

Restoring The Demon Possessed Men

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Date: 24 February 2019

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[0:00] For helping with the music and let's look at a very unusual story here.! We'll just pray once more before we do that.!

Jesus' authority here. His authority over evil. And although we may not frequently encounter such a dramatic opposition to him, we pray you'll help us to apply it in any ways that we are aware of evil influences in our own lives.

Help us please, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, you've noticed by what we've read that this is in Matthew and Luke.

It is also in Mark, this story. And I want to cover, I won't spend ages on any of these items really, but just so don't worry if you're used to three points.

But I want to talk about the broader context of evil with a softer start on some of my observations and even a confession from my childhood on impish ways.

[1:32] And if I ask questions, well we'll see, we'll come to that. But as the context of evil, I want you to, some of you won't know anything about the Decapolis, so we'll explore a little bit about what was unusual about that area.

And then we'll go through the story, his condition, his encounter with Jesus. And very unusual to see these responses at the end, and how we'll get some lessons from this.

So, when I lived in London, and a question I'm almost just keeping in mind for a couple of light-hearted observations is, are these sort of cheeky things or are they evil things?

And on the second one, our seminar is not allowed to answer, because I know exactly what she'll think. I used to commute on a train in London. And do you remember these things?

Yeah? You sit there, did anyone else sort of ever see these things and think, you know, it would be quite tempting to pull them? No? I don't think I ever saw anyone do it for fun.

[2:32] But I did see a piece of graffiti once, next to this, which I remembered still, though it was many years ago. And it said this, if 25 pounds you can afford, be a devil and pull the cord.

But if 25 pounds you do not own, leave the silly thing, it didn't say silly, but I just toned it down a bit for you. You do not leave the silly thing alone. So anyway, but I just remembered that in this little bit of graffiti, be a devil.

That sort of impish streak of mischievousness that would have probably caused a lot of disruption to a lot of people who were trying to get to places on time.

Now, yeah, I used to go through Hammersmith Station. That was near my school. And do you remember these things? Do you remember these things?

Oh dear, boys' school it was. We were sometimes quite mischievous, really. And we realised that if you notice the doors on that train, they sort of shut and you can't really open them until you get to the next stop.

[3:38] So, we, yeah, there were times, I was only about 14 I think, in case I get into trouble on this one. But you know, you can put these things in the train, you can just quietly tread on them and then you get off the train and then the doors shut.

And then on it goes to the next stop, you see. Smells like rotten eggs and stuff, yeah? And what makes this even worse, I'll just give you a tube map here. There's a subtle difference here that between Hammersmith and Acton Town, it goes through about five stations worth of stops.

Normally, it's about two minutes of stop. So, this is a particularly wicked... Well, I was going to say, do you think that's a cheeky prank or downright evil? Shhh. Shhh.

Shhh. No, no, I know exactly what you think, right. But, I'm just developing how we think of devilish and impish things in a lighthearted way up to a certain point.

E.T., many of you will know the film. It's rather a funny moment in the film where he's found some alcohol and he's getting drunk and he's about to fall over in the kitchen.

[4:51] And it's quite an entertaining moment in this film. But as you can imagine, and I'm sure many of you will know of people who have had alcohol develop as a problem, and you can suddenly realise how the occasional too much alcohol, and suddenly you hear of people who can't leave it alone, and their lives become ruined.

I certainly know a person who lived in London who died early through far too much alcohol. But you see, suddenly, what seems a bit impish, and suddenly you see a sinister side to it, and you start to think, hang on a minute, there is an evil force, there is a devil.

There is some evil at work in the world. And Chris reminded me on an email, in the light of some of this, Paul gives us some warnings, do not give the devil a foothold.

So, somewhere between impish habits and something taking control of you, the devil has got a foothold, and he's taken over.

And there's a lovely other verses, you know these well. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. This is in Ephesians 5. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. And that's the idea of a bit of an either or an or.

[6:13] And if you are being busy being filled with the Spirit, there actually isn't room for the evil one. You can't have both. And we'll come to some of the reasons why they can't both abide there.

So, just before we launch into some of the story, I just wanted to, for some of you who might be, well, we hear about the devil and evil, but if God is mighty and good, you might be thinking, is the devil equally mighty and just bad?

And if you haven't had much to do with the Bible, and you're just looking around in the world, that's a pretty obvious thing you might be thinking. But we do read a little.

We're not told everything we want to know about where the devil might have come from. But if you look, you might want to turn up to Revelation 12. But I will just pick a few bits to skim over here.

And you hear this story about the pregnant woman and the red dragon seeking to devour her child. And yet, just at the point where you think it's all going to go wrong, the child is snatched up to the throne.

