

# Matthew 8

## Verses 28-34

## Go!

27.08.2006

A story is told of World War 2, from the deserts of Egypt. Some of the German soldiers were patrolling when an Australian soldier stood up on one of the rolling sand hills. The Aussie waved and whistled, and yelled to them that he single-handedly could whip as many of them as would like to come, and then he ducked down behind the hill.

The German officer sent 20 men to kill him... but none came back. So he sent 40 men. After several minutes, one staggered back over the top of the hill, and just before dying, he yelled "It's a trap... there are two of them."

In today's reading from Matthew, some people have felt like the Germans. Both Mark and Luke only mention one demonised person. But in Matthew 8:28-34, we find that there were two. It does not mean that there was a mistake. One reason could be that one was dominant and made such an impression that Mark and Luke only tell of that man in their accounts. Whereas tax-collector Matthew, liking his numbers, remembered two.

But like the Aussie soldiers in the story, no one could over power the two demonised men. The territory near Lake Galilee in the Gadarene area was their turf. No-one could pass through unaccosted.

Some people want to stress a difference between possessed, oppressed and obsessed. However, the Bible only uses two ways of describing a person under the influence of a demon. The first is the word which is most commonly translated as "demon-possessed". The other is to say that a person has a demon.

Each time the Bible uses "oppression", it is oppression by humans, never by demons. If you want, grab a concordance and look up every passage that mentions oppression or the oppressed. You will find that on each occasion it refers to people oppressing others. Therefore when we come to a passage like Luke 4:18, where Jesus says he has come to "give sight to the blind and release the oppressed", the most

natural understanding from the rest of the Bible is that he is NOT referring to demonic oppression. This understanding is also confirmed in the passage Jesus quoted, Isaiah 58:6, where human oppression is on view.

Some modern Christians may be helped by classifying the demonised into possessed, oppressed and obsessed, but the Bible says you either have demons or you do not.

But these two men from the Gadarene territory did have them. And the two came from the tombs to confront Jesus when he came near them.

They shouted "*What have you to do with us, Son of God?*"

They knew exactly who Jesus was. In the verses just before this, the disciples were scared and wondering who Jesus was. The storm had been stilled and they were terrified in the boat asking "*What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*"

The demonised men answered their question. But even they, knowing who he was, were apprehensive. For they asked "*Have you come to torment us before the time?*"

They knew the power he had. Here before them was the judge of the world. Yet he was early. Judgement day was still far off. Yet they recognised his power and authority and shivered in awe and fear.

The two thugs and bullies of that area who patrolled, controlled and cajoled the area were submitting in fear to Jesus.

A large herd of pigs was grazing nearby, so the demons kept asking to be sent into them. Jesus cared for the two men and wanted to free them. The demons chose the pigs. Since Gadara was part of the Decapolis or ten towns near the South East region of Lake Galilee, there were many Gentiles who lived there. Unlike the Jews, they had no qualms with eating pork or bacon.

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So at their request, Jesus told them to go. At that moment, the whole herd began to rush to a steep cliff, and they all went over and died in the water below.

Those tending the pigs ran off to town. They reported what had happened to the pigs and to the demonised men. I often wonder how they would have explained the large herd's death... every single pig down the cliff!

The whole town turned up to see what had happened.

We are not told by Matthew about the reactions of the freed men. We are not told if the people were angry about the dead pigs, or happy about the freed men, which would mean that funerals would be less chaotic.

But we are told that the townspeople pleaded with Jesus to leave their area.

Why? Why reject the only person who could ever control and fix their major problem of the two demonised men?

Was it because the pigs were gone? Was it a purely hip-pocket nerve knee-jerk reaction? Their finances, their meat, their meals had now gone!

Was it because they preferred pigs to Jesus?

Was it because he had fixed that problem and they did not want anything else changed?

Maybe all of the above. But I do not think that is the whole of the matter.

To me, fear is a major aspect, just as it was when the storm was calmed. They feared this man who had power over demons. By a word he could bring peace and calm into the lives of two who made many A.D.D. and A.D.H.D. kids look like pavlovas. He had power to cast out demons into pigs, who had then rush off and die. Fear played a major part in their rejection of Jesus.

The end of Matthew 8 shows us Jesus having power and authority over nature and demons. In our modern Christian settings, we cheer and say

thank you God. However, in the pressure and surprise of the actual day, it brought fear to the disciples and fear to the town.

I do not believe we are ready to see his glory, dominion, majesty and power on full display, without us falling down as if dead. His authority and power was veiled so we only began to see glimpses of it, as Jn would put it in his gospel.

The leper knew the power and said in Matthew 8:2 "*Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.*"

The centurion knew the power and authority and said in Matthew 8:8 "*Just speak the word and my servant will be healed.*"

The crowd knew the power, authority and mercy, so brought their sick to be healed.

The would-be followers did not appreciate his power.

The disciples in the boat saw it. The demons knew it.

And you? Do you know and appreciate the power, the authority, and the mercy of our God? Or would you, like the people in the town, rather tell Jesus to hop in his boat and push off?