

## Matthew 8F

- It's finally time we finish Chapter 8, and as we do, we're looking at one of the most fascinating and most misunderstood subjects of the New Testament – demonic possession
  - But before we get there, let's do a brief recap of where we are in Matthew's Gospel
    - Jesus is in the Galilee, teaching and performing various miracles to validate His testimony as the Messiah
    - In Chapters 8 and 9, Matthew presents a series of ten of Jesus' miracles to illustrate Jesus' power and authority
    - He organizes the miracles into three groups that span the full range of Jesus' supernatural power
    - And he separates the three groups with two scenes that illustrate Jesus' authority over all men
  - Currently, we're in the second group of miracles, emphasizing Jesus' unlimited power
    - And tonight, as we reach the end of Chapter 8, we're looking at Jesus' second miracle in the second group
    - This miracle shows us Jesus' power over the intersection of the natural and spiritual realms

**[Matt. 8:28](#)** 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.

**[Matt. 8:29](#)** 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?"

**[Matt. 8:30](#)** Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them.

**[Matt. 8:31](#)** The demons began to entreat Him, saying, "If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine."

**[Matt. 8:32](#)** 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.

**[Matt. 8:33](#)** The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs.

[Matt. 8:34](#) And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region.

- You'll remember last week, during our study, that Jesus and His disciples were on the move by sea
  - They were traveling by boat across the northern tip of the Galilee to a place called Garasa, on the eastern side of the lake
    - The names used in the Gospels for the eastern side of the lake can be a source of confusion to Bible students
    - Sometimes the area is called the land of the Garasenes, and other times, the Gadarenes
  - To clear up that confusion, the entire eastern side of the lake was called the region of Gadara
    - And there was also a town in the region called Gadara
    - If that wasn't confusing enough, there was also a town named Garasa, in the region of Gadara
    - So the names can be used interchangeably, to some degree, to describe the area east of the Sea of Galilee
  - This entire region is a Gentile area of the Galilee
    - It wasn't free of Jews entirely, but Jews typically kept their distance from Gentile settlements
    - So as Gentile settlements spread out in Gadara, they naturally pushed Jews away
    - So that by this time, Gentile settlements dominated three quarters of the Galilee lakefront from Bethsaida to Tiberias
- As Jesus and the disciples land the boat in the region of Gadara, they are met by two men coming out of the tombs
  - Matthew says the bodies of these men were possessed, or occupied, by demonic spirits
    - As a result, they were extremely violent men
    - They routinely attacked any who might pass by their way, Matthew says

- So the locals had learned to steer clear of the tombs and of these men
- Luke and Mark, who also record this miracle, include considerable additional detail beyond what we have here in Matthew
  - Yet both Mark and Luke chose to mention only one of these men
  - So although Matthew abbreviated his account, he kept both men in his telling, probably because he wrote to Jews
  - And Jews would have been more persuaded by an account based on two witnesses
- But as these men come upon Jesus, they cry out, asking Him two peculiar questions
  - By the nature of the questions and of what follows, we can tell that the demonic spirits, not the men themselves, were posing the questions
    - First, they ask Jesus, “What business do we have with one another, Son of God?”
    - In literal Greek, they simply said, “What to us and to you, Jesus, Son of God?”
  - Their questions are one part inquiry, one part shock and surprise
    - First, they are caught off guard to see Jesus in this way
    - So they are questioning why He has come to them
  - Secondly, they are surprised by His timing
    - They ask “Have You come here to torment us before the time?”
    - They assume Jesus’ purpose in arriving in Gadara was to initiate a time of judgment
    - But they seem to think that the proper time for judgment was some time away
  - Before Jesus can answer, the demons point out a herd of swine feeding a distance away and ask a third question
    - They ask Jesus if He intended to send them out, could He send them into those swine?

- Remember, this was the Gentile region of the lake, so herds of pigs were not uncommon
  - So the encounter ends with Jesus agreeing to their request, at which point, Jesus orders the spirits out of the men with the command, "Go!"
    - And as they leave the men, they enter into the pigs as agreed
    - At which point, the demons drive their new hosts to run down the steep hillside of the Galilee and straight into the water
    - And as the pigs enter the water, they drown en mass
    - They commit sue-eee-cide
- Now as we try to make sense of all this, let's take note of each detail in the story
  - And our first point should be obvious: demons are real
    - Demons are the Bible's name for angels that followed after Satan when he fell into sin (you can read about Satan's fall in Ezekiel 28)
    - Revelation says that as Satan (the dragon) rebelled against God, he persuaded a third of the angelic realm to follow him

