

The King's Power Over Demons

Matthew 8:28-34

Introduction

Chapters 8 and 9 are devoted to the miracles of Jesus. Jesus cures the sick (8:1-17; 23-24) and calms the sea (8:23-27) and confronts the spirit world (8:16; 28-34). On the eastern shores of the Galilee lies a region that was called Gergesa near modern Jerash. The incident is also recorded in Mark 5:1-21 and Luke 8:26-40.

Some moderns reading the account file this in the folder marked “Fantasy” or “Superstition”. Some people believe demons should be grouped with zombies, mythical creatures, ghosts, vampires and werewolves. The Bible is clear that angels are real, demons are real; there are benevolent and malevolent spirit beings. Both angels and demons are said to interact with human beings and that demons can oppress, possess and destroy human beings.

The Bible teaches that Jesus has power over dark and wicked forces.

Some Christians have an unwise and unhealthy preoccupation with Satan and Demons. Others who perhaps call themselves Christians but think they know better than Jesus himself deny the existence of invisible, supernatural spirit beings. C.S. Lewis famously wrote in his classic volume, “The Screwtape Letters”; “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist and a magician with the same delight.”

The Truth About Demon Possession (v.28a)

Matthew 8:28 (NKJV) 28 When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men,

In Matthew's gospel we read of two men who are demon possessed. In Mark's gospel the focus of the encounter who appears the most vocal.

In Mark's gospel the place is called Gadara—it was the nearest large city some 6 miles away. In Ephesians (6:12) Paul writes; “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”.

The Bible speaks of demons—unclean spirits—evil spirits. They speak (v.29) and they know about the identity of Jesus (v.29). They know about future damnation (v.29). They experience fear (v.29).

How can we tell the difference between a person who is emotionally distressed or mentally ill and the demon possessed?

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Good question.

The Traits Of Demon Possession (vv.28b-32)

coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.

Where are the demon-possessed? In the tombs exceedingly fierce—so that no one could pass that way!

Jesus will go where others fear to go. In the ancient world people steered clear of the demon possessed. Jesus is willing to go where others fear to go (v.28) and save those who seem untouchable, unapproachable, unreachable. The Lord Jesus wants all people saved. Mean people, violent people, scary people, possessed people.

The expression “exceedingly fierce” (*chalepos*) can mean violent (NIV) or terrible (as in 2 Tim. 3:1). In Mark's gospel we read (5:3); “who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains” (v.4) “because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him.”

What solution does society offer? Bind them, guard them, imprison them; medicate them. Society can offer a limited amount of restraint and protection; but can they solve the problem of sin and Satan?

What are the traits of genuine demon possessed people?

1. **The actual occupation by an alien spirit being.**
2. **Fixation and preoccupation with death and the dead.**
3. **Supernatural strength.**
4. **Fits of uncontrollable rage.**
5. **Resistance or opposition to Jesus and the Gospel.**
6. **Hyperaesthesia or excessive sensibility.**
7. **Personality disintegration; the splitting and then manifestation of foreign personalities. Alteration of voice and speech by demons.**
8. **Occult transference; the demons leave the men and enter the swine.**

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Are all manifestations of demons so gross and compelling?

In 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 Paul writes; “And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness”.

Can demon possessed people look and act normal?

29And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”

The men are possessed by demons. They are drawn to Jesus and repelled at the same time. They are drawn to Jesus but filled with fear because of the presence of the demons in their lives.

The word ‘torment’ (*basainzo—verb—from the noun basanos*) first meant a touchstone—something that determines the value of precious metal—a dark stone used in testing metal—came to mean ‘examination by torture’ and finally torment or torture. **The demon might be expressing fear that Jesus will immediately send them to Gehenna. Demons know they are doomed. They believe in One God and tremble (see James 2:19).**

30Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding.

31So the demons begged Him, saying, “If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine.”

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32And He said to them, “Go.” So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water.

This is the first mention of deviled ham in the Bible.

When we read Mark's account we discover there may have been as many as several thousand swine. The power of Jesus is invincible. Jesus dismisses the whole lot in a single word. Jesus blows away evil. Jesus has complete power over sin.

Why did Jesus permit the demons to enter the herd of swine?

There are several possible reasons.

The first and most obvious reason was to provide tangible, physical, undeniable proof that this was not mental illness or emotional distress but rather real evil spirits, real demons were expelled from the poor tortured men. **No doubt they were genuinely possessed. No doubt they were genuinely delivered. Only a dramatic act could provide overwhelming and convincing evidence.**

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We forget in our age of skepticism that in the ancient world there were skeptics as well. The Sadducees did not believe in angels or demons.

Perhaps there is a lesson about holiness and obedience. Jews were forbidden to eat swine (see Lev.11:7; and Isaiah 65:3-4; 66:17). Were the owners Jews? If they were they were breaking Jewish Law! If that's the case—than the presence Jesus demanded holiness and obedience to the Law.

Was the cleansing and the exit of the demons into the swine intended to teach us something of the value of a human being? Weren't these two men more valuable than all the pigs in the world? Not according to some who place animals on the same worth scale as human beings. If in your world view—humans are just another kind of animal—than the present text might be alarming! But what if the Bible's testimony about human beings is true; we are made in the image of God. The Bible teaches that animals were also created by God; and the Bible teaches that animals are not to be abused. In the Commandments when human beings are ordered to rest the same edict extends to a person's oxen and donkey's.

But forget that for a moment. Why did the people have pigs? To eat them. A food source and a revenue source. Is it possible that Jesus in part performs this miracle and allows this event to serve as an opportunity to preach the gospel and reach the lost? Wouldn't the news of the presence of the Messiah stir people's hearts to turn from sin and turn to God? Wouldn't the people greet the news that the enslaved demon possessed people were at least delivered and healed?

