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Man of the Tombs (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "Man of the Tombs (Part 2)", Steve Gregg explores the motivations behind the demons' request to be sent into the pigs in the biblical story of the man possessed by demons. While it remains unclear why the demons preferred to inhabit the pigs and why they chose to harm themselves, Gregg suggests that the story serves as a symbolic illustration of Jesus' total authority and sovereignty over both the outward circumstances that threaten us and the inward struggles that keep us bound. Ultimately, Jesus' power transcends our limitations and sets us free.

Transcript

...spirits. We have the Abusos, the Abyss, mentioned several times in the book of Revelation. The beast comes up out of the Abyss. The locusts that come up in Revelation 9, that have tails like scorpions and so forth, this horde of locusts, they come up out of the Abyss.

But not until an angel falls from heaven with a key to the Abyss and unlocks it to let them out. They're trapped there until that point, and then they come out. The demons come out.

Likewise, in Revelation 20, Satan himself is bound in the same place, the Abyss. I think it is fair to assume that the Abyss in the Bible is understood to be the place where the demons themselves can be incarcerated and are. Now, they weren't at the point in time that Jesus was encountering them, but they knew that he was going to send them there, or could, and they begged him not to do so.

The question then becomes, why didn't he? Why did he grant them their request? They didn't want to go to the Abyss. They wanted to go into the pigs instead, and he said, okay, go into the pigs. Now, why did Jesus give them their request? These were demons.

He didn't have to take orders from them. It's very clear from the whole interchange that they had to take orders from him. Why did he grant them this? I don't know for sure, but my guess is, and it's an educated guess.

I'm not just pulling guesses off the top of my head. This is a considered opinion based on what the Scripture says elsewhere, but it may not be the correct opinion. I think that the proper time for the confinement of the demons to the Abyss was at the time of the death and resurrection of Jesus, which was still, you know, some months off at this point.

It was not yet time. In fact, one of the Gospels, I think it may be Matthew, but when the demons asked him not to torment them, it actually has them asking him, have you come to torment us before the time? Let's see, I think that's in Matthew 8, verse 29. That'd be correct.

Yeah, the parallel there. Matthew 8, 29, their statement to him You see, both Mark and Luke say they begged him not to torment them, but here's what they actually said, apparently in their actual words. In Matthew 8, 29, they said, what have we to do with you, Jesus, you Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time? Now, that statement shows that they knew that torment was their destiny, that there was a time coming for them to be tormented.

They also had some sense of timing, although they might have been quite mistaken as to what the right time was. They had some reason to believe this was a bit premature. They had reason to believe that the time for their being tormented was not yet, and, you know, what are you doing here now? Aren't you a little early? Are you here to torment us before the time? Now, many interpreters, especially those that I sat under when I was a younger Christian, learning for the first time the scriptures, many interpreters have felt like the right time for them to be tormented is when Jesus comes back, the second coming of Jesus.

They believe that at that time, Jesus will bind Satan for a thousand years and cast him into the bottomless pit. At that time, the demons, no doubt, will be cast in there with him, and that'll be the correct time they'll be thrown into, well, even after that, that they'll be thrown into a lake of fire, and that will be the correct time for their torment. That could be correct.

That's certainly the only interpretation I ever heard anyone ever give, and I heard it from many places, but my own thoughts is it's more likely that the time of their torment began with the death and resurrection of Jesus. That's when they were disarmed. That's when he disarmed principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, it says in Colossians 2.15. He rendered them powerless, and you know, it says in 2 Peter 2 and the book of Jude, both these places speak about spirits that left their first estate, demons that sinned, excuse me, angels that sinned, presumably now the demons, the Bible doesn't say they are, but that's the general presumption, is that the angels that sinned may be the same beings that we read of here as demons.

But Peter and Jude mention that those angels that sinned are kept in chains under darkness awaiting the judgment of the great day. In 2 Peter 2 it actually names the place

of their incarceration as Tartarus. It says, if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, the Greek says, to be reserved in chains until the judgment.

