



## **Matthew 8:28–34**

28 When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. 29 “What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” 30 Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. 31 The demons begged

Jesus, “If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.” 32 He said to them, “Go!” So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. 33 Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. 34 Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

## **Reflection**

Many of the disciples were seasoned sailors, they’d grown up on the Sea of Galilee, fisherman like their fathers before them.

They'd weathered many storms at sea - but a storm that makes even seasoned fisherman fear for their lives had come out of nowhere; they'd thought they were going to drown. Then Jesus calmed the wind and the waves with a word – complete, eerie calm. Their great fear of the storm outside the boat became an even greater fear of the person within in the boat, 'What kind of man is this?' The thought in every heart; the thought written on every face. You can imagine the sober silence that followed as they rowed their way to the shore, arriving in the region of the Gadarenes.

There's some irony in the fact that the disciples stepping out of that boat on those too calm waters, didn't know who Jesus was. And that it was up to the demons who

came out of the tombs to tell them that Jesus is the Son of God. But before we look at this story it's important that we speak briefly about demons and exorcism.

In our passage today two men are demon-possessed. In parallel passages from the other gospels we are given the impression that they are possessed by many demons. In Mark's gospel the demons are called Legion, because they are many, and this is confirmed in our passage when the demons leave their two hosts and enter a large herd of pigs. But in the modern Western world, we struggle to explain what's going on in people like these. NT Wright said poetically, 'Think of that wild sea, now turn it into a human.' In Jesus' day, and in many parts of our world today (especially Africa and South America), the most natu-

ral explanation is that these men are possessed by some evil force. 'Demons' was the regular way of describing the condition. This language makes us uncomfortable today. And yet, while modern Western medicine has found alternative ways of diagnosing people with violent mental illnesses, there still remain today, even in Western society, some people for whom the ancient explanation still seems the best. We encounter two men like these in our passage today.

What's so striking and disturbing about today's passage is that it's like the two men are so completely overpowered by these demons that they have no personality of their own. When Jesus speaks to them it is the demons that speak back. The bible presents demons as violent, either violent

to others or violent to their hosts. These demons are so violent no one could pass their way. So Jesus moves from defeating violent nature with a word; to defeating violent men with a word. He turns from saving his disciples from the violence of the natural world; to saving these two men from the violence of the supernatural world. Jesus demonstrates his power over both the natural and the supernatural.

There's no battle here. In James chapter two, James writes that even demons know that there is one God and they shudder. These demons know the authority of the Son of God and when they see him, they shudder with these words,

29 "What do you want with us, Son

of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?”

They know who Jesus is, they know they are doomed, they know that they will be judged and cast into hell alongside Satan at the end of days and just like Satan they are intent on taking as many people with them as possible. Like Satan they are cunning, devious and defeated.

They're cunning; the game is up with these two men. They're devious: 'Send us into the pigs Jesus.' The implications are chilling. Demons won't die until the appointed time. And demons needs hosts. From the men to the pigs. Jesus commands and they enter the pigs. But they're cunning as well and as violent as ever. Immediately

the huge herd of pigs rushes down the steep bank and drowns in the water. Only pigs can swim quite well; these pigs didn't drown, they were killed by the demons – the implication being that they left those pigs and went out to find other hosts. Chilling isn't it?

At this the whole town went out to meet Jesus. The two men returned to them in sound mind, peoples' husbands, brothers, family, a powerful miracle, what response would you expect? The whole town came out and then the whole town asked Jesus to leave. Cunning demons killing the pigs of townsfolk who prefer pigs to people, who prefer money to men. But in this story I don't think Matthew is so much concerned with the impression Jesus leaves on this town in the Gadarenes. This is about Je-



Jesus' authority. This isn't a story about mission but about power of Jesus Christ over the supernatural world.

## **Think**

Take some time now to think over the implications of this passage. We live by faith and not by sight; and our faith is in the supernatural. The bible tells us that there is a great spiritual battle going on. The enemy is defeated; but he's still fighting to the death. Satan has power over our world and demons are real. While we should not be overly focussed on Satan and demons, many of us never give their activity in this world a passing thought, which is dangerous and treacherous and out of step with Scripture. Take some time to meditate over this passage and especially Jesus'

authority and power over the supernatural realm.

## **Pray**

Then pray. A whole town unmoved and rejecting Jesus. Two poor men ravaged by violent mental illness. Needs just as great in our present day and age, and a Saviour just as great, and just as relevant today as back then. Pray for these needs and whatever else God has put on your heart as you've considered his word this morning.