

**The Welcoming Committee 7-25-04**      **www.bible-sermons.org**

Matthew 8:28-34

*<sup>28</sup>When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. <sup>29</sup>"What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" <sup>30</sup>Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. <sup>31</sup>The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." <sup>32</sup>He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. <sup>33</sup>Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. <sup>34</sup>Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region. Matthew 8:28-34 (NIV)*

In our previous studies of this chapter we have seen that for the first time Jesus is headed to a Gentile region to minister. As the disciples sailed toward Decapolis a storm came up. Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat. The disciples woke Him and He calmed the wind and waves and rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith and the resulting fear. (Matthew 8:26)

In our passage today, they arrived at their destination. It was about a six-mile trip, but with a favorable wind it would go quickly. The prevailing wind is often in that southerly direction. Upon arriving, who should come to greet them but a pair of demon possessed men. In the other Gospels you will read of only one man. It is not a discrepancy. It was common in Jewish literature to leave out irrelevant details, and we will see that one of these men played a more important role. Matthew is emphasizing Jesus as King over all things.

These two men were unclean to the Jews in three ways. They were Gentile. They were from a graveyard, and they were demon possessed. Yet, Jesus did not hesitate to help them. These men were feared by most people, but not by Jesus. We've had several people come into our congregation over the past years with some serious problems. We have done everything we could to help them physically and spiritually, and God has worked in their lives. When God sends those folks to us, will we react with the compassion and conviction of the Son of God, or will we see them as unclean and keep our distance? Are we so fearful of being contaminated that we will pass by on the other side, like the Levite in the Good Samaritan story, (Luke 10:30-32) or will we have the love and compassion of Christ to reach out in loving wisdom, guided by the Spirit to help the least of these? (Matthew 25:40) I certainly hope and pray that Wayside will be known as a place that is humble and loving, not gullible and easily tricked, or too arrogant to dirty our hands. It costs to be a servant of God. (Matthew 16:24-25) Are we willing to be His servant? If so, we will meet the unclean like Jesus did, unafraid, compassionate, and with the power of God.

It might help for us to realize how much our society and even our own lives have been influenced by the demonic. (1 Timothy 4:1) You don't have to look very far. Flip through

**Commented [notes1]:** <sup>26</sup>He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. Matthew 8:26 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** <sup>30</sup>In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

<sup>31</sup>A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

<sup>32</sup>So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. Luke 10:30-32 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** <sup>40</sup>"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25:40 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** <sup>24</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. Matthew 16:24-25 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** <sup>1</sup>The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 1 Timothy 4:1 (NIV)

your television channels or pick up a newspaper and it is quite obvious. This is not something removed from our day and age. To say it doesn't exist is to deny the trends in our society and where it is leading our culture. The demonic calls good evil and evil good. (Isaiah 5:20) It is going on all around us, and we must be alert that it not influence our thinking. We must be ready to compassionately confront it as Jesus did.

**Commented [notes6]:** <sup>20</sup>Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.  
Isaiah 5:20 (NIV)

These two men were violent. *They were so violent that no one could pass that way.* Mark tells us that they broke the chains that were to keep them bound. They practiced self-mutilation. Violence is a sign of the demonic. In the last 20 years we have seen violent crimes so horrific that sociologists and criminologists are at a loss to explain them. We fumble, searching for some kind of explanation that would explain why a person could be so heartless and destructive and yet show no remorse. Modern society does not want to believe in evil, and yet it is undeniably present. Initiation into the gangs today is to take a linoleum knife and slash some poor innocent person's face. (Psalms 73:6-7) Violence is rooted in evil that drives men to ignore their God given conscience. (Ephesians 4:19) In our schools today, self-mutilation is becoming a problem. Where is this coming from? Of course there are social roots, a lack of godly love in the home, peer pressure and isolation, but you can lump this under one title that includes it all, "evil". (Genesis 6:5)

**Commented [notes7]:** <sup>6</sup>Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.  
<sup>7</sup>From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.  
Psalms 73:6-7 (NIV)

This story reminds me of an encounter that my wife and I had on a train in Tokyo. A young man with a shaved head stepped onto the train we were riding. He had ball with water in it attached to a thick rubber line. He began bouncing it off the walls of the inside of the train while wearing a sinister sneer. He looked like a hoodlum and appeared to be inebriated. My heart began to pound, and I prayed "Oh, Jesus, make me invisible." That's when he spotted me. (At that time there were very few foreigners in Japan, and I stood out like a sore thumb.) He pushed his way between us and began trying to talk to me in a rough slang kind of vocabulary. I didn't know what to do! Mariko spoke to him. He was still slinging his ball off the ceiling. All the passengers had cleared a space and were trying not to stare. Then an amazing thing happened. Mariko began to sing John 3:16 to him. He stopped smashing his ball on the train walls and began to listen. Then he said, in a whole different tone, that he had gone to a Christian reform school. Apparently he wasn't reformed. But Mariko's boldness and the words of John 3:16 drove the demons back. Our stop came, and we got off, as he sat quietly in his place. Who knows what God did from there or how that affected the rest of the passengers? I was embarrassed that I had been so frightened, so like the disciples in that storm and perhaps as the disciples when Jesus approached these violent men. Jesus in Mariko met that young man, just like He met these two men near Gadera.

