

Jesus' Power over the Supernatural

Scripture: Matthew 8:28–34

Code: 2261

INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

This is a marvelous account--familiar to many and yet it is filled with meaning. Let us begin by reading verse 28 to the end of the chapter:

"And when He was come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, there met Him two possessed with demons, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God? Art Thou come here to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the demons besought him, saying, If Thou cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine. And He said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine; and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told everything, and what was befallen to those possessed with the demons. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they besought Him that He would depart from their borders."

A. The Plan of God

God determines to redeem men, the earth, and the entire universe from the curse of sin. In order to do that, He came into the world in the form of the Messiah and saved man from sin and death. When Jesus Christ came to earth the first time, He accomplished the redemption of mankind. The second time He comes, He will redeem the earth and the universe around it. So Matthew is concerned that we understand that Jesus Christ is King of the earth, Messiah, the rightful ruler of the world, and the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity. In other words we must see that the Lord Jesus Christ is God.

B. The Proof of Christ

One of the major factors in proving beyond a doubt that Christ is the Messiah, is to show that He has power over the unseen forces of the supernatural world. If the Lord Jesus Christ will, in fact, redeem the earth and take possession of fallen humanity, He must show that He can overpower that which now holds all of creation in its control--Satan and His demons. Therefore, we find occasions throughout the gospel record where the writer gives us examples of Jesus' ability to cast out demons. He can do that instantaneously and authoritatively, uttering only a word. That gives us clear proof that He can handle the kingdom of darkness.

C. The Power over Satan

We have already seen that Jesus Christ can resist Satan, for in Matthew chapter 4, Satan tempted Him and the Lord was victorious-- He confronted Satan and never gave in. But His power goes beyond that. The primary issue is not that Christ never gave in to Satan and his hosts; it is that He causes them to give in to Him.

Matthew has shown us the perfection of Christ in His temptation-- He never gave in. Now we see the power of Christ--He makes the demons give in to Him. So Jesus manifests a resistant power as well as an overcoming power, demonstrating two dimensions of His ability to deal with the kingdom of darkness. First John 3:8 emphasizes the latter dimension: "...For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." Ultimately, when Jesus establishes His

Kingdom, He will incarcerate Satan and all his demon hosts for a thousand years. At the end, He will gather them up to be eternally tormented (Rev. 20:2, 10). By casting out demons throughout His ministry, Jesus was giving samples of His great power by destroying the works of the devil. In fact, on one occasion, He said, "But if I, with the finger of God, cast out demons, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Lk. 11:20). Why? Because one of the marks of the Kingdom would be the overthrow of Satan, and Jesus was saying that if they saw Him doing it, they would know that the Kingdom had come. So Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the devil. Matthew records that tremendous work in the eighth chapter of his Gospel.

D. The Perspective of Men

The disciples themselves were aware that overthrowing Satan was not easy. In fact in Matthew 17:19, even though the Lord had given them power to cast out demons (Mt. 10:1), they had to admit that they couldn't get some demons to respond to them. So when Jesus came along and cast out demons, the Bible says that people marvelled. For example, Mark 1:27 says, "And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they do obey Him." It wasn't just that He cast them out--others may have had success with that at some point if they were godly people--it was the ease and the powerful authority with which He did it that shocked people. In fact, that was so unnatural, some concluded that Jesus was actually in collusion with demons and the whole thing was a ruse. In Luke 11:15, the Pharisees accused Jesus, saying, "He casts out demons by the power of the prince of demons. That is a phony deal folks; don't be kidded--that man is of the devil himself. Only if He were in collusion with the demons could He get such cooperation." They were forced to conclude that what He did was far beyond anything they had ever seen in their own experience.

Matthew shows us samples of Christ's power, desiring us to see that He is the One who can reverse the curse and set up the Kingdom. He was able to heal sickness, control the forces of nature, deal with sin, overrule death, and conquer demons. Matthew records nine miracles in chapters 8 and 9 to show the many facets of Christ's great power. I have organized Matthew 8:28-34 with three key words: possession, power, and perspective--the possession by demons, the power of Christ, and the perspective of the people. Let us begin with...

