

As you know we are working our way through Matthew and today we come to chapter 8 where Jesus comes face to face with two demon-possessed men.

The question, of course, is “How is this to us today relevant, surely this has hardly ever happened to any of us!?” And to answer that I want us to see three things:

- The complexity of evil in our world
- The pattern of evil in our life; and
- The way to defeat evil at its source.

so if you would, it would help me if you could turn to Matthew Chapter 8, p973 where we’re going to see: the complexity, the pattern and the defeat of evil in our life

So Let’s begin with

1. The Complexity of Evil.

Matthew 8:28 says “when Jesus arrived at the other side of the lake, two violent demon-possessed men came from the tombs to meet him”

The disciples have just survived a nightmare of a storm when they thought they were going to die, They have just managed to paddle ashore And suddenly they realise that they have landed in a grave-yard and they are being charged by two violent, naked, demon possessed men. *Most scholars agree that this is a poor start to the day!*

The Bible tells us that these men are “demon-possessed”.

Now I imagine that many people are uncomfortable or even highly sceptical over such a notion.

“Demon possession?”

Isn’t it just a little *irrational?*,

Well “no, not really” its completely consistent with a modern sophisticated world view.

for surely, if we accept *the possibility* of a personal supernatural force for good (which is actually the position of the vast majority of our 21st Century society – overwhelmingly people accept *the possibility* of a personal supernatural force for good) then it’s NOT illogical to accept *the possibility* of personal supernatural forces of evil.

If we believe that God is spirit, and that he is personal, and that he is good – then it’s not so unreasonable to believe other beings that are, spirits, personal and evil.

It’s not at all irrational!

If you believe in the possibility of one, the possibility of the other is not irrational.

But then, perhaps, we say “yes, but isn’t it all just a little *primitive?*”

I mean surely people used to believe in demons when they didn’t know how else to explain the world!

People back then didn’t understand these things so they just simplistically lumped them all together and called them “demons”.

But now we know how the world hangs together,

what we used to attribute to demons, we now call personality disorders, or medical conditions or mental illnesses.

Well that may be true for some societies, but it absolutely *isn’t* true for the Bible.

In fact the Bible has one of *least* simplistic *most* multi-dimensional, *least* naive, *most* nuanced views of reality that I think exists.

If you look back to Matthew 4 v24 we read that

“news about Jesus spread around Syria and people brought to him: the ill with diseases, those in pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, the paralysed and he healed them all”.

In other words the Bible clearly differentiates

between trauma and neurological problems

between the demon-possessed and the diseased (between spiritual and physiological illness),

between those suffering from seizures and spiritual oppression,

And therefore far from being simplistic, the Bible is actually incredibly nuanced in its view of illness.

So the Bible's world view is **not**, that it sees 'demons everywhere',

“oh, I don't understand what this is so let's call it a demon”

but rather, it is far more nuanced, more multi-dimensional and sophisticated in its approach.

So when Jesus sees these two men running towards him he knows he is looking at a world of physical, mental, moral and spiritual pain - and he has to work what is *really* going on.

I took a crowded train journey on Tuesday,

and the man opposite me was on the phone and there was the usual hubbub going on all around him.

But then he said in a really loud voice “yeah man, I feel really, really rough, I'm not even sure I am going to make it through the day!!!”.

At which point all conversations stopped.

Everyone looks at him.

And we're all trying to figure out what is wrong with him and is it contagious!”

Jesus was looking at two hurting men running towards him, and he knew that what was wrong with them was legion, and complex, and evil.

Now *Evil is NOT count Dracula, or Spirits dressed up in White Sheets, or Men with improbably red suntans with pitched forks and pointy tails.*

Evil in the Bible is the same word as 'brokenness' and therefore anything which breaks something is called an act of evil.

To break someone's health (by hitting them) is an act of evil,

to break someone's reputation (with gossip),

to break a person's marriage (through an affair)

to break someone's financial security (with fraud)

all these are acts of evil.

In fact, the Bible says that all brokenness in our lives is the result of the impact of evil.

And evil isn't just physical or mental or moral or spiritual it is all of these.

Its both 'out there' and 'in here', it is 'natural and supernatural', it is 'individual and corporate', 'it is personal and it is systemic'.

And unless we understand this, then evil which impacts us all will keep defeating us.

In fact, the reason why we make so little headway in so many of our society's problems is because we see it such a multi-dimensional, nuanced ways as the Bible does.

*So the problem of unwanted teenage pregnancies is not simply a matter of education or access to condoms, it is much deeper than this... it is practical **and** moral, it is economic **and** spiritual. And unless we see it in this we will never make headway in it.*

The fact that our banking system drove us into a mountain of debt isn't just an economic problem. Greed is systemic and spiritual.

So the impact of evil in our lives, is complicated and unless we see that it has spiritual roots there will never be healing

We can increase our wealth 10 fold and society will still be just as unhappy

We can give everyone centralised healthcare and people will still be lonely

We can triple the price of alcohol and there will still be jobs

Why? Because the evil in our life – the brokenness in our life – is physical, mental, moral **and spiritual**,

And unless we see this, unless we recognise this truth,
we will keep treating symptoms and not causes,
we will spend billions and get no-where;
we will waste years of our life uselessly scratching where we do not itch.
Do you see?

Jesus saw these men running towards him and,
firstly, he recognises the spiritual roots in the complexity of the evil that was hurting them; and

2. Secondly, he understood the pattern of evil in their life.

v28 says that these men were “demon-possessed”

[Now this phrase “demon possessed” gives us, I think, a false sense of security.](#)

For most of us would say

“well, I’ve heard about ‘demon possession’ but I’ve never really seen it – so this is all pretty remote to my life”

Well, the Greek word that we translate “demon possessed”
is just a very simple Greek word which means “demonised”.

And to be “demonised” is simply to be touched by the influence of evil.

Paul says in 1 Timothy, that if we act **proudly** then we fall into the trap of the Devil.
He says in Ephesians, that “if we are bitter we fall under the influence of the Devil”

In other words, these normal everyday flaws, which we all have,
such as a pride and bitterness lay us open, make us vulnerable, to spiritual attack,
to spiritual evil impacting us.

So actually, a Biblical-world view sees the impact of evil as much more common and everyday than we would imagine.

If we are bitter, self-centred, unforgiving, proud (to name just a few) – then we make ourselves open, to some extent, to the influence evil in this world.

Therefore the difference between someone who is demon possessed or “demonised” and ourselves is simply a matter of degree.

The difference between them and us – is just the extent to which evil had hold of them.

We are all, to some extent, impacted by the evil spiritual forces in this world

[And Jesus knew how such evil can take hold in our lives.](#)

Mark tells us that

these men were immensely strong - so strong that no-one could bind them,

but he also tells us that

they were tortured-souls who cut-themselves, lived naked among the tombs and were shunned by all around

On the one hand they felt empowered – they had super human strength, they felt unstoppable;
On the other hand they were enslaved by their misery.

This is the pattern for anyone who makes a pact with the devil:
there is both a sense of greater empowerment, and an inner slavery.
And what is writ large in their life – is writ small in so many others...

Why do people take drugs? Why do they get drunk? Why do they have affairs?
Why are people Selfish? Why do they steal?
Its the reward of me, me, me!
There is a reward in all these things
And if we pursue them, they will make slaves of us.

If we let ourselves gossip - there is a buzz there – but if we let it get a grip it will enslave us.

Listen, If we make anything more important in our life than Jesus,
if we make anything more important for our self image, for our self worth, for our happiness,
than the Jesus,
then we're making a pact with it,

What we are saying is “you will make me happier than God can make me, so I will pursue you”
“I will serve you and you will give me in return what I am looking for: happiness security, meaning”.
And slowly its grip on us tightens.
This is how evil works in our lives,

The person who seeks power is controlled by power,
the man who seeks sex is controlled by trousers,
the person who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people they want to please,
[Here is a Spiritual truth: all of us are controlled by the thing we seek.](#)

And therefore whatever we centre our life on to make us happy, to give us fulfilment, to provide purpose... we
have just entered a pact with it and we will serve it.

So if, for example, we make the main fuel of our life our career,
if this is how we value ourselves, if this is what drives us
then on the one hand we are likely to become successful in it (of course we are, because we are investing
ourselves in it);
but on the other hand we will become its slave

For the more we pursue it,
the more likely it is that we'll put our career before other peoples needs;
the more likely it is that we will cut ethical corners to win the deal
the more likely it is we'll get our work/life balance screwed up
the more likely it is that our relationships will suffer,
the more likely it is that our relationship with our church, and God will dim
we'll sacrifice these things for the one we serve.

If anything is more important to us than Jesus Christ,
the one who made us and the one for whom we were made for
then we have just made a pact with the devil, and
we have laid ourselves wide open to the influence to the reality of evil.

We're no different to these men, it's just a matter of degree.
They didn't start out legion!
They didn't start out cutting themselves,
they didn't start out being shunned by people,
they didn't start out looking dreadful
they just slowly became more and more enslaved.

We don't start off alcoholics (it gives us courage and self-esteem but it makes us its slave)
We don't start out always looking at women in a sexual way (it gives us a "buzz" and then it slowly makes us its slave)
We don't start out always being negative about people (it just makes us feel taller when we pull them down, and then slowly it makes us its slave)

I am no different to these men, we are no different to these men,
it is just a matter of degree.
Do you see the pattern of how evil takes a grip in our lives?

It's spiritual; and
we end up being controlled by the thing we seek;
So whatever we put in front of God we end up making a pact with it...

3. So How can we defeat it?

If everybody in the world is, to some degree, is impacted by the evil in our world,
how are we going to defeat it?

Well, we do what these men did –
[they went to the source of the power to defeat evil.](#)

They put Jesus right in front of them.
And what Jesus did was totally unprecedented.
When anyone ever tries to deal with a demon, they always, always call on a higher power
They always call on someone or something that has authority.
But Jesus doesn't do this,

He doesn't work up a sweat,
He doesn't dance himself into a frenzy
He doesn't plead with some higher power,
His disciples who witnessed this said "all it took was one word" v32 "go!"
Just like he rebuked the storm in v26, Jesus deals with the demons in the same way, one word: "Go!"
Jesus doesn't call on a higher power because he IS the higher power.

And the demons go and dive into the pigs, v32...

[Now what's with the pigs? – why the pigs?](#)

Why did the demons say –

"OK if we have to move house, can we go to the pigs because of the 'lake view'"

Why the pigs?

Well to be honest – I have no idea.

The truth is that if you read FIVE commentaries on "why the pigs" you get SIX possible reasons!

We have no understanding on how spiritual forces relate to physical bodies,
we have no data to help us figure out what is really going on here!

But what we do know is this,
that when we put Jesus in front of us, when we put Jesus at the head of our life –
firstly, he knows what he’s doing
secondly, he has the power to defeat the brokenness in us; and
thirdly, he’d gladly sacrifice any number of pigs to save one soul.

The people of the town wouldn’t do that
When they looked at the pigs they say \$ signs
They were more concerned about their money than the salvation of these lost souls.

But Jesus is different: he says “not all the wealth in the world is worth one human soul”.
You know at the PCC said on Thursday – someone said “I would gladly spend £150,000 on CafeLife if it saved 1 soul”.
That’s right!

The people of the town didn’t agree.
They told Jesus to sling his hook.
because they didn’t see these 2 men with the legions of hurts as their prime concern.
To be honest
They saw the Romans with their legions of soldiers as the prime concern.

If you asked the local people what the root of their problems were –
they would have pointed to the Roman hill forts and said “those evil pigs up there”;

As far as they were concerned if Jesus was the Messiah he should put the evil Romans to death and give them
back their pigs.
What Jesus did was to give two men back their lives and to hell with the pigs.

The people of the town thought their first priority was to rid the world of the evil “out there”
Jesus knew that their first priority should have been to rid the evil “in here”.

Solzhenitsyn was right when he said that *“the line separating good and evil passes not through states, classes, or parties, but through every human heart, and through **all** human hearts”.*

We may be tempted to think that our first priority is the evil is out there...
In fact it always will be “the evil, the brokenness, the selfishness” in here.

And when these 2 men met Jesus
and bowed to him
he defeated the evil in their life.

In fact Mark tells us that one of them became a disciple.
Mark tells us, that one of them took himself to the Priest, was cleansed, blessed, restored and forgiven and
discovered what real life was all about.

He was able to do that because He and Jesus exchanged places.
He was healed because by the end of Matthew they have exchanged places.

In Matthew 27, we find that it is Jesus who is naked, tortured, cut and bleeding.
It is Jesus is crying out in isolation.
It is Jesus who is oppressed by every human evil laid on him; and
It is Jesus who is driven into the tomb.

This is how God deals with evil in our lives... he takes it on himself.

And only when we see what it cost him to defeat evil

– can he begin to heal us like he healed these men,

Only when we see how much he ultimately loves us,

how much he ultimately values us –

can we be healed from the need to look for **our** ultimate love and value anywhere else.

Its seeing the immense cost that he paid to defeat evil, that defeats evil in our life.

its only when we **see** for ourselves the cost that Jesus paid to defeat evil,

that evil can be defeated in our life

Only when we see him stripped naked for us,

cut for us,

oppressed for us,

driven into the tomb for us,

do we discover the reason to defeat evil in our life.

In other words, it is only a genuine engagement with God's love which drives out our demons.

Only a *real experience* of the cross

can break our pride,

melt our bitterness,

banish our shame, and

remove our sense of rejection.

And all the pills in the world, all the friends in the world, all the hospitals, psychotherapists, counsellors and vicars in the world cannot do what seeing (and seeing) Jesus on the cross can do.

Only he can give us the reason why we are alive, the power to forgive, the sense of approval, the peace in the storms

And to pass this on to others is worth all the pigs in the world.

And so

I pray that we may see how vulnerable we become when we put other things before Jesus

I pray we may see the immense cost that he paid to defeat evil so that we may have the power to defeat evil in our life; and

I pray that we may so value this gospel that would give all our 'pigs' to show others the same.