

MATTHEW

Chapter 8

The Man with Leprosy

When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. ² A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” ³ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “**I am willing,**” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. ⁴ Then Jesus said to him, “**See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.**”

8:1 CROWDS FOLLOWED HIM – The crowds follow Jesus, but they have not yet begun to understand or to believe in Jesus’ claim to authority. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the crowds remain a transitional group when compared to Jesus’ disciples on the one hand and the various religious leaders of Israel on the other hand. Although the crowds follow Jesus physically, they do not indicate that they have begun to believe, even imperfectly, that he is the Messiah of Israel and the man who is bringing God’s gracious rule and reign into history. The crowds remain ambivalent, outside God’s reign in Jesus. (CC)

8:2 leprosy. See NIV text note and Lev 13–14. (CSB)

People believed God was punishing those afflicted by such diseases (cf Nu 12:10). Lepers were ritually unclean and excluded from the community. (TLSB)

A leper approaches Jesus, and Matthew marks the event with his characteristic “look” (ἰδοῦ, 8:2). This development is noteworthy for at least two reasons. First, the Law of Moses required lepers to live apart from the community of Israel and keep themselves at a distance from others (Lev 13:45–46). Although the disease itself was not contagious, they would transmit their ritual uncleanness to others by contact. That OT stipulation would still have been in effect among Jews in the first century. Nevertheless, this man approaches (προσελθών, 8:2) Jesus, close enough that Jesus could touch him (8:3). (CC)

make me clean. Leprosy made a person ceremonially unclean as well as physically afflicted (see note on Lk 5:12–16). (CSB)

This leper believed because of the healing authority Jesus had shown (4:23–24). Lepers who were healed could be pronounced clean and were allowed to reenter society. (TLSB)

The words that he speaks to Jesus reveal the second remarkable thing about the leper’s approach: “Lord, if you are willing, you are able to cleanse me” (8:2). These are words of faith, and his faith has content. He believes in the authority of Jesus to cleanse

him from his disease. The man is paying homage to Jesus even as he is speaking to him, and he addresses Jesus as κύριος, “Lord.” In Matthew, Jesus’ disciples always address him as “Lord” during his earthly ministry, and they never call him anything else—never “Teacher” or “Master” or another title. The combination of the address, “Lord,” and the faith of the leper evident in his approach and posture (he “began to show reverence”) are Matthew’s way of inviting his readers/hearers to regard this leper, and other supplicants like him, as no longer members of the ambivalent “crowds” (8:1); these supplicants have become Jesus’ disciples. This leper’s faith, though not fully formed, is nevertheless genuine. He knows that Jesus possesses the authority that he has claimed to possess (7:29), and even more importantly, the leper believes that Jesus exercises his authority for the benefit of those in need. Yet he leaves it up to Jesus: “if you are willing ...” (CC)

8:3 REACHED...TOUCHED – On a purely human level, it was an extraordinarily powerful gesture of love and acceptance for a person who is himself clean to touch an unclean person. On the theological level, the gracious and saving authority of Jesus reverses the flow of uncleanness. Any other clean person who would touch a leper would thereby become unclean. However, rather than Jesus himself becoming ritually unclean through contact with the leper, Jesus’ touch transmits purity and holiness to the unclean man and restores him! (All commentators observe how remarkable it is that Jesus touches the man before he has been cleansed of his disease, but they interpret the significance of the action differently. The OT command for a leper to avoid contact with others (Lev 13:45–46) implies that a person who has contact with a leper would become ritually unclean too, and would require cleansing. The same OT principle applied to other sources of ritual uncleanness that were regarded as being contagious. However, the Law has provisions for cleansing people who become unclean by touching other unclean persons or things (see, e.g., Lev 11:24–28; 15:1–11). Some interpreters cite Lev 5:3, which in its context (Lev 5:1–6) indicates that touching human uncleanness was a sin that incurred guilt, and suggest that Jesus here is violating the Law of Moses (Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:198) and is showing his authority over that Law (France, *Matthew*, 152). However, Keener, *Matthew*, 261, is more on target when he suggests that by touching the leper, “Jesus does not actually undermine the law of Moses, but fulfills its purpose by providing cleansing.”) In cleansing this man, Jesus both restores his physical health and also restores him to full fellowship in the people of God, since he would be able to participate in the temple sacrifices and the community meals of his fellows. As in the healing of the paralytic in 9:1–8, Jesus shows his authority to remove both the physical manifestation of sin and death (leprosy as *sickness*) as well as the more overtly spiritual manifestation of the leper’s fallen condition (leprosy as *ritual uncleanness*). (CC)

I AM WILLING – Matthew thus proclaims to his readers the authority of Jesus and the Lord’s willingness to remove illness and uncleanness and to restore those who call upon him in their need. Where Jesus has promised and said, “I am willing,” there his restoring power will surely be at work. But not all the lepers in Galilee were cleansed that day, or during the period of Jesus’ ministry. Moreover, in divine and hidden wisdom, Jesus has not said, then or now, “I am willing to cleanse all disease at once.” He has,

however, promised to extend his authority so that many from among the nations may become his disciples through Trinitarian Baptism and apostolic teaching (28:16–20). He has promised a Day when all things will be made completely clean and the flesh of all believers will be restored to purity. On that Day he will answer all our supplications for our health and the health of other Christians when he says, “The Day has come, and I am willing. Be cleansed!” (CC)

8:4 *don't tell anyone.* Perhaps for several reasons: (1) Jesus did not want to be considered just a miracle worker, (2) he did not want his teaching ministry hindered by too much publicity being given to his healing miracles, and (3) he did not want his death to come prematurely, i.e., before he had finished his ministry. See 9:30; 12:16; Mk 1:44; 5:43; 7:36; Lk 8:56. (CSB)

show yourself to the priest. See note on Lk 5:14 – (By this command Jesus urged the man to keep the law, to provide further proof for the actual healing, to testify to the authorities concerning his ministry and to supply ritual certification of cleansing so the man could be reinstated into society.).