I. THE POSSESSION BY DEMONS (vv. 28-31)

After leaving Capernaum, Jesus and some of His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee in a little boat. They encountered a storm, but the Lord calmed it. Then they continued on to the opposite shore, where they were immediately confronted by an incredible situation:

A. The Reception by Demons (v. 28)

"And when He was come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, there met Him two possessed with demons, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no man might pass by that way."

1. The Place

The identity of the country of the Gadarenes on the other side of the Sea of Galilee has caused some confusion because Mark's account says "Gerasenes" (Mk. 5:1), and some Greek manuscripts of Luke say "Gergesenes" (Lk. 8:26). I believe the best explanation for the discrepancy is this: On the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was a little village named Gergesa (or Khersa, as it known today) about six miles from Capernaum. Its topography fits the story here, having cliffs that plunge down near to the sea where a herd of pigs could fall to their death. Gadara, a city much further south and inland, does not fit the setting. However, if we assume that Mark and Luke probably refer to Gergesa, the village, we can conclude that Matthew notes the whole area. The name Gadara could have not only referred to the city by that name, but also to the surrounding area that might have encompassed the village of Gergesa.

2. The Possession

a. Debated As the little boats arrived by divine appointment on the shore, "there met Him two possessed with demons." Mark and Luke only introduce us to one of the two demoniacs. However, neither of them say there was only one. It is obvious there was two--one being the main figure with whom the dialogue of Mark 5 is carried on. What does it mean to be possessed with demons or "demonized" (Gk. *daimonizomenos*)? Some people say that there's a difference between being obsessed, oppressed, and possessed. But the Bible doesn't make those distinctions. To be demonized simply means to be under the control of demons.

b. Delineated Demons can tempt people to sin by getting into their minds and luring the thoughts. They can bring about disease, as in the case of Paul, who called the disorder that he had "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me..." (2 Cor. 12:7b). The Bible tells us that "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1) pervert the truth and lead people into idolatry and error. Scripture delineates three areas of affliction with many New Testament illustrations:

- 1) Physical Affliction--Disabling the Body
- a) Dumbness (Mt. 9:32-33)
- b) Blindness (Mt. 12:22)
- c) Deformity (Lk. 13:11-17)
- d) Epilepsy (Mt. 17:15-18)
- 2) Mental Affliction--Deranging the Mind
- a) Insanity (Lk. 8:27-29)
- b) Suicidal mania (Mk. 9:22)
- c) Masochism (Mk. 5:5)
- d) Murder (Rev. 9:14-20; 18:2, 24)
- 3) Spiritual Affliction--Driving to Sinful Practice
- a) Corruption of the truth through false religion
- b) Occult practices
- c) Immorality

c. Defined Although a definition of demon possession might be helpful, it can also be limiting. Remember that demonic activity is a supernatural reality and we are not able to go any further than the Bible takes us in comprehending it. Demon possession is a condition in which one or more demons inhabit the body of a human being with the purpose of controlling it. There may be different degrees or manifestations of possession, however. The word *daimonizomenos* is used twelve times in the New Testament. So it is clear that both the Lord and the New Testament writers acknowledge its reality. In fact, in the early church, the gift of miracles or powers (Gk. *dunameon*; 1 Cor. 12:10) included the ability to cast out demons.

Three elements of demon possession that I would like to discuss include...

- 1) Adapting to Society In all of the incidents of demonizing in the New Testament, none of them is recorded as having occurred in the city of Jerusalem. I don't know if that's an important factor, but it seems to show that all of the incidents occurred in rural settings. Satan adapts himself to the level of sophistication in a society. Modern missionaries, for example, have stories about cases of demon possession, which are rather common in the rural setting that some of them work in, but are uncommon for us. Only once in my life have I been involved in a case of demon possession, where I actually talked with seven different demons speaking through a woman. But that is not a common occurrence in a sophisticated society. Demon possession seems to be much more common in a less sophisticated society, because in the presence of pagan religion, there is the fear of evil gods through which demons can exert their influence. However, when people in our society act demon possessed, we lock them up in an institution for the insane and try to ignore them. Therefore, demons wouldn't have the same impact in our society, which demands a much more subtle approach from Satanic forces. But in the rural setting on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, demon-possessed maniacs were wreaking havoc.
- 2) Eclipsing Personality The personality of a demon eclipses the personality of a demon-possessed person. In Mark's account, when Jesus asked a demoniac his name, the demon answered, "...My name is Legion; for we are many" (5:9). The demoniac was unable to speak for himself. I witnessed the same thing when I was talking to the woman possessed by demons: When I asked a question, I got at least seven different voices, each with different names--she couldn't even speak in her own voice. Demon possession involves the automatic projection of an intense new personality. Now it may come and go or it may be constant. I'm sure there are many people in our society who are diagnosed as mentally ill but are really possessed. And may I say that the solution for them is the same as it was for the demoniacs we meet in Matthew 8--the only one who has power over demons is the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The Particulars

