

# Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **Matthew 8:28-9:8** **“The Power And Limits Of Jesus’ Authority”**

June 19, 2015  
(6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

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## **“Following Christ From City Center!”**

IVC1,2: MATTHEW 8:28-9:7

"THE POWER AND LIMITS OF JESUS' AUTHORITY"

Authority Over Evil, Over Sin & Disease, No Coercion

1) 8:28-9:1 THE GADARENE DEMONIACS: FREEDOM AND RESISTANCE. Center Of 8:1-9:35

//Mk. 5:1-20 (2x as long, 19 → 7 Lines), Lk. 8:26-39, Ps. 51:9-10

Miracle Form

a) v.28a Arrival Of Jesus At "The Other Side:" Hope. One Of the Most-Difficult Miracle Stories

Focus On Jesus, Most Severe Case Of Demonization In N.T.

28

And when he came to "the other side",

Decapolis, Pagan Polytheistic Territory, JESUS' INITIATIVE

to the country of the Gadarenes,

Gadara 6 mi. From Lake, Some MSS, Confusion Over Name/Location

Healing Sanctuary In Gadara (No Benefit), Mt. Shortens Mk., 2 Stanzas To 1 (20 verse to 7)

b) v.28b-29 1) Two Demoniacs Come To Meet Jesus, 2) Resistance Demonstrated.

Short/Long Versions, Major Editing Of Mark 5. Goal = Single Scroll?

Problem

1 two demoniacs met him, 2: Mt. 9:27-31 (Stylistic), Human Beings Are Vulnerable, Spiritually Permeable coming out of the tombs, Jn. 8:44, 12:31, Unclean, Among The Dead, b. Nid. 17a so fierce that no one could pass that way. //9:27, 20:30, Summary, 2 Witnesses(Dt. 19:15), Hostility/Danger

Turf, Repudiation = "Mind your own business, Jesus!" MEET/RESIST

29

2 And behold, they cried out, (vv.29, 32b, 34a; 9:2, 3), Know Him, Assume Man's Voice, 2 Questions

Q1 "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Who Is This, 8:27, Act 10:38, Spirits Know Him! Resist!

Q2 Have you come here to torment us before the time? Why Now? 2 Ages, 25:41, "Yes!" 12:28

Torture: 1 Enoch 15-16, Jub. 5:6-100, 10:5-9, T. Levi 18:12, b. Pesharim 112b

c) v.30 Swine Feeding (With Herdsmen).

30

Now a herd of many swine was feeding at some distance from them.

Not Jewish Territory

Swine, Lev. 11:7-8, Dt. 14:8

d) v.31 Permission Requested: Cast Out And Enter.

Regional, Jesus Dialogs With Spiritual Rats!

31

1 And the demons begged him, "If you cast us out,

Matthew Limits Possible Magical Associations

Is. 51:9-10, 65:3-5

2 send us away into the herd of swine."

12:28, 43, BEG/BARGAIN

Jewish Joke: Unclean Spirits In Unclean Animals!

d) v.32a Permission Given: Cast Out And Enter.

EXPULSED

Healing

J. Martyr, Dialog 85, Only Ex. Demonic Conversation With Jesus

32

1' And he said to them, "Go."

//8:16, No Incantations, Simple Command, Authority!

2' So they came out and went into the swine;

No Need To Fear Demonic

Deviled Ham! Jesus Overthrows Satan's Reign Brings In God's Rule

c') v.32b-33 Swine Perish, Herdsmen Flee And Tell.

Abyss At End Of Time

Proof

Bad Surprise! Jesus Values People Over Property

and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea,

Goal = Death, PROOF

and perished in the waters.

Perish, He Rules The Waters (8:24-27)

33

The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything,

and what had happened to the demoniacs.

Ps. 107:10-15, NOVELTY/NEWS

And behold (vv.29, 32b, 34a) = Revelation Made Visible

b') v.34 1) All The City Comes Out To Meet Jesus, 2) Resistance Demonstrated.

Jesus Is Dangerous To Their Interests!

34

1 And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus;

Catalyst/Curiosity, Focus On Jesus, Not Demoniac

8:16, 9:32 Do Not Bring Sick/Demonized

2 and when they saw him,

Victory Over Evil, Not People! DEEP RESISTANCE

Response

they begged him to leave their neighborhood.

//v.31a, \$\$ Over People, Who Is Demonized Here?

Acts 16:16-24, "Begged" = Same Language As Demons, Shadow Of Cross

a') 9:1 Return Of Jesus To "His Own City:" Tragedy.

RESPONSE TO REJECTION

1

And getting into a boat

Not Plead, Not Stay Where Not Wanted, No Storm On Return

he crossed over and came to "his own city."

Lk. 10:8-12, Jesus Fulfills Their Request Capernaum, Jesus Crossed Sea Of Galilee For Two Hopeless Men!

