

Section 17

JESUS FREES THE
GADARENE DEMONIACS

(Parallels: Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

TEXT: 8:28—9:1

28. And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, there met him two possessed with demons, coming forth out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man could pass by that way.
29. And behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?
30. Now there was afar off from them a herd of many swine feeding.
31. And the demons besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine.
32. And he said unto them, Go. And they came out, and went into the swine: and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep into the sea and perished in the waters.
33. And they that fed them fled; and went away into the city, and told everything, and what was befallen to them that they were possessed with demons.
34. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought *Him* that he would depart from their borders.
- 9:1. And he entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his own city.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- From the information given in this text in the speeches of the demons themselves, what is revealed about their nature?
- Why did the herd of pigs react so violently?
- What is the value of the testimony of those who kept the swine in this incident?
- Why should people, whose public enemies numbers one and two had been completely "rehabilitated," request their Benefactor to leave? Why, do you think, did Jesus so meekly leave this territory without actively opposing His expulsion? Could He not have reasoned with this superstitious populace and have gained thus entrance into the Decapolis?

- e. Since it was apparently under Jesus' orders that the disciples took the boat back to Capernaum with Jesus on board, what does this indicate about Jesus' original desire to get away from Capernaum for awhile? (See Notes on 8:23) Did Jesus change His mind after He left Capernaum? If so, tell the sequence of events which may have led the Lord to decide to return to Capernaum instead of sailing further south on the east side or else landing on the western shore south of Capernaum.
- f. Do you think that we have anything today similar to the demon-possession as described in the Bible? What is the basis for your conclusion?
- g. Why do you suppose the demoniacs lived in the tombs?
- h. Could these demons foretell the future? What makes you think so?
- i. Explain why the men who tended the swine fled.
- j. Do you think the following question is fair: "If Jesus is truly just, why then did He permit this loss of property to the owners of the swine?" If you think it is fairly stated, answer it; if not, show how it does not justly represent the situation involved. In this latter case, how would you rephrase the question and then answer it?
- k. Why do you think the freed demoniac made the request that he did?
- l. Can you give at least one reason why Jesus sent the man back to his own city to tell them what God had done for him?
- m. How does Jesus' technique of sending the freed demoniac back to his own people in the Decapolis, harmonize with Jesus' own admission of the general proverb: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and among his own people"? (cf. Lk. 4:24; Mt. 13:57)
- n. From an objective reading of the three synoptic accounts of the demoniacs' approach to Jesus, can you decide whether the actions of these two are attributable to the influence of the demons or to the men themselves, as they struggle against the malign influence? For instance, what prompted them to "worship" Jesus? Would demons have been likely to worship Him? What makes you say so?
- o. If you decide that the demons actually worshipped Jesus through the outward actions of these demoniacs under their influence, what may be learned regarding the respective positions of Jesus and the demons in relationship to each other?
- p. If you decide that the men actually worshipped Jesus in a wild, desperate attempt to seek help in being rid of the demonic influence, then what may be deduced respecting the personal re-

sponsibility and control or freedom of anyone who is demon-possessed?

- q. Some suggest that the demons chose to enter the swine with hatred for Jesus and planned to drive the hogs to destruction in a deliberate attempt to discredit Jesus before the local populace through the eradication of the swine herd. If so, could not Jesus have foreseen this and forestalled the consequent rejection by the townspeople? Do you think Jesus was gullible enough to let Himself be tricked by the demons?
- r. Where do you think the ex-demoniacs found the clothes in which they were seen dressed, sitting at Jesus' feet, by the time the crowds from the town arrived? Considering their former manner of life under demonic control, their wild, naked existence, would they have been likely to have a suit packed away in one of the tombs? Where did the clothes come from?
- s. Whose idea was it to make the plunge into the lake, the demons' or the hogs'? Or was this the purpose of neither, hence, an accident?
- t. If you conclude that the demons upon entering the swine had no intention of driving them into the lake, but rather deceived themselves into supposing a peaceful habitation in those animal bodies in order to postpone being hurried into the abyss, are the commentaries right in suggesting that the demons' succeeded in thwarting Jesus' further work among these people?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then, after the calming of the tempest, they arrived on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (which is opposite the province of Galilee, as you look at it on the map), to the country whose chief Roman city is Jerash or Gerasa. Closer to the sea is the town of Gadara while Gergesa is located on the shore. All three towns have given their name to the territory.

As Jesus came ashore, there met Him two demoniacs from the nearby city who were coming out of the tombs where they lived. For a long time they had worn no clothes and did not stay in a house at all. They were men in the grip of an unclean spirit. They were so violent that none dared use that road anymore. No one had yet been able to subdue them, not even chains could hold them. Many had been the times they had been secured with fetters and lengths of chains but they merely snapped the chains and broken the fetters to pieces and made off for solitary places. No one was able to do anything

with them. And so, unceasingly, night and day, they would scream among the tombs and on the hills, gashing themselves with stones.

When they saw Jesus in the distance, they ran and flung themselves down on their knees before Him and worshipped. (Jesus commanded the foul spirit, saying, "Come out of him!") Then the demons began yelling at the top of their voices, "What business have You here with us; what do You want of us, O Son of the most high God? Have You come here to torment us before the appointed time? For God's sake, we beg of You, do not torture us!"

Jesus questioned him, "What is your name?" To this, the most prominent demoniac replied, "My name is Legion, for there are many of us," for many demons had entered the men. The spirits begged and begged Jesus earnestly not to banish them from the country into the bottomless pit.

In the distance on a hillside there was a large drove of hogs feeding. So the demons begged Jesus, "Send us over to the pigs and we will take possession of them!" So Jesus gave them permission, saying, "Go!" and the unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs. The whole herd of about two thousand head stampeded over the edge of the cliff and down the steep slope into the sea, where they were drowned.

When the hog-feeders saw what had taken place, they took to their heels, and made for the town where they poured out the whole story, not forgetting the part about what had happened to the demoniacs. All over the countryside they told the news! Notice that the whole town came out to meet Jesus and to learn what it was that had happened. They saw Him and former demoniacs sitting at Jesus' feet clothed properly, and in full control of themselves—the very ones who had had the legion of demons! The crowds were afraid. Those who had seen the incident told them what had happened to the demon-possessed men and about the tragedy of the pigs. Upon this all the inhabitants of the surrounding country near Jerash began to implore Jesus to get out of their neighborhood; for they were terrified.

When Jesus was boarding the boat, one of the former demoniacs begged Jesus to let him go with Him but Jesus would not allow it but sent him away, saying, "Go to your own home and friends and tell them how much God has done for you and how the Lord has had mercy on you."

So the man went all over the town spreading the news of how much Jesus had done for him. He did this, in fact, throughout the Decapolis. Those who heard him were simply amazed.

So, Jesus, boarded the boat and crossed over the lake to the other side and came to His own city of Capernaum.

SUMMARY

After the stilling of the tempest, perhaps even the same evening, Jesus and His disciples landed at Gergesa. They were met on the shore by two demoniacs who recognized Jesus for His divine authority. Jesus cast out the demons, giving them leave to enter a swine herd. The frightened swineherds alerted the local populace to come see what had happened. The superstitious folk unanimously begged Jesus to depart. The chief ex-demoniac pleaded to be permitted to accompany Him, but was sent home to testify to God's goodness in his behalf.

NOTES

I. THE VIOLENT

8:28 **And when He was come to the other side** of the Sea of Galilee following the stormy crossing, the events occur which follow. However, the time element is not clear since this event follows hard on the stilling of that tempest, which, in turn, took place after the disciples and Jesus set sail "when evening had come" (Mk. 4:35) This phrase used by Mark (*opsias genoménes*) must be interpreted according to context to determine just what time is meant, whether before or after sundown. (Arndt-Gingrich, 606) So, if the storm blew the disciples in an easterly direction, like the wind after the feeding of the five thousand (cf. Jn. 6:17 with Mk. 6:48), it would not be impossible for them to have arrived at Gerasene shore not too long before sunset. Thus, the freeing of the demoniacs possibly took place that evening. Rejected by the native population, Jesus and His disciples either slept in the boat for the return trip to Capernaum, or else slept on the beach where the local people found them the next morning and asked them to leave.

to the country of the Gadarenes. A quick survey of the parallel texts in various translations will reveal divergent names for this area. The Greek texts are not much more help, although there is a firmer consensus of opinion among the editors of Greek texts that Matthew's original wording was "Gadarenes" while that of Mark and Luke was "Gerasenes." This apparent confusion is due to the error of scribes, seeking to correct what was thought to be an error in an earlier manuscript, when they had the correct original reading in hand. **The country of the Gadarenes** is the political territory around

Gadara, the chief city having jurisdiction over the land on the south-east side of the Sea of Galilee. This could certainly include the lesser town, Gergesa, a name also found in the manuscripts at this place. Gadara was one of the well-known cities of the great Decapolis city much farther away from the Galilean Sea to the south-east about 30 air-miles. Or, this latter name may be a pronunciation variant of the word Gergesa, found in the manuscripts. (See *ISBE* 1217b) Barnes (*Matthew*, 91) notes that these different names simply prove that the Evangelists are not deceivers, since, were they imposters attempting a hoax, they would have sought to agree! But their testimony is the more valuable, since this divergency demonstrates that these independent witnesses knew their land!

