

MATTHEW 8:28- 9:8 THE ULTIMATE ABOLITION

For decades, anyone living within 5 or 6 miles of the hat factory in Denver, Pennsylvania, would set their clocks and even their lives by the siren that would blare each work day, beginning at 5:30 am. It would then sound again for breaks, lunch and quitting time. Eventually the sirens were halted as another means of marking time began. One day, years later, a retired employee was talking with the man that had once been the official timekeeper of the factory. He asked the timekeeper what he used to determine the exact time for each wail of the siren. The timekeeper looked at him with a twinkle in his eye and pulled out an old “Mickey Mouse” watch. Some authorities are not as authoritative as they seem.

But that isn’t the case with Jesus as we have clearly seen thus far and as we will see again today.

Last week we left off with Jesus calming the storm, the very storm into which He sent His disciples. With the sea now as smooth as glass, Jesus and His small armada now land on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is predominantly populated by Gentiles. There are ten large cities in this region making it known as the Decapolis. Jesus and His disciples won’t land at one of these large cities, but a small port village. And it is here that we pick up our story and Jesus resumes His show of authority for His disciples and the local Gentile population.

28 When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.

29 And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”

(slide of Sea of Galilee)

Gadara was both the name of a city, 5 miles or so southeast of the Sea, as well as a larger province, known for shipping and fishing. Mark and Luke use the name, Gerasa, modern day Kersa, another village with a small port on the eastern side

of the Sea. They are more specific in their account of the location and help us to focus on the scene.

As they exited their boats, two men began screaming at Jesus. We are told they were demonized to such an extent that they had been relegated to the tombs (caves) of the village and at times had been shackled, though they were able to break their chains. At least one of these men specifically, we are told, would howl from the mountains and cut himself with rocks. He couldn't be tamed. Matthew mentions two men whereas Mark and Luke only mention one. By this we can infer that Matthew had personal knowledge of the second man and mentions him though he doesn't play a central role in any of the accounts.

Demonization is a more literal rendering of the Greek. It involves the indwelling of unseen evil spirits in a way that prevents an individual from fully controlling his or her own actions. There were many exorcists in Jesus' day, but He displayed a unique directness, immediacy and effectiveness.

(Slide of tombs)

As Jesus gets ashore, the demoniacs accost Him and call Him by name.

- This shows both that they know Him as deity and also that they attempt to control Him by using His name.
- They know Jesus. There are others whom they don't know. (Acts)
- Have you come to torment us before the time? Their theology?

30 Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. 31 So the demons begged Him, saying, "If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine."

32 And He said to them, "Go." So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water.

- Deviled Ham and Sewi-cide!
- Why go into the pigs?
- Why grant them their wish?
- Why does God allow evil to exist? Why not banish them to the same place in Hell as those that we read about in Genesis 6?

33 Then those who kept them fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. 34 And

behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region.

- The locals (Gentiles) testified of the exorcism of the demoniacs, but that good was overcome by their economic loss of the pigs.
- Jesus, please leave. You have cost us money.
- Do we ask Jesus to leave certain locales in our lives because He costs us money, or something else?
- Do we attempt to hem Jesus up in certain areas while asking Him to reign in others?
- Mark and Luke tell us that the man wanted to follow Jesus, but was sent home to minister to those in his hometown.

1 So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. 2 Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."

3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!"

4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'?

6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

7 And he arose and departed to his house. 8 Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

- This is the parallel account of the men lowering a sick man through the roof in Mark and Luke.
- Individual sin is not usually the direct cause of a person's sickness. All sin and sickness are due to sin in the world, but that does not mean we can attribute every sickness to a particular sin.
- Jesus' authority is the theme once again. By forgiving sin He is attesting to His divinity.
- Which is easier? It is much easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven you." There is no way to quantify that remark on this side of Heaven. That was a rhetorical question. Jesus then went on to heal the man, which could be verified by witnesses. This was the harder thing to do.
- To proclaim His authority for making the easier claim, He performed the harder task.
- Jesus showed that their objections came from evil hearts.
- The end result was the desired one – they marveled and glorified God.

Marveled – “phobeos” = awe/ fear.

- Just as Jesus demonstrated His authority over sickness, wind and waves, as well as demons, He has now staked His claim at having the authority to forgive sins. Only God can do this.

Those who encounter Jesus are either attracted to, or threatened by His authority. We should see what the appropriate response is. It should be to approach Him with trust, having a humble recognition that He alone is adequate to handle the needs of all who come, regardless of whether society considers them worthy or not. Jesus has the power to break down any boundaries.

Another appropriate response to Jesus’ authority is unqualified allegiance to His person and mission. We are to place Him at the center of our world. His authoritative work in our lives should cause us to serve Him.

But the tragedy is that not all who encounter His authority respond with trust in and allegiance to His person and ministry. Many see Him and His authority as a threat. Some approach Him with mixed motives and find that following Him is a threat to their comfortable lifestyles. Others come with dual allegiances and find that commitment to Jesus threatens their social and cultural acceptability.

Still others become so fixated on the consequences of Jesus’ assault on the powers of this world that they are threatened by the consequences in their own lives if they allow Him to take up residence in their personal, everyday world.

And still others are threatened at the very core of their religious worldview, and they flatly refuse to shift their thinking and belief structure in order to give Him authority in their lives that He deserves and demands.

In these scenes we have seen people face the same fears we have. They have faced disease, spiritual oppression, social ostracism, and even the storms of nature. But this final scene, the healing of the paralytic depicts the most fearful of all challenges, though there are some that don’t give it the consideration it deserves. That is, the fear of facing death with eternal consequences.

As Christians, we should know and tell others that our greatest threat, that of sin, has been vanquished! And because our greatest enemy has been removed, it should give us a greater perspective, which allows us to better take in stride the other fears we face.