He should submit himself to be examined by a priest, who would pronounce him to be clean (healed). Then he should obediently offer the prescribed sacrifice to God at the Jerusalem temple in grateful acknowledgement that his cleansing has taken place. (CC)

them. The priests. (CSB)

8:1–4 Cleansing the leper is the first of 10 miracles that Jesus performs in chs 8–9. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had demonstrated His teaching authority (7:29). Jesus uses that same divine authority in working miracles. His miracles are signs that anticipate the day when every disease and even death itself will be no more (Rv 21:4). Then, as forgiven sinners, we will rejoice with all those who have been cleansed. • Precious Savior, heal me. Fill me with anticipation for that day when You will heal every illness. Amen. (TLSB)

The Faith of the Centurion

⁵ When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶ “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.” ⁷ Jesus said to him, “**I will go and heal him.**” ⁸ The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” ¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, “**I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.** ¹¹ **I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.** ¹² **But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**” ¹³ Then

**Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.”
And his servant was healed at that very hour.**

8:5 centurion. A Roman military officer in charge of 100 soldiers. In Luke’s account (Lk 7:1–5) Jewish elders and friends of the centurion came to Jesus on his behalf, but Matthew does not mention these intermediaries. A parallel situation was the flogging of Jesus by Pilate, in which the act was obviously not carried out by Pilate himself but by the Roman soldiers at Pilate’s command (27:26, lit. “he flogged Jesus”). (CSB)

Commander of 80–100 soldiers in the service of Herod Antipas. This Gentile centurion, like the leper (vv 2–4), was an outsider in Jewish society. (TLSB)

8:6 LORD HE SAID – As Matthew presents the interaction between Jesus and the centurion, the verses are dominated by dialogue that builds to Jesus’ climactic declaration to the centurion in 8:13. Mt 8:5 briefly sets the stage and prepares for the centurion’s opening words to Jesus. This Gentile soldier addresses Jesus as “Lord” (8:6). This is the typical way for Jesus’ disciples to speak to their Master; it suggests, but only suggests, that the centurion is approaching Jesus properly, with at least the essence of genuine faith. And yet in the context of both the actual historical event and in the mid-first century AD context of Matthew’s hearers/readers, a question remains. The man is a Gentile soldier. Can this person know the one to whom he is speaking? It was unusual enough for a leper to come out from the ambivalent crowds and approach Jesus (8:1–4). How will Jesus respond to the statement of this Gentile soldier’s need? (CC)

PARALYZED...SUFFERING – The centurion has not yet asked Jesus for anything specific; he has only named the desperate condition of his servant (8:6). The soldier’s brief statement of need and Jesus’ brief response give the Gospel’s audience the opportunity to learn more. Dialogue will dominate the rest of the pericope. (CC)

8:7 I WILL GO AND HEAL – Jesus responds with a question: “Shall I myself come and heal him?” (8:7). As suggested in the textual note on 8:7, the balance of evidence weighs slightly in favor of taking Jesus’ words as a question, rather than as a positive statement, “I will come and heal him.” The evidence is not grammatical as much as it is contextual, historical, and cultural. Modern Gentile readers of Matthew can easily forget how unexpected a thing it would be for Jesus, the Jewish Messiah who has come to fulfill the Scriptures of Israel, to enter the house of a Gentile soldier. Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes, more strongly than the other canonical Gospels, Jesus’ Israelite lineage and his ministry as the true Israelite to and among the Jewish people. Historically and culturally, then, it is easy to imagine that Jesus responds, “Are you asking me, the Messiah of *Israel*, to come to your house?” (CC)

If indeed Jesus’ words in 8:7 are a question, however, we should not think of Jesus as being *reluctant* to go to the house of a Gentile. Rather, Jesus seems to want to discover more about the faith and the knowledge of this Gentile soldier who initially addresses him as “Lord” (8:6). The conceptual parallels with Jesus’ interaction with the Canaanite

woman (15:21–28) are extremely strong. This Gentile woman addresses Jesus as “Lord” and with the messianic title “Son of David” (15:22). Through his puzzling and drawn out interaction with her and with his disciples, Jesus learns (and Matthew’s readers/hearers learn) that the woman fully understands the nature of his ministry as the one who fulfills the Scriptures of Israel—on behalf of Israel’s lost sheep *and* for the salvation of the Gentiles too. Just as Jesus drew out the faith and understanding of the Canaanite woman by his “delayed” response to her need, so his question to the centurion elicits the humble words from that soldier’s lips, “Lord, I am not worthy” (8:8). (CC)

8:7 Some translate Jesus’ words as a question: “Shall I come and heal him?” Jews did not usually enter the home of a Gentile (cf Ac 10:28). (TLSB)

8:8 *I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.* According to rabbinical law, a Jew ceremonially defiled himself by entering a Gentile’s house. But the centurion’s statement may also reveal his own sense of moral guilt in the presence of Jesus. (CSB)

With that humble beginning, the centurion responds at length. In answer to Jesus’ question, the man replies with a small discourse that shows his stunning insight into the extent and the purpose of Jesus’ authority (8:8–9). He does not regard himself, Gentile sinner that he is, to be worthy that the Lord should come under his roof. Nor is such a thing even necessary. (CC)

only say the word. The centurion was confident that Jesus could heal from a distance by His word. (TLSB)

8:9 **MAN UNDER AUTHORITY** – The centurion was part of a chain of command. He needed only to speak a word, and the soldiers under him would obey. He believed Jesus had even greater authority, even over creation. (TLSB)

This centurion is well aware of how real authority works. The person in authority merely speaks, and his word carries the power to accomplish its purpose. Even the centurion himself, who is only under an earthly, military authority, must obey those who speak to him. Moreover, those under *his* authority respond at once to his commands. (CC)

Because (γάρ, “for,” 8:9) it is thus with mere earthly, military authority, how much more will it be the case with Jesus! The centurion’s words assume an argument from the lesser to the greater, from his own experience and use of authority to the authority of Jesus. This highlights all the more the man’s humility, for centurions were the backbone of the Roman army and by all normal human measurements they were men of great power and influence. As Luke’s narrative also reveals, the man was wealthy enough to have constructed a synagogue (Lk 7:5)! The man’s request? “Do not come to my house. Only speak with authority to the disease that is terribly tormenting my servant. You have authority over disease. It will obey you, and my servant will be healed.” (CC)

8:10 HE WAS ASTONISHED – Rarely does Matthew record Jesus’ “internal” reactions to those with whom he interacts. It is all the more remarkable, then, that the evangelist writes that Jesus “marveled” (8:10). Jesus responds to the soldier’s impressive declaration of faith by addressing those who were following him (8:10–12). Jesus’ climactic utterance to the situation of need is held in abeyance. Even though 8:10 does not specifically name Jesus’ addressees as the “crowds,” the narrative context makes it clear that this is who they are (8:1). His words to them contain both an invitation and a warning, for the crowds will have been essentially Jewish in their makeup. (CC)

