

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Matthew 8:28-34

The Exorcist

We are continuing in our study of Matthew's Gospel, his God-inspired account of the words and works of Jesus. We are picking up in Matthew 8:28:

Matthew 8:[28] And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. [29] And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" [30] Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. [31] And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." [32] And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. [33] The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. [34] And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

This is an important event in the ministry of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell this story in their Gospels, each recounting some different details from the event. And this story is important because it encompasses the message of who Jesus is, what He came to do, and what our response to Him should be.

Who Jesus Is

This exorcism in the Gadarene region is the latest demonstration of Jesus's authority.

The sermon on the mount ended with the people amazed that Jesus was teaching with such authority. And in chapter 8 that follows, Jesus demonstrates his authority in various categories: His authority over disease (as he cleanses a Leper and heals a centurion's servant as well as many other healings.) He demonstrates his authority over nature as he calms a storm. And here He demonstrates his authority over evil and the demonic realm as he casts the demons out of these two possessed guys who live among the tombs. In chapter 9 He will even demonstrate his authority over death by raising a dead girl to life.

Matthew is telling us who Jesus is.

And his Gospel began with tracing His lineage back to King David, so Matthew's aim is to show us that Jesus is the rightful king. But He's a king unlike any other king. Jesus has called Himself the "Son of Man," a term Daniel had used to describe the one to whom

**Daniel 7:14 "...was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.**

So Jesus is now proving that He is the one with dominion, He rules over all things. He does so here with the casting out of demons.

Demons and their worship are all over the Old Testament. But the one thing you never see in the Old Testament is the casting out of a demon. There are no Old Testament exorcisms.

But in walks Jesus, the One with authority over things nobody could master before. He raises the dead, he heals the sick, and he casts out demons. There's nobody like Jesus.

Jesus is the Son of God and Son of Man, with unique authority.

So you are again in this passage who Jesus is, and you see

What He came to do:

The people of God in Israel had a long history of interactions with demons.

**Deuteronomy 32:17-18 [17] They sacrificed to demons that were no gods,
to gods they had never known,
to new gods that had come recently,
whom your fathers had never dreaded.
[18] You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you,
and you forgot the God who gave you birth.**

Again and again the people of Israel in the Old Testament got involved with the worship of other gods. And they did it because there was some real power there. Many of the gods they worshiped were demons - these fallen spiritual beings that demonstrate real power, but they a power that couldn't be tapped into without turning from the true God.

And so again and again they forsook the true and living God and chose instead to ally themselves with demons.

And this was always destructive - because demons destroy, and because the people took themselves out from under the care of God because of these allegiances to false gods.

Allegiance to demons is always damaging.

But Jesus came to destroy their dominion. Walking through the passage:

Matthew 8:[28] And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.

Jesus comes to the region of the Gadarenes, a big region in the southeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. It was an area mostly occupied by Gentiles, non-Jews. Jesus rarely ventured outside of Jewish areas, so this is a unique visit.

And Matthew tells us that two demon-possessed guys meet Jesus there.

Mark and Luke only recount the presence of the one guy, but Matthew gives us the added detail that there was another guy there, too, similarly possessed. This shouldn't be seen as a contradiction: if a group of us met Josh Allen and his friend Bob, some of us would tell the story as "I met Josh Allen yesterday" - which is true. Some would say, "We met two guys, and one of them was Josh Allen" - also true.

Combining the details from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we know that they actually lived among the tombs, that day and night they would shriek and cut themselves. Luke says they wore no clothes. So in every way they are unclean: they live in unclean Gentile areas, live among unclean tombs (where even touching a tomb required 7 days of purification rituals), they are bleeding and naked. They have a high degree of whatever the opposite of rizz is.

And in Mark's Gospel, when Jesus asks his name, one guy says his name is Legion, saying, "for we are many." So these two basically haunted these tombs, and nobody could walk by there anymore.

So these guys are possessed by demons and it looks like something straight out of a movie.

You thought you had bad neighbors!

Do we, as Christians, have to worry about possession like this? Could this be us?

The kind of possession you see here is complete control of these guys' minds, wills, and emotions. The demons take over their thoughts completely, and speak through their voice.

But because Jesus came to cast demons out of his people, this kind of thing can't happen to a Christian:

1 John 4:4 "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of us, we've been purchased and sealed, we are His. So we can't be possessed by the devil or his demons.

But that doesn't mean that there's nothing to look out for.

We do have an adversary in the devil still:

1 Peter 5:8 - Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

James tells us to:

James 4:7 - Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Ephesians 4:26-27 “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”

That’s literally, “don’t give the devil a foothold.”

We are still warned about this personal, intelligent, active devil and his angels the demons. And we’re told that we could give him a foothold in our lives which can allow him to grow in influence over us and in our relationships. So while we don’t have to worry about possession, we do still have an enemy who would love to work his way into our lives and into our church community to do damage.

We don't know how these demon-possessed people got this way: we just know that it got worse over time.

