

Jesus' Power Over Demons

Luke 8:26-39

Pastor John Miller

Last time, in Luke 8:22-25, we saw Jesus' divine power over nature, over the wind and the waves. Jesus had gotten into a boat with His disciples, they had started to cross the lake, a storm came up, He was asleep in the boat, His disciples fearfully woke Him up, Jesus spoke peace to the wind and waves and there was a great calm. The disciples then asked, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"

Now we move from Jesus' power over nature to Jesus' power over the supernatural world; over the natural world—the wind and the waves—to the supernatural world—over the demonic powers.

Mankind has always been fascinated with the supernatural. They want to know, "Is there a God? Is there a devil? Is there life after death? Are there demonic beings? What's going on in the supernatural realm?"

There are two dangers that are prevalent when it comes to demons and the devil. The first danger is that you deny their existence. The Bible teaches the existence of a personal devil, Satan or Lucifer. It also teaches that there are demons that fell with Satan in his fall from heaven, and they are evil spirits that are wreaking havoc against God and mankind in the world. So they are real and legitimate, and we need to know what the Bible says about them.

The other extreme is not only to deny their existence; it is to be overly enamored with them, intrigued by them and overly involved with them. It's either one or the other; people go one way and deny their existence, or they go the other way and see a demon in everyone. If you have a cough, you have the "demon of cough." You have the "demon of donuts" or the "demon of nicotine." I saw a preacher on TV one time who was going to cast the demon of nicotine out of a man. I don't think so!

When we get to verse 30, Jesus asked the man, "What is your name?" The man said, "'Legion,' because many demons had entered him." The man didn't say "Lust" or "Greed" or "Hatred." He said that many demons had entered this man. Demons aren't named. Nicotine and the like are sins of the flesh and are named, so they aren't demons.

As Christians, we fight against the world—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16)—the flesh, and the devil. Those are the three enemies of believers. But we need to be careful that we don't blame the devil for our fleshly sins. "I have anger problems, so I have a demon. I need to have this demon exorcised out of me, and I'll have victory over my anger." Or "I have the demon of lust." They're not named that way in the Bible. These are your flesh.

You can sin without the devil being involved. Flip Wilson used to say, "The devil made me do

it!" But you sin just fine without the devil. "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

"If Satan cannot pull you down with disbelief, he will just as happily push you overboard with an obsession about him."

Our study of the demoniac of Gadara does affirm the reality of Satan and of his fallen hosts, demons. But it also reveals greater power, purpose and the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The demons know who Jesus is, and they call Him "Son of the Most High God" (Mark 5:7). So the reality is that demons exist, but we are not to be overly enamored by them or attracted to them; we are to keep our eyes on Jesus. Even though there is a lot about the demon-possessed man in this story, the story is about the power of Jesus Christ. That is why all three synoptic Gospels tell this story: they want to show that Jesus has power over demons. "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

I am going to break this story into four sections. The first section is in verses 26-29. It is the destructive power of Satan. Luke says, "Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time." The King James Bible says "devils," but it would be better translated "demons," because there is only one devil, Satan, but there are many demons. And the Bible doesn't tell us how long this man had these demons or how he got them.

Verse 27, "And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, 'What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!'" Now the next verse is a parenthetical statement; Luke is telling us why the demon said, "Do not torment me!" Verse 29, "For He had commanded the unclean spirit..." the title for this demon "...to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness."

Verse 26 says, "Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes," so they came to their destination. In the previous story Jesus calmed the storm on the lake Galilee. They left the west side of the lake, sailed across, the storm hit and the wind probably drove them to the southeastern side of the lake. And this area is mainly Gentile territory, the area of the Gadarenes. The town of Gadara was about six miles from there.

So they landed there, got out of the boat and "There met Him a certain man," verse 27. Mark and Matthew tell us that there were two men. Critics of the Bible ask, "How many were there? One or two?" There were two, but the focus is only on one. It is on the one who is the most vocal, the one who is transformed. The other one is not mentioned, other than he is one of the two men. Both were demon possessed, clearly one of them is saved, redeemed and set free, so the focus is on him. "And he wore no clothes..." which is interesting "...nor did he live in a

house but in the tombs.”

So these two guys are not people you want to live in your neighborhood. Running around, out of their minds, mad men, unclothed, attacking people and terrorizing people. Both were demon possessed.

