

## Follow Him! Afraid of Jesus? Matthew 8:28-9:8

Mark Vroegop

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28 And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. 29 And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" 30 Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. 31 And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." 32 And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. 33 The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. 34 And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

9 And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. 2 And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." 3 And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." 4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? 6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." 7 And he rose and went home. 8 When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men (Matt 8:28-9:8)

Let me ask you a pretty generic question: Who is Jesus to you? Some of you would respond with statements like: He's the Son of God, The Lamb of God, A prophet, Savior, Perfect Sacrifice, Prince of Peace, Lord, or Ruler. And all of those would be true. But the question is – "who is He to **you**?" The reason that I asked this question is because the Bible tells us that everyone will see and know Jesus one day. Philippians 2:10-11 says, "...at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

Do you understand what that means? The Bible tells us that one day every person will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. Everyone will see him and know who he really is, but that day will not be happy and joyful for some. On that day there will be two kinds of people: those that know him and love him, and those who rejected him and fear him. He will be Savior to

one group; he will be judge to another. One will be saved from eternal punishment by his sacrifice on the cross; the other will suffer eternal separation in hell because of sinful rebellion. That is why the question: "who is Jesus?" is really important. At the end of the day Jesus is either your Savior or your Judge.

## **Not Safe, But Good**

The title of my message today is a question: Afraid of Jesus? And I'd like to suggest to you that we don't often think of being afraid of Jesus, but we really should because for many people in the Bible an encounter with Jesus created fear – and rightly so. They should have been afraid. But we don't often talk about Jesus like that. We prefer the soft, gentle images of Jesus that appear in Children's Bibles. We'd like to think of Jesus in Barney-like, Mr. Rogers-like qualities – comforting and calming. Jesus certainly is kind, gentle, meek, and comforting, but that picture is not complete. One of my favorite quotes from the movie "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," regarding Aslan, the Christ-like Lion, is: "He is not safe, but he's good."

We get a clear taste of this in Matthew 8:28-9:8. Jesus does a lot of good in this passage, but none of it is safe. In fact, Jesus' actions make many people afraid, and I'd like to see why. There are three different reasons why people are afraid of Jesus, and I hope to show you that **if you don't know Jesus then you have reason to be afraid.**

## **Three Reasons Why People Were Afraid of Jesus**

Matthew 8-10 is all about the power and authority of Jesus. We've already seen a leper cleansed (8:1-4), a servant restored to health (8:5-13), an old woman cured instantly (8:14-17), and the calming of a storm (8:23-27).

Our last section ended with these words from his disciples: "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and seas obey him?" (8:27). Our passage today gives us two more miracles: the exorcism of a demon-possessed man and the healing of a lame man. Embedded into both stories are people who were afraid of Jesus. Let's learn why.

### **1) He Exposes Evil (v 28-30)**

Verse 28 indicates that Jesus again crossed the Sea of Galilee to an area called Gadarenes. This area was a Gentile area which is why there is a reference (v 30) to a herd of pigs since no Jewish person who raise a herd of unclean animals.

Jesus comes into contact with two demon-possessed men who lived in the tombs and terrorized the people of that area. Mark 5:3-5 gives us some additional information<sup>1</sup> on what this demon possession involved:

3 He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, 4 for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones (Mark 5:3-5).

When the demon-possessed men meet Jesus, they treat him with hostility. Notice that they are not talking with Jesus; they are screaming at him. The word here means to shriek or cry out. It is the same word used in Matthew 14:26 when the disciples thought that Jesus was a ghost walking on the water. Their statements that are most interesting: "What do you have to do with us, Son of God?" and "Have you come to torment us before the time?" The first statement is a fearful, panicked question: "What are you doing here?" You see Jesus is invading their arena, and the demon-possessed men don't like it – at all.

The second comment gives a hint as to why they are screaming at him. The demons know who Jesus is (thus "O, Son of God"), and they ask him if he has come to judge. Apparently the demons know that there is coming a day when Jesus will hold them accountable, and they are worried that his presence means that it is going to happen immediately.

These men are afraid of Jesus because his presence has the power to expose their evil. If you read Mark and Luke's account, you will find that when Jesus asks the man his name. He replies, "Legion, because he had many demons in him (Luke 8:30). Jesus' mere presence threatens their control of this man.

This is what Jesus always does to evil men or evil deeds; he exposes them. The Bible frequently talks about Jesus or the Gospel (the message about Jesus) this way:

19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed (John 3:19-20).

Notice that John says that people love darkness more than light **because their deeds are evil**. Notice that people don't want their deeds to be exposed so they **do not come to the light and they hate the light**.

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<sup>1</sup> You will note that in Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39 there is only one demon-possessed man. The likely solution to this is that Mark and Luke focused on the conduct of one man – perhaps the leader or more vocal of the two.

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:3-6).

Satan's strategy is to keep people blind to the truth. He doesn't want them to know that they are sinners; he doesn't want them to think about eternity; he doesn't want them looking carefully at their lives. The devil wants you addicted, aimless, hopeless, and thinking you are happy. He wants you full of shame, yet full of self-confidence. He doesn't want Jesus telling you what you are really like or shining the light of truth on who you really are. Some people are afraid of Jesus because he exposes who they are. They are miserable, but they are afraid that Jesus will expose them. So they are afraid of him.

