
The Authority of Jesus over Demons

Matthew 8:28-34

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Behind the chaos of this world and all its many troubles and trials, is the hateful hand of the enemy of our souls. Who knows but what this present season and all its attendant troubles has been the mischief of Satan and his hosts.

But let us never forget the great theme of the book of Matthew and the thrust of our text before us. There may be so much trouble: disease, storms, demons... But Jesus Christ has power over them all.

Be encouraged dear saint that Jesus is ever with us. Jesus calls us to follow Him. Jesus is the King. The wind waves obey Him. And so do the dark denizens of this present darkness.

The Chaos of the Sea (v. 23-27)

Matthew is hooking these two stories to a theme that runs through the Bible. I like to compare this to a zip line. There are many, many themes running through the Scriptures. They are zip lines strung between the poles of key texts. Watch how the theme of the sea as representing chaos and disorder runs through the Scripture. But the sea is also representative of the Gentiles. Watch how these two ideas. Let us begin with story of the storm on the sea.

²³ And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵ And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." ²⁶ And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷ And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

Its Biblical Theme

In Creation (Genesis 1:1-2)

This idea begins at the very beginning of creation.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

In Psalms

The Psalms are full of the chaos of the raging sea and the power of God over it all. Yet this raging sea is also where the King brings His salvation to the nations.

Psalm 65:5-8

⁵ By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness,
O God of our salvation,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas;
⁶ the one who by his strength established the mountains,
being girded with might;
⁷ who stills the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples,
⁸ so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your
signs.
You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy.

Psalm 89:8-9

⁸ O Lord God of hosts,
who is mighty as you are, O Lord,
with your faithfulness all around you?
⁹ You rule the raging of the sea;
when its waves rise, you still them.

Psalm 135:5-7

⁵ For I know that the Lord is great,
and that our Lord is above all gods.
⁶ Whatever the Lord pleases, he does,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.
⁷ He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth,
who makes lightnings for the rain
and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.

Psalm 74:12-13

¹² Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the midst of the earth.
¹³ You divided the sea by your might;
you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters.

In Jonah (Jonah 1:4-6)

The points of comparison between Jonah 1 and Matthew 8

⁴ But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty
tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ Then the
mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the
cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah
had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was
fast asleep. ⁶ So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean,

you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

In Matthew

Here is a theology of the sea from the book of Matthew. This is not an exhaustive list. But notice the connection Matthew is making between the sea as a place and the Gentiles as a people.

Matthew 4:15-17

¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 13:1-3

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow.

In Revelation

Listen to a sampling of the symbolic use of sea in Revelation related to Matthew.

Revelation 10:1-3

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. ² He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, ³ and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.

Revelation 13:1-2

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

Revelation 15:2-4

² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.

³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!

⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come and worship you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Revelation 18:21

²¹ Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more;

²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.”

Revelation 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

Its Connection Here (v.24, 32)

We saw how the storm on the sea text was connected to the ones before. Matthew was showing us Jesus’ authority over followers. Now that story is also connected to this one as well, but in a different way.

In the storm story Jesus leads the disciples into the boat and they go out into the storm. Though they are in great danger, they are safe because Jesus is there with His peace and His power. In this story, Jesus sends the demons and thus the pigs into the sea at His command. Now the disciples are no longer in danger from these demon-possessed men and they are safe because Jesus is there with His judgment and His power.

Its Great Assertion

What is Matthew asserting? Jesus is King!!!!

Jesus has the authority over the elements of the physical world for even the winds and the waves obey His commands.

Jesus has the authority over the chaos of the fall and the teeming nations.

Jesus has the authority over the powers and entities of the spirit world.

The Country of the Gentiles (v.28)

The storm is over. The boat glides toward the shore.

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.

A Safe Arrival

After the storm, they arrive at the beach. Just as Jesus had said, they went over to the other side. I am sure that there were some sighs of relief.

A Certain Location

We are told that they arrived in the country of the Gadarenes. This was a region or a province. The question is, what town is this? The text tells us that this was a region of caves used as tombs. It also tells us that a steep hill descended sharply to the very edge of the water. This description matches the area around a town called Khersa. The people living in this town would have been known by the region they were located in and thus called the Gerasenes or Gergesenes. There was a larger city called Gadara located a few miles southeast of the sea but extended all the way to the shore. It was the capital of the entire district to which Khersa belonged. It makes sense then that the different accounts used different words. It would be like telling someone that I live in the Dayton area in Centerville. Khersa was situated on the northeastern shore, about six miles diagonally (oversea) southeast of Capernaum. To this day, there is a hill descending sharply to the edge of the water as well as many caves – evident even today – suitable for tombs. (Hendriksen, p.413)

A Hidden Significance

While not stated openly in the text, there is something significant about this location. People of Jesus' and Matthew's day would have known. This region was mostly Gentile in its population. Matthew once again is authorizing evangelism to the Gentiles. Jesus in His own ministry spoke to, admired the faith of and went to Gentile regions. This is in anticipation of the church going to all the people groups to carry the gospel and to disciple the nations.

The Confrontation by the Demons (v.28-29)

When they arrive in the region, as they are on the way into the town, a dangerous confrontation takes place.

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.

The Demon Possessed Men (v.28)

Matthew reports that there were two. We are not trying to solve the issue of whether the other accounts which report that there was one person are the same event or why does Matthew report two. Efforts to resolve the differences

between the accounts in different gospels often lead us away from what the author of each account was trying to convey. What Matthew records is what the Spirit inspired him to write. What he wrote is intended to fit within the themes and trajectory of his gospel.

Jesus and His entourage are confronted by two demon possessed men.

