**Notes on Matthew 8:28-9:8**

* Vv. 28-29
  + “And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. 29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?”
    - After calming the storm, Jesus and His disciples arrived on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Some have questioned why Matthew says that Jesus arrived “into the country of the Gergesenes,” while Mark and Luke say that Jesus arrived, “at the country of the Gadarenes.” The reason why they question this is because Gergesa and Gadara are two different cities. Is this a contradiction? No. Both cities are on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Of the two cities, Gadara was much more significant (BKC). Therefore, the “country of the Gadarenes” was a more general term for the whole eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, while the “country of the Gergesenes” was a term referring to a smaller portion of the same area. Matthew’s term was more specific. For instance, if I said, “I arrived in the Lincolnton area,” I could just have easily said, “I arrived in the Charlotte area.” Neither is wrong. One is just more specific than the other. This illustration reveals a likely reason why Matthew would have used a more specific term. If I told someone, “I live in Crouse (the tiny, little town I call home),” you would assume that I was talking to a local (someone who knows the area). Otherwise, they would have absolutely no idea where Crouse is. However, if I told someone, “I live in the Charlotte area,” you would assume I was talking to a visitor (someone not familiar with the area). The more specific term is used for locals, while the more general term is used for visitors. Take this understanding over to the situation in Matthew. There are many features in the book of Matthew that demonstrate that it was originally written to a Jewish audience. On the other hand, Mark and Luke clearly had a more varied audience in mind. In other words, Matthew was written to locals (people who lived in Israel), while Mark and Luke were written to people less familiar with Palestine. In light of this, Matthew’s use of a more specific term makes complete sense. There is no contradiction between the Gospels, just different audiences (hence, different terminology).
    - Critics have made a big deal over the fact that Matthew mentions two demon-possessed men while Mark and Luke only mention one. It’s important to notice that neither Mark nor Luke said that there was *only* one demon-possessed man. Just like the two-town situation discussed above, Matthew is simply giving additional details. While Mark and Luke probably focused on the fiercer of the two demon-possessed men, Matthew mentions both of them.
    - Matthew tells us that these two men lived in the tombs. In our minds, we probably think of a graveyard. However, tombs in this part of the world were usually caves (either manmade or naturally occurring). Even the manmade ones could be quite extensive. Since becoming demon-possessed, these two men had moved into these tombs near Gergesa.
    - They were “exceeding fierce.” This describes someone who cannot be controlled. Luke tells us “no man could bind him, no, not with chains: 4 Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.” It seems that description was true of both of these men. Matthew says that they were so fierce that “no man might pass by that way.” The people in the nearby town could not handle the demonic power within these men, so they simply surrendered that territory to them. They couldn’t contain them—so they just let them roam free.
    - In stark contrast, these demons were terrified of Jesus. They knew exactly Who He was. They called Him the “Son of God.” He was the rightful King of Kings, and they knew it. They asked Jesus, “art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” The word “torment” literally means “to torture,” (Thayer’s). God’s Word makes it clear that the final destination of Satan and his demons is hell (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6; Rev. 20:10). It is a torturous place of judgment, reserved for them for all eternity.
* Vv. 30-34
  + “And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. 31 So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. 32 And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. 34 And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.”
    - In light of their eternal destiny, the demons begged Jesus to allow them to possess the pigs that were a distance away (but still in sight). I find it interesting that they appealed to Jesus’ mercy and faithfulness. The demons knew that, according to God’s Word, they would be judged at the proper time. You could paraphrase the demon’s comments as “Jesus, You are going to keep your Word, right?” Not only did Jesus keep His Word, He even demonstrated mercy to these demons. For whatever reason, it seems as if demons desire to operate through a physical host (cf. Luke 11:24-26). Perhaps this is the only way that they can manifest themselves physically. Jesus would not allow these demons to go back into another human, but He did allow them to possess a nearby herd of pigs. Such an act of faithfulness and mercy to demons demonstrates both the superiority and the unfailing character of our God.
    - The result of the demons possessing these pigs must have been terrifying. All of the sudden, at least a “legion” of demons (if specific, about 6000) entered into this herd of pigs—and the pigs went nuts. The herd of “about 2000” pigs stampeded over a nearby precipice and drowned in the Sea of Galilee. The ones who had been feeding these pigs were terrified. They ran into the town (Gergesa), and told everyone their story. A man had arrived from Israel and freed the demon-possessed men. The evil spirits had passed from the men into the pigs, and the herd (of “about 2000” pigs—Mark 5:13) stampeded into the sea. Considering that these people weren’t Jews, it shouldn’t surprise us that they were terrified by this story. Before Jesus even arrived at the city, the people came out to meet Him—but they didn’t come as a welcoming committee. Once they confirmed what had happened (the demon-possessed men were healed and the pigs were drowned), they begged Jesus to leave. Living so close to the land of Israel, I’m sure that these people had heard about the promised Jewish Messiah. But our perception of the Messiah and theirs would have been completely different. As modern, Gentile Christians, when we think of the Messiah, we think of our Savior—the One Who shed His blood for us so that we could be saved. But that’s not who the Jews were expecting in the first century. They were expecting a military leader who would conquer the world for them. This military leader would be revealed by signs and miracles (Matthew 11:4-5)—such as healing two demon-possessed men. Considering who the Jews believed their Messiah would be, I don’t find it at all surprising that Gentiles would have been afraid of Him. After all, if He really did turn out to be the Messiah the Jews had been talking about for centuries, all Gentiles were on the verge of subjugation. The destruction of the herd of pigs even lends itself to that theory. The Jews famously considered the pig to be an unclean animal (alas, no bacon). A mysterious Jew had just showed up and destroyed their pigs through supernatural means. Was this the beginning of a Jewish takeover? This man clearly had the power to do it. Perhaps the Jewish Messiah had finally come—and they wanted nothing to do with Him.