I realize it would be good if I gave you all the verse numbers, but the thing is I'm working from memory here, and I could look them all up, but it would slow us down because there is so much to say, but I can give you at least that verse I suppose. That would be in 2 Peter 2, verse 4. For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell, the word hell there in the Greek is Tartarus, the only place in the Bible where the word Tartarus appears, and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved for judgment, and then he goes on, that's not the end of the sentence, but it has a parallel statement in Jude, which I think might be Jude, verse 6. Jude, verse 6, and the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day. The question is, when did this happen to these angels that sinned? When did they get confined in these chains under darkness? Well, one thought is of course that that happened way back when they first fell.

Sometime back in Old Testament times, or even before Old Testament times, a certain number of angels sinned and God immediately cast them into darkness and chains and so forth. The problem that arises with that is that it's quite desirable, although maybe not certain, it's desirable to assume that the angels that sinned are the demons. And they didn't appear to be in chains in the time of Jesus, in fact they weren't even tormented yet.

But the question is, when is that torment? Well, Jude and 2 Peter, of course, are written after the cross. Jesus' encounter with the demons in the Gospels is before the cross. It's possible that the time for the demons to be chained and bound and so forth was at the cross.

Certainly the Bible indicates that something very significant happened to them negatively from their point of view when Jesus died and rose again. And it's possible that Peter and Jude are simply telling us that those demonic powers, which were freely roaming about prior to the cross, since that time have been reserved in chains under darkness waiting for the judgment. Now that doesn't satisfy all questions.

For instance, why would there still be some demons running around free today? And is it really correct to identify the angels that sinned with the demons? The Bible doesn't make that identification, but it has generally and historically and traditionally been made. Some of those questions we may not ever be able to answer. But my thought is, and that's the best I can do on this matter, my thought is that when they said, have you come to torment us before the time, the right time to do it was at the cross.

And it is at that point that Revelation represents Jesus as having bound Satan in the abyss. And since Jesus had not yet died, at this point in time that we're reading of, and

had not yet risen again, it was perhaps not the time to send him to the abyss. And so when they begged him not to, he complied.

He said, okay, I'll send you those pigs instead. Now someone might say, but isn't that kind of destructive, a property that wasn't Jesus? Those pigs, 2,000 swine, could be worth a lot of money. Didn't Jesus, in this act of allowing the demons to go there, didn't he become responsible for the destruction of this property? Well, one thing may or may not be significant, and of course the pig was an unclean animal.

The Jews weren't allowed to eat him. We don't know whether the owner of the swine was Jewish or not. It might have been a Gentile.

I don't know. We simply don't know enough about the story. But it's possible that the pigs were owned by a Jew, who shouldn't have been raising pigs in the first place.

He wasn't allowed to eat them. And therefore the destruction of the pigs was quite within Jesus' rights, you know, as the enforcer of the law of Israel on the Jews. I don't really know.

We simply don't have the data to know whether these were Jewish-owned pigs or what. Of course, it's not Jesus who drove the pigs into the sea. Jesus simply allowed the demons to go into the pigs, and the demons presumably drove the pigs into the sea.

Or maybe the pigs just went for a cirque, and the demons had nothing to do with the direction they ran, you know. We are told by Jesus in Matthew 12 that demons, when they go out of a man, prefer to go through waterless places. And it's hard to know why the demons would choose to go into the sea then, if Jesus, by his own statements, indicated they prefer dry places.

Maybe going into the sea was a judgment upon them of sorts anyway. There's too many conjectures and not enough details to really answer them. So, while I raise some of these points, I don't claim to have any answers to them.

The point I would make is that this story has some things that are so much in common with the previous story, of stilling the storm, that I can't help but think there is an intentional linking of the two stories. Of course, they were linked chronologically. The stilling of the storm happened on the very voyage that was going over to meet with this man.

But nothing happens without the providence of God, and particularly so in the life and ministry of Jesus. I think that the linking of these two things is very significant. Jesus didn't still every storm he ever encountered, as far as we know, but he stilled this one on this occasion.

And it was just before he cast the demon out of this man. Now, one of the things that

links these two stories, and I pointed this out in our last session, is that both stories, unlike most, represent that those who saw the miracle, in each case, were more afraid after the miracle was done than before. The disciples were afraid when the storm was about to sink their ship.

