

Jesus vs a Legion

Matt. 8:28-34. // Mark 5:1-20. // Luke 8:26-39.

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28 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. 29 “What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” 30 Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. 31 The demons begged Jesus, “If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.” 32 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. 33 Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. 34 Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

The demon & Jesus. The pigs & The abyss. The population & The men.

In the last sermon, Jesus immediately calmed the storm with the power of his voice - he did so to demonstrate he is God the Creator. In today's sermon, Jesus shows his power over the demons - he does so to demonstrate he is God Almighty, he is stronger than the enemy.

HOUSEKEEPING: Today's topic is demon possession, it is important we approach this with a sober mindset. People often go to extremes when talking about this: Either they think "everything" is the devil's fault, or they literally avoid the subject and erase the devil from the picture. Both these extremes should be avoided.

MISCONCEPTION: There is a misconception I find important to notice before we jump into the text. Due to the historical Greek/Roman influence in our culture, people often see God as the king of Heaven/good; & the devil as the king of Hell/evil - as if God and the devil were fighting on "**the same league**." Consequently, some teach that "if you do not *belong* to God, you *belong* to the devil." We need to be careful here when we talk about **ownership**...

Remember, Satan *is not the creator*, therefore he doesn't own the things we usually think he does. He DOES NOT own the human race. The devil does influence/affect people's lives, yes indeed; but people do not *belong* to him - people belong to God, whether they are Believers or not.

Why is that important? Here is why:

(i) demonic possession - If everyone (who's not a Christian) were to belong to the devil, everyone would be severely demon possessed - just like this man, in today's sermon. That's why we do not have a widespread catastrophe everywhere. *He does influence/affect/tempt/oppress/persecute the human race but he does not own it.

(ii) demons are *already* condemned - Scriptures present God high above and Satan and the demons defeated under God. They are accountable to God. They have all rebelled against His majesty; their condemnation was already pronounced and is soon to be enforced (Genesis 3:15 is the pronouncement, Revelation 20 is the final enforcement).

(iii) human responsibility & the image and likeness of God - By default, we were made in the Image and Likeness of God; by default, we have common Grace in us; by default, God has placed inside of us the desire for eternity. All of these, by default, curbs the devil from possessing whoever he wants.

(iv) when demon possession happens - When someone yields to Satan: Sin, paganism, and immorality! Demonic possession means someone was influenced by

Satan to such an extent, that though he does not belong to the devil, the devil has “taken over” that person’s mind and body. And he acts!

As a matter of fact, today’s text showcases two men in a heavily pagan land with Old Testament impure work/practices (the herd of pigs). It is clear that they yielded to Satan, and he possessed them.

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Here is the summary of this passage: Jesus commands the evil spirits to leave the men, and they obey Him after some negotiation. The people of the land got scared and asked Jesus to leave their town. As He was leaving the town, He entrusted evangelism to the two men who were healed by Him - and they preached the Gospel to their own people.

We can structure the story this way: (i) The Demon & Jesus; (ii) The Pigs & The Abyss; (iii) The Population & The Men.

The Demon & Jesus -

What is a demon? A demon is an angel that has fallen. God did not create evil things, since everything God creates is good. However, Satan and “his” angels rebelled against God and therefore they became evil (demon).

What did the demons do to the two men? Matthew does not say much about that, but Mark and Luke do. According to them, these men were: Cast out of society, they lived in the graveyard, they were aggressive, they cut themselves, they walked naked, everyone was afraid of them, and not even the chains could hold them. Their state was so bad due to the amount of demons inside of them - there was a Legion (6,000) possessing them.

Jesus gave the command to the Legion to leave the men, and they obeyed. Moreover, they prostrated and worshiped Jesus (see Mark & Luke). We can learn a few things with their worship: (i) Jesus is God - worship is due to God alone. (ii) The demon’s “worship” was forced. Believers worship Jesus willingly. The Devil and non-believers will confess Jesus forcefully on his second coming. “Every knee will bow down and every tongue shall confess Jesus is the Lord.” (iii) On the other hand, as the two men bowed down and worshiped, we conclude they were crying out for help; “please, set us free from these demons, we beg you.”

