

'Body & Soul' – Jesus' Authority Matthew 8v28-9v8

More we follow the King, then the more we learn about him. Last time – account of Jesus and the storm – authority over natural world. ***'What kind of man is this?'*** And, in case any of his readers still in doubt as to the answer to that – now come TWO MORE accounts (**end of Ch. 8 & start of 9**) – evidence of AUTHORITY of Jesus.

Storm in **vv23-27** description of circumstances that are out of control. Storms are like that – or seem to be – both meteorological variety & 'storms' of life that threaten to engulf us at times.

Account of the two demon-possessed men here (cf. **Mark's** fuller account of 'Legion' in **5vv1-20**) - related but different. Here it is not about EXTERNAL circumstances that affect us, but inward conditions that are both frightening (**v28**) & terrible.

THE DISTRICT – we need to note (**v28**) that Jesus had arrived ***'in the region of the Gadarenes'*** (or alternatives). This would be a Gentile area – hence the local pig-keeping - certainly not a Jewish tradition! But here is another note about AUTHORITY of Jesus that is not limited by geographical borders. His mission is border less – without any human limitations put on it. Hence the question (**v29**): ***'have you come HERE to torture us?'***

THE DEMONIC – so we come up against a recurring theme in Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry – that of his battle with demonic forces in people's lives. This may present us with a problem – references to demons & evil spirits may not be easy for our 21st century lives filled with modern science, technology & medicine.

So – this description here of ***'two demon-possessed men'*** could simply be dismissed as a rather dated way of describing two people with some serious mental health issues But the NT has many such references throughout gospels & NT –

'being possessed' (13) > 'demon' (60) > 'unclean spirit' (21) + e.g. Ephesians 6v12. It is the authority of Jesus over that world that is demonstrated here. And that spiritual battle continues in many & various forms in 21st cent UK too.

[**'Tarot Bible' > 'Crystal Bible' etc seen in W H Smith's Lichfield recently**] – disturbing enough that you can buy such books – even more disturbing = that people actually believe such stuff.
Further evidence of **50 shades of the greying of the Gospel!**

Back to our text - what confronts us here in these two poor, deranged individuals is a worst case scenario of being made in God's image – but here it is a broken & fallen image.

Jesus comes to put that right – supremely at the cross – **Col. 1 vv19 & 20**. And he comes now in these vv to put these two men right also – although note how Matthew tells us no more about the two men & their actual healing [*cf Mark's account of 'Legion' – Matt uses two men – a Semitic device whereby two witnesses establish the veracity of an event*]. What we read of at the end of this account is probably the bit that we find the most difficult – this business with the pigs -

THE DELIVERANCE – the local bacon trade may have just taken a nose dive (snout dive?) in **v32**, but this is the outward & visible sign of authority of Jesus over the demonic here

Pigs have their place - from Packington to pork chops! But pigs are not the point here. Rather is it further evidence of Jesus' authority & a restoration of two people made in God's image. And that we are much more valuable – **Matt 6v26**.

And, finally in this 'Part 1' of the word this morning - notice the reaction. **V34 'Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus..'** and we might think that's great – some mass conversion about to take place – '3000 added' Acts style – but then this – **'And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.'**

[‘Jesus came to comfort the disturbed – disturb the comfortable.’] ³ Here is one of 1st examples of spiritual ‘NIMBY’ syndrome. ’

Not in my back yard’ thank you. You can go to church, attend that meeting, support that church event. You can get involved in all of that if you like, but don’t let all that Jesus stuff impinge on my time, my pace, my life. **[First Sunday morning** that I stayed for after church coffee at our local Cambs church – invitation from friendly Deacon to a church barbecue. Couldn’t see me for dust!]

AUTHORITY of Jesus – **DISTRICT** (Geographical authority) > **DEMONIC** (Spiritual authority) & **DELIVERANCE** from Satanic authority.

