

Matthew 8:28-9:1

Introduction

- A. Today we come to the story of Jesus and two demon-possessed men.
 - 1. Mark and Luke also have this same story, but as you can see from the Comparison Chart, their versions of the story are well over twice as long as Matthew's.
 - 2. So Matthew has left a *lot* out!

- B. Mark and Luke both tell us about only *one* demon-possessed man.
- C. Matthew, however, tells us that there were *two* demon-possessed men.
- D. Is this a contradiction?
 - 1. Not at all! Mark and Luke never say that there was "*only*" one man.
 - 2. They simply *tell us* about only one man.

- E. So why would Mark and Luke tell us about only one man, when there were actually two?
 - 1. Any answer to this question will always be speculation, but I will hazard a guess that I think has some support from the text.
 - 2. Mark and Luke both spend quite a bit of time describing the change in the man who had been demon-possessed.
 - 3. They tell in the first place of his horrible suffering; how he had worn no clothes, how he had not lived in a house but among the tombs, how night and day he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones, and how he would be seized and driven out into the desert (Mk. 5:5; Lk. 8:27, 29).
 - 4. (Matthew doesn't tell us *any* of this.)
 - 5. Then Mark and Luke tell of his transformation.
 - 6. They tell how he was sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind (Mk. 5:15; Lk. 8:35).
 - 7. They tell how he begged to be with Jesus, but how in the end he went away and began to proclaim throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him (Mk. 5:18-20; Lk. 8:38-39).
 - 8. (Once again, Matthew doesn't tell us *any* of this.)
 - 9. My guess is that the other demon-possessed man did not respond in the same way (cf. Lk. 17:11-18).
 - 10. Since Mark and Luke wanted to draw attention to the proper response of love, and gratitude, and service (from one who has been delivered from so much cruel suffering), there was no point in including the second demon-possessed man (the one that didn't respond in this way).
 - 11. Matthew, however, is obviously not interested in how the men responded because he leaves out *all* of this information.
 - 12. Matthew tells us *nothing at all* about the change in the demon-possessed men, so there is nothing to keep Matthew from telling us that there were two of them (one of whom may not have responded in gratitude).

- F. There is a lot of speculation in what I just said, but there is one thing we see clearly.
1. In Matthew's account, the demon-possessed men are "incidental" (this is very different from Mark and Luke) and the focus is kept squarely on Jesus and his confrontation with the demons.
 2. In Matthew, the point is not so much the liberation of the men, but the power and the authority, and the majesty of Jesus.
 3. We will seek to keep this in mind as we move through the text.

Verse 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.

- A. Matthew is clearly setting us up for a "show down".
- B. Jesus is "met" by two demon-possessed men.
1. As we go along, Matthew will imply that these two men were possessed by *many* demons.
 2. But Mark and Luke explicitly tell us that they were possessed by a "legion" of demons – perhaps as many as two thousand (in light of the size of the herd of pigs (Mk. 5:13).
 3. Even here we see the *inevitability* of confrontation. It's inescapable!
- C. There is an ominous ring to Matthew's statement that the men came from the tombs.
1. Tombs, of course, were places of uncleanness and death.
 2. And now they were also the haunts of demons.
- D. The demon-possessed men were so fierce that no one could pass that way.
1. They terrorized the region.
 2. Mark tells us that "no one could bind [them] anymore, not even with a chain, for [they] had often been bound with shackles and chains, but [they] wrenched the chains apart, and [they] broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue [them]."
- E. And yet here is Jesus, coming ashore at the very place that no one else dares to go.
1. And when He comes ashore, He is met immediately by the two demon-possessed men.
 2. There *will be* a contest between Jesus and the demons – between the *lone* Jesus and the *legion* of demons.

F. The stage is set.

Verse 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?"