One fact stands out clearly: as will be seen from the map, the Arabic name Khersa or Kurseh clings to the ruins of a city mentioned by McGarvey (*Lands*, 328). At the southern side of the mouth of a deep ravine through the eastern mountains called Wady Samakh are to be found these remains. McGarvey describes the area:

Immediately south of (Khersa) rises a rocky mountain penetrated by tombs, which extends more than a mile along the lake-shore, at first leaving a plain more than a quarter of a mile wide between its base and the water's edge, but finally projecting one of its spurs close to the shore. Here, as Captain Wilson has clearly shown, must be the place where the hogs into which the demons entered "ran violently down a steep place into the sea." (Mt. 8:32) He says: "About a mile south of this (Khersa), the hills, which everywhere else on the eastern side are recessed from a half to three-quarters of a mile from the water's edge, approach within 40 feet of it; they do not terminate abruptly, but there is a steep, even slope, which we would identify with the 'steep place' down which the herd of swine ran violently into the sea, and so were choked. . . . It is equally evident, on an examination of the ground, that there is only one place on that side where the herd of swine could have run down a steep place into the lake, the place mentioned above."

Angry, fear-filled eyes had been following the progress of the boat in which Jesus and the Apostles had crossed the Sea of Galilee. Apprehension grew in the two as the boat bearing the Son of God drew nearer and nearer the shore. As the Creator and Lord of heaven, earth and hell stepped ashore, the two watchers ran to accost Him. **There**

met Him two possessed with demons, coming forth out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man could pass that way. See the Paraphrase-Harmony for the full description of their terrible case. Mark (5:6) intimates that from their home in the tombs, from a distance, the demoniacs had watched Jesus and the disciples disembark. Now they run to Him, fling themselves on the ground at His feet and worship. (Luke 8:28) Here is tragedy; these men belonged to the city (Lk. 8:27), but they came out of the tombs.

Out of the tombs is probably not intended to suggest that the demoniacs became such by some league with the devil through communication or companionship with the dead, for Luke (8:27) states the natural antithesis of this abode thus; "He lived not in a house, but in the tombs."

However, see Isaiah 65:4 which connects base idolatry with sitting in graves. Is there some connecting link between idolatry, necromancy and demon possession? The gods of the Gentiles are called demons. (See Deut. 32:17; Psa. 106:36-37; Rev. 9:20; I Cor. 10:20, 21) False religions are also connected with demons. (I Tim. 4:1; I Jn. 4:3-6; 2 Th. 2:2, 3, 9-12; I Cor. 12:10; Rev. 16:13, 14; I Kings 22:22, 23; Zech. 13:2)

The hillside between the ruins of modern Khersa (Gergeṣa?) and the spur closest to the sea is literally studded with natural and hewn caves which were used as tombs. These two demoniacs were able from their shelter in the tombs to hinder passage along the road that followed the seacoast by rushing out screaming, terrorizing all who attempted to use the road.

Two possessed with demons. This alleged contradiction with Mark and Luke who mention only one demoniac is a simple difference in style of writing, since there are several cases where Matthew speaks of two persons or things in a given situation, while the other two Synoptic authors, in describing the same situation, mention only one. (See McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, III, 57) Obviously, Mark and Luke mention only the more fierce of the two, while Matthew objectively describes the total picture. In addition, the other two authors do not affirm that there was only one demoniac; hence, there is no contradiction.

Demons. For fuller notes on Demons, see the special study "Notes on Demon Possession" by Seth Wilson in THE GOSPEL OF MARK

by Johnson-DeWalt, pp. 509-513, with its selected bibliography. The very mention of demons brings us moderns to an immediate crisis of conscience: here before us are records that purport to be true, which includes the assertions that Jesus Christ talked with, and cast out of their human victims, certain, spiritual beings of which there is very limited scientific knowledge today. Did Jesus really cast out demons?

A. Assuming the accounts which record this phenomenon are false, we can have no certain knowledge about Jesus, since there are no objective grounds whereby the accounts themselves can safely be excised from the total record without destroying the fabric of the whole testimony of each Evangelist that mentions Jesus' casting out of demons. Only the subjective presupposition that demons do not exist (a prejudice in itself) has been seriously offered. (See special study on miracles at the end of chapter nine.) Foster (*syllabus in loc.*) lists the following radical explanations offered by some:

1. "The whole story is a myth." But there is just not time historically available for the development of the legend between the supposed occurrence of the facts and the writing of the record and its reception by hundreds of witnesses who both knew the facts and could testify to the contrary, were that necessary.
2. "The freeing of the man from the demon and the people's rejection of Jesus are true but the swine detail is a later, untrue addition." Again, there is no objective evidence, textual or otherwise, of any addition.
3. "The demoniacs frightened the swine: thus the supposed transfer of the demons into the swine was imagined." But again Jesus' own words are proof against this: He permitted the demons to go. Nor is there any evidence that the demons left the men with such a paroxysm so great as to scare the hogs.
4. "The drowning of the swine and the casting out of the demons are simultaneous events with no connection between them." However the inspired Apostles record the connection, for they were eyewitnesses and could not confuse hearsay reports about the two events.
5. "The demons were just mentally insane, whom Jesus humored by granting permission to imaginary demons to enter the swine, giving rise to the fable of the demons entering the

swine so producing their destruction." Explain, please, the two thousand dead hogs bobbing up and down in the water.

Thus we are compelled to reject not merely the objectionable parts of the narrative that do not suit our preconceptions, but rather the narrative in its totality, since there is no sure method whereby we can safely reject one part of the eyewitness' testimony and accept any other part. Further, we must admit that the record is free from the influence of popular Jewish ideas. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 480-485, also Vol. II and appendix XIII, p. 748-763 and appendix XVI, 770-776) demonstrates that it is not merely deceiving, but totally untrue to assert that these reports are tainted with the ideas prevalent in that superstitious age. These reports are just as different from the ideas that Judaism expressed on demons and demon possession as the difference between empty superstition and what is sober, credible history. (See also *ISBE* article, 828, 829.) We are driven to:

- B. Assume the accounts which contain the reports of demon possession and the casting out of demons are true. But even the assumption that the accounts are true, does not free us from responsibility to weigh carefully this evidence. For:
1. Either Jesus did not know demons did not exist.
 - a. In this case He was Himself deceived, for He actually thought He was casting them out, which, in fact, He never did.
 - b. And He is as ignorant and superstitious as the people He pretended to teach and help.
 2. Or else Jesus knew that demons did not exist.
 - a. In this case He is a conscious deceiver, since He continually "went through the motions" of casting out demons, encouraged His disciples to believe that they too had the power to do the same (Mt. 10:8); scolded them for their failure to do so (Mt. 17:14-21). He Himself claimed to cast them out and gave God thanks for this power (Lk. 10:17, 18, 21) as well as argued on the basis of the actual fact, not the hypothesis, that He had so done. (Mt. 12:27-29)
 - b. Even a theory that describes Jesus as "accomodating Himself" to the popular superstitions of the day, in order to deal with what modern scientific knowledge would term "an unbalanced mental condition, manias, insanity, etc." leaves Jesus under the morally fatal charge of deception,

by permitting even His closest disciples to remain under the old delusion. He is hereby to be charged with withholding vital information from us on so important a subject in the modern period.

3. Or else Jesus knew that demons exist and dealt with them accordingly.

- a. But Jesus did not treat demoniacs as merely sick, nor demons themselves as another disease, although when the demons were gone out of their victims, who had shown also characteristics of disease, the demoniacs were well.
- b. Nor did Jesus treat demons as mere "sins". There is no evidence that He regarded demoniacs as particularly guilty, beyond other sinners.

