

### **Cost of Discipleship & Power of Jesus**

**Matthew 8:18-34; Mark 4:35-5:20; Luke 8:22-39, 9:57-60**

Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region. (English Standard Version – ESV)

#### **Background:**

- Disciples usually sought out their own teachers and generally acted as servants to their rabbis, following practical orders relevant to the work of the teacher and his school. Comparisons with animals, which Jesus employs here to describe the cost of discipleship, constituted a reasonably common teaching technique (e.g. Aesop's fables).

- One of an eldest son's most basic responsibilities (in both Greek and Jewish cultures) was his father's burial. However, the initial burial took place shortly after death, and family members would not be outside talking with rabbis during the reclusive mourning period immediately after death. What could be in view here is the secondary burial, a year after the first burial. By then the flesh had rotted away, and the son would return to rebury the bones in a special box in a slot in the tomb's wall. Thus, the son in this narrative could be asking for as much as a year's delay.

- Jesus' demand that the son place him above the greatest responsibility a son had toward his father would have sounded like heresy. In Jewish tradition, honoring parents was one of the greatest commandments, and to follow Jesus at the expense of not burying one's father would have been viewed as dishonorable.

- Greek stories about those who could subdue nature were normally about gods or demigods who had acted in the distant past. Jewish tradition reported some earlier teachers who could pray for rain or its cessation like Elijah, but absolute authority over waves and sea belonged to God alone. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why the disciples did not know what to make of Jesus!

- Tombs were ceremonially unclean and thought to be haunts for evil spirits. Gadara (here) and Gerasa (Mark 5:1) were predominantly Gentile cities in the region of the Decapolis, but Gadara was much closer to the Sea of Galilee (Gerasa, a prominent and magnificent city, was over thirty miles southeast). Roughly six miles to the southeast, Gadara probably controlled the land where this narrative occurs. Violent behavior is frequently associated with spirit possession in cultures that recognize the phenomenon.

- “Before the time” means before the Day of Judgment. Apparently even the demons did not expect the Messiah to come in two stages (i.e. first and second coming). Ancient stories about demons suggest that they liked to negotiate the least difficult terms if they were forced to leave one whom they possessed.

- Jews lived in this region, but it was predominantly non-Jewish; hence the pigs. Hearing that demons would want to inhabit unclean pigs, Jewish listeners would have said, “But of course!”

- In Jewish tradition, demons could die or be bound. Since Matthew says nothing to the contrary, his readers would probably assume that these demons have been either destroyed or imprisoned.

- The Old Testament narratives of Elijah and Elisha allowed Jews to place some miracle workers in the category of prophet. Greeks usually categorized them as magicians or sorcerers, who were usually malevolent. Since the exorcism Jesus performed cost these Gentiles from the Decapolis economically, they were naturally terrified of him.

### **Questions:**

- + In view of Matthew 8:18-22, how would Jesus define discipleship? How do you define it? Regarding Jesus’ responses to the cost of discipleship, which challenges you most, and why? What will it cost you to be a fully devoted disciple of Jesus? Are you willing to pay the price?
- + In view of Matthew 8:23-27, what is main point of the story? How does it apply to you today? What “great storm” recently happened in your life, and how did you respond to the situation? With this passage in mind, how does Jesus want you to respond to future storms in your life? What does the disciples’ response in v 27 say about Jesus? What “sort of man” is He to you?
- + In view of Matthew 8:28-34, what is main point of the story? How does it apply to you today? What is significant about the two questions asked of Jesus by the two demon-possessed men? What is significant about Jesus sending the demons into pigs, which then drown in the sea? What things in your life should be cast out and drowned? Will you let Jesus take action?