A. "And *behold*, they cried out..."

- B. On the one hand, what the demons say (using the men as mouth pieces) is truly *amazing*.
1. They acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God.
 - a. They know this immediately.
 - b. They see what even the disciples have not yet fully seen.
 - c. So this confrontation is obviously taking place on a supernatural dimension!
 - d. Imagine being the disciples listening in.
 2. What thoughts would go through *your* mind when you hear the demons ask Jesus if He has come there to torment them before the time?
 - a. Obviously something is happening here that is bigger than us!
 - b. The “time” is the final Day of Judgment when the kingdom comes and all the enemies of the kingdom are vanquished forever – demons included.
 - c. Matthew 25:41 – Then [the Son of Man] will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”
 - d. Revelation 20:10 – And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.
 - e. The demons know their days are numbered, and they know that this man whose boat has just landed on their shore is the very one who controls their fate.
 - f. They see the One who will one day return on a white horse getting out of a boat on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and they are not deceived by the humble “garb”.
 - g. The legion of demons actually *fears* Jesus.
- C. But while what the demons say is true, and even profound, their *intent* is evil.
1. “What have you to do with us” is a defiant and rebellious cry.
 - ✓ It translates a Greek idiom that in this context could be also be translated “Go away!” or “Leave us alone!”
 2. When the demons call Jesus the Son of God, they obviously aren’t doing so out of humility and reverence!
 - a. They’re obviously not trying to be a testimony to the disciples.
 - b. Actually, they’re just trying to control Jesus by “pronouncing” over Him His true identity.
 - c. So in Mark, the demons say, “I adjure you by God...”
 - d. In Matthew, it’s as though the demons are saying, “Son of God, leave us alone!”
 3. And then they go on to imply that Jesus (who has been telling them to come out of the men; cf. Mk. & Lk.) is actually overstepping His bounds.
 - a. Judgment day has not yet come.
 - b. Jesus is getting ahead of Himself and acting prematurely.
 - c. *His* kingdom must still await some future date.
 - d. “Son of God, leave us alone. Your day has not yet come.”
 4. This is rebellious desperation.
 - a. And yet to many, it could seem that the demons have a point.

- b. Perhaps He had better back off... at least until the final Day of Judgment and the coming of the kingdom.
- c. Perhaps He had better wait for that white horse and the “shock and awe” of the second coming.

Verses 30-31 – Now a herd of many pigs [numbering about two thousand; cf. Mark] was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.”

- A. When the demons say, “If you cast us out”, the Greek construction really means, “*Since* you are *going* to cast us out.”
 - 1. Apparently, their control tactics have not worked, and now they have no doubt about what Jesus will do.
 - 2. He will not leave them alone until the day that He comes again in power and great glory.
 - 3. He will cast them out right then and there.
- B. And so the demons resort to begging Jesus not to send them into the abyss (Luke) or out of the country (Mark), but into the distant herd of pigs.
 - 1. Really? Is that all they’ve got?
 - 2. How is it that this host of demons is so quickly reduced to a defeated begging when in Matthew’s account Jesus hasn’t even uttered so much as a single word?
 - 3. We know from Mark and Luke that Jesus has told the demons to come out of the men *and* that He has demanded their name.
 - 4. But even this is a far cry from all the magical incantations and complicated formulas used by other Jewish exorcists.
 - 5. These demons of the spirit world are cowering in submission at the mere presence of Jesus.

Verse 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.

- A. Now at this point, there are a multitude of questions that we could ask.
 - 1. Why did the demons want to enter the pigs?
 - 2. Why did Jesus let the demons enter the pigs?
 - 3. How was this “fair” to the pigs?
 - 4. What about the herdsman and the owners of the pigs?
 - 5. Did the demons know that the pigs would rush into the sea and drown?
 - 6. What happened to the demons after the pigs died?
- B. I have read all sorts of different answers to these questions.
 - 1. And I have tried very hard to think of some answers on my own.
 - 2. The reason I have done this is not just to satisfy idle curiosity, but to see if there are any answers that would shed light on what Matthew is trying to communicate to us.
 - 3. But after doing a whole lot of thinking, I still don’t know of a single answer that is without apparent “problems”.

- C. But even in our confusion, there is an important lesson to be learned.
1. And Calvin exemplifies this lesson wonderfully.
 2. When Calvin wonders why Jesus gave the demons permission to enter the pigs, he ends up concluding: “While the reason of it is not known by us with certainty, it is proper for us to behold with reverence, and to adore with devout humility, the hidden judgment of God.”
 3. Let me say it again.
 4. When we don’t understand *why*, it is best and “proper for us to behold with reverence, and to adore with devout humility, the hidden judgment of God.”
- D. We don’t know all that was going on in this story. I’m not even sure that Matthew knew.
- E. But what these events do show us is the amazing “authority of Jesus over all the powers of the supernatural realm” (Mounce; quoted in Morris).
1. And *that* is precisely Matthew’s *agenda*!
 2. Notice that Matthew says, “And **behold**, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters.”
 3. At the very least, Matthew sees in the violent destruction of the pigs an indicator of the majesty and power of Jesus.
 4. This great horde of demons had succeeded in terrorizing a city, granting “invincible” strength to two men, and now in causing the destruction of a herd of two thousand pigs.
 5. But they were all subject to the single word of Jesus – “Go.”
 6. In Matthew chapter four (the temptation of Jesus), the Greek word for “Go” is translated “Begone”.
 7. There is no magic formula, no “in the name of”, no manipulation or visible signs of coercion or “force”.
 8. There is just a single, simple word of command: “Go.”
 9. Now think about it. Why did the *demons* obey Jesus when all He did was speak a word?

