

Matthew 20-02-09a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're going to continue our study this morning in the gospel of Matthew. Very fascinating things, pigs and demons.

So, can't get better than that. Especially with the Lord Jesus in control. So, if you have not already done so, you might be turning in your Bibles to the gospel of Matthew where we resume our study this morning in Matthew chapter 8 beginning in verse 23.

We got the beginnings of this last time and we're going to sail on through. Let's take a moment as we begin to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and investigations into his word and we'll begin. Father, we are grateful for your many blessings, your provisions, your protection, your sovereign care in our lives and in our world.

It is with a great sense of peace and security that we recognize that we are held firmly in your hands, in the hands of the Lord Jesus. We cannot be shaken, we cannot be moved and we pray that as we review this wonderful episode from the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus this morning that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart to encourage us and to motivate us to redeem the time and to make the most of the resources and the opportunities that you provide to us each day. We pray these things in Jesus name, amen.

I must say that I have seldom had more fun looking at something in the word of God than this. John 9 is a competitor with the blind man and his questions back to the religious leaders but this is a wonderful and encouraging section of scripture and we have not just a two camera view but a three camera view which gives us a great amount of detail and a great amount of insight into exactly what is going on and most importantly what its significance is for you and me. We may not be a tomb dwelling man possessed by the legion but there is a lot of grist for our personal mill in this passage and we will see it as we go through.

Let's read it once again from our account in the gospel of Matthew beginning at verse 23. Talking about the Lord Jesus, now when he got into a boat his disciples followed him and suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea so that the boat was covered with the waves but he was asleep. His disciples came to him and woke him saying, Lord save us we are perishing.

He said to them, why are you fearful O you of little faith? If you like marking your bible and again we are reviewing context this is a central piece of our Gadarene demoniac context. Why are you fearful? Circle it, put a star next to it, make a note of it. Why are you fearful O you of little faith? Oligopistoi, you know an oligarchy is ruled by the few so oligopistoi, pistos is faith so you've got oligos pistos, only a little bit of faith, a minority.

He arose rebuked the winds and the sea and there was a great calm. Jesus stills the storm not with a machine, not with an appeal to the angels, not with a great demonstration of waving his arms or dancing around a sombrero or anything else. He speaks, he rebukes the wind and the waves and there is an immediate great calm.

The men marveled who can this be that even the winds and the sea obey, obey him. Winds and the sea obey. When he'd come to the other side to the country of the Gergesenes, Gadarenes, Gerasenes, however you want to take this, there's a town nearby, there is a region, it's all the same, there's no conflict between the gospels here.

There met him two demon possessed men coming out of the tombs exceedingly fierce, exceedingly fierce. I just want to dwell on that and savor it like a tasty piece of prime rib, exceedingly fierce so that no one could pass that way. Why would no one pass that way? These two fierce men and what is the condition that causes them to not want to pass by the exceedingly fierce men? Fear.

I might experience bodily harm. I'm not walking through Central Park in New York in the early morning hours with hundred dollar bills hanging out of my pockets. Why? I fear bodily harm so that no one could pass that way.

These two men have sort of taken charge of this area. It's like a gang turf war. This is mine and if you come in here you're going to get hurt.

And suddenly they cried out saying because Jesus had come to the other side, what have we to do with you Jesus, you son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time? Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. So the demons begged him saying, if you cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine. 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. 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. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus.

And when they saw him, they begged him to depart from their region. Well, I find this very fraught with significance for us. And the first issue that presents itself to our mind here is demon possession itself.

How does that work exactly? You will notice that none of the 12 disciples ever woke up one morning finding himself demon possessed. You don't find any example of a faithful motivated believer ever being possessed by a demon going from Holy Spirit filled life or in the Old Testament, even just an obedient and faithful life, suddenly tragically being overcome and overtaken by a demon. So the first thing we can say is in some way,

shape or form, the people we see in the New Testament scriptures who were demon possessed were vulnerable in a way that faithful and obedient believers are not.