What are demons? The Bible does not say much about who they are or where they come from. They usually appear to be inhabiting people and thus people are said to be demonized or possessed. There is a lot of speculation about them. They were created by God. They, at some point, fell into sin. They are part of the fallen order. They are evil. They inhabit the spirit realm. They can and do occupy humans and can take over control of that person. They are part of Satan's kingdom and do his bidding as God allows.

We do not know all the mechanics of demon possession. Matthew is not concerned with details in that regard. He simply states that these two men were "demonized" or were demon possessed. From the text we can see that the men were controlled by the demons to the degree that the demons used the men to speak.

What does this mean for ministry today? The evil spirit world exists in our day. Satan and his evil followers are confined here on earth. They are bent on destroying the church and even all of humanity if they were allowed. Demons may possess unbelievers. We believe that they cannot possess a Christian. They may oppress and harass a Christian externally. They often impart superhuman strength to people. They tend to cause possessed people to seek out darkness and to live in graveyards.

Think about the implications of the behavior of these men. They live in caves that are used as graves. They are violent and dangerous. They attack people without provocation. They believe they can choose their own fate.

Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets in both the old and new testaments had a special authority over the spirit realm. So much error, myths and fairy tales surround casting out ministries. While there may be a place for a Christian to deal with an unsaved, demon possessed person, great caution must be exercised in any true confrontation.

Those with Jesus and later, any Jews reading the text would quickly evaluate such a setting as extremely unclean: possessed men living among the tombs, in Gentile territory, near a large herd of pigs. This is not a place to go. These are not people to be around. This way was avoided by all the townspeople. Yet Jesus seems to choose and thus to instigate the confrontation.

The Demon Recognized Authority (v.29)

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?"

Matthew draws our attention, not so much to what the men do, but what the demons in them say. They recognize who Jesus is. This may explain why Matthew indicates that there were two of them. He is writing to prove that Jesus is who He said He was.

These men cry out, literally, screamed at Jesus. They screamed out, "What have you to do with us?" and so, "Why do you bother us?" They recognize Jesus as being the Son of God. They know who He is. They recognize Him even when clothed in human flesh. This is the answer to the prior question of the disciples, "What kind of man is this that even the wind and waves obey Him?" Well, here is the answer. He is the Son of God. He is God, the Son. He is deity. He therefore commands the winds and waves. He therefore is the Lord over the spirit realm and all who dwell in it.

Since Jesus, the Lord is here, they challenge Jesus. They know their doom is sure. But they think it is far off. But Jesus is here with all that it means. On the coming day of judgment at the cross their relative freedom to roam about on earth and in the sky above it (See Ephesians 2:2; 6:12) must cease forever. There will come a day that their final and most terrible punishment in the Lake of Fire will begin and will never, ever end. (See Hendriksen, p.414)

The Command by the King (v.30-32)

The demons are in trouble and they know it.

³⁰ Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. ³¹ And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." 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.

The Nearby Pigs (v.30)

Matthew mentions that a huge herd of pigs was nearby. They could see them. They were kept by these Gentiles. Outsiders were keeping unclean animals. It does raise the question of why? What would be the marketplace for pigs in the east side of Galilee? But there they are. The forbidden food for Jews. If 1st century pigs are anything like 20th century pigs, there is also quite a stench.

The Demon Plea (v.31)

The demons beg Jesus to send them into the pigs. They expected Jesus to cast them out of the men. Jesus' compassion is not wasted on the unclean of demons or pigs. It is hard to know why the demons wanted to go into the pigs. It may well be that the alternative was worse.

Notice they had to have permission. When Jesus cast them out, they had to have permission to enter the pigs. We see all through the Scriptures that Satan and his evil servants are not free to do whatever they want. They are constrained in what they do. Jesus is the King over even the demons. They must seek His sovereign permission.

The Sovereign Command (v.32)

The demons also must obey His powerful word. Jesus wastes no breath on them. He simply commands a single word. "Go!" It is almost as though Jesus wants as little to do with the malevolent, snarling, screaming presences in the men. With the voice that created all that is, His command goes out. In response to Jesus' command, there is an immediate response of obedience. The demons leave the men and enter the pigs.

The Destruction

We come full circle - the unclean pigs, filled with demons are destroyed in the sea. It is a stampede. Matthew is unconcerned to impress us with the number of the pigs. Other gospel writers do say. Matthew is keeping his focus on what the pigs do. Possessed by the vile spirit entities, demons, they rush headlong over a cliff and into the sea. There they all perish.

The Consequences for the Lord (v.33-34)

What happens next should not really surprise us.

³³ The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. ³⁴ And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

The Report (v.33)

The herdsmen ran into the city. They have lost their pigs. The whole herd has been destroyed. But the center of their report, according to Matthew, is what had happened to the possessed men. They had been delivered from the demons. They were now sane, normal, in their right minds.

Hallelujah? Praise the Lord? Let's bring Jesus into the town and honor Him?

The Response (v.34)

The whole city responded. This was not a small faction. This was not merely the people owned the pigs or whose livelihood depended on the pigs. This was the whole town.

They begged Jesus to leave. The demons begged Jesus to go into the pigs. The townspeople begged Jesus to leave the region.

Matthew is warning us that even when the power of Jesus is clear and unmistakable, many people will not accept Him. They will actively reject Him.

Reflect and Respond

Jesus is Lord and King, sovereign over all. He gives His Word, teaching with authority. He heals the sick with a touch, with a word, near and afar. Jesus calms the waves and the winds. Jesus commands the demons. His Word is obeyed.

Jesus has the authority over truth, over disease, over nature and over demons. All must obey. All must submit immediately.

Jesus brings to an end the tyranny of the devil in the world and in people's lives. Satan and his demons may cause great mischief, but he is subject to the providence and the power of God.

The great words of Martin Luther ring out from this text...

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.

That word above all earthly powers —
No thanks to them — abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also:
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is for ever.