[7:26] And then, I think I'm in verse 7 here. It says this, and it's very clear who it's being talked about by the time we get to the end of a couple of paragraphs here. Then, war broke out in heaven.

Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon, I'm just missing out some bits, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray, was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.

And then, I heard a loud voice in heaven say, Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser, and I'm not going further than verse 12, if you're trying to work out where I've gone.

For the accuser has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore, rejoice, you heavens! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you.

He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short. So, do you immediately pick up, if we were almost thinking, is there an equal good and an equal bad?

[8:46] That this is telling us that the devil originated in heaven with God, that he was in fact bumped up by pride and tried to go against God's ways.

And there was a war and a battle which he lost. And he was thrown out of heaven, but down to have some limited sway and power on this earth.

So, the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war. This is just in the few verses after verse 12, against the rest of her offspring.

And it's clearly implied in there, this is the church. Those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus. But then if you want to keep in view, what is the final end of Satan? Prior to the final judgment, Satan is cast into a lake of burning fire. Just prior to the final judgment. So, we are just keeping this in a broad setting.

[9:53] The devil is powerful and influential in this world, but to a limited time, and certainly when Jesus comes again, and before the final judgment, there will be no more of him.

And 1 John 3 verse 8 says, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Now, let's get a little bit back into our passage, shall we?

I've given you a map here of the Decapolis. Can you see that on the right here? That is your right, isn't it? Yes. The little bit of history here, which you may or may not know.

Alexander the Great dreamed of Hellenizing, that means making Greek, the entire world. I don't know if Maria ever has dreams like this, wanting to make the whole world Greek.

But he was a very dominant guy at building an empire. And after his death, cities of the Decapolis were founded. In fact, a few other cities throughout Israel were founded by these Greek soldier settlers.

[11:03] So, I'm just introducing the idea that in and around, but particularly in the Decapolis, there was this very Greek influence. And the Greeks tried to convert the Jews to their pagan values.

But then during this, it's a very quick whistle through the history. Then, of course, there came a Maccabean revolt. The Maccabeans were around, this is 167 to 63 BC.

And they were, at least largely, irritated by the Greeks trying to badger the Jews. And they'd had enough of it. And there was some uprisings.

They took a little bit of dominance. And then we go, this is going the other way now, that the Jews are beginning to badger these Greeks in the Decapolis. So, these are not friendly neighbors.

And if you lived in Israel, rural, simple, Jewish Israel, over the river there in the Decapolis, it was a different, it's like the sin bin, it might have been thought.

[12:09] Then compound all this, that in 64 BC and thereabouts, Rome brought the whole Near East under its dominion. And that included this area.

And really, this side here was the eastern extent of the Roman Empire. But probably for the people in Decapolis who were a bit irritated by these Jews badgering them, they probably welcomed this relief from being pestered.

And the Romans having control, it says they had their own currency, things like that. So they were free. And they were city-states. And the culture of these prosperous cities was Hellenistic Greek in all its Roman glory.

This is sort of marble roads and floors, mosaics. So the simple Jewish people, they must have found it quite difficult. If we have sort of fancy cars and gadgets and TVs, these simple people must have said, oh, you know, they seem to be so blessed over there, they had theaters and all kinds of things.

Right. So that's the area that Jesus is about to sail into. You know from where Aaron got to last week that we've just had this sailing across from, if I go back to the map, from Capernaum, wasn't it?

[13:29] Can you see that there? Sailing across the lake. And what happened on the journey across the lake? We have a big storm. Could well have been something to do with, apart from Jesus' opportunity to show his power, maybe the devil trying to say, I don't want you to come over here.

I'm throwing up a big storm. But notice he then arrives in the book of Matthew. And we are told, two demon-possessed men, and I just noticed if you were looking hard at the passages we led, Matthew very clearly refers to two, but in both the accounts in Mark 5 and Luke 8, you'll find he only mentions one.

Now, that doesn't have to be a contradiction because Mark and Luke don't say only one. They were just only aware of one or only noticed one. Matthew mentions two.

Just to remind you of some of those things we read, and I want you to picture this rather unusual situation. So violent that no one would pass his way, this demon.

I'm going to describe him in the singular. At least there is a lead man. So violent no one could go that way. Mark and Luke often also tell us that he was often chained hand and foot.

[14:47] So these people are trying to contain him, trying to chain him, but this demon spirit in him was so strong he could break chains, and they couldn't contain him.

So they were unable to subdue him. That's in Mark 5 and verse 4. Night and day, we didn't read Mark, but just to give you this bit, night and day he would cry out and he would cut himself.