I think you can make that assumption and draw that conclusion with a great deal of confidence. There is some kind of vulnerability there that does not exist for an obedient and faithful believer. So the first thing to remember is you and I, so long as we are obedient and faithful believers, have nothing to fear from the presence and power of demons.

This is an affliction that comes from people who, for whatever reason, are near the fringe of the light or beyond it in the darkness. Darkness provides an opportunity. It creates a vulnerability and men who love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil are going to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous demon activity.

It's not just bad luck. It's not outrageous fortune. It is being in the realm where darkness prevails.

I don't know the history of these two men. I don't know how they came to be so vulnerable that not just one demon but a legion of demons, thousands of demons. You get the idea that these men were so much fun like a car to drive that, okay, it's my turn.

It's my turn. And different demons, they're all in the immediate vicinity, but who gets to drive? Who gets to be in control when they beat up the next unwitting passerby? And they're just all in the wings and they have attached themselves in some fashion to these two men. That is demon possession and it is a condition that has a component of fault on the part of the person.

If you were doing what you were supposed to do vis-a-vis God, you're not going to be demon oppressed and demon possessed. You can be attacked, but you cannot be possessed. You cannot be overcome and controlled.

You cannot be ruined as these men are. And there is a great difference in being overcome, sacked, taken prisoner, and thrown into the dungeon and waging a battle with a well-provisioned army and a good defense and plenty of logistical provision. In both cases, you are facing an enemy, but in one you are defeated and overcome, and in another you are waging an effective and profitable battle.

So that's the first thing. This is a very graphic instance of demon possession, the worst in the Bible. We don't really have any other examples of hordes of demons persecuting, oppressing, and torturing individuals as we have here.

So that's first, and that is key to understanding what the application is for us. They're exceedingly fierce so that no one could pass that way. So what do they delight in doing? This is not a business where they're robbing people and setting aside shekels and such to enrich themselves.

What's the upside for these demon-possessed men? And because this activity is motivated by the demons, what do the demons get out of it? Have you ever thought about that? I'm a demon. I'm a minion of Satan. I'm a purveyor of evil.

I'm satanic, bad, and a promoter of darkness. And so I and my legion friends get ahold of these two guys who are vulnerable, and I spend my days and weeks and months attacking passersby and creating mayhem and havoc. There are a few more clever commercials than the insurance guy, you know, Mr. Mayhem, and he's the dog with his tongue hanging out the window or whatever.

That's really witty. I enjoy every one of those I can see. But he's mayhem.

And you get the idea that that guy really enjoys being mayhem. And these demons are getting something out of it. What are they getting out of it? What do you think? I'm a demon.

What's the joy factor here? What are they really doing? They are exercising power and they are instilling fear. How many times in history, how many times, how many examples can you find in the world around us of people whose motivation seems to be to exercise power and to instill fear? Look at your politics. Look at your business world.

Look at the secular endeavors. What gets people up in the morning and makes them go in the realms of power? I will gain. It isn't strictly, you know, I don't have enough boats.

I don't have enough fine cars. I don't have enough great wine in the cellar. People don't get up in the morning because they really feel rich people don't feel like, you know, I just need to be more rich.

What's their motivation? It's the famous actor question. What's my motivation? Why are they doing this? There is a satisfaction gained in the world of self-indulgence and self-centeredness and godlessness. Where do you get your pleasure? Whether it's in relationships, you have codependency, you have what Bob Thieme called the arrogant and the inadequate.

On the arrogant side of that, there is a perverse pleasure in exercising power. You find this in abuses of authority, in abuses of position, in abuses of, you know, by employers on employees or by supervisors on. You remember the Abu Ghraib prison debacle, the stupidity that went on at that prison.

