

## What is God like 1 - All Powerful

**Reading: John 14:8-9** “...he who has seen Me (Jesus) has seen the Father....”

### **Introduction:**

No-body on earth has ever seen God (the Father) face to face<sup>1</sup> (**John 1:18**) and then tell us what they discovered. Moses came close to seeing God with the “burning bush” (**Exodus 3:1f.f.**), and on Mount Sinai when God gave him the Ten Commandments (**Exodus 33:19-23; 34:6**). Neither has God the Father come here to reveal Himself in person to show us what He is like. Therefore, it may seem reasonable when some people ask, “*What is God (the Father) like?*”

Following the Passover meal just before His death, Jesus discussed various things with the disciples. At one point in the conversation, Philip asked,

“*Lord, show us the Father....*” (**John 14:8**).

Obviously, Philip wanted to know what God was like<sup>2</sup>. The response Jesus gave to Philip suggests that he should have known by now what God was like. “*Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’*” (**John 14:9**).

We can see from this verse that Jesus had expected Philip (and the other disciples) to have understood by now that God the Father was the same in nature as Jesus Himself. Other New Testament passages also highlight the point that Jesus was making;

“*He is the image of the invisible God....*” (**Colossians 1:15**)

“*....the express image of His person....*” (**Hebrews 1:3**)<sup>3</sup>

In other words, Jesus was the tangible (*i.e.* something that you can see, touch, *etc*) representation of what the invisible God is like.

Therefore, one way that we can answer the question, “*What is God like?*”, is to look at the qualities of Jesus<sup>4</sup>, and see how He lived His life – His power, His actions, His attitudes, and His words.

Over the course of three or four lessons, we will look at various aspects of Jesus life so that we can understand what God is like. In this lesson, we will look at the power Jesus had over both the physical/natural world and the spiritual world, and how that can be a comfort to us today.

## **LESSON**

### **1) Jesus’ power over the laws of nature**

Mankind has been able to harness and use the laws and forces of nature for its own benefit. For example, we can use the wind to move sailing ships across the oceans. We can build dams to store water from rivers, and use gravity to make the water drive hydro electric generators. We use the natural laws of aerodynamics to make aeroplanes that enable us to fly over great distances in

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<sup>1</sup> Except for Jesus – **John 1:1-2, 14**.

<sup>2</sup> The text does not tell us whether Philip wanted to know what God looked like in appearance, or whether he wanted to know what God was like in character or nature.

<sup>3</sup> The context is God the Father referring to His Son, Jesus, being the “*express image*” of God the Father.

<sup>4</sup> We can also see what God is like by looking at the history and His dealings with people in the Old Testament. The primary focus of these lessons is to look at Jesus’ qualities.

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relatively short periods of time. We can use the rays of the sun to provide warmth and solar power. But in spite of all this, we cannot change these laws. We cannot command the sun to stop shining. We cannot force the wind to blow clouds in a particular direction. And we cannot defy the law of gravity if we step over a cliff wearing nothing but our clothes.

But Jesus demonstrated that He did have control over nature. In fact, He was the creator of all things (**John 1:3; Colossians 1:16**), therefore He created these natural laws and forces. And while He was here on earth, He demonstrated this power over these things. Consider the following two examples.

### a) Jesus stops the storm

In **Matthew 8**, Jesus and the disciples had been in Capernaum where Jesus had healed a Centurion's son and Peter's mother in law (vs. **5-15**). When evening had come and many others had been healed, they left in a boat to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (vs. **18, 23**). During the trip, a storm arose. This was not simply a case of the wind picking up a bit, it was a "...*great tempest*..." (vs. **24**). The boat was covered with waves, in danger of being swamped. In fact, the storm was so great that the disciples, some of whom were fishermen and no strangers to the Sea (**Matthew 4:18-22**), thought that they were about to lose their lives (vs. **25**).

So they woke Jesus who was asleep in the boat. Jesus "...*rebuked the winds and the sea*...", *i.e.* He spoke to the wind and the sea telling them to stop, "...*and there was a great calm*..." (vs. **26**).

This was not a case of the wind subsiding a bit, or the sea become not so rough – there was a "*great*" calm – the wind ceased blowing, and the water became flat like a mill-pond.

**Point:** Jesus spoke to the wind and the sea, and they obeyed His command.

### b) Jesus walks on water

On another occasion, the disciples were in a boat crossing the same sea, but without Jesus on board (**Matthew 14:22-33**). Just prior to this event, Jesus had fed the 5000 with the two loaves and five fish (vs. **13-21**). Jesus had sent the disciples on ahead to cross the Sea (vs. **22**) while He went up into the mountain to pray (vs. **23**). However, during the crossing, the disciples faced a strong head wind which caused the sea to be rough, tossing the boat about (vs. **24**). In fact, the parallel account in **John 6:19** says that the disciples had to row the boat in order to make headway.