Verse 28, “When he saw Jesus, he cried out...” the demon is speaking through the man, and he “...fell down before Him.” The other Gospel says that he “worshipped Him,” but it doesn’t mean he worshipped Jesus; it means he prostrated himself before Him. “And with a loud voice said, ‘What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?’” Demons know who Jesus is. They know He is the Son of God. They are orthodox in their belief.

“I beg You, do not torment me!” The other Gospel adds “before the time.” He knew his time was going to end, but he was saying that the time was premature. It was early so “Not yet.” It will be at the Second Coming, when Jesus comes back, when He will bind the devil, throw him into the abyss or the pit. They are alluding to Revelation 20 in verse 28 of our text.

Verse 29, “For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him...” took control of him “...and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness.” The people of the city tried to restrain the man with chains, but the demons would give him supernatural strength to break his bonds.

I want to talk about demons for a minute, but it’s not my favorite subject. Demons do exist. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God...” Before anything else existed, there was God. God always has been. There was never a time when God was not.

You say, “Well, I don’t understand that.” Neither do I. But isn’t it awesome?! God is eternal. There has never been a time when God did not exist. He is personal, all powerful, all present and all knowing. And what did God do? He “created the heavens and the earth.”

Sometime, either before or after Genesis 1:1, God created angels. So now there is God and angels. Angels are spirit beings created by God, so they are not eternal. They are creatures. They are limited; they are not omnipotent, not omnipresent, not omniscient. From the angelic beings, one was named Lucifer, a beautiful, powerful angel. But he was filled with pride (Isaiah 14), and he wanted to exalt himself above God. One of the greatest mysteries in all the Bible is the origin of evil or sin; all we know is that it originated in the heart of Lucifer. So Lucifer became the enemy of God.

As a result of his sin, Lucifer was kicked out of heaven—it’s called the fall of Satan. And the Bible indicates that one-third of the angelic beings rebelled and fell with Satan. We don’t know how many angels there are; the Bible indicates there are more than you can number. They are innumerable.

So demons are fallen angels. You have God, Satan and demons. And some demons are

bound right now in the pit awaiting judgment (2 Peter 2:4). I guess it's because they are so wicked. And then you have other demons that are loose who try to defame God, they attack man and like Satan, they come "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10). They are wicked, evil spirits, also called "unclean spirits" (Matthew 12:43). Apart from that we have no more knowledge or understanding of the spirit realm.

Whatever you want to know about the supernatural—especially the demonic realm—get your information from the Bible. Not from experience. Always interpret your experience by the Bible. Never interpret the Bible by your experience. Always judge what you hear, see and experience by the clear teaching of the Bible. Never the other way around; never take your experience and force it upon the Scriptures. Those who get messed up when it comes to demonology or Satanism do so, because they try to use their experience to interpret Scripture rather than using Scripture to interpret their experience. In every aspect of your life, you must interpret all things by the Bible. It's the objective truth of God's Word.

So demons are fallen angels who hate God, hate mankind, try to thwart the purposes of God, and they also have their own demon doctrine. All the cults with their false doctrine, false teachings and false religions have a demonic influence behind them. Like Satan, they sometimes come as "an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), but they are actually messengers of Satan. They are wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). That's the background on demons.

Be careful, too, when you interpret Scripture to ask yourself, "Is this just descriptive—explaining what happened, or is it prescriptive—telling us what to do?" Some verses are just historical narrative, which is what we have in our text; they are just descriptive. In the epistles, we have didactic teaching, which is prescriptive teaching, that tells us specifically about demons and how to deal with them.

Verse 28, "When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, 'What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!'" Notice that these demons are orthodox. In James 2:19, it says they believe there is only one God. What the liberals or progressives today deny—the deity of Christ—the demons affirm.

The demons also believe that Jesus is coming back and will bind them and throw them in the pit and in the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41), so he says, "I beg You, do not torment me!" It wasn't their time yet. Verse 29, "For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man." Jesus has power over demons; He can command them and they must obey. "For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness." So what we have is the sad, destructive plight of those who are taken captive by the devil and his demons.

Now we don't know how this man became demon possessed. But it is dangerous to dabble in demonic things. There are no such things as "good witches" and "bad witches." There is no such thing as "white magic" and "black magic." It is either demonic or of God; there is only the

devil and God. And they are not equal battling out; God is sovereign, eternal and all powerful. The devil has to do what He says, because God is in control.

