

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Jesus Heals a Man with a Demon

Luke 8:26-39

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Scripture

In chapter 8 of Luke's Gospel, he answers the question, "Who then is this?" (8:25). In four different accounts he shows that Jesus has power over nature, demons, disease, and death.

Last time we examined Jesus' power over nature when he calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Today we are going to examine Jesus' power over demons in the country of the Gerasenes.

Let's read about Jesus healing a man with a demon in Luke 8:26-39:

²⁶Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." ²⁹For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) ³⁰Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. ³¹And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³²Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

³⁴When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then peo-

ple went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ³⁶And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:26-39)

Introduction

C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Screwtape Letters*:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist and magician with the same delight.¹

Our modern culture tends to disbelieve in the existence of demons. On the other hand, less well-developed cultures tend to believe in the existence of demons.

The fact is that demons really do exist. They work to advance their agenda, which is to keep people as citizens of the kingdom of Satan, that is, the kingdom of darkness.

Luke describes Jesus’ encounter with a man possessed by demons to show us Jesus’ power over demons.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co., 1942), 9.

Lesson

The account of Jesus healing a man with a demon in Luke 8:26-39 will teach us about the power of Jesus over demons.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Setting (8:26-27, 29b)
2. The Plea (8:28-29a, 30-31)
3. The Deliverance (8:32-33)
4. The Effect (8:34-36)
5. The Reaction (8:37a)
6. The Commission (8:37b-39)

I. The Setting (8:26-27, 29b)

First, let's look at the setting for the healing.

After Jesus calmed the storm on the lake, Jesus and his disciples continued their voyage, and **they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee** (8:26).

The country of the Gerasenes is on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew calls it "the country of the Gadarenes" (Matthew 8:28). Liberal scholars contend that Scripture is in error because the name of the place is different in the two Gospels. However, A. T. Robertson clears up the confusion:

The long famous instance of "discrepancy" as to the place in this narrative has been cleared up in recent years by the decision of textual critics that the correct text in Luke is Gerasesenes, as well as in Mark, and by Dr. Thomson's discovery of a ruin on the lake shore, named Khersa (Gerasa). If this village was included (a very natural supposition) in the district belonging to the city of Gadara, some miles south-eastward, then the locality could be described as either in the country of the Gadarenes, or in the country of the Gerasenes.²

² A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), Lk 8:26-39.

Luke said that **when Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs** (8:27). Matthew mentions that “two demon-possessed men” (Matthew 8:28) met Jesus. A. T. Robertson said, “Mark and Luke describe one, who was probably the prominent and leading one.”³

Luke said in verse 29b that **for many a time the demon had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.** Matthew mentioned that the demoniac was “so fierce that no one could pass that way” (Matthew 8:28), and Mark said that “no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him.” Furthermore, “night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always cutting himself with stones” (Mark 4:3-5).

Phillip Ryken said “the man that Jesus met was nearly in the worst condition that anyone could imagine. He was naked, lonely, violent, and insane; he was walking among the dead.”⁴

And then Ryken insightfully adds:

Yet even for all his misery, we can see ourselves in his situation, because sin has similar effects on all of us. It exposes us naked in our guilt. It alienates us from one another, leaving us lonely and alone. It makes us violent, at least in our attitudes, if not in our actions. Spiritually speaking, we walk among the dead. Thus the madman in the graveyard shows the wretchedness of our condition outside of Christ.⁵

³ A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, Lk 8:26–39.

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke-Volume 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 395.

⁵ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke-Volume 1*, 395.

II. The Plea (8:28-29a, 30-31)

Second, notice the plea by the demoniac.

Luke said in verses 28-29a that **when he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man.**

Don't miss that the demoniac **fell down before** Jesus and acknowledged him as **“Jesus, Son of the Most High God.”** The demons, speaking through the man, did not fall in worshipful reverence but in submissive obedience before Jesus. They knew who Jesus was when they were in his presence.

Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him (8:30). A **legion** is “a unit of the Roman army. In New Testament times the standard size of the legion was 6,000 men, to which some 120 cavalry were added.”⁶ Because it represented a large body of men, the word **legion** came to be used symbolically for an indefinitely large number.

Luke then notes that the demons **begged Jesus not to command them to depart into the abyss (8:31).** The **abyss** is the place of the dead (Romans 10:7). Revelation describes it as “the bottomless pit” where Satan and his demons will be condemned (Revelation 20:1-3). The demons know that this is their final destiny. They know that their doom is sure. They know that one day they will be cast into a place of terrible and everlasting torment (Revelation 21:8).

Philip Ryken says, “Some people may not believe in hell, but the demons certainly do! We should believe in hell, too, and

⁶ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1322.

repent before it is too late for us, as it already is for them.”⁷

III. The Deliverance (8:32-33)

Third, note the deliverance of the demoniac.

Jesus delivered the man in a way that seems strange. Luke said in verses 32-33 that **a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.**

First, notice that Jesus **gave them permission**. Demons are not able to do anything apart from the permission of God.

Second, Mark tells us that there were “about two thousand” pigs (Mark 4:13).

And third, be aware that some people (like PETA members!) find this action of Jesus offensive. The famous twentieth-century British philosopher, Sir Bertrand Russell, wrote a book titled, *Why I Am Not a Christian*. One of his objections to Christianity has to do with this incident. He writes,

There is the instance of the Gadarene swine, where it certainly was not very kind to the pigs to put the devils into them and make them rush down the hill to the sea. You must remember that [Jesus] was omnipotent, and He could have made the devils simply go away; but He chose to send them into the pigs. . . . I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history.⁸

How do we respond to critics regarding Jesus’ action? It is important to note that Jesus did not destroy the pigs; the de-

⁷ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke-Volume 1*, 399.