[Rev. 12:7](#) And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,

[Rev. 12:8](#) and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

[Rev. 12:9](#) And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

- Notice that those who followed after Satan were originally angels
  - But because these angels sinned, they became evil adversaries of God, known forevermore as demons
  - So if you believe the Bible when it says God created angels, then you must also believe there are evil angels called demons
  - And if you believe the Bible when it says angels were created by God to be ministering spirits rendering service to the elect...
  - Then you must also believe that the demons serve Satan by attacking the saints to disrupt God's purpose in our lives

- The Bible (and this scene in particular) also makes plain that demons have the power to take up residence in the body of a human being
  - This principle is present throughout the Gospels, and Jesus' interaction with these spirits is a hallmark of Jesus' earthly ministry
    - And the principle of demons interacting with physical bodies extends all the way back to Genesis
    - We see Satan inhabiting the body of a serpent in the Garden in Genesis 3
    - And we see demons mating with women shortly before the flood in Genesis 6
  - Furthermore, we have an even more dramatic example of spirit in union with human bodies in the New Testament
    - The Spirit of God inhabits the body of every believer
    - So if we can accept that the Spirit of God lives inside us, then we must also accept the reality that demons can inhabit a person
- But Scripture is also clear that these possessions are mutually exclusive
  - As the Spirit of God comes to live in a believer in Jesus Christ, He sets up a permanent residence
    - He will never leave us nor forsake us, Hebrews says
    - And because the Spirit of God is living in us permanently, there is a "no Vacancy" sign on our bodies
    - The in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit makes demon possession impossible
  - Our God is a jealous God, and the Bible says He will not share us with demons

**[2 Cor. 6:14](#)** Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

**[2 Cor. 6:15](#)** Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

**[2 Cor. 6:16](#)** Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

**"I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;**

AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

[2 Cor. 6:17](#) "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord.

"AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN;

And I will welcome you.

[2 Cor. 6:18](#) "And I will be a father to you,  
And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,"  
Says the Lord Almighty.

- Furthermore, John reminds us that the Lord, Who dwells in us, is stronger than the enemy who is in the world
  - So once the Lord has placed His seal on us, His faithfulness and His power ensure that we can never belong to the enemy
  - Simply put, a Christian cannot be possessed by a demon
  - Later, in Chapter 12, Jesus teaches a story of a house swept clean that will prove this point again
- Having said that, we should not underestimate their power to affect us in various ways
  - They might not indwell us, but they can tempt us, torment us and disrupt our plans
    - In those moments, we aren't to stand up to them, foolishly thinking we have power against them
    - They will run all over us
  - The Bible says we are to resist the devil's efforts to tempt us, and if we resist, He will flee

[James 4:7](#) Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will **flee** from you.

- So the real answer to defeating the enemy and his demons, is to submit to the Lord
- When the devil sees a believer's heart is submitted to the Lord's will, he knows he stands no chance for the moment and he flees
- So demons may possess the bodies of unbelievers, and as they do, they have dramatic effects on the person, as this story also illustrates

- They can substitute their own thoughts, actions and even voices for those of their hosts
  - In this case, these demons spoke through the mouths of these men
  - The men didn't speak...the demons did
  - In Mark and Luke, we learn that these demons also drove the men to act in bizarre ways, including going naked in public, attacking people and wandering into the desert
- Furthermore, demons can also greatly magnify a person's abilities beyond what would be possible otherwise
  - As a result of the possession, these men gained supernatural physical strength
  - Mark and Luke report they had the power to break the iron chains that the townspeople used in a futile effort to bind them
  - It's likely that the stories of ancient mythology of superhuman characters may be based on cases of demon possession
- So as demons possess a body, the person may act in bizarre, evil, uncontrollable and powerful ways
  - Demon possession is a tactic the enemy uses as part of his efforts to steal, kill and destroy
    - And obviously, making people act in crazy, violent, seemingly unexplainable ways, furthers that purpose
    - So many of the great tragedies of our day are often the product of people experiencing demon possession
  - Take note how often mass shootings, violence against children, sexual crimes and the like, follow a similar pattern
    - You're not looking at different people committing copy-cat crimes
    - You're looking at the same demons moving from person to person, driving them to commit similar acts
  - In fact, watch news stories surrounding such events carefully, and you'll begin to notice a pattern of how demons work

- And at the same time, take note of how incapable the unbelieving world is in explaining the cause of such things
  - They simply have no answers, because they limit their investigation to the natural...they won't consider supernatural causes
  - They call such behavior mental illness, rather than spiritual illness, because the unbelieving world denies that there is anything beyond the physical
- So just as the Spirit of the Lord enters a believer's body to equip us for godly work, so can demons inhabit unbelievers' bodies to prompt ungodliness
    - But I believe the consequences of demon possession extend beyond producing mayhem
      - Besides granting extreme strength, demons may also grant a person special knowledge and abilities that the normal person would not otherwise possess
      - Demons can bolster human intellect, charm, charisma and talent in ways that encourage a great following
    - It wouldn't surprise me to learn that many of the achievements of the geniuses of history (especially of our current times) were prompted by demonic influence
      - Extraordinary athletes, prescient inventors, transcendent artists or musical savants may owe their success in some cases to powerful spiritual agents that occupy their bodies
      - After all, this is exactly how the enemy will equip the Antichrist to accomplish great things during Tribulation
    - Remember, the enemy works to kill, steal and destroy, and he will use a variety of methods
      - His ultimate purpose is to draw our attention and worship away from God and toward him
      - And he can accomplish that either by instilling terror and fear, or by enticing humanity away with entertainment and spectacle
      - A man or woman who displays rare insight, or can perform mysterious feats or drive great accomplishments will command a great following

