"Responding to the Son of God" Matthew 8:28-34, Sermon Notes
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Saving Grace Bible Church
May 22nd, 2016
Morning Worship Service

"When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way. 29 And they cried out, saying, 'What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?' 30 Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them. 31 The demons began to entreat Him, saying, 'If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.' 32 And He said to them, 'Go!' And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. 33 The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. 34 And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region." (Matthew 8:28-34 NAU)

Text: Matt 8:28-34

Title: Responding to the Son of God

Focal Point: "What business do we have with each other, Son of God?"

Homiletical Keyword: Mercy

Interrogative: How? (How do you respond to the mercy of God?)

Teaching Aim: To show the various responses to God's mercy and encourage the heart to entrust itself to Christ.

Introduction

What is fair?

- Equal portions?
- Is fairness measured in everyone getting the same thing?
- If we are dealing out ice cream, is fairness equal 6oz portions?

When God demonstrates His character, must He show the same character to all, in order to be fair?

- IE can He show grace to one and not another, and still be fair?
- How do you view the thief on the cross? Did God show grace to one man and not another? What is fair?

If God shows mercy to a criminal and saves him, is he unfair to the victim?

If we are honest, when we think about God and how God operates, we struggle with understanding what is fair and right

- Can God justly show mercy to sinful objects and still not be responsible for the sinful acts those agents of evil perform?
- For some the answer is no
- They believe that God must wipe out the Hitlers and Jim Jones' of the world so that innocent people are not harmed. Otherwise God is unloving or unmerciful.

But think more carefully; was God unfair to Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain, because God was merciful to Cain and gave him a chance to repent?

- Was Abel mistreated by God?
- Aren't you glad you are not God?

The problem of human suffering in light of God being merciful, loving, and patient is too much to reconcile for the human mind. In our minds, God cannot show mercy to evil without being guilty of hurting the innocent.

- To us, fairness is God equally protecting the righteous and the unrighteous
- If the wicked receive mercy which eventually hurts someone, then God must have not been fair
- God has to be fair to the innocent and the evil alike

If God should show mercy to one who is evil and that evil agent should hurt another innocent victim, it is God who is the problem.

- Some may say, "Well yeah! What is the problem with that? God cannot show grace to the wicked if that very wicked person is then going to turn around and be evil!"

Are we then saying that God must stop being God, and stop acting like God, because in being God He opens the doors to our being hurt?

- More simply, are we saying: God, we are being hurt because of You! You are too merciful and thus we keep getting hurt!

The problem of evil is so slippery. How can a good God allow evil, and more importantly to us this morning, how could a good God be good to evil agents who then in turn harm us?

- This text is going to teach us some amazing lessons this morning and open our thoughts to issues I am sure only a few have investigated

This is the great lesson we learn in our text this morning: Jesus, who is merciful to all, grants mercy to all and is rejected by those who are afraid of His works because they cannot see the mercy in His works.

BODY

The account of Jesus' interaction with the demoniac is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39

Once again, both Mark's and Luke's accounts have greater details about the event than Matthew's

- Once again, Matthew is going to focus on an aspect of Christ's power and the various responses to Christ
- In this case, the response of the demons and the city

As we are working through this account and looking at the details, do not lose sight of how the account points to Christ, no matter how interesting the other characters are

- One person reading ahead suggested I entitled this sermon "Deviled Ham" ;)

Setting

"When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way." (Matthew 8:28 NAU)

There are many differences in the various synoptic gospels

- Two men in Matthew while just one in Mark
- Matthew does not describe how violent these men are because Christ is the focus, not the men
- The exorcism is simplified by Matthew
- The simplicity demonstrates Jesus' authority

The setting is again established by Matthew recording a reference to an event, "when He came to the other side"

Just as ch 9:1 starts a new event

After they had arrived on the other side in the country of the Gadarenes, Mark and Luke say that Jesus and His disciples come to the region of the Gerasenes.

"Both Gadara and Gerasa were cities of the Decapolis, a league of ten Hellenistic cities east of the Jordan and going north into Syria. Gersa was thirty miles to the southeast of the lake, but it had territory that reached to the lake and included a city named Khersa on the shore. Khersa could easily be the "Gerasa" of Mark/Luke. Thus the discrepancy would only be on the surface." Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on Matthew by Grant Osborne pg 318

- This is like saying Saving Grace Bible Church is in Sarasota
- While technically it is in Osprey, because of the size of Sarasota and the increasing population with the dwindling identity of Osprey, we would say "Sarasota" and people will understand where we are located

- This is what happened here. Matthew is technically right, while Mark and Luke refer to the larger city which had a reach to the same area so everyone knows which location they are speaking of.

