

Matthew 8:34

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

The City's Rejection of Jesus: This verse describes the Gadarenes' shocking response after Jesus liberated two demon-possessed men by casting demons into a herd of swine (Matthew 8:28-32). The Greek phrase "the whole city" (pasa hē polis, πᾶσα ἡ πόλις) emphasizes communal action—this wasn't a few individuals but corporate rejection. They "came out to meet" (exēlthen eis hypantēsin, ἐξῆλθεν εἰς ὑπάντησιν) Jesus, initially suggesting welcome, but their purpose was hostile: they "besought him to depart" (parekaleson hopōs metabē, παρεκάλεσον ὅπως μεταβῇ), urgently requesting His departure from "their coasts" or borders.

Economics Over Deliverance: The Gadarenes' request reveals tragic priorities. They witnessed an extraordinary miracle—two violently insane men (so fierce "no man could pass by that way," v. 28) were completely restored to sanity. Yet rather than celebrating liberation or seeking Jesus' teaching, they focused on economic loss (the drowned swine herd, likely numbering around 2,000 according to Mark 5:13). Material prosperity trumped spiritual deliverance, demonstrating how love of money blinds people to divine visitation. They preferred profitable pigs over the presence of God incarnate.

A Pattern of Rejection: This incident foreshadows Israel's broader rejection of Messiah and the gospel's turning to Gentiles. Jesus didn't force His presence on those who rejected Him—He departed as requested (Matthew 8:34 records He "entered into a ship and passed over"). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus honors

human will even when it chooses against salvation. The Gadarenes' rejection contrasts sharply with the healed demoniac's response in Mark 5:18-20—he begged to follow Jesus and instead became a missionary to his own people. This illustrates that divine encounter produces either radical acceptance or rejection, but never neutrality.

Historical Context

This miracle occurred in the "country of the Gergesenes" (Matthew 8:28), identified with Gadara, one of the Decapolis cities—ten Greco-Roman cities east of the Sea of Galilee with predominantly Gentile populations. Archaeological excavations at Gadara (modern Umm Qais in Jordan) have uncovered extensive Hellenistic and Roman ruins, confirming its prosperity through agriculture and trade during the first century AD.

The presence of a large swine herd indicates Gentile territory, as pigs were unclean to Jews (Leviticus 11:7). Pork was a dietary staple and economic commodity in Greco-Roman culture. The herd's destruction represented significant financial loss, explaining the city's distress. However, their response reveals skewed values—they cared more about economic stability than the oppressed men's freedom or spiritual truth.

Gadara lay about six miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee, though the demon-possessed men met Jesus near the shore where steep hills descend to the water—the location where the swine rushed into the sea (Mark 5:13). This region was Jesus' only recorded ministry in predominantly Gentile territory during His earthly ministry, anticipating the gospel's eventual spread beyond Israel. Early church father Origen (3rd century AD) and later Jerome (4th-5th century) discussed the geographical details of this account, confirming ancient awareness of Gadara's location and Gentile character. The Gadarenes' rejection mirrors persistent human tendency to resist divine intervention that threatens comfort or prosperity.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does the Gadarenes' choice of economics over spiritual deliverance reveal about human nature's priorities?
2. How should Christians respond when God's work in their lives or communities requires material sacrifice or disrupts comfortable patterns?
3. What is the significance of Jesus respecting the Gadarenes' request to depart rather than forcing His presence upon them?
4. How does this incident anticipate the gospel's movement from Israel to the Gentiles when many Jews rejected Jesus?
5. In what ways might modern believers similarly request Jesus to 'depart' from areas of life that His presence would disrupt or cost us economically or socially?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἰδού,	πᾶσα	ἡ	πόλις	ἐξῆλθεν	εἰς	συνάντησιν	τῷ
And	behold	the whole		G3588	city	came out	to	meet
G2532	G2400	G3956		G4172	G1831	G1519	G4877	G3588
Ἰησοῦ	καὶ	ἰδόντες	αὐτῶν	παρεκάλεσαν	ὅπως			
Jesus	And	when they saw	him	they besought	him that			
G2424	G2532	G1492	G846	G3870	G3704			
μεταβῆ	ἀπὸ	τῶν	ὅρίων	αὐτῶν				
he would depart	out of	G3588	their coasts	him				
G3327	G575		G3725	G846				

Additional Cross-References

Acts 16:39 (Parallel theme): And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

Luke 5:8 (References Jesus): When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

Job 21:14 (Parallel theme): Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.

Job 22:17 (Parallel theme): Which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them?

1 Kings 17:18 (Parallel theme): And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org