a. Their Residence Verse 28 tells us that the demoniacs were living in tombs. To a Jewish person, one of the worst defilements of all was to touch a dead body. How far those poor souls must have been driven for them to be living in the tombs! The cliffs are high in that area of the eastern Galilean shore, and chambers had been hewn out of the rocks for use as tombs. b. Their Irrationality We learn more about the demoniacs in parallel accounts: Luke 8:27 says that they "wore no clothes." There are people who have said things like, "There's nothing wrong with wearing no clothes; I belong to the Sunshine nudist colony." In the Bible, the only people who went around naked were raving maniacs, who had no sense of social balance or modesty. c. Their Rage Matthew also says the demoniacs were "exceedingly fierce." That means they were violent. Mark 5 says that people had tried to bind them with chains, but those demoniacs broke them with their tremendous strength. Such strength was demonstrated to me when the demon-possessed woman I spoke with flipped over a steel desk with only two fingers. Mark also says they were "crying [Gk. krazo = 'an inarticulate shriek'], and cutting [themselves] with stones" (v. 5). Can you visualize the scene? They were stark naked, hacking themselves with stones, shrieking, and racing down the hillside with incredible strength. No wonder that the end of Matthew 8:28 says, "...so that no man might pass by that way." No one dared to go down that road, for as soon as they did, the demoniacs would come out of the tombs, screaming down the hillside.

B. The Recognition by the Demons (v. 29)

1. Of Jesus' Deity (v. 29a)

"And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God?..." In other words, the demons who controlled those two men asked, "Why are you bothering us? Why are You here?" In fact, Mark 5:6 tells us that when they saw Jesus, they "ran and worshiped Him." The Greek word is *proskuneo*, which describes a person who reverences a superior such as a king or supernatural being, on his knees. It can contain the idea of profound awe, respect, and worship. It is incredible that the demons should bow before Jesus, but they did. Why did they do that? Because they knew exactly who He was. As fallen angels who participated in Satan's rebellion against God, demons are well acquainted with Him and Jesus His Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. Nobody needs to help them with their Christology. Therefore, those particular demons knew that Jesus was their antagonist as well as their judge.

Think of it--beings who were damned for all eternity and knew it, could not resist worshiping Him, because they knew of His ultimate power. I do not doubt that all demons know the truth of Philippians 2:10, which says "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth."

2. Of Jesus' Authority (v. 29b)

"Art Thou come here to torment us before the time?"

The demons realized that Jesus was there too soon to be judging them. They knew that Jesus was Christ, the Son of the living God (some cults don't even know what demons know); they knew what the eschatological plan was, and they knew that they were to be damned forever. Therefore, they bowed the knee to Christ, their judge. Evidently, demons somehow have already been made aware of the divine plan and can even anticipate what is going to happen at some points. They were way ahead of the Lord's disciples in their understanding of both of Messiah's comings.

When the demons addressed Him as, "Jesus, Thou Son of God," they made an important statement. The title "Son of God" is a synonym for Messiah. In Matthew 16:16, Peter answered Christ, saying, "Thou art the Christ, [Messiah, the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek] the Son of the living God." God the Father was revealing through Peter that the Messiah is the Son of the living God. It's clear that demons acknowledge God's authority and power:

a. James 2:19 -- "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well. The demons also believe, and tremble." Rightly so, because they know the end result of their rebellion. b. Luke 4:41 -- "And demons also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ [Messiah], the Son of

God....for they knew that He was Christ."