## **2) He Creates Costly Consequences (v 31-34)**

The story shifts to the people of the city. In verse 31 the demons beg Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs. Apparently, they long to possess something!<sup>2</sup>

I trust you know that demon possession is very real. In my high school days the book *This Present Darkness* by Frank Peretti was very popular and controversial. I didn't like everything in the book, but it was a helpful reminder that we are in a real spiritual battle with unseen forces (Ephesians 6:10-12), and I often really wonder if we are a bit too naïve and Western in how we look at the world. The enemy wants people blind, addicted, and happy! Isn't it possible that there is more to sin and the vehicles of sin than meet the eye? I really believe that there are evil spiritual forces attempting to advance and promote abortion, pornography, substance abuse, evolution, and other issues. I really believe that there are some people who are knowingly and unknowingly empowered by evil forces to do what they do. And I also believe that there are sections of our city that are practically under the oppressive control of the enemy. I just want you to see the world a little differently.

Jesus (v 32) gives a one-word command : "Go!" And immediately the demons (between 3,000 – 6,000) rushed out of these men and took control of the pigs, causing them to run into the sea and to their death. Can you imagine this scene and the ensuing chaos?

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 12:43-45 gives us a chilling look at this: 43 "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. 44 Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. 45 Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation" (Matt 12:43-45).

The effect was that the herdsman ran into the city to tell anyone who would listen what had happened. Luke gives us a great picture of what happened next:

35 Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. 36 And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. 37 Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear (Luke 8:35-37).

Notice that they were afraid of what happened to the man, and they wanted Jesus to leave. Is that curious to you? Instead of marveling that the men had been delivered, instead of rejoicing over the presence of divine power, they wanted him to leave. Rather than deal with the reality of what happened, they simply ask him to leave them alone. The deliverance of the men was too costly for the city, the consequences of their deliverance was just too painful. As D.A. Carson says, "They preferred pigs to persons, swine to Savior."

Oh how often I have seen people afraid of Jesus because of the consequences. I have seen people afraid because Jesus calls them to repent from their sins, because following him requires costly, painful decisions, or because life seemed much easier prior to learning the truth about who they really are. Let me give you a few examples:

- A saved single young man who knows that he shouldn't be dating an unsaved person but does it anyway.
- A young woman who wants to fill the hole in heart so badly that she latches on to anything "male," knowing that it's an idol.
- A married couple who refuses to deal honestly with each other's sins because it's just easier not to talk about.
- Parents who don't ask their kids hard, personal questions because they don't want to know the answers.

Jesus challenges the status quo. He creates costly consequences. And some people are afraid. They should have been rejoicing over what happened, but they couldn't get past the pigs. So it is just easier to ask him to leave.

### **3) He Creates an Encounter with Power (9:1-8)**

In chapter nine, the scene shifts to the city of Capernaum. Verse 2 tells us that some people brought him a paralyzed man who was lying on a bed. However, Mark 2 tells us that Jesus went home and many people gathered to hear him. The friends could not get their friend to Jesus so they opened up a hole in the roof (of Jesus' house!).

When Jesus saw the extraordinary faith of the man's friends he said (v 2), "Take heart, my son: your sins are forgiven." That is an interesting statement for a number of reasons. First, it is interesting because the healing was based on the friend's faith, not his. Secondly, it is interesting because Jesus links this man illness to his sins.

Here's another important side bar: Not all people get sick because of their sin (see John 9:1-5), but this verse indicates that there was some kind of connection. We would do well here to see the balance of the Bible when it comes to the connection of sickness to sin. Three things need to be noted: 1) The ultimate root of all sickness is sin (Isaiah 54:5, Rev 4:4), 2) Some sickness is caused by sin (James 5:3-15), and 3) some sickness is not caused by sin (John 9:1-5). I think that our present Christian culture rarely even considers that sickness could be because of some specific sin. But apparently they were connected here.

Scribes were listening to the teaching of Jesus, and they are not pleased with his granting forgiveness to this man. Jesus sensed this (v 4), and said "Why do you think evil in your hearts?" This is the first recorded conflict with the religious establishment in Matthew, and they probably thought that Jesus talked about forgiveness because he wasn't able to heal him.

Jesus aims to prove that he has divine authority or power. That is why Jesus says (v 5), "Which is easier, to say 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say 'Rise and Walk?'" And with that, he said to the paralytic "Rise, pick up your bed and go home." The young man immediately got up and went home.

Now the response of the crowd is telling. "When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God who had given such authority to men" (9:8). It is interesting to note how other translations render the phrase "they were afraid." NASB – "they were awestruck and glorified God," NIV – "they were filled with awe; and they praised God," NKJV – "they marveled and glorified God," NLT – "Fear swept through the crowd...and they praised God..."

The reason that there are so many different nuances is because we really do not have a word in English that captures the emotions of fear, amazement, and joy. I called it frightening joy – a beautiful and traumatic mix of emotions that you feel when something amazing, unexplainable, and life-changing happens. The same word is used by Matthew to describe how a soldier felt at the crucifixion of Jesus (Matt 27:54).

This kind of fear is different than what the demon-possessed man or the community felt. This is a fear that comes from knowing that something beyond yourself, something "other-worldly", something divine is in your midst. It is the kind of power that Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 14 -

"But if an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" (1 Cor 14:24-25).

This fear is a good fear. It is reverential fear; it is a fearful respect. It is coming to the realization of who Jesus really is, who you are, and what he can do. This is the frightening joy of knowing who Jesus is and thanking God that you see it now.

It is the picture given to us in Revelation 5:

6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, *"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."* 11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" 14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped (Rev 5:6-14).

The reason that heaven is bowing to him is because of the power of who he is.

And that brings me back to the very first question I asked you: "Who is Jesus to you?" He is either your Savior or your judge. He exposes evil; he creates costly consequences, and he creates an encounter with divine power. And the question is this: Do you know him? If you don't, you have reason to be afraid!

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