Nowhere among the Jews had Jesus found a faith superior to that of the centurion (cf 15:28). (TLSB)

8:11 The universality of the gospel is one of Matthew’s themes (see especially 28:19–20). (CSB)

Jesus had in mind the messianic banquet of salvation in heaven (cf 22:2; Is 25:6–8; Rv 19:9). (TLSB)

many ... from east and west. Gentiles from all over the world. (TLSB)

recline. It was customary to eat while lying on one’s left side, esp in formal settings (cf Jn 13:23). (TLSB)

Jesus’ words “I say to you that many will come from east and west and will recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the reign of heaven” (8:11) constitute an invitation to any—even Gentiles!—who will recognize his authority and trust that it is a gracious authority for them in their need. This invitation is ultimately not limited to the biological sons of Abraham (3:9) or to the lost sheep that are the house of Israel, although Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, will continue in Matthew to minister primarily to that flock. In the final, resurrection banquet held under God’s gracious reign, many will come from the corners of the earth to feast with the patriarchs. Stunningly, Jesus’ words echo the OT promise (see Ps 107:2–3 and Is 43:5) that God would gather *Israel* again to himself, but Jesus applies the prophetic promise also to *non-Jews* like the centurion whose faith has so astonished him! (CC)

8:12 *sons of the kingdom.* Those descendants of Israel who supposed that their earthly heritage guaranteed them a place at the banquet (v 11). (TLSB)

WILL BE THROWN OUT – Yet Jesus’ words also constitute a stern warning to the crowds that are following him: “But the sons of the reign will be thrown out into the outermost darkness; there the weeping and the gnashing of teeth will be” (8:12). The Baptizer had warned the religious leaders of Israel not to assume that their ethnic identity guaranteed them a good standing in the eyes of the God of Israel (3:7–9). Jesus ironically warns that “the sons of the reign” may find themselves denied access to the end-time banquet when God consummates the ages and brings final salvation. In this

Gospel, Jesus will repeatedly use the image of weeping and torment in the outermost darkness to describe the fate of those who reject the Son of God. (CC)

outer darkness. Hell. (TLSB)

gnashing. Grinding one's teeth because of the spiritual and emotional pain and anger accompanying this torturous ordeal (cf 13:42). (TLSB)

Everything depends upon Jesus himself, upon his authority. Faith in him entails the knowledge of one's own helplessness and the conviction that he is able and willing to rescue. The centurion does believe that Jesus is the Lord. And yet Jesus' words may very well have conferred far more than the centurion was thinking or expecting. All who trust in Jesus and in his gracious authority will have a place at the final, eschatological banquet. Tragically, all who do not come to such faith will be cast out forever. (CC)

8:13 IT WILL BE DONE – Only now in 8:13 does the narrative reach its brief, powerful climax, as Jesus explicitly responds to the centurion's need. His faith has caused him to lay hold of Jesus on behalf of his suffering slave. Jesus speaks the authoritative word that he needs: "Go; as you believed, let it happen for you." The centurion's servant "was healed in that hour." (CC)

Matthew's narrative once again proclaims *both* the power of the reign of God that is present in Jesus' ministry of healing *as well as* the greater promise of restored fellowship and blessing with God. This Jesus, who has authority to heal, is also the one who grants entrance into the great eschatological feast. Jesus' miraculous deeds of authority are anticipations of the Last Day, when God the Father in the crucified and risen Jesus will finally overcome all death and sickness and sin. All the dead shall be raised, and all in Christ shall have gloriously incorruptible bodies like that of their risen Lord (see, e.g., Is 25:6–9; Dan 12:2–3; 1 Corinthians 15). Then God will welcome all who have believed that Jesus is the Lord to the eternal banquet fellowship in the new heavens and the new earth (e.g., Is 11:6–16; 65:17–25; Revelation 21–22). And although the Gospel's narrative will continue to recount how Jesus' ministry of authority is offered chiefly to Israel's lost sheep, this same Gospel's conclusion will explicitly extend Jesus' gracious, saving authority (28:18) as the basis for the mission to make disciples of all the nations through baptizing and teaching (28:19–20). (CC)

Matthew's hearers/readers, both ancient and modern, should also understand that their Eucharistic celebrations are anticipations of the final banquet that Jesus promises to all who trust in him. The gifts in the Lord's Supper, Christ's broken body and his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins, sustain the church until the day when the banquet begins in all its fullness—until that day when Jesus drinks the cup with us in a new way in the reign of his Father (26:26–29). Then the foretaste will be caught up into the complete and eternal feasting of salvation. (CC)

believed ... healed. Jesus healed the servant just as the centurion believed He could. (TLSB)

8:5–13 Jesus' words possess power and authority. The centurion believes this, and his faith is not in vain. Jesus' words still possess power and authority. Water, joined to the Word of Jesus in Holy Baptism, washes away sin. Bread and wine, joined to the Word of Jesus in Holy Communion, is His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. What marvels God can do! We sinners rejoice at these miracles of grace. • Lord Jesus, grant me full confidence in the power of Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Heals Many

14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. **15** He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. **16** When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. **17** This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

8:14 *Peter's house.* Archaeologists discovered an ancient building in Capernaum (v 5) that may have been Peter's house. It later became a church. (TLSB)

PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW - In the most bare-bones style imaginable, Matthew describes the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Paul independently supplies the information that Peter was married (1 Cor 9:5). The house in which the mother-in-law lay ill was most probably Peter's own home. (This verse is a reminder that Jesus' call to leave all and follow him should not be regarded as absolute and without qualification; see the commentary on 4:17–22 and 19:27. The mother of Peter's wife probably resided with them as a member of Peter's extended family (so Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:209). Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:33–34, remind us that archeologists have discovered an ancient home in Capernaum that later became a church and holy site and that may have been Peter's home. They note that Christian pilgrims in the fourth and sixth centuries mentioned seeing a house church in Capernaum made out of Peter's house.)

