

## Preaching 23.02.25 - Luke 8:22-25: Revelation 4

*May the words of my lips and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You O God.*

When I left uni, almost immediately I got sent to prison. And I hadn't even committed a crime. And they gave me keys.

That was for work. Sometimes things are not as they seem. Whether a story is really familiar, like the passage from Luke about the calming of the storm, or unfamiliar, like Revelation 4, it's always useful to stop and think - we can dig a bit deeper to see more of what's going on. Today we'll see more of the majesty of God, and how He calls us to reign with Him. PAUSE

Many of the disciples were fishermen by trade. They would've been used to unideal conditions at sea. Here, though, they're clearly scared for their lives. This is not a light wind. This is a storm big enough to terrify professional seafarers. In Matthew's account of this passage (Matt 8:24), he describes the wind storm using the word σεισμὸς (seismos), which also means earthquake (which as a Greek nerd, I love). This gives us something of an idea of the kind of storm we're talking about. Yet, Jesus calmly speaks to the storm, and it fully dies down. Jesus is completely present with the disciples, yet also completely transcendent. He demonstrates here how He is in absolute control of the powers of creation. God is the creator of the wind and waves.

More than that, as Revelation 4:11 says, God is the Creator of the entire universe. This universe includes our galaxy, the Milky Way, and billions of other galaxies. To give you an idea of how massive this is, light takes 8 minutes and 20 seconds to reach us from the sun. If you flew non-stop to the sun, it would take roughly 21 years. That's a lot of in-flight films.

Our nearest galaxy, Andromeda, is about 2.5 million light years away. And this is only the nearest galaxy, let alone the billions of other galaxies in the universe.

God created it all, and has total power over it. This gives us a glimpse into how majestic and transcendent God is. In this context, Jesus calming the storm is really only a minuscule fraction of what God can do.

Yet, this is also the God who knows each and every one of us intimately. Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:30 'even the very hairs of your head are all numbered'. God who made this universe, who calms storms with a word, knows you so intimately He knows how many hairs are on your head. But God doesn't just know about us - we'd expect that from a God able to create the universe. God loves us, and wants us to have a relationship with Him. He made this possible through Jesus' death on the cross, and His rising again.

This is good news.

The natural response to this is amazement and worship. And that's what we see in the passage from Revelation.

Revelation is a letter that describes a vision that John, one of Jesus' disciples, was given while in exile on the Island of Patmos. In this part of his vision, in Revelation 4, he's shown 'what must take place after this' (4:1). This describes the future reality, when God will fully establish His Kingdom on Earth and make everything new.

Now, as we read this passage, there's some fairly out-there descriptions. Revelation can be pretty wacky and seem quite distant from reality. It's easy to be put off the weird and unfamiliar imagery. There is no denying how weird it can often seem - I mean, creatures with eyes all over them [come and chat to me afterwards if you want to hear more about that!!] But we can learn a lot from it, and it's worth persevering and digging deeper, because there's so much depth and richness contained in the imagery and symbolism. You'll be glad to hear I don't have time to go into all the different images in this passage, but we will have a look at a couple of them.

For example, having talked about God sitting on the throne, John describes 24 elders sitting on 24 thrones around God's throne. Now one crucial thing to look out for when you're reading Revelation is the significance of the numbers. Numbers are significant throughout the Bible but they have particular significance in this book. The 24 is not random - it likely references the 12

apostles added to the 12 tribes of Israel, representing the people of God before and after Jesus' Incarnation. These elders are 'seated' on thrones around God's throne which means that they are seeing God in the fullness of who He is. The disciples in the boat saw a small display of God's power, relatively, when we think about the God of the entire universe, but the elders on the thrones are seeing God's glory in its fullness. If the disciples responded with 'fear and amazement', how much more would the elders, seeing all that God is, respond with the same.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they had to hide when God's glory passed by because it was too great for them to see and live. Yet, because of Jesus, it's not just the elders described in this vision who will see God. This is a promise given to everyone who wants it. We x see God Himself face to face. PAUSE

And actually, God offers us even more than that.

Just before this, Jesus has given John messages to 7 churches. In the message to the final church, in Laodicea, Jesus says 'To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.' (Rev 3:21). 'I will give the right to sit with me on my throne'.

Throughout the Bible, 'sitting', particularly on thrones, is a sign of someone's authority and reign. For example, in 1 Kings 2:12, "Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his kingdom was firmly established". Hebrews says that Jesus 'sat down' once He'd completed His work on earth (1:3).

Here, John is showing us that the mighty God, who created the universe and rules over it, not only knows us, loves us and died for us, but actually invites us to reign with Him on thrones in heaven, giving us authority.

This isn't a one off moment in Revelation - this idea crops up again and again. In 2 Timothy 2:12, it says 'if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He will also deny us'. Likewise, in Ephesians 2:6 Paul says 'God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms'.

This is the hope we have - if we remain faithful to God He actually invites us to reign with Him.

So what does it mean to reign with God? Firstly, it means recognising who we reign with. The majestic Lord of the universe. The Elders here get this: they are worshipping God as they sit, reigning on the thrones. 'Holy, holy holy is the Lord God Almighty'.

Secondly, reigning means joining God in His Kingdom work, serving Him. When God told humanity to 'rule' over creation in Genesis, this meant serving God by stewarding it.

Worship and service are two sides of the same coin. Worship is both an expression of reverence, as shown here when the creatures and elders proclaim God as holy, and an act of devotion to God. In Romans 12:1, Paul says 'in view of God's mercy...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship'. This sacrifice, our service, is a fundamental part of our devotion to God.

But this reigning with and worshiping God is not just a future reign in the New Creation - Jesus invites us to participate in the work of the Kingdom now. This is a glimpse of eternity.

In 1 Corinthians 3:9 Paul calls us 'God's fellow workers'. God wants to partner with you to bring justice and bring about His kingdom. This is nothing to do with who you are or what you've done. This is all because of what Jesus has done - as He says in John 15:5 'apart from me you are nothing'. The disciples definitely discovered that in the boat. Apart from God we are an insignificant bundle of atoms in a tiny corner of the universe. With God, we are a holy people, loved, chosen and reigning with Him. PAUSE

So, where is God calling you today to partner with Him? How can you surrender to our majestic & powerful God? Where is the Spirit leading you, in your sphere of influence, to worship and serve Him, this week?

This will look different for everyone.  
It might be moving to a new job.

It might be sacrificing your time to serve at Church.

It might be speaking out against injustice.

It might be forgiving someone who's deeply hurt you.

It might be letting go of a part of your life where you're clinging to control, and giving it to Jesus.

Whatever it looks like, it will cost you. This is how we'll get a glimpse of what it looks like to reign with God, and see His Kingdom come.