

Introduction

What can you learn from a demon? On the one hand demons are deceivers and you must be careful of them. But on the other hand what they say when they come into contact with Jesus reveals that there are things we can learn from them.

[Read Text; Pray]

We saw back in the earlier part of chapter 8 that Jesus gave orders to go to the other side of the lake. His intent to travel to the other side was not incidental. On the way the group encountered a great storm which Jesus stilled and demonstrated he is Lord over nature. The display of his holiness caused the disciples to marvel and fear and wonder, "what sort of man is this?" And when he arrived at the other side, he displayed that his lordship extends even to the realm of the invisible, the realm of spiritual powers. And again the display produced fear. So this morning we consider a text in which Matthew takes his emphasis on Jesus' holiness to the next level. There are two responses here to that holiness. But neither one is an exemplary response for you or me.

Looking at the text we first need to be reminded that . . .

I. Demons Are Real.

A. The age in which we live could be correctly described as a secular age. The supernatural is all but dismissed. Skepticism abounds with regard to demons and the devil. About the only place in our society which lends any attention to evil spirits is in movie theaters where so much that is portrayed is seen as fantasy. You walk out of a theater and you walk into the real world so to speak and here hardly anyone takes the spiritual realm seriously.

And the fact is that I have never knowingly encountered a demon. And you may not have either, but we have all encountered the demonic. False doctrines and beliefs come from demons, and this age is rife with them. In fact demons love a society that has become like ours that makes itself

oblivious to the spiritual realm. In this way they have us where they want us—deceived and deceiving others about the reality of a spiritual realm in which we would be pressed to deal directly with the reality of God himself.

B. But when Jesus arrived at the other side of the lake, he encountered demons. They were inhabiting two men who came to meet Jesus when he arrived ashore. The two men were under the authority and control of the demons. So what are demons? They are created spiritual beings, originally good, who joined the rebellion of Satan. They are fallen angels who oppose God, God's plan, and God's people. Jude 6 says they are "angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling." And we learn about them in this passage that demons are like bullies, actively involved in disrupting and destroying the lives of human beings with all manner of uncleanness. Here they were, driving mad the men whom they oppressed and through them making miserable the lives of the people around them. This is not a fantasy of horror but real life and it is horrific. Demons are real and they pose a danger to humans.

1. In Mark's gospel we are told that one of these demonized men was not able to be restrained. Mark tells us that "he had often been bound with shackles and chains but he wrenched the chains apart, and 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." Clearly the man himself was miserable due to the hateful work of the demons within him.

2. But through him these demons were also a menace to everyone around him. Matthew tells us these two men were such formidable threats that no one could pass that way. The hostile power of the demons was working out through the men such that the people around simply did not possess the power or authority to come through that way. It is as though the demons had turned these men into vicious attack dogs, and the dogs had this domain of death to themselves. They were fearsome and people kept their distance.

This picture is a warning for human beings not to trifle with the demonic realm. It is real. It is horrific. Exposure to the realm could bring you into

its clutches. People of the world, beware. Do not take lightly playful involvement in the world of demons and spirit and witches and such. It is a real realm of evil and darkness which is opposed to God.

C. But now listen. The nature of the demonic possession of these men is an accurate depiction of every sinner by nature. Satan is the prince of the power of the air. Even those who are not oppressed as were the two men are still under the rule and darkness of the devil and his spiritual colleagues. Paul describes our natural condition to the Ephesians—dead in trespasses and sins, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. It is a condition depicted well by the reality of these men who were oppressed and miserable, living among the tombs, and making others miserable as well. As surely as no one could restrain them, no one can help the sinner, that is except the very one who came to the two men that day. The one who just stilled the storm did have the power, did have the authority to bring relief, and did have the intent to save them from their horrific situation of death and uncleanness and oppression. When Jesus comes, no amount of human or natural or spiritual resistance can stand against him and keep him from doing what he comes to do. Jesus came across the lake to deliver these men from Satan's power. And the demons would not be able to withstand the saving delivering mission of Jesus.

Praise God! When Jesus became a man and crossed the divide between heaven and earth, he came to save sinners oppressed under the prince of the power of the air. And nothing could stop him. Oh, the work of Satan in the hearts of men led them to cry out for his crucifixion. But this was not his defeat. It was the necessary provision of sacrifice for the forgiveness of the people chosen by God. He rose from the dead. And his saving work is sure for all who trust in him.