Then, in the "...*fourth watch of the night*<sup>5</sup>...", Jesus came to them, walking on the water (vs. **25**). Jesus was over-powering the laws of nature by being able to walk on top of the water, rather than sink down into it. This was such an unnatural sight that the disciples thought that they were seeing a ghost, and were fearful (vs. **26**)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> In New Testament times, the night was divided into four watches – the first was from 6pm to 9pm, the second was from 9pm to midnight, the third was from midnight to 3am, and the fourth was from 3am to 6am. Therefore, this event took place between 3am and 6am.

Ref: Clarke's Commentary on the Bible. <http://clarke.biblecommenter.com/matthew/14.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Peter was also able to walk on the water when he went to meet Jesus, but as soon as he took his eyes off Jesus, he sank (vs. **28-31**). In other words, Peter could not do this on his own – *i.e.* by his own power.

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Note that there were four other significant events about this account;

- (i) The disciples had a great head start on Jesus in crossing the lake, but He was able to catch up with them. When they left, Jesus had gone up into a mountain to pray – **Matthew 14:22-23**. He was still on land when they were half-way across the lake - **Mark 6:47**.
- (ii) Although it was dark night on a rough sea, Jesus was able to see and locate where the disciples were in the Sea – **Matthew 14:25; Mark 6:48; John 6:17**.
- (iii) When Jesus got into the boat, the wind ceased immediately – **Matthew 14:32**.
- (iv) Also when Jesus got into the boat, they suddenly arrived at their destination on the other side of the Sea – **John 6:21**.

**Point:** Jesus overcame the laws of nature by walking on water.

### 2) Jesus' power over sickness and death

As well as having power over the natural laws concerning our planet, He also has power over the natural laws concerning our bodies. On numerous occasions throughout the Gospel records, we have records of people coming to Him and being healed of various forms of physical sickness<sup>7</sup>. In fact, one of the reasons that He had so many followers for a time was because people wanted to see Him heal people – e.g. **John 6:2**. Let us consider a few examples.

#### a) Healing the man who had an infirmity for 38 years

**John 5:1-9** takes us the story. People with various forms of diseases and illnesses used to gather at the pool near the Sheep's Gate<sup>8</sup> at Jerusalem (vs.2-3). They gathered here because at certain times, an angel would come and stir the waters of the pool. The first person to step into the pool after the stirring (by the angel) would be healed of their sickness (vs. 4).

Now there was a man there who had an infirmity for 38 years (vs. 5). Whatever the infirmity was, it prevented the man from ever being able to be the first to step into the pool after the stirring (vs. 7). Jesus said to him,

*“Take up your bed and walk”* (vs. 8).

Immediately the man was made well - he took up his bed, and walked (vs. 9).

Note the recovery here. It was not a slow, gradual recovery with the man first trying to get shaky legs working after 38 years of being disabled. No, it was an instant, full recovery – it was immediate. Not only could he stand up straight away, but he could also pack up his “bed” and walk away.

**Point:** When Jesus healed somebody, no matter how long the person had been sick, or what the sickness was, the recovery was instant and complete.

#### b) Healing the Nobleman's son

In the above example of Jesus healing the man at the pool near the Sheep's Gate, Jesus was there with the man in person. But for Jesus to heal someone,

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<sup>7</sup> For example, **Matthew 9:35; 15:21-31; Mark 6:55-56; Luke 9:11**.

<sup>8</sup> The Sheep's Gate was on the northern wall of Jerusalem, north-east of the Temple.

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He doesn't have to be actually there on the spot – He can do it remotely. Consider the following.

In **John 4:46-53**, we have the account of the Nobleman's son who had a life-threatening illness (vs. 49). At the time, Jesus was in the town of Cana in Galilee (vs. 46). When the Nobleman heard about Jesus' presence, he went to Him at Cana, leaving his sick son at home in Capernaum (vs. 46) – a bit over 20 km away to the north-east. When he asked Jesus to heal his son, Jesus said, "*Go your way, your son lives*" (vs. 50). The man believed Jesus and started the trip back home again.

While he was on his way home, his servants had also left his home to meet him on the way (vs. 51). They met their master the following day and told him about when his son had recovered (vs. 51-52). Based on what his servants told him, the Nobleman knew that his son recovered at the time that Jesus had said, "*...your son lives*" (vs. 53).