But after Jesus said, Peace be still, and the storm stopped, it says, then they were exceedingly afraid. And in this case, we have no doubt, although it's not stated, that the people of the town, or the region of Gadara, that they were afraid of these demon-possessed men who were so fierce and so forth. That's not stated.

But what is stated, was that after they saw the man healed, the man in his right mind, and no longer in danger, then they were afraid. It says in verse 15, Mark 5, 15, the very last line. They were afraid.

Which, of course, both stories tell us that while there was a fearful situation, remedied by the miracle, after the danger was gone and the miracle had been done, the miracle itself was so scary to certain people, that it caused them to get goosebumps, or even worse. In the case of the Gadarenes, it made them want to get out, and Jesus, get out of there. Now, this particular detail of the two stories may be simply incidental and not important, but I think that in the stories of the stilling of the storm, and the story of the casting out of these demons, we have some spiritual types of significance.

I mentioned when we talked about the stilling of the storm, that I think, very likely, the meaning of that miracle was to show that Jesus, who commands the wind and the waves, and the sea, and they obey him, is the Lord over the nations of the earth, which in the Old Testament are represented as the sea, and the four winds that strive on the sea and create turmoil and so forth. And the wind and the waves represent external dangers to the disciples. In our case, it may, in fact, be political dangers, environmental dangers that have to do with persecution of the church, or whatever.

In the story of the wind and the sea, it was, of course, physical elements that were endangering them. But the point is, Jesus showed himself capable of subduing and controlling those external threats to his people. But this second story focuses on the internal enemy, the enemy within, and Jesus' ability to subdue that one, too.

The disciples at sea were threatened by external forces. The demon-possessed man in Gadara was threatened and endangered spiritually by an internal enemy. Now, while I don't think anybody here is demon-possessed, and I trust none of us ever shall be, and in all likelihood, I doubt if anyone here has been, yet there is an analogy, I believe, just as there was an analogy, in my opinion, between the wind and the sea representing the nations and the enemies of the gospel, presenting an outward danger to the Christian, the Christian faces an inward enemy as well.

He may not have a legion of demons, or even a single demon, but he has an enemy

within. And he is as much hopeless to get victory over this enemy within as the demon-possessed man on his own was, without Jesus. That Jesus is here represented as the deliverer, not only from external dangers to his people, but internal dangers, spiritual enemy within.

Now, I'm not here to talk about the possibility of Christians having demons. As I've said many times, I don't know whether Christians can have demons or not. The Bible doesn't address the question directly, and I'm open to either possibility.

It's not really a principal concern of mine. But I would say this, the Bible makes it clear that there is an enemy within every Christian. Paul said, there's sin in my members, and he's perplexed about it.

In Romans chapter 7, he says, with my mind, I agree with the law of God and with righteousness, and I want to do the right thing, but what I find myself doing is wrong things. I choose to do the right, but I do the wrong. I want to avoid evil things, but I do the evil things.

I want to do righteous things, but I end up not doing those righteous things I want to do. What's the story here? And he says, well, he said, I see then there's something else in me that's not me. It's sin in my members.

He said, therefore, it's not I who am doing this, but sin that is in me does it. This whole discussion at the end of Romans 7, I'm sure you're all familiar with it. We won't bother to turn there.

Or as Paul puts it elsewhere, I think it's in Galatians 5.17, he says, the flesh lusts against the spirit, the spirit against the flesh, and these two are contrary to one another, so that you cannot do the things that you want. Now, that's not to be identified with demon possession, but it certainly has its analogy to demon possession. Because the man who is demonized is no more or less subject to and in danger of the enemy within him than the person who is not demonized and has sin in his members.

And that is the internal enemy of the Christian. And this story, just like the story of stealing the wind and the wave, shows that Jesus has power over the external dangers to the church and to his people. This story of his casting out this radically powerful demon, and this man who is terribly, hopelessly lost, it illustrates that Jesus can take care of the dangers outside and inside, and that Jesus has authority over the outward circumstances of our lives that might threaten us, as well as the inward enemy.

He can control, he can deliver. And you know, seen that way, there's some interesting things in this story I'd like to draw your attention to. In Mark 5, 3 and 4, it says, This man had his dwelling place among the tombs.

