

Jesus vs. the Spirit World

Matt. 8:28-34

Intro. I'm sure you've heard of the proverbial "*elephant in the living room.*" In the idiom, the elephant represents *a big issue everybody is acutely aware of, but nobody wants to talk about.* The elephant in view this AM is one God wants us all to know about. The elephant is the existence of the spirit world... the fact that Satan and myriads of invisible evil spirit beings inhabit our space with supernatural power and diabolical intent. Yet the world's attitude toward the spirit world borders on schizophrenia. Books and movies that portray the occult are a multi-million dollar industry. Check the local listings. It would seem that every week Hollywood releases something related to Satan or occult influence. People file into theaters to view these frightening productions. So the spirit world is a really big issue everybody is aware of. But it's an issue few want to seriously consider...especially from the biblical perspective. That's what I call "schizophrenia." So there sits the elephant. This powerful adversary of God and man stinks up the living room and corrupts God's world. But most would rather ignore the elephant because no one wants to believe a literal Devil is really out there.

The Bible, on the other hand, leaves no room for uncertainty. In the third chapter of the first book of the Bible, we're introduced to the highest fallen angel. His name is Lucifer or Satan. He first appeared in Eden as a serpent. The Bible traces every problem in our world, from discord to disease and death, to his influence which resulted in Adam's fall. Down through the ages, satanic activity has been like obscene graffiti on the wall of God's creation. Though history isn't taught this way, Satan is the unseen instigator behind the distortion of truth and a plethora of violent atrocities. In **Jn. 8:44** Jesus said, **He (the devil) was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.**

I Jn. 5:19 adds...**the whole world is under the control of the evil one.** When Adam sinned he forfeited his scepter of authority over God's creation. And Satan was right there to snatch it up. Yet Satan's rule isn't over humanity in general, his influence extends over individuals like you and me. Before every sinner trusts Christ for salvation, **Eph. 2:1, 2** say, **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.** These declarations fly in the face of humanism and the false notion that we each control our own destiny. The Bible says **the whole world is under the control of the evil one.** Apart from Christ, those who think they're doing their own thing, are in fact marionettes whose strings are in the hands of this diabolical ruler.

And let me also say this...the pervasive philosophy of our day insists that humanity can solve every problem. Given enough time, it's believed human ingenuity can cure every illness / extend longevity / establish peace between warring people and nations / feed the hungry / create a stable global economy / and even control the climate. The articles of the original Humanist Manifesto of 1933 end with this summary..."*So stand the theses of religious humanism. Though we consider the religious forms and ideas of our fathers no longer adequate, the quest for the good life is still the central task for mankind. Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement. He must set intelligence and will to the task.*" No mention of Satan there. Yet here's a question for the humanist...What hope does humanity have of liberating itself from the tyranny of "*the elephant in the living room*"...that wicked and supernatural "**prince of this world?**" Of course, the average person denies Satan's existence...but that's the point. The elephant is an enormous issue most have chosen to ignore even though his corrupting influence is evident everywhere!

Though the study of Satan and demons could occupy the next several Sundays, we need to postpone that study for another time.

Matthew's purpose here was to present Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. To that end, he set forth the authority of Christ's teachings in **chaps. 5-7**. Now beginning in **chap. 8** he sets forth the authority of Jesus over disease and deformity and His authority over the forces of nature. After Jesus calmed the fierce storm that threatened the lives of all on board, we ended our study at **8:27 - The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!"** As Pastor Jim Carrell said, last Sunday night, *"this miracle was over the top."* Who but God, the Creator, has power to command wind and waves? Who but the Word of God speaks and causes storms to cease?

But there remains that *"elephant in the living room;"* that arch enemy of God and man; that supernatural antagonist against whom human powers and ingenuity are no match. Having already resisted Satan's temptations, how will Jesus perform when challenged by two men thoroughly under Satan's control? That's the question addressed in the passage before us this AM. It's a crucial question... because, what good is a Messiah who is powerless to rescue us from our greatest enemy? And what good is a king who is overpowered and subservient to another?

1. Confronting the demonic – vs. 28, 29 - 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. "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"

Rather than admit the existence of Satan and the demons under him, many prefer to regard men in this condition as mentally disturbed...deranged. But if words mean anything and we believe Jesus always told the truth, the unavoidable conclusion is that these men were in fact, **demon-possessed**. That means demons had ruthlessly taken over the command and control center of their lives.

