



GETTING RID OF JESUS

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Greetings and welcome to the broadcast on this Lord's Day. It's so good to be with you and to have a few moments to open the word of God and study it together. If you've just discovered Let the Bible Speak, I hope you'll make it a part of every week. We will never ask you for money or anything else for that matter... just a few minutes of your time and an open mind and heart as we ready and study the bible. Today, I want us to turn to one of the famous and dramatic episodes in the life of Christ found in Matthew chapter 8. Jesus' ministry is now well underway, and word has spread of Jesus' healing power and so He is busy with the multitudes who are coming to either receive or witness His miracles and listen to Him preach. The crowd along the Sea of Galilee is thronging about Him and so Jesus orders His disciples to go with Him to the other side of the sea and they get into a boat and launch out. Jesus, weary and tired from all His work lays down in the boat and goes to sleep and that great storm comes up and the winds and waves lashed the boat until the disciples thought they were going to die. Jesus calmed the storm, to their amazement and they landed safely on the other side.

Now, Jesus is going to show His power in yet another way. He has displayed His power over sickness, and with the calming of the storm, His power over the forces of nature. Little does He set foot upon the sandy shoreline until He is confronted by another force over which He will display His mighty power: the forces of hell. Listen, beginning in verse 28: "When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed *men*, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. So, the demons begged Him, saying, "If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine." And He said to them, "Go." So, when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea and perished in the water. Then those who kept *them* fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what *had happened* to the demon-possessed *men*. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged *Him* to depart from their region." Up unto this time the common people had been thronging Jesus wherever He would go. But

here, an entire town comes to make Him leave. He had caused such a disruption in their city, they wanted Him gone. Many are so disposed toward the Christ even today.

Jesus performed many signs and wonders throughout His three-and-a-half-year ministry. Not only did His miracles help the people who received them, but they also taught important lessons to those who witnessed them. Jesus demonstrated His Lordship over all by the various types of miracles that He performed. When He healed, He showed His Lordship over sickness. When He raised the dead, He showed His triumph over the sin and the grave. When He still the raging waters of Lake Galilee, He demonstrated His sovereignty over creation and over nature. But there was an unusual phenomenon that was mostly reserved for the time of Christ's ministry which God allowed that Jesus might show His triumph over the devil and all Satanic forces and that was demon possession. Demonic spirits would enter and possess their helpless victims and cause them to do terrible things to themselves.

The incident we read in Matthew chapter 8 is one of the most famous cases of this temporary invasion by hellish forces as two men were possessed by devils and dwelt in the graveyard along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. This appears to have been a Gentile city because they raised pigs. Swine were unclean animals to the Jews and so you find pig farmers in their towns. But here, there were herds of swine feeding and wallowing somewhere near the seaside slopes where these two men were living. They must have been terrifying souls as they roamed among the tombs and screamed and carried on as they did. The bible says that they were exceedingly fierce and violent. And so, as you might imagine, people stayed away from the caves where these demoniacs roamed. They would go out of their way to avoid them as they terrorized the countryside. Well, when Jesus and His disciples disembarked from their boat these demoniacs were there to meet them and when they saw it was Jesus, they cried out "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" First, they had no problem recognizing Jesus. The bible much later tells us in the book of James that the devils believe and tremble. They very well know that they have no power over Christ. The devil himself knows that he has no power over Christ. He and his demonic imps know that their time is short. It's interesting that when the demons cried out to Jesus that THEY brought up the Day of Judgment. They know more than many people around us today know and that is that there is a judgment day coming; that evil won't win the day and it won't be allowed forever. They understood that the day is coming when they will be eternally punished and thrown into the bottomless pit. Knowing that Jesus could cast them out of the men, they saw that great herd of swine feeding over yonder and asked Jesus to send them into the pigs. There's some mystery about that but be that as it may, Jesus agreed to that "And He said to them, "Go." So, when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea and perished in the water." It was a ghastly site as the pigs wildly plunged into the lake and their corpses bobbed about in the waves and the farmers just stood there astonished at what had happened. The bible says they ran into the city and told everyone what Jesus had done.

Do you suppose the people of the city breathed a great sigh of relief that no longer were those two men possessed by demons and now they could have relief from all the terror they had been experiencing? Do you suppose they were glad for those men, and do you suppose they were just happy that they could go back to their business and not have to worry about encountering these wild demoniacs anymore? You would think they would have gone out to find Jesus to learn more about Him or to fall at His feet and worship Him after He had done such a wondrous thing. But no! They were more concerned about their pigs than they were the people. Jesus had disrupted their lives and the business. He had run their profits off into the sea and had caused, in their minds, a much greater inconvenience by getting rid of the swine than was caused by these menaces to their town who they had to deal with for so long. And so, the

bible says that the whole city went out to meet Jesus and begged Him to leave. They wanted Him gone because He had disrupted their livelihoods and their way of life. And Jesus does not stay where He is not wanted and where His goodness and blessings are not appreciated and so the record says that Jesus and the disciples got back into their boat and went to the other side back to their own city of Capernaum.

This wasn't the only time that Jesus stirred the ire of people to the point they wanted rid of Him. The religious leaders of that time wanted Him gone as well. As far as some of them were concerned, He was a threat to their power and influence as He exposed their inconsistencies and hypocrisy. Many of the Pharisee's wanted Jesus done away with. On several occasions, Jesus left them speechless and humiliated with His answers to their questions and perhaps even more so with HIS questions THEY could not answer! Christ actually followed and honored the Law of Moses instead of their rabbinic traditions and interpretations which they had elevated above the actual law. In other words, Jesus interfered with their political and religious agenda. He showed how hypocritical they were in their claims to honor God and His word as opposed to their vigorous defense of their own practices and requirements which the law said nothing about.