The Bible says that before we were saved, we were dead in trespasses and sins. And

Jesus delivered us from death and brought us to life and so forth. And this man had his place among the dead.

He belonged there. He was, I mean, he felt at home among the dead. And the Bible says we once ran with those who are children of wrath, too, when we were dead in trespasses and sins.

But it says in verse 3, No one could bind him, not even with chains. He had often been bound with chains, but it hadn't helped. And it says, and also in verse 4, at the end it says, And neither could anyone tame him.

Now here's the two ways that people try to control sin. By taming it, or by binding it. You know, it says, for example, in James, No man can tame the tongue.

But it also says in James, if you don't bridle your tongue, your religion is vain. You can't tame your tongue, because it's part of your nature. You can't, you can, there's two ways to deal with a wild horse.

One is to put a harness on him and just, you know, by sheer muscle, force him to do your will. The other is to break him, to break his spirit and tame him, make him a domestic animal. You can do either with a horse.

Some animals don't domesticate. But any animal can be controlled by man, and has been at one time or another. But the sin in our nature.

First of all, we can't tame it. We can't just eradicate it and make ourselves not inclined to sin anymore. That's not in our power to do.

We can't tame that thing. But even binding it with chains doesn't really provide the answer. You know, I wouldn't be surprised if there's sort of an intentional symbolism here of the legalism of Pharisaic religion or any kind of legalistic religion.

Jesus said that the Pharisees bind people with heavy burdens and so forth and grievous to be born. And he talks about them being in bondage. You know, it is certainly the case that laws, religious laws and civil laws seek to bind people's sinful behavior and criminal behavior.

But if the person is untamed within, those kinds of chains and shackles don't really solve the problem. The person remains, the sin remains more powerful than the chains, as it were. And persons do try to bind themselves with religious rules and so forth, but if the heart isn't changed, if there's no deliverance from sin itself, religion just becomes a weak effort to bind and to control sinful behavior, and it's certainly no solution.

The need, of course, is to have a changed heart. I may have told you before, I like this analogy. It comes from Greek mythology and the stories of Ulysses.

Of course, these stories are not true. But there is a story in the Iliad or the Odyssey, one or the other, about a place called the Island of the Sirens. And if I have told you the story, bear with me as I tell it again.

The Island of the Sirens was a place inhabited by women who had beautiful voices. In fact, they sang so beautifully, in that they couldn't be resisted. That is, their music could not be resisted.

And any sailors that came near with an earshot of that island would hear the singing, and they'd be drawn irresistibly into the island. But what was not obvious from the surface of the sea was that there's jagged rocks near the shore, and every ship that came near the island was dashed to pieces on the rocks, and the sailors were killed. And I don't remember, I think the women might have cannibalized them, I forget.

But it was obviously very dangerous to be drawn to this siren song. In fact, the story has given rise to a lot of imagery, even in the way people talk. And now they talk about lots of things that seem to be irresistible, whether it's addiction or whatever, a siren song, which is based on this idea of the Island of the Sirens.

Well, according to Greek mythology, two sailors managed to successfully hear the music of the sirens without succumbing and dying. One was Ulysses. And Ulysses was determined he'd heard about this, and he wanted to hear the music, but he didn't want to come under its spell, as others had.

And so he arranged with his sailors that they would go near the Island of the Sirens, and he would be bound to the mast of his ship. They would tie him up securely so that he couldn't get away. And then all his sailors put wax in their ears.

But he wouldn't have wax in his ears, so that he could hear the music, but he'd be powerless to respond to it. All of his sailors, because they had wax in their ears, would not be drawn to the song, they couldn't hear it. Anyone who would be drawn to it would not be able to control any situation.

So they did this, and they came near the island, and the song came wafting across the waves to him. And sure enough, just like any other mortal man, he found it irresistible. He started screaming to his men to turn in, to go.

You know, they had to get closer to this island and so forth, even to the point where it would be dangerous, because he'd lost his mind over this music. But his sailors had wax in their ears. They couldn't hear his screams, and they had been instructed not to do so.

And so eventually, they went beyond the range of the music, and he came back to his senses. And he lived to tell the tale. He was the only first man to hear the song of the sirens and live to tell the tale.

But there was another guy in mythology, a guy named Orpheus, who was a skilled musician. And he also heard the siren song with the men on his ship. And when they got near the island of the sirens, the song of the sirens came out, and they could hear it, and all the men began to be drawn into this island, which would have been their doom.

But Orpheus took out his instrument and began to play music that was more beautiful than the music of the sirens. And that music drew his sailors away from the siren music and was able to keep them safe until they sailed beyond and when they didn't hear the music anymore. And my former pastor, Chuck Smith, used to use this illustration with great effect.

I frankly think it's an excellent one of the way people try to overcome sin in their lives. Because everybody hears the siren song of temptation to sin at times, but if they respond, it's to their doom. But there's two different ways of doing it.

That is, of resisting it. One is that some people tie themselves to the mast, as it were, of their religion. And though their heart is crying out to go after the sin, and they're drawn to it and they love the sin, yet their religious convictions forbid them and the accountability of the church or whatever or the social group or simply their strong willpower of legalism and refusing to give up their religious rules, their bound as to a mast, they manage to avoid giving in.

But their heart wants the sin, but they just don't allow themselves to do it. And some people, by this means, manage to overcome sinful habits in their life to a certain degree. Not a very enjoyable life, however.

But others, they also resist sin, but not by religiosity, not by binding themselves to religious rules and regulations, but by, as it were, tuning in to the more attractive, the sweeter music of holiness, the beauty of holiness and the beauty of the Lord. And just being more enamored with Jesus and more enamored with righteousness and holiness and godliness, which is, of course, something only Jesus can work in you because by nature we don't have that attraction. But once that is there, once the heart is after God, then you don't have to bind yourself with rules or a song of temptation because you'd rather be holy.

You'd rather be righteous. And it's not that your heart wants to sin, but you just don't let yourself. Your heart doesn't want to sin because you want to stay close to that song.

You want to stay close to Jesus. And this man, I think, serves, at least whether intentionally or not, as an illustration of a sinner who has not been set free by Jesus. He doesn't have the song of the Lord to distract him.

And human means cannot bind him. They can't stop him. They can't stop this demonic power that's rampant in his life.

They can't tame him and they can't confine him. They can't control him inwardly. They can't change his heart and they can't control him outwardly.

The man is simply doomed unless he gets something more than what man's solutions have to offer. Now, of course, Jesus delivered the man. And down in verse 15, the people of the town, after the man was delivered, they came out to Jesus.

They saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had legions sitting and clothed and in his right mind. Now, here he had clothes on now. He obviously was a new man because he'd run around naked previous to this.

But he was in his right mind. But there's a detail in Luke that I like that I wish all the versions had included. But we can turn to Luke to get it.

In Luke 8.35, there's a detail to the description of the man after his deliverance. Luke 8.35 says, Then they went out to see what had happened and came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had departed sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. Now, I can't help but think that Luke worded it this way for reasons more than historical but also for symbolic reasons.

The man now delivered was sitting at the feet of Jesus. He was sitting when Martha was complaining about her not helping in the kitchen. Sitting at the feet of Jesus.

People sitting at the feet of Jesus usually were being disciplined. Usually were sitting at his feet for instruction, for teaching. We're not told that Jesus was teaching the man but we can hardly doubt that he was.

Some period of time must have elapsed from the deliverance to the time the servants ran off and brought the people from town. What was Jesus doing standing silently there? Was nothing happening? Or was Jesus giving this guy some instruction, that Jesus didn't just sit around silently waiting for the people to come in and ask him to leave. He was ministering to the guy, I'm sure.

And the guy was at the feet of Jesus. And the result of that, he was clothed. Where the clothing came from we don't know.

Maybe Jesus gave him his own clothes. And he was in his right mind. This is certainly the right description of a person who's not only been converted but delivered and disciplined.

He is found at the feet of Jesus. He'll be in his right mind. Many times people think that Christians are the ones in their right mind.

They are the ones in touch with reality, in touch with the truth, because they're sitting at the feet of Jesus. It has a very good effect on the mind. The Bible says in Timothy that God has not given us a spirit of fear but of love and of power and of a sound mind or a

disciplined mind.