‘End of Part 1’

By very definition, **A&E** is never a place we expect to be! Examples – middle of night incident over 20 years ago - my own **‘take up you bed & walk’** moment! Or in Perth A&E first morning of Scottish holiday some years back with wife & snapped finger tendon. Or again 2nd full day of Welsh holiday – driving same wife (with broken ankle this time!) to nearest A&E – which was in Bangor – 50 miles north!

Paralysed man at centre of today’s ‘Following the King’ incident was most likely not an A&E case – but someone with long-standing condition. But this man’s friends took emergency action, (by using an emergency entrance) – to get their mate in front of Jesus.

Our 2nd healing incident from today’s Matthew extract is about Jesus healing another individual – but healing is not main point – which is, again – the **AUTHORITY** of Jesus. But, before we get to that – consider the various elements in this account – starting with -
1)The FRIENDS & THEIR FAITH:

Matt does not refer to breaking in through roof means of access to get to Jesus. As one commentator puts it:

Matthew's account is much more abbreviated than Mark's: he has so much other material he wants to include within the limits of one scroll.

But the friends of this paralysed man were prepared to go to great lengths to try & get him to Jesus. They gave of their time & changed their schedules. Faith will do that – cause us to ‘prioritise’ – is that not what brings us together this morning? Do you ever notice other people on your way here Sunday by Sunday? I do – the relaxed stroll to paper shop > the pottering in the garden > the car being loaded for family Sunday trip to coast...

All these & many more on offer each Sunday morning for all of us – and nothing wrong with any of them! (**Two weeks time Fradley 10k!!**) But **we** are **here**, because FAITH brings us here. The strength & depth of that faith may vary from individual to individual (even from week to week for some). For some, it is a faith that is so central to our daily living – must be here every Sunday, ranging down to a ‘crisis of faith’ that may bring someone here, because there is just nothing else left, so may as well give God a chance.

The four friends took time out – time off (?) to get their sick friend to Jesus. How much are we, do we, change **our** schedules to go to the Lord? Faith, extreme faith, will change our schedules. ‘Time is money’ to many people - & faith can be limited to when it suits & can be fitted into our schedules. But the friends here put FAITH FIRST.

[Many churches have a clock behind the congregation – where it is quite obvious to the preacher. Some don’t (TFC cf. CBC!). The one where Rev. Sam had been invited to preach, did not. As time went on, Brother Sam finally commented that he had forgotten his watch that day & asked, ‘does anyone have the time?’ A weary voice piped up: ‘There’s a calendar behind you!’]

How does our faith affect our schedule? Does it bring us to Jesus on every Sunday morning (evening?). Does it bring us to the prayer meeting? Does

our faith in Jesus draw us into the life & activity of the community of faith during the week/month/year?

So, Pastor, do those who attend ALL the meetings have MORE FAITH than the rest? Is there an 'attendance register' in heaven recording the no. of times we turned up? Of course not – but, just like the friends in this account, living, committed FAITH in Jesus will mean that that faith will schedule US, not the other way round...

2)The PATIENT & his PRIORITIES:

Here, Jesus does not simply perform a 'FAST FOOD FAITH' act of healing, with a quick prayer & laying on of hands. Like with man at Pool, something else has to be dealt with first – '**Son, your sins are forgiven**' is a startling first response of Jesus to the man lying before him, in cloud of ceiling plaster.

And Jesus' pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins on this patient immediately brings him into dispute with all the religious 'professionals' around him (see in minute).

Once again, we are confronted with the total 'healing package' that Jesus brings from heaven to earth – the restoration & reconciliation between God and humankind. '**For he himself is our peace – those far away brought near by Christ** ' – Eph.2. Ultimately and supremely in the blood of Christ: '*In this bread, there is healing, in this cup there's life forever.*'

As part of our life together, as Church together, you and I regularly share in bread & wine at this table. **Dates initially available for preaching Jan-May included a Passion Sunday Communion** next month – I was keen but then 'fixture' was changed & I had to

Here in Matthew 9 , signs are there for those who will see & hear. The **authority & power** are here. Messiah is here -

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'We have never seen/heard anything like this' (7v28 > 8v27 > 9v8) is the reaction & testimony of the people, who are there to witness it & the testimony of the writer's faith in that power.