The healing took place in the later hours of the day. Even though it had become late, people still brought to Jesus those who were afflicted. (CC)

8:16 DEMON-POSSESSED – In 8:16 we have Matthew's first reference to demon possession and a summary account of Jesus' power over these evil, fallen angels. Although the narrative here does not offer an interpretation of Jesus' exorcisms, we may reach ahead to Jesus' words in 12:28: "But if in connection with the Spirit of God I myself am casting out demons, then indeed the reign of God has come upon you." Presaged by Jesus' direct conflict with Satan in the wilderness (4:1–11), now the Son of God, who ministers on behalf of God's "son," the nation (see 2:15), casts out with divine, royal authority the demons that afflict human lives. God has broken into history, through exorcism and in healing, so as to rule graciously through Jesus. Satan will be defeated, and Jesus is driving back the effects of sin as the one who has come to save his people from their sins (1:21). (CC)

Lit, "demonized." Demon possession was common during the earthly ministry of Jesus. (TLSB)

FULFILL...PROPHET ISAIAH – In 8:16–17 the evangelist interprets Jesus’ deeds of power. The purpose of Jesus’ healings and exorcisms was to fulfill what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet: “He himself took our sicknesses, and he carried our diseases.” This OT citation from the evangelist has elicited a wide variety of interpretations, and it affords an opportunity to probe the depths of Matthew’s theology of sin, sickness, death, and salvation. (CC)

The theology of Matthew’s citation of Is 53:4 in Mt 8:17 provides a crucial element of our hope as believers who still live in the time between Jesus’ resurrection and our own resurrection at the consummation of the age (28:20). The Suffering Servant has come, and from his completed ministry now flow forgiveness and present blessing for all who are baptized in the triune name and who are taught to hold fast to Jesus’ words (28:19–20). His healing ministry in Galilee was part and parcel of the work that culminated at the cross and empty tomb. The full manifestation in us of his work of bearing sin and sickness and death awaits his return in glory. Although God can and may miraculously intervene to take away our sicknesses during this time of our waiting, he does not do so often. Rather, he calls us as Jesus’ disciples to live in hope and to endure suffering with patient endurance as we proclaim the Good News of the reign of heaven until the end of all things comes (24:14). On that Day, the One who healed many in Galilee and who would bear our sins in his body will raise us up and heal us forever. (CC)

The powerful healing word of Jesus is again emphasized (cf v 8). Luther: “All the wretchedness and misery rampant in the world is the work of the devil, who delights in bringing ruin and death on man; for it was he who plunged all human nature into sin and death” (AE 24:73–74). (TL SB)

8:17 Matthew’s translation of Is 53:4 brings out the truth that the saving work of Jesus, the Suffering Servant, includes final victory over all illness and disease. Cf Is 35:5–7; 53:5. (TL SB)

8:14–17 Take heart! Jesus came “to destroy the works of the devil” (1Jn 3:8): sin, disease, and death. • Divine Healer, keep hope alive in my heart, that no sickness can separate me from Your love. Amen. (TL SB)

The Cost of Following Jesus

18 When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. **19** Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” **20** Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” **21** Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” **22** But Jesus told him, **“Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”**

8:18 *the other side.* The east side. (CSB)

Jesus went from Capernaum to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. (TL SB)

Although Jesus never turned anyone away who came to Him for help, He did occasionally withdraw from the crowds to get some rest and to spend time in prayer to His heavenly father. At this time His strategy was to cross to the other side of the lake (the Sea of Galilee). (PBC)

8:19 TEACHER OF THE LAW – At once a scribe, one trained to read and to study the OT Scriptures, approaches with the promise to follow Jesus wherever he might go. By his address to Jesus as “Teacher” and by his voluntary offer, “I *will* follow,” the man shows that he is not yet a disciple and that he does not know how one becomes a follower of Jesus. No person is able to initiate this salvific relationship with the Son of God. Rather, the Son calls people to follow him, and only as God graciously acts through the power of his Word do people then respond in faith by following Jesus (4:18–22). (This dynamic involves the doctrine of human will. By nature man is dead in sin and is completely unable to “decide” to follow Jesus or “choose” to believe in him. Natural man has the ability only to disbelieve and to choose evil. Yet the gracious God regenerates man by the power of his Word and Holy Baptism, creating faith in Christ and a new creation, the “inner” or “new man” (e.g., 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 4:24) of the person who is “in Christ” (e.g., 2 Cor 5:17), and thus the Christian is led by the Spirit to choose the things of God.) (CC)

Gk *didaskalos* corresponds to Hbr *rabbi*. Strangers and critics (e.g., scribes) used this term when addressing Jesus to show they did not regard Him as an authority (cf 12:38). Jesus’ disciples seldom used this term (cf vv 2, 6). (TLSB)

8:20 FOXES HAVE HOLES – Situated in the immediate context in which Jesus’ *authority* is of central importance, Jesus’ reply to the scribe in 8:20 shows that the scribe does not know the *purpose* of Jesus’ authority. Since his response is a corrective, Jesus’ words imply that the scribe has no conception that while Jesus is the Son of God, the Son will not exercise his own authority for his own comfort or his own self-promotion (see especially 4:1–11; chapters 26–27). Moreover, to follow such a one as this Man will be to surrender all guarantees of comfort or predictably stable existence. Though the humble animals can count on places of rest and welcome, Jesus, who possesses unparalleled authority, nevertheless will not carry out a ministry that secures this comfort and stability for himself or (by implication) for his disciples. Rather, his authority will cause him to expend himself on behalf of others, ultimately to the point of death itself on the cross. All who think that they wish to follow such a Man will need to recognize, at least in some beginning way, the humble and cruciform *purpose* of Jesus’ authority. Ultimately, only Jesus’ call itself can bring a human being to knowledge of Jesus’ purpose, to faith in him, and to trust in his humble, sacrificial, self-giving authority. Only by a divine miracle can a follower of Jesus actually rejoice in his call to take up his own cross, follow Jesus in the way of suffering and death, and even rejoice therein, confident of sharing in his resurrection. (CC)

Son of Man. See note on Mk 8:31 – (Jesus’ most common title for himself, used 81 times in the Gospels and never used by anyone but Jesus. In Da 7:13–14 the Son of Man is pictured as a heavenly figure who in the end times is entrusted by God with

authority, glory and sovereign power. That Jesus used “Son of Man” as a Messianic title is evident by his use of it (v. 31) in juxtaposition to Peter’s use of “Christ” (v. 29). (CSB)

