

Sermon – 10/07/2011 am

Reactions to Demoniacs Deliverance

Study Text: Luke 8:34-39

In the city of Philippi there was a slave girl possessed of a spirit by which she could tell the future. Her owners exploited her for these supernatural powers. One day she came up to the apostle Paul and his partners crying out '*these men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim the way of salvation*' (Acts 16:17). In the name of Jesus the apostle cast the evil spirit out of this poor girl. He set her free from this bondage. She was given back her mind and her life.

Paul got no thanks for saving this girl. Realising their loss of business opportunity, her owners grabbed Paul and dragged him before the magistrate. He was stripped and beaten and thrown in prison. He was called a trouble maker for doing this good deed. Paul must have reflected on the response that Jesus got when he cast the demons out of the man in the Decapolis.

1. Report

'What do you want with me Jesus, Son of the Most High' screamed the demon possessed man that Jesus met on the eastern shore of Lake Galilee. The people of this town were terrorised by this naked and violent man. He ended up living in the graveyard. Jesus ordered the evil spirits out of the man. After begging not to be sent to the abyss he allowed them to go into pigs that were grazing on the hill nearby. The people watched as all the pigs raced down the hill and drowned in the lake. Those tending the pigs were gripped with fear and raced off to town to tell everyone what had happened.

What are we to make of these things? Jesus allowed the demons to move from the man into the pigs. Demons have one aim and that is to destroy. They aimed to destroy the life of this poor man; they were torturing him before finally killing him. The man often cut himself with stones (Mark 5:5). Would it soon be a knife? The destructive work of demons is clearly seen in what happened to the pigs.

What also was clearly seen was that the demons had left the man. Demons are spirits. They are not seen by human eyes – but their work is. The demon possessed man saw with his own eyes evidence of the evil spirits leaving him and going into the pigs. If he ever doubted that these demons had left he would have recalled what he saw on that day. It is not unlike us recalling our baptism or communion. These are visible signs of our deliverance from the rule of Satan in our life.

Some people accuse Jesus of destroying all these pigs. Some say that they were being kept by Jews who should not have been keeping pigs anyway. Some would accuse Jesus of economic vandalism; others of gross cruelty to animals. Let us be clear about two things. Firstly, it was the demons that destroyed these pigs. Jesus **allowed** them to go into the pigs. Yet he did so knowing what they would do. As sovereign Lord he was ultimately ruling over what happened. Notice that he tells the man to go and tell everyone what God had done for him (8:39).

Secondly, the life of this man meant much more to Jesus than the life of the pigs. Those who believe that we are descended from the apes object to this idea. They place the same value on the life of a person made in the image of God, as on the life of an animal – in some cases less value. Idol worshippers in India will take their cow to the doctor but not their wife because the cow had greater economic value.

Not so different is the contrast being seen in our society between concern for animal cruelty and concern, or lack thereof, for the abhorrent killing of human babies in the womb. As people turn away from God concern for human life decreases, while that for animal life increases.

2. Rejection

The report of those tending the pigs gripped the imaginations of the people in the town and the countryside. It would also have gripped the pockets of those who owned the pigs! They rushed to see what had happened. What did they find as they reached the hill by the lake? They saw no pigs – unless some were floating in the lake.

What they saw was the crazy man sitting at the feet of Jesus. It was not easy for them to recognise him because he was now clean and dressed. He was no longer running about naked and screaming at the top of his voice. He was *sitting at the feet of Jesus, dressed and in his right mind* (8: 35). How did they respond to the amazing change in this man? Were they pleased? Did they start rejoicing in seeing him a normal man again? No. They were afraid (8:35).

What were they afraid of? They ended up asking Jesus to leave because they were *seized with great fear* (8:37). These were superstitious people. They saw the changed man, but how did this happen? By what power had this man been changed? It was a power they did not know about. They feared things that they did not know about, especially powers they could not control. That great power was standing there before them, and they were gripped with fear.

These people had been told how the demon possessed man was made well (8:36). Those tending the pigs or someone else heard the interaction between this man and Jesus. The demons were shouting at Jesus and begging him not to send them into the abyss but into the pigs instead. The crowd saw the results. Jesus had done something wonderful for their friend who was now sitting at Jesus feet, but still they rejected Jesus because of fear.