Once again we see evidence of the physical & the spiritual nature of healing interwoven in this man's life. As the friends bring the paralysed man to Jesus, they probably would not have fully comprehended the true nature of their friend's condition. Nor would they have realised that their simple, but bold act of faith, provided Jesus with the opportunity to demonstrate the cosmic & eternal dimension of his ministry.

The man's physical disabilities were lifelong, but spiritual damage is eternal. Here once more is the broken image, the scrambled pattern, the fallen world, lying before Jesus, the one who conquers sin & death & who is therefore able to say '**Your sins are forgiven – now get up & walk...**'

The friends here are carrying out an act of INTERCESSION. Time & again, when it comes to healing in NT, we read that such healing comes about, not as a direct result of prayer by the sick person themselves, but via the pleas, prayers & actions of others.

Jairus (9v18) my little daughter is dying. Please come & put your hands on her so that she will be healed & live.

(15v22) Canaanite woman (non-Jew) pleading for her daughter.

(Mark9v23)Father with son with evil spirit: 'If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us...I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.' This man's prayer = the prayer of us all at some point?

Christian faith that means we do pray for others – intercession – of course for those closest to us – family & friends.

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Probably not a day goes by when we do not do that. Of course for the Church – those we know well & less well – or not at all. And also for world situations – peace in Middle East, Sudan, Syria...

For earthquake & hurricane victims – for places near & far. By so doing - & by FAITH, we bring those situations into God's presence & **under authority of JC.**

Friends & their Faith > Patient & His Priorities > 3) The Critics and their Comments:

'Your sins are forgiven' is a pronouncement that can only come from God: **Exodus 34v7 > Psalm 103v3 He forgives all my sins & heals all my diseases > Is.43v25 'I am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.'**

The religious leaders believed in forgiveness all right, as long as it came from God. But they had a big problem here in this crowded room, where this preacher & healer from Nazareth starts saying **'I forgive your sins...'**

(Imagine I went up to ... this morning & said *'I forgive your sins...'* might cause a few eyebrows to raise, just a tad presumptuous, don't you think?...) But when we pray **'Father forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, through Jesus Christ our Lord...'** – a **different authority** being invoked. Praying to God through JC – on our behalf – priestly role – interceding – praying for us – ALL of us, including the person praying. ALL of us OWN the PRAYER, when we say **AMEN.**

'AMEN' is not just a way for prayer leader to signal to congregation to open their eyes, (even to wake up?!); but a way of affirming the prayer just prayed – SO BE IT. That's MY PRAYER too – I need forgiveness – I need healing – I need to come before Jesus Christ & his authority – AMEN, ME TOO, ME TOO, Lord!

'CLAIM' **'Campaign for louder Amens in members.'**

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Which is easier for Jesus to say here **'Your sins are forgiven...'** – who's going to know whether forgiveness has taken place? But when Jesus says, **'so that you may know that I DO have such authority, I tell you, get up, take up your mat & walk...'**

And it happens before their very eyes, then there is no doubt, is there? Amazement all round.

Friends & their Faith > Patient & His Priorities > 3) The Critics and their Comments: all come before the authority of Jesus.

4) Authority of Jesus – Reject or Respond?

That's the choice Matthew poses us here. The people of Gadara wanted Jesus to go away – not to disturb their lives & livelihoods. Many in UK this morning will have similar response '*not today thank you.*'

The religious establishment are scandalised ('*who does he think he is?*') - first evidence of the opposition that will send Jesus to the cross. And some who witness the miraculous healings praise God (**9v8**). But none of those are sufficient response.

Response required? Evidenced right here two weeks ago in **Baptisms** of Stephanie, Annette & Laura. The call to follow is authoritative, urgent & compelling & Matthew's own time to respond comes now -as we'll see next time.