

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 8:28 - 8:34



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this passage, Steve Gregg discusses the disparity in the accounts of the demon-possessed men mentioned in Matthew 8:28-34. He clarifies that although one gospel writer mentions one man while another mentions two, it is likely that there were indeed two demon-possessed men. Gregg also addresses the question of why Jesus allowed the demons to possess the pigs, explaining that pigs were considered unclean animals by the Jews and that the loss of the pigs was a significant cost to the owner. Ultimately, the two men were freed from their torment and were no longer a terror to those around them.

### Transcript

Today we're turning to Matthew chapter 8 and beginning at verse 28. Matthew 8, beginning at verse 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.

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? 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, which he did.

In chapter 9, verse 1, he got into a boat and left their region. What a strange story this is, really. There's many things that Matthew does not tell us that the other Gospels do when they relate this story, and it's my desire really to stick fairly closely to the account in Matthew, and to wait until we get to the other Gospels to go into the details that they

give.

However, it should be understood that there is more known about this situation as you look at some of the other accounts in the Gospels. This man, or these two men, excuse me, there were two men who were demon-possessed. I should point out that in the other Gospels, there's only mention of one.

This has bothered some people as they read the Gospels, and they see that sometimes in the Gospels, a story is told a little differently, with different detail. There is a story, for example, in one of the Gospels of a blind man named Bartimaeus. Luke tells the story, I believe, or Mark, and about Bartimaeus, the blind man, who's outside Jericho, and Jesus heals him of his blindness.

But Matthew tells us there were two blind men there. Likewise, the other Gospels tell us of this demon-possessed man who lived in the tombs in this region. Matthew tells us there were two.

The disparity between the accounts where one Gospel writer mentions one man, and the other mentions two, is sometimes troubling to people because they think they've found a contradiction. And if the Bible is indeed God's Word, we would hope that there would be no contradictions between the accounts. Well, the fact of the matter is, it is not a contradiction.

Let me make something very clear. If there is a contradiction, by definition, both accounts cannot be true. That's how we define a contradiction.

A contradiction doesn't exist simply because different accounts exist, with different detail. A contradiction exists if both accounts cannot be reconciled. If both accounts cannot be true, then you have a contradiction.

Well, can both of these accounts be true? Can Matthew tell us there were two men, and Mark tell us there was a man who lived in the tombs? And who came out and met Jesus? Of course they can both be true. If there were two men, there was certainly a man, and he had a companion. It's entirely possible for a person to tell the story without mentioning how many parties were present, especially if there was one notable demon-possessed man who did all the conversing with Jesus, and all the dialogue took place between Jesus and this one man, and yet he had a companion with him who was not involved in the dialogue.

And so, in telling the story, the one who is telling the dialogue may not mention that there was another man who was not involved. And it's as if I would tell you that I made a trip to Hawaii last week, and then you later heard me telling somebody that I and my family went to Hawaii last week. Well, would you think that I had lied in one of those two cases? Because in one of them I had only said I had gone, and the other time I said I and

my family had gone? No, of course, in one case I'm simply giving more detail than the other.

So to say there was a man in the tombs who was demon-possessed, or to say there were two, is not contradictory. One simply gives more detail of the facts of the case, and different writers definitely give different details in every case, not only in the Bible, but whenever you find different people telling the same story, it does not mean that one is inaccurate, or that they're contradicting each other. It just means that one is giving more detail than the other.

Now, there were two demon-possessed men. Now, Jesus had just come across the Sea of Galilee in a boat, and had almost sunk in the middle of the sea, because a great storm had come to prevent Him from having this encounter with these demon-possessed men. Jesus, however, had rebuked the storm, and it had calmed, and Jesus successfully got there with His disciples to encounter these men.

Now, according to the other Gospels, these men actually came running up to Jesus and fell down and worshipped before Him. Matthew doesn't mention that detail. It just mentions that there were two demon-possessed men coming out of the tombs, and exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.