However, Edersheim (*Life*, I, 481) argues that there is no evidence for permanent possession or that the demonized were under constant power of the demon. An illustration of this is the impression of a sudden influence in the demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue as if occasioned by the demon's reacting to the spiritual effect of the words or Person of Jesus (Mk. 1:21-28). Consider also the epileptic demonized boy (Mt. 17:14-21; Mk. 9:14:29, esp. 18; Lk. 9:39). The boy was possessed from childhood (Mk. 9:21). Accordingly, says Edersheim (*op cit.*, 484), this fact "establishes a moral element, since, during the period of their temporary liberty, the demonized might have shaken themselves free from the overshadowing power, or sought release from it." Is Jesus discussing demonology when He taught that "when the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none, whereupon he returns with seven other spirits more evil than himself"? (Mt. 12:43f)

- c. Jesus dealt with demons as spirits who inhabited the body and governed the mind of human beings. He addressed them as evil visitors from the spirit world whose malignant control over those made in God's image roused His indignation and sympathy.

There met him two demoniacs, but Jesus saw them as men:

1. Violently antisocial: "they lived not in a house but in the

- tombs," "fierce," "night and day among the tombs and on the mountains," "driven by the demon into the desert."
2. Indomitable: "None could bind him any more with fetters and chains, no one had the strength to subdue him."
 3. Extremely tormented to the point of brutal self-abuse: "he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones."
 4. Unclean spirit (Mk. 5:2) Up to this point one might have pointed to natural mania or some other violent insanity. Here the line is sharply drawn, for the man was the vile home of other personalities who were destroying him.

There met him two demoniacs, and Jesus met them. He stood His ground calmly while the fiercest, wildest beings alive ran, screaming toward Him. He had earlier been charged by the Pharisees with being the very incarnation of Satan's power, but now is the moment of truth as He stands calmly awaiting the most terrifying conflict with naked evil. What thoughts race through the minds of the disciples as these frightening figures rush toward their Master? The Apostles' worst nightmare was occurring in broad daylight. They probably did not run because Jesus did not. When Jesus is in this thing, we are not to panic regardless of the danger or fear we feel! The Pharisees had snarled that Jesus had some secret agreement with the Devil. This calumny is about to be brought to its most startling test.

II. THE VANQUISHED

The two demoniacs **ran and worshipped Him** (Mk. 5:6). But why? Who really did this: the demons or the men themselves?

a. If the demons worshipped Jesus, then out of what motives?

(1) Recognition of their real Master, greater than Satan, and their final Judge for eternity? (See on 8:29)

(2) McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 289) supposed two malignant purposes:

(a) The demons perhaps used cunning flattery and fawning to dissuade Jesus from casting them into the abyss;

(b) By pretending friendship between themselves and Jesus, they could hope maliciously to injure His cause, and show thereby that the wicked calumny of the Pharisees was true.

b. If the men worshipped Jesus, then this could be seen as a desperate bid for freedom against the awful possession which seemed unending. But, how could two mere men recognize

in Jesus the potential Savior when they terrorized all others who passed that way? Or, did Jesus' personal calm tame their habitual fierceness by showing them a reaction never before experienced, and in their surprise they are reduced to abject submission? Did Jesus' moral courage temporarily restrain the demons, giving their victims opportunity to express themselves thus? Could it be that the demons' fear of God's Son was communicated to the harried minds of their victims?

In this same general connection, it will be seen in the Gospel narratives several apparently contradictory elements in the speeches of the demoniacs, both in frequent changes from singular to plural and vice versa as well as changes from the man who seems to be speaking, to the demons who use the man's voice to speak their will. Eidersheim (*Life*, I, 608f.) deals with these phenomena thus:

In calling attention to this and similar particulars, we repeat that this must be kept in view as characteristic of the demonized, that they were incapable of separating their own consciousness and ideas from the influence of the demon, their own identity being merged, and to that extent, lost, in that of their tormentors . . . The language and conduct of the demonized, whether seemingly his own, or that of the demons who influenced him, must always be regarded as a mixture of the Jewish-human and the demoniacal. The demonized speaks and acts as a Jew under the control of a demon. Thus, if he chooses solitary places by day and tombs by night, it is not that demons really preferred such habitations but that the Jews imagined it, and that the demons, acting on the existing consciousness, would lead him, in accordance with his pre-conceived notions, to select such places . . . The demonized would speak and act in accordance with his previous (Jewish) demonological ideas. He would not become a new man, but be the old man, only under the influence of the demon.

This note argues the difficulty of deciding whether the men themselves worshipped Jesus or whether it were the demons, since their self-identity was lost in that of the other. As Mark (5:9) and Luke (8:30) say, Jesus endeavored to bring out the slightest possible trace of the demonized men's self-identity, but the answer reveals the depth of the confusion of the man's consciousness with that of the demons.

8:29 And behold they cried out, What have we to do with thee thou Son of God? The report of Mark and Luke

includes Jesus' personal name and describes God as "the Most High God." Plummer (*Luke*, 229) believes that this expression as a description of God given by the demons, "rather indicates that the man was not a Jew, and there is some evidence the owners of the swine were not Jews. 'The Most High' (*Elyon*) is a name for Jehovah which seems to be usual among heathen nations." His references cited are Gen. 14:20, 22; Num. 24:16; Mic. 6:6; Isa. 14:14; Dan. 3:26; 4:2, 24, 32; 5:18, 21; 7:18, 22, 25, 27; Acts 16:17. However, some of these are statements by Daniel not necessarily directed to heathens or spoken even for Gentile ears, even though stated within a Babylonian context, as Plummer notes. Further, see Stephen's thoroughly Jewish sermon, (Acts 7:48) and many other undoubted Jewish references in the OT (Psa. 7:17; 78:35; Dt. 32:8; 2 Sam. 22:14 etc.) Thus, the demoniacs could well have been very Jewish indeed.

Jesus, thou Son of God. It is remarkable that these denizens of hell refer to Jesus in terms totally contrasting with the common Jewish expectations regarding the Messiah. (See additional references to Jewish views made by Edersheim at 8:28 under A.) Further, they use terms that even Jesus had not publicized as often as His use of the title "Son of man," even though He accepted and used the term Son of God as true concerning Himself on other occasions. This fact immediately gives the lie to the possibility that these "anachronistic" terms were mythologically originated or else derived from supposed Jewish parallels. The point is that these demons, then, really did know Jesus! (cf. Mk. 1:24) They, however, are not the proper witnesses by which Jesus would have His identity proclaimed, even though these supernatural voices from the spirit-world provide corroboratory testimony.

What have we to do with thee, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? Here the personal testimony of the demons clarifies the true relationship between themselves and Jesus, and, at the same time, shows that they recognized Jesus' authority above that of Satan:

1. By their cries to be let alone. But, let alone to do what? They preferred their past course to be far better than any temporary or permanent judgment Jesus would bring.
2. By their denial of all connection with Jesus: **What have we to do with thee?** (*Ti hemin kai soi*) means "what do we have in common? What is there between us that unites us in a common bond? Nothing!" (See other examples: 2 Sam. 16:10; Jn. 2:4) Here the demons implicitly declare

the total lack of connection between Jesus and themselves. Now none could make the mistake of supposing that Jesus casts out demons with Satan's blessing and aid.

3. By their expressed understanding that He had the right to cast them into abyss. **Have you come here to torment us before the time?** There is no question in their minds about the torment: for them it is but a question of timing. It is a fair question whether this pained question by the demons, which is reported by Mark and Luke as an earnest pleading and, ironically, an adjuration by God, be further illuminated by the demons' later entreaty "not to command them to depart into the abyss" (Luke). That is, are these latter requests an expression of the demons' understanding of the meaning of the "torment" feared? **The time** referred to can be no other than God's final vindication of His wrath against all rebellion in His creation. (cf. Mt. 25:41; 2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:12.) They are sure of the **torment**. (cf. Lk. 16:23, 25, 28; Rev. 14:10, 11; 20:10)

This adjuration, "I adjure you by God, do not torment me." (Mk. 5:7b) probably represents the desire of the demons, but expressed in the conscious thought-form of the Jewish speakers, since the men are so confusedly identified with them. (For similar form of adjuration see Mt. 26:63. For an example of exorcism by use of this same formula, see Acts 19:13.)