It is clear from the narratives in the Synoptic Gospels themselves that for those who heard Jesus’ preaching and teaching, “the Son of Man” was not a title or a phrase that by itself conveyed or evoked a predetermined meaning. To be even more specific, evidently it was *not* a common or widely used messianic title. The proof of this is simple and may be discerned through two facts. First, in the Gospel narratives no one ever reacts to Jesus’ use of it as a self-designation. (At first glance, the high priest’s response to Jesus in 26:64–66 seems to be an exception to this rule. However, in this passage Caiaphas is reacting to Jesus’ allusions to Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13–14, and not merely to the use of “the Son of Man.” In support of this, those who mock Jesus as he is being crucified do not deride him for claiming to be “the Son of Man,” but rather for claiming to be “the King of Israel” and “the Son of God” (27:39–43). Second, no figure besides Jesus ever employs it as a descriptive predicate in relation to Jesus, and Jesus only does so once. (In Jn 5:27, Jesus employs the phrase as a predicate nominative: the Father gave the authority to judge to the Son “because he is the Son of Man.” This one example in no way overturns the point here, namely, that “the Son of Man” was not a common or widely used messianic title before or during Jesus’ earthly ministry. However, later in the NT era it became a Christological title, as one can see already in Acts 7:56 and Rev 1:13; 14:14.) (CC)

To say the same thing more plainly, when titles such as “the Son of David,” “the Christ,” “the King of the Jews,” or (especially!) “the Son of God” are applied to Jesus or when Jesus uses them for himself, the people around him *do* respond and react. Those titles are used as expressions of faith, but they can also evoke scorn or violent opposition from Jesus’ enemies or be expressions of the same when used by them. Those positive and negative responses show that in Palestine in the first century, those titles were familiar to the people as genuine messianic titles. Yet Jesus never identifies himself by stating outright, “I am the Son of Man,” and in the Gospels no one else declares about him, “You are the Son of Man,” whereas other titles are used in those ways (e.g., Jesus is acclaimed as “the Christ” in 16:16 and as “the Son of God” in 16:16; 27:54). (CC)

Why did Jesus make such extensive use of “the Son of Man”? Given the likelihood that it was not widely regarded as a messianic title, why then did Jesus use it as his most common form of indirect self-identification? We have no direct answer to this question from Matthew or the other Gospels, and so any answer must be only an informed guess. I would suggest, in agreement with others, that Jesus chose to use this phrase to speak of himself precisely *because of its ambiguity to his hearers*: to them the phrase was a mostly empty vessel that would evoke this question: “Why is Jesus referring to himself that way? Who is he claiming to be?” (CC)

More importantly, however, Jesus would begin to fill up the phrase with meaning that he (not his contemporaries) would provide—meaning that would flow precisely from the font of Dan 7:13–14, from the truth that Jesus himself is the “one like a Son of Man” in

that vision that God vouchsafed to the sixth-century-BC prophet Daniel. Not every use of the phrase “the Son of Man” would evoke that OT prophetic text, and when modern hearers/readers of Matthew encounter the phrase “the Son of Man,” they should not always import all of the theology of Daniel 7 into their reading of the text. (Examples of such over-readings of Jesus’ use of “the Son of Man” occur in various commentaries on Mt 8:20. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:42, suggest that “Matthew will have understood 8:20 in terms of the incredible contrast between the Son of man on earth and the Son of man in his kingdom. Before coming in glory with his angels to judge the quick and the dead, the Son of man must first suffer humiliation and rejection.” But this contrast is present in the text even if Matthew had recorded Jesus’ words as “But *I* do not have anywhere to lay my head.” Jesus has taught with authority, cleansed a leper, healed many, and cast out demons. He has unparalleled authority—yet he has nowhere to lay his head. Jesus’ use (and Matthew’s recording) of “the Son of Man” in 8:20 does not evoke all of the eschatological connotations of Daniel 7.) (CC)

nowhere to lay His head. John Wycliffe: “In his humanity, [Jesus] had not any such place; in a worldly sense, in his own proper right of possession” (*TT*, p 167). Jesus and His disciples were constantly on the move. Potential volunteers needed to count the cost of discipleship. (TLSB)

8:21 *bury my father.* A request to honor a parent, a duty Jesus encouraged on another occasion (15:4–6). (TLSB)

8:22 Jesus’ harsh-sounding answer to this would-be disciple should not be understood as a general rule, since honoring one’s parents was required by the Commandments (Ex 20:12). This particular man needed to hear that following Jesus should take precedence over everything else in his life (cf 10:35–39; 19:21; cf 1Ki 19:19–21). (TLSB)

let the dead bury their own dead. Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. The time of Jesus’ ministry was short and demanded full attention and commitment. This statement stresses the radical demands of Jesus’ discipleship, since Jews placed great importance on the duty of children to bury their parents. (CSB)

Under any understanding, Jesus’ response is like a hammer, hard and unyielding: “Follow me and allow the dead to bury their own dead” (8:22). Both the literary and cultural contexts can help us to understand Jesus’ reply more fully. But nothing can (or should) soften Jesus’ words to this disciple or to any Christian who might think that he can qualify or demote the *priority* of Jesus’ authority. Two major interpretive questions require answers. The first question is the situation implied by the man’s request, and specifically what he means by “to depart and to bury my father.” The second question involves the referent of Jesus’ reply; who are “the dead” who are to be left to “bury their own dead”? (CC)

On a simple reading of the man’s request, it would seem that this disciple’s father has just died or is at death’s door. Why else would he invoke the event of his father’s burial? This reading, however, involves filling in some large and fairly difficult “gaps” in the situation. Was this disciple in the process of following Jesus around, and while he was

accompanying the Lord, he received word of his father's demise? That could have been the case, but Matthew has not provided any information to that effect. Another possible case would be that the man was with his father and then left him in order to approach Jesus and make this request. However, Matthew provides no information to that effect either, and it seems more improbable that the man would leave his dying father, even if to present his request to Jesus. Kenneth Bailey has cogently suggested a third possible setting: the phrase "to bury my father" is a shorthand expression for "complete my filial obligation until my father dies—and that is not necessarily something that is on the verge of happening." If that is the case, then the disciple is asking Jesus for permission to place his obligation to his father on a higher plane than his obligation to Jesus—at least until his father dies. Bailey's view has much inherent plausibility, but we cannot be quite certain of every aspect of the disciple's request. (CC)