And because of the way the policies were constructed, underlings got to be overlords and were incredibly stupid and immoral in the doing of it. But it's like, wow, here's a case where even though I'm only a PFC or a junior enlisted person, I can put a leash on somebody and parade them around with no clothes. I can take pictures and laugh and mock.

I can suddenly exert power and instill fear. There is a dangerous part of every human psyche, including yours and including mine, that hooks into this type of evil. Power for its own sake, control just because of the satisfaction of exerting it.

And when it's pushed past a certain point, a delight in instilling fear. People say it's respect. It's fear.

Respect my property. You pass in here, you're going to be in trouble. So I would submit, feel free to give me a better theory, but as near as I can tell what the demons are getting out of this, and a lot of them, is exerting power and instilling fear.

What did I have you circle in the preceding context? Why are you afraid, O ye of little faith? Fear is the enemy of the healthy Christian. What does your scripture say? You've got a memory verse that says, God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of what? Power, love, and sound thinking. Power, love, and a sound mind.

God has not given us a spirit of fear. What does perfect love do? Perfect love, help me out. Perfect love casts out fear.

Perfect love casts out fear. Don't have a spirit of fear. Perfect love, what are the two great commandments? What sums up the law and the prophets? Love the Lord your God, love your neighbor as yourself.

If those loves are perfected, if they're mature, what happens? No fear. Why are you afraid? Why are you fearful? O you of little faith is the answer. The reason you're afraid is you're of little faith.

Jesus asks the question and answers it in a single sentence. Why are you weak, O ye who never work out? Why are you overweight, you who are not careful with your diet? Why are you afraid, O you who are not growing and exercising your faith? So these demons are exercising fear. Now, that said, and having gotten that far, what happens in this account? They're exceedingly fierce.

They own this place. Jesus comes out of the boat and what happens? Right away here in verse 29. Suddenly they cried out saying, what have we to do with you? O Jesus, you son of God, have you come here to torment us before the time? Who's afraid now? Who's powerless now? Who has in a glance had all of their control, all of their power, all of their fear instilling ability completely evaporate.

One look at the Savior and this is not one demon. He's not like sort of a weak, not too smart demon. This is a mob.

This is a crowd. It's a legion of demons and all of them are immediately petrified at the sight of the son of God. Why? Look at the title.

They don't say, what have we to do with you, O Nazarene, O Messiah, O great physician, O great, what do they say? Son of God, son of God, authority, justice, divine power, and they're instantly petrified with fear. Now it is not a deep observation that I offer you here, but many times there is sort of a beam moat effect where those who are most prone to fear, who have reason for fear, who have problems, project and manifest that very behavior trying to make others do the same thing. I'm afraid.

I'm concerned. So I'm going to make others feel that way. Misery loves company, so to speak.

So these are demons and what do they know? What do they reveal in this question? Have you come to torment us before the time? It's a very revealing question. Oh, you son of God, you are going to do something at a specified time. Are you going to harm us before then? Are you going to do something unpleasant to us before this appointed time? Good way off.

There's a herd of many swine feeding. The demons begged him saying, if you cast us out, permit us to go away into the swine. If you, and this is so much fun now to get to, I'm going to the other gospels and getting side details.

Matthew's is the shortest and sweetest in some ways, account of this whole story. It picks up in Mark chapter four, you have the stilling of the storm. And if you pick up in Mark 4 39, when Jesus arose and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still.

And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But he said to them, why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith? Again, the link between fear and faith. And they feared exceedingly.

Why are you fearful? Oh, ye of little faith. They were afraid of the storm. Now they're afraid of Jesus fear, fear notice.

What was their initial fear? What does Jesus ask them? What are they afraid of? Say it out loud. What are they afraid of? Professional fishermen, middle of the sea, violent storm. Why are you fearful? It's the storm, right? It's forces beyond their control.

Jesus stills it. And he, after it's calm, he says, why are you fearful? Where's your faith? Now they fear exceedingly. What are they afraid of now? Storm's gone.

