

KEEPING COMPANY

There is an interesting encounter described in the scriptures. It is a peculiar story involving a lot of pigs. The fact that they were present in quantity was fortunate because there were a lot of demons looking for a place to stay. Waterlogged hogs are still better accommodations than Hell. You can read the story yourself in Matthew. The whole city came out to greet Jesus after He had defeated the demons, restored the mind of the madman, and made their highways safe once again for women and small children. Okay, we are paraphrasing just a bit. These folks did not; however, come out to thank Him. The reason they came was to ask Him to leave them alone.

Their reception of Christ leaves room for a bit of confusion. Why did they ask Him to leave? We thought we must have missed something. It could not be that they had lost a lot of friends in the demons that had been eliminated. It was not that they were worse off than before for having the mind of the madman restored. Then we realized what was wrong with the story. Why were there pigs present?

Jesus did not spend a lot of time ministering to the Gentiles. We don't hear of Him traveling much outside of Israel (plus or minus an early detour to avoid infant killers). So it is safe to assume that this herd of pigs was being raised in Israel, albeit in a part of Israel with a heavy Gentile influence and probably a large Gentile population. The real question is why? If you have ever heard your friends and neighbors complain about how difficult it is to be a farmer today, try raising hogs in Israel under the dispensation of the Law, You and your neighbors were absolutely forbidden to eat them. We have asked those wiser than we are what pigs can be raised for besides eating. We did not obtain much more wisdom. Most successful farmers don't make a hobby of raising animals for which they have no market. So it is probably safe to assume that the market for the pork was right there in the land of the Gergesenes, hopefully only for the Gentile population. You cannot move hogs very far without the help of the Teamsters or other efficient and economical forms of transportation.

In Hebrews, Paul stated that under the Law of Moses, true righteousness was not really possible. Nonetheless, the Law was all they had to live by. They were given hundreds of rules to follow in order to be right in the sight of God. Behind those rules was solid rationale, much known only to God at the time, for improving and bettering the life of His chosen people. More important than the rules though, was the willingness and effort to follow them. Much like an earthly father with his children, their attempts at obedience and their pursuit of righteousness made His people precious in His sight. So precious that He would bless them, strengthen them, fight for them, and put up a hedge of protection around them. Protection from all of their enemies. Including demons.

Besides the spiritual problems associated with raising hogs under the Law, there are other unpleasant aspects of living with these animals that are social in nature. Most deal with hygiene. We don't tend to let these animals live in our homes. They are unclean as a food source and objectionable as companions because they tend to eat dead things as well as garbage. Their smell is offensive because they make no effort to stay clean. They make rude noises that we get really tired of our children trying to imitate. They are also powerful enough to intrude into areas of the home where they are not wanted. But, we suppose that if we really enjoyed pork meat, we could put up with all of that. Especially if we wanted to discourage company from dropping in.

Supposing that it was God Himself that wanted to visit us? Even in our dispensation of grace, the success of our pursuit and desire for righteousness can still be dependent upon what can be found where we live. If we are to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, then it would be wise to have no other gods in our hearts that would serve to anger the jealous God we serve. We are to attempt to live

clean and holy before Him. We stress the word attempt, because righteousness is no more possible by our own efforts than it was for the Israelites. The effort is once again what God desires. In an effort to make Him feel invited and desired in our homes and our lives, we should do for Him what we do for any other honored guest. We should remove from ourselves anything that would offend Him or make Him feel less than welcome. We should also remove it from our homes.

There are several places where God plainly tells us what He dislikes. A pretty extensive list of these, including such things as fornication, murder, covetousness, inventors of evil things, and those disobedient to parents, can be found at the end of the first chapter of Romans. They are the result of a reprobate mind. All these things that God despises can be readily found in the subject matter of what we often bring into our homes to entertain us with hardly a second thought. We are warned against finding pleasure in those who do these things, for they are only worthy of death. When we fill our hearts and minds with these things to amuse ourselves, we are not making it desirable for God to dwell within us. He clearly states that light has no fellowship with darkness.

As with Joshua, it ultimately comes down to a choice as to whether we and our house will serve God. We can answer a lot of conflicts within ourselves by asking whether God would spend time watching what we are about to. We suppose that if we were truly able to enjoy what passes for entertainment these days, we could tolerate having TV programming come back into our home. We tried it for a while. But the filth got to be too much to bear. Too much death was being made a part of our daily diet. So much garbage spilled into the home that it was sometimes difficult to even feel clean. The programmers pushed into subject areas that they should not have gone into and the rude noises coming with the package were not the ones we wanted our children imitating. Most of all though, we really missed having company.

In the Gergesenes, neither company nor righteousness was a praised commodity. Raising pigs would have to have been about the most flagrant violation of the Law of Moses. Contact with animals that were unclean required ritual purification of the face and hands and being considered unclean until sundown. Raising pigs and being in contact with them on a daily basis would have made staying righteous under the law almost impossible for a Jewish farmer. Surely they must have been Gentiles. They were not even trying to maintain the appearance of serving Jehovah. Which would explain why they were a bit uncomfortable in the presence of God. He was neither wanted or welcome. This would also indicate that there was no hedge of protection around their land. As a result, the demons there were named Legion, because there were so many.

God is still traveling. He is still looking for a people who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Still searching for the companionship for which He longed when he created us. So He comes to our hearts and our homes and peeks in to see what type of things dwell within. Whether they be good, or pure, or lovely. If we don't want Him coming in, we can quickly make ourselves and our habitations unfit for Him to dwell in. This traveler was the author of the Law. He did not care for the fellowship of pigs then. Still doesn't now.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Do you think the townspeople who came out to greet Jesus were uncomfortable because of His power or because of His holiness?
2. Have you ever noticed odd things mentioned in the scriptures that seem out of place with the rest of what is being related? Have you ever really pursued the meaning of any of these and found a powerful truth? Any examples?
3. Knowing that God looks at the heart, do you think God is more interested in how strictly rules are adhered to or the effort made to adhere to them in order to please Him?

4. How much company would you get if pigs lived in your home?
5. If you wanted someone to come and visit you, would you leave something in plain sight that you thought might offend them?
6. If you badly wanted them to stay with you, to what extent would you change your lifestyle to avoid offending them?
7. Does it matter to you that there are some things that God really dislikes and finds offensive? He wants to live with you. Would you want Him to visit or even more seriously, live in your home with you? If you knew you had any of those things in your home that offend God, would you act to remove them?
8. Could watching shows that contain such things be construed as finding pleasure in them that do those things?
9. If light has no fellowship with darkness, do you think God will stay where there is sin that is not repented of and even enjoyed?
10. If people you knew came into your home and said to you what is said, acted the way they act, and dressed the way they do on some TV shows, would they be tolerated? Asked to come back daily? Is there a difference between the two?
11. The obvious answer is that the TV can be turned off. If the show is mildly offensive, how often is it turned off in your home? In the process of acceptance, have you found yourself desensitized to things that bothered you a year or two ago?
12. How many shows can you think of that are really fit for small children to watch? Who said that we are to become as children?
13. If most are not fit for small children, why are they fit for older children or adults? What makes the difference?
14. What would you accept in trade for the presence and protection of God upon your home?
15. Is there anything in your room, home, or life that you are pretty sure God would not consider good, pure, and holy? Is it worth making your celestial visitor uncomfortable?