- And that following may then be led away from the Lord and His Word
- So the Word of God tells us that the spiritual realm is a real and powerful and important realm...in many ways, more so than our physical world
  - It's the one that controls what we see in the physical realm
    - And the enemy is only too pleased that the world remains ignorant of his role in the events that rock their world
    - But we have the Word, so we don't share in their ignorance
  - Still, I feel it's important to remember C.S. Lewis' words concerning demons:

**There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight. – Screwtape Letters**

- We must recognize that demons are real and they have real power
  - But we must also refrain from the temptation to see devils lurking behind every corner
- Moving on, the next thing we notice from our story is that these demons recognize the power and authority of true deity
  - These demons immediately knew Who Jesus was, and they addressed Him as the Son of God
    - That's interesting when we remember demons rebelled against God and were cast down from Heaven *before* Jesus was incarnate
    - So presumably, they've never seen the man, Jesus, yet they recognize Him immediately anyway
  - Which tells us that demons, like all spirits, can perceive a spiritual dimension that human beings cannot see
    - So even though Jesus and His disciples were just walking by, like countless townspeople had probably done before them

- Nevertheless, the demons perceived Jesus to be something much more than His outward appearance indicated
- And what's more, they also readily acknowledged Jesus' authority over them, despite having already rejected that authority in Heaven
  - This pattern is so different from the way human beings think and act toward God
  - A person who rejects the authority of God lives in defiance of God, committed to never acknowledging Him
  - But they can only do that for a while, and only because they've never encountered God face to face in a spiritual context
- One day, all unbelievers will stand before Jesus in a spiritual form, and in that moment, they will act just like these demons did
  - For the first time, they will obtain the spiritual insight to know Who Jesus truly is, and they will respond with recognition
  - But more than that, they will acknowledge His power and authority to judge them
  - But that acknowledgement will come too late to save them
  - As Paul testifies:

**Phil. 2:9** For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

**Phil. 2:10** so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

**Phil. 2:11** and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- That's what these demons assumed was happening in this moment
  - They assumed Jesus came to act on His promise to judge all unrighteousness
    - They cannot help but confess Jesus as their Judge, despite having set their hearts against His rule
    - Yet they also sense this wasn't the right time for the judgment

- This gives us our next insight...demons possess a general understanding of God's plan
  - But they lack the spiritual insight to appreciate the specifics
  - The devil and his forces can't understand Scripture, because just like unbelievers, they lack the Spirit of God to explain it
  - So though they know that an end is coming, they don't know the exact timing of events, and they can't see things in advance
  - They only know they face judgment for their rebellion, so they fight to stop it
- We see this clearly during Jesus' crucifixion
  - The devil knew that the Son of God was coming to defeat him, but the devil didn't understand how God would accomplish the plan exactly
  - So Satan has tried time and again to stop the plan
  - He prompted Herod to kill the baby Jesus, and later, he drove the Pharisees to conspire against Jesus and Judas to betray Jesus
  - But in doing so, Satan merely played into God's hand by furthering the plan to put Jesus on the cross
- This is why much of Scripture is written in ways that obscure its meaning, using parable and prophecy
  - As Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew 13 concerning His use of parables, believers are appointed to know these things, but the world is not appointed to know
  - Obscuring Scripture in this way prevents the devil, and the unbelieving world in general, from interfering in God's plan
- So we've learned demons are real, they can possess human bodies, giving them great abilities, and they use these pawns in their war against God's plan
  - They possess people to sow seeds of fear, confusion, and hopelessness
    - They also possess people to create great spectacles and awesome power to draw humanity away from following the living God