The abyss (Lk. 8:31) is a figure used in the OT for ocean depths (Psa. 33:7; 77:16; 107:26) or even deep fountains (Deut. 8:7) which gives the figurative picture of anything deep out of which immediate or easy escape or access is impossible. Thus, by the time of the NT period, it became a figure of "the depths, of the underworld," in the sense of the abode of the dead (Ro. 10:7); the dungeon where the devil is kept (Rev. 20:3), abode of the beast (Rev. 11:7; 17:8), of Abaddon (Rev. 9:11). But in Revelation **the abyss** denotes only the abode of evil spirits, although not the place of final punishment, since it is apparently distinguished from the "lake of fire and brimstone" wherein the beast and false prophet are thrown alive and into which the Devil is to be finally cast (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). (See *ISBE*, article "abyss", 26, 27; Arndt-Gingrich, 2)

Out of the country (*éxō tēs chóras*) may be the antithesis in the demons' mind with "do not send us into the

abyss," meaning "do not send us out of the district of this earth into the abyss." But this phrase is also perfectly consonant with the confusion, in the demonized wretches, of their interests with those of the demons: he does not wish to leave his home country to be sent into the unknown. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 612) supposes this means that the **demons** desired to remain in Gilead too, and gained their purpose through the permission to go into the hogs. But the destruction of the hogs frustrated this, although it is left unknown whether the demons yet had to go into the abyss or were left wandering homeless throughout the Decapolis.

4. By their overt acts of worship, the demons vigorously expressed their recognition of Jesus' authority. This focuses more clearly an answer to an earlier question: who worshipped Jesus—the demons or the men? Perhaps both, but certainly it is the demons that expect the final triumph of Christ!
5. By their implicit knowledge that it was useless for them to fight or flee, though they were an obvious numerical majority, while He was only One against a Legion. Though they had easily overpowered humans and terrorized the countryside, they stood calmly bowed before Jesus of Nazareth, knowing that their only respite could be gained through parley.
6. By their parleying for another place of abode, in place of banishment to the abyss, they reveal the almost certain knowledge that He could and would cast them out. This is more than insanity: this supernatural knowledge comes out of the spirit world.

This protest shouted by the demons is the expressed admission that the demons themselves stand in the presence of God's Holy One, before Whom all the powers of moral destruction cannot hold their peace: they must speak and confess their subjection and doom. It is unnecessary for Jesus to discuss or debate with these evil spirits. It is sufficient for them that Jesus is the Christ: He had already won the victory. Now it was merely a question of what to do with the captives! James' words (2:19) ring true: "The demons believe—and shudder!" In another connection McGarvey comments: "Let the sinner listen to that cry and learn what is to be under the domination of Satan."

At this point, Mark and Luke report that Jesus asked the principle demoniac, "What is your name?" His answer was: "My name is Legion; for we are many," for many demons had entered him. Note

the changes from singular to plural. **Legion:** There is no necessary connection between the usual size of a Roman legion, 4000-5000 men, and the actual number of demons in the two demoniacs. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 612) offers as a suitable translation of "Legion" a purely Jewish expression representing a large number, an idea more general than, strictly, a Roman legion. Who answered therefore, the man speaking for himself or the demons? Probably the demons spoke, still being in control, since it was not until they were ejected that that man's own rationality returns, showing itself in reasonable speech. (Mk. 5:18-20; Lk. 8:38, 39) But why did Jesus ask the man his name?

1. Perhaps Jesus was trying to draw out of the human being himself all the human identification He could possibly reach. Had this demoniac so completely lost his original identity with his family and the society from which he had come, that, as far as he was concerned, his own true name was completely blotted out from his disordered existence? If so, it is because he must see that he is a person, once free from, and even now not permanently bound to, the demons.
2. Perhaps to reveal the name of the demons to His Apostles. But if so, for what future purpose? Was it to expose the demons' vulnerability to His men, who would later cast them out? If so, these disciples must learn that even the fiercest of these spirits from the unseen world, however strong or numerous they may be, they are all subject to Jesus' world and to those who stand against the demons in Jesus' name!
3. Plummer (*Matthew*, 134), placing emphasis upon Jesus' human nature, suggests that He asked him for information, since Jesus may have chosen not to know by supernatural insight. If so, this question becomes another manifestation of the historical dependability of the narrative, since it would seem to imply some ignorance (even though willed) on the part of Christ, which the Evangelists, on the basis of apologetic motives, would have sought to remove. Any sharp-eyed critic can see the scandalous character that would be pictured for Jesus among those who do not understand His unique incarnation.

8:30 Now there was afar off from them a herd of many swine feeding. Two thousand head of swine (Mk. 5:13) were feeding on the hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee about a mile south of modern Khersa. (See map of the Sea and notes on 8:28) But what were so many pigs doing in Jewish country? But that is just

the point: this was not merely Jewish territory, but rather the sub-territories of the famous independent cities of the Greek Decapolis. (Mk. 5:20) It may well be that that herd of swine represents Greek contempt for Jewish prejudices. Yet, since this event occurred within the tetrarchy of Philip, the owners of these swine could well be Jews, seeking profits from Gentile purchasers. They could have justified themselves, whining, "But we don't eat the stuff! We just grow the hogs and sell the pork to the heathen neighbors!"

8:31 And the demons besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine. If thou cast us out is no expression of doubt, since Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to depart (Mk. 5:8; Lk. 8:29). It is rather a dickering device, whereby the demons can escape their worst fears and yet hope to pacify Jesus. They did not instantly obey Jesus' command, since they began to protest and barter instead of leaving. This fact, too, demonstrates the trustworthiness of the record, since the Apostles would probably have tried to cover up the obvious disobedience to Jesus' commands.

Send us into the swine. Why did they make this strange request? Several answers are possible:

1. They did not ask to be sent into other humans. Such a request would be self-defeating, as they would only be cast out again.
2. They apparently did not wish to remain disembodied. (cf. Mt. 12:43-45). If so, this suggests their inability to read the future, since they probably would not have made this request had they been able to foresee the outcome that ensued. Desperate to have a home, any home but the abyss, they seized upon those brute beasts which they probably must have surmised to be less precious to Jesus.
3. It might be that they requested this with malicious intent, surmising, from the damage that they had been able to do while inhabiting the two humans, that they could turn the swine into savage beasts, hence, damage Jesus' reputation. It would thereby appear that this Benefactor brings no unmixed blessings.

To any who would reject any of these reasons on the basis of the fact that the demons, in driving the herd into the sea, defeated their own supposed purpose, let it be noticed that nowhere is it stated that the demons "drove" the herd anywhere. What we see in the hogs' action is THEIR decision, not that of the demons! If it be asked why the demons, who had so obviously taken men under control, could not have prevented the swine from destroying themselves, thus disembodimenting

the demons again, it might be suggested that the demons could not control these beasts without as much intelligence or will power as men. The hogs turned savagely wild, ran the easiest direction i.e. downhill and the herd found the lake in its path and could neither turn nor stop.

8:32 And he said unto them, Go. And they came out and went into the swine: and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep into the sea, and perished in the waters. Down the steep slope that fell away toward the road that skirted the seacoast. For a description of the land, see on 8:28 and *ISBE*, 1166a. This was not necessarily a sheer precipice, as some artists draw it. Mark notes that the herd numbered "about two thousand." There is no necessary connection between the number of demons i.e. "Legion" Roman legion of 4000-5000 men, and the size of the herd. Actually, just a few wild hogs could stampede the whole herd. There is no need to seek a harmony between "2000 hogs and 4000 demons", since no Gospel writer affirms the latter figure.

And he said to them, Go. Whether this word be construed as mere permission or as a repeated command (cf. Mk. 5:8 and Lk. 8:29), by its use Jesus unleashed the demons to go their chosen path. But by the same word, Jesus unleashed another storm of controversy among modern scholars about His right to say it. The moral problem, it is said, lies around the question: How could Jesus allow this destruction of personal property which did not belong to Him? How could Jesus have permitted the demons to have what they requested without becoming also morally responsible for the damage that was produced? Several answers have been suggested:

1. If evil blinds its victims to hinder them from considering all possibilities in a real world, could the demons have foreseen the reaction of the hogs, that, finding themselves in the fearful grip of this horrible power, rushed around in wild panic until, against the will of the demons, they plunged further and more wildly down the hill to their destruction? Thus, the demons, victims themselves of the deception of evil, had not foreseen the frustration of their desire, as Jesus could well have planned.
2. Would Jesus, thus, have been so short-sighted and gullible as to have accepted so apparently benign and harmless a plan as the demons proposed? Did He not, rather, foresee both the destruction of the herd and the frustration of the demons? Otherwise, would He not have simply demanded the immediate

passage of the demons into the abyss? As it is, He accomplishes a double purpose of His own, presuming that His permission was a judgment upon the swine owners too. If these latter were Jews, then they were violating the spirit of Moses' Law in keeping swine. (See Lev. 11:7, 8; Isa. 65:3-5; 66:3, 17) Jesus' permission to destroy the herd becomes to them a shocking reminder of duty to God.