Whatever the specific situation that led to the man's request, it is clear that he wanted "to depart" from Jesus and to do so "first" before (resuming?) following Jesus (8:21; contrast "But *first* seek indeed the reign [of God]," 6:33). What is even clearer is that Jesus rejects his request and counters with an absolute claim to this disciple's allegiance. In the first-century culture of Palestine, the words of Jesus would have stung far more strongly than in the twenty-first century. Filial obligation and respect for the authority of one's father are not prime values in our time. They were, however, commanded by God in the OT, (Interestingly, in the OT the high priest (Lev 21:11) and Nazirites (Num 6:7) were forbidden from attending to their dead father or mother because doing so would make them unclean and interrupt their service to God.) and they were of paramount importance in Jesus' historical context, even as they still are in other parts of the world today. (CC)

Jesus presents the disciples with the question of boundaries. Where will the line be drawn for him? Which relationship will be primary? This is not the question of *faithfulness*, for the Lord Jesus knows full well that his disciples are and always will be sinners in this life, falling far short of God's commandments and their own best intentions. However, no one can remain a disciple of Jesus if he *demotes the authority of Jesus* to be on or even below the level of human authorities and responsibilities. So Jesus sternly commands this disciple and all of his Christians to make their allegiance to him of first priority. Those whom Jesus names "the dead" (8:22) are probably the man's family members who were not disciples of Jesus, so they are "spiritually dead." This interchange between Jesus and one of his disciples over the priority of Jesus' authority is the narrative equivalent of Jesus' words in 10:34–39, and most especially 10:37: "The one who loves a father or a mother more than me is not worthy of me." (CC)

No one can look the Son of God in the eye, so to speak, and say, "You are not first." Yet Jesus knows that his disciples will not always fully acknowledge the priority of his authoritative call and will. Like all sins, the failure to let Jesus' authority be first is a sin from which disciples need to repent; then they can receive Jesus' abundant mercy, have their priorities restored, and remain his disciples. This is precisely why the questions in the liturgy for the rite of Confirmation include the following words that

reaffirm that the confirmand is a child of God through Baptism into Christ and that renew the promise that, by God's grace, this disciple will follow Jesus to the end: (CC)

Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways? ...

Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?

The Christian replies in the power of the Holy Spirit:

I do so intend with the help of God.

8:18–22 Neither one of these would-be disciples of Jesus has counted the cost. One is too quick in promising to follow, while the other is too slow to follow. We are not told if either one followed Jesus. The examples invite us to ask, What kind of disciple am I? When we evaluate our lives as Jesus' disciples, we must confess that we often fail in our words and actions. Though we fall short, our Savior did not. He went all the way to the cross for us and grants us sincere repentance, faith, and life. • Lord Jesus, make me a better disciple and a more faithful witness. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Calms the Storm

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. **24** Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. **25** The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" **26** He replied, "**You of little faith, why are you so afraid?**" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. **27** The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

8:24 *furious storm.* See note on Mk 4:37 – (Situating in a basin surrounded by mountains, the Sea of Galilee is particularly susceptible to sudden, violent storms. Cool air from the Mediterranean is drawn down through the narrow mountain passes and clashes with the hot, humid air lying over the lake.) (CSB)

Gk *seismos*, which may also mean "earthquake." This violent squall contrasts with the "great calm" that followed (v 26). (TLSB)

But Jesus was sleeping. See notes on Luke 8:23(CSB)

Jesus was unaffected by the storm and its danger. (TLSB)

In spite of the tumult all around and even within the boat, Jesus is undisturbed, unaffected. The storm has no power over him. (CC)

8:25 LORD SAVE US – The disciples in the boat play the foil for Jesus in the text's second contrast. They approach Jesus and wake him, crying out for rescue: "Lord!

Save! We are perishing!” (8:25). Some commentators commend the disciples for turning to Jesus in their time of need. In light of Jesus’ response, any such commendation should be light at best. True, they *are* his disciples, even in their cowardice and smallness of faith; he has called them to follow and believe, and they in turn address him as their “Lord.” But Jesus’ question, “Why are you cowardly, you little-faiths?” reveals that they as yet scarcely know him (8:26a–b). (CC)

8:26 *little faith?* Jesus did not chide His disciples for disturbing Him but for disturbing themselves with their fears (cf 14:31; 16:8). (TLSB)

8:27 The disciples’ question speaks also to you as a reader, inviting you to consider and confess what you have learned of Jesus. (TLSB)

WAVES OBEY – Now Matthew narrates, in breathtaking fashion, the extent of the authority that the peripatetic (8:20), lowly, gracious Son of Man possesses (8:26c–d). The one who has healed and cast out demons by means of a word (8:8, 16) now *rebukes* the winds—and they obey him, so that a “great calm” (8:26) replaces the “great storm” (8:24)! The creation responds to one who possesses the authority of the Creator. (CC)

The implicit Christology is orthodox, inescapable, and should never cease to be stunning. This man, who is not the Father in heaven, nevertheless is God, the same God of the OT who created the world and who reigns over it. He is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity—the Word, the agent and preserver of the creation. The world has shown itself to be a place of threatening danger. Jesus, however, has authority to calm the chaos and restore peace to the fallen creation. (CC)

This text proclaims that Jesus has the authority to restore order to the creation, vanquishing the hostile powers and preserving the lives of his disciples. Implicit are two crucial truths. First, the creation is not the “very good” place that God originally made it to be (Genesis 1–2). Because of the fall into sin (Genesis 3), even the physical world itself is now a disordered, unpredictable, and dangerous place. We Christians still on earth have never known any other world, so it is hard for us to imagine what its pristine state was. Even in its and our fallen state, the heavens are able to declare the glory of the living God to those with the eyes and ears of faith (Ps 19:2–7). Nevertheless, God made the earth to be a dwelling place of perfect harmony and peace, and sin has wrought a terrible evil twisting throughout God’s good creation. (CC)

Second, Mt 8:23–27 promises that there will come a time when not just storms on the Sea of Galilee will be stilled, but the entire creation will be restored to God’s design, to its original submission under the rule and reign of the God who made it. Then it will not just be the temporal lives of some disciples that are spared; all the redeemed in Christ shall be raised to live forevermore in the new heavens and new earth. That restoration will take place through Jesus, for he and he alone has the authority to accomplish it (cf. Rev 1:17–18). He is the one who is already bringing the reign of God, and he will finally and fully usher in that reigning on the Day appointed. (CC)