No Struggle, Menace, Jesus Has Great Authority

Mt. Focuses On Demonic Reaction And Destruction Before The Time (i.e. Final Arrival Of Kingdom), A Preview

Easier For Jesus To Deal With Demons Than With Resistant People/Cities/Zones/ Social Strongholds

"The tender love of Jesus has but frail defenses against human freedom." (Rene Latourelle)

This Is A Window/Icon/Portal Into A Cosmic Conflict; No Evil Will Endure Forever!

**2) 9:2-8 FORGIVING AND HEALING THE PARALYTIC.**

//Mk. 2:1-12, Lk. 5:17-26

Miracle Form

Mt. Edits/ Abbreviates Mk., Colorful Details Gone

**a) v.2 Man Forgiven: Faith Of Friends Highlighted.**

Visible Need Not Always Primary Need

Problem

// Asclepius Epidaurian Inscriptions 1.16, 2:37-38, Not All Have The Same Problem

2

And behold, they brought to him a paralytic,

Intercession, Spotlight On Jesus, Not Friends/Roof As In Mk.

lying on his bed;

Effect Of Fallenness, All Need Forgiveness; Some Need Healing And/Or Deliverance

Gk. *idon* = Know/See (v.2b, 4)

and when Jesus saw (*idon*/know) their faith

Love Of Friend + Hope In Jesus, Intercession + Action

he said to the paralytic,

8:10, 2 Sam. 12:13, Pronounces God's Will, Link Between Sin/Sickness Here?

"Take heart, my son;

Take Heart = Be Encouraged! (Ex. 14:13, Is. 35:4, 7; Ps. 103:2-3, Is. 6:7, 43:25, 44:22)

your sins are being forgiven."

p.v. = by God, 1:21, 26:28, First Need: Jesus Heals Our Relationship With God!

Bypasses Temple, Not Pray But Declare (vv.2b, 6), Focuses On Jesus' Sovereign Power

**b) vv.3-5 Private Conversation: Charge Of Blasphemy.**

Jesus Did Not Always Precede Healing With Forgiveness, Not Always Linked, James 5:14-16

3

1

And behold,

Torah Scholars, Or So They Thought!

some of the scribes said to themselves,

Supposedly Derogatory To God's Dignity, Use His Name In Vain

"This man is blaspheming."

Taking Divine Prerogative = Acts In God's Place As If He Knows

9:34, 12:24, 26:65, Shadow Of The Cross

**b') vv.4-6 Divine Revelation Of The Thoughts/Heart: Challenge Of Jesus.**

4

1

But Jesus,

Jesus Sees Faith, Sees Secret Evil Thoughts

knowing (*idon*/see) their thoughts, said,

How? Spiritual Gift: Prophetic Word Of Knowledge

"Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

Link! Mt. Adds Evil, Opposed To God, 12:34-35, 15:19

5

2

For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,'  
or to say, 'Rise and walk'?

Grace = Jesus Reasons With His Opponents  
One Invisible, One Visible

6

But that you may know

Dan. 7:13, No Blasphemy

that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,

Told To Do What He Could Not Do, Jn. 5:8, Mt. 12:13, Lk. 17:14

he then said to the paralytic,

'Rise, take up your bed and go home.'

3 Commands, Visible Establishes Invisible

Forgiveness Precedes Healing, Follows It (Lk. 17:19, Jn. 5:14)

Healing

**a') vv.7-8 Man Healed: Response Of Crowds Highlighted.**

Jesus Has Authority At Multiple Levels

Proof

7

And he rose and went home.

The Greater/Visible (Healing) Establishes Lesser/Invisible (Forgiveness)

Not Told How Scribes Responded

8

When the crowds saw it,  
they were afraid,

Different Reaction Than Previous Story

Response

and they glorified God,

Right Response To Jesus = Give God Glory, Positive Response Of Crowds

who had given such authority to men (*anthropois*, humans).

Dan. 7:13, Jesus Has Authority, 16:19, 18:18, Jn. 20:23

To Community, Healing Is Holistic, Comprehensive: Soul/Body

Circles Of Authority: Jesus Has Dominion Over Sea, Demons, Sin, Illness, False Religious Leaders

**The U.M. Confession of Faith, Article XI: "Sanctification and Christian Perfection"**

We believe sanctification is the work of God's grace **through the Word and the Spirit**, by which those who have been **born again** are cleansed from sin in their thoughts, words and acts, and are enabled to live in accordance with God's will, and to strive for holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Entire sanctification is a state of perfect love, righteousness and true holiness which every regenerate believer may obtain by being delivered from the power of sin, by loving God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and by loving one's neighbor as one's self. Through faith in Jesus Christ this gracious gift may be received in this life both gradually and instantaneously, and should be sought earnestly by every child of God.

We believe this experience does not deliver us from the infirmities, ignorance, and mistakes common to man, nor from the possibilities of further sin. The Christian must continue on guard against spiritual pride and seek to gain victory over every temptation to sin. He must respond wholly to the will of God so that sin will lose its power over him; and **the world, the flesh, and the devil** are put under his feet. Thus he rules over these enemies with watchfulness through the power of the **Holy Spirit**" (*U.M. Book of Discipline 2012: 73*).