Be careful if you dabble in the occult—in Taro cards, in the Ouija Board, in Satanic activity. Those things can open you up to demonic activity. Drugs also. I lived in the '60s and I know that when people took LSD and smoked marijuana, they thought they saw God and heard voices. Today LSD and other psychedelic drugs are back in vogue, and people also are eating mushrooms again. This is demonic activity. If you take LSD and think you're hearing from God, you're not. There is only one way to get to God, and that's through Jesus Christ. So don't dabble in those things.

If you're not born again, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, then you could possibly be attacked or even possessed by the devil. You need to be born again, have the Holy Spirit and become a child of God.

Man is made "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27). So what does Satan do? He tries to mar the image of God. This man in our text was naked, out of his mind, attacking people and was demonically possessed. God has to change us by the power of His Spirit.

Marriage is under attack today. Why? Because it reflects God. Gender confusion is an attack of Satan, because we are made in the image of God.

Now we move from the destructive power of Satan to the second section, verses 30-35, the delivering power of the Son of God. Jesus has power over demons. "Jesus asked him, saying, 'What is your name?'" Then the demon speaks out through this man. "And he said, 'Legion,' because many demons had entered him." A Legion was a group of Roman soldiers numbering 6,000. I don't know if that means there were 6,000 demons in this man. But that will mess you up! It's more likely that there were "many demons" in him. There probably were hundreds, maybe even thousands of them possessing this man.

Over the years there have been movements in the church to help people with sin in their lives. A few years ago it became very fashionable to tell believers they had a demon, and that's why they have lust, unforgiveness, hatred, greed or other problems. So they needed to have the demon exorcised out of them, and then they would be free. But that's not taught in the Bible.

The Bible says that we should take off the works of the flesh, not cast them out. I say this because they were naming demons with names of sin, and they were trying to get rid of those demons by just exorcising them in a church service. Again, they were going by experience rather than Scripture, so they got off balance and that's very dangerous.

I don't believe that a Christian can have a demon. I don't believe a Christian, a born-again child of God, can have a demon living inside them. "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Do you think God is going to dwell in a duplex with Him on top and the devil on the bottom? Upstairs God, downstairs the demon?! "The devil made me do it!" You need the demon of nicotine or the demon of greed cast out? No. Those are the things from which

we “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).

And you're not going to get deliverance just by some exorcism. You're going to get deliverance by yielding to the Spirit, walking in obedience to Christ and having the Word of God in your life. We walk in the Spirit. It's going to be a process of sanctification; not a deliverance of demonic activity.

So we see Jesus' power to set free and transform this man. How marvelous!

In verses 31 and 32, we have the first prayer or petition in the story. It is demons praying to Jesus to not cast them into the pit, the “abusos” (Revelation 20:3) but rather to go into the pigs. There are three different prayers in our text, this is the first and it has two parts. “And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss. Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them.” So they asked Jesus not to cast them out before their time but to allow them to go into the swine. Notice that Jesus answered their prayer: “And He permitted them. Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned.”

Some people get really upset, as critics of the Bible, when they say that it wasn't very nice of Jesus to kill those poor pigs. That's stupid. Jesus is God. Can God not do whatever He wants? Yes. That's a prerogative of being God. Before anything else existed, God existed. So by right of creation, He is Lord of all. If He wants to let these demons go into the pigs—it wasn't his idea; it was their idea. And Jesus allowed them to go. This is the first prayer in the graveyard, and Jesus answered their prayer. And people get all upset over the poor pigs.

And then others say that the Jews aren't supposed to keep pigs, and Jesus was just eliminating an illegal business. But it doesn't say they were Jews. And nothing in the text says that was Jesus' motive. He just allowed the demons to go into the swine. But they had to obey Him at His word.

When Jesus comes back in His Second Coming, He will then bind Satan and cast him into the lake of fire.

These pigs, full of demons, ran down the hill into the lake and drowned. Verse 34, “When those who fed them saw what had happened they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed...” notice three things “...sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed...” who gave him the clothes? “...and in his right mind.” Notice the response. “And they were afraid.”

They were freaking out! This was scary. They were more afraid of this man transformed than they were when he was possessed by the demons. That's so sad. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” You talk about the power of Jesus Christ to change a life! Sometimes there's a quick and radical transformation. It's amazing.

J.C. Ryle said, “Never is a man in his right mind until he is converted or in his right place until he sits by faith at the feet of Jesus or rightly clothed until he puts on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.” I like that. So this man was sitting at the feet of Jesus and in his right mind.