- They possess spiritual insight enough to know Who their real enemy is, and they know they will be judged by Him
- But they do not know the Bible, so they cannot understand God's plans in detail
- Therefore, they must always remain on the attack, seeking to disrupt God's plans in any way they can
- But now, we still have the end of the story to consider
  - Why do the demons ask to enter the swine and why does Jesus allow it?
  - And why do they kill the pigs in the end?
- Our answers come from what we've already learned in this story
  - First, the demons thought Jesus had come for them, yet they also knew that their ultimate judgment day wasn't supposed to happen just yet
    - They probably understood that there were numerous events foretold in God's plan that were yet to happen
    - So they assumed Jesus had come to send them to the temporary place of holding for demons
  - The Bible tells us that God holds disobedient spirits in confinement in the center of the earth awaiting their judgment day
    - When unbelievers die, their spirits enter a holding place called Hades, which the Bible says is located in the depths of the earth
    - Unbelievers wait in Hades until their final judgment in the future
  - Now demons don't die, but on occasion, God will confine demons to a prison in the center of the earth called the Abyss
    - Demons are confined only until their final judgment too
    - For example, the demons who mated with women before the flood have been confined to the Abyss, according to Peter
    - In Luke's account of this moment, we read this:

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

- Therefore, these demons knew it wasn't time for their final judgment, so they assumed Jesus came to confine them to the Abyss for their bad behavior
  - So they quickly try to negotiate with Jesus, thinking they can work a better deal
    - They suggest He could cast them into swine instead
    - The demons knew that swine were unclean animals to Jews, so they hoped Jesus would view such a fate as equally bad punishment
  - They thought they were putting one over on Jesus, because they knew if He agreed, they could escape from their pig prison easily enough
    - This story teaches us one additional, important detail concerning demons' possession
    - Once a demon decides to set up residence in a person's body, they cannot leave that body by their own volition
  - And throughout the Gospels, we find stories of people possessed by demons seeking a way to set the body free
    - But it's not just the person who is trapped in this condition...the demons themselves are trapped in the body
    - Only the Lord has the power and authority to remove a demon from a body
    - Notice that these demons only leave the two men after Jesus orders them to go
- Apart from God's power to remove demons, the only other way they escape a body after having entered it, is when that body dies
  - We see biblical evidence of that here
    - As soon as the demons enter the swine, they compel the swine to kill themselves
    - By killing their hosts, the demons were freeing themselves to roam again and potentially inhabit another body in the future
    - You may also remember that after Satan entered Judas and compelled him to betray Jesus, Judas took his own life the same day

- Satan had no intention of remaining inside Judas for longer than necessary
- You can also see this pattern working in the world today
  - Notice how often those who perpetrate the most extreme and bizarre crimes in our day, often take their own lives at the end
  - Presumably, a demon has compelled the person to commit the crime
  - And when the killing spree is complete, the demon persuades the person to commit suicide, so the demon is freed
- The demon doesn't want to wait for the person to die in prison after decades
  - He wants to leave the body quickly to roam the earth again and find his next victim
  - And if that person fails to take their own life, the demon will continue to torment them in prison, pressing them to find a way to die
- That was the trick these demons thought they were playing on Jesus...they knew they couldn't escape from the Abyss
  - But they could escape a pig prison easily enough by causing them to die
    - So why did Jesus let them get away with it?
    - Simply put, Jesus didn't care about punishing these demons, at least not at this moment
    - He had come to set these men free
    - His focus was on saving, not judging, and so He didn't care where these demons went
  - Remember, Jesus didn't initiate the conversation about the Abyss or judgment
    - The demons had made bad assumptions and proposed their own solution to a problem that didn't actually exist
    - Yes, one day they will be judged, and Jesus was content to wait for that day

- In the meantime, Jesus just wanted to free the men from their influence, and the pigs would just be collateral damage
- Ironically, because of their ignorance, the demons played into God's hand again
  - They intended to trick Jesus and prolong their rebellion
  - But in reality, they testified to His authority and identity, and they gave opportunity for Jesus to display His power over them
- So what do we do with this knowledge?
  - Well, in short, we live in fear of God, not in fear of the enemy
    - But we live with a respect for the reality and power of the enemy
    - And we obey Scripture when it tells us to submit to God, so that we might resist the devil and he will flee
  - If and when you encounter demon-possessed people in this world, be wary
    - They aren't behind every corner, but they are around
    - Steer clear of them and do not presume you have power over them
    - Only the Lord can free a demon-possessed person
    - So unless the Lord grants you the spiritual power to do so, you are not their equal (read about the sons of Sceva in Acts 19)
- Finally, don't allow the enemy's tactics in bringing death and mayhem in the world prompt fear or despair in your heart
  - Notice in vs.33-34 that as these men reported the outcome, it resulted in fear among the people, so that then they asked Jesus to leave
    - That's the effect the demons wanted
    - It's another irony in this story...that even though the demons weren't able to outsmart Jesus, nevertheless, they did accomplish their mission to a degree
    - By inhabiting these men, and then later the swine, the demons generated fear and that fear drove people away from Jesus

- Remember, He Who is in you is greater than he who is in the world, so do not fear the enemy
  - This world belongs to him for a while, but the world is passing and so is he
  - And you have overcome this world by your faith in Jesus Christ