Upon arriving to the other side of the lake, after their adventures on the Sea of Galilee, they were met by two demon-possessed men

- These demon-possessed men were very violent
- Nobody would walk by them because they were so violent
- Matthew records 2 men
- While Mark and Luke only one
- But it is also possible that there was one main speaker between the two men while the other was silent and not a prominent character
- This being the vocal leader and dominant one between the two

The demon possession shows that demons seek to control people

- As they do, they bring harm to the people they inhabit and to others
- Demons are inflicting pain on others
- But this passage also demonstrates Jesus' authority over the demonic world
- Look How the demons pleaded with Christ vs 31

Mark records Jesus interrogating the demons more:

"And He was asking him, 'What is your name?' And he said to Him, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.'" (Mark 5:9 NAU)

These men were very violent so that no one could pass by the way

Mark 5:1-5: "They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. 2 When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, 3 and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; 4 because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones."

- Mark describes how they broke chains – act of superhuman strength
- They inflicted harm upon themselves – bruised himself
- Attempted suicide – cutting himself

The road Jesus was walking on was their road and they were particularly possessive of it

- This would have meant that the city would have faced great difficulty at the hands of these men
- Roads were important
- They provided easier travel

- They even had an element of security
- To lose a road to these men would have impacted the city, especially since this road traveled down to the sea

Imagine losing access to US 41 because a couple of crazy people would not allow you to pass by.

- In Argentina people will regularly protest and start a fire in the middle of the street and stop all traffic

These men were literally blocking traffic and making travel very risky

Likely rerouting the road around these men would have made matters more difficult, make for a longer journey

They lived in the tombs- vs 28: These were natural places for demons, lepers, and other driven from their homes to live because they would find privacy there since they were considered perpetually unclean

- Many times these areas would be filled with caves and the wealthy would buy these caves and use them to bury their dead
- The caves would provide a natural shelter for those who were outcasts

Confrontation

"And they cried out, saying, 'What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?'" (Matthew 8:29 NAU)

Two questions are posed by the demons to Christ:

1st Question: What business do we have with each other, Son of God?

This is a very revealing question:

- They know exactly who Jesus is
- There is no doubt in their mind that this is the Son of God
- They are not debating who Jesus is. While they know, they have no problem being deceptive spirits seeking to mislead others by lying about Christ and creating a false Christ

We cannot miss the connection between the final thoughts of the Apostles in vs 27 and the first words of the demons in vs 29

- What kind of man is this? – The disciples
- What do we have to do with you Son of God? – The demons
- The supernatural realm knows who Christ is
- The earthly realm is figuring out what is taking place
- Some get it and others do not

- The disciples are starting to realize this is God, while the demons are already aware of it
- Seriously, the demons have to laugh at our ignorance. They know God immediately. We are still thick and trying to figure it out.

By this point we should be aware that we are following the details of God as He walked this earth

- The demonic world knew this
- Man who is slow in heart to believe and mind to comprehend, struggles to comprehend this truth
- God lived among men demonstrating His power

The first question is a Jewish idiom "What is it to us and to you?" IE "What do we have nothing in common?" Zondervan Exegetical Commentary pg 319

The demons are trying to figure out what is happening here

Their second question reveals their fear:

2nd Question: Have You come to torment us before the time?

- They want to know if their freedom is over
- Have you come to torment us before the time?
- "Have you come" emphasizes the results of Jesus' arrival

The question betrays their understanding. They know God is in control.

- They know their time is limited
- They know to whom they give an account

The Scriptures teach that even the Devil is aware he is living on borrowed time: Listen to Revelation 12:12

"For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time." (Revelation 12:12 NAU)

- The Devil is very angry because his time is short
- Each day it grows increasingly shorter

The demons are aware of their destiny and they are simply awaiting the time

- They want to be left alone before their time
- They did not know if this was the time. They too did not understand the full plan. They knew Christ was going to set up His kingdom but did not know this was only the inauguration of the coming of His great Kingdom.

What did the demons know?

1. Jesus was the Son of God

2. There was a time of judgment coming

3. Jesus had the authority to do what He pleased

What is the idea of torment?