One of the other Gospels tells us that He had actually been chained before. Apparently, the townspeople nearby had been so terrified by Him that they'd tried to overpower Him and chain Him up. But He had broken the chains, and He had fled out into the wilderness, and now lived in tombs.

So, this man was uncontrollable by human beings, and he was fierce, and people were afraid to come near that way. Actually, I'm speaking as if it was one, but there are two. And so, these men are notorious demon-possessed outcasts.

And when Jesus set foot on the shore near their area, they actually came out running to Him and worshipped Him. As I said, Matthew doesn't give this detail, but that's given in the other Gospels. Now, that's an interesting point, because sometimes people who have discussed the subject of demon possession have said that people who are demon-possessed are not in control of their own lives at all, and cannot receive Christ.

I disagree with this. Here are two men who are as demon-possessed as they come, and yet, they had the power to seek help from Christ. They ran to Him, and worshipped Him, and sought deliverance, I believe, on this occasion.

Now, the demons that were within them were brought into near proximity of Christ by this means, and were terrified. It seems clear the demons did not desire to be in the presence of Christ. They said, What have you to do with us? What have we to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Interestingly, they had no problem identifying who He was.

And they said, Have you come here to torment us before the time? Now, that's an interesting statement. Have you come here to torment us before the time? What time? Well, apparently the demons knew that there was a time that would come when they would be condemned, when they would face judgment. Who are these demons, anyway? Well, the standard theory held among evangelical Christians is that the demons are fallen angels.

As the theory goes, there was once a great angel named Lucifer who was a good angel and who perhaps commanded a third of the angels in heaven. But he rebelled against God and he was cast out of heaven and with him a third of the angels went. And they became the demons and he became the devil.

Now, having said this, I say this is the most common theory among evangelicals. The story may be a true one, but you cannot establish it from Scripture. I'm sorry to say.

I wish we could. There's nothing in the Bible that identifies Lucifer as Satan and there's no place in the Bible that identifies the demons as the fallen angels. Now, don't get me wrong.

The Bible certainly teaches that there is a Satan and there are demons and it also teaches that there are fallen angels. In 2 Peter chapter 2 and in the book of Jude we read that certain angels have not kept to their first estate and have fallen and sinned. However, these passages tell us that they are presently incarcerated in chains under darkness awaiting the judgment of the great day.

The demons may be identified with these fallen angels or may not be. The Bible does not ever clearly identify them as such. But the common theory is that the demons that we read of in the Gospels were angels that fell.

There are other theories but none of them can be established clearly from Scripture and therefore we cannot be dogmatic. All we know is that the demons were personalities, spirits probably under the command of Satan because Beelzebub was called the Prince of Demons and Beelzebub is equated with Satan by Jesus. In Matthew 12 we shall find that.

He is accused of casting out demons by Beelzebub and Jesus answers, Well, if Satan is casting out Satan of course he's identifying Beelzebub with Satan. So, Beelzebub is the Prince of Demons. Satan must be the Prince of the Demons.

The demons, in other words, are under the command of Satan. Now, what do they do? They do a number of things in the Bible but among things that they do, they often inhabit people. Now, these demons someday anticipate being judged.

The day will come when the Prince of this world and his angels, his demons, his followers will experience judgment and condemnation and will be no doubt cast into the lake of

fire. We read of Satan, the dragon being cast into the lake of fire in Revelation chapter 20 and we can presume with some degree of certainty that his following demons will no doubt go with him to that place. So, it is probably this judgment in the lake of fire that the demons were anticipating when they said to Jesus, Have you come to torment us before the time? Now, it's interesting because they knew that the time would come when they must face torment, when they must face judgment.

And yet they did not think that this was yet the time. It seemed premature for them. They thought the time must have been further off and that Jesus had come a little early.

Now, it's not clear exactly where the demons got their sense of schedule or of timing, whether they were off or on, whether they were right or wrong because after all, we know that it was not the time quite yet that they would be judged and they may have known that. And so, they wondered why it was he had come to them at this time. You know, Jesus' coming was in two stages.

