

ST. MATTHEW PRESENTS THE CHRIST

HOME STUDY MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Our world has always had a way of classifying people. Today we see that happening in many facets of our lives. Let's take a minute to think about a place that, for many, conjures up shivering tales of awkward interactions, and pecking orders that are ruthless – Junior High! You have jocks, theater kids, band nerds, socially awkward wallflowers, goodie two shoes, and the bookworms in Junior High. There is some jockeying for position among some of these groups, and then there are those who just accept their outcast life.

Life has not changed that much over the history of the world. There have always been classes of people who are not accepted or wanted. In our reading today, we see a few of these people and how Jesus interacts with them.

TODAY'S READING

Read through Matthew 8:28-34. In this Gospel section, we will find Jesus confronted by a legion of demons that have possessed two men in a pagan land. As you read this section, think about the different groups of people in this passage.

So who are the players in this passage? There are the demon-possessed men living amongst the tombs, the demons, the pigs, those who are tending the pigs, the people in the town, and Jesus. Let's think about each group.

Pigs and those who tend to them: When we think of pigs, what descriptions come to mind? Smelly, dirty, destructive at times, and overall not welcomed during this time period as they were considered unclean animals. So what would be thought of those who tend to these filthy beasts?

They would be considered outsiders who must stay a distance from the town to keep the pigs from being too close to the town. So as the "outcast" class in this area, they would see the comings and goings more than any of the other outcasts.

Demon-possessed men: The men who were possessed by demons were dangerous and were out on the fringe even further than the dirty pigs and their keepers. They were living among the dead and threatening the safety of those around them. They were not in their right mind and were naked.

Demons: As part of the loyal club to the Devil, the demons are found wreaking havoc on the men they possess and anyone who comes near them. The difference between them and the other people in this land is that they fully understand who Jesus is and what power he has. Not only do they admit who he is, but they follow his one-word command of "go."

Jesus: We know that Jesus is the Son of God, but it is further confirmed that the demons are aware of this truth as well. In Matthew 8:29 we read, "And behold, they cried out, 'What have you to do with us, O Son of God?'" They know his power and confirm what will be coming in the future. "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" In this line, they are speaking about the end of time when Jesus will banish all evil to the pits of Hell. They have been enjoying their "playground" time torturing God's creation. Still, when they face the Savior of the world, they realize time is up.

Townspeople: The townspeople only appear at the end of this passage, pleading with Jesus to leave their area. This is a strange reaction to the help that Jesus provided the people by ridding their land of demons. However, the unknown is rarely embraced or accepted as truth. People tend to be slow to learn but quick to judge.

All these people/groups have a point of view in this passage. The pigs and those who tend to them are pushed outside of town as part of the undesirable. They live a quiet but lonely life. The demon-possessed men have tortured souls, living dismal and out-of-control lives. The demons are serving the Devil, who wishes to seek and destroy while still knowing the truth about who Jesus is and his power. The townspeople don't want to be bothered by anything threatening their way of life. They don't want to take care of the issues that plague them; however, they are not receptive to Jesus when he does. Jesus comes to love, heal, and share the truth.

This is just one of many miracles he performs during his ministry to show us that he is the Son of God. He came to save all of these people/groups. No matter what pecking order or social class they found themselves in, Jesus humbled himself to save them.

What person/group do you most align with in this passage? What can we learn from this message to positively impact our own lives? Jesus has gone to minister to those on the fringe, the outcasts. How does this knowledge comfort you as a child of God? Christ came for all, and that includes you.

The next time you are tempted to dismiss or discount a person because of their position in society, whether that is a class higher or lower than your own, remember that Jesus came for all. Rejoice that you have been saved through the grace of Jesus.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God Almighty, help me/us to remember that Jesus came for all. He came to love, teach, and rescue all of your children and provide a way for me/us to reunite with you. Help me/us to see all of your children in the same light as you see me/us now when you look at me/us through the lens of Jesus' sacrifice. In your name I/we pray. Amen.