

The Messiah Has Come
Week 34
Matthew 8:28-34
“The Proof Is in The Power (Part 3)”

Introduction

What do you think? If someone has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go and search for the stray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over that sheep more than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. In the same way, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish. **Matthew 18:12-14**

As we continue this section of Matthew's Gospel which demonstrates the mighty power of Jesus, we come to a fascinating, and yet controversial, story. While the miracle of the healing of the two men living in the tombs near Gadara is a wonderful demonstration of Christ's power, even over the realm of Satan himself, many have missed the point of the entire narrative, while choosing to focus solely on the discrepancies between this passage and those given in the other gospels; namely Mark and Luke. So allow me to go on record here and unwaveringly declare that there are no contradictions in The Word of God. There are only the foolish people who do not comprehend it, juxtaposed against those who are wise because they have been regenerated by The Spirit. The truths of Scripture can only be “spiritually discerned” (**1 Corinthians 2:14**), and therefore, The Scriptures are always being misinterpreted or misunderstood by those who are devoid of God's Spirit.

The first thing that we have to understand is that out of the three synoptic gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke (synoptic means; *sharing a common view*), only one of these three men was actually present to witness this dramatic event, namely Matthew. Mark relied on The Apostle Peter in order to write his narrative, while Luke relied upon Paul. And these men were all inspired by The Holy Spirit in what they wrote. So why then, does Matthew mention two demon possessed men, while the other gospels speak of only one? My personal opinion after reading much debate on the subject is that only one of these men actually became a follower of Christ. In fact, I believe after this man was released from his demonic possession, he was actually sent out by Christ on a mission! And that is why, I am convinced that Peter and Paul focused all of their attention upon him, rather than the two. After all, they never said there was only one man living in the tombs, Luke simply mentioned a “*certain man*” (**Luke 8:27**), which would lead one to believe that he would become familiar to the disciples.

Another so-called controversy that the detractors of Scripture will often bring up is that the different gospels have assigned this man to different towns, namely Gadara and Gerasa. This discrepancy also can be easily explained. These are both towns in the same region, inside an area known as the Decapolis (meaning ten cities), and it was quite common to call the area in which these two towns were located, either the region of the *Gerasenes* or the region of the *Gadarenes*. So again, there is no controversy. It is also important to note that Matthew's audience was mainly Jews, and there was a substantial Jewish population in Gadara, making it more familiar to his readers, while Mark and Luke's gospels were written to a broader group of people, and Gerasa was more commonly known among those who were Greek. Again, The Spirit is far more qualified to inspire Scripture, for He always knows exactly what He is doing!

So, as we look at this amazing passage today, let us not get caught up in the weeds, as it were, of the so-called discrepancies between the gospels, but rather, let us discover the wondrous message that this event holds for us who believe. Jesus had already demonstrated His power over death and disease, and the very winds and waves are also subject to His will. Now, He demonstrates His absolute Lordship over even the hosts of Satan. So, if we belong to Him, what is there to fear? Or as the Apostle Paul would say: **What, then, are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (Romans 8:31).**

So let us revisit this very familiar passage with a fresh set of eyes today, and as a famous commercial once suggested, *"Taste it again for the first time!"* We will explore the truths found in the redemption of a demoniac living among the tombs of Gadara and be encouraged to know just how much The Savior loves even the least of us. In our message this morning, we will explore together: *The Reason, The Rescue, and The Reaction.*

The Reason (vs. 28-29)

When He had come to the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him as they came out of the tombs. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. Suddenly they shouted, "What do you have to do with us, Son of God? Have you come to torment us before the time?" Matthew 8:28-29

I would like, for the sake of complete understanding here, to back up a few verses and explain exactly what it is that is taking place. Too often, Scripture passages are taught in a vacuum, rather than placing them in complete context. So let's start with the reason that Christ went across the sea in the first place. He had spent the previous night at Peter's house. The crowds surrounded the home in search of healing, as well as a chance to see The LORD do wondrous works in their presence.

The Savior awoke before dawn to go and pray in a solitary place to seek His Father's guidance. After which He was compelled to leave the crowd behind and to cross the sea over to the region of the Decapolis, an area which was far more influenced by Greek culture than Jewish. And being an all-knowing God, He knew before hand, not only was He headed into a storm, but also to a place that would not accept His message! So why did He go? Why would He leave a massive crowd of adoring followers (albeit many of them were false followers) to go to Gadara? Answer: to reach ***one lost sinner!*** Let that sink in for a minute. And maybe this might be a good time for you to stop and thank Him for going out of His way to find you!