This encounter also reveals to us that . . .

II. Demons Are Not Dumb.

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. The previous section ended with the disciples marveling. They were asking "what sort of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?" What they wondered about then, the demons answered right here. He is this type of man—a man who is the Son of God. The demons are not dumb. They correctly identify Jesus. It is not a question for them but a certainty. Jesus is the Son of God. This is the first instance in Matthew of a creature identifying Jesus, and of all creatures the identification comes from his mortal enemies. They know. They were present when he laid the foundation of the earth. They were among those who sang together and shouted for joy as the Son of God created the world. They know the three persons of the Trinity. The demons are not dumb. They have an accurate Christology. They know and understand who Jesus is. And they say so here.

B. The demons also know their eschatology. Eschatology refers to the doctrines of the last things. And these demons know that the last things involve a day of final judgment. The demons speak of "the time." They use a Greek word that highlights an event that stands on the horizon. It is an event of defining proportions. They acknowledge that on God's calendar a day is fixed when he will judge the living and the dead, and even them. And they see Jesus, the Son of God, as the one who will judge them. "Have YOU come to torment us before the time?" They also know that the outcome of standing before this judge will mean torment for them.

A couple weeks ago we had this unusual event right here in the service when I was preaching on this very matter. Jesus warned the Jews that Gentiles would come into the kingdom while many Jews would not. They would be thrown into the outer darkness where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. We had a heckler who did not like the idea of eternal punishment, who disputed that it was so. This is not a pleasant truth to our fleshly sensibilities. But it is true. And even the demons believe in tormentous judgment by God. They give testimony to it right here. There is a time of torment coming. At that time Jesus will consign the wicked angels and humans to such an eternal condition.

Jude 6 – and the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

2 Peter 2:4 – God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.

Matthew 25:41 – at the great judgment, King Jesus will say to those on his left: “Depart from me, you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Revelation 20:10 – the devil who had deceived [the nations] was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the prophet were and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

The demons have a better grasp of the scripture than many who claim to be followers of Christ. They are not dumb. And we should not be guilty of getting it wrong where the demons get it right.

C. Now it is not the intent of demons to promote truth. They are responsible for all manner of wrong belief. It is not because they lack understanding but because they hate God and stand opposed to truth. There is great malice in the hearts of the devil and his angels. They lie and deceive and seek to persuade human beings of the falsehood of the very things they know to be true. I am getting sick of the politics of deceit these days. The ads are so deceptive. If you were dependent on political ads to know who to vote for, you would be in a world of hurt. If you are a low-information voter, you are at the whims of lies. And the same is true if you are a low-information person. You must know the facts. And to know the facts, you must know the Bible. Otherwise, you will be carried away by every wind that blows. And let me tell you the devil is blowing a lot of hot air. But it is not because he is dumb.

D. The demons are not dumb, but they tremble. James 2:19 says, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe and shudder.” They believe. They know. They give assent to the fact that God

is, that Jesus is the Son of God, that judgment is coming, and that they will be subjected to eternal torment. But they do not repent. They do not trust. They remain enemies of Christ. And so they shudder. Believing facts never saved anyone. And that is James's point in his epistle. Mental assent is not the same as saving faith. Because the faith that saves is a faith that serves Jesus Christ. It is with him. It follows him. So do not be convinced that you are a Christian and are headed for heaven because you believe in God, because you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, because you even believe God raised him from the dead. All that is essential to saving faith. But the demons believe all that. You are no better than a demon if you merely believe certain facts. True and saving belief repents. It turns from hostility against God to love and serve him. It ceases being against him and takes up even a cross to follow him.

If all you do is believe facts about Christ, you have not yet come to saving faith. You must abandon yourself and your sin and lay hold of him as your hope, your anchor, your refuge, and your Lord.

Next we come to the heart of Matthew's concern in relating to us these details. He wants us to see that . . .

III. Jesus Is Lord Over Demons.

A. These demonized men were so compelled by the demons that no one could pass that way. But here comes Jesus, and all that is about to change. The demons could block everybody else, but not Jesus. He comes and orders the demons to leave the two men. Why dare he to do such a thing? Because they cannot do anything he does not permit them to do. Because he has dominion over them. Because it is the intent of Jesus to deliver these men from Satan's power and possession.