3. Another suggestion describes Jesus' permission as like God's general permission of all evil and all evils till the end of all all evil. God permits tornadoes, floods, animal diseases and other natural disasters to destroy herds or portions thereof every year. Hence these owners had no more right to complain than other owners who lose animals to whatever cause.
4. Others say that, as Creator of the universe, Jesus had a right to do what He wished with His own. The local owners of the swine were but temporary stewards of their possessions, whereas the Owner of the world suddenly chose to "liquidate" His swine holdings. What is so unusual about this act of God incarnate? (See Psalm 50:10-12) Is it not He who gives and He who takes away, in order that thereby He may bless His children? (Study Job 1:21, 22) Why should He not decide to destroy the man's herd of hogs in order to give him a brother for whom to care? Plummer is right in saying (*Matthew*, 133), "Brutes and private property may be sacrificed where the sanity and safety of human beings is concerned." The slaughter of these brute beasts, were it personally willed by Jesus Himself (of which there is, of course, no proof), is of no relative importance compared with the saving of the souls of two men! As God, Jesus could dispose of His own possessions as He choose, and what human subject could object?
5. Those who see a real moral difficulty here and thereby endeavor to reduce Jesus to a mere man, face the equally great difficulty involved in succeeding. For if they can reduce Jesus to a mere man, He could not have foreseen this destruction and cannot be blamed anyway! Thus, the answer to the apparent dilemma lies elsewhere.
6. Trench (*Miracles*, 102) suggests an interesting principle that is worth studying:

To the evil all things turn to evil. The wicked Satan (Job 1:11) and his ministers are sometimes heard, and

the very granting of their petitions issues in their worst confusion and loss. (Num. 22:20, 35; Josh. 13:22; Psa. 78:29-31) So it is now: the prayer of these evil spirits was heard but only to their ruin. They are allowed to enter the swine; but the destruction of the whole herd follows . . . they defeated their own purpose . . . there reveals itself here the very essence and truest character of evil, which evermore outwits and defeats itself. . . .

In seeking applications of this principle, it would be well to be aware of the fact that not all evil turns to evil *immediately*. Some evil men seem to succeed in turning all things to good during their lifetime. (cf. Job 21) These inequities will, however, be rectified at the judgment.

III. THE VILLAGERS

8:33 And they that fed them fled, and went away into the city. If our identification of the site of Gerasa, or Gergesa, as the location of the steep place is correct, then the herdsmen had about a mile to run. But why flee? What reaction is more natural, when the herd you are watching as it calmly roots or rests, suddenly begins to squeal and bellow, then rushes headlong down the slope into the lake below? You can give no normal explanation for this mad dash of the drowned herd now only so many corpses floating at the shore. You were charged with the safe care of this valuable herd. Why not run? But why flee to the town to shout the news of the herd's destruction? Who would believe the fantastic story about Jesus and the demoniacs?

1. They fled out of fear of the unknown: What had really caused the inexplicable actions of the hogs? Were they demonized? If there were spirits in the neighborhood, it is best to leave the place!
2. Fear of the consequences to the swineherds themselves if other mouths brought the owner word. It is better to tell it yourself than let him find out about it himself: he could hold you liable and punish severely.
3. But the swineherds were also eyewitnesses of the whole event. They had seen the whole proceeding. The still air of the quiet countryside had been pierced by the shrieks of the demoniacs as they approached Jesus, drawing also the interest and attention of these swineherds. So they **told everything and what was befallen to them that were possessed with**

demons. It was this message about the casting out of the demons that was foremost upon their lips as they rushed through the town shouting the news. It was the one fact that would lend credibility to their story about the swine.

8:34 And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart from their borders. All the city means the majority of its inhabitants, as we say, "Everybody and his dog was there," although we never mean the absolute totality of any population. The people had come:

1. **to meet Jesus,** because the swineherds had testified that it was Jesus that had cast out the demons. There could be no doubt that He possessed unlimited, supreme power.
2. **to see what it was that had happened.** (Mk. 5:14b) This was for these citizens a time of severe testing even though they probably did not realize it.
 - a. **To the demoniacs.** The very fact, that these their own fellowcitizens had been delivered from Satan's bondage, should have signalled beyond doubt to the gathered crowd that God's Kingdom had suddenly come among them. (cf. Mt. 12:28 and Acts 14:8-13 for a true pagan reaction) They were being tested whether they would hold all else cheap in comparison to the victory and joy at the release of two human beings, God's creatures and their townsmen. Was it to be nothing to them that the former demoniacs now freed, were sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in their right mind?

The expression "in his right mind" certainly implies that the demoniacs had been insane, which is correct. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 292) comments wisely: "This detracts nothing from the reality of demon possession; it only shows that the presence of the foreign spirit within a man disturbed, as from the nature of the case it must, the normal workings of his own spirit."

- b. **And to the swine.** The corpses bobbing up and down in the lake gave tangibility to the story told by the swineherds, who according to Mark and Luke, undoubtedly repeated their testimony to all comers.

And when they saw Jesus, they besought him that he would depart from their borders. They knew that He could not

be treated indifferently nor safely ignored: they must decide. They chose to ask Him to leave! Why?

1. Did they fear the loss of more property? Was it that they considered the loss of only two thousand hogs of more importance than the restoration of two men to useful life as citizens of their town? If so, what a horrid warped sense of values! Can it be that they would hold fast to the most forbidden sins, the most despicable life and the most perishable property, rather than rejoice in the presence of Jesus and the happiness, peace and blessing He brings?
2. Luke (8:37; cf. Mk. 5:15; Lk. 8:35) emphasizes the depth of their fear: "(they) asked him to depart from them; for they were seized with great fear." (Study Lk. 5:8; 8:25 for similar responses.) These sinners, when they had sized up the whole picture of Jesus, the freed demoniacs, the dead swine, they realized they were standing in the presence of naked supernaturalism, in the presence of sheer otherworld power. They stood on the battlefield of a spiritual-world and it unnerved them. These sinners stood in the presence of Jesus, the Holy One, the Son of the Most High God. But their gross ignorance of His mission of mercy and help to earth hindered them from understanding God's power and holiness. They found God's holiness incarnate, standing in their presence, intolerable, so they asked Jesus to leave. What other consequences would follow in their lives if He were allowed to remain? If illegal hogs could be destroyed in a flash, what would He do in their personal lives? Would they too soon be visited for their own many sins? Their own fear and guilt is the pain of their sinfulness in the presence of God's holiness, and it blinds them to God's mercy. (Cf. Job 21:14 where the same words reflect not so much fear as rebellion.) Perhaps the only reason none dare present Jesus with a bill for the payment for the destroyed swine is both secret acknowledgement of His right to have destroyed the animals and fear to admit the ownership of the illegal animals. Besides their suspicions, and proof He did it was circumstantial. Only the swineherds had seen the facts but perhaps had not heard the direct connection between Jesus' permission to the demons and the destruction of the hogs.

Plummer (*Matthew*, 134) points out that this "request of the inhabitants is a guarantee for the general trustworthiness of the narrative. Fiction would have made the inhabitants

anxious to detain Him that He might work other wonderful cures, where He was regarded, not as a dangerous magician, but as a great prophet. . . ."

IV. THE VALIANT

Mark and Luke narrate the anxious clinging of the freed demoniac to Jesus. Just as Jesus was boarding the boat to depart, the man begged Him that he might accompany Him. Here occurs one of the starkest lessons of discipleship: Jesus refused his request, even though so natural and apparently so needful. Why did Jesus do it? Edersheim (*Life*, I, 614) puts it so poignantly:

It would have seemed to him, as if he could not bear to lose his new found happiness; as if there were calm, safety and happiness only in His Presence; not far from Him—not among those wild mountains and yet wilder men. Why should he be driven from His fellowship, who had so long been an out-cast from that of his fellow-men, and why again left to himself? So, perhaps, should we have reasoned and spoken; so too often do we reason and speak, as regards ourselves or those we love. Not so He Who appoints alike our discipline and our work. To go back, now healed, to his own, and publish there, in the city—nay, through the whole of the large district of the. . . . Decapolis—how great things Jesus had done for him, such was henceforth to be his life-work. In this there would be both safety and happiness.