What scares them? Jesus. Jesus is a scary individual. Why? His authority, his power is like nothing they've ever seen or even heard of.

I mean, they would have to think back and say, well, maybe the parting of the red sea or the, I mean, you remember the parting of the sea, there's a wind involved, wind and wave. Last time anybody has seen this kind of power is the Exodus. And they're in the boat with the individual who is wielding that power.

You can't run to a safe distance. You know, Peter can't even bow down and say, have mercy on me, a sinner. I mean, they're in a boat swamped with water.

They're exceedingly fearful. Who can this be? Look at chapter five, verse one. Now in Mark, they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes.

When they had come out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs. No one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains and the chains had been pulled apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces. Neither could anyone tame him.

And always night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. We talked about this when we did Mark and Luke, the inability of man to control the demonic power operative in this man, these men, right? Shackling power that has demonic force behind it is not effective. Binding it is not effective.

The shackles will be broken. The bonds will be pulled apart. He can't get rid of it himself.

Why do you think he's bashing himself with stones? This is not the demons saying, I just want to see what pain feels like. This is the man with the limited motor control he can gain in between spasms of demonic activity. He's trying to drive them out himself.

The Old Testament notion of stoning someone was to eradicate evil from Israel. He's trying to eradicate the evil from himself by bashing himself with stones. But notice, when Jesus had come out of the boat, verse two, immediately there met him out of the tombs, the man.

What can the demons not do? They can do a lot of things, but they cannot stop the man from falling at the feet of Jesus. He runs in the direction of Jesus. How does he know? Jesus hasn't said or done anything.

Boat comes up to the shore. He's and his friend are traipsing around the area there. How does he know to run to Jesus? He's intimately aware of his demonic presences, right? And he senses they are afraid.

If they're afraid, I want to go there. Rocks don't work, but if the demons are afraid of this man, I'm going in that direction. I feel evil, helpless in the face of this man.

I want the evil out of my life. I will go to the man coming out of the boat, right? This is what you might call, and what has been called positive volition at the point of God consciousness. We know what's inside us.

And when God, the Holy Spirit convicts us, he also shows us a way out. He reveals the

Lord Jesus who has crossed the sea and has gotten out of the boat just for us. The only thing Jesus does, the reason he said, let's get in the boat and go to the other side is he knew these guys are over there.

He knew there was a demon problem over there and he crosses the sea, puts his disciples through the torture of the storm. They don't know why, why on earth, you know, maybe they saw the lowering clouds and said, this is not a good, you know, based on my extensive professional experience as a fisherman, this is not a good time to get on the, on the sea. Jesus says we're going and they don't know why.

Many times we don't know why there are weird stormy episodes in our life, but God knows. And in hindsight, would the disciples say the trip was worth it? They get a, they get a twofer out of this. They get to see the authority and power of the Lord Jesus over the wind and the wave like nobody has seen it since Moses.

And they're going to see Jesus authority over legions of demons. I don't care who you are. If you're outnumbered, say 2000 to one, it's a bit of a sobering confrontation.

You, you better be sure that you've got the, you know, you didn't bring a knife to a gunfight that you you've got superior force, but they, they see this. So verse six of Mark five, when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him. We have this double emphasized in Mark.

Mark tends to be the shortest account, but he gives a lot of extra detail that Matthew doesn't include. When he saw Jesus, he ran and worshiped him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, what have I to do with you? Jesus son of the most high God.

It's all about authority. I implore you by God that you do not torment me. I implore you by God, a demon is invoking the authority of God to avoid torment.

I implore you in the name of God. I implore you by what God has said. There is an arrangement.

There has been a suspension of torment. There has been a suspension of punishment. There has been a suspension of the sentence for having followed Satan in the rebellion in heaven that is detailed in Isaiah chapter seven and Ezekiel chapter 14.

And God has said this far and no farther for the demons. He has said this far and no farther for the angels and for the son of God himself. God has stated the parameters in which this conflict, this debate, this experiment is going to take place.

