



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 8:28-34

Topic

Jesus casts a legion of demons out of two men and they go into a herd of two thousand swine which then hurtle themselves over a cliff to their deaths

Title

"Well Here's Another Swine Mess You've Gotten Us Into"

Introduction

Hollywood has ruined me. I can never think of an exorcism without flashing back in my mind to the 1973 feature film, *The Exorcist*.

Moviephone.com lists a few weird facts surrounding its production:

- Mercedes McCambridge provided the demonic voice of Regan, the demon-possessed girl. She achieved the gravelly tone by chain-smoking and forcing herself to vomit up a mixture of raw eggs and mashed apples.
- Theaters screening the movie came equipped with "Exorcist barf bags."
- Post-production for the film was done at 666 Fifth Avenue in New York City.

There are several other weird facts but one in particular captured my attention: The sounds that are made when the demon leaves Regan's body come from an audio clip of **pigs being herded to slaughter**.

In our text Jesus encounters a legion of demons possessing two men. He ends up sending them into a herd of two-thousand pigs who promptly stampede over a cliff into the sea and to their death.

The Exorcist is fiction and not at all a proper representation of God's authority over demons. In the biblical account we will read today all Jesus had to do was say "Go!" and the demons were cast out.

What is more amazing, and at the same time baffling, about this story is that once these men are made whole, their neighbors confront Jesus and tell Him to "Go!" **and He leaves**.

We're going to talk about Jesus' authority over demons but also His humility among men. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Has The Authority To Tell Demons To "Go!", and #2 Jesus Has The Humility To Be Told By Men To "Go!"

#1 Jesus Has The Authority To Tell Demons To "Go!"

(v28-32)

Matthew has previously reported Jesus casting out demons, but this is the first detailed account. It is what we might call a classic possession in which demons are inhabiting people causing them to do weird things. It's the kind of account that makes us wonder why we don't see more of this today.

Truth is, classic demon possession doesn't give the devil the attention it used to. We are prone to label everything as mental illness or some syndrome and the effect is that any actual cases of demon possession go unnoticed.

When the devil does get mentioned as the source of some tragedy, e.g., a mother murdering her children, people don't believe for a minute that "the devil made her do it."

While demon possession may be down, there is an absolute explosion all over the globe of occult and supernatural activities that *are* sourced by Satan. I would add to that the UFO phenomena - most of which is certainly demonic.

Mat 8:28 When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.

You also find this account in the gospels written by Luke and Mark. As usual, Matthew's is the shortest. He left out a lot of details.

Since he was presenting Jesus to the Jews as their promised Messiah, he concentrated on the Lord's authority over demons. It was one of the expected credentials of the Messiah.

In the other gospels only one man is mentioned, but that's no contradiction. Pam might ask me later today if I saw a particular person at church. If I say "Yes," it doesn't mean that I didn't see a lot of others, too.

There is a dispute among Bible scholars as to whether "the country of the Gergesenes" was Jewish or Gentile. It's sort of important in a secondary way because, if it was Jewish territory, they were raising pigs against the Levitical law.

The message of the story isn't about Jews breaking the law, and there are reasons to think this was a predominately Gentile region in which a few Jews lived. We'll go with that conclusion.

These two "demon possessed men" had been driven out of town and took up residence in "the tombs," meaning the caves in which people were buried. They possessed supernatural strength and if you were smart you avoided travel near the cemetery.

Let me give you one more fact from the Gospel of Mark. In that account the demons give their name as "Legion" for there were many of them possessing these two guys.

How many? Well, a Roman legion was six thousand men. Maybe there were fewer demons than that, but there were a lot because in a minute they are going to be sent into a herd of two thousand pigs.

Jesus landed and, when He had come ashore, it says, "there met Him" these two demon possessed men.

One aspect of this story easy to overlook is that this was an attack by a legion of demons upon Jesus and His followers. Demon activity is often described in military terms and here we see a legion of them going to confront Jesus as He lands on their shore, in their territory.

The devil knew Jesus was coming. The unusually extreme storm as Jesus was traveling by boat seems to have been Satanic. Having failed to kill Jesus by the storm, the devil sends a legion of demons against Him.

Or perhaps this was an attack by Jesus upon demons. He landed on the beach - much like an invading army would land in order to secure a beachhead and press on into enemy territory.