When Jesus came and appealed to the common people throughout Galilee and then other places and the people began to follow Him, it filled the Pharisees and Sadducees with jealousy and hate for Him until they soon began to plot to kill Him. For example, one time Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. They condemned Jesus for this because according to their traditions healing was considered work and was therefore forbidden on the Sabbath Day. They didn't understand the Sabbath though. They failed to remember that the Sabbath was created for man and not man for the Sabbath and that it was never wrong to do what Jesus did in the eyes of God — it was forbidden by their elders in their later and misguided interpretations of the Sabbath law. Not only that, but Matthew, the gospel writer, exposes their wicked and self-serving motive in the matter in Matthew 12:10 saying that "they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" THEY THEY MIGHT ACCUSE HIM." Well, it was not a sin to heal on the Sabbath and Jesus knew that such was not against Moses' law and so He told the man to stretch out his withered hand. And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other. They didn't merely have a disagreement with Jesus. That would be bad enough to challenge the Christ and His truth-claims but the record says in verse 14: "Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him." And this was not the only time they would see Jesus' life. They tried to stone Him. They plotted to turn Him over the Roman authorities and ultimately have Him put to death by crucifixion. Why? Because He stood in the way of their power, their purposes, and their binding their traditions on the people.

But then there was another who wanted rid of Jesus, and he merely wanted Jesus off his hands because he didn't know what to make of him or what to do with him and he did not want the weight of making such a decision and that was Pontius Pilate. When the Jewish leaders finally brought Jesus into their custody, they shoved Him into Pilate's Hall and demanded that Pilate adjudicate Him as a threat to the Roman government and put Him to death. We read in John 18 and 19 how Pilate repeatedly tried to get Jesus off his hands. He was troubled by the claims of Jesus and by his wife's predictions that involvement in the case would only come back to haunt him and so Pilate made every effort to get Jesus out of His court and let the Jews fight it out amongst themselves. Ultimately, as we well know, bowing to the political pressure and in cowardice and spiritual indifference, Pilate condemned Him to go the cross and die. As he passed the awful sentence, he went over to a basin of water and washed his hands saying he was washing the blood of the innocent Jesus off his hands. He simply wanted Jesus off his conscience and wanted no responsibility in deciding the case of One in whom he found no fault.

Well, people have been trying to get rid of Jesus ever since. Many want rid of Him today and they want rid of Him in one way or another for essentially the same reasons as those ones did so long ago. Many are like the owners of the swine along the Sea of Galilee and Jesus represents a disruption and an inconvenience to them. They cannot bear the consequences of having Jesus in their lives. Receiving Jesus into their community, their home, their heart, and their life means the loss of things they don't want to give up. They're more concerned about clinging to their financial investments; their earthly relationships; their livelihood and their lifestyle more than they are the wonderful things Jesus can bring into their life. And so, Jesus must go! They want to get rid of Jesus because of His works and His will in their lives.

Others are like the religious leaders of that day who see Jesus and His word as interfering with their religious traditions and their agendas and plans. They try to get rid of Jesus today by getting rid of His Word. They might be willing to receive Jesus as a prophet or even as their King so long as His will fits their own. But instead of accepting His word for what it says and what it teaches, they try to twist and distort His word and even do away with it in deference to their own religious traditions and inclinations. I would submit to you that a vast part of the religious world has tried to do away with the word of Christ — maybe not physically — but so far as listening to it and obeying it is concerned. Very few churches today believe that the New Testament is a pattern and a guide for us to follow. They appeal to the scriptures when they seem to vindicate their churches belief or practice but if they want to do it another way, they explain the bible away or just ignore it all together. Jesus said, "if you love me, keep my commandments." He said "all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me..." but when we ignore what His word says to preach or practice what WE want, that is no better than those of Christ's own day who wanted to silence Him because He did not fit their Messianic expectations and because He honored the truth of God over their man-made dogmas and traditions.

And then, there are people like Pilate. They not only have little interest in His word or in following His ways, but they simply want rid of His WEIGHT. That is, they don't want their conscience to be bothered. They don't want to have to deal with Him and with His claims of truth. They turn Him away and try to stay as far away from Him as possible. They aren't really interested in the truth claims of Christ. They, like Pilate, shrug and ask, "What is truth?" and seek to get him off their hands. They don't want to face up to their guilt. They don't want to account for the life their living. They don't want the consequences of taking Him seriously and they don't want to face the implications of Him being the Son of God and being the King of kings. So, they close their eyes and their ears and simply want to get Him out of the courtroom of their heart and off their conscience.

But friend, you can't get rid of Him. Jesus is here to stay. His claims on your life are unavoidable. You WILL answer the question "what shall I do with Jesus which is called the Christ" which Pilate asked so long ago. The pigs are going to perish anyway — one day. The truth of God as revealed in Christ is all that will matter when we stand one day in judgment. The truth claims of Christ and who He really is and what you do with that supreme fact is a proposition you cannot avoid dealing with forever. Jesus stood before a Pilate who thought He got Jesus off his hands... but one day Pilate will stand before Jesus in HIS judgment hall and give an answer for his life whether he wants to or not. And so will you! Are you trying to get rid of Jesus? Do you wish He would go away? Do you wish His word didn't stand in the way of your man-made religion? Do you somehow think you can send Him away by ignoring His word and that you can silence your conscience and go on your merry way? You can't get rid of Him. He is the Christ of God. He is the judge of this world before you and I will one day stand. Isn't it better to listen to Him, receive Him, obey Him today instead of answering to Him in the Day of Judgment for our stubbornness and disobedience? Won't you receive Him in gospel obedience today? Believe Him and obey Him and

instead of getting rid of Him, invite Him into your heart and life to live and rule and abide with you as your Lord, your Savior, and your Friend from here to eternity.

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