How do we know this? Job chapter one, Job chapter two, Satan is by far the most powerful of any of the fallen angels. God says, you can do this, but you cannot do that. You can touch his possessions, but you can't touch him.

You can touch him, but you can't take his life. Satan is a rebellious angel. Why doesn't he just kill Job? He can't.

The authority of God is absolute. Nothing can befall us that has not been permitted by God. And the degree to which it touches us is the degree that God permits and no more.

And it's an amazing thing to see these demons that are so full of hubris and joy in inflicting fear, harm, control, are quaking with fear in the presence of the son of God, because they know that if need be, he can change the terms of the arrangement. He's got the authority. He's got the power.

I implore you by God that you do not torment me. And you can add from Matthew before the time, for Jesus was saying to him, come out of the man, unclean spirit. Then Jesus asked him, what is your name? And he answered saying, my name is Legion for we are many.

Also, he begged him earnestly that he would not send them out of the country, not send them out of the country. Really important detail that he would not send them out of the country. Large herd of swine is feeding, you know, the rest.

Mark includes the detail in verse 13, Jesus gave them permission to go into the swine. The unclean spirits went out and entered the swine. There were about 2000, 2000 swine.

Herd ran violently down the steep place and drowned in the sea. Well, we are engaged in a struggle against this very force. These individuals represent the minions of Satan, the third of the angels that departed with him from God.

And you remember what Paul says in Ephesians, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. 612 of Ephesians, it's principalities and powers and rulers. All three of those are authority words, principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this age.

That's who you wrestle against. That's who I wrestle against. It's not the flesh and blood of the man that you see.

Now, if you want to understand the illogic and the violent passion of those who oppose truth and who oppose light and who oppose good, don't look at the flesh. Oh, that particular politician is such a rascal. Oh, this particular individual.

These individuals are accountable in the way that these men are accountable in having failed to come to the light, failed to stay in the light, whatever it is they did to make themselves vulnerable, but they do not kid yourself. They are in the grip of and are being operated by principalities and powers and rulers. Therefore, logical appeal is not going to work.

Persuasive argument is not going to work. Piles of facts and statistics and the most

persuasive material that can be organized and presented is not going to divert them. It's not going to stop them.

It's not going to sway them. Pointing out where they are wrong is not going to slow them down. Why? Many times we say, how can people think this way? How can people act this way? How can people be this way? It's not the flesh and blood you're looking at that is at work.

They are a tool. They are a means to an end by forces that are larger and greater. And you do not oppose demons with shackles and chains.

You cannot bind it. You cannot constrain it with human means. What is it that is so effective that it puts them in mortal fear and dread? It's the son of God.

It's the Lord Jesus. Who do you and I represent? Who are we actually a part of? If you want to talk about the flesh and blood, the body, who do we represent? The man getting out of the boat. So in this tumultuous turmoil of politics and right versus wrong, don't lose focus.

Don't think it's just a matter of finding a superior debate point or a superior flesh and blood individual to try to put against the flood tide. This is a spiritual conflict, top to bottom, beginning to end. It began in heaven and it's going to conclude in heaven.

We'll see that after the break. But don't be fooled. Don't get busy thinking we just need the version 2.0 shackle.

We need the modified, upgraded, super duper bond and chain. If we just use titanium, that'll work. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

It is these principalities and powers and there is one absolute surefire, never fails, always works solution and it is the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus for his glory and to his credit and for his purposes. That's our job is to reflect and focus the power of God as representatives, personal individual representatives of this man every day of our lives.

That's the solution to the mayhem and the fear and the evil control being perpetrated in the world. And anytime we forget that, we are casualties. We are the disciples.

Why are you afraid? Where is your faith? This is our faith. This is how evil is overcome. Well, let's pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we've got to get to these pigs. That's one of the most fun things I've looked at in a long time. Right after the break.