⁸ Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian, and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 18-19.

mons did. Although Jesus gave the demons permission to enter the pigs, it was the demons who provoked the pigs to run over the cliff.

There are other responses, as well, but I think the best response is the one given by Philip Ryken. He says,

It is better to say that the pigs lived and died for the glory of God. These fine swine are the most famous pigs in history. What other herd of pigs can claim to have demonstrated the divine power of Jesus Christ over the dark powers of hell? Jesus cast out the demons as easily as he had commanded the sea. He is the ruler of both the natural and the supernatural realms. In order to prove this, he permitted the demons to enter the pigs. In this way, everyone could witness what had happened in the unseen world of the spirits: Jesus had delivered a man from his demons. The pigs were an essential part of demonstrating the full extent of the miracle that had taken place.⁹

Jesus was yet again demonstrating that he really is God in human form. He was demonstrating that he has power over demons. Let us believe that Jesus really has this power!

IV. The Effect (8:34-36)

Fourth, observe the effect of the deliverance.

Luke said in verse 34 that **when the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country.** Obviously, **the herdsmen** wanted to make sure that they were not blamed for the loss of the pigs. And so they went to tell the people **in the city** what had happened.

Luke said in verses 35-36 that the **people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were**

⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke-Volume 1*, 400.

afraid. And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed.

Darrell Bock summarized the transformation:

In a complete reversal of the previously possessed man's demeanor, he is now clothed, whereas before he had been naked; he is now seated, whereas before he had been roaming; he is now associating with others as he sits at Jesus' feet, whereas before he sought solitude; he is now of sound mind, whereas before he had been crying out in a loud voice; he is now comfortable in the presence of Jesus, whereas before he wanted nothing to do with him.¹⁰

Luke said that this man was **"in his right mind."** Isn't that a wonderful expression of what happens when Jesus transforms a person?

Unbelievers think that Christians are "out of their minds" for believing in Jesus. But, actually, it is non-Christians who are "out of their minds," and it is only when people become Christians by the transforming power of Jesus Christ that they are in their "right minds"! This is a wonderful picture of what happens in salvation. Have you experienced this transformation?

V. The Reaction (8:37a)

Fifth, look at the reaction to the deliverance.

Astonishingly, Luke said in verse 37 that **all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear.**

Interestingly, we might expect that the people asked Jesus to leave because they had suffered a significant financial loss. But none of the Gospel writers mention this.

The reason given is that **they were seized with great**

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 777–778.

fear. The people could see what Jesus had done. They could see the man transformed by the power of Jesus. And they wanted to have nothing to do with it. So they **asked him to depart from them**, which Jesus did. And as far as we know, Jesus never returned and they never had an opportunity again to hear the good news of God's grace.

Is this a picture of you? Are you rejecting Jesus' power and authority in your life?

VI. The Commission (8:37b-39)

And finally, notice the commission given by Jesus.

Luke said in verse 37b that Jesus **got into the boat and returned**, presumably to Galilee on the west side of the lake.

Then **the man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you"** (8:38-39a).

The man, transformed by the power of Jesus, wanted to be with Jesus. But Jesus had another mission for him. He was to stay in his hometown, and share with people how much God had done for him.

Luke describes the man's marvelous obedience in verse 39b when he said that **he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.**

I want you to notice that Jesus told the man to **"declare how much *God* has done for you."** Luke then said that the man **"went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much *Jesus* had done for him."** Here is another not-so-subtle statement about the deity of Jesus in Luke's Gospel.

Notice further that is what Jesus calls everyone to do who has been transformed by his power. We are all to tell others how much Jesus has done for us. And this is really the proper response to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus healing a man with a demon as set forth in Luke 8:26-39, we should declare how much God has done for us.

Kent Hughes tells the story about an ophthalmologist, just fresh from college, who opened his own business. Without friends, without money, and without patrons, he became discouraged, until one day he encountered a blind man. Looking into his eyes, he said, "Why don't you have your eyesight restored? Come to my office in the morning."

The blind man went. When an operation was performed and proved successful, the patient said, "I haven't got a penny in the world. I can't pay you."

"Oh, yes," said the doctor, "you can pay me, and I expect you to do so! There is just one thing I want you to do, and it is very easy. Tell everybody you see that you were blind, and tell them who it was that healed you."¹¹

That is what the former demoniac did. He proclaimed throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. And Mark says that "all the people were amazed" (Mark 5:20).

You may not feel skilled at sharing what God has done for you. Then sign up for the "Share Your Faith" workshop on April 11-12. You will learn some basic skills about sharing what God has done for you.

And then invite your family and friends to the Easter Sunday Worship Service, and also to the Christianity Explored series that will begin the Friday night after Easter.

You and I may not have been healed of demons. But we do know the transforming power of Jesus in our lives. Let us share with our city what God has done for us. Amen.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 310.

Mission Statement

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Father, we thank you for this wonderful account of Jesus' power over demons. Thank you for the demonstrable way in which he cast the demons out of the man and put him in his right mind.

Give us an obedience to Jesus that, like the healed man, we too will proclaim throughout the whole city how much Jesus has done for us.

And for this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!