He came the first time, but he's going to come a second time as well. And it is at the second coming, I believe, that Jesus will judge the devil and his demons in the decisive and final manner of consigning them to the lake of fire. But they didn't realize he was going to come earlier than that, perhaps.

And I believe the demons did not understand that before he would come and judge the world and judge them, he would come and die. I don't think the demons or the devil himself had any inkling of this secret strategy of God that Jesus would die for the sins of the world. After all, if the demons had understood it, no doubt they would have not been involved in instigating the crowd to crucify him or inciting the crowd, I should say.

We read in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 that in verse 7, Paul said, We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew. For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. That's 1 Corinthians 2, verses 7 and 8. If the rulers of this age, perhaps he means the demonic rulers of this age, he uses that expression later in Ephesians to speak of demonic powers.

If they had known the secret strategy of God that he would save the world through the death of Christ, they would not have cooperated. They would not have crucified the Lord of glory, Paul said. And so, although the demons knew that Jesus would someday come and judge them, they didn't know that he would first come and die.

And when Jesus appeared, it seemed to them that he was early. It was not yet time for the judgment. And yet, here he was.

And they said, What's going on here? Have you come to torment us before the time? Now, apparently, he had not come to torment them before the time. He was just there to

deliver these men from the demon possession. And he did not send the demons off to hell.

He did not send them off to the lake of fire. It was not yet the time for them to be tormented. But he instead actually gave them their request.

They requested that if he was going to cast them out of these men, that he at least permit them to go and inhabit a herd of swine that was nearby. Pigs. And it's interesting that Jesus agreed with them.

Now, Jesus was under no obligation to give them their request. These were demons. They're rebels against God.

And Jesus was clearly in command. They had to do what he said. If they were to go to the herd of swine, it had to be with his permission.

They could not go on their own. They were terrified of Jesus, realizing he was in a position to torture them or torment them, if he would. So, I mean, here, Jesus has no obligation.

He's under no pressure to do what they say. And they ask, please send us in the herd of swine. And he gives them their request.

And so they go. We might ask, why did Jesus do this? Why did he let the demons go into the swine? We see that the result was that the swine stampeded down the hill into the water and drowned. Wasn't this the destruction of somebody's personal property? Was Jesus then responsible that somebody who was an owner of these pigs lost a great deal of money by these pigs going off and drowning as they did? By the way, one of the other Gospels mentions that the number of pigs that went in and drowned were about 2,000.

There's a lot of pigs there. That's a lot of money lost. Now, why would Jesus allow this expensive waste of somebody's personal property? Well, you might recall that pigs were an unclean animal to the Jews.

It was wrong for them to be raising pigs. Now, some of you might say, well, this was over in Gentile territory. And, well, it may have been.

But Jesus was only ministering in regions where there was sufficient Jewish population for him to minister to the Jews. Because even at a later date, he said he was not yet sent to anyone outside of the house of Israel. So, even when Jesus went over into Gentile territory, he went with a mind to address the Jewish community with the message of the kingdom.

And it's very likely that these pigs were owned by a Jewish farmer, a Jewish pig herd, swine herd, who, of course, could not eat them because they were unclean, but very

possibly was raising them for profit to sell to Gentiles. And yet, this is really kind of a shady operation for a Jew to be involved in. If God has revealed to them that swine are unclean animals for them to eat, that they would nonetheless raise them and sell them to others to eat would be quite a compromise of their piety before God.

And so, it would seem that if the owner of these pigs was Jewish, and we don't know for sure that it was the case, but then that man should have had nothing to do with pigs in the first place. And here, Jesus kind of ends his swine herding operation by allowing the demons to go in and have their way. And they drive the pigs over the precipice into the water.

Now, it's interesting. One thing this story does tell us that we might not otherwise know. And that is that demons can possess not only humans, but animals as well.

There are animals that can be demon possessed. These pigs became demon possessed. I've heard stories from missionaries in the field who have reported cases of cats and dogs becoming demon possessed.