**A Brief Treatment Of Matthew 8:28-9:8**

These two paragraphs (IIIC. 8:28-9:1, IIIC' 9:2-8) are the double center of the larger essay on miracles and discipleship (8:1-9:35) which focuses on Jesus' authority as God's Son and empowered agent (e.g. over leprosy, over paralysis at a distance, over fever, over all diseases and demons, over a sea storm, over demons outside Israel, over paralysis up close). In him God's love is on the move behind enemy lines to set things right again! The section has two parts: the liberation of two demoniacs (//Mk. 5:1-20) and the forgiving/healing of a lame man (//Mk. 2:1-12) which— because Matthew's doubles the demoniacs— gives us three healings to match the three of 8:1-17 and the three discipleship lessons of 8:18-27. As before, illness and disability are distinguished from demonization (e.g. 8:16-17). There is no use of material common with Luke (Q). The relative order of the Markan stories is reversed, demonstrating both our author's creativity and faithfulness to tradition. Episodes are selected and reordered under the heading *Jesus' Amazing Authority*. There is not— as in modern biographies— a strict chronology; *what it means* is more important than precisely *when it happened*. Matthew abbreviates his source and omits much detail to keep the spotlight on Jesus and not ancillary characters. This controls length and keeps his biography to one scroll. He makes liberal use of his characteristic linking phrase *And behold* (8:29, 32b, 34; 9:2, 3).

Mark's liberation of the demoniac is a complex story in two stanzas. In 5:1-13 Jesus frees the demoniac; in vv.14-20 he deals with the citizen's negative response. Matthew brings the two stanzas into one 8:2 concentric pattern (a-b-c-d//d'-c'-b'-a'), largely by omitting four blocks of Markan detail (5:2b-6, 8-10, 15b-17a, 18-20) and creating an inclusion between Jesus' crossing *to the other side* (a. v.28) and the return to *his own city* (a' 9:1). Several other points of Matthew's work are distinctive, the first being his doubling the demoniacs from one to two (repeated with the blind in 9:27-31). Since he omits Mark's story of the man being left behind as witness (5:18-20), and since two witnesses were required for validity (Dt. 19:15), the men's story may be trusted because there are now two. There is a brief dialog with the demons (d//d'), but no adjuration by them or the revealing of their name as *Legion* after interrogation as in Mark. In answer to Matthew's second question, "Have you come to torment us before the time?" the implied answer is *Yes*, and they are dismissed with a simple *Go*, not an extended struggle as in Mark. Jesus *the-demon-duster* is a preview of coming attractions; in him we see the fate of all powers now in opposition to God's kingdom. The Evil One and his minions will be banished, along with all that is unclean. The spotlight is on Jesus. The presence of the swine (v.30) and their end (vv.32b-33) are told in parallel (c//c'), as are the *approach* of the demoniac (b. v.28b) and the *approach* of all the city (b' v.34). The use of *begging* by both demons (v.31a) and residents (v.34b) raises a question, Who is more infested? Meeting wide resistance, Jesus departs without a word (9:1). Demons are easier than unbelief! What do you do when people prefer profits to a prophet, pigs over people? Can larger structures (e.g. businesses, villages, areas, religions, governments) be demonized as well? Yes. Note how Matthew's *And behold* marks turning points: speech of the demons (v.29a), perishing of the swine (v.32b), arrival of residents (v.34a).

Our second story is linked the first by the titles *Son of man* (9:6) // *Son of God* (8:29b), by the repeated phrase *And behold* (vv.2a, 3a), by the contrasting negative (8:34) and positive (9:7-8) responses of the crowds. As before, blocks of Markan description are excised (2:1b-2, 3b-4) and much else abbreviated. The result is a 4:2 concentric pattern (a-b//b'-a') with the inclusion of the man *lying on his bed* (v.2a) and at the end he *rose and went home* (v.7). That Jesus operates in the Spirit's gifts is indicated in that he *sees faith* (v.2b), *knows* whom God forgives (v.2b), *reads* the scribes' evil thoughts (v.4a), and *issues* effective prayers of command for healing which demonstrate his authority as Son of man (v.6b). That he reasons with his opponents and puts a dare before them (9:4-6) is also a demonstration of his love.

## THE POWER AND LIMITS OF JESUS' AUTHORITY

*“Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.”*

Jesus used both the power of encouragement and the authority to forgive.

### M A T T H E W 9 : 2 b

**W**ho among us has not heard the proverb *Confession is good for the soul?* Souls that do not make regular confession get sick from the accumulated toxins of sin. What dialysis does for blood, confession does for the believer. This is an insight of Catholic theology we Protestants have ignored to our harm for about five hundred years now. Much of what is accomplished in professional counseling used to be taken care of in the normal spiritual hygiene of confession and pastoral care.<sup>1</sup> It may be time for us to revisit the idea of confession, repentance, absolution, and penance, which are a four-fold repeatable path to life.<sup>2</sup>

By that sequence of four words we mean, first of all, calling sin what God calls it in the presence of another trustworthy Christian, laity or clergy. An affair is adultery; fudging the truth is lying; tardiness at work is theft; occult involvement is idolatry; fooling around is fornication; drinking and driving is attempted murder; greed is coveting; you get the idea, a real dose of honesty. And until you call it what the Bible calls it, you get to keep it! To name it and feel the sting of conscience is a necessary start in confession. This takes humility and is often driven by pain. To make an honest confession is already a sign the Holy Spirit is deeply involved and offering healing grace. The piercing of conscience with the awareness of sin is not so much judgment as an invitation to mercy.

