>>>>>>> Matthew – Lesson 23 <<<<<<<

1) Ok, moving on to the last passage of chapter 8 …

Matthew 8:28–9:1 (ESV)
Jesus Heals Two Men with Demons

28 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. **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?" **30** Now a herd of many
pigs was feeding at some distance from them. **31** And the demons begged him, saying,
"If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." **32** 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. **33** The herdsmen fled, and
going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-
possessed men. **34** And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they
saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

9 **1** And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.

2) To help get the picture, the word fierce in verse 28 can mean violent, in fact, many translations use that term.
3) We have several things of interest here that we might talk about for a moment.
4) Demon possession:
   a) First, it was not unique to the time of Christ.
   b) Demon possession is seen in historical writings of many ancient cultures including Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece.
   c) However, it does appear that, from scripture, demonic activity is especially prominent in the area of Palestine in the time of Christ.
   d) Many scholars attribute this to the spiritual conflict that peaked during the era because of the coming of the Messiah.
      i) This is one of many examples where it is a given that these demons know Christ, they know who he is, and they absolutely know his power.
   e) One other interesting feature here is the question that they ask.
      i) It is obvious from the question that they knew not only his power but what the future held for them at his hand.
      ii) Their question was have you come to torment us before the appointed time.
      iii) There is an appointed time when all demons and Satan himself will be sent into eternal torment and punishment.

Revelation 20:10 (ESV)

10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

iv) Jesus does not answer them directly so they entreat him to send them into a nearby herd of pigs – would not have been my first choice and, as it turns out not the best for them either.

v) Jesus says Go and they do and from there it is lights out – no more little piggies and perhaps, no more demons! Scripture doesn't really tell us.

f) Then we get to the herdsmen.

i) They flee the area and tell the complete story to the townspeople.

g) The townspeople come out and begged him to leave their region.

i) These were undoubtedly Gentiles.

(1) The region was part of the Decapolis – a group of ten Hellenistic cities on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee.

(2) In this case, pig farming might have been a significant portion of their economy based on the large size of the herd.

(a) No Jewish town would have such an occupation as a significant portion of its income.

ii) After hearing the story from the herdsmen, they obviously wanted these Jews out of their area so they would not be dealing with any more trouble.

(1) Even though the herdsmen had especially told of the fate of the demons and demon possessed men, it was not the miraculous removal of the demons from the men that were menacing them.

(2) One must assume their priority was what had happened to the pigs and what might happen beyond that.

h) Jesus accommodates them and departs immediately.

i) Mark shares a few more details of the ending to the story…

Mark 5:18–20 (ESV)

18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. **19** And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." **20** And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

5) In this case, at least one person was grateful for what Jesus had done.

a) And, as you recall, this incident sets the stage for a return to the Decapolis later with far different results.

Do you think we have demons and demon possession today?

1) So, moving on into chapter 9 …

2) We know from the last passage that Jesus is now back in Capernaum.

3) We do not know the exact location of this next passage, it may even have been at Peter's house.

Matthew 9:2–8 (ESV)
Jesus Heals a Paralytic

9 [2] And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." [3] And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." [4] But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? [5] For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? [6] But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." [7] And he rose and went home. [8] When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

4) This is the first we have record of Jesus actually verbally forgiving the sins of an individual.
   a) In 1st century Judaism there were three basic methods by which one could receive God's forgiveness for sins.
      i) The Levitical system – sacrifices made in the temple, the day of Atonement, etc.
      ii) For sins against others – Confession and restitution.
         (1) Repentance, prayers, fasting, and charity or good deeds.
   b) Now, without much detail, it is still obvious that in all cases the individual must do something and the giver of the forgiveness for what was done was God.
      i) Priests only acted as mediators – not forgivers of sin.
5) So, when Jesus says to this man, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven" in the mind of the scribes, there were only two possibilities.
   a) He knew the mind and heart of God personally and was speaking for Him.
   b) OR – He was God.
6) Since in their minds, neither could be true, Jesus speaking this way would have been blasphemy and this was exactly what these scribes were thinking.
7) Jesus, knowing their thoughts, then accuses them of thinking evil.
   a) The evil is that they are accusing him of blaspheming.
8) When Jesus completes his statement, these scribes would have been really surprised – why?
   a) Because, of course, Jesus knew what they were thinking.
9) Without regard to that, what Jesus does next would be impossible for anyone but God to do – – instantly heal this paralytic with a single statement or command, "Rise, pick up your bed and go home."
   a) And, the man does just that!
   b) This is really a double whammy!
      i) Many Jews in the 1st century associated illness and suffering with sin, believing that divine forgiveness could bring healing.

ii) This would mean in many of these folk's eyes that if the man was a paralytic, without forgiveness of his sins, he could not be healed.

iii) So, for many, the forgiveness of sins allowed the healing.

(1) To be clear, however, not all suffering was thought to result from personal sin, and healing was not always seen as dependent on prior forgiveness.

10) Matthew concludes by observing that the crowds were afraid, unlike the end of the Sermon on the Mount where they were amazed.

Why afraid and not just amazed?

If you were in the crowd, which would you be – amazed or frightened? Why?

1) Moving on, Matthew finally becomes part of Jesus' disciples …

Matthew 9:9 (ESV)
Jesus Calls Matthew

9 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

2) Since this is the writer of the book we are studying, we might want to learn some facts about him.

3) Additionally, as we read the following passage, we will understand better what puts the Pharisees in such a confrontational mode when they talk about the tax collectors.

a) Matthew was a Jew who worked for the Romans, specifically for Herod Antipas.

b) This meant he had basically given up everything to accept this job.

c) The name used here is Matthew which is his Roman name.

i) Most people in Palestine during this time had two or three names, a Jewish name, a Roman name, and possibly a Greek name.

d) Luke and Mark use Levi which was his Jewish name.

e) Tax collectors took a commission on the taxes they collected, so most of them overcharged and kept the profits.

f) Most Jews hated tax collectors for several reasons.

i) They cheated the people who paid taxes.

ii) They supported Rome.

iii) They were in constant contact with "unclean" Gentiles.

g) A Jew who accepted such an office shamed his family and friends.

i) They were not officially excommunicated from the synagogue but likely were not welcomed with open arms either.

ii) Chances are they would not even try to attend.

4) Jesus and the disciples he had so far, Peter, James, John, and Andrew all knew Matthew.

5) Matthew's tax booth was most likely located in Capernaum, near the Sea of Galilee, along a commercial route where customs were collected.

6) I can't help but think this creates a situation.
   a) Matthew was likely hated or at least intensely disliked by these four men.
      i) After all, if he was collecting taxes from them, he was likely cheating them.
      ii) Even if he was not collecting their taxes, the perception of his cheating as mentioned above was there.