- The word translated as “torment” has the idea of “to torment” or “to torture”
- It is the idea of testing something to prove its worth
- It also has the idea of inflicting punishment as part of judgment
- This idea is made clear in Rev 9:5 as God’s judgment is poured out and the people are in torment or under punishment

They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss. (Luke 8:31 NAU)

Pleading for mercy

“Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them.” (Matthew 8:30 NAU)

“The demons began to entreat Him, saying, ‘If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.’" (Matthew 8:31 NAU)

Now Matthew adds to the scene for us

- Jesus had just gotten out of the boat with His disciples
- He was walking up the road when He came upon two demoniacs
- These demoniacs rushed to Jesus and fell down at His feet
- They started questioning Him about His intentions and pleading with Him
- Off in the distance, still within eyesight but far enough away from being too close, was a herd of swine

After agonizing over what Christ was there to do, Mark and Luke records Jesus telling the demons to leave

They then plead with Jesus, they beg Him, they beseech Him:

- They honored Christ’s authority
- They recognized they could not control these men
- They began entreating Him
- Pleading with Him
- Begging Him
- If we are going to be cast out, send us to the swine
- Plead to enter into the pigs

- The pigs were some distance away
- They were feeding on the hillside

Clearly, the pig farm tells us we are in a Gentile land

- Pigs were considered unclean by the Law and would be prohibited among the Jews

Why go into the pigs? Why would Jesus honor this request?

Two Answers I believe are fitting:

1st- As James Boice says: "To give visual proof"

- Demonstrate His work and give tangible evidence to His work
- Two men healed and in their right minds
- Demons caused this as evidenced by the destruction caused to the swine they were sent into

2nd- To demonstrate His character of being merciful to those who do not deserve His mercy

- These demons pleaded with Him
- He could have said no
- He could have said: "Depart and get out" and not given them a place to go
- He could have sent them to the abyss
- He allowed them to enter the swine
- He revealed His power and demonstrated His mercy at the exact same time

Receiving of Mercy

"And He said to them, 'Go!' And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. 33 The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs." (Matthew 8:32-33 NAU)

- He commands the demons to go

Very simple and brief recording of what was said. "Go"

- This again fits Matthew's purpose of demonstrating Christ's authority
- Christ does not need to argue or persuade; He simply declares

Contrast this with modern exorcists

- Where the exorcists go on and on with people begging for the demons to leave
- They try all kinds of sayings and methods
- Modern exorcisms are as violent as the demon-possession
- Even the disciples had trouble casting out demons Luke 9:1

- But not with Jesus – He declares and there is freedom

The moment the demons left, they entered the swine

- No long drawn out process. He spoke and they immediately acted.
- They enter the herd of swine and the swine rush towards the water

Many wondered how these pigs were killed. Obviously by water, but by whose volition; theirs or the demons?

- Could have been killed by the demons
- Could have been startled and they rushed to their death

A simple Google search tells you that pigs cannot fly, but they can swim

- This was a suicide mission on the part of the demons to once again inflict pain
- To the animals for sure, but even economically to the feeders

BTW, the Greek term here is not herdsman or farmer. It is a participle which describes what these men were doing. They were feeding the pigs.

- They could have been taking their rotation to watch over the city's swine
- Thus this final act was economic sabotage and a final way to inflict pain on man

Evil always wishes to inflict pain on man. The devil and his demons want to harm mankind. This is why he is called a murderer.

- This is another reason why playing with evil is so harmful. Because the devil and his demons have no mercy on mankind
- Contrast that to Christ who had mercy both on these two men and on the demons

Now vs 33 makes the scene bigger

"The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs." (Matthew 8:33 NAU)

- The farmers knew what happened to their swine
- And they also knew what happened to the demoniacs
- So clearly they were a part of the group of disciples and Jesus

Likely, they saw this group of men walking near the area of the demoniacs and they started to watch to see what would take place

- They could have rushed to Jesus to try to warn Him and the disciples of the dangers ahead
- They could have seen the demoniacs rushing out to see Jesus and thought this group is going to need our help

- They could have want to watch the show

By what they say to the city, it is evident they were in the loop

- They were part of the discussions
- They were watching the whole event play out in front of them

They were eyewitnesses to the events and they gave an account to the whole city

- They gave account to what happened and how it happened through what Christ did

To be clear –

- The demoniacs receive mercy because they are set free from the demons
- The demons are given mercy as they are allowed to enter the swine
- AND the city people are shown mercy because they now have their road back. Right? Do you see that? These two lunatics are now in their right mind. The road is now free and clear.

