Matthew 8:28 And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.

Gadarenes (Gergesenes; some Gerasenes). “Of the various proposals, perhaps the most likely is that the name confusion results from the transliteration into Greek of the name of a less-well-known non-Hellenistic lakeside town which, given the curious inconsistencies of ancient transliteration, proved subsequently difficult to identify. But the various suggestions remain conjectural.”

“The locale seems to have been in the district controlled by the town of Gadara, near the village of Gerasa … which lay about midpoint on the lake’s eastern shore.”

“This region lay in the predominantly Gentile territory of the Decapolis…; the presence of the pigs (v. 30), inconceivable in a Jewish milieu, points to its Gentile background.”

coming out of the tombs…. 

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so fierce that no one could pass that way. Mark gives us some detail on how fierce they were.

“He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.” (Mark 5:3–5, ESV)

In Acts, we see additional information on the strength of demons.

“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.” (Acts 19:13–16, ESV)

Matthew 8:29 And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?”

But when Jesus passes that way, they recognize him and they cower.

These demon-possessed men would attack those who traveled their way with the result that no one could even travel that road. Yet when Jesus appears on that road, their response is considerably different. “Instead of representing a threat, the demoniacs behave as though threatened themselves.”4 John Chrysostom noted, “They who kept others from passing are stopped at the sight of him who blocks their way.”5

us…. The “us” here are the demons, not the men they possess.

“And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.”” (Mark 5:9, ESV)

Legion: “A unit of the Roman army. In NT times the standard size of the legion was 6000 men.”

Son of God…. “While the men in the boat are doubting what manner of man this is, that even the winds and the sea obey him, the demons come to tell them…”

“...they express a supernatural recognition of Jesus as Son of God, and are aware that he is likely to bring trouble for them.” It will not be until 14:33 that the disciples reach the point of making the same assertion themselves.

“...they express a supernatural recognition of Jesus as Son of God, and are aware that he is likely to bring trouble for them.”

Have you come here to torment us before the time? “The intriguing phrase pro kairou, “before the proper time,” implies a recognition by the demons that their time of opportunity to trouble human beings is limited, and that the arrival of Jesus signals the beginning of the end, which they had hoped would not come yet.

It appears from this question that the demons believed that: there was a torment coming, they knew they were doomed to that torment, that there was an appointed time for that torment and that Jesus had the authority to implement it whenever he chose. They were even certain that the now of this story was “before the time.” That is, the torment should normally be sometime in the future.

The demons expressed a fear of Jesus based on his ability to “destroy both soul and body in hell.”

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28, ESV)

These demons appear to be fallen angels.

“And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—” (Jude 6, ESV)

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torment⁰¹…. “As the question is phrased, it recognizes that Jesus is the one who will discharge that judicial function at the “appointed time”; therefore it confirms the fullest meaning of “Son of God.””¹²

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” (Matthew 25:41, ESV)

Matthew 8:30 Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them.

pigs¹³…. Mark tells us there were about two thousand pigs.

“So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.” (Mark 5:13, ESV)

“The commercial keeping of pigs indicates that we are not dealing here with a Jewish community….”¹⁴

Matthew 8:31 And the demons begged him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.”

send us away into the herd of pigs. “There is no indication in the narrative as to what that meant for either the demons or the pigs, or as to why the demons should make such a request. But we may reflect that unclean animals would be suitable dwellings for unclean spirits.”¹⁵

Matthew 8:32 And he said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters.

Go¹⁶…. The demons have no authority to decide this for themselves but are dependent on Jesus authorization.

Luther, who suffered the attacks of Satan beyond our comprehension, has given us a great hymn on the power of demons.

A Mighty Fortress


“And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him.”

_the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters_. “The behavior of the pigs, caused by the entry of the demons, is recorded as visible proof that the demons have in fact left the men.”

“…pigs can swim if necessary and so could have climbed back up out of the water.” The fact that they were drowned therefore shows the state of insanity that they were in because of the demons. This in fact does not seem that different from their effect on men either.

**Matthew 8:33** The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men.

*told everything*… The herdsmen “told their exciting story, and told it completely (*everything*). We need not doubt that they told it all in such a manner that they were exonerated from all blame for the loss of the pigs they were minding; they would have insisted that it was all Jesus’ fault.”

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especially\textsuperscript{21} better and... “...if we take and to mean an addition, the meaning is that their big story was the loss of the pigs, after which they added the healing of the men.”\textsuperscript{22} The order of their story shows their concern and priorities.

\textit{Matthew 8:34 And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.}

“It might have been expected that they would want to welcome the man who had power over the demons and who had brought such spectacular and unexpected deliverance to the demon possessed in their own area. But this was not the case.”\textsuperscript{23} “For them he is not a messianic figure, but a wandering Jewish “holy man” whose activities have already caused a great deal of damage; he will be safer back among his own people.”\textsuperscript{24}

It is not uncommon to experience a backlash for ministry that opposes the economic gain of sin.

“About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.” When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!””

(Acts 19:23–28, ESV)

The economies of the world are deeply entangled with the many financial benefits of catering to sin.

“We are to ask whether the city values property more than persons, economics more than human beings, their pigs more than the rehabilitation of their townsmen. Jesus may have temporarily wiped out this particular herd, but he has permanently restored two men to the labor force, and in the long run, even economically, Jesus’ presence is beneficial to the community. …. Jesus’ mission at first seems economically harmful. To modern cities in the grip of economic “demons” Christian mission will often appear obstructive. Mammonized personalities will not see what happens to people; all they see is what happens to their business, to their bottom line, and to their pigs.”\textsuperscript{25}


“To name the demons in modern society is to incur disfavor.”

In our day people still ask Jesus to leave, sports teams, Hollywood, and corporate operations intimidate the community, “He is simply not good for business!” “It is him or us,” they demand, “one must leave.” It is better to cater to the baser sort, the pigs, who destroy body and soul but who bring wealth to the community, than to cater to Jesus, who does no more than bring healing to body and soul.

Postscript

“…Mark gives a touching account of the rehabilitation of the former demoniac, of his wish to join Jesus’ party and of his commission instead to tell his own people about Jesus…”

“As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.” (Mark 5:18–20, ESV)

In Summary

“The scope of this chapter is to show the divine power of Christ, by the instances of his dominion over bodily diseases, which to us are irresistible; over winds and waves, which to us are yet more uncontrollable; and lastly, over devils, which to us are most formidable of all. Christ has not only all power in heaven and earth and all deep places, but has the keys of hell too.”

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