So he was into injuring himself as well as being violent to others. Cut himself with stones. And it said in the last part of what we read in Luke 8 that he's been driven by this demon often into solitary places.

So can you just imagine for a moment this poor person? You may just feel angry of all the evil in him, but just imagine his plight. It also says that he wore no clothes and he didn't live in a house. So he showed a lack of control, a lack of shame, a lack of peace, a lack of identity.

[16:01] We did read, I think, in Luke about the fact that we are discovering that there's more than one demon in him. So this is, when you talk to this guy, if you know that Tolkien film about, with Gollum, you know, the two characters trying to fight with each other.

And this poor man didn't know who he was. So just imagine this poor man. And I suppose also imagine the effect on the neighbourhood. If this was just somewhere around the corner here, there would have been a no-go road.

No one would have walked down there. It was just this as a madman. And had some supernatural strength as well. So then, Jesus arrives.

Matthew tells us in verse 29, yeah, in chapter 8, verse 29, they shouted at Jesus, that's the two men, what do you want with us, son of God?

Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? And you think, what a strange thing for these people to suddenly come up and say to Jesus, they knew exactly who he was.

[17:16] They hadn't said, who are you? They knew exactly who he was. We pick up a little bit of details from the other passages. All we hear here is that they're shouting at Jesus.

In Mark 5, it says, these people ran from a distance. And that they fell on their knees, Jesus, son of the most high God. And Luke 8 does confirm that Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of them.

Luke 8 also tells us that Jesus asked them, And what a reply this came back, Legion, of course, in the Roman armies, 6,000 troops, that would have been a legion.

That's not necessarily the number that's going on here. But there is many, many demons that have gone into this man. So, many people do ask about who Jesus is.

And actually, if you remember where we were at the end of the story with the storm on the sea, what was it Aaron was saying at the end of it? The people, are not curious that even the winds and the waves obey him.

[18:34] Who is this Jesus? Most of us, well, what kind of man is this? But these demons, they're not asking, they're not curious, who this person is.

Exactly. Their final judge, the one with supreme authority, and one that they had to obey. How curious.

You would have thought if there was any sort of semi-equality between forces, and if I was the demon and Jesus was arriving, wouldn't I be hiding somewhere so that I don't have to encounter this stronger than I?

But they seem to be compelled to come and to shout at the top of their voice, Jesus, Son of the Most High God, Hi God, what do you want with us?

Have you come to torture us before an appointed time? So then we move on to the demons coming out, and we read about many pigs dying, and these men being restored.

[19:43] It says in Luke 8, there's just a bit more detail here, and they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the abyss. It's the idea that the demons like to dwell and influence people or animals, but if they're not in one or the other, and they're roaming around, if they

don't have any home, they may be assigned to the abyss earlier than they want.

The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. And then we read that when the demons came out of the man, they went into these pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and was drowned.

Mark tells us that there were, in fact, about 2,000 pigs. And doesn't that get you, we're not told that there were 2,000 spirits, demons in this man, but if you try and put two together, there were so many demons coming out of this man, these two men, that they go into 2,000 pigs.

We've seen already, thinking about these two men, how utterly destructive and wicked the demons' influence on them was, and to exemplify that further, we see these pigs charging off into the sea. Not the sort of thing you see frequently, A very unusual miracle. It's important to remember some context here.

[21:19] Of course, the Jews, you know they don't eat pork. We get this in Leviticus 11. And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud, it is unclean for you, you must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses.

This is all part of the Jewish heritage. So no Jewish farmer would keep swine, and no Jewish region would tolerate the presence of pigs, let alone 2,000 of them.

The other thing going on here, we've picked up that history that this is a very Roman controlled area. the Romans sacrificed pigs to their gods. Of course, their gods were a bit more decadent, weren't they?

They didn't try to pretend to achieve a perfect standard, but they did still in their way of religion sacrifice pigs. But Jew and Roman alike was really being called in order to follow the...

We're not exactly sure why the pigs were used as an example of this. I think there are two or three reasons, but certainly just keep in the background that the Romans, they used pigs for their religions. Just a perhaps here, we have read, I'm sure you know, some other examples of where demons are in people, and you see a rather...

[22:46] people in a fit or shuddering under the influence of it. And possibly with the amount of... there is a sense that Jesus may have been very sensitive to them because if he had been rather awkward about, no, you're not going into the pigs.

And these demons, as well as getting used to the fact they were coming out, they were also angry because they didn't know where they were going. perhaps this man would have died completely. And if nothing else, you can see, we know that people made in the image of God have an eternal soul.