The scriptures say that nobody could bind him “anymore” (Mark 5:3). So at one time, they were controllable, at one time they could be subdued. But not anymore. They had grown too strong, and even when the ironsmiths would make shackles for him, he would break them.

While we don’t have to worry about this kind of full, unbreakable possession if we are Christians, we do have a demonic enemy that we are warned about who, if we allow him an inch, will take a mile. He exploits our weakness to gain the maximum possible influence.

We open the door just a crack, and the dogs come rushing in.

So in what ways do we open ourselves up to this kind of evil? How do we allow demonic influence in our lives?

There are some ways that you might expect.

Scripture certainly warns against magic and sorcery and everything like it.

Things like Tarot cards and astrology and fortune-tellers and witchcraft and psychedelics are not for Christians to dabble in. Paul gets in the face of a so-called Christian who practices sorcery in **Acts 13:4-12**, calling him a son of the devil. So false worship and religious and magical practices are to be avoided.

And while works like these open the door to evil to people in our culture sometimes, you can see their full effect in animistic cultures where there are shamans and possessions that often look like they looked that day in the Gadarenes.

But we can sometimes make the mistake of resting easy, thinking we aren't engaged in any satanic activity because, after all, we don't do magic mushrooms or consult mediums or sacrifice to demons.

But there is far more to his work, and we see the devil and his demons working in ways that are much more subtle and less obvious throughout scripture. And we may be allowing him a foothold in our lives in a number of ways:

We see him promoting lies in John 8:44. So when we believe lies, or speak lies, or don't tell the truth we are opening up a door to his work. These can be lies we tell others or lies we tell ourselves, repeating them to ourselves over and over until we believe them. Getting us living according to lies is the work of the devil.

We see him planting thoughts that are against Christ in John 13.

We see him encouraging the betrayal of Jesus in the same chapter.

We see him promoting arrogance that will grow and ensnare Christians in 1 Timothy 3:6.

We see him convincing people they don't have to love other Christians in 1 John 3:10. When we believe love is optional, or not necessary in this one case, we are not necessarily being influenced directly by demons, but certainly engaged in thinking how they'd like us to think.

We see him breathing out false accusations in Revelation 12:10. So spreading false reports and gossip is his work.

We're told that letting the sun go down on anger gives him a foothold in Ephesians 4. So resentment that builds over time and doesn't get remedied early breeds the kind of destruction he enjoys.

So his work is not yet over, he is still roaring about, and we still see his work and influence and are told to beware and to resist him.

Because he gets a small foothold, and exploits it, and his influence grows.

And I've sat with so many Christians who are caught in a sin or a moment when it all comes crashing down and they say, "How did I get here?"

I believed a lie that a relationship with someone other than my wife would be fulfilling, and now I've crashed my family. It started with a thought.

I used to have all these friends but little by little, through my arrogance and lack of love, I've pushed them all away and now I'm completely alone.

I allowed anger at someone else to fester, the sun went down on it many nights, and now it has destroyed relationships.

And this is what our enemy does to us.

Just as allegiance to these false gods destroyed the Israelites on a number of occasions in the Old Testament, just like the demons destroyed Legion and his friend (and even the pigs) allegiance to the devil and his work can do tremendous damage in us and among us.

So don't give him a foothold, the scripture says.

But also, don't be afraid of supernatural evil like demons.

Matthew 8[29] And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

Notice who's afraid here. It isn't Jesus.

The devil and his demons in the New Testament are raging and terrified because they know Jesus has come to destroy them.

Revelation 12:12 - Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Notice that demons are afraid of Jesus, it isn't the other way around. Christians shouldn't be scared of the demonic. It's the demons that are afraid of the presence of Jesus. They know there is coming a time when Jesus will finally and fully destroy them. If we are afraid of them, they may know our theology better than we do.

Jesus came in part to defeat evil, whether it's evil and sin in us, or supernatural evil in the demonic realm, defeating it was all part of his plan:

Hebrews 2:14 - Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

Jesus came to destroy the devil. So we don't need to fear the devil.

How did Jesus defeat him?

Colossians 2:13–15

[13] And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. [15] He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

These spiritual rulers and authorities, the gods of the nations, the demons - had one big weapon that had to be disarmed: our sin.

We had sinned, and had a record of debt against us, with legal demands - that debt must be paid. So the accuser had something to accuse us with. He didn't have to lie to say we are guilty and deserve hell.

But Jesus disarmed them, triumphed over them, by nailing our sin to the cross. Now the debt is paid for all who believe.

And the primary weapon that Satan has to use against us has been destroyed. So

Genesis 3:14–15

[14] The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

[15] I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.” (ESV)

s predicted from the beginning of the Bible. Genesis 3:15.

Jesus would come to crush the head of the serpent. Jesus is the dragon slayer. So many cultures have myths and legends of great men who are brave and strong and slay the dragons that terrorized their towns. We love those stories, because there is a True dragon slayer.