    - Instead of Jesus staying and trying to convince them of their error, He left at least one of the demon-possessed men behind as a missionary. Mark 5 says, “And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. 19 Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and **hath had compassion** on thee. 20 And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.” Jesus knew that the best person to reach these Gentiles was one of their own. They were afraid of Jesus, but He wanted to show them that He was compassionate. This man faithfully obeyed Jesus. He shared His testimony throughout all of Decapolis (lit. “Ten cities”). This describes the ten major Greek cities in the area. The Jews had portrayed the Messiah as someone for Gentiles to be afraid of, but Jesus made a special trip across the Sea of Galilee to start the process of correcting that misunderstanding.

* Vv. 9:1-8
  + “And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. 2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. 3 And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. 4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? 5 For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? 6 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. 7 And he arose, and departed to his house. 8 But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.”
    - Per the request of the Gergesenes, Jesus returned to Capernaum (“his own city” – his current base of operations). Luke 5 tells us that Pharisees and teachers of the Law “out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem” had gathered to see Jesus for themselves. At this point, Jesus had captured the attention of more than just the common people. As they did with John the Baptist, the religious leaders showed up to determine whether Jesus was legitimate or not.
    - In addition to the Pharisees and teachers, a large crowd had gathered around the house where Jesus was teaching. Mark says, “And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.” This crowd was so tightly packed that there was no way through it.
    - Four men were trying to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus. A single person would have struggled to get through this crowd, but these four men carrying their friend on a stretcher found it impossible. However, they refused to give up. 1st century Jewish homes were built with flat roofs, and were close enough to walk from one roof to the next (Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* – *Jewish Homes*). The four men were not able to approach Jesus on the ground, but the roofs provided an alternate route. Once they arrived on top of the house where Jesus was teaching, they lowered him down to Jesus through the roof.
    - First, Jesus took note of their faith. No one would go through such trouble if they didn’t believe in Him. Beyond that, Jesus could see their hearts. He knew that these five men believed in Him. Perhaps the four friends had seen Jesus heal before. In any case, their belief in Jesus had resulted in their persistence. If they could only get to Him, He would heal their friend.
    - I’m fairly certain that Jesus’ opening comment took everyone by surprise—except for the paralyzed man. He said, “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” This must have caught the four friends off guard. Obviously, they had brought their friend to Jesus for physical healing. Yet, Jesus talked about forgiveness. We know that the religious leaders were shocked—but the paralyzed man wasn’t. He was paralyzed, but that wasn’t the main source of his depression. “Be of good cheer” has the idea of “take heart, it’s going to be alright.” The root of this man’s discouragement was his sin. Whatever he had done, he knew what it was. Perhaps he was afraid that God would never forgive him. Can you imagine what his journey to Jesus must have been like? He was going to see the Messiah. What would the Messiah say to him? Would Jesus berate him in front of everyone? Would Jesus reveal his sin for all to see? Surely, these thought were going through his mind—but after Jesus took one glance at him, He said, “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” I imagine the tension melted away. He was forgiven. Everyone else might have been baffled by Jesus’ comment, but this man wasn’t. The guilt was gone, and that was more important than anything else.
    - Of course, the religious leaders took issue with Jesus comment. Only God can forgive sin—and they certainly didn’t believe that He was God. To pretend to be God was blasphemous. On a side note, I find their thinking to be almost humorously inconsistent. The Pharisees were mad that Jesus pronounced this man forgiven, but they spoke on God’s behalf all the time. They were constantly putting themselves in the place of God—condemning people for countless infractions that God’s Word didn’t describe as such. Why should they have been bothered by Jesus standing in the place of God by proclaiming this man guiltless when they continually put themselves in place of God by condemning people through their traditions? If they allowed themselves to falsely fabricate condemnation, why should they have been bothered by someone falsely fabricating forgiveness? The Pharisee’s condemnation and Jesus’ forgiveness are two sides of the same coin—except for the small fact that Jesus actually was God and did possess the power to both condemn and forgive.
    - Jesus asked the religious leaders a rhetorical question; “whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?” Both sentences are easy to say, but “arise, and walk,” is a command that demands physical evidence. Forgiveness carries with it no external evidence, but healing from paralysis certainly does. To prove that He had the power to forgive sins, Jesus commanded the paralyzed man to “Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.” What followed was undeniable proof that Jesus had the power to forgive sin. The man got up and went home. How do you get around that? God’s approval of Jesus’ claim was there, walking before their very eyes.