

The Deliverance of Two Demon-Possessed Men
Matthew 8:28-34
Gerry Andersen
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

Matthew 8-9 provides us with the account of ten miracles that serve to prove the authority of Jesus over all. These miracles are structured thematically, rather than chronologically. Matthew has organized these miracles into groups for the purpose of presenting Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

- Miracles of healing (8:1-17)
- Miracles of power (8:23-9:8)
- Miracles of restoration (9:19-34)

The first group of three miracles all involved physical healing, showing Jesus as having authority of physical ailments. The second set of three miracles involves Jesus' power. Matthew 8:23-27 shows Jesus' power over nature and Matthew 8:28-34 shows Jesus power over the demonic world.

The demon-possessed men encounter Jesus (8:28)

The boat survived the storm because Jesus calmed the wind and the sea. They completed their journey as planned (cf. 8:17) to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to the region where those from Gadara lived. Gadara was the capital of the region of the Decapolis a few miles to the southeast of the southeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus and His disciples entered this region from Capernaum on the northwest coast of the Sea so they had made their way across the width and length of the body of water.

One challenging issue is comparing Matthew 8:28-34 with Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39, where the disciples are described as sailing to the country of the Gerasenes, not Gadarenes. Actually, all of the synoptic Gospels have variant readings which support each and Mark and Luke even have a variant reading of Gergesenes. The word "Gergesenes" likely appears from copyists errors resulting from pronunciation. The other readings derive from copyists seeking to harmonize the stories in the Gospels. This is why modern translations show the different words for in what country this incident takes place. The King James Version followed later manuscripts that had "Gadarenes" in all three Gospels.

The best conclusion is that all three are speaking of the same territory but that Matthew is not as specific. Matthew is instead referring to a larger general area. Matthew's reading of Gadarenes is referring to a region near the Sea of Galilee and Mark and Luke are referring to the country around the town of Gerasa, southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

Gadara, as a regional capital, even had its own coins, which displayed a ship. This tells us that Gadara considered the sea part of its region, even though as a town it was a few miles inland. This area was controlled by those from Gadara and this area of Decapolis ("ten cities") was originally founded by Alexander the Great over three centuries earlier. It was at this point in time a Roman province filled with Gentiles.

A second issue surrounds the number of demon possessed men, as Mark and Luke only describe one man approaching Jesus. Of course, Mark and Luke do not say only one demoniac approached Jesus. They both say that one did. The one came to Jesus came along with another. Whenever you have two, you also always have one. Matthew may have mentioned two men as two witnesses to this miracle.

This is not the first time that Jesus would cast out demons (cf. 4:24; 8:16) and this will be seen many times later in the Gospel, including in the section of chapters 8-9 (9:32-33). The theme of opposition to Jesus from Satan is frequent (cf. Matthew 4:1-11) as the Son of God has come to dwell among us.

These two men resided among tombs in a cemetery. This kept them away from the Jewish population who considered tombs as a place that was ritually unclean. The conduct of such men was "extremely violent." Because they lived among the tombs, they were less of a nuisance to the population.

The demon-possessed men react to Jesus (8:29)

Upon encountering Jesus, the two demon-possessed men reacted strongly against Jesus. We can observe a few important conclusions from their words. First, their words are reflective of the demons who possessed them. This can be best seen in the words from Matthew 8:31, "*If you are going to cast us out.*"

Secondly, they had a prior awareness of Jesus. This was very early in Jesus' public ministry and yet they knew of Him in spite of living apart from the population of the town. This shows the demons had prior knowledge about Jesus.

Also, they identified Jesus as “Son of God.” This messianic title has been used often by Matthew to refer to Jesus as being from God to this point in the Gospel (1:23; 2:15; 3:17; 4:3, 6). They had an awareness of who Jesus was, more so than even the disciples!

This brings to mind James 2:19, “*You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*” Demons have an understanding of God but are disobedient to Him. These two men were controlled by demons who knew more of Jesus than they would have, yet were opposed to Jesus.