Mark and Luke's account of this event provides more details regarding one of these men. Though each man tells the story from his own unique perspective, none contradicts the others. **Mk. 5:2-5 - When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.**

They lived in **the tombs** or *mausoleums* as we call them today. The cemetery was a place where they could steal food offered to appease the gods on behalf of the deceased buried there. Luke's account adds...**For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. - Lk.8:29** Like the leper, these men were separated from the living...from family and friends. They were in complete bondage to solitude, misery and death. Notice their superhuman strength...chains couldn't hold them and **no one was strong enough to subdue him**. Matthew said this demon-possessed duo was **so violent that no one could pass that way**.

We should be thankful that demon-possession is uncommon and held in check by God's Restrainer. **(II Thess. 2:7)** Demonic activity increased dramatically in the first century when Jesus was here. And demon possession so prevalent in primitive cultures. The prophetic Scriptures say satanic activity will increase in an unprecedented way when Satan is cast to the earth during the final days before Jesus returns. Yet even now, demonic activity is increasing in our own country. I have little doubt the blood thirsty barbarism of ISIS is inspired by demonic influence. Ask yourself why so many of their victims are Christians and Jews. And let me add this...the Bible accounts of demon-possession no nothing of the *"demon of over-eating,"* the *"demon of laziness"* or the *"demon of soap operas."* Geraldine Wilson was wrong...*the devil didn't make her buy that dress!*

In the Bible, demon possession is a desperate condition manifest in super human strength and self-destructive behavior. In the intellectual, psychological and social realms, demons promote false teachings / confusion / and insanity. Yet in the physical realm, demon possessed individuals were often unable to speak, uncontrollably violent, and driven by suicidal mania.

While these two men were not greater sinners than others, they suffered terribly. They graphically illustrate the bondage of every human being enslaved to sin and sin's effects. **I Jn. 3:18** says, **The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.** Jesus came for this reason. He came to set us free from Satan's power over us. Just the evening before, Jesus left Capernaum and boarded a boat to cross Galilee so He might confront these demons and deliver these two men from Satan's grip. And while many people deny the deity of Jesus Christ, there's no confusion or **denial in the spirit world. The demons were the first in the NT to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God.** They remembered the pre-incarnate Christ from the time before their fall...and observed His birth in Bethlehem. As on other occasions the demons spoke and said, **"What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" – vs. 29.** Not only do demons know who Jesus is, but they know they are powerless before Him and destined to be tortured in Hell at the appointed time. In a context where James distinguishes between saving faith and mental assent (or head knowledge) he wrote, **You believe that there is one God. Good! (good for you) Even the demons believe that--and shudder. – Jas. 2:19**

2. Commanding the demons – vs. 30-32 - Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." 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.

Not every question is answered in the Bible. Here's an example of an open-ended question. *Why did the demons beg Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs?* This was no small herd...**Mk.5:13** says the herd consisted of 2,000 animals. That's almost as much bacon as they serve on a Saturday at Tony's Restaurant in Birch Run! (Peggy and I have seen unsuspecting travelers stare in utter disbelief at the pile of bacon on their plate!) The great size of the herd indicates how many demons inhabited these men. In fact, when Jesus asked the demon's name, he replied, **"My name is Legion...for we are many." – Mk. 5:9**

But why the pigs? Two suggestions seem plausible. **First**, the demons may have thought there was a divine change in plans and Jesus would cast them into the Abyss right then and there. To be cast into the pigs seemed like a better option to them. A **second** possibility, though not as good as the first, is that Satan may have sensed an opportunity to create hostility between Jesus and the pig farmers who lost an entire herd. The financial loss suffered by the owners and the ripple effect on the town may have seemed like a good plan to the adversary. But in my mind, that's a stretch.

What we can be sure of is this...demons, though powerful and numerous, obeyed the voice of Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus spoke only one word...**Go!** and **they...went.** Later when Jesus sent out His witnesses, we read...**The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." – Lk. 10:17** What we have in **Matt. 8** is a preview of what will happen when Jesus returns in power and glory. **Phil. 2:9-11** say, **God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** On that day every human being / every angel / and every fallen angel, will bow before Jesus Christ. So demons know who Jesus is and they have no alternative but to obey His voice. This is Matthew's point. Yet to people for whom faith and obedience is optional and motivated by love, Jesus said,

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? - Lk. 6:46

What happened next was sudden and dramatic. The whole herd rushed down the steep slopes and perished in the Sea. By this sudden stampede, everyone knew the demons had left the men. This photo was taken from the ancient ruins of Gadara looking west toward Galilee. But here's another question... *Why did the pigs do this?* They behaved like bathers with bees in their swimsuits! Did the demons cause the frenzy? Or did Jesus silently command the pigs to stampede? We don't know. But whatever the cause, the demons seem to have miscalculated. Satan isn't omniscient like God and he routinely shoots himself in the foot. The demons couldn't know the pigs would commit suicide. But once the pigs were dead, the demons were disembodied and sent to the Abyss.