All of his fear, that the demons, in the absence of Jesus their Master, might return to repossess their former victims, then, diminishes in the man's confidence that Jesus' command to return home has become his assurance that Jesus' authority is complete. The demons will not return: he is safe even with Jesus gone. So long as the man is engaged in this mission on which Jesus sends him, his safety is guaranteed. If he fears the unfriendly populace which had rejected his Savior, then Jesus' command to evangelize them, to take the offensive, is his best defense. If his desire is to accompany Jesus as a close disciple out of deep gratitude for his salvation, Jesus indicates the direction his discipleship and gratitude must take: "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord God has done for you and how He has had mercy on you." (Mk. 5:19; Lk. 8:39)

Note that both Evangelists record that the man did go home and told how much JESUS had done for him. The theological connections

between God and Jesus might not have been crystal clear to the man yet, but he could speak in concrete terms about the power of Jesus.

Contrast this commission given by Jesus to this ex-demoniac to go tell what God had done for him, with the injunctions to silence given to others:

1. This area is not Galilee but Gilead, less thickly populated and less excitable by Messianic rumors. Also Jesus had not yet worked here and needed this man's enthusiastic pre-campaign advertising here, not over in Galilee to which Jesus was soon to return.
2. The others healed by Jesus needed more inner reflection upon God's great action on their behalf in order to learn deeper appreciation of God's power and goodness. As Jesus' disciples, they needed to learn submission and self-control. But this ex-demoniac needed immediate association with people, to re-enter human society once more. He needed to be drawn out of himself, out of his lonely environment into usefulness to his fellows. Jesus knew that by his public proclamation of God's mercies this man could certainly maintain the spiritual health with which Jesus left him. (Psa. 66:16)
3. Jesus laid no unnecessary burdens of great sacrificial discipleship upon the man. He restored him immediately to his family and friends. He sent him home (Mk. 5:19; Lk. 8:39) and to go home and work for Jesus was just as much obedience as for others to leave home to work for the Master! (Lk. 9:59-62)

Read the enthusiastic reports of Mark and Luke about the man's ministry, or should we say, that man's obedience after the disappointment of not being permitted to join Jesus' immediate company! "He went away and began proclaiming throughout the whole city, nay, in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all men marveled." Oh my soul, can I take "no" for an answer from Jesus and still love Him and go right on preaching His Word where He is largely an unknown, rejected miracle-worker from Galilee?

It is easy to think of the valiant Twelve who remained by Jesus in His ministry and suffering; but they are also valiant servants of God who go it alone, knowing only that Jesus wills it? This man's preaching must have been tremendously effective, since everyone could remember him as the mighty terror of Gerasa. But now he was the living monument to the power and mercy of God in Jesus of Naza-

reth! No wonder he succeeded; his mission method was personal witnessing to the change wrought in his own life.

V. THE VICTOR

9:1 **And he entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his city.** To entitle this section which describes Jesus' retreat from Decapolis "the Victor," would seem to some exaggerated, since Jesus obviously accepts the fear-filled request of the selfish, superstitious villagers as sufficient reason to leave. But this is to forget the total picture painted by the three Evangelists: Calmly Jesus had stepped out of the boat to face the fiercest inhabitants of the Decapolis. The mere fact that He was the Christ was itself victory, and the demons must confess their submission and condemnation. With but one final authoritative word, He drove the unclean spirits from their victims. Against His ultimate command there was no appeal. What had been proved thereby? Edersheim answers so picturesquely (*Life*, I, 613):

He that had erst been the possession of foul and evil spirits—a very legion of them—and deprived of his human individuality, is now 'sitting at the feet of Jesus,' learning of Him, clothed and in his right mind.' He has been brought to God, restored to self, to reason, and to human society—all this by Jesus, at Whose Feet he is gratefully, humbly sitting, 'a disciple.' Is He not then the Very Son of God? Viewing this miracle, as an historical fact, viewing it as a parabolic Miracle, viewing it also as symbolic of what has happened in all ages—is He not the Son of the Most High God? And is there not now, on His part, in the morning light the same calmness and majesty of conscious Almighty Power as on the evening before, when He rebuked the storm and calmed the sea?

But what is so victorious about His retreat? Here is written the meekness of the Son of God. He could have mustered all manner of invincible argument why they should permit Him to remain. He could have shown a demonstration of supernatural power that would have overpowered their reason and frightened them into abject submission. But He did not. Jesus did not stay long where He was not wanted, (cf. Lk. 9:51-55; Mt. 13:54-58; Lk. 4:16-30). He simply left without a word.

But He left behind Him a one-man advertising campaign that would more than prepare for His Decapolis ministry next year! (See

Mt. 15:29-39; Mk. 7:31—8:10) Jesus' real purpose for coming to the Decapolis area was to save it. Though He must postpone His actual ministry there till a later date, yet the activity of this freed ex-demoniac brought a deep change in the attitude of the people. Later when Jesus returned He met an open-hearted reception. Contrary to several commentators who ignore Jesus' Decapolis ministry cited above, Jesus DID come back. His mercy is long-lasting. He gave Decapolis a second chance!

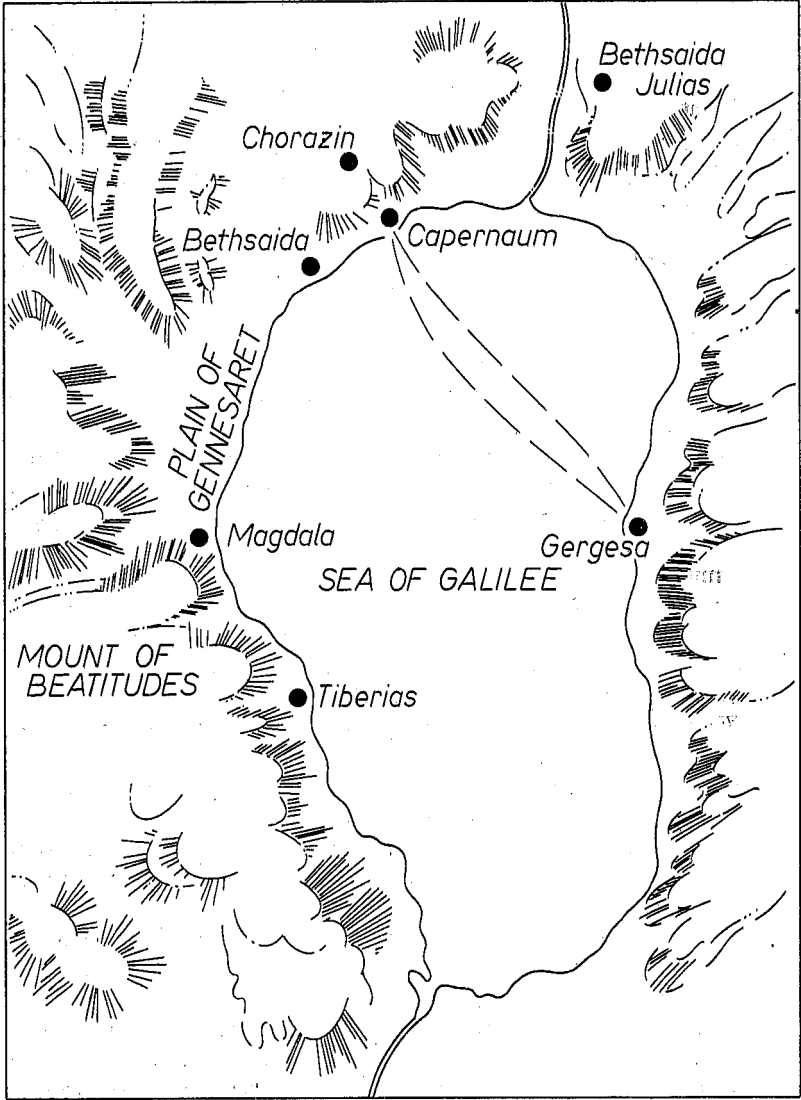
What is the proper theology regarding this section and many more like it? Jesus is NOT in league with Satan, but is successfully routing the devil's infantry at every encounter! Casting out demons, defeats also their lord, Satan. (cf. Lk. 10:17, 18; Mt. 12:29) No wonder Peter, in retrospect, described Jesus' ministry thus: "He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where is the "country of the Gadarenes"? Explain about the three different wordings of this and how they harmonize.
2. How many of the Gadarenes were possessed with demons according to the Gospel accounts? Explain the apparently conflicting reports regarding the number of demoniacs by listing other occasions where Mark mentions one thing or person where Matthew mentions a multiple number.
3. What symptoms or actions indicated that they had demons?
4. How could people tell that the demons were gone from them?
5. Quote accurately what the demons said to Jesus and tell four or five things that are clearly indicated by their speeches.
6. What did the general populace ask of Jesus after the demoniacs were healed? Why?
7. What did one demoniac ask of Jesus after he was healed?
8. What did Jesus command him to do?
9. Explain the meaning of the demons' expression: "Are you come here to torment us before the time?" To what did they allude? What were they afraid of?
10. Tell what the NT teaches about "the abyss," "the bottomless pit" which was the horror of these demons. What is the difference between this and hell?
11. State the pleas made by the demons in reference to their future state, whereby they hoped to secure a compromise from Jesus. What other NT passages may explain why they made this particular plea?