I was thinking about my friend, Pastor Raul Ries. He got saved when he was waiting at home with a loaded shotgun to kill his wife, his children and then himself. As he paced the living room with a shotgun, he took the butt of the shotgun and hit the On button of the TV. It came on and Chuck Smith was on the TV. He was sharing the Gospel and talking about the love of God. Raul was then on his knees, weeping before God, praying, repenting and getting right with God. It transformed his life. The rest is history. God can radically change a person’s life. It is the power of Jesus to transform a person’s life. How marvelous! How wonderful!

The third section of our text is in verses 36-37. It is the damning power of sin. “They also who had seen it told them by what means he who had been demon-possessed was healed.” They saw what happened and told others what happened. “Then the whole multitude of the surrounding region of the Gadarenes asked Him to depart from them.” This is the second prayer.

The first prayer was from the demons—“Just let us go into the pigs!” And Jesus said, “Go for it.” The second prayer, in verse 37, was from the people—they begged Jesus to leave them alone. “...for they were seized with great fear. And He got into the boat and returned.”

Jesus won’t stay where He’s not wanted. If we reject Jesus, He will walk away and leave us to our own destruction. This is scarier than the demon-possessed man himself. These are sinful, rebellious, hardened hearts.

There is a lot of speculation about this. “Well, they cared more about pigs than they did people.” I can’t help but think that because of our lack of Christian influence and the demonic activity in our culture today that people love animals more than human beings. It’s unbelievable to me that people are more into animals than they are human beings. Animals are great. But humans are made in the image of God!

We’re losing that in our culture. Our culture today says, “Go away Jesus! We don’t want You! We don’t want You in our churches. We don’t want You in our politics. We don’t want You in our public schools. We don’t want You in our bedrooms. We don’t want You in our marriages. We don’t want You in our homes. Be gone!” And we are reaping what we sow; demonic activity in these last days. And Jesus won’t go where He’s not wanted.

It’s interesting that if you take the whole Bible and see the whole story of God’s redemptive plan, where you see the most demonic activity is at the first coming of Christ. There is very little to almost nothing about demon possession in the Old Testament. But in the Gospels, when the Son of God becomes man and walks on the earth, demons are manifested everywhere. “What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”

In all the Bible, in the Gospels and then in Revelation we see the manifestation of demons. God

will open the abusos, demons will come out of the pit and during the tribulation, they will torment men for seven years. What a horrible tribulation it will be! And they will be manifesting again at the Second Coming in the book of Revelation. Christ will take them captive, put them back in the abusos, throw them in the lake of fire and then there will be the kingdom age forever.

The fourth section of our text is the desire of the saved, verses 38-39. "Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him." This is the third prayer. "But Jesus sent him away, saying...." So basically Jesus said "No" to his petition.

To the first prayer—"Let us go into the pigs"—He said "Yes." To the second prayer—"Leave us alone"—He said "Yes." But to the third prayer—"I want to be with You"—He said "No."

Verse 39, Jesus said, "'Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you.' And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him."

A footnote to this is that when he went home, he was told to publish what God had done for him, and when he published his message, he said, "This is what Jesus has done." So Jesus is God. So the demon-possessed man becomes a missionary.

It's interesting that Jesus said "Yes" to the demons, He said "Yes" to the citizens, but He said "No" to this man who said that he only wanted to be with Jesus. It probably brought tears to his eyes. "Can I go with You; You've changed my life!" But Jesus said, "No."

Ministry and witnessing starts in your own home. First go home and testify. Can you imagine his wife's reaction to his transformation?! Looking out the kitchen window that day, seeing her husband coming down the driveway clothed, in his right mind, shaved, bathed—she must have been totally blown away! Her husband comes in the house, they hug, they're reunited, the kids come out of the closet from hiding. "Dad's home!"

One of the people I want to meet when I get to heaven is the demoniac. He'll be sitting next to me at the last supper; I want to hear his story. "How did your wife respond when you went home? Was she freaking out? Did she get saved and believe in Jesus?" The Bible doesn't tell us. It says that he testified, but it doesn't tell us if there was a revival, if people believed him and got saved. So I want to hear the rest of this man's marvelous story.

In summary, there are three different forces at work in this man's life. First was Satan, who robbed him of his sanity and his self-control. Satan comes "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." Second was society, that rejected him, tried to restrain him but could not help him. Third is the influence of the Savior. Only Jesus could deliver him, transform him, redeem him and restore him to his sanity, to family, to society.

"It is no secret what God can do.

What He has done for others,

He'll do for you.

With arms wide open,

He'll pardon you.

It is no secret what God can do."