Now, of course, we are entitled to question the veracity of these stories or even the interpretation of the events that the missionaries place upon them. But, because they're not biblical stories, they're just experiences people have. But there's nothing to prevent this from being true.

The Bible does indicate that demons can inhabit animals as well as people, as is seen in this particular case. The demons go out and they inhabit these pigs. And then they drive them over the precipice.

Now, this was an event that was witnessed by those who were the keepers of the pigs. You know, like the pig herders were out there. And they watched those pigs that they were supposed to be watching and caring for just go berserk and go barreling over the cliff into the water.

And, of course, that greatly distressed them. And it says in verse 33, then those who kept the pigs fled and they went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. So they told that these demon-possessed men had been delivered of demons and all these pigs had gone stampeding over the cliff.

So that report was certainly the strangest news they'd heard all day. So everyone in town went out to see where this had happened. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus.

And when they saw Him, the strangest thing, it says they begged Him to depart from their region. Now, why would they beg Jesus to depart from their region? Well, there could be maybe more than one possibility. On the one hand, they might be afraid of the

unknown, of the unexplainable.

One of the other Gospels in telling this story says that when they saw the demon-possessed men now clothed and in their right mind, they were afraid. That's another case where people are afraid when the men are fierce and they're afraid when they're normal. Different kinds of fear are documented in the Gospel.

The fear of actual physical harm is one. The fear of the unexplainable is another. There is a sense in which certain things give us the creeps because they're beyond our ability to understand.

And we suddenly are thrust into contact with the supernatural realm. And we don't know how to deal with it. It kind of makes our skin crawl.

And that was the experience of the disciples coming across on the boat. It says that they were, of course, terrified when the boat was sinking. But when Jesus stilled the storm, they were very greatly afraid because they said, Whoa, who is this with us in the boat that can still the storm? Well, here's a similar case.

People were terrified of these demon-possessed men when they were demon-possessed. But when they were delivered and in their right mind, and people saw that something so supernatural had happened, they greatly feared. And they were very uncomfortable with this, the unexplainable phenomenon.

And it may have been simply their discomfort with that that caused them to ask Jesus to go somewhere else. They didn't know how to deal with these kinds of things, these miracles. But I suspect there was a different motivation here when they asked Jesus to depart from their region.

I suspect it may have had to do with the financial losses they had incurred because of His being there. In which case, their decision to welcome Jesus to their region or to ask Him to leave would depend upon the relative value they placed on the financial cost of those pigs drowning, on the one hand, and the benefit of seeing those demon-possessed men freed from their torment and cured in their right mind. On the other, I mean, here we have two supernatural things happen.

One was a great cost to somebody financially, the loss of the pigs. The other was a tremendous benefit to two men who had been separated from their families, had been tormented, had been living naked in the tombs, cutting themselves, crying out in the night. People in the village had heard them howling like coyotes every night or like wolves.

And now these men were normal. They had clothes on. They were in their right mind.

And, you know, is that worth a few bucks? Is that worth a few thousand bucks? Is that



worth a few thousand pigs? What do you value more, the pigs or the people? Do you value your money more than you value human beings? Well, these people, I suspect, valued their money and their pigs more than they valued the souls of these men. And because of it, they knew that Jesus in their area had cost them a lot of money. Now, they could have looked at those two men and said, hey, but look at this.

These two men who terrorized us and freaked us out every time we heard them howling and every time we passed that way we had to steer a wide berth around them. They're normal now. Their lives are changed and ours are changed because of it.

There's been a tremendous spiritual thing that has happened here. But they didn't value the spiritual benefit as much as they valued the pigs that they lost. And therefore, they did not welcome Jesus.

Would you welcome Jesus in your life if it cost you money? What about the spiritual benefit of having Jesus in your life? It may cost you a great deal of your idols, your pigs as it were, your money, your lifestyle to follow Jesus. But the spiritual benefits certainly should outweigh them. Let me consider these things further next time because we've run out of time and we'll continue our study of the life of Christ next time together.