

June 28, 2026

Pursuing the Kingdom: The King Who Reigns Over Darkness

Matthew 8:28-34

Vernon Advent Christian Church

As we continue our journey through the Gospel of Matthew, we come to one of the most dramatic encounters in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Up to this point in Matthew 8, we have seen Jesus demonstrate His authority over disease, distance and even the forces of nature. He cleansed a leper with a touch. He healed a centurion's servant with a word. He restored Peter's mother-in-law from sickness and He calmed a raging storm with a simple command.

And now, Matthew takes us into territory that many of us might find a little unsettling. In our passage today, we are brought face-to-face with the reality of the demonic and spiritual warfare. And the setting is striking. After crossing the Sea of Galilee and calming the storm, Jesus and His disciples arrive on the eastern side of the lake in Gentile territory. And what awaits them is not a welcoming crowd. It is not a synagogue. It is not a celebration. Instead, they are met by two men living among the tombs.

The storm on the sea is over but another storm is waiting on shore and Matthew wants us to see something profound here. And that is that the same Jesus who rules over the wind and waves also rules over every power of darkness.

Now, the portion of Scripture we're going to read today is also recorded for us in the Gospel of Mark ch. 5 and the Gospel of Luke ch. 8. Mark and Luke focus their attention primarily on one demon possessed man and provide additional details about his condition, his restoration and his testimony following his encounter with Jesus which we'll see as we go along. But Matthew, writing primarily to a Jewish audience, mentions two men as he often highlights pairs of witnesses in his gospel, consistent with the Old Testament principle that every legal matter is established by the testimony of two witnesses. (Deuteronomy 19:15)

Now, these accounts do not contradict one another. Matthew mentions two men. Mark and Luke concentrate on the more prominent of the two mostly likely because he was the one more severely possessed. But together they give us a fuller picture of what happened that day. As we dive into this passage together, Matthew wants us to understand that pursuing the kingdom of God means recognizing that Jesus possesses absolute authority over every power that opposes God and every force that seeks to enslave the human race. And so, let's jump right in. If you are able, please stand with me in honor of God's word, as I read from the Gospel of Matthew 8:28-34. [Read Passage]

Matthew writes, "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 immediately Matthew paints a disturbing picture for us. These men are living among the tombs in a cemetery. Not like cemeteries today where the dead are buried underground with a tombstone on top. These tombs, would have been above ground crypts or caves cut into the hillsides that would have been accessed from the

outside by family members, or in more nefarious cases, grave robbers and those who practiced the dark arts.

Now, to the Jews, tombs were considered places of uncleanness and always located outside of the city limits. Not only because coming in contact with anything dead would make someone ceremonially unclean according to the law, but the dead also were seen as separated from God's realm of the living, making cemeteries a natural "home" for unclean spirits. And so, these men are described as being isolated from society, dangerous, and controlled by powers beyond themselves.

Now, Mark and Luke give us a few more details at this point in the story. According to them, we learn that one of these men lived among the tombs continuously. Every time someone tried to restrain him with chains and shackles he broke right through them. Day and night he cried out and cut himself with stones. It is a heartbreaking picture. The image we get here is one of complete bondage. Here is a man made in the image of God, yet reduced to a life of misery, isolation, self-destruction and torment.

While this is an extreme example of demonic possession, it reminds us of a broader biblical truth. Satan, the enemy of God and the great deceiver of the brethren, has always had the purpose of destroying what God has created. Jesus later says in John 10:10 that "the thief," speaking of Satan, "comes only to steal, to kill and to destroy..." Everything about these men reflects destruction. Their relationships, their dignity, their peace and their connection to community have all been destroyed. And that is always the direction of darkness.

You see, one of Satan's greatest strategies is convincing people that he does not really exist. Our modern culture often dismisses the supernatural realm altogether other than in a mythical sense. Yet Scripture consistently teaches that spiritual warfare and the realm of the demonic are a part of our reality. As Paul reminds us in Eph. 6:11-12, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

As C. S. Lewis wrote in his famous work, *The Screwtape Letters*, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them." The Bible avoids both of these extremes. It neither ignores the reality of evil nor is it obsessed with it. Instead, the Scriptures continually direct our attention to the greater authority of God.

Notice that there's something remarkable about this story. The demons are terrifying to everyone else. They terrorize the community and create fear throughout the region. Yet Jesus is not afraid. Look at all the fear that is mentioned in this passage and the surrounding context. The disciples feared the storm. The people feared these men. Everybody avoided this region because they were afraid. But Jesus arrives without hesitation and without fear. He does not approach cautiously. He does not retreat. He does not negotiate. Why? Because darkness has no authority over Him and the King has now entered enemy territory.

