

“Believe because Christianity is True” (Matthew 8:23–34)(10.18.20)

Matthew 8:23–34 (NIV84)

²³ Then he [Jesus] 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!”

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.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Believe because Christianity is True”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

My original plan was to just preach Matthew’s account of the healing of two demon-possessed men. But, in my study I realized that I almost fell into a trap that too many fall into – not taking the scriptural context into account. The pairing of these two miracles is intentional and informative. Jesus is Lord over the natural realm and Lord of the spiritual realm too.

While this is very important, there is something more subtle in the connection. The amazed disciples ask the universal question, “What kind of man is this?” I like the King James translation here, “What manner of man is this.” The answer to the question occurs in the healing account just two verses later from the spiritual realm. The demons cried out to Jesus, calling him, “the Son of God.”

This question and answer is the core issue of the New Testament. You could argue they are the core issue of all scripture. This question begs answering for every human heart. The answer brings eternal life or eternal death. The answer defines how we live out our lives in this world. Every one of us must decide if it is true. Is Jesus the Son of God? And then, respond appropriately.

Three events brought this scripture to the preaching pulpit today. If you are participating in the Emmaus New Testament Reading Plan, you may remember that today’s reading was for last Sunday. The scheduled reading for today is the parallel account in the Gospel of Luke and tomorrow is the parallel account in the Gospel of Mark.

Last Sunday night, I was playing basketball with my son, grandsons, and the two exchange students who have become part of the family. My son told me about an incident in my grandson Ben’s Bible class.

And the third event is that I just got a new book for my Logos Bible Software. The short title is *Forensic Faith* and the long title is *Forensic Faith: A Homicide Detective Makes the Case for a More Reasonable, Evidential Christian Faith*. Using methodologies learned in his law enforcement career, author, James Warner Wallace, argues that Christianity is True. He also explains why all Christians should be able to present this truth. The standard for belief is what would convince a jury in a courtroom. I will be quoting extensively from this book during this sermon series.

BODY:

Wallace says, "I've been speaking around the country for a number of years now. I often address church groups of one nature or another, and when I do, I usually begin by asking a simple question: "Why are you a Christian?" The response I get is sometimes disappointing. Typically, attendees provide responses in one of the following broad categories:

Answer 1: "I was raised in the church" / "My parents were Christians" / "I've been a Christian as long as I can remember"

Answer 2: "I've had an experience that convinced me" / "The Holy Spirit confirmed it for me" / "God demonstrated His existence to me"

Answer 3: "I was changed by Jesus" / "I used to be [fill in your choice of immoral lifestyle], and God changed my life"

Answer 4: "Because I just *know* the Bible is true" / "Because God called me to believe"

The problem that Wallace sees with these answers is that advocates from most any religion could give parallel answers, similar answers. The answer he almost never hears, "I believe because Christianity is true."

When we examine why so many younger Christians have fallen away from the faith, we must confess that we have failed to properly equip them for confrontation with our culture. "When surveyed, the largest segment of young, ex-Christian respondents said they left Christianity because they had intellectual doubt, skepticism, and unanswered questions."

As we send our young Christians off to college, we must recognize that we are sending them into combat. We have NOT taught them WHY Christianity is true. Did you know?: "College professors are nearly five times more likely to be professing atheists or agnostics than people in the general population. The vast majority of university professors reject the Bible as "the actual word of God.""

On J. Warner Wallace's website: www.ColdCaseChristianity.com, he posts a blog, podcasts, and videos weekly. He received this email from a college student named Andrew Deane:

"My Dad was a Southern Baptist Preacher and while I was growing up I basically lived at the church. I knew all of the bible stories and was even baptized when I was eight ... After graduating high school, I went to college to get a degree in mechanical engineering. One might think a degree of this kind would involve little to no discussion of whether or not God exists, or if Jesus was a real person, but I encountered these and many more objections.

I had a literature class where the professor gave a presentation on how Jesus was copied from other gods and how this explained away the "mythology" of Jesus. I had an electromagnetics course in which the professor viciously attacked the concept of intelligent design ... I had a space technology class in which the professor vehemently argued for the existence of aliens but refused to acknowledge the existence of God. These are just a few examples from the many interactions I had with my professors. Unfortunately, most of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are severely lacking in training, and when they encounter even the weakest arguments, they are not prepared ... As a Christian in the college setting, you are being constantly challenged, constantly poked and prodded. It is easy to throw your hands in the air, becoming convinced your faith is a lie when you are being trampled every day by both professors and by peers. All Christians, but especially ones in college, must know what they believe and why they believe it if they have any hope of surviving with their faith intact ... I think of college almost like an atheist ambush. The Christians are walking in totally unaware of the danger until it is too late and the damage has already been done.

That's why I wanted to take the time to thank you ... When I entered college, I was struggling with many of the objections I encountered. I discovered your podcast and your careful research. The evidentiary approach was incredibly helpful. As a result, I actually exited college with my faith even stronger than when I began. I want to encourage you to keep up the good work."

When Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV84)

³⁷ Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with **all your mind.**’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.”

Paul tells us in Romans 12:2 (NIV84)

² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by **the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Unfortunately, we have ignored “the mind” aspect to the detriment of a healthy Church, a healthy Body of Christ.

The New Testament authors understood the necessity of convincing the mind through the presentation of evidence. Miracles in the early Church served as evidence of the Holy Spirit at work. The apostles gave their personal testimony about Jesus. They testified to what they saw and heard while they were with Jesus. They shared what Jesus taught them.