CHAPTER EIGHT

This map of the Sea of Galilee indicates in a general way the movements of Jesus when He left Capernaum by boat, calmed the storm, debarked in Gadarene territory, freed the demoniacs and sailed directly back to Capernaum.



THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER EIGHT:
"THE TOUCH THAT CLEANSSES"

(8:2-4)

Introduction: When Matthew wanted to show God's power at work in Jesus of Nazareth, he picked the most loathsome disease he could conceive.

I. THE LEPER'S INSISTENT REQUEST: It was:

- A. Original: there were no previous recorded instances of such a cure amid all the Judean and Galilean cures. Perhaps he reasoned: "It is no secret what God can do; what He's done for others He can do for me too!"
- B. Courageous: "full of leprosy" "in a city" directly to Jesus he came with a courage born of desperate hope.
- C. Pitiful: "Lord, if you will . . ." Is he not sure of Jesus' willingness?
 - 1. He had a repulsive disease from which people recoiled in disgust; it was a horrible, living death.
 - 2. His was a contaminating disease; rabbis wanted nothing to do with him or his kind; they even delighted in throwing stones to keep him at a distance so as to insure their ceremonial purity.
 - 3. He had an isolating or separating disease which barred him from human society.
- D. Believing: he had a perfect confidence in Jesus' power and even in Jesus' willingness to welcome the man whom everyone else would have driven away.
- E. Humble: There is no demand here, no thoughtless claim upon His time, or energies. His unspoken plea: "I cast myself upon your heart."

II. THE LORD'S IMMEDIATE RESPONSE: To a Jew trained in the strict observance of the Levitical mentality of ceremonial pollution and cleanness, there could be no more amazing sentence in the New Testament than the simple declaration: "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched the leper."

- A. From a human standpoint Jesus ran the risk:
 - 1. of ghastly infection: "What if Jesus became a leper too?"
 - 2. of moral contamination: "Should anyone, including Jesus, deliberately sully His life with such outcasts as lepers? Would not God also reject Him?"

SERMON ON CHAPTER EIGHT

3. of social rejection: "What if the crowds rejected an unclean Christ?"

B. Jesus got involved and touched this leper. It was just like Jesus to do it! But when Jesus became man He had already gotten involved with our filthy, corrupting morals and our insoluble problems.

C. Jesus not only spoke cleansing but willed it! (Greek: *thélō*) "I will it—I want to cleanse you!" Jesus' answer was no naked word of power spoken at an uncommitted distance. Jesus loved him and desired to help him. Here we see a man who had been kept at arms' length by all men, now wrapped around with the compassionate love of God.

III. THE FIRST COMMAND OF JESUS TO HIS DISCIPLE: "Obey God's revelation for those in your situation!"

A. To the cleansed leper it was:

1. "Go show yourself to the priests for a testimony to them!" They too must hear of my power first."
2. "Offer the sacrifices Moses commanded for your cleansing! Not even so marvellous a cleansing as that from living death can excuse you from your normal duties to God."
3. "Keep still: revolutions are afoot; the success of my ministry cannot stand such display of ignorant popularity encouraged in unthinking crowds. Besides, your pride cannot stand display either. Tell it to no man!"

B. To us and our age, Jesus charges us who claim to be His followers:

1. Faith, repentance, baptism (Mt. 10:32; Lk. 13:3; Mt. 28:18-20).
2. Growth in discipleship (Mt. 11:28-30) and all that it involves.
3. Sharing His message and His life with our associates.
4. Getting involved in His work.

CONCLUSION. Jesus touched the untouchable, crossed the chasm and got involved in our suffering, our sorrows. Who can refuse such a Lover as He? No man can ever feel himself incurable in body or unforgiveable in soul while Jesus Christ lives! Do you fear the exposure of some hideous sin in your life? Are you deliberately separating yourself from human companionship because of some heartbreaking experience in your home and family? Do you wonder if anyone really loves you and cares what happens to you? Do you long above all else to turn to a useful, happy life of service, gratefully rendered to Jesus? Jesus calls you to His side. Will you come? Will you say, "Jesus, if you

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

want to, you can cleanse me, restore me, heal me, fill me!" He lays His reassuring hands upon you, saying, "I want to, come to me. I will give you rest and cleansing."

"THE MASTER MARVELLED"

(8:5-13)

What can excite the wonder and admiration of Jesus of Nazareth? The times of Jesus' earthly ministry were days loaded with excitement, but they must not dim our sight of the Lord Himself. If we desire to delight this Master, let us pay attention to what brings Him highest joy. There are some genuinely impressive facts in this text: what one fact drew Jesus' attention leaving Him overjoyed and amazed? Matthew tells us of . . .

I. AN UNEXPECTED COMPASSION. Ours is a cruel, hard-nosed, "business is business" world, where men climb the heights to a success over the bent backs of their inferiors, the less fortunate.

A. An unlikely object of compassion was the centurion's slave.

1. Slaves in the Roman empire were no better than a living tool, differing from other things possessed by owner in the sense that the slave could talk. Slaves too sick, too old or too unable or unwilling to work could be disposed of in any manner the master chose.

2. But here in this household the anguished cry from a paralyzed human being, though a slave, was heard!

B. An unlikely person for expressing such compassion was the centurion.

1. His military career had not been able to extinguish his human concern for another human being.

H. P. Hughes commented: "I know nothing more noble, more indicative of the godlike man, than a proper courtesy and thoughtfulness and a disinterested and unselfish care for those who are our social inferiors."

2. The centurion was not Jewish, therefore, technically a pagan. What opportunities had he had for knowing God's revelation? What circumstances had God combined to bring him to his love for the subject people over which his own government had posted him to keep law and order?

C. No, while this compassion and unexpected generosity certainly surprises us, this is not yet what caused the Master to marvel.

SERMON ON CHAPTER EIGHT

II. AN UNPRECEDENTED AFFECTION. (Read Luke 7:1-10) Here Jewish elders actually intercede with Jesus on behalf of the Capernaum centurion—yes, a centurion!

A. He was more a candidate for assassination, not assistance.

1. In the Jewish struggle for independence from the Roman yoke, every Roman official, every collaborator with Rome, every supporter of Roman government would be viewed with suspicion, if not outright hatred.

2. But here we find the precise opposite to be the case: responsible Jewish citizens expressing unprecedented affection for a centurion.

a. Why *should* they hesitate to help him? "He loves our nation. He built us our synagogue!"

b. Herein is a sentence sermon: Sterile orthodoxy that does not love, that does not act, is not orthodox!

c. The orthodox deeds of one Gentile centurion produced more concrete results, more humanity, more genuine affection and deep-felt appreciation than all the orthodox speculations of a hundred theologians.

B. Who were these "elders"? Was Jairus among them? What about the royal official (Jn. 4:46-54) whose son Jesus had already healed?

C. What opportunities had they had for knowing God's revelation? What witness had they given to this centurion concerning Jesus? Had they been as generous with the centurion as he had been with them? Many of these intriguing questions stimulate our imagination, as they fill in the flesh-and-blood outline of these real people.

D. The actions of these men who normally would not be known to be so solicitous for a Roman's needs lead us to feel their unprecedented affection for him, and yet even this example rising above usual Jewish parochialism did not excite the wonder of our Lord so much as

III. AN UNEXAMPLED FAITH. That did it! Nothing turns the head of Jesus of Nazareth so quickly as the concrete expression of real belief! What was the formula of his "great confession"?