And now, in a powerful demonstration of the identity of Jesus as the Exorcist, the dragon slayer, the one who came to destroy the devil and his works and effects:

Matthew 8: [30] Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. [31] And the demons begged him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” [32] And he said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. [33] The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men.

So the demons beg Jesus not to send them to hell but instead to send them into the pigs. So Jesus casts them into the pigs, and because demons always destroy their habitation, they destroy the pigs and drown them. Wasting well over a million dollars of bacon in the process.

It was terrible what the demons did to these two men. And less terrible, though also terrible, what they did to the bacon.

Mark tells us that at the end of this story Legion is clothed, sane, begging Jesus to let him come on his mission.

Matthew 8:[34] And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

We have these two responses to Jesus here. The men who were possessed by demons want to go with Jesus and their lives are changed.

But the people of the city want to maintain their allegiance to other gods and they try here to exorcise Jesus.

When someone demonstrates power and love like that, don't you make Him king

Shouldn't they have a parade and make Him King of the Gadarenes? What a bizarre response this is.

But this is an invitation to us to ask the question, "will we follow the call of Jesus"

He has demonstrated even more power to us. He went to the cross to conquer sin and death, He rose from the dead.

Of course, we want Jesus to come and save and restore. Who doesn't want that?

But he is also the Lord - and when he comes to save, he also comes to rule over everything. Over EVERYTHING. And often, the cost is too steep: what would it mean for me if I came to Jesus. I'd lose so much.

We invite Jesus to come and bring a swiffer, and he brings a jack-hammer.

So they begged him to depart.

It's like getting upset with a firefighter for tracking mud into the house while saving it from a fire

And we will do this too. We'll say, "Of course I want Jesus to change this in my life." But when he offers the remedy for us, we say, "Well, I couldn't do that. I couldn't give that up. I'd be AFRAID to lose that."

Of course, they wanted a solution for Legion. They wanted to stop this guy from haunting their town. But they didn't want a Lord - they didn't want someone to claim every area of their lives, including their livelihood.

They wanted a savior who would bless, but not one who would rule.

We do this:

I want to build my marriage on Jesus. But we're still going to live together before we're married. We want the blessing, but don't want the Lord.

I want my business to be blessed by the Lord, but I don't want to follow any of his standards for integrity and honesty, then I wouldn't be competitive.

For years, their land was suffering the consequences of kicking out God.

They wanted his benefits but not his rule. Now he shows up, demonstrates his love, his compassion, his power, the results he brings.

It's like he's here giving them another chance to accept his rule.

And they begged him to leave.

Do we?

In the Lords Supper we have a reminder of who Jesus is, what He came to do, and a frequent call for our total allegiance to Him.

1 Corinthians 10:6-22 [6] Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. [7] Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." [8] We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. [9] We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, [10] nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. [11] Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. [12] Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. [13] No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

[14] Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. [15] I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. [16] The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? [17] Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. [18] Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the

sacrifices participants in the altar? [19] What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? [20] No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. [21] You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. [22] Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Prayer of Confession:

Father, we come before You acknowledging our sin and confessing our need for Your grace. We seek Your mercy, for we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, we have seen Your authority over disease, nature, and the demonic realm as recounted in the Gospels. We confess that, like the people of Gadara, we have often recognized Your power but resisted Your lordship. We desire Your blessings but hesitate to submit fully to Your rule. We ask for Your forgiveness for the times we have valued our comfort and possessions over Your presence and guidance. Forgive us for when we have wanted salvation without surrender.

We confess that we have allowed footholds for the enemy in our lives. We have given into lies, spread gossip, and harbored anger and bitterness. We have not always resisted the devil as You command in Your Word. Instead of being vigilant, we have grown complacent, opening ourselves to influences that draw us away from You. Cleanse us from all unrighteousness and renew a right spirit within us.

Holy Spirit, give us the grace to flee from all forms of evil and to cling to You alone. Strengthen our faith, that it may not be shaken by the trials and temptations we face. Help us to submit to Your authority, to resist the devil, and to walk in the freedom that Christ has won for us.

We pray all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Assurance:

Micah 7:18-19 “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) In Matthew 8:28-34, how does this display of authority contribute to our understanding of who Jesus is and His mission on earth?
- 2) The demons immediately recognize Jesus as the "Son of God" and express fear of being tormented before their time. What does this recognition and fear tell us about the spiritual realm's awareness of Jesus's authority? How should this influence our perception of spiritual warfare and our confidence in Christ's power?

- 3) While Christians cannot be possessed by demons, we have to remain vigilant against giving the devil a foothold in our lives. What are some subtle ways the devil can gain influence over us? How can we resist these temptations and remain steadfast in our faith?

- 4) Why do you think the people in the Gadarenes responded the way they did to the exorcism? What does this reaction reveal about their values and priorities? How can we apply this to our own lives when considering the costs of following Jesus?

- 5) How is the Lord's Supper a reminder of where our true allegiance should lie?