**Commented [notes8]:** <sup>19</sup>Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.  
Ephesians 4:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** <sup>5</sup>And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.  
Genesis 6:5 (KJV)

**Commented [notes10]:** <sup>16</sup>"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.  
John 3:16 (NIV)

The Bible is the one source that explains man's condition. Modern man searches for explanations that will satisfy the mind and leave out the supernatural, but when a child shoots their parents, and the mother, still barely alive, begs for mercy and the son calmly walks outside, reloads, and comes back in and empties the gun, what do you call it? I call it evil having free reign. When the government of Sudan looks the other way as Christians are slaughtered by the tens of thousands, what do you call it? In Mark's Gospel Jesus said, "Come out of this man, you EVIL spirit!" Mark 5:8

These two men greeted Jesus with the words in verse 29. *"What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"* The demons recognize Jesus as the Son of God. They know His authority. They know His power. They know what the future has in store for them. It seems they even know the appointed time, or at least that that day was not it. Apparently they either cannot or will not repent. They are bent on carrying out evil through mankind until they face justice. (John 10:10a) They call that just punishment awaiting them torture. (Luke 8:31; Revelation 9:1-2) They have sown torture in the hearts, minds, and actions of men. They will reap torture in eternity. (Hosea 8:7a)

In some extremes of the church, I hear people blame everything on the devil and demons. In the other extreme, it is as if they did not believe they even exist. The Biblical perspective is to realize that we are in a war. (Ephesians 6:12) Our old nature is one enemy. (Galatians 5:17) Satan and his demons are another. (Revelation 13:7) They often use our old nature to tempt us into destructive ways. (James 1:14) We have several clues here as to how to know when there is demonic influence. It is violent. It is destructive to the temple of your own body.

These poor men were possessed. Possession comes about when someone invites evil to take up residence. I don't believe it happens to any but those who have opened a door to evil. There are many ways to do this. If you meditate, meditate on Scripture. If you listen to voices in your heart, test the voice and see that it is in line with Scripture. Always ask for protection from the evil one as Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's prayer. (Matthew 6:13)

I don't believe a born again Christian can be possessed, but they can be severely oppressed. Unrepented sin, such as unforgiveness, can invite oppression. If you have had destructive thoughts, or thoughts of violence toward others, or if you struggle over and over with the same battle and find yourself defeated time and time again, I encourage you to get some good Christian counseling. Listen to positive things like Christian radio and praise tapes. (Philippians 4:8) Memorize Scriptures that deal with that problem. (Psalms 119:11) Talk to a mature Christian that you trust about your struggle, and pray until you find complete victory in Jesus. If you are willing to let Jesus have His way in every area of your life, there is no reason for you to endure demonic oppression. (Romans 12:21)

<sup>30</sup>*Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding.* <sup>31</sup>*The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs."* <sup>32</sup>*He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water.*

To the Jew, pigs were unclean animals, but to the Greeks, they were sacrificial animals. The demons pleaded to be sent into the pigs. Jesus allowed this, but then the pigs ran down a steep bank into the lake and drowned. Mark tells us there were about 2000 of them. (Mark 5:13) I guess you could call this the Bay of Pigs.

Animals can be possessed. It seems to me that the demons may have thought they were pulling a fast one on Jesus.

**Commented [notes11]:** <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; John 10:10a (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** <sup>31</sup>And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. Luke 8:31 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** <sup>1</sup>The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. <sup>2</sup>When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. Revelation 9:1-2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** <sup>7</sup>"They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. Hosea 8:7a (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12 (NIV) ... [1]

**Commented [notes16]:** <sup>17</sup>For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ... [2]

**Commented [notes17]:** <sup>7</sup>He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ... [3]

**Commented [notes18]:** <sup>14</sup>but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. James 1:14 (NIV) ... [4]

**Commented [notes19]:** <sup>13</sup>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' Matthew 6:13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** <sup>8</sup>Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if ... [5]

**Commented [notes21]:** <sup>11</sup>I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalms 119:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** <sup>13</sup>He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. ... [6]

<sup>33</sup>Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. <sup>34</sup>Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region. This was Jesus first attempt to enter a largely Gentile area, and these demons had blocked His entrance. The destruction of the pigs was enough to have the town's people ask Jesus to leave. Here was a huge loss of revenue in these sacrificial animals. Did they think Jesus was going to force their conversion to Judaism because of the slaughter of the pigs? Or perhaps they simply thought He was a powerful prophet and feared what He might do next. Unlike their imaginary gods, Jesus wasn't something you could control or set on a shelf. If you've got god under control, you don't know the Lord of lords.

Jesus does not force Himself upon unreceptive people. The time is coming when He will be forceful, but this is not it. (2 Peter 3:9) He honored their request by leaving, but we find the rest of the story in Mark. For Matthew's purposes, this was enough, to tell that Jesus reigned over the demons, even the ones that possessed the Gentiles. Jesus is King. But Mark wanted to show Jesus as the servant of God, so we will see something Matthew did not record.