Second in the sequence after confession is repentance, which engages the will

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<sup>1</sup> For a critique of the church giving away and vending out its particular gifts, see David E. Fitch, *The Great Giveaway* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), particularly Chapter 7, “Spiritual Formation,” 181-200.

<sup>2</sup> F. L. Schults, S.J. Sandage, *The Faces Of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003); also Martin L. Smith, *Reconciliation: Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church* (Cowley, 1985).

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as aided by God in turning away from the wrongs I have done. I regret the damage my sin has caused to my relationship with God, with myself, with others. If not, the process stops. In repentance we soften and become teachable again. We do an about-face and begin to march in the other direction and ask to be weaned away from the tug of the sinful powers in which we've become entangled. There's no forgiveness without repentance, and those who desire only relief from the consequences of sin without a change of heart and behavior will continue to suffer.

Third in the process is receiving God's forgiveness, another name for which is *absolution*. The one who hears your confession says to you, "In Jesus' name, you are forgiven." I cannot say those words without trembling. Chains of shame are broken and the burden of guilt removed, though not necessarily all the consequences, which may take time to work through depending on the nature of the sin involved. Minor sin, minor consequences; major sin, major consequences. As Charles Wesley taught the early Methodists to sing: "He breaks the power of cancelled sin; he sets the prisoner free; his blood can make the foulest clean; his blood availed for me."<sup>3</sup> It's amazing to watch what happens to those who welcome Christ's gift of forgiveness; there is release, peace, gratitude, hope, a new sense of freedom in God's love. Forgiveness dissolves the super glue that keeps us attached to our sins. Forgiveness is an invitation to new life because it heals our relationship with God and offers a fresh start. And now that I am again free, how shall I live?

Finally comes *penance*, which means taking up a wise plan to be strengthened in character for the ongoing battle with deception and temptation and frailty. How will I be strengthened in goodness and in joy? What will I do to avoid this stumble in the future? What virtue must grow to replace this vice in the garden of my soul? Penance is misunderstood if seen as pain I inflict on myself to pay for my sin. Not at all. Christ is the final scapegoat, not you, and you can add nothing to what he has done, as in the old language of our communion service, his is the *full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world*, and to that we add nothing.<sup>4</sup>

Penance is a healing discipline that draws on the grace of God to strengthen the

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<sup>3</sup> *The United Methodist Hymnal*, No. 57, Stanza No. 4.

<sup>4</sup> John Wesley, Sermon No. 5, "Justification By Faith," [www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-5-Justification-by-Faith](http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-5-Justification-by-Faith). The phrase is originally from the Church of England (and later Methodist) Communion liturgy.

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soul in new habits. Penance is taking up a spiritual exercise program of new disciplines, the first of which is faithful attendance at worship and receiving communion. Penance is to the injuries of sin what physical rehabilitation is after cancer surgery. If the sin is gluttony or alcoholism or lust or some other bodily sin, then confession means naming it: I am a glutton; I am a drunk; I am immoral. Penance for gluttony is going to Weight Watchers and taking up fasting. Penance for immorality is ridding my life of porn and relearning respect for myself and others. Penance for addiction is going to AA and learning the wisdom of day-to-day recovery with others along the twelve steps. The mentally lazy must read Scripture, the greedy must take up tithing, and the liar must learn to tell the truth. The lazy must work and the gossip guard their tongue and the reputations of those not in their presence. Get the picture? Penance requires ongoing coaching and support for all of us. It never stops because we all remain in a corrupting environment of sin and evil until we die and are finally out of their reach. Four classic steps to freedom: can you remember them? *Confession*: we stop making excuses and call sin what God and Scripture call it, and that takes honesty. *Repentance*: in hope we turn around and walk in a new direction. *Absolution*: we humbly receive the gift of forgiveness which cleanses the slate with God for a fresh beginning. *Penance*: we take up the means of grace that strengthen our dependence on God's mercy. It's a lifestyle, not just an event.

Several years ago a remarkable thing happened on 44<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. Two performers, Laura Barnett and Sandra Spannan, created an exhibit that allowed passers-by to alleviate guilt. The two women— dressed as 19th century washerwomen— sat in a storefront, one of them underlining the words on the glass: "Air your dirty laundry. 100 percent confidential. Anonymous. Free," the other painting. Onlookers were invited to write their deepest secrets on pieces of paper. When they left, the women collected the confessions and painted them in the window for all to see.