Verses 33-34 and 9:1 – The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region. And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.

- A. There is no mention of the spiritual transformation of one of the men (cf. Mark and Luke).
1. And now Jesus is asked by all the inhabitants of the region to go back to where He came from.
 2. Matthew ends on what seems to be a rather discouraging and anticlimactic note.
 3. But this would be to miss the main point.
- B. Notice first of all that Matthew says that the herdsmen “*fled*”.
- ✓ They were terrified of Jesus and his “other-worldly” power.

- C. Notice second of all (“*behold*”) that when all the city *saw Jesus*, they begged him to leave their region.
1. Calvin points out that if they were just mad about the pigs “they would not have [begged] him, but would rudely have driven him out.”
 2. Like the herdsmen, they too trembled to be in the presence of a man with such supernatural powers.
 3. Luke says that they were “afraid” and “seized with great fear” (Lk. 8:35, 37).
 4. Calvin writes: “Having seen the miracle, the Gadarenes were afraid, because the majesty of God shone brightly in Christ... They honour him as God’s minister, and yet are so struck with dread as to desire that he will go to a distance from them.”
- D. The demons begged Jesus to send them away into the herd of pigs.
- E. And now even the people beg Jesus to go away from them.

Conclusion

- A. I am reminded of the famous dialogue from C.S. Lewis’ “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe”.
1. After hearing the name of Aslan, Lucy asks: “Is he a man?” “Aslan a man!” said Mr Beaver sternly. “Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion – *the* Lion, the great Lion.” “Ooh!” said Susan. “I’d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.” “That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.” “Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy. “Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe.”
 2. And then later on in the book, Mr. Beaver adds: “He’s wild, you know. Not like a *tame* lion.”
- B. I am not suggesting that we could take this whole dialogue and apply it to Jesus.
- C. But I do think it helps us to catch Matthew’s point here in this passage.
- D. In a very real sense Jesus is not at all “tame” or “safe”, but rather very awful, and very fearful, and very terrible, and very dangerous.
1. The herdsmen were actually more *sane* than many when they *fled* from Jesus.
 2. The Gadarenes were actually more *sane* than many when upon seeing Jesus, they begged him to leave them.
 3. The love and goodness of Jesus does not mean that He is unthreatening or “tame”!
 4. And all those who refuse to submit to His lordship will certainly wish one day that they, too, could flee from His presence.
 5. Indeed, sometimes when I see my sin, I can begin to be terrified, just as the Gadarenes were.
 6. But then I remember the grace of Jesus that has enabled me to trust in Him and find in Him the forgiveness of my sins.
 7. Have you trusted in Him and His sacrifice for sin on the cross?

- E. The awfulness, and the fearfulness, and the terribleness, and the dangerousness of Jesus does not mean that He is not *good*.
1. As Mr. Beaver says to Lucy: “Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.”
 2. As I think about Matthew recording this story about how dangerous and terrifying Jesus can be, I remember that Matthew was writing to the *church*.
 3. He was writing to a people who no longer have any reason to be afraid of Jesus.
- F. And yet what about the devil and his angels?
1. What about all the supernatural forces of evil and wickedness that move most often behind the scenes, and against whom, Paul says, is our *true* battle (Eph. 6:12)?
 2. Peter says that our “adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).
 3. So what about Satan and his demons?
 4. And I can just hear Matthew saying to his church:
 5. “Let the events of this day in history leave you without any doubt! ‘*Greater* is He who is in you than he who is in the world’” (1 John 4:4).
 6. I think of what Jesus would later say to Peter:
 7. Matthew 16:18 – I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
- G. The demons felt that Jesus had come too early and was threatening their realm too soon (cf. Hagner).
1. “His arrival seem[ed] premature” (Blomberg).
 2. But the demons know now that in the person of Jesus the Messiah, the rule and reign of God has already arrived.
 3. The kingdom has already come!
 4. So Jesus can say to His disciples:
 5. Luke 10:18-19 – I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.
 6. John 12:31 – Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.
- H. Brothers and sisters, regardless of what front it’s on, our battle is *not* against flesh and blood, “but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).
1. We need to *know* this.
 2. And we also need to know that Jesus is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named... [God] put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:20-23).
 3. Therefore:
 4. Romans 16:20 – The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Closing Song – “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

Mark 5:1-21 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the pigs, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea. The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea.

Matthew 8:28-9:1 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. 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?" Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." 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. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region. And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.

Luke 8:26-40 Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.