It's entirely possible the owners of these pigs were living in defiance of God's Law...disobedient Jews. If they didn't eat the pork themselves, they may have sold it to the Gentiles on that side of the lake. Though the financial loss was great, they had no business raising pigs in the first place. But make note of this...in the sight of God, the souls of two men was worth far more than 2,000 animals! Under the pervasive influence of evolution and its link to animal rights / abortion / and euthanasia...this distinction has been blurred and distorted. Today human life is cheap and often valued less than some endangered species of animal. But Jesus pitied these men and 2,000 pigs was a small price to pay to release them from Satan's grip.

3. Conceding to the defensive – vs. 33-34 - Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

Every person who witnessed this event became a witness of Jesus. They told everybody what they had seen Jesus do. The fact that the whole town went out to meet Jesus sounds very encouraging. It reminds us of 8:18. Mark and Luke add a few more details to these verses:

- **Mk. 5:14, 15 - Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.**
- **Lk. 8:35 - and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.**

To other questions we can add this one... *Why did the people of Gadara react as they did? Why did they plead **with** (Jesus) **to leave their region?*** Before we attempt an answer I want you to observe several things:

- **v. 28** says **two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him** / then **v. 34** says, **the whole town went out to meet Jesus**. Here we see two men who knew they were in bondage and in great need of deliverance. But we also see a whole town of people whose need of deliverance is equally great. But here's the difference...the town folk don't know it. Tell me, whose condition is more desperate? Those who know they need a Savior or those who need a Savior and don't know it?
- **v. 31** says, **The demons begged Jesus** to send them **into the herd of pigs...** / compare that with **v. 34** which says, **And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region**. The demons know who Jesus is. They know He controls their destiny. They dread the Hell that awaits them. So they beg Jesus to send them into the pigs. The townsfolk also plead with Jesus...the One who controls their destiny too. But they plead with Jesus to leave.

Several reasons are offered to explain why the people wanted Jesus to leave and each one has some merit. But I think one explanation has more going for it than the others. Dr. John MacArthur who writes, *"When unholy men come face to face with the holy God, they are terrified."* Remember when Isaiah saw the Lord seated on His throne? He said, **"Woe to me!...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."** – **Isa. 6:5** On that day when the disciples followed the advice Jesus gave them and caught so many fish they almost broke his nets **Lk. 5:8** says, **When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"** And here's a riddle for you. What is more terrifying than being in a small boat at night in the midst of a furious storm? Answer? Realizing the One with you in the boat is the Omnipotent Holy Creator God you haven't trusted so much. **Mk. 4:40, 41 - He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"** The disciples were frightened by the storm, but they were terrified by the Savior who controls even the forces of nature. So I think the people wanted Jesus to leave because He exposed the elephant in their living room with irresistible force. In terror they reasoned the way the disciples did the night before. They said, "Who is this?" Then they said, "Go away."

The central figures in this story aren't the disciples / the demon-possessed men / the towns-people / or the pigs. The focal point is Jesus Christ. Listen to **v.34** again - **Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.** Matthew wants us to know the whole event turned on Jesus...the Son of God...the Healer...the One who speaks peace to wind and waves...the Messiah who came to overpower and **destroy the devil's work.** Yet as so many have done, the people of Gadara didn't want Jesus and sent Him away. In this present Age of Grace, Jesus won't force Himself on anyone. Each person is allowed the prerogative of choosing to receive or reject Jesus Christ...to embrace Him or send Him away? There is no neutral position.

In the previous event, the disciples were completely safe because Jesus was with them in the boat. In this event, Jesus is the answer to *"the elephant in the living room"*...the powerful spiritual adversary who deceives the whole world and holds humanity in bondage. Apart from Christ we are defenseless pawns. Listen to **I Jn. 4:4 - You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.** Jesus demonstrated His power over the forces of nature and the unseen forces of the spirit world. The only way of salvation and safety is to have Christ living in you. He comes in by faith and personal invitation. Have you believed Him and trusted Him to save you?