No one else would accept Christ on this particular day, but He made the special trip for just one person. Now, I know what you are thinking... there were actually two demon-possessed men who were released from their bondage that day. Even so, I really truly believe there was only one whose heart was forever changed. That is why I am convinced, that the other Gospels only speak of him. But nonetheless, even if both of these men became ardent followers of Christ, that still means He left the crowd behind to reach only two people! That sure does put the parable of the ninety and nine in perspective, does it not (***Matthew 18:12-14***)? Our Savior cares about the individual, not just the masses. So always take God at His Word when he says things like:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on Him, because He cares about you. 1 Peter 5:6-7

Jesus wasn't worried about leaving the crowd behind to reach such a forgotten outcast as the man of Gadara. And to be honest with you, I don't even believe this man was a Jew. My guess is that he was a Gentile, outcast and shunned by society, one of the forgotten nameless faces that everyone had written off as a hopeless cause. But nothing is impossible with God! *The Bible* tells us that the possessed men were unapproachable and violent. Listen to Mark's account for more information:

He lived in the tombs, and no one was able to restrain him anymore — not even with a chain — because he often had been bound with shackles and chains, but had torn the chains apart and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. Mark 5:3-5

Now, I am certain that the people who lived in that area avoided those men like the plague. They were terrified of them, and not only this, but I can certainly imagine how much trouble they would go to not to have to hear the men's tormented screams. How often do we ourselves try and "tune out" the voices of the suffering all around us? We escape from the noise of the hopelessness by isolating ourselves from its cries. But while no one else wanted to hear this man's screams of anguish, Christ not only heard them, but crossed a stormy sea to come to his rescue. And He has done the same for us as well, leaving the comforts of heaven, so that He could make Himself nothing in order to answer the desperate cries of our souls (**Philippians 2**). And that is why it has so often been called... Amazing Grace! For God so loved... ***the world***. And we are the reason that He came all this way in order to save. Had you been the only one, He would have crossed a thousand stormy seas just to rescue ***you***.

The Rescue (vs. 30-32)

A long way off from them, a large herd of pigs was feeding. "If you drive us out," the demons begged Him, "send us into the herd of pigs." "Go!" He told them. So when they had come out, they entered the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the water. Matthew 8:30-32

When the demons saw The LORD, they began to shriek violently and proclaim Him as The Son of God. Not only did they recognize Him, but they were terrified in His presence. Notice that they left little doubt as to whom was LORD over all. They acknowledged Him as LORD, and yet, they were destined for destruction. As a matter of fact, when these demons, who were living within these men, recognized Jesus, they even ***knelt*** before Him (**Mark 5:6**)! Remember what The LORD had said earlier? **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'LORD, LORD', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven."** (**Matthew 7:21**). The demons, by definition, are believers. But they are certainly not saved, which brings us to the passage in James:

You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe — and they shudder. James 2:19

The demonic hosts also know something else; and that is that their time is coming. They were terrified that Jesus was going to ***"torment them, before their time"*** (**vs 29**). There is no hope for those who joined in on Satan's rebellion and subsequent fall from heaven. Their fate is sealed. Luke's account tells us that the demons also begged Him not to send them into the Abyss. This is a reference to a group of demonic angels, who have been kept in chains from the days of old, because according to the book of *Jude*, they left their proper abode.

...and the angels who did not keep their own position but abandoned their proper dwelling. He has kept in eternal chains in deep darkness for the judgment on the great day. Jude 1:6

This passage is apparently a reference to the fallen angels in **Genesis 6**, who decided to transform themselves as ***"human"*** and intermarry with the daughters of men, thereby creating an irredeemable master race in order to rule the earth. Their vile offspring were destroyed in the great flood, and those angelic beings were placed in chains in the Abyss until their final day of judgment. The demons that possessed the man of Gadara knew all about this place, and they begged Jesus not to send them there. They would rather be sent into a herd of pigs as to go into the darkness of the abyss! So that is what they requested of The LORD, and with one word, He commanded them thus. **"Go!"** He commanded, and the legion of demonic spirits rushed into the herd of swine.

The pigs were so tormented to be possessed by these wicked spirits that they rushed headlong into the sea and drowned themselves! So, we can only imagine how tortured these two men had been all those long years among the tombs; alive, yet not living; sentient, but spiritually dead, wholly consumed by evil with no means of escape.

I have only personally encountered a demon-possessed person once in my life. I may indeed have been around others unawares, however, with this particular individual it was undeniably obvious. My encounter with him was back when I was in college. His sad journey began with a fascination of the occult. As he delved deeper and deeper into this dark realm, he became more and more insane, until he was no longer even recognizable or for that matter understandable. He spoke in strange tongues and had the look of a madman. His hatred for Christ and Christians was insatiable, despising everything to do with those who claimed the Name. Then one day, he simply disappeared from campus. I was later informed that he had been committed to an insane asylum, but this I neither confirm or deny. I can just tell you that every encounter I ever had with him made my skin crawl.