- "The hermit crab was still alive when I threw it down the trash shoot."
- "I want to see SUVs explode. Those people are so selfish."
- "My girlfriend and I think Osama Bin Laden has a sweet-looking face."
- "I make fun of this one friend behind her back all the time...."
- "I haven't yet visited my dead parents' grave."
- "I am dating a married man and getting financial compensation in exchange for the guilt. I'm 25; he's a millionaire. It pays to be young."

Barnett told the *Times* they were often overwhelmed by the weight of others' sins:

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"We go there; the window is empty; we're wearing all white. At the end, the window is full, and we're covered with paint. It's exhausting. Some of those things are really, really sad. Afterwards, I need to take a bath."<sup>5</sup>

Without understanding the full process of confession, repentance, forgiveness and penance, Barnett and Spannan were fumbling their way towards a neglected ministry of the church. They are right in getting it onto the streets; they are wrong in thinking confession is enough. And Yes, the uncleanness and moral defilement they experience afterwards is real, and also positively spiritually dangerous because a shower cannot remove it. It needs to be flushed. I have learned to pray for myself and release persons back to God after dealing with them. He can carry them; I cannot, and I do not wish to be polluted by anything revealed in my presence. When I begin to feel heavy and burdened, it's a sign I'm carrying what's not mine. Just as I wash my hands with alcohol when leaving a hospital room, I do the same spiritually after hearing confession. I'm not called to be a garbage dump. I have enough in my own life; I don't need to carry yours. That's Jesus' job.

Some say our whole Christian perspective on sin and evil is negative, but I think it's the embodiment of hopeful realism about who we are and where we live, which is on a battlefield that used to be a peaceful garden. Our human condition is desperate. Our problems are deep at the core of every life. We need saving, not improving. Good advice is insufficient; we need rescue. Everything we create bears the seeds of its own destruction, our children and our institutions. Nothing and no one are untouched. There are no easy answers, no quick fixes. Positive thinking will not carry you through, even if it provides a short burst of attitudinal adrenaline. We are made in God's image, and that image has been blurred and defaced, bent and twisted. The problems we have, which we inherited in original sin and added to in personal sin, is complex. It's as gnarled as all history and as layered as the sediments of the earth. The problem is *up there* in the invisible cosmic evil of the devil and his angels, *out there* in a fallen world and corrupted culture that is our environment, and *in here*, meaning in my own sinful heart and rebellious tendency to ignore God.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Shattuck, "Artists Display Confessions of Passers-By on a 44th Street Storefront," *The New York Times* (May 6, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> My reading of the first U.M. baptismal vow, "Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness (up there!), reject the evil powers of this world (out there!), and repent of your sin (in here!)" (*The UM Hymnal*, 34).

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Goodness still shines through, and beauty is all around, but it is never alone. God preserves the deep structures of creation and limits the effects of sin and evil, but the teeming surface of life is a constant battle with real casualties, as in Charleston and Chattanooga and a thousand unnamed and unnoticed places.

It is only in the light of such realism that what God offers us in Christ makes sense. Against the darkness his light shines the more brightly. As John said, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”<sup>7</sup> It took a sinless life and a cruel cross and surprising resurrection to open a new way, not just by anyone but by God the Son in the flesh. The lengths to which God was required to go demonstrates how serious was the problem to be solved. Everything is connected, everything fallen, everything corrupted. Not as bad as it might be, but enough that it does not work as it ought. This is why God showed up in Jesus. To offer hope and fix what’s wrong at every level, from the cosmic down to the personal. It’s why we call him Lord and God and Friend and Deliverer and Healer and Forgiver and Teacher and Judge and Son and Savior. There is nothing in our lives that cannot be changed and finally healed by more of Jesus Christ. Christians are boring, repetitive people. Whatever the issue, whatever the problem, the answer is the same: Jesus Christ and some part of him we’ve not yet grasped. And if you think that’s a shallow answer, you don’t know much about the depth of who he is; in him is all the wisdom of God. Being mastered by him as a living presence means that over time you become a deeper person, open to God in any situation. Knowing him, the Father who sent him and the Spirit who accompanied him is the purpose of life; it’s eternal life now.<sup>8</sup>

It is instructive that the Lord’s Prayer makes a distinction between sin and evil by putting them in different petitions. We are to give and receive forgiveness; we are then invited to pray for protection from temptation and evil, or— more accurately— from *the Evil One*. *Forgive our sins, as we forgive; lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from the Evil One*. Why did Jesus make this distinction in the prayer and in the rest of his ministry where sins were forgiven, temptations resisted, and the demonic faced down and expelled? Because, again, the problem has more than one dimension. We are our own worst enemy, and we have one who’s always egging us on. There is more to this world than us and God and physical stuff. There is an angelic mediating dimension around us that is not all friendly. Sin is the pain we

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<sup>7</sup> John 1:5.

<sup>8</sup> John 17:3.