**Point:** The distance between Cana and Capernaum was such that it was an overnight trip for the Nobleman to return home. But that distance was no hindrance to Jesus. He could heal people without the need to be physically present.

### c) Raising Lazarus from the dead

Not only could Jesus heal people of their sickness, He could also bring back to life someone who had even died due to their illness.

In **John 11:1-44**, we have the account of Lazarus dying. He was the brother of Mary and Martha of Bethany (vs. 1-2). Jesus was away at the time, and so the sisters sent for Him. However, He did not return immediately, but waited a few days (vs. 3-6).

When Jesus came to Bethany, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for 4 days (vs. 17), and by implication from verse 39, the body would have already started to decay. Nevertheless, Jesus commanded Lazarus to "*...come forth*" (vs. 43), and he did....risen from the dead.

**Point:** Jesus can restore a dead person back to life again.

### 3) Jesus' power over spiritual forces

Not only does Jesus have control over things to do with nature and the physical realm, He also has control over the spiritual world.

While the spiritual world is not something that we can see or touch, it does exist. In the Old Testament, God condemned those who were mediums and "spiritists" – people who "dabbled" with the spiritual world (**Leviticus 20:27**). **1 Samuel 28:3-25** tells of a woman who was able to conjure up spirits. And in the New Testament, Paul wrote that we are at war against the spiritual forces of darkness (**Ephesians 6:12**). So the spirit world is real – it does exist.

But Jesus had complete control over this intangible world of spirits and demons. An example is found in **Mark 5:1-17**.

There was a man in the land of the Gadarenes<sup>9</sup> who was possessed by an unclean spirit (vs. 1-2). The spirit had such a control over the man that nobody could restrain him – not even with chains (vs. 3). When Jesus

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<sup>9</sup> Located south east of the Sea of Galilee.

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commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man, we learn that there was more than just one spirit – there were many (vs. **8-9**). Eventually, Jesus gave permission to the spirits to enter a herd of swine nearby. After entering the swine, the animals raced downhill into the sea and drowned (vs. **12-13**).

Meanwhile, the man who originally had the spirits was now “... *in his right mind...*”, calmly sitting down (vs. **15**).

**Point:** Jesus has authority over the spirits and demons.

### **Conclusion and Application:**

This series of lessons is about helping us to understand what God is like by looking at Jesus. We have seen in this lesson that Jesus had power over the forces of nature, and the natural laws. He had the power to heal the sick, whether He was in their presence or not, and even had the power to raise the dead back to life. He also demonstrated His power over the unclean spirits and demons.

God (the Father) has the same powers. A quick read of the Old Testament will show how He was able to do things like make the sun stand still (**Joshua 10:12-14**). He was able to make childless women able to conceive and bear children of their own (**Genesis 11:30; 21:1-3**). He was able to strike down in one night thousands of the Assyrians in order to protect His people (**2 Kings 19:35**). God could even put restrictions on what Satan could or couldn't do (**Job 1:12; 2:6**).

Note: Such demonstrations of His power refute the claim that we sometimes hear that the crucifixion was a case of things “getting out of control”, causing God to delay His plan of setting up His kingdom<sup>10</sup>.

So what does this mean for us?

In this world we are subject to various temptations, fears and uncertainties. We can never be certain about what today might bring, let alone tomorrow (**James 4:14**). At times we see evil prosper and the good and the innocent suffer at the hands of the unrighteous (**Psalms 94:3-7**) and wonder “*Why?*”. We do our best to do what is right, but sometimes it seems like we are going backwards. All this puts pressure on our faith, and based on what we see around us, we start to wonder about God's promise that “...*all things work together for good to those who love God...*” (**Romans 8:28**).

But as you read the scriptures and look at the history of God's dealings with people, you can see that He is completely in control of things. He may not do things the way that we think they should be done, or He may allow things to happen that we think shouldn't happen (**Isaiah 55:8-9; 1 Corinthians 1:25**). But this is where we need to have trust in God (**2 Corinthians 1:9**). A trust, not based on blind faith, but based on the evidence from the scriptures that God is all powerful; mankind cannot thwart His will; He is in control; and He knows how to keep and watch over those who are His (**2 Timothy 1:12b; Hebrews 13:5-6; Romans 8:38-39**).

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<sup>10</sup> The crucifixion was always a part of God's plan for the redemption of mankind (**Isaiah 53:1-12; Acts 8:26-35**). In addition, the setting up of the kingdom was not delayed. The church is the kingdom, and was established when Jesus said it would be (**Matthew 16:18-19; Mark 1:15; 9:1; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-47; Colossians 1:13**).