I tell you this story so that I can warn you. **Do not dabble in the devil's playground**, for there is danger there for the unsuspecting! Horoscopes, Ouija boards, psychic hotlines, tarot cards, and the like are **not** harmless activities. They are gateways into the occult. A true Believer need not fear the power of Satan, for in order to possess a true Believer, the devil would have to oust the indwelling Holy Spirit from within him. However, there are a lot of people out there who claim to be believers, when they are not! And it is those people who have no power to stand against the devil's schemes. So beware!

But as for those who truly belong to Christ, your security from Satan is guaranteed. He needs but say a word and the demonic will flee His Holy Presence. **"For greater is He that is in you, than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4b - KJV)"**. Though the demonic may try and oppress us, the true Believer can never become demon possessed. Hear the word of Christ on the subject:

How can someone enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. Matthew 12:29

When you are in Christ, and He is in you, you have the ultimate "Strong Man" guarding "your house", and at the sound of His Name... demons flee!

The Reaction (vs. 33-34)

Then the men who tended them fled. They went into the city and reported everything, especially what had happened to those who were demon possessed. At that, the whole town went out to meet Jesus. When they saw Him, they begged Him to leave their region. Matthew 8:33-34

As a result of Jesus' mighty power displayed, there were two separate and distinct reactions that we need discuss. First, there was the reaction of the townspeople, and second, there was the reaction of the man who was set free. We do not know anything about the reaction of the second man that was healed, for the gospels do not tell us anything about him. We can only assume that he, although freed from the burden of demonic oppression, never actually did anything for Christ as a result. There are so many people like that, who claim to believe in Jesus, but their lives are never changed as a result, thus proving that their belief was merely a superficial one.

As for the people of the town, when they heard the story of the miraculous deliverance of the men from demonic possession, as well as the resulting suicide run of the possessed swine herd into the sea, they were terrified. They came to look upon this one who had exorcised the legions of demons with their own eyes. And upon seeing him, as well as the man who was released from his terrible bondage, they were frightened of Jesus all the more! And rather than being drawn to faith, they pleaded with The Son of God to leave their region.

We should take a moment to analyze this reaction more thoroughly, for swine in *The Bible* are labeled as unclean by *The Old Testament* Law. This is one way that we can be assured that the majority of the people in this story were Gentiles, for no self-respecting Jew would have ever even placed themselves in proximity of a herd of pigs. When something is declared unclean in Scripture, rest assured, it is a metaphor for sin. The pigs in this story represent sin itself, unclean and unfit to reside among the people of God. And when the townspeople heard about the destruction of the herd of pigs, they wanted

nothing to do with The Savior. Why? Because they thought more of the swine than His miraculous deliverance!

The same is true today and throughout history for those who reject the healing and forgiveness that could be theirs. Why do they do this? Because they love their sin more than they love the grace of God. Jesus died so that we could be set free from the bondage of our sin, but what happens when a person loves their sin and does not want to be free from it? It is proof that they love the unclean swine more than they love God.

I have met many so-called "atheists" in my time. They all seem to have one thing in common. They all claim that they don't believe in Christ. But deep down in a place that they won't readily speak of, they really *do* believe. In fact, they *know* He is LORD. The reason they refuse to believe is simple. They do not *wish* to believe! They prefer the "*swine life*" to the Savior. And so they lie to themselves in the hope that He will simply leave them alone. But The Scriptures are clear; one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD to the glory of God The Father (**Philippians 2:10-11**).

But enough about them, let's move on to talk about the man who was set free! Mark's Gospel gives us a bit more insight into *his* reaction as Jesus was about to get back in the boat to leave the region:

As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged Him earnestly that he might remain with Him. Jesus did not let him but told him, "Go home to your own people, and report to them how much The LORD has done for you and how He has had mercy on you." So he went out and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and they all were amazed.

Mark 5:18-20

And just in case you were wondering, when The LORD returned to that region later on, the people there were anxious to meet with Him because of this man's testimony (**Luke 8:40**). So, now do you see the reason why Jesus left the huge crowd behind and sailed across the sea? Because there was a tormented demon-possessed Gentile living among the hills of Gadera, that Jesus wanted to rescue. And once this outcast was saved and set free, The Savior had a plan to send him out as the very first Christian missionary to all of the Decapolis! No one, and I mean no one, could have ever seen that coming... save an Almighty, Loving, and Omniscient God! This very same God created you for His glory, and He has a plan and a purpose for your life as well. The question is not, "Can He do great things through you?" The question is, "Do you *believe that He can?*!"

TRUTH!!!