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inflict on ourselves and one another, but evil is a degree beyond. If sin is the flu, evil is cancer. Sin you do mainly on your own; evil takes diabolical inspiration. Sin debilitates; evil degrades. Sins are wiped away so that persons are restored; evil, however, is alien and must be expelled. Sin is a spiritual disease; evil is a spiritual intruder. Sin is wear and tear in a fallen world; evil is deliberate vandalism. Sin is an open wound, evil an invading and infecting organism. None of these analogies are sufficient, but perhaps together they point us in the right direction. One of my favorites word picture is borrowed from Dr. Charles Kraft: sin is accumulated moral garbage that stinks up a life; evil is the rats that feed on the garbage. Get rid of the garbage, then it's easy to fumigate the house. In his book *Wounds That Heal*, Dr. Stephen Seamands— a professor of Methodist doctrine— builds on this analogy:

“As significant as demonic influence may be, it is never the primary issue.... It may be a destructive consequence or fruit, but is not the root.... demons are like rats attracted to garbage. The problem is the garbage, consisting of things like our persistent sinful behaviors, our reactions to our emotional wounds, and sinful generational influences and patterns. These are the issues for which we are responsible. When we deal with them, when we get rid of the garbage, the rats won't have anything to feed on, and it's easy to make them go away.”<sup>9</sup>

### TURNING TO THE TEXT

#### 8:28-9:1 The Gadarene Demoniac.

In the traditions about Jesus found in the first three gospels, the deliverance of the man of Gadara is always preceded by the stormy crossing of the Sea of Galilee. The stories always traveled together. That is because the church understood the storm not as a natural occurrence but as supernatural resistance. Someone did not want Jesus to cross over and plant the banner of the kingdom of God on Gentile turf. The storm was suppressive fire to block an amphibious landing; Jesus discerned the cause behind it because he operated by the revelation of the Spirit. He *saw* what others did not and *heard* what others did not. What appears to us as merely natural is not always so. At a minimum we ought to be asking, “What’s behind this resistance?” It is

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Seamands, *Wounds That Heal: Bringing Our Hurts to the Cross*, (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2004), 93.

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interesting in certain counseling or conflict situations to pray silently, “If this is the devil, stop it in Jesus’ name,” then to watch what happens.<sup>10</sup> If it’s him, you notice a change of atmosphere, as if a fog vaporized; and if it’s not, you just have to wade through it with whatever God provides at the moment.

Upon Jesus and his crew landing on *the other side*, he is immediately met by two demoniacs.<sup>11</sup> Here is the front line of the clashing of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.<sup>12</sup> This is pagan turf where false gods are worshiped; these men live among the dead; they are violent and dangerous, and in the holy presence of Jesus other voices assume their vocal cords and resist intrusion onto their turf. This is the most severe case Jesus faced, and we are not to think all demonization is this extreme. There is a scale from minor to major, all the way from temptation— which we all experience— all the way down towards external oppression and inward invasion which lie at the more extreme end of the scale. Where do you think some of those awful ideas and unwelcome impulses come from? From the enemy, through his underlings, testing your availability and probing your defenses. Learn to differentiate between issues of personal sin and the allurements of evil. They have a different feel.

This story also raises the issue of the territoriality of evil. It may be that certain powers are only free to operate in certain places because they have legal rights there. In one home there is freedom and light; just next door there is oppression because of occult practices and unbelief. You can often feel the difference when you cross from one piece of spiritual geography to another. You get the creeps and feel heavy spiritual oppression. It’s a common experience, and now you have an explanation for it. I’m convinced there is not only a topography of geography but a topography of good and evil, with some places being positively infested because of habitual sin being practiced there, of which idolatry is the chief culprit. Wherever any power

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<sup>10</sup> A strategy learned from Dr. Charles Kraft.

<sup>11</sup> I am aware of the one demoniac in Mark and two in Matthew. The best explanation is that since Matthew omitted Mark 5:18-20 he added a second witness to fulfill the requirement of Duet. 19:15 concerning two witnesses, as in 9:27 and 20:30.

<sup>12</sup> For a scholarly symposium, see William Kay, Robin Parry, *Exorcism & Deliverance: Multi-Disciplinary Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); for a summary from a missionary scholar and theologian, see Charles H. Kraft, *The Evangelical’s Guide To Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2015).

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other than the one God is given allegiance and attention, there evil prospers and has the right to do so. This is why you want nothing that is attractive to evil in your home. And if you've never prayed to dedicate your home to Christ, including the land on which it's built, do it today. You own it; you have temporary legal and spiritual authority. Just as toxic chemicals remain in the soil and poison the water, so sin and evil have residual effects on those who come along later. You don't know what happened on your land. What we do know is that for hundreds of years the evil of slavery dominated this area, and we as a culture are still dealing with its after-effects. Pray over your home and land, especially if there's been a history of disease, accidents, or spiritual phenomena, including reports of ghosts. Christian homes should be filled with light and holiness, not darkness. You have authority; use it!

There is a fascinating story from the early church. The third century church father Tertullian had occasion to pray with a Christian woman who was spiritually afflicted. She was free before; she was now compromised. What happened?

