

Introduction:

- A. A couple months ago a young friend of mine at Einsteins asked what I thought about exorcisms. Probably been watching too many movies, but I told him I'd had some experience with them and he was pretty surprised. For the kids here, an exorcism is when an evil spirit from the devil is thrown out of a person by the power of Jesus' name. Satan can't tempt and trouble us all, but it is rare that he can invade someone's mind and body. It can all sound pretty scary but the wonder is that Jesus has authority and power over the devil, and Jesus exercises that authority to set people free.
- B. Today, we'll look at a story in **Matt. 8:28-34** that is an abbreviated version of a story told by both Mark and Luke. One difference is that those two gospels speak of only one main character, while Matthew speaks of two, probably because Mark and Luke wanted to highlight that one man's story. It happens right after Jesus calmed the violent storm on the Sea of Galilee. He and his disciples were crossing from the Jewish side of the Sea to the predominantly Gentile side known as Decapolis, which means Ten Cities. After that wild night they arrive at a rather odd place. It's not a town. There are steep banks so it's not particularly accessible. There were tombs nearby and a huge heard of pigs. You have to admit, it's a pretty strange place to put in. Here's what happened... [**vv.28-34**]. Now let's walk through this story a little more slowly and really look.

I. THE STORY

- A. "Two demon-possessed men." A better literal word would be *demonized*, though in this case they really were owned

by the demons within them. **These demons had completely vandalized these two men.** You've heard of vandals breaking into a home and completely trashing it? Well, that's what these evil spirits did to these men's minds, hearts and bodies. They trashed them, defaced them, dehumanizing them, turning them into savages.

The two men "*were coming from the tombs,*" which were either carved into the stones or were small stone chambers. But the point is that they held the bones of the dead, which was home-sweet-home to the demons.

"They were so violent that no one could pass that way." Mark says they had such superhuman strength that they could break chains. *"No one was strong enough to subdue them,"* he says. Add demonic violent anger to that superhuman strength and the only thing people could do was stay away lest they become victims. Mark and Luke tell us that these men wore no clothes. Mark says of the one man, *"Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones."*

And Jesus makes sure the boat he's on comes up on that particularly inhospitable spot, where these two men come out to meet him, shouting.

- B. We see these wild, violent, crazed men but we hear the demons within them shouting at Jesus, "What do you want with us, Son of God?" It seems like a good thing that they identify Jesus as the Son of God. But here's a curious thing: **Mark 1:34** says, *"He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was."* **For the demons to use Jesus' divine name was a kind of power play.** Did you ever have a slick salesman, in the middle of his pitch, say, *"You know, I didn't get your name."* And if you know what's good for

you, you'll say, "*I know. I didn't give it.*" To have your name is to have a certain power over you. The demons were up to something like that. Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus turned the tables and demanded to know the demons' name, which was, "*Legion, for we are many.*"

- C. Look what else they say in **v.29**, "*What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?*" They are expecting to face the Son of God eventually, but they weren't expecting it that day. The sense of that phrase is surprise: "*What are **you** doing **here**?*" The devil and his demons know that their days are numbered and that they *will* most certainly face God's judgment and hell, but these demons also knew that time had not yet come. So what's with Jesus showing up?!

"*Have you come here to torture us?*" Jesus certainly could've, and they surely deserved it, but he didn't. Luke says, "*they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss*" where the Bible says many demons are already in chains awaiting the judgment day [Jude 6]. But Jesus didn't do that either. Because God has all this on his great timetable, even the wicked work of the devil. **John Piper** explains, "*The Son of God, Jesus Christ, will be more highly honored in the end because he defeats Satan through longsuffering, patience, humility, servanthood, suffering, and death, rather than through raw power. And the more highly honored the Son is, the greater the joy of those who love him.*" [8/19/07 sermon, DesiringGod.org]

- D. Now if all this isn't weird enough, things take an even stranger turn next in **vv.30-31**: "*Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus, 'If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.'*" The other gospels tell us this was a huge herd—2000 pigs! I

grew up in farm country. Our friend, Walton, raised pigs and I can tell you they stink to high heaven, plus they wallow and rut and grunt. To the Jews, they were the filthiest of all the animals. And here were 2000 of them all grunting and wallowing and stinking up the place. And the demons seemed to say, *“Look! Move in ready!”* If there was any place as unclean as tombs it was pigs.

V.32, *“He said to them, ‘Go!’”* (That’s it. Just one word and a legion of violent, powerful demons immediately obeyed his order.) *“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.”* This was a swine mob, a **pig panic**, squealing and stampeding down the bluff and into the water. Generally, pigs can swim, but they couldn’t that day! I suspect they were hauling pig carcasses out of the Sea of Galilee for a long time!

I don’t think that was the intent of the demons. They want a body to live in. In **Matt 12:43** Jesus was talking about evil spirits and he said, *“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.’”* (Which they cannot do if the Holy Spirit has taken up residence there.) The demons didn’t intend to be the death of all those pigs. But even pigs couldn’t accommodate them and their filth.