Which brings us to our next point, this is yet another passage which reveals the absolute authority of Jesus. Matthew says in vs. 29, “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?’” This is one of the most fascinating moments in the Gospels. The religious leaders and the crowds frequently misunderstood Jesus. Even the disciples are still learning who Jesus is demonstrated by their response to Him calming the storm in our passage last week. But the demons know exactly who Jesus is. For James 2:19 says, “You believe that God is one, you do well. Even the demons believe and they shudder!”

The demons who are possessing these two men immediately recognize Him as the Son of God. Both Mark and Luke add a little bit more here as they quote them as saying of Jesus, “Son of the Most High God.” This legion of demons know, and understand, the full authority of Jesus. They understand His identity. And they understand their destiny.

Notice they ask, “Have you come to torment us before the time?” What is “the time” they are talking about? Well, the demons not only know who Jesus is but they also know there is a coming judgment. They know God has appointed a day when all evil will be fully defeated and destroyed. Even the powers of darkness acknowledge God’s sovereignty over all things.

But, think about the irony here. The disciples, the men most closely connected to Jesus, have just asked in the previous passage, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” Now the demons answer that same question. He is the Son of the Most High God. They know exactly who He is, and they know they are powerless before Him.

You see, this is not a battle between equal forces. Scripture never presents Satan as God’s rival in the sense of equal power. We give far too much credit and power to Satan then he actually has. God is Creator, while Satan is a created being. God is sovereign over all things including Satan himself, while Satan is limited in his power only able to do what he is allowed by God to do as we read about in the story of Job in the Old Testament.

No, Jesus does not struggle against these demons. There is no contest. There is no uncertainty. There is no dramatic battle in which the outcome hangs in the balance. In fact, the outcome is never in doubt. Just like Jesus had full authority over the storm, He has the same authority over every enemy that opposes Him.

The reformer, Martin Luther, picked up on this point in the hymn which we sang this morning, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” when he writes in verse 3,

“Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him.”

The authority of Christ is absolute. Notice, the demons have to ask permission to even move. That is remarkable. The very beings who terrorized these men must ask permission before acting. Matthew is emphasizing for us the unmatched authority of the King.

And that authority is what brings freedom to those who are held in bondage. Matthew tells us in vs. 30 that a large herd of pigs was feeding nearby. In the other gospel accounts, we read that there were as many as two thousand of them. And the demons beg

Jesus in vs. 31, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” And Jesus responds with a single word, “Go.” That is all. One word. Immediately the demons leave and they enter into the pigs who immediately rush down the steep bank into the sea and drown.

Now, one of the most difficult questions in this passage is why Jesus allowed the demons to enter the herd of pigs. And while Scripture does not explain every detail, it does reveal an important truth about the nature of evil. The demons immediately drove the pigs to their destruction, demonstrating Satan's ultimate purpose. And the pigs became a visible illustration of where the pathway of evil always leads.

At the same time, this account reminds us of the immeasurable value God places on human life, those whom He created in His own image. A herd of pigs was lost, yes, but two men were set free. In the eyes of Jesus, people matter more than possessions. And this miracle reminds us that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and to bring freedom, restoration and life to those enslaved by sin.

Now, Matthew doesn't give us much detail about what happened next, but both Mark and Luke help us see the remarkable result. The herdsmen run into town and tell everyone what has happened and the formerly demonized man is then found sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind. And when Jesus and His disciples leave to go back to Galilee, this man begs to go with Him. But Jesus tells him to “Go and tell everyone what God has done for you.” (Mark 5:19; Luke 8:39) And the implication here is that he does just that.

Think about that transformation. A man who could not be restrained is now sitting peacefully at the feet of Jesus. A man who lived among the dead is now experiencing life that is only found in Christ. A man isolated from society is restored back into community. A man enslaved by darkness is set free by the King. And he can't help but go and tell others what Jesus has done for him.

And that's what Jesus does. The details may differ, but every believer shares this story. We may not have been possessed by demons, but apart from Christ we were all enslaved by sin. We were all spiritually dead, separated from God and unable to rescue ourselves. And yet, Jesus moved toward us with grace.

Another verse from a song we sang together earlier:

How great the chasm (sin that separates us from God) that lay between us,
 How great the mountain (the Law) I could not climb.
 In desperation, I turned to heaven
 And spoke Your name (Jesus) into the night
 Then through the darkness, Your loving kindness
 Tore through the shadows of my soul
 The work (on the cross) is finished, the end is written (our salvation is secure)
 Jesus Christ, my living hope

You see, the same King who crossed the sea to reach these men came into our world to rescue us. As Charles Spurgeon once said, “No man can know the full extent of God's love until he sees the depth from which God has rescued him.” This miracle is not

simply about deliverance from demons. It is a picture of the saving power of Christ that rescues people from bondage and restores them to life.