By the way, if you were following Jesus, you were mind-blown. He landed in Gentile territory and was doing battle with two notoriously demon possessed men. Never a dull moment.

Where do demons come from, anyway? The Bible explains that Satan, whose name is Lucifer, is a created angel who rebelled against God, wanting to be God. A third of the created angels in Heaven followed him in his rebellion.

These fallen angels are the demons.

The devil went into the Garden of Eden, disguised as the serpent, to tempt Eve. Adam and Eve sinned by believing they, too, could be as God. God's creation was subjected to sin and corruption and death.

The devil is called the god of this world and the prince of the power of the air. He rules over the demons as principalities and powers, as the rulers of the darkness of this world.

Together they desire to rob, to kill, and to destroy human beings. They certainly can do it by possessing someone, but they have many other sinister strategies by which they may destroy lives.

The Bible makes it clear that God is victorious over the devil in this cosmic conflict. Not just that He will be victorious, but that He already is.

In the Garden of Eden God told Adam and Eve He would Himself enter the human race to destroy the devil by His own death and resurrection. He did just that in the Person of Jesus Christ, the God-man, who died on the Cross and rose again.

In many human conflicts, the war can be over but many individuals fight on anyway. It should not surprise us that the devil won't go quietly.

The devil and his demons fight on but it is clear that they know they are defeated and have a limited time to rob, kill, and destroy.

Mat 8:29 And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

Demons know that Jesus is the God-man. They know prophecy, including future prophecy. They have good theology.

The demons reveal two incredible things:

1. First, they know they are absolutely and unavoidably headed for eternal "torment."
2. Second, they know they have a limited period of time before The Lord sends them to their torment.

The "time" they are referencing is at the end of the thousand year kingdom of Heaven on the earth, after Jesus' Second Coming and before the creation of the new earth. The devil and his demons will once-for-all and forever be thrown alive into the Lake of Fire that was created for their eternal punishment.

There will be no partying in Hell. The devil is not the ruler of a kingdom in Hell; nor are his demons tormentors in Hell but, rather, they are tormented.

Mat 8:30 Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding.

Mat 8:31 So the demons begged Him, saying, "If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine."

The demons knew Jesus was going to cast them out of the two men. It's what happens whenever Jesus is in the presence of the demon possessed. They asked permission to be sent into a herd of pigs.

A lot of speculation surrounds this request. For example people speculate that demons don't like to be disembodied and desire a host. I can't see that from this; and we should be careful drawing conclusions about why demons do what they do - except that they do it in rebellion against God in order to rob, kill, and destroy.

More likely they feared that Jesus might incarcerate them in a demonic prison to await their final torment.

The apostle Peter, in his letters, as well as Jude and the Revelation, indicate some demons are currently held in prison.

They knew The Lord wouldn't allow them to go into other people; the closest living creatures were "a herd of swine" "a good way off," so it was their only play.

Plus they may have thought they could sneak-in one final blow to the people in the region by destroying their source of livelihood. Remember, all demons want to do is cause harm of any kind.

Why did Jesus answer their demon-prayer? Not sure if it is why He did, but because He did we will see something incredible in the reaction of the town.

Mat 8:32 And He said to them, "Go." So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water.

Demons might like bacon, but bacon doesn't like them. The pigs perished.

Not the demons; they can't drown. In fact we have to say that it seems from Scripture that neither angels nor demons can be killed. In Luke 20:36 Jesus references the fact that angels do not die. They are eternal beings.

Jesus had and has total authority over demons. He didn't need to speak the word, "Go!" He spoke it so the witnesses could see what was going on - that He was exercising authority.

Going into the herd of pigs also benefited the witnesses. They could 'see' that the demons left their human hosts to enter the animal hosts. They could give testimony a genuine exorcism had taken place.

You and I, as believers in Jesus and His ambassadors on the earth, have His delegated authority. We, too, can say, "Go!" if we are ever confronted by demons.

We don't need a crucifix or holy water or special prayers and incantations.

Apparently there are some demons who are more difficult than others. In those cases Jesus said we must be fasting and praying - *not* learning Latin spells.

Don't be drawn to ritual exorcisms or special prayers or the identifying of territorial spirits or demanding their names. It's not biblical.