Though the disciples in the boat do not yet understand the extent of Jesus' authority, Matthew's hearers/readers can understand and believe. We are invited to acknowledge that Jesus is the sort of Man who is God ("God is with us," 1:23) and who thus has the authority of God himself, come to repair the creation and undo all the damage caused by sin, even death itself, through his own death and resurrection. The primary hope engendered by this text is future, eschatological. Though creation's repair has begun in Jesus' own death and resurrection in the place of all mankind, the creation's birth pangs will continue (24:7) until the Last Day. On that day, the Son of Man will rebuke once more and all will be calm again—and forever. He has come with authority for those in need who call upon him in faith, even though we are "little-faiths" (8:26). He who now has received all power in heaven and on earth (28:18) will come again with glory on the clouds of heaven with fully manifest authority to save those same ones. (CC)

8:23–27 Jesus shows His divine authority by doing what only God can do (cf Ps 65:7; 89:9). The great calm that the disciples experienced was a foretaste of the truly blessed conditions that all believers will enjoy in the new creation. By nature, we have no right to live in that world. We are citizens of God's kingdom only because of what Jesus has done for us. • Dear Jesus, when danger threatens and my heart trembles, remind me of Your presence and Your power. Amen. (TLSB)

The Healing of Two Demon-possessed Men

28 When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. **29** "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" **30** Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. **31** The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." **32** He said to them, **"Go!"** So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. **33** Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. **34** Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

8:28 *region of the Gadarenes.* The region around the city of Gadara, six miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Mark and Luke identify the region by the capital city Gerasa, located about 35 miles southeast of the Sea. (CSB)

Gadara was southeast of the Sea of Galilee in Gentile territory. (TLSB)

two. Mark (5:2) and Luke (8:27) mention only one Gadarene demoniac. (CSB)

WERE SO VIOLENT – Matthew sets the scene with 8:28. The power and terror of demon possession are emphasized by the violence of the men and by the fact that they are dwelling *in tombs*. The men themselves and the region in which they live are

probably Gentile, yet even Gentiles would be appalled by these men living among the remains of the dead. Jesus' disciples, and the Jewish Christians for whom Matthew writes his Gospel, would have been even more horrified at the unclean, defiled state of the men, and also by the unclean swine nearby. The two demoniacs "met" Jesus (ὑπήντησαν αὐτῷ, 8:28), and when the incident is over, the nearby city will go out "to meet Jesus" (εἰς ὑπάντησιν τῷ Ἰησοῦ, 8:34). We are not told why the demoniacs met Jesus. What is clear is that between the two meetings, the authority of Jesus transforms the situation. (CC)

Two violent men confronted Jesus and blocked His way. (TLSB)

tombs. Caves. Even Gentiles would be repelled by people living among the remains of the dead. (TLSB)

8:29 ESV introduces this verse with "AND BEHOLD" – The first of three "And look!" exclamations introduces the dialogue between the demons and the one who will prove to be their Master (8:29–32a): "And look, they cried out and said, 'What do we and you have in common, Son of God? Did you come here to torment us before the time?' " Like Satan, who, when tempting Jesus in the wilderness, addressed him, "If you are the Son of God" (see 4:1–11), these demons' initial words to Jesus reveal that they have some grasp of Jesus' true identity. When the demons address Jesus as "Son of God," this probably reflects their recognition that Jesus truly is God. Satan and his fallen angels possess factual knowledge about the true God. Cognitively they "believe" that God is one but "shudder" (James 2:19), all the while hating and opposing the one God and his purposes. The demons' speech reflects the mystery of evil, which continues in hatred to set its will against the good will and plan of God in Jesus, in spite of the awareness of what lies ahead. (CC)

The demons knew the answer to the question that the disciples had asked about Jesus' identity (v 27). (TLSB)

appointed time. The time of their judgment (see notes on Mk 5:10 and Lk 8:31). (CSB)

Final judgment. Jesus does not answer their questions. (TLSB)

When the demons say "before the time" (καιρός, 8:29), they most likely are referring to the time of the final judgment: on the Last Day, Christ will return in glory, all the dead will be raised, and all believers in Christ will inherit the everlasting kingdom (25:31–34), while unbelievers, together with Satan and his angels, will depart into eternal fire (25:41). The demons seem to know that the day of reckoning will come and that their eternity will be one of torment. They think, however, that Jesus' appearance is somehow "before the time." They do not reckon with the reality that the reign of God already now stands near in Jesus (see 4:17) and that he will exercise his authority now on behalf of the men whose bodies the demons are inhabiting. (CC)

Jesus does not answer either of the two questions put to him by the demons in 8:29. They speak again in 8:31, pleading to be sent into the herd of pigs that was grazing at a distance (8:30). Only after their continued pleading (The imperfect indicative παρεκάλουν in 8:31, “they began to beseech,” helps to underscore the demon’s abject submission to Jesus’ authority. Contrast the simple aorist παρεκάλεσαν, “they besought,” in 8:34.) does Jesus speak to them: “Go” (8:32). The demons are completely subject to Jesus’ authority, and his powerful word suffices to control the evil spirits. This recalls Matthew’s earlier brief description of Jesus casting out evil spirits merely by means of “a word” (λόγω, 8:16). Here Jesus speaks literally a single Greek word, the imperative ὑπάγετε, “Go” (8:32). (CC)

8:30 *herd of pigs.* Large numbers of Gentiles lived in Galilee. Normally Jews did not raise pigs, since they were considered the most “unclean” of all animals. (CSB)

8:31 Unclean spirits sought refuge in unclean animals. (TLSB)

8:32 Though Jesus seemingly consented to the demons’ request, the pigs carried the demons into the depths of the sea—perhaps symbolic of the Abyss (see Lk 8:31 and note). (CSB)

Go. With a single word, Jesus cast out the demons. This contrasts with the complicated formulas employed by human exorcists (cf 12:22–28). (TLSB)

drowned in the waters. Unclean spirits sought refuge in waterless places (cf 12:43). These demons were plunged into a watery tomb. (TLSB)

That much is quite clear. Yet we may wonder, Why did the demons ask to enter the herd of swine, and why did Jesus grant their request? Since Matthew does not answer those questions, no certain answers are possible, and there is no profit in listing various guesses that scholars, both ancient and modern, have offered. What seems fairly certain is that Matthew would have expected the Jewish Christians for whom he wrote his Gospel to conclude that the demons’ desire to enter into *swine* provided further evidence of these spirits’ evil and unclean nature. (Keener, *Matthew*, 287, suggests: “The earliest Jewish hearers of this story would have nodded knowingly that demons wished to enter unclean pigs.”) Since the demons must obey Jesus’ every word, the fact that after Jesus commanded them to “go,” they “came out [from the men] and departed into the pigs” (8:32a) means that he must have ordered them to enter the swine. (CC)