A. "I am not worthy."

1. He is a Roman who says this to an itinerate Jewish Rabbi!

2. This is obviously real humility: the higher he held Jesus, the lower he esteemed his own power, position, accomplishments and person.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

3. This confession of unworthiness was his highest claim to being actually worthy of the Kingdom! (Mt. 5:3)
- B. "I understand authority and I know you possess it." When he had learned to confess Israel's God as his own and to believe Jesus to be absolutely unlimited in the exercise of God's power, this centurion permitted no frivolous objections to hinder his decisive action, such as might be raised by scribes and Pharisees of his day.
- C. "Only speak the word, and my servant will be healed."
 1. What an intelligent grasp of the fundamental principle underlying God's government of the world! (Ps. 33:6-9; Heb. 1:1-4; 2 Pe. 3:5-7)
 2. The centurion knew that if one simple word from Jesus could not cure his slave, hundreds of mumbled or shrieked incantations from others were so far less incapable of bringing the slave back to life and health. One powerful word from Jesus is all that is needed: "Just give the command, Sir."
- D. This kind of faith brought Jesus joy, wonder and admiration just because it was so rare, strong, pure and real. Why great?
 1. The centurion was sensitive to human need; religious people can be so unseeing, so deaf to concrete hard life problems.
 2. The centurion had overcome gigantic obstacles of prejudice to bow before this Jewish Teacher; more often "the right people" would have called this "improper" at least, or unthinkable, at most, for a man of his position. Honesty compelled him.
 3. Despite the difficulties that would have choked the momentary enthusiasm, the conflicting theories and contradictory logic and broken the reasonably resilient faith of others, the centurion arrived at a determined conclusion and with confident firmness confided his case to Jesus.
 4. The centurion was humble enough to recognize the high holiness of Jesus. Our "humility" is often so pretentious! By contrast, this centurion was willing not to be honored by the Lord's presence.
 5. The centurion, even though a Gentile and in much more need of it, did not ask Jesus for a confirmatory sign for verification of the reality of His power before working the miracle. (Contrast Gideon's fleece, Judg. 6:36-40; or the Jew's demand for signs, Mt. 16:1-4)

SERMON ON CHAPTER EIGHT

6. The centurion showed careful planning by sending the elders, men whose religious views he thought would not be so likely to clash with Jesus as would perhaps the Gentile unworthiness of the centurion himself. Thus, he showed himself keenly sensitive even to Jesus' views, as a man.
7. His faith had been intelligently arrived at. Simple trust of Jesus may be acceptable, but Jesus is more stirred by a man whose faith is the result of his mental wrestling with facts, theories, alternatives, prejudices, personal ignorance and desires and who STILL decides to believe Jesus. The centurion had shown careful reasoning behind his actions.

This leads us around to

IV. AN UNTHOUGHT-OF-CONCLUSION. The tables are turned; the relations reversed!

A. The UNWELCOME are welcomed! (Mt. 8:10, 11)

1. Jesus praised the "pagan" centurion's faith: "I tell you I have not found so great faith!"
2. Jesus answered a "pagan's" prayer, wrapped the loving arms of God's compassion around both men:
 - a. around the hated man, the agent of a foreign government occupying one's homeland.
 - b. around the despised man, the slave, the living tool with no human rights and no legal existence except as property of his master.
 - c. "I will come and heal him . . . (later) Go your way; as you have believed, so be it done for you." Jesus knew neither Jew nor Roman, slave nor free, male nor female; He only recognized human need. No prejudice was strong enough to hold Jesus within its narrow, provincial bounds.
3. Jesus threw open the doors to God's Kingdom to believing Gentiles like this centurion. (Mt. 8:11)

B. The ELITE are excluded! Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are not the exclusive possessions of any exclusive race of men. He is the possession of every man in every nation in whose heart there is FAITH.

1. Jesus' amazement at the centurion's faith was caused directly by the contrast with the usual, dull lack of deep commitment He met in the very people who had enjoyed God's preparation for Messiah's coming.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

2. Jesus' voice reflected the tragedy of unbelief: "I have not found so great faith, *no, not in Israel!*" With a reluctance that throbbled with the love of God, Jesus condemned unbelievers to hell (vs. 12)

Yes, Jesus marvelled at the faith found in this very unlikely person, He encouraged the man as far as circumstances permitted and answered the centurion's request. Any Jew standing around could probably have said, "Who would have thought that THAT man could be the object of God's mercy?"

All of us make a very unlikely crowd to be the special objects of God's continued mercy! But the point is: He does care. Who would have thought that WE could be Christians? But we began with the confession: "I am not worthy. . . . Jesus, you are our Authority: only speak the word and we will live!"

CHAPTER NINE OUTLINES

- Section 18. Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic (9:2-8)
- Section 19. Jesus Calls Matthew Levi to be Apostle (9:9-17)
- Section 20. Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter (9:18-26)
and Heals Woman's Hemorrhage
- Section 21. Jesus Gives Sight to Two Blind Men (9:27-34)
- Section 22. Jesus Evangelizes Galilee (9:35-38)

STUDY OUTLINE

- I. JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYTIC (9:2-8) at a "Congressional Investigation."
 - A. Situation: house full of critics, Jesus in midst. Paralytic lowered through roof into Jesus' presence.
 - B. Crisis: Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic
 1. Pharisaic reasoning: "blasphemy!"
 2. Jesus' reasoning: "It is my right."
 - C. Conclusion: Jesus, as God, has power on earth to forgive sin.
- II. JESUS CALLS MATTHEW LEVI TO BE APOSTLE (9:9-17)
 - A. The Call of Matthew (9:9)
 - B. The Concept of the Master: "I am Physician for the sick, at work where I belong. (9:10-13)
 - C. The Controversy: feasting versus fasting (9:14-17).
 1. Situation: Disciples of John and Pharisees fasted, while Jesus' disciples feasted.

CHAPTER NINE

2. Jesus' Defense: Things that do not harmonize should not be united.
 - a. Illustration: a wedding is no place for mourning
 - b. Illustration: new patches do not repair old garments.
 - c. Illustration: new wine bursts old wineskins

III. JESUS RAISES JAIRUS' DAUGHTER (9:18-26)

- A. Situation: Twelve year-old daughter of the leader of synagogue dead; father comes to Jesus requesting His help.
- B. Jesus' response: The broken heart of the father moves Jesus.
 1. Jesus' journey, interrupted by the woman He healed, was filled with agonizing delays for the father whose understanding was inadequate.
 2. Death notice delivered to father: extreme crisis of father's faith.
 3. Jesus ministered comforting words to Jairus, He was healing the father's heart also.
 4. Jesus stopped the funeral to call dramatic attention to what He is about to do.
 5. He then raises the daughter from death.

IV. JESUS HEALS A WOMAN'S HEMORRHAGE (9:20-22)

- A. Situation: Jesus hurried to Jairus' house, pressed by crowds on every side. Woman in crowd with unhealing 12-year hemorrhage, practically excommunicated from worship, from normal marital relations, practically penniless, decidedly incurable and unbelievably desperate.
- B. Jesus' Response: healing.

V. JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO TWO BLIND MEN (9:27-31).

- A. Situation: Coming away from Jairus' house, Jesus is accosted by two blind men requesting healing, who persist in following Him indoors.
- B. Jesus tests their faith.
- C. They respond affirmatively.
- D. Jesus healed them instantly with a word and a touch.
- E. Jesus demanded secrecy.
- F. Instead they publicized the miracle.

VI. JESUS FREES A DUMB DEMONIAK (9:32-34)

- A. Situation: A dumb demoniak is brought to Jesus;
- B. Jesus' Response: He cast out the demon, with the result that the dumb man could speak.

- C. The Crowd's Reaction: "Nothing ever seen like this in Israel!"
- D. The Pharisees' Reaction: "Jesus is in league with Satan."

VII. JESUS EVANGELIZES GALILEE AND SHARES HIS VISION WITH THE DISCIPLES (9:35-38)

- A. Situation: Jesus goes on a preaching and healing tour of Galilee.
- B. Jesus' Motivation: His compassion and intelligent love for the leaderless multitudes.
- C. Jesus' Challenge: Pray for helpers to reap the waiting harvest.

Section 18

JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYTIC

(Parallels: Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

TEXT: 9:2-8

2. And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.
3. And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.
4. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?
5. For which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk?
6. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.
7. And he arose, and departed to his house.
8. But when the multitudes saw it, they were afraid, and glorified God, who had given such authority unto men.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose so many theologians began to gather around Jesus on this occasion? Were they slowly becoming His disciples too?
- b. Why did Jesus declare first the forgiveness of the man's sins? Would it not have been better first to heal the man and then declare his sins forgiven? It certainly would not have scandalized the religious