By saying “*what business do we have with each other*” (literally, “what is to us and you”), they hold a perspective that there is no relationship between them and Jesus. They share no common interest whatsoever.

In addition, they knew their destiny. They had full awareness of their future torment that was established at a point of time in the future. Their question, “*Have you come to torment us before the time*” also acknowledges that this appointed time of judgment was able to be altered by the authority of Jesus. The future judgment will culminate in the lake of fire judgment (Revelation 20:10).

The demon-possessed men are delivered by Jesus (8:30-32)

The demons understand that Jesus has the ability to deliver the two men from their demon possession. The word “if” in verse 31 is a first-class condition, meaning that they expected to be cast out, as Jesus had done earlier (Matthew 4:24; 8:16). Therefore, they request to be sent into the herd of swine that was feeding at a distance from them. Mark 5:13 says there were about 2,000 pigs in the large herd.

They acknowledged His authority and they sought a better place for themselves. Just as they knew their eternal destiny, they knew they were under the authority of Jesus. Since they knew they would be cast out, they sought to be sent into the swine in order to escape the presence of Jesus.

The presence of a large number of swine is significant, since pigs were unclean animals. “*The pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you*” (Leviticus 11:7-8). The demons seek refuge in uncleanness.

The presence of the pigs testifies to the country of the Gadarenes as being predominantly Gentile. Jews certainly would not have been herding swine. If it were primarily Jewish, the market for the pigs would be very limited. It was the Gentiles who would be eating the food from the herd.

Jesus' authority is demonstrated by the single word "Go!" Immediately, the demons were cast out of the men and into the swine. The result was the complete destruction of the pigs into the waters of the Sea of Galilee. The extremely violent behavior of the men are now seen in the extremely violent behavior of the pigs.

Destruction is the work of the evil one. These demons afflicting the men were numerous, as seen in Mark's account where they say, "*My name is Legion, for we are many*" (Mark 5:9). There are so many that they produce the destruction of around 2,000 swine.

Some have wondered why Jesus would precipitate the death of 2,000 pigs. It is important to observe that Jesus did not destroy the pigs, the demons destroyed the pigs. The most that can be claimed is that Jesus allowed the demons to destroy the pigs.

This is the reality of God allowing evil in this world. Evil produces destruction. One day, God will deliver us from evil and death will end. But in God's profound wisdom, we patiently long for the day when there will no longer be any death (Revelation 21:4).

The focus of Matthew's narrative was not the two men. Luke records that one of them sought to follow Jesus (Luke 8:38), but certainly his deliverance did not occur by his faith, but by Jesus' authority over the demons. In Matthew, the engagement was between Jesus and the demons, not the men. Jesus had greater power than the forces of evil, just as Jesus had greater power than the forces of nature.

The response of the people (8:33-34)

The destruction of the swine caused those who were the herdsmen to report the deliverance of the demoniacs to those in the city. Matthew describes them as running away, likely not wanting to be responsible for the destruction. Upon hearing of this incident, the citizens came to investigate (Mark 5:14-16). When they investigated, they observed the men in their right mind, no longer violent, and told the city (cf. Luke 8:35-36).

This caused a great response from the city of Gadara against Jesus as they implored Him to leave. One would expect such a miracle to lead to the crowds wanting to learn from Jesus as was seen in the healing of the demoniacs in Matthew 4:24. This crowd was only interested in His departure.

This puzzling response can be understood when we consider the economic value of the herd of swine. Using the present value in today's currency, a herd of 2,000 grown pigs could be worth around one million dollars. In terms of the economy of an agricultural society, this was a dramatic loss and given the population base, could even affect the food supply to a degree.

The response of the residents showed their priorities. They were more concerned about the threat to their economy than they were about the two men who were suffering under demonic oppression. They valued the pigs over the people who were restored by the authority of Jesus.