You confront demons with simple, but powerful and effective, delegated authority, **not** ritual.

As powerful as this exorcism was, the real impact of this story is what comes next.

#2 Jesus Has The Humility To Be Told By Men To "Go!"

(v33-34)

Two men, presumably citizens of the region who had led normal lives, had become seriously demon possessed. They were undoubtedly someone's fathers, or sons, or husbands; someone must have loved them and felt their loss.

But they were incurably possessed and were forced away from others, forced to haunt the tombs.

Jesus stormed the beachhead and set them free from possession. The only price was two thousand pigs.

It proved too big a price to pay.

Mat 8:33 Then those who kept them fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men.

Mat 8:34 And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region.

What??? It's incredulous - a word that I can't really define but expresses perfectly how messed-up this was.

Think about the people of that "whole city." There must have been among them many who were suffering from diseases and infirmities. In other words, there were among them many who needed healing.

Then, too, as far as they knew, two- to six-thousand demons were still in the area, on the loose, presumably looking for human hosts.

But for all that, and for a reason or reasons not made clear, they asked Jesus to "Go!"

- It's assumed that if they were Jewish, then this episode exposed their illegal herding of swine. Maybe; but everyone already knew there were two thousand pigs there. You can't hide two thousand pigs! There was nothing to expose.
- It's assumed that if they were Gentile, then they had just lost their livelihood. This was a huge herd, worth a lot of money. The area would probably be hit by a recession.

Still, why ask Jesus to "Go!" when there would be even *more* needs than ever?

Those might be the reasons, or among the reasons, for them acting the way they did. But they are not the point. At least, not the point I want to develop.

The point is this: In a world of spiritual conflict, where God is already victorious but the devil fights on, when The Lord can bring help and healing, **men prefer, for whatever reason or reasons, to remain in their sin and in darkness rather than submit to the authority of God.**

They'd rather take their chances without God so as not to yield their lives to the Savior. If a few of them are casualties - demon possessed or diseased or infirm - well, that's the price you pay for being successful in 'pig business.'

I want you to expand this thought because I think it is an illustration of a greater, global truth.

We've been talking a lot, lately, about the presence of evil, the problem of pain, wondering why, since there is an almighty God who is love, bad things still happen.

It's a huge argument nonbelievers appeal to in order to debunk the notion that there is a God Who cares for them.

I suggest to you that one reason evil seems to have such free reign is that most men tell God to "Go!" so they can continue to live without Him.

Of course, when something bad does happen, when some evil befalls them, they blame God. They refuse to acknowledge that they banished Him, refusing His help.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, very God of very God, who has all authority given to Him, is nevertheless humble and will not force Himself upon those who refuse Him.

Evangelists say it all the time. Jesus is standing at the door of human hearts, knocking. But He won't break down the door; you must open it, letting Him in.

If you've ever seen that famous painting that depicts The Lord standing at a door, knocking, you've probably noticed that there is no door handle on the outside. It's the artists interpretation of the humility of Jesus, needing to be invited in.

Even though rejected and humble to retreat, Jesus still has compassion on those who tell Him to "Go!"

In the Gospel of Mark the story ends this way:

Mar 5:17 Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

Mar 5:18 And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him.

Mar 5:19 However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you."

Mar 5:20 And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

They refused Him, told Him to "Go!" He told the delivered, saved man to "**Go!**" *to them*.

Jesus left them a missionary! It was an early version of the Great Commission we all have been given as believers.

Our world is fallen. It is temporarily subject to the prince of the power of the air, the god of this world, and his legions of demons seeking to rob, to kill, and to destroy. They fight on, causing all manner of mischief and terror.

God already owns the victory. The devil acknowledges his defeat and knows he has but a short time until his eternal torment. As he goes about seeking whom he may devour, Christians "Go!" into all the world with the presence of Jesus Christ.

Jesus can still destroy the works of the devil, deliver men and women from his grip, save and heal.

But all too often those He reaches out to in compassion prefer their sin and the darkness to His incredible salvation.

Want to blame someone for the presence of evil, the problem of pain? Look no further than nonbelievers who have told Jesus to "Go!"

We must therefore keep going to them right up until the time Jesus comes for us.