And even two people are much more valuable than 2,000 pigs. That is an obvious thing when you understand the difference between human beings and animals. But of course, to some, they would have just been pigs that make money.

This is commercialism and suddenly 2,000 pigs had gone. But then towards the end of this part of the passage, and I'm getting a bit more detail from Luke 8 here, when those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened.

And when they came to Jesus, they found the man whom the demons had gone out, from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind.

[24:18] Can you picture that? After the description we had earlier? That naked, violent, self-harming, confused with so many voices in his head, now sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind.

And the people were afraid. And the people were afraid. So we find these two different responses. The local people, forgive me not just staying in Mark, sorry, Matthew.

Mark 5 and verse 15. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there. They were afraid. We've come across that. Then all the people of this region, Gerasenes, some of the other ones, Gadarenes, it's a similar place.

They asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So did he argue with them? He just got into the boat and he left them.

So just wind it back and see this Gentile, very anti-God territory that Jesus had arrived in. And this dramatic miracle, healing two men who were madmen for what we would have seen of them.

[25:46] And seeing them remarkably healed. Suddenly people you could start to, if you were not afraid, you could start to engage and have a relationship here and talk to them. But 2,000 pigs off the end of a cliff and all the people at large want, they just want, just go away, Jesus.

We don't want you here. This is too disturbing for us. But then we have the man who had been restored, or at least the lead man who had been restored.

And what do we find? And we don't get this in Matthew. We get this in Mark, and I think it's also in Luke, but I've got it up on the screen there. As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.

That word, begged or pleaded, we've had the demons begging begging not to be allowed to go into the swine. We've had, and here we have these demon, sorry, let me just read where we are.

The man who had demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him. This man wanted to go with Jesus, but he said, go home to your own people. Tell them about how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.

[27:09] So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. So how, if you were, if you were now having the meeting a few days after, like we do midweek, recalling this occurrence and saying how many good contacts that we had here.

And you'd probably think, well, we've got two healed men, but we've got a whole city saying, nah, just go away, thank you. But this one man was sent on a mission to go and tell what Jesus had done for him.

And if you've just got a picture in your head about where that man was and how he was sitting, clothed at Jesus' feet, and this right man, what a story he must have had. What power there must have been in that story.

One and a half years later, you will know, well, you could look up in Mark 7 and verse 31, that Jesus comes back to this area and he heals a deaf and mute man.

This is exactly the same sort of area. It says, the people were overwhelmed with amazement. Surely he has done everything well. This is probably some of the people who one and a half years before had said, please leave.

[28:29] And we hear that this large crowd gathered soon after that in Mark 7, another large crowd gathered to hear Jesus and follow him. And we have the second miracle of feeding a large number.

This is the feeding of the 4,000. So, perhaps just from this man and his activity going around, telling what Jesus had done, we see the beginnings of inroads into this dark area.

So, I think we've dealt with most of the issues before us. Let's just pick out, and remind ourselves of some lessons here. Are we not astonished and can we not be encouraged by this astonishing authority that Jesus had over evil?

Somehow the evil couldn't hide from him. They came to him and Jesus had absolute power over them. And they all knew that they couldn't, they couldn't do a conniving or try and manoeuvre a better outcome for them in the end.

They knew their end. All they were saying to Jesus was, you haven't come to torture us before the appointed time. But if we're trying to work out how we might go away from here, we don't often come face to face with such a bold example of evil, completely filling someone.

[30:03] But I wonder if we at least can think of some areas in our lives, and this we might need the help of good close friends to help us with, but are there things in your own life where the devil has got some little hold on you, and Jesus shows up, and in a smaller measure you're just trying to say, Jesus go away, I'll give you this much of my life, but this area that's not quite right, just keep away.

Don't give the devil a foothold. The people plead with him to leave, the healed man beg to follow him, and when Jesus comes near to us, his utter purity is really quite unsettling, because it shows up things.

You know, when we're not really face to face with him, we don't think we're quite that bad really. We're going on, compare yourself to other people you see, and just what you see of them for a few minutes on Sunday, you think, oh I'm doing okay here, but when Jesus gets close to you, and you suddenly realise that bright light shows up things that we might need to deal with, and we have to decide really whether you want to embrace the what might be quite uncomfortable parts of Jesus. Just imagine what those people might have done if they'd have come out. The other option would have been, wow, this man has such authority, and the people might have said, you know, we are humbled, and want to explore.

But just for us, do we want this Jesus? Do we want him to leave, or beg him to stay? So that's all I have for you on that.

[31:49] And I think we've got another session. I think we've got another session.