Wouldn't this act convict the people gripped by greed that the salvation of human beings is more important than whatever revenue might be generated by the pig industry?

When Jesus heals people and delivers people could that threaten the alcohol and tobacco industry? The marijuana industry? How do we awaken people who slaves to greed or pleasure? How can we help them understand that unless they turn to Jesus for healing and deliverance they are doomed?

What if someone in complete denial—suggested that the demon possessed people were really in a good place—a happy place—a healthy place! What if the men were possessed by friendly spirits? Alien spirits from another world who wanted to help us and guide us and lead us into a better understanding of reality? But Jesus wants to prove that these are malignant, evil, wicked, harmful, destructive devils! Evil spirits act out of their nature. And their nature is to steal, kill and destroy.

The Gergesene's Paranoia Over Jesus (vv.33-34)

33Then those who kept them fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men.

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We are all familiar with shepherds in Bethlehem but less familiar with pig farmers. They used to be called swineherd. Most people know that Jews have no business keeping pigs. Are these disobedient Jews or greedy Gentiles? Whoever they are—they are more interested in income than freedom. Note—“they went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men”.

In Mark's gospel it says they found the man “sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid” (5:15).

34 And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region.

The whole town comes out to meet Jesus.

How did the neighbors react to the news of the men's healing and restoration?

Did they rejoice because the broken, the wounded, the hounded and tormented men were given freedom? Hardly. They asked Jesus to leave. **Why did they beg Jesus to leave? Jesus was bad for business. They saw Jesus as the reason for their economic down-turn! Some people see Jesus as bad for business. The covetous are not fond of Jesus. They have nothing in common with Christ. They are not interested in holiness, righteousness and self-denial.**

Think about what you have read. The demons pray to Jesus to be sent into a herd of swine. The people in the region pray that Jesus will leave them alone! All the swine futures were floating in the lake. The pigs were in hog heaven (OK I'll stop).

The covetous are asked to forsake their sin—and repent. But the covetous reject Christ and want to expel Christ from their lives, from their business. The materialist, the greedy—the self-seeking—the pleasure seeker doesn't want Jesus—they want to get rid of Jesus.

Later Matthew writes (16:26); “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

But what about those who were formerly demon-possessed? Two hopeless individuals were cleansed and healed and delivered! Satan hates humanity! The Bible's repeated testimony concerning Satan and demons is their bitter commitment to rob, kill and destroy!

Demons are tasked with the job to oppose God's purposes for your life (Eph.6:12). They execute Satan's plan (1 Tim.4:1). They disseminate false doctrine (2 Thess. 2:2). Some cause insanity (see Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel; Mark 5:15; Luke 8:27-29); loss of speech (Matt. 9:33); various diseases; deafness, epilepsy, blindness, suicidal ideation, personal injury. In the book of Revelation demons will inflict grievous torture upon the unsaved in the Great Tribulation (see Revelation 9:3-4).

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The Gergasenes valued pigs more than people. For some pigs will always be more important than people. They will choose swine over the precious souls of human beings.

Conclusion

How does your meth dealer feel about your recent conversion? Your friends and family are thrilled that the demons are gone—right?

*Rabbi, begone!
Thy powers bring loss to us and ours.
Our ways are not as thine.
Thou lovest men, we swine.
Oh, Get thee hence, omnipotence, and take this fool of thine!
His soul?
What care we for his soul?
What good to us that thou hast made him whole,
Since we have lost our swine?*

How truly modern. What do we value most? In Mark's gospel we learn the healed man—begged Jesus to let him go with Jesus—and Jesus did not let him but said “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord had done for you, and how he has had mercy on you”.

How interesting—Jesus answers and allows the demons to enter the swine. Jesus answers the prayers of the people to leave—by leaving. But then denies the man who is healed—his request. Jesus answers the pleas of demons; answers the plea of the citizens but refuses the pleadings of a man freshly delivered? Jesus doesn't refuse the man's love or the man's discipleship. He simply asks him to go home first. Jesus may not use you at first—the way you would like to be used. The delivered man is given the opportunity to share his testimony and become one of the very first disciples to the Gentiles!

And isn't it true that Christian living begins at home? Jesus takes care of our past failures; our present sin; our current bondage—and gives a future for all who desire to follow Him and be used by Him. Don't make the same mistake made by the the neighbors who failed to rejoice in the demon possessed deliverance! They asked Jesus to leave. They pleaded with Jesus to depart.

What will happen if I ask Jesus to leave me alone? He will not force Himself on you. He loves you. In kindness He may seek you out again.

*Harden Not Your Heart
There is a time, I know not when,
A place, I know not where,
Which marks the destiny of men
To heaven or despair.*

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*There is a line by us not seen
Which crosses every path,
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath.
To cross that limit is to die,
To die, as if by stealth.
It may not pale the beaming eye,
Nor quench the glowing health.
The conscience may be still at ease,
The spirits light and gay;
That which is pleasing still may please,
And care be thrust away.
But on that forehead God hath set
Indelibly a mark,
By man unseen, for man as yet
Is blind and in the dark.
And still the doomed man's path below
May bloom like Eden bloomed.
He did not, does not, will not know,
Nor feel that he is doomed.
He feels, he sees that all is well,
His every fear is calmed.
He lives, he dies, he wakes in hell,
Not only doomed, but damned.
Oh, where is that mysterious bourn,
By which each path is crossed,
Beyond which God himself hath sworn
That he who goes is lost?
How long may men go on in sin?
How long will God forbear?
Where does hope end, and where begin
The confines of despair?
One answer from those skies is sent,
"Ye who from God depart,
While it is called today, repent,
And harden not your heart."
—Author unknown*