Jesus demonstrated His authority over evil spirits and delivered two men who were so violent that no one could pass by them (8:28). This was not only a blessing for these two men but it was a blessing for the community. Yet the community failed to observe the greater spiritual blessing because of their concern for economic loss.

When we value material possessions of any kind so much that we miss the greater value of spiritual deliverance, we have evidence of idolatry. Jesus taught in the Sermon of the Mount that *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth"* (Matthew 6:24).

When we serve material possessions, we lose sight of what is far more important. *"We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Note that these people that were fearful about this destruction were Gentiles. Early in Jesus ministry we see Gentiles being encountered by Jesus and we see them imploring Him to leave them alone. The rejection of Jesus was not exclusively Jewish, for Gentiles are seen as lacking faith and opposing Him early on in His public ministry. We then see even early on in Jesus' ministry that He goes to Gentile people as a precursor to the gospel going to the world. Yet, as will become evident, opposition to Jesus will be from all peoples, just as the reception of Christ will be from all peoples (Revelation 7:9).

Conclusion

These encounters that Jesus had with demons leads to the question of whether this happens today. Why is it no longer our perceived experience that demons are afflicting people and creating mass destruction?

Many conclude that demons are fictional. They are part of stories from the past when people were superstitious. The Bible not only is clear regarding the reality of demons, but even warns us to be on the alert, *“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”* (1 Peter 5:8).

Many conclude that such things are happening today. They view disturbed and sinful people as being demon-possessed and seek to cast out demons from people. They believe that they can know what the devil is affecting and they have the means to deliver people from demonic oppression.

If we believe in Jesus, we will believe the Scripture as Jesus did. The Scripture is clear about our adversary. The outstanding question regards the timing and the means of our deliverance from the evil one.

God gave certain people the power to cast out demons, just as He gave certain people the power to heal the sick. This was never something that was common, but remarkably supernatural. The reason why it was not common was because God used these supernatural powers to validate His revelation through His appointed messengers.

As with other affirming sign gifts, the ability to cast out demons passed with the foundation of the church. This explains why there are no instructions given to us in the epistles to cast out demons. Our role is not to rebuke the devil, this is the Lord's domain (cf. Jude 9).

The reason we do not see these incidents of sending out demons today is because Jesus and the apostles are no longer with us. The church has been founded and the New Testament is complete. The forces of darkness control the world as *“the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”* (1 John 5:19).

Freedom from bondage to Satan occurs through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Upon belief in Christ we are delivered to eternal life. *“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son”* (Colossians 1:13). This deliverance is for all who believe and is permanent.

All believers in Christ have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. *“However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him”* (Romans 8:9). The Lord has delivered us from the power of darkness. *“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4).

Evil is propagated by the father of lies (John 8:44) and we can stand firm against evil by adhering to the truth of the word of God. *“Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil”* (Ephesians 6:11). The schemes of the devil can then be resisted by submission to God’s will. *“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you”* (James 4:8).

All these truths about our spiritual deliverance from the evil one is based upon the power of Jesus Christ over the domain of darkness. Jesus has all authority on heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). The same power that delivered these two men from the demons in Matthew 8:28-34 is the same power that delivers us from the evil one.

Matthew 8:28-34 shows the destruction of Satan. The men were tormented, the community was in fear, and their future apart from Christ was condemnation. Christ’s healing of the men brought them a sound mind and peace. No longer did they act in an extremely violent manner to those who came near them. This is part of the deliverance that Christ brings as the Savior of the world, ultimately delivering believers to eternal peace rather than eternal torment.

It is essential that we grow in our appreciation of all of what salvation in Jesus Christ means. This record of Jesus’ authority over demons should build our trust in Christ who delivers us from evil (Matthew 6:13). As the king of the Jews, Christ’s kingdom will conquer the spiritual forces of darkness for eternity. We should long for this deliverance, with thanksgiving for the confidence we have in the coming fulfillment of the promise of eternal life.