“He tells of a Christian woman who went to the theatre (like the coliseum at Rome) where people slaughtered and maimed one another as entertainment and came back demonized.” Here is Tertullian's account, “In the casting out, the unclean creature was upbraided with having dared to attack a believer; he firmly replied, ‘And in truth I did it most righteously for I found her *in my domain*.’”<sup>13</sup>

I don't think believers should go to places that celebrate sin and evil. I don't think Christians, unless specifically directed by God, should visit pagan temples and shrines or bring home mementoes that may have been dedicated to other gods. I don't think you should join fraternal or sorority groups that are fuzzy on Jesus Christ and engage in all sorts of rituals and mumbo-jumbo. I know that Christians should never dabble in the occult. You may come home with a visitor, and if your appetite for God has grown dull and tasteless, this may be one of the reasons. As the unholy spirit said to Tertullian, *I found her in my domain*. Don't go where sin and evil are practiced. Keep that stuff out of your home and away from children! Practice spiritual public health; don't pollute your church! Don't lacerate the body of Christ and open us to spiritual infections. Don't make my work any harder than it already is.

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<sup>13</sup> *De spectaculis*, 26, as found in A. Scott Moreau, et.al. editors, *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 2002), 71.

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These two men were severely infested, and the details of how and why are not given. This is the most severe case in all Scripture, far beyond mental illness. The created integrity of their souls had been pierced with alien personalities to the extent that in the presence of Jesus their personalities submerged and other voices emerged and shouted, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God?” This is spiritual communication; they knew who he was without being told. Then this question, “Have you come *here* (meaning *our side of the lake*) to torment us *before the time*?” They know the judgment that’s ahead and want to avoid it as long as possible. His holy presence is their torment, and if God were to turn up the rheostat of his presence in our midst today, all of us would feel the holy weight of it and some would become very uncomfortable. Sin would be exposed as well as any unholy spiritual attachments. The answer of Jesus is “Yes, I have come to torment you before the end as a preview of what’s ahead for all the world when the kingdom comes. You guys are finished, so get out!” Jesus crossed the tracks and faced a storm to free these men. No one is beyond the reach of his love and help, and when we obey the Lord and follow him against our inclinations, there’s no telling what you will find upon arrival.

What happens with the swine is the cause of great discussion. Since I find the Scriptures trustworthy and have weighed the arguments about what a travesty this is and found them wanting, to me it demonstrates three insights: first, that demons look for a body through which to have influence; secondly, that the principle of territoriality applies; and thirdly, that it was a display of what enormous evil can indwell a human being, as if the men said afterwards, “All that was in us?” All creation is subject to spiritual manipulation, and so far we have three examples: the wind and the waves as an attack, two men as cases of severe demonization, and now a large herd. In John’s Gospel Jesus labels Satan *the prince of this world*,<sup>14</sup> and in the temptations in the wilderness Jesus does not dispute his claim. That we do not take the Devil with the same seriousness as Jesus says much about our skepticism and nothing about him. But there is one more level of resistance to be uncovered, and that is larger social structures. The herdsmen flee and tell all so that the entire city comes out to meet Jesus. What an opportunity! But here we meet a troubling, sobering scene, verse 34: “And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged Jesus to depart from their neighborhood. And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.” He did not beg; he left without a word. Could it be that some of us, or some of our towns, have done the same?

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<sup>14</sup> John 12:31.

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Two men came near and were delivered; the city came near and was confirmed in resistance. The spirits in the men *begged* Jesus to leave them alone; the spirits in the crowd *begged* Jesus to leave their land. What do you do with people who care more for pigs than people? Such is the nature of spiritual resistance across multiple generations and within resistant cultural structures. Jesus has power over spirits, but not over the free wills of people who guard their false religious traditions and resist God’s kingdom when it comes near in Jesus. Grace is magnetic; it is not irresistible. All of which leaves me with a question: Who was the more demonized here? The two men who were freed with relative ease, or a city that collectively resisted?

Is it possible whole cities can be under a dark cloud because of historical sin never repented of? Las Vegas is ruled by spirits of gambling and the goddesses of luck and chance, San Francisco by perversity of all varieties, New Orleans by the occult and witchcraft, New York by greed, Washington by power, Charleston and Richmond by southern cultural pride, and what is it that reigns invisibly over Greenwood or Cheraw that blocks a widespread awakening? Why is it so hard to make gospel progress in this place? If the Lord was to draw near to us as a city, what would our response be to him confronting and breaking the principalities and powers that rule over us? “Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry; while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by.” We sing it; do we mean it? There are reasons awakenings come to some places and bypass others. The waters of grace flow to humble places and around resistances. Prayer and repentance prepare the way and invite the Lord to move, but in themselves guarantee nothing. Evil is pervasive: it may use nature, colonize people, corrupt economies, and shape a resistant culture when given grounds. What one generation allows to be installed, the next inherits without necessarily repeating the sins of the ancestors. Evil is a cosmic and personal and social and structural squatter. It loves to hide and avoid detection so its work goes unrecognized. It is only in Jesus the light that the depth of darkness is revealed. He shows us what’s *up there* in the heavenlies and *out there* in the culture and *in here* in our hearts. Things are worse than we thought, and God loves us more than we can imagine, enough for Jesus to cross over to *the other side*.