<sup>18</sup>As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. <sup>19</sup>Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." <sup>20</sup>So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. Mark 5:18-20 (NIV)

Who won that round? The Apostle Paul tells us that, "All things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28 Was Jesus tricked into doing something that drove Him away from God's plan? I don't think so. Like General MacArthur or The Terminator, "He'll be back!" In the mean time, a testimony is going to go out throughout these cities that declares that Jesus is Lord over all. The man who was once an instrument of destruction is now a testimony-sharing servant of God.

One of these men that were set free wanted to go with Jesus. Instead, Jesus sent him to tell his story of deliverance to the Greek people of this region. All the people were amazed at his story. Between the undeniable story of the pigs and these men set free, the whole region would be prepared for the time when Jesus will come again near this area. It is the story we know as the feeding of the 4000. (Mark 7:31) Lives will be changed. In the future a church will be founded here, the church at Kursi. It became a meeting place for one of the early church councils. So who won, the demons or Jesus? Let me tell you a truth. In the end, the Lamb always wins!

So often we face situations in life in which we know we are following God's will. There is no doubt that we are where we are supposed to be, but things don't go as we would expect them. In fact, some of the clearest leadings in my life have been followed by the biggest difficulties. Moving back from Japan was followed by the misunderstanding of my senile grandmother that suddenly put us out on the street. The call to ministry was shortly after followed by the fall of my own pastor. Why is it that these clear calls are followed by what seems at first glance like defeat?

**Commented [notes24]:** <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes25]:** <sup>31</sup>Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. Mark 7:31 (NIV)

Well, I can tell you from this story about the welcoming committee and my own experiences that we need to go forward in faith and trust God to fulfill His word. (Hebrews 11:6; Proverbs 3:5-6) You see, the demons would have said, "Ha! We fooled the Son of God! We got Him to let us into the swine and killed them, which in turn upset the people and kept Him from invading our territory. Good plan!" But looking back now, we can see that God was using the man who was delivered to prepare the ground for a larger harvest when Jesus returned. This man may have been the first Gentile missionary of the Gospel! His message is my favorite message, *"how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."* That is an irrefutable testimony. Tell them how much the Lord has done for you.

In my own experience, that situation we were in when we returned from Japan ended with my move here, which eventually led to where we are right now. I wouldn't change it for anything. In the process, we got to house a Japanese student who came to Christ and now teaches Bible studies in New Jersey. Did the enemy win? God sent us back from Japan, we forsook all and followed Him and ended up with no place to go. At the time it looked like the enemy won. We wondered, "God, where are you? You sent us here and now look what a mess we are in?" Kind of like the disciples on the boat, I started yelling, "Lord, wake up; we're going to drown!" But God knew exactly what He was doing. He was building our faith, guiding our life, and winning another soldier of the cross.

When God called me to fulltime ministry and my pastor left, did the enemy win? I thought I was supposed to pastor that church, or go to a mission field, but every door closed. Did the Lord call me, have me sell my business, and put the time into satisfying the Wesleyan requirements, just to leave me jobless and without a ministry? Did the enemy win? Well, at the time I might have said, "Yes!" But looking back now, I can see He had Wayside Chapel in mind. They have a wonderful pastor at Christ Center. How many lives have been affected and souls saved because of a seeming defeat? Only God knows. But we know one thing. If we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all these things will be added to us as well. (Matthew 6:33)

It is about being fruitful for the kingdom of God. It is all about God being glorified! In these situations the enemy must have thought he won a battle, only to find it was God's preparation for a greater victory. The darkest storm cloud can be the bearer of much needed rain. I think that Satan must be the most frustrated creature alive. Every time he thinks he has won a battle, he finds it was a set up to deal him an even greater defeat. I hope you can see that in your own life today. If the clouds look dark and heavy, count on them bringing much needed rain. If you think you have just lost a battle, wait and see what God will bring out of it. It may be years down the road, but it is coming, because all things do work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purposes. Romans 8:28 It was true in Decapolis, and it is true in your life today. Have you stepped out to obey God and been met with a demonic welcoming committee? Trust God to redeem the seeming defeat and to make it preparation for an even greater victory. Amen?

**Commented [notes26]:** <sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.  
Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** <sup>5</sup>Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; <sup>6</sup>in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.  
Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** <sup>33</sup>But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.  
Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

**Page 3: [1] Commented [notes15] notes**

<sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

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<sup>17</sup>For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. Galatians 5:17 (NIV)

**Page 3: [3] Commented [notes17] notes**

<sup>7</sup>He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. Revelation 13:7 (NIV)

**Page 3: [4] Commented [notes18] notes**

<sup>14</sup>but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. James 1:14 (NIV)

**Page 3: [5] Commented [notes20] notes**

<sup>8</sup>Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

**Page 3: [6] Commented [notes23] notes**

<sup>13</sup>He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. Mark 5:13 (NIV)