C. The Requisition of the Demons (vv. 30-31)

"And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the demons besought Him, saying, If thou cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine."

The demons knew it was inevitable that they would be cast out, because they also knew of Christ's compassion for those whom they held captive. Consequently, they made a strange request: they wanted to inhabit a herd of two thousand pigs (Mk. 5:13). One wonders why they would request such a thing. We don't really know, but maybe the demons, desiring a home, thought that their request to possess the pigs would be an acceptable concession to Jesus, who didn't want the demons harming people. Most probably, the demons feared being sent to the bottomless pit (Lk. 8:31). Possibly they wanted to destroy the pigs so people would kill Jesus for having brought about the slaughter of the herd. We can only speculate. But whatever the reason, the demons had their plan. And most interesting is Jesus' response.

II. THE POWER OF CHRIST (v. 32)

Matthew now takes our focus off the demons and onto Christ: "And He said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine; and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters."

A. The Method Exercised

When men try to cast out demons, they work hard to get the demons to cooperate; but when Christ comes along, all the demons want to know is where they're allowed to go. He simply said, "Go," and the entire herd of two thousand rushed off the cliff into the sea below and drowned. When He appeared, they wanted to leave and so He commanded them to do so with only one word. That instantaneous miracle shocked everybody. It wasn't necessarily what He did, it was primarily how He did it.

Realizing that demons are powerful beings that men cannot effectively deal with on the supernatural level, one can see how ludicrous it is for people think they can cast out demons by their cleverness. People are no match for the power of demons. Second Peter 2:11 says that "angels...are greater in power and might" than men. Psalm 103:20 says that "angels...excel in strength." One holy angel in 2 Kings 19:35 slew 185,000 Assyrians at one time. Evidently, demons are as powerful as holy angels, for Daniel 10:13 indicates that a holy angel, who was dispatched with a message from God for Daniel, was withstood by a demon for three weeks until Michael came to assist him. Demons are incredibly powerful. Therefore, the only way that man can handle them is by putting on the armor of God and being strong "in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10-11). Only the power of the Lord Jesus Christ could cast demons into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:3), and He displayed His power by casting them into swine.

B. The Message Emphasized

Jesus granted the demons their request; however, not for their sake, but for His. He allowed them to enter the herd of pigs. In trying to determine why Jesus granted that request, some people say that Jesus was teaching a lesson to people who were raising pigs when they shouldn't have. However, I don't think that is the lesson here. The primary point is that Christ can cast out demons, and He gave a dramatic demonstration of His ability. The reality of His miracle was clear to those observing when a normally peaceful herd of pigs demonically raced toward a cliff, dove in the water, and drowned, while at the same time, the individuals that had previously been demonized were "sitting, and clothed, and in [their] right minds" (Mk. 5:15). The bystanders saw a deliverance they would never forget. Furthermore, Jesus' exorcism portrayed the destructive nature of demons and also gave them a preview of their coming destruction. So if you're concerned about the pigs, you've missed the point. We must be willing to allow the sacrifice of two thousand pigs for Jesus to manifest His incredible power. I believe that He wanted living proof that demons came out of the men--and what

unforgettable proof He gave!

III. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PEOPLE (vv. 33-34)

A. The Reaction (v. 33a)

"And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city..."

That verse refers to the swineherds, the people who cared for the pigs out on the hills. When they saw that their pigs had committed mass suicide by racing like maniacs into the water, they took off for the city as fast as they could go.

B. The Report (v. 33b)

"...and told everything, and what was befallen to those possessed with the demons."

Notice that the swineherds got the message. They didn't report what had happened to the pigs; the issue was the men who were delivered from the demons. The pigs' fate was only the proof.

C. The Request (v. 34)

"And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they besought Him that He would depart from their borders."

1. Explained

The city didn't come out to Jesus to participate in a revival, as their request reveals. Some think that they said what they did because they were more concerned about their pigs than Jesus, being consummate materialists unconcerned about the souls of the demonized men. But that reasoning is weak because the passage doesn't say a word about the owners of the pigs. The response is that of the whole city. Mark 5:15 says, "...they were afraid." They were not angry; they were scared to death. Luke 8:37 similarly says, "...they were taken with great fear...."

