

It really is one of the most jarring moments in the Gospels. Jesus performs an astonishing miracle—restoring two incredibly dangerous, marginalized men and making the region safe again—and the townspeople’s immediate response is basically, “Please get out.” To understand why they react this way, we have to look at the cultural, economic, and psychological context of Matthew 8:28–34. When we unpack the scene, their reaction actually makes perfect, self-preserving sense. Here are the primary reasons the townspeople begged Jesus to leave:

1. The Massive Economic Devastation

The most immediate and practical reason the people wanted Jesus gone was the catastrophic financial loss.

When Jesus cast the demons out of the men, he allowed them to enter a nearby herd of pigs, which then rushed down a steep bank and drowned in the sea. In the parallel accounts (Mark 5 and Luke 8), we are told there were about 2,000 pigs.

This was a massive blow to the local economy. In this Gentile region (the Gadarenes/Decapolis), pork was a staple of agriculture, trade, and livelihood. Jesus essentially traded a multi-million dollar local industry for the sanity and souls of two outcasts. For the townspeople, the “cure” was far too expensive. They were likely terrified of what else Jesus might cost them if he stuck around.

2. Fear of Uncontrollable Power

In the ancient world, encounters with the divine or the supernatural were deeply terrifying. The townspeople were already afraid of the two possessed men—Matthew notes they were so fierce that no one could pass that way.

But suddenly, the people were confronted with someone who possessed a power far greater than the demons. If the demons were a local menace, Jesus was an absolute force of nature. They didn’t view Jesus with warm, religious reverence; they viewed him with sheer terror. He was an unpredictable, uncontrollable power who could upend the natural and spiritual order with a single word. They simply wanted the danger to leave.

3. The “Known” Chaos vs. The “Unknown” Cure

Psychologically, humans often prefer a predictable problem over an unpredictable solution. The people of the region had adapted to the demon-possessed men. It was a terrible situation, but it was a *known* quantity: they knew to avoid the tombs, they knew the men were dangerous, and society had built a boundary around the problem.

Jesus disrupted the status quo. His presence brought radical transformation, but it was messy, frightening, and required a completely new way of living. The people decided they preferred the familiar chaos of their old lives over the disruptive, awe-inspiring presence of the Kingdom of Heaven.

4. A Cultural Clash

This event takes place on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, which was primarily Gentile (non-Jewish) territory. The presence of a massive herd of pigs—an unclean animal to Jews—highlights this cultural divide.

To the locals, Jesus was a foreign Jewish rabbi bringing disruptive spiritual warfare into their territory and destroying their property in the process. There was likely a sense of civic self-preservation: *We don't know who this Jewish teacher is, but we don't want his kind of trouble here.*

Ultimately, the exegesis of this passage reveals a sharp contrast in values. Jesus valued the restoration of two broken human beings above all property and social comfort. The townspeople, faced with the overwhelming reality of who Jesus was, decided the cost of having him in their neighborhood was just too high.