**9:1-8 Forgiving And Healing The Paralytic.**

Notice the similarity between our two stories of spiritual power in Jesus, the first a deliverance from evil spirits, the second a multi-level healing of sin and disability. In the foreground we see afflicted people: two demoniacs and the paralyzed man. But in the background we see larger forces of resistance, pagans who beg Jesus to leave

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and Jewish scribes who accuse him of assuming the privileges of God. Jesus has no trouble with the identified patients, but great trouble with those who guard the religious and cultural structures on both sides of the lake. So if the deeper question in the first story is, Who is more demonized, the two men or the whole town? the question in the second is, Who is more paralyzed and trapped in sin, the paralyzed man or the Jewish scholars who label Jesus an enemy of Judaism, one worthy of death? The irony being that Jesus is deity and knows whom the Father forgives.

Often, when Matthew introduces something new, he signals us with the phrase *And behold*, “And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed.” Something’s about to happen! *And behold!* The man has friends who have faith enough to get him close to One they’ve heard about; they intercede for him. By their loving actions, and also by revelation of the Spirit, Jesus *sees* their faith, *hears* from above and knows the man’s first need is forgiveness and announces it with an extra dose of encouragement, “Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.” Courage to displaced fear, “Take heart.” A family relationship to displace alienation, “my son.” And forgiveness to replace guilt, “your sins are forgiven *by my Father.*” Three distinct items in one personalized announcement. Amazing in concise power!

We make the mistake of thinking only able-bodied and able-minded people need forgiveness. Our compassion gets in the way of the truth, which is that all people need to have their relationship with God healed, and that includes the disabled. Down’s Syndrome and those with Autism need forgiveness, as do the profoundly handicapped and retarded. They may not sin in the same ways you do, but they also sin. People need encouragement; people need to be claimed as God’s kids; people need forgiveness. Jesus gave all three. He knew the mind of the Father on the matter and had the authority to announce it publicly, which he did. The Father willed it, the Spirit communicated it, Jesus enacted it. One God, three persons, harmony in Trinitarian action and perfect love. The man knew what Jesus was talking about, even if no one else did. And when his friends asked, “What was Jesus talking about?” he smiled, “I don’t know. He has forgotten it, and so have I!”

That Matthew opens verse 3 with a second *And behold* signals something of divine revelation is occurring. It’s an insight into the scribes who in secret conversation accuse Jesus of blasphemy, “*And behold*, some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This man is blaspheming,’” which is true only if Jesus is not who the church claims him to be. Does Jesus know the mind of God? We say Yes; they said No. Verse 4 is a window into Jesus’ normal mode of operations. We are told *that* he

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knew their thoughts were evil, but not *how*. Matthew says, “But Jesus, knowing (and the Greek word can also mean *seeing*) their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” Did he see or hear their thoughts? We don’t know, but this is nothing other than the revelation of the Spirit, what Scripture calls a *word of knowledge*, revealing what cannot be known by observation. Jesus was not a psychic mind-reader but a Holy Spirit listener. As Son, he operates as a sinless human being inside the counsel of the Holy Trinity. What he needs to know is revealed in the moment. Jesus heard with clarity; we catch a word or two through the confusion and static of our sin. It is a gift of the Spirit and means God is up to something, so pay attention. That God keeps most of our secrets is a great mercy. Can you imagine the burden of knowing everything about everyone you walked past? It would drive you crazy.

The same Spirit that revealed the scribes’ private discussion also gave Jesus a strategy to deal with them in the form of a public dare. Forgiving sins is easier because invisible; healing is harder because it requires visible proof. If Jesus has God’s authority to heal, then perhaps he has authority to forgive sins as well, so the logic goes from the greater to the lesser. After laying out the dare- which is a form of reasoning with his stubborn opponents- Jesus said to the paralytic, “Rise, take up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home. Case closed. What is tragic is that we hear no mention of the scribes in verse 8, “When *the crowds* saw it, they were afraid and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.” Who is truly paralyzed in sin here? The scribes, who even if they were not as controlled by evil as the demoniac, were at least open to the devil’s inward suggestions that Jesus is an enemy of God. There’s more than one way to do business with darkness. Some he humiliates; others he places in high church office with advanced degrees.

### CONCLUSION

Jesus has power, but there are limits to his present effective authority, as demonstrated here. A Gentile town and a band of Jewish scholars set up resistance, and he does not bully them. Demons are stirred in his presence and flee at his command; sins are removed and paralyzed limbs called from death to life. But this is easy compared to social and territorial and civic and religious resistance. Jesus will not command allegiance, at least not yet. Human freedom is a factor, and he will not force trust. Your decision for him and lifelong participation with him really matter. He will not do for you what he desires to do through you and with your consent. Just how much of Jesus do you want for yourself, your family, your church, for our town? A Yes at any level promises a major disruption. I’m sorry, it’s just the way it is.

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