Rejection

"And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region." (Matthew 8:34 NAU)

The emphasis is on them seeing Jesus and pleading with Him to leave

- They lost their livelihood
- Likely believed it was Jesus' fault
- They would also be in shock seeing the death of their animals
- They could have also feared for their lives seeing Jesus as a threat greater than the demoniacs

"It could be that Matthew wants to expose the true values of the townspeople: they prefer swine to the Savior." Zondervan pg 322

- Tells us they feared Christ- Luke 8:37

"And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat and returned." (Luke 8:37 NAU)

- Matthew likely hides this idea for a couple of reasons
- First- his intention is to show that Jesus was accepted by Gentiles
- Second- this would be a demonstration of Gentiles turning Christ away

Instead of welcoming Jesus, they rejected Him

- They received benefit from Christ as they got their road back
- Their loss was more important to them
- And even more significant, they feared His power

Maybe some thought Christ was the cause of the swine's death

- The demons were
- Christ was merciful in casting them out
- The mercy of Christ lead to the destruction of the swine

Maybe they knew the kind of men these guys were and how hard they worked to subdue them, only to find it useless to contain them. So when Christ comes and frees these men and destroys their herd of swine, they cannot fathom trying to contain Him. If they could not contain the demon-possessed men, how are they going to deal with the One who controls the demons?

One may conclude: shouldn't an all-knowing God know not to show mercy to a group of demons who would then destroy these swine?

- I mean, an account like this would make a PETA activist angry!
- Should God not show His character if evil will use His character to do more evil?
- Why show mercy to demons who then use that mercy to kill the swine and hurt the city?
- Some would believe that God should not be merciful if mercy means that evil will hurt others. It is God's fault for being God.

This is not the case at all. Christ was merciful to every party even if the people should lose some swine at the handiwork of the demons

- What is revealed is not evil in God or deficiency in God, but the idolatry of man who believes God must be there to make his life easier or better

Why did these men reject Christ?

We are not told why, but there are some things we need to take into account

- These men received mercy and they did not know it
- They got their road back, which they could not see by the demoniacs being healed and the swine dead

Conclusion

Now, the text leaves us with an interesting observation. How can Christ be just in delivering the demoniacs when in return it was going to harm the city?

I mean, we look at this scene and say: Christ you brought evil upon the city by allowing the demons to take over the swine! How can this be?!

- But the Scriptures are quick to show this is not the case at all
- Christ showed mercy to all the parties
- All we can say is that Christ showed mercy. His every act to each person and spirit being He dealt with was an act of mercy

Demons have no mercy, while Christ shows mercy to all. He even shows mercy to those who do not deserve it.

- Christ shows mercy and the result is that evil increases. Does this make God evil or wrong?

Do you recognize the authority of Christ? Do you recognize His mercy? Or are you angry with God because He is merciful and patient?

Now listen, I know some will say they were scared that He had power over the demons. Yes indeed, the kind of power Christ had would be frightening. But if they understood the mercy He demonstrated, even to demons, they would not be afraid, but rather they would turn to Him.

- We too should respond to the character of God in this way
- God's character demonstrated among sinful man should cause us to fall down and praise Him
- His patience, love, mercy, and grace compel us to adore the living God
- We have no right to stand over God and judge Him because we think His mercy is not fair to us
- He is not responsible for the evil performed by those who reject Him
- Who are we to get angry with God, or even fear Him and push Him away, if He shows mercy to someone who has brought us harm?

Man naturally wants to tell God how to be God

When you reject God's right to be God, you will then live in terror of God

- Look at the demons
- Look at the city people
- Those who reject authority live in fear of it
- On the other hand, when you recognize God's character and have received His mercy, you will follow Him
- I cannot imagine a greater comfort to us than this: I know God will be merciful to me this week because He even shows mercy to demons!
- I'll let God be God to demonstrate His great character knowing that He can work all things for our good Rom 8:28-29

You might be asking: Where did you get this "mercy" idea? I do not see the term mercy at all here!

The finger prints of mercy were all over this passage, but Listen to Mark's account:

"As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him. 19 And He did not let him, but He said to him, 'Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.' 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed." (Mark 5:18-20 NAU)

- Now get that last point: When the people realized what had happened, their fear turned to amazement!
- This is how we should stand when His mercy is on display
- I believe we often fail to see mercy because we expect it to only come to us

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