The Apostle Paul shares the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day **according to the Scriptures**, and that *He **appeared** to Cephas, then to the twelve.* After that *He **appeared** to more than five hundred brethren at one time,* most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then *He **appeared** to James, then to all the apostles;* and last of all, as to one untimely born, *He **appeared** to me also.”*

The Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 5:1, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and **witness of the sufferings of Christ**, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed.”

And in 2 Peter 1:16, “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were **eyewitnesses** of His majesty.”

The Apostle John shares in 1 John 1:1–3, “What was from the beginning, what we have **heard**, what we have **seen** with our eyes, what we have **looked at** and **touched** with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have **seen** and **testify** and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—*what we have **seen and heard*** we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us.”

Dr. Luke starts the Gospel of Luke 1:1–4, “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were *handed down to us by those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses and servants of the word***, it seemed fitting for me as well, having **investigated** everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that **you may know the exact truth** about the things you have been taught.”

There is more scripture like this, but these four authors make up the bulk of the New Testament. There is a song called “Old Time Religion.” If it was good enough for our mothers and fathers in the faith, it should be good enough for us. Yes, our experiences of God also give evidence. Yes, our transformed lives and the fruit of the Holy Spirit give evidence. At the same time, let us not neglect the importance of appealing to the mind because Christianity is true.

Let us move on to the second event that motivated this message:

My grandson Ben is a freshman at The Pilgrim Academy. All the students take Bible as a subject, every year. In the Upper School, the boys and girls go to separate Bible classes. Last week, Ben’s Bible teacher told the class that God doesn’t love everyone. Remember, that most of these students have spent years at this Christian School and most all of the others also have a faith-based background. They are trained to respect authority.

When my son told me about this, I said, “The parents need to go down the school and address this right away.” He replied, “The boys have already handled it!” Apparently, Ben and his classmates discussed it. They researched with their study Bibles and his friend Jeremy was the spokesman. When they went back to Bible Class, Jeremy laid out the argument that God does love everyone and he cited several passages from scripture.

The Bible teacher loved their response: "This is great, we are getting into the Word. Let's keep doing this."

These students were being like the more noble Bereans, they searched the scriptures to make sure Paul, or in this case their teacher, was speaking truth. We should learn from these students. I commend The Pilgrim Academy for the way they train up the youth in the way they should go. Like every subject they teach, learning about the Bible is also a matter of the mind.

Now, there is likely to be people hearing this message that are thinking, "That is all fine and good; but, what if we don't believe the Bible." In the coming weeks, I will develop a full rebuttal, but let these brief thoughts suffice for today.

By the standards of historical documents, the Bible is exceptional. Thousands of Archaeological finds have supported the Bible. Fulfilled prophecy verifies the Bible. There are literally thousands upon thousands of ancient manuscripts that are highly consistent with each other.

By now, you may be thinking that I have forgotten about today's text. I have not. One of the many objections to the reliability of the Bible is the alleged contradictions. In Matthew's version, he says that there are two demoniacs. In Mark and Luke, only one demoniac is mentioned.

Mark and Luke say "a" man, not "one" man; and, even then it would not necessarily have been a contradiction to say one. They focused on the demon possessed man that responded positively to Jesus' healing. In a Bible study we could spend quite a bit of time examining the scholarly debate trying to reconcile the two different numbers in these three accounts.

When we look at all three accounts, we get a fuller picture of what happened. That is another lesson for us: look at parallel accounts of an event. In a courtroom, many eyewitnesses are called to see the event from different viewpoints and to get to the truth of the situation. By taking a basic and plain reading of the three accounts, I believe a universal truth is revealed.

Two demon possessed men are healed by Jesus but respond differently. They both heard the demons call Jesus the Son of God. The one man, referred to as Legion because of the extent of his possession, ends up sitting at Jesus' feet. This is a position of worship. Now, he was clothed and in his right mind. He begged to go with Jesus, but Jesus refuses him and sends him home to share what God (Jesus) had done for him. And, the man obeyed.

The second man is not mentioned again. It seems logical that this is because he didn't respond in a like manner. Otherwise, he would have been mentioned. It is also consistent throughout the whole New Testament, some respond to the Good News of Jesus and others do not. The evidence, the experience, may be identical, but each individual must decide for themselves, "What manner of man is this? Who is this Jesus?"

We see the rejection of the local townspeople. They heard the testimony of those tending the herd of pigs. They saw Legion, who was previously a total outcast who they avoided because of his violent nature. Chains could not contain him. He would not wear clothes and lived in the tombs. This man with no hope had been completely restored to full humanity by Jesus.

Luke tells us that the townspeople were fearful. Of what were they afraid? Were they afraid that Jesus really was the Son of God? Were they afraid of the unknown? Were they afraid of losing their livelihood? Were they afraid that their understanding of the world might be turned upside down?

CONCLUSION:

We see in the two healed demoniacs that a choice must be made. You can celebrate what Jesus has done for you and worship Him. Then you must tell what God has done for you. The other option is to disappear into oblivion, never to be heard from again. With Jesus there is life and without Jesus there is not life.

There is a mass of people that simply refuse to accept the evidence for Jesus. They hear the testimony from eyewitnesses. They see that their swine have been drowned. If they receive Jesus, they would have

to give up their worldview. They would have to give up their way of living in which they feel a frail and perilous comfort.

Jesus warned His disciples of coming persecution. They would be beaten and dragged before the authorities. This would be an opportunity for them to be a testimony and bear witness to what God the Holy Spirit tells them.

Let us not wait for the persecution to come. Let us proclaim, teach, and model a life-giving gospel: the Good News of Jesus. We are Christians because we have been baptized with water and the Spirit. We are Christians because we have seen Jesus change lives. We are Christians because Christianity is true. Amen and amen. Let us pray.