Now think of this: all that evil madness had been concentrated in those two men. It’s unimaginable what it was like in their minds, emotions and bodies. Then Jesus comes to them—not to their *town*, for they had none; not to their *homes*, for they had no homes—but to their *tombs*. Jesus engaged the evil spirits. He was not intimidated by their madness or violence. Instead, Jesus took charge. He

invaded this place of the world's dark lord—Satan—and took command in order to set these prisoners free.

- E. Well, the pig herders lit out for town. I'm guessing there were a bunch of people in that town who owned stock in swine and Matthew says, "*the whole town went out to meet Jesus.*" Mark tells us that when they got there, "*they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind.*" That frightened them! But Matthew doesn't mention the men. He wants us to focus just on those townspeople. Again, "*Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him...*" Well, you kind of expect the next line to say, "*They rejoiced and believed in him,*" but what it actually says is, "*they pleaded with him to leave their region.*" Matthew uses the same word twice in this story. The demons *begged* Jesus to send them into the pigs, and the townspeople *begged* Jesus to leave their region. So the demons stayed and Jesus left. That's irony. **John Oxenham**

[a.k.a. Wm Arthur Dunkerly] wrote a poem entitled, "GADARA, A.D. 31."

*Rabbi, begone! Thy powers
Bring loss to us and ours.
Our ways are not as Thine.
Thou lovest men, we--swine.
Oh, get you 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?*

II. WHY DID GOD GIVE US THIS STORY IN THE BIBLE?

- A. First of all, Matthew wants us to see again the authority of Jesus Christ, this time over the terrifying, deadly power of Satan. Later, on a similar occasion in Matt. 12, Jesus was accused of driving out demons by the power of Beelzebub

—Satan. He replied, “*If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ... But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.*” Here, Jesus is plundering the house of the mighty Satan, not in some secret burglary, but in broad daylight, while the enemy watched helplessly.

Such is the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ whom we serve and trust!

- B. Satan’s demons cannot easily overtake someone’s life but the devil is very active all around us. Sometimes we think there are only two actors in the drama of redemption—God and humanity, but there are three. Satan always lurks about the shadows of the stage. [F. Rutledge, paraphrased] **1 Pet 5:8-9** says, “*Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith.*” **He seeks to devour us by tempting us to sin, by lying to us about sin, and by accusing of us of the sins Christ has forgiven.** He also seeks to frighten us, depress us, confuse us, and distract us. So *stay alert!* But don’t be afraid.
- C. Here’s why: The Holy Spirit lives in us and **1 John 4:4** says, “*the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*” There are times when Satan’s pressure is hard upon us, when he is frighteningly near and evil, when his temptations seem relentless. Call out to Jesus! Speak in his mighty name. “*In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, you have no power over me. I belong to him. You are defeated! Leave me alone!*” Illus.: I’ve told you before

about a terrifying dream I had one night. It was more than a nightmare. There was evil in it. I was threatened by the sinister voice I heard. At first, I felt frozen. All I could muster in my half-asleep stupor was to call out, “*Jesus!*”, and in that moment all the darkness and fear vanished. Instantly. At the name of Jesus! It was exhilarating. Just the name of Jesus broke the devil’s power!

- D. There’s one more thing Jesus wants us as his disciples to remember from this story. Those townspeople weren’t all that unusual. Jesus came to deliver those whose bondage the world ignores. You may not encounter someone who is demonized but every day we meet people whom Satan has blinded, tormented, and tempted. When you sense that this is the case, and God impresses the need of that person on your heart, pray for them in the strong name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that the eyes of their hearts may be opened. That God will convict them of sin so that they yearn for a Savior. Pray that God will reveal Jesus to them. Then be ready to be God’s instrument, be ready to explain the hope we have in Christ, be ready to come against Satan for them.

In a larger context, we must be champions for those who are in any kind of bondage. Sexual abuse is one of the enemy’s entries into a life. Children torn from their parents are at risk of the enemy. Hatred and prejudice, injustice, violence and cruelty. This world system that trades in the bodies and souls of human beings. False teachers who deny that Jesus is God and Lord, and any belief that negates our sin and need of a Savior in Jesus. In all these and more, Satan lies, destroys, and murders.

You and I can't fight on all these fronts, but we can come in Jesus' name somewhere in the battle.

Conclusion

Illus.: Recently, our friends Bill and Carol were with us. They're in India now for a couple weeks and one of the men they work with there is named Bibi. When he was a young man, Bibi lived in a remote rural Buddhist village in eastern India. He was deeply devoted to Buddhism and even in his teens had learned hundreds of chants and incantations.

Then Bibi's mother died. Her body was laid out in their home and the women of the village came to mourn and to chant over her. So did Bibi. Unbeknownst to any of them, there was one woman there who had been away in a different village and had learned of Jesus. In the midst of all this, she rather innocently suggested they ask Jesus to raise her back to life, and then she prayed in Jesus' name. And Bibi's mother came back to life!

Bibi was so stunned and spiritually hungry that he traveled half way across India to find someone who could answer his questions about Jesus. Today he is a powerful evangelist and scholar for the cause of Christ.

All hail the power of Jesus' name!

Let angels prostrate fall.

Bring forth the royal diadem,

and crown him Lord of all.

Bring forth the royal diadem,

and crown him Lord of all!