Why do people fear Jesus? We see such fear in people who refuse to come to church. We see such fear in people who refuse to listen to the gospel, and try to stop others from listening also. We see such fear when people want to stop prayers in the parliament and in the schools. There is fear of the power of Jesus to change people's lives; power to change sinners into people who sit at the feet of Jesus in their right mind.

Pilate was afraid of Jesus even though he gave permission for him to be crucified. He took water to wash his hands of Jesus' blood. Festus the Roman governor told Paul he was out of his mind after he had listened to him preach the gospel. But King Agrippa knew Paul was not out of his mind. He knew what Paul was saying was true but he walked out saying '*do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian*' (Acts 26:28). What was Agrippa afraid of?

You will have met people who are afraid that becoming a Christian will deprive them of having fun in life. They say 'when I have enjoyed life, (meaning a life of sin) and become old I will think about Jesus'. Others are afraid of losing their friends, particularly their boyfriend or girlfriend.

The people who came out and saw Jesus were superstitious. They probably saw the loss of their pigs as divine judgment. Jesus was responsible for this judgment. They were all guilty of sin and feared further divine judgment. In their ignorance they thought asking Jesus to leave them would mean escaping judgment for their sin.

The demons responded to Jesus saying 'leave us alone'. Now the local people were asking Jesus to leave them alone. Do you sometimes want Jesus to leave you alone? Why? Do you fear what he wants you to do? It is only those who are bound up in sin who fear the judgment of Jesus. Jesus will indeed judge all sin whether we like it or not. But when we welcome Jesus and sit at his feet we will know the wonderful saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Jesus got into the boat and left (8:39). Jesus did not force himself upon them. He quietly got into the boat and left. What a tragedy. Jesus left this region, never to return. The people walking in darkness saw a great light. They saw the Light of the world. But they preferred the darkness to the light. Do you know anyone who has made this tragic choice? If so, remind them that Jesus has left but that he will return in judgment.

3. Remain

Last but not least we look at the reaction of the man who was cured. Here we see the right reaction to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Here we see a man who no longer feared Jesus and his power. We see a man who had faith in Jesus. He knew the power of Jesus to heal and to set men and women free from evil. He could now pray 'deliver us from evil' knowing that Jesus would answer that prayer.

This man stood/sat as a testimony to the people who came out to see what had happened. He was like the man born blind who was healed by Jesus (John 9). The Pharisees who hated Jesus because he made himself equal with God could not deny that this man was healed. They asked him how it happened and he told them that a man called Jesus had healed him.

Are you a testimony to the power of Jesus Christ as these men were? Are you sitting in peace at the feet of Jesus? Are you ready to tell anyone and everyone what Jesus has done for you? They may or may not listen, but let that not deter you from telling them.

What a beautiful picture it is to see this previously troubled soul sitting in peace at the feet of Jesus. Is this a picture of you? He wanted to remain with Jesus. Is this what you want most in life? Are you clinging to Jesus like this man? This man begged to go with Jesus. Are you praying and pleading with Jesus to remain with him all the days of your life?

As Jesus got into the boat to leave this region the man he cured begged to go with him (8:38). But Jesus sent him away. How strange! The man must have been very disappointed. But what an honour! Jesus sent him away witness and to glorify God. There was no concern for misplaced Messianic expectations in this region. Jesus would return to the Jews. He must continue on the way to the Cross.

Jesus sent him back to his earthly home and community. He sent him with a message. '*Tell how much God has done for you*' (8:39). So the man went away to tell everyone in his town what Jesus had done for him. There is no conflict here between what 'God had done' and 'Jesus had done'. Like the man, we are meant to understand that Jesus healed and saved in the power of God.

We are not told the outcome of this mission Jesus sent him on. All we are told is that he obeyed and went. And that is all Jesus tells you to do. When you come and sit at the feet of Jesus he will send you out to serve him. He calls us to be witnesses of his grace and power in our own families and our own communities. He calls some to go further away, even to the ends of the earth. Will you go wherever Jesus sends you?

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon