

What Kind of Man is This? Lord of the Supernatural
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe” By Phil Brainerd
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Introduction

In a few weeks it will be October. And at the end of October everyone in the western world knows what happens: Halloween!

Imagine that it’s a few days before Halloween. It’s the season of things that go bump in the night. All over the neighborhood, the decorations are going up: Jack-o-lanterns, along with images of scary things like ghosts and witches.

You hear something a little odd in your back yard, so you look out the window. When you do, you see this: You see a small furry creature, about a foot high. Half of its body is a skull. One minute, it runs on all fours like a rat. The next minute, it stands up.

What do you do?

Maybe you scream and hide in a closet. Maybe you call the police. Or maybe you step outside to see what it is. That’s when you find out: The little demonic-looking creature is a squirrel. Somehow, it got its little head stuck in a neighbor’s Halloween decoration.

Case solved. We like these kinds of stories because we believe that we live in a world that ultimately makes sense. Things that make sense make us feel safe. But what if this wasn’t so easy? What if you lived in a world where scary things happened on a regular basis? Things like people acting in horrible ways. Ways that couldn’t be so easily explained.

We’re in our series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe. We’re working our way through the book of Matthew. Currently, we’re in a sub-series we’re calling, “What Kind of Man Is This? In our last session, we saw Jesus face a terrible storm. He made the storm calm down by merely speaking. From that we learned that Jesus is **Lord of Nature**.

Today we’re going to learn that the world was a different place back in the days when Jesus walked on the earth. It was a place where scary and unexplainable things happened on a regular basis. Because of this, we’re going to learn that Jesus is **Lord of the Supernatural**.



Let's read our story for today.

28 When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. 29 "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (Matthew 8:28-34)

To understand the story we're reading today, we'll ask three questions:

- I. What happened?
- II. How did the people involved in the story react?
- III. What does this mean for us today?

I. What happened?

Let's look at that first question, "What happened?" Remember from our last few sessions that Jesus was surrounded by crowds on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Crowds are great for celebrities today, but Jesus didn't always care for them. He wanted to give some special training to a small group of his closest followers. So, he and a small team set out on a boat to cross the sea of Galilee. That small team was going to be shown things that few mortals have ever seen.

In our last session, we saw the first of the special things Jesus wanted to show his team. The boat was met with a violent storm. Jesus made the seas calm with a few words. When the boat landed, the team saw their second incredible and rare experience.

When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. (v 28)

Demon possession. Today, we hear stories of demon possession, but the stories are rare. Those stories were heard more often in ancient days. Why is that?

Mental Illness vs. Demon Possession

Some say that demon possession never existed. Those people say that over the ages, some individuals became mentally ill. The general population in those days weren't as sophisticated as we are today, or so it is thought. So, when people saw others who behaved in weird ways, they made up the idea of demons and demon possession. ***The Bible gives us the information we need to determine whether that's the case.*** Let's look at a story from the life of David.

The great King David started his life as a shepherd boy. However, through some amazing acts of faith, David became a trusted friend of the first royal family in Israel; the house of Saul. Sadly, David fell out of favor with King Saul. Why? One day, David and Saul came home after a big battle. King Saul heard the crowds sing something:

...the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. As they danced, they sang:

“Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands.”

(I Samuel 18:6-7)

King Saul wasn't too happy when he heard the crowds giving David a better score than he got. He got jealous. Eventually, the jealousy grew to a point where David had to run for his life. Let's read about it:

10 That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him, “Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances:

“Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands'?”

12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. (I Samuel 21:10-12)

Once David arrived in the neighboring country, he had a revelation - A bad revelation. He realized he wasn't in the best place. During his military career, David killed a lot of people in battle that were friends of the local king.

How did he get out of this mess? Let's read on:

13 So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard. (I Samuel 21:13)

David decided to act like he was insane. How did the local king react?

14 Achish said to his servants, “Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? 15 Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?” (I Samuel 21:14-15)

David decided to act like he was insane because there was a rule in those days: If insane people weren't hurting anyone, you left them alone. If you left them alone, they were usually harmless. Because David relied on this, he was allowed to escape.

Now, notice what the king didn't say: He didn't say, "Oh no! This man is demon possessed!"

Here's why I'm bringing this up: People in those days knew the difference between insanity and demon possession. Insanity was viewed as an annoyance. Demon possession was different. It was a much bigger problem. It was supernatural. So, when Jesus and his followers got off the boat, and some men came running at them, everyone knew that the problem wasn't insanity.

