carried to Jesus, Jesus was 'seeing' their faith. As these scribes are thinking 'wicked thoughts', Jesus is 'seeing' their hearts. It is a significant confrontation – not to accept Jesus' revelation is 'wicked'. Not to recognize Jesus as he is – God-in-the-flesh – is 'wicked'.

The question Jesus poses them is, in one sense, an exercise in the hypothetical, at least for humans. It borders on the ridiculous, because no human can do either 'easily'. That is why, I think, Jesus doesn't answer his own question – did you notice that? Instead, he cuts to the heart of the matter: he is the human who is the Son of Man, who is God-in-the-flesh, and he will demonstrate his whole concern. And, so, he heals the man.

The revelation of Jesus as God comes at the climax of these three miracles. Jesus sets the natural right. Jesus sets the

supernatural right. Then, in one man, Jesus sets the whole man right – inside and outside. Only God can do this. Jesus must be God!

This conclusion is unavoidable. And the crowd is awestruck, as anyone should be when the glimpse God-in-the-flesh – **look at verses 8... READ.**

6. Jesus has the authority, as God, to set things right

Marie Kondo loves to set things right. In her philosophy, driven by the desire for joy, such tidying and ordering is about bringing the maximum joy. But, in a broken world, it is a constant battle with no end in sight.

Jesus comes to set things right, completely. And he has the authority to do it, completely. Matthew wants us to see this:

(i) The **authority** of Jesus to re-order the natural, the supernatural and the whole human is so clear. He sets the natural right, rebuking the broken physical world. He sets the supernatural right, commanding those demons to 'go', displaying the power that will come in all its completeness 'in the time'. And, he sets the whole human right, starting with their root illness – sin – and bringing restoration to the body.

(ii) The **identity**, then, of Jesus is unmistakable: he must be God. Only the Creator can restore the natural. Only the Creator can banish the supernatural. Only the Creator can forgive sin and restore the flesh.

(iii) How do you **react** to this authority and identity? Matthew is so obviously interested in our reaction, as readers and witnesses. He makes this concern clear as he continually highlights the reaction of people watching Jesus – did you notice that in these three episodes each has a clear statement about how people reacted to Jesus?

Jesus' authority and identity raises questions, as people deal with him – 'Which box can I put this man in?'

Jesus' authority and identity raises opposition – confronted by the God of the universe in flesh, people often would rather their own universe, and their own 'godness', even at the expense of wholeness and restoration!

Jesus' authority and identity can bring immense comfort and restoration. It is a wonderful truth to be proclaimed that the only one who can set the natural right, the supernatural right, and the whole human right, has come and lived and died and risen, to do exactly that! Faced by an invisible virus that has turned this world upside down, and exposed our disorder and unruly rebellion, this is immensely comforting and wonderful: Jesus is God, who came to set the world aright. Jesus is God who has come to deal with sin, and all the damage it has done to us and this world. Jesus is God who has come to forgive sin, and only he can do that!

What do you make of Jesus? Are you struggling to fit him in a normal human box? Would you prefer him to 'leave the district'? Do you reject his revelation as God-in-the-flesh? Or, do you come to him, knowing that through him alone, sins are forgiven, humans

Place: NAC

Date: 10/5/2020

Passage: Matthew 8:23-9:8: Jesus has the authority to put things right...

are restored, the supernatural is set right, and the natural is re-ordered?