ESV AND BEHOLD found right before NIV “the whole.” – The second “And look!” introduces the next part of the account (8:32b–33). Once again, we may ask more questions than the text answers. Why did the swine, now in some sense inhabited by the demons, self-destruct? Or was it Jesus’ word and will that the herd rush headlong and perish in the waters of the sea, over which he himself had just shown absolute authority (8:24–27)? Perhaps the most important thing to emphasize is that the demons did not *escape* from Jesus’ authority. Jesus did not grant their strange request so as to permit them to continue their evil works elsewhere. In the direct mortal combat between

the reign of God in Jesus and the reign of Satan and his evil angels, there is no doubt as to the victor in the battle. (Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:84, write that after Jesus' word, "the result is dramatic. The herd thunders over a cliff and perishes in the water. The sovereign power of Jesus could not be more effectively presented. His word is compulsion.") Those who were in the very act of tending the pigs fled and recounted the disturbing events to the inhabitants of the nearby town (8:33). (CC)

8:34 *pleaded with him to leave.* They were probably more concerned about their financial loss than about the deliverance of the miserable demon-possessed man. (CSB)

begged. The demons had done the same thing (v 31). (TLSB)

leave their region. The presence of so powerful an exorcist frightened these superstitious Gentiles. They did not thank or praise Him for mercifully healing two demon-possessed men. (TLSB)

This strange ending too raises questions for which no answers are provided, but the basic message is clear. Jesus' divine authority, which is powerful enough to cast out demons on behalf of those who are afflicted, is not always met with faith. For every leper (8:1–4) or centurion (8:5–13) who recognizes Jesus' authority and believes in him, there are cities that see his mighty works but do not repent (see 11:20). The demons and the townspeople recognize that Jesus possesses extraordinary authority, but both react in fear, not in faith; both have nothing in common with Jesus and want nothing to do with him. Whether Jesus' authority comes to human beings in the form of his Word or in the form of a mighty work, the mystery remains: only some are granted faith to see and truly to see, to hear and truly to believe. (CC)

What are we to think of demon possession in the world today? We cannot reject the possibility that some today may be possessed in the same way as the demoniacs were in 8:28–29. Scripture does not promise that during this time before Christ returns, Satan and his angels have been bound so as never to enter and possess a human being, as these two men in the region of the Gadarenes had experienced. However, two qualifications may be offered. (CC)

First, Scripture itself paints a suggestive picture. While the reality of the evil spirits is apparent throughout the OT and NT, accounts of demon possession are concentrated primarily in the Synoptic Gospels. There are precious few accounts of what we would call demon possession in the OT. Most of the NT, in fact, lacks any emphasis on direct demonic activity. (One of the remarkable features of John's Gospel is that it contains *no* accounts of demonic possession.) (CC)

By remarkable contrast, there is a dramatic emphasis on demon possession in the Synoptic Gospels, where the dominant theme of Jesus' message and ministry is the present reality and future promise of *the reign of God*. One might cautiously suggest that the great adversary and accuser threw his forces into the fray in unprecedented

fashion during the time when the Son of God was bringing God's royal reign near and driving back the old evil foe. (CC)

The Scriptures affirm that in Christ's earthly ministry and continuing throughout the NT era, Satan is bound to an extent (Mt 12:22–29; Rev 20:2), so that he cannot prevent the Gospel from being proclaimed (Mt 24:14; 2 Tim 2:24–26). Toward the end of this age Satan will be let loose for a short time (Rev 20:3). Moreover, the Scriptures picture Satan as being thrown out of heaven and defeated by the earthly ministry of Jesus, culminating in his death and resurrection (Lk 10:18; Jn 12:31; Col 2:15; Rev 12:5–10). (This suggests that Satan no longer has the ability to come before God in heaven and accuse God's saints as he did in the OT era, notably in Job 1–2 (cf. also Zech 3:1–2). As the Gospel is proclaimed throughout the world, Jesus continues to drive back Satan and his forces. Therefore, it should not surprise us if demonic possession is much rarer in our world and in our experience than it seems to have been in Palestine during Jesus' ministry. Jesus' numerous encounters with demoniacs in the Synoptic Gospels testify that the time of his earthly ministry was unique in all the history of the creation. Ever since Jesus achieved the decisive victory at the cross and empty tomb, Satan and his hordes have been in retreat. (CC)

Nevertheless, Scripture does not declare that such things as oppression and even possession by demons are impossible or unknown during this present time, perhaps especially among peoples and in lands where the Gospel has not yet been proclaimed widely or at all. Yet the church now lives in the confidence of Christ's first manifestation of the reign of heaven and in hopeful watching for his final and complete bringing of that reign at his second coming. (CC)

A second suggestion, therefore, may be in order. What is clear from other parts of the NT is that all baptized believers in Christ have received the Spirit of God and are God's treasured possessions, with Christ living within (Rom 8:12–17; 1 Cor 12:3; Gal 2:20; 4:4–7; Col 1:27; 1 Jn 4:4). Therefore, no Christian could ever be indwelt or possessed by demons, or require exorcism as we see especially in the Synoptic Gospels, including Mt 8:28–32. God's children will surely be subject to the temptations and attacks of Satan. However, we do not need to fear demonic possession. For we are the followers of Jesus, who lives within us, and whose authority is incomparably greater than any demonic force (1 Jn 4:4). In these latter days before the triune God ushers in our full salvation in the new heavens and the new earth (Revelation 21–22), the Son of God has given us the Holy Spirit in Baptism as his gift and down payment to vouchsafe our inheritance (see the commentary on Mt 28:19–20; also Eph 1:13–14). (CC)

8:28–34 Demons are especially active in opposing Jesus' ministry. But they cannot stymie God's Son, who repeatedly shows His authority over them. We cannot reject the possibility that demon possession causes some afflictions today. However, baptized children of God do not need to fear demonic possession. For our Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us "from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil" (SC, Second Article, p xxxvii). Baptism into Christ ensures that His victory is our victory. • Thank You, Lord Jesus, for manifesting Your power over all demonic forces. Amen. (TLSB)