The principle we see here is that when unholy men face a holy God, they experience terror:

2. Exemplified

a. Isaiah 6:5 -- "...Woe is me! For I am undone...for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Isaiah, the best man in the land, pronounced a curse on himself when he saw God because his unholiness was exposed. b. Luke 5:8 -- When Peter saw Jesus Christ in the majesty of His power, he said, "...Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." c. Mark 4:40-41 -- When a severe storm came, the disciples were "fearful" and when Jesus stilled the storm, they "feared exceedingly." They were more afraid of the calm than they were of the storm, because they knew that God was in their boat.

The supernatural power of Jesus caused the townspeople to panic because they observed the One who not only controlled the demons, but also took the souls of two men and gave them back to them. Supernatural things make men uncomfortable. The people from the city were absolutely panicked by the presence of Jesus in their midst. Instead of falling at His feet in worship, they said, "Go away; we don't want You!"

People think that if everybody could see miracles, they would believe. Unfortunately, many of the people who saw the miracles of Christ didn't believe--they nailed Him to a cross instead. Some people, when exposed to the awesomeness of a holy God, want nothing to do with Him because they love their darkness. They are like bugs under a rock that run for cover as soon as they are exposed to light.

CONCLUSION

The story isn't over--it ends in Mark 5:18-20, where we see how gracious God was to the people of Decapolis: "And when He was come into the boat, he that had been possessed with the demon implored Him that he might be with Him. Howbeit, Jesus permitted him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and all men did marvel." The fearful people who wanted Jesus out of their country

never did break His compassion or mercy for them, for He left them at least one missionary as living proof of His mighty power. How wonderful that the grace of Christ is extended even to those who don't want it!

Focusing on the Facts

1. What does Matthew want us to understand about Jesus Christ as He writes his gospel?
2. If the Lord Jesus Christ is to redeem the earth and take possession of fallen humanity, what must He overpower?
3. What are the two kinds of powers that Jesus manifests with regard to Satan?
4. What is one of the purposes that Christ came to earth, according to 1 John 3:8?
5. What is the ultimate fate of Satan and his demons (Rev. 20:2, 10)?
6. What was the general reaction of people who saw Jesus cast out demons? Why (Mk. 1:27)?
7. How can the discrepancy between the different names of the place where the demoniacs dwelt be resolved?
8. Did Jesus meet one or two demoniacs? Explain.
9. In what three areas do demons afflict people?
10. Why might cases of demon possession be relatively uncommon except in rural areas?
11. Why would no man pass by the area where the demoniacs lived (Mt. 8:28b)?
12. Why did the demoniacs bow before Jesus?
13. Who did the Father reveal Christ to be through the Apostle Peter (Mt. 16:16)?
14. What are two possible reasons why the demons wanted to be sent into the swine?
15. How did Jesus cast the demons out?
16. What is the primary point of the dramatic demonstration that Jesus gave?
17. What did the report of the swineherds emphasize?
18. Why did the people from the city ask Jesus to leave, according to Mark 5:15?
19. Why are miracles not a guarantee that people will believe?
20. According to Mark 5:18-20, how did God demonstrate His grace to the cities of Decapolis?

Pondering the Principles

1. Has your faith been shaken by someone who seemed to know more about the Bible than you and discredited the Biblical account? In your Bible reading, you have probably come across several apparent contradictions between parallel accounts of an incident. When you encounter them, put a question mark by them so that you can make a more detailed study that can provide some reasonable solutions. A church library or your local Christian bookstore may have several commentaries on the passage in question or books that specifically deal with Bible difficulties. Many times there are very simple explanations for apparent difficulties that historical, cultural, or geographical insights can help provide.
2. Demons are powerful, but we need not fear them as Christians, for we are indwelt by the Spirit of the One who has permanently sealed their defeat. Meditate on the following verses to learn how to effectively face the archenemy of God and his host: Matthew 4:1-11; Ephesians 6:10-18; James 4:4-7; 1 Peter 5:6-9; and 1 John 5:18.

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