B. I want you to notice the key word that describes the behavior of the demons in verse 31. "The demons BEGGED him saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." The mighty demons who so fiercely operated through these men now appear as squealing weaklings prostrate before the King, begging him not to be thrown into the abyss just yet. They cannot lift a finger before him, they cannot do anything without his permission. They are absolutely subservient to his will. It is not because they want to be this way. It is because they can't help it. Jesus rules over

the spiritual realm. The power of God is his. They cannot resist. Jesus allows the demons to go into the large herd of swine nearby and the pigs drown themselves in the lake.

C. This is a spooky, creepy situation. But the drowning of the pigs is evidence that Jesus is Lord over the demons. He has entered into a strong man's house and he is plundering it for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. 1 John 3:8 says, "the reason the Son of God appeared is to destroy the works of the devil." Destroying the devil's works, he accomplishes his own work to save. The two men, once demonized, now sit clothed and in their right minds. Jesus came to deliver them and no demonic roadblock could keep him from it. That deliverance comes to everyone whose faith is in Christ Jesus. For (Colossians 1:13) "he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

What manner of man is this? He is the Son of God. The Father had spoken it at his baptism. His works and words had shown it. The demons had admitted it. And he further proves it with the exertion of his power in the supernatural realm.

Martin Luther said it well: The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure; for lo, his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him; that WORD above all earthly powers no thanks to them abideth, the Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth, let goods and kindred go; this mortal life also,,; the body they may kill; God's truth abideth still; his kingdom is forever.

The devil may threaten. At times he may seem to hold you in his hand, but Jesus holds him and his angels in his hand. Followers of Christ do not need to fear Satan. He is not a threat. Do not take him lightly. He seeks to devour. He exists to steal, kill, tempt, and destroy. But live with the full armor of Christ, and do not tremble for him.

Finally we observe that . . .

IV. Jesus' Lordship Provokes Resistance.

A. The herdsmen went into town and reported the astonishing events they had witnessed. And all the city came out. It was a place they had not been able to come to for as long as the legion of demons had overpowered the two men. But now they came. They had heard about the 2,000 pigs that had gone crazy and run into the lake. And they had heard about the fact that the two men were now at peace. But what did they come to see? The text says they came out to meet Jesus. The focus was rightly on him. This is where Matthew wants our attention as well. After all it is his purpose to show us that Jesus is king so that we too will be convinced, so that we will become his disciples as well, so that we will submit joyfully to his rule.

B. But that is not how the towns people responded. The same word that described the position of the demons before Jesus now describes them. They BEGGED Jesus. They implored him. And what was their urgent request? "Please leave." Can you imagine? Leave? Here were two men in their right minds. A way they could not travel was now a peaceful place. The misery and oppression brought by the demonic presence was eviscerated. But they preferred things the way they had been?

Some postulate that they were upset about losing 2,000 pigs. That is not it at all. What it was is that they were confronted with the same sense of the transcendence of God that the disciples had experienced in the boat on the lake. The authority of Jesus, the power of Jesus, the deity of Jesus, the holiness of Jesus were more uncomfortable to their souls than the fearful presence of demons. As we pointed out last week, the holiness of God is undoing to the human soul. There is nothing more undoing than that. God is a consuming fire. It is a fearful thing to fall into his hands. No greater threat exists. The holiness of God is the reason there is the day of judgment. It is the reason there is wrath. It is the reason there is guilt. It is the reason there is eternal torment.

But it is also the reason Jesus came. He came to satisfy the holy and righteous demands of God so the threat might be eliminated. And it is for those who surrender to the King!

But how sad what happened here in the region of the Gadarenes! They begged their only hope, their only refuge from righteous wrath to leave.

And . . . he left. The text flows this way: "They begged him to leave their region. And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city."

C. Think how many times and how many ways Jesus crosses over into your region, over into your life and reveals himself. And how do you respond to him? Oh to respond like the Gadarenes is a grave and sad mistake! Do not make that mistake today! Welcome him, fellowship with him. Invite him to stay and deliver you as he did the demon possessed guys, beg him not to leave but to transform you, to remove you from uncleanness and hopelessness, to clothe you and put you in your right mind.

Conclusion

All the begging in this text merely postponed the inevitable. Paul gloriously speaks of the day when Christ is fully exalted. Because of his great humility and willingness to serve and die on the cross, "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."