The Pigs & The Abyss -

Here is the most mysterious aspect of today’s text: The demons had a dialogue with Jesus. They asked, “What do you want with us, Son of God?” And, “Have you

come here to torture us before the appointed time?” As we clarified in the beginning, the demons are already condemned by God, the Judge. Thus, their inquiry communicates two things: (i) Jesus is God, the one who will condemn them eternally; (ii) their torment has a due date in the end of days, not now.

Even more mysteriously, they “prayed a petition” to Jesus: “If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.” EVEN MORE MYSTERIOUSLY, Jesus permitted it! Now the Legion went to the herd of pigs, and the animals rushed down to the lake and died in the waters (the pigs died, not the demons). What’s going on here?!

Mark and Luke help us to understand it: The word “sea/water” and the word “abyss” have **the same meaning** in the Bible: (i) It is deep and dark. (ii) Nobody can see what’s deep down. (iii) Once an object is thrown into the sea, it is gone. (See Genesis, when God created the Universe it was *void and formless, in deep darkness...* and the Spirit of God was hovering the face of the *waters*)

****Be careful, the word “sea/water” literally means just “sea/water” too, context clarifies things.****

What is going on here? As Jesus became flesh and walked among us, the condemnation of Satan was happening simultaneously. Yes, there will be a final torment when Jesus comes a second time. Yes, it is not the time for Jesus to cast the demons to the Lake of Fire yet. Yes, for now only, the devil has some “freedom” and he still torments people. But as surely as this Legion of Demons were sent to the abyss (sea/water) to perish now, they will also be sent to the abyss (Lake of Fire) in the end to perish eternally!

This passage depicts the first fruits of the devil's condemnation!

The Population & The Men -

There is a contrast between the attitudes of the men healed and the population in town: The men who were delivered wanted to follow Jesus wherever He went (See Mark and Luke), as opposed to the population in town wanting to kick Jesus out of their land.

Jesus conceded to the population’s request but He did not concede to the men’s request. Jesus commanded them to “go back to their own people and share their testimony to their own.” Which they obeyed faithfully.

Perhaps this is the most paradoxical thing ever: Jesus did “concede” to the Legion’s petition to go into the herd. Jesus “did not concede” to the men’s request to become disciples like the 12 disciples were.

Nevertheless, now we clearly understand why: Jesus defeated the demons when they were rushed to the sea. Jesus gave these two men a mission when he refused their request - he made them the first missionaries ever! Even before the Apostle Paul was named "the Apostle of the Gentiles," these men were already missionaries.

Conclusion -

The three applications of this sermon:

(i) Evangelism - What's the best way to evangelize others? Our testimony. To whom? To the ones who are closer to us.

(ii) The apex of human decay - The people of the town cared more for the herd of pigs (money/profits) than they cared for the healing of the two gentlemen. For the sake of an example: Back home, if I hit and run a dog with the car, I pay a greater fine than if I were to hit and run a human being...

(iii) Salvation is the solution. We tend to tackle symptoms instead of the root of the problem. For example: Some preachers would love to perform a deliver prayer in a moment like this, but that's just the symptom... The root problem is indeed lack of salvation. **The person delivered must believe and surrender to Jesus as the Lord of their lives.**

If that does not happen, there will be another future possession... *"When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first."* (Matt. 12:43-45)

May the Lord have mercy on us! Amen.

Key ideas -

(i) Evangelism - Isn't it true that sometimes we are willing to go to another nation to preach the Gospel (e.g: I came from Brazil to Canada), but we are not willing to share Jesus with the ones who are the closest to us?

(ii) Syncretism - How dangerous it is when our perception of the spiritual world is wrong: God is not "facing off the devil on the same level/league." The Devil is subdued to God's power. He is a creature accountable to God.

(iii) Torment/Condemnation - You may rest assured Satan will be the most tormented being in the Lake of Fire!