Here's another indicator:

"They were so violent that no one could pass that way." (v 28(b))

We're told that these men were violent. They were so bad that everyone had to avoid the area where those men lived.

Now, mental illness can make people violent. But this was different. We learn more by looking at Mark's version of the story: Mark focuses on one of the two men:

3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. 4 For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. (Mark 5:3-4)

This man could tear apart metal chains. There are plenty of mentally ill people who think they're Superman. But thinking you're Superman doesn't make you Superman. You can imagine all you want, but you won't be able to bend steel with your bare hands. This man could. This was not just mental illness. It was something much, much different. We'll learn more about how different in a few minutes.

So, there's a difference between mental illness and demon possession. Now that we see this, let's ask again: Why don't we see demon possession today?

The Way the Devil works

Here what I think is the main reason we don't see much demon possession today: It involves the way that the Devil works.

There was a French writer named Charles Baudelaire. He lived in the mid-1800's, and he made the following statement:

"One of the skills of Satan is to convince people he doesn't exist."

Today we're going to get some insights into the Devil and demons. In particular, we're going to get some insights into how they think.

The Devil would probably love to pop out in broad daylight and terrorize people. The demons would love to possess people and do things that are even worse. But, most people think the Devil and demons don't exist. The average person today thinks they're too smart to believe in a Devil. Because they think there's no Devil, people don't think they need God. On the day that people start believing in the Devil, they might start to believe in God. ***In fact, they might start believing that they need God.***

So, for the Devil, it's better to stay in hiding. And that, I think, is why we don't see so much demon possession today.

In the days of Jesus, the tactics of the Devil were different. People saw him and the demons doing more things in the open.

Attributes of the Devil and Demons

We said a moment ago that we would see some insights into Demons. We're going to learn some of the attributes of the Devil and Demons. Let's do this by reading about how the demons reacted when they saw Jesus.

“What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” (Matthew 8:29)

We see two very important things here:

The demons know who the Son of God is.

First, the demons recognize Jesus. It's interesting: You'd think they would run and hide. Instead, they run directly to him. They don't always do that, so there's something unique going on here. But we can see that they know exactly who Jesus is.

In the book of James, we see this:

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. (James 2:19)

So, every demon in existence knows that there is a God - And it scares them. When the demons see Jesus, they see something that mortals around them can't see. We live in the natural world, so we do not always see spiritual realities. The demons live in the super-natural world. They know who Jesus is, and something compels them to run over.

Again, we learn more from Mark:

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him.
(Mark 5:6)

That phrase to “fall on knees” is used for worship. The force that has taken over this man is compelled to show the utmost respect for Jesus.

So, the demons all know who Jesus is, and they recognize his authority. What else do we learn?

Demons know about the future.

The next thing we learn is that demons know about the future.

“What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” (Matthew 8:29)

We’re told in several places in the Bible that one day, the Devil and his cohorts will be judged. They will be thrown into an eternal lake of fire. However, there are a series of events that must occur before that day. You can read about them in the book of Revelation. At this point, none of those events have taken place. It’s not time yet for the demons to be judged. It’s not “The appointed time.” So the demons ask, “What are you doing here, Jesus? It’s not time yet!”

As we can see, demons know all about the future. Here’s a suggestion for us: It would be good for all of us to know those things, too. Maybe it’s time to read ahead to the book of Revelation if you haven’t done that yet.

Next, we something very important about the personality of demons.

Demons project their evil on everyone else.

Demons think everyone else is like them. In psychology, this is called “projection.” Project occurs when someone has a bad habit or bad character trait, and they assume everyone else does the same.

Let’s imagine that someone lies a lot. Because they lie a lot, they don’t trust other people. They assume that everyone is going to lie to them, just like they lie to others. This is what the demons did with Jesus.

They asked Jesus, “Have you come here to torture us?” Now, what were the demons doing at the time? They were possessing someone. Let’s read about what that looked like from Luke:

For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. (Luke 8:27 (b))

This poor man couldn't live in a house. He had to live in the tombs, a place of death and defilement. He couldn't put on any clothes.

Living in a home and wearing clothes are things that make us human. The demons forced this man to live in a way that was sub-human. He lived in shame and loneliness.

Let's look again at Mark:

Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (Mark 5:5)

Not only was this man forced to live on a subhuman level. Not only was he forced to live in shame and loneliness. He was living in terrible pain. The demons were not just possessing this man - They were torturing him. So, guess what? ***Because they tortured others, they assumed that Jesus wanted to torture them.***

At this point, we need to understand something. This is why we discussed the idea of an appointed time: A time of justice and judgement for the forces of evil. Someday, God will bring justice to the Devil and to demons. This will result in punishment - And the punishment will be painful.

There's a big difference between a just punishment, and torture. Torture is what happens when evil beings bring pain on others for no reason. The person who tortures someone delights in watching others in pain. It's their idea of fun. That's evil.

So, this is what we need to understand: ***The Devil and Demons believe that God is evil.*** When they see Jesus, they assume that he just wants to kick them around for no other reason than that it's his idea of fun.

This gets worse. The Devil wants to kick God off his throne. Why? The Devil wants that because he believes that he belongs on that throne. He thinks he's better than God. That's the core of sin and evil: Believing that you are better than God.

Let's see where things go from there.

Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. (Matthew 8:30-32)

We're not sure why, but the demons didn't want to merely leave. Apparently, for demons, any warm body is better than the alternative.

Notice something here: It's not one or two pigs - It's a herd. How big was the herd? Once again, let's look at the other accounts: Here's Mark:

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." (Mark 5:9)

"Legion" How big is a legion? In the days of Jesus, a Roman legion had Five Thousand men. Let's skip down a few verses in Mark's story:

The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. (Mark 5:13)

So, this was not one demon. It was not a few demons. ***This was an army of demons.*** When 5,000 demons tried to enter 2000 pigs, the result was chaos and death. It was like a big game of musical chairs, only a lot more deadly.

What have seen so far? Recall, one of the goals that Matthew has for his book is introduce his friends to the King of the Universe - The great Messiah. So, along the way, he keeps presenting the credentials of the King. Because of what we've seen, we see that ***Jesus is Lord of the Supernatural.*** Armies of the forces of darkness, armies capable of wreaking havoc on the world, must flee at the command of Jesus. A few words, and they're gone.

So now, we see what happened in this passage. Let's move on to the second question: How did people respond?

II. How did people respond?

Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region. (Matthew 8:33-34)

Let's add a detail from Mark again:

14 Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15 When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind... (Mark 5:14-15)

So, the people who took care of the pigs reported everything they saw. People from the area came running out to see. They saw the man who was previously possessed. Previously he was

violent and shameful. Now, he's dressed and healed, mentally and physically. They saw that a whole area of their region was opened up so they could go there again.

How did those people respond? Did they say, "Jesus, thank you for all you've done! - It's obvious that you're a man of God – we want to follow you!" No, they pleaded with Jesus to leave their region.

You see, they also saw 2000 dead pigs. Those pigs were probably a major source of income for them. As it turns out, Jesus was bad for business. Up to this point, a terrible evil controlled their region. It looks like people had grown accustomed to just tolerating it. A possessed man living in pain and shame? That's somebody else's problem. A big piece of real-estate that had to be avoided? That was the cost of doing business.

Given a choice of Jesus or profit, the people chose profit.

III. What does this mean for us today?

Let's look at the final question: What does this mean for us today? We've seen yet one more example of the power of Jesus. He is the Lord of the Supernatural. He can command armies of powerful demonic beings with a word.

What is our response?

First, we have to acknowledge that we live in a complex universe. A world where everything has a natural explanation feels safe. A lot of the problems we face can be explained that way, but some cannot. We hear about horrible crimes being committed. We see cities on fire set by criminals. In the former Soviet Union during the twentieth century, over twenty million people were killed by the communist leaders. Does evil on the scale that we see it only come from human minds? Or is there something more?

There is a reason that Jesus commanded his followers to pray daily, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Matthew 6:13) Our universe is complex. Some is purely natural, but some is supernatural. We need to face our world with supernatural tools like prayer.

Next, we need to make choices. The people in the region we just visited saw a great evil. They grew accustomed to it. They stopped fighting it. One day, God sent them help. They chose business over God. Let's ask: Do we get too accustomed to evil? Maybe it's evil in the world around us? Maybe it's evil in our own life?

Mark gives us one more insight into this story. Most of the people in the story rejected Jesus. - But there was one notable exception to the rejection that Jesus saw.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” (Mark 5:18-19)

The man who had been freed knew what Jesus had done for him. He begged to become a follower of Jesus. Jesus responded in a way that we can all appreciate today. Jesus told him that he didn't have to travel to far-away places to follow Jesus. He could stay close to home and tell his friends.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

What kind of man is this? We learned in the last session that Jesus is the Lord of Nature. Today, we've learned that Jesus is Lord of the Supernatural. That means he's Lord of All.

Let's make him the Lord of our life. He is worthy.

Once we do that, let's tell our friends about the mercy and love of Jesus Christ.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net