But, sadly, the story doesn't end there. It actually ends in an unexpected and sobering way. Matthew says that after the herdsmen fled into the city and reported everything that had happened there comes a surprising response from the people in vs 34, "Behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region."

Think about that. The people have just witnessed undeniable evidence of the power of God. Men who were feared by everyone are now restored. Lives have been changed. Freedom has come. Yet instead of worshiping Jesus, they ask Him to leave.

Why? ... fear, greed and contentment with the "status quo." The townspeople were terrified by Jesus' absolute authority and divine power and the destruction of the herd of pigs represented a massive financial loss. Many theologians and commentators note that the villagers valued their material prosperity and livelihoods more than the spiritual restoration of the healed men. The fact that they ask Jesus to leave highlights how the presence of God can disrupt our worldly comforts and cause those who prefer the "status quo" to reject Jesus.

Sadly, this same response still exists today. Many people admire Jesus from a distance. Many appreciate some of His teachings. But when His authority challenges their desires and priorities, they push Him away.

The townspeople faced a choice. Would they welcome the King or protect their comforts? They chose comfort. They chose familiarity. They chose temporary concerns over eternal realities. And, in doing so, they missed the blessing standing before them.

So, what does this passage teach us about pursuing the kingdom of God? First, we need to recognize that the spiritual realm exists and is real. Yes, we live in a world where darkness and evil exists but, brothers and sisters, we do not live in fear because Christ is greater than all that opposes Him.

Because secondly, we need to remember that Jesus possesses absolute authority. Whatever fear, temptation, bondage, or struggle you face, none of it is beyond His power. Yield to Him and let Him set you free.

Third, never underestimate the transforming grace of Christ. The most hopeless person is not beyond His reach. The most broken life is not beyond His restoration. [Just like these men who seemed beyond redemption, whom everyone else had given up on, Jesus delivered them from their bondage. We aren't told how long these men were in this condition. But nothing is outside of God's power to redeem. Keep praying for your loved ones, your neighbors, and especially those that seem hardened to the gospel because Jesus is still in the business of changing hearts and lives.

Finally, we need to examine how we respond to the authority of Jesus. Do you welcome His authority over your life? Or are there areas of your life where you are asking Him to leave because His presence threatens your comfort?

As we close, imagine the scene one final time. The disciples step onto the shore after surviving the storm. I can almost imagine them falling to the sand and rocks, kissing them, like in the movies, just happy to be on steady ground again. But within moments everything changes.

Two men, demon possessed and uncontrollable appear before them. Yet, instead of causing fear, the demons tremble in the presence of Jesus. Then they are cast out and the men are fully restored and the authority of the King is revealed. The kingdom of God has arrived in enemy territory and the lesson for us is clear. There is no place too dark for Christ. No life too broken. No bondage too strong. No enemy too powerful. The King who healed every sick and disease, who calmed the sea, now demonstrates His power over darkness itself.

Ultimately, this story points forward to the cross. At the cross, Jesus entered the darkest battlefield of all. He confronted sin, death and Satan. And through His death, burial and resurrection He secured the final victory for everyone who believes and places their trust in the finished work of Christ.

The kingdom of God advances because the King reigns over all. And for those who belong to Him, that means we never face darkness alone. The One who commands demons, calms storms, and restores broken lives walks with us still.

So pursue the kingdom of God with confidence. For the King who rules over every power of darkness is also the Savior who rescues, restores and reigns forever. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the authority and power of Your Son, Jesus. Thank You that He is greater than every force of darkness and stronger than every power that opposes Your kingdom.

Lord, remind us that we do not need to live in fear. Strengthen our faith when we face temptation, discouragement or opposition. Help us to trust completely in the victory that Jesus has secured for us through His death and resurrection.

Thank You that no life is beyond Your grace and no person is beyond Your reach. Give us hearts that welcome the authority of Christ rather than resist it. Help us pursue Your kingdom with confidence, courage and obedience.

May our lives bear witness to the transforming power of the King who sets captives free and brings light into darkness. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior, Deliverer and King. Amen.

Benediction: May you go forth in the confidence that Jesus Christ is Lord over every power of darkness and every fear that seeks to overcome you. May His authority strengthen your faith, His presence guard your heart and His grace remind you that no bondage is greater than His saving power. As you pursue the kingdom of God, may you walk in the freedom, peace and victory of the King who reigns forever. Amen.