And this man was now in his right mind because he was at the feet of Jesus. And he was clothed. The man had been naked before.

Well, all of us are naked before God in one sense. But the Bible makes it very clear that God was clothed with the righteousness of Christ. And this man was no longer in his shameful nakedness.

He now had nothing to be ashamed of. You remember in Adam and Eve, when they sinned, they sought to cover their shame and their nakedness with leaves, but God had to slay animals to provide skins to cover them. But God did so.

God covered their nakedness, which would be shame, when they were naked and ashamed. And nakedness in the Old Testament was gone and covered by Jesus. And so we have in, as I say in these two stories, of the stilling of the storm at sea and in the casting of the demon out, I think, my personal opinion is there's a deliberate analogy in these stories to illustrate for us Jesus' total authority and lordship and sovereignty over the outward circumstances of our lives that threaten us and the inward enemies so that Jesus is the answer to all of our problems.

Not only the outward circumstances that he is the one who sets us free, it is by sitting at his feet, it is by hearing his word and submitting to his commands, and by worshipping him as this man did, and no doubt adoring him, that the demon of flesh, the demon of sin is overcome in our lives so that we are no longer governed by a sinful mind, but we're in our right minds and we're clothed, no longer ashamed and naked. I've got this tape for you and I'm actually kind of glad that most of you when I asked about this yesterday weren't familiar with this song therefore it might have an initial impact on you. This song, the first time I heard it, I was just powerfully moved by it so I got a tape of it and I've heard it now about a hundred times and I'm still powerfully moved by it.

There's just a few songs I've heard recently that are, to my mind, powerful. Now I realize that what some people call powerful music is no doubt to them powerful and doesn't do a thing for you or me or whatever. But the first time you hear it and you'll only hear it once here today it's hard to catch all the words.

I'll tell you what the words are and to my mind this song takes this story and powerfully makes application to the average ordinary person not to the demon possessed person but to people like you and me who no doubt are not demon possessed never were, never will be but still were unclean, still were ashamed still were bound by sin and yet have found freedom in Jesus. Let me tell you the words of this song then I'll play it for you on this tape player. The writer of this song and the performer who does it is Bob Bennett and the song is called Man of the Tombs but here's how the words go.

Of course it sounds better mixed with the music than just to state them but I want you to hear the words so that when you hear them you'll know what they were. It goes, Man of the Tombs lives in a place where no one goes tears at himself up dead among the living knows no mercy and no forgiving Man of the Tombs he's driven to cry out loud can you hear him cry out loud? Man of the Tombs possessed by an unseen enemy breaks every chain and mistakes his freedom for being free shame and shamelessness equally there like a random toss of the coin in the air Man of the Tombs he's driven to cry out loud then there's a chorus that goes underneath this thing that I've become a memory of flesh and blood I cursed the womb I blessed the grave I lost my heart I cannot be saved like those who fear me I'm afraid like those I've hurt I can feel pain naked now before my sin these stones that cut against my skin though some try to touch me no one can Man of the Tombs I am the next verse goes down at the shoreline two sets of footprints meet and speak in only a moment and only a word the evil departs like a thundering herd Man of the Tombs he hears this voice cry out loud underneath the thing that you've become I see a man of flesh and blood I give you life beyond the grave I heal your heart I come to save no need to fear be not afraid this man of sorrows knows your pain I come to take away your sin and bear its marks upon my skin though no one can touch you still I can for son of God I am and the last verse is dress now and seated clean in spirit and healthy in mind Man of the Tombs he begs to follow but must stay behind he'll return to his family with stories to tell of mercy and madness and heaven and hell Man of the Tombs soon he will cry out loud underneath this thing that I once was I have a life beyond the grave I found my heart I can now be saved it's coming something about no need to fear I'm not afraid this man of sorrows took my pain he comes to take away our sin and bears its marks upon his skin I'm telling you this story because Man of the Tombs I was it's not a very good rendition of it I don't have it completely memorized I guess but now that you know what the words are you'll be able to recognize them on the song a little better it's a little hard without knowing in advance this I take to be one of the best songs ever recorded if you don't agree then you know I don't have the same taste in music