

INTRODUCTION

A couple of weeks ago, I spoke to you about when Jesus and His disciples were out on the Sea of Galilee. They started from Capernaum on what should have been a three-hour cruise. But the weather started getting rough, the tiny ship was tossed; if not for the power of the fearless Lord, the disciples would be lost. I spoke to you about how when Jesus is in your boat, you don't have to be afraid of storms. Since then, dozens of people have written or e-mailed me telling me about their own storms. Every one of them wrote in bold letters: **WITH JESUS IN MY BOAT, I KNOW I'LL REACH THE OTHER SIDE!** Jesus never promised to keep us *from* the storms but He promised to sustain us *through* the storms. Now after the disciples reached the other shore, I can imagine they kissed the ground, happy to be safe from the storm. This is a good time to notice what is on the other side of the storms of life.

After the storm, picture Peter and John pulling the boat up on the land and then kneeling to kiss the ground, glad to finally be on solid ground again! About that time they hear a horrifying scream. They look up to see a naked man, running down the hill toward them with a wild look in his eyes and chains hanging from his hands and feet. It's obvious this man is out of control. I can imagine Peter and John glancing at each other, saying, “Let's get in the boat and head back out into the storm!” Let's read about this amazing encounter in Luke 8:26-39.

They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town [Mark tells us he was running down the hill]. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you don't torture me!” For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside [Mark tells us there were 2,000 hogs]. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned [that's what I call a swine dive]. When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Let’s examine the four different scenes in this amazing encounter and then we will end by drawing some personal lessons for our lives.

SCENE I: A DISTURBED MAN

Like all health care professionals, I’m sure Dr. Luke was intrigued by this man’s symptoms and behavior. Luke is concise in his description and we might well study this man’s behavior as a case study for demonic influence. As the Great Physician, Dr. Jesus was immediately able to diagnose the man’s problem. One of the biggest challenges of any physician is to be able to look beyond the symptoms of a disease or illness and treat the root cause.

Years ago, a certain mental hospital was notable for its simple test to determine the rationality of a patient. Patients were put into a room with a sink, and the water was turned on until it overflowed the sink. With the water still running, the patient was given a mop and told to mop up the water. If a person turned the faucet off, pulled the plug, and then mopped the water, they were considered to be capable of rational thinking and they were sent home. However, if they mopped and mopped while the puddle grew, they were considered to be insane and were detained at the hospital.

That reminds me of what a lot of people are doing today. They know they have a “problem” and they are mopping like crazy. But Dr. Jesus has the ability to go to the source of the problem and deal with the cause, not just the symptoms.

Now, I’m not saying everyone who has a mental or emotional problem, or anyone who sees a psychiatrist or a counselor is demon-possessed. That very term, “demon-possessed” is confusing. But we would do well to understand the immutable connection between body, soul and spirit. There is a spiritual dimension to our lives that touches every part of who we are. Jesus recognized this man’s problem was of a spiritual nature. In order to understand Satanic or demonic influence, let’s take a moment and do a quick basic study about the devil and demons. Hopefully, you will learn something that will help you overcome them.

1. Satan is only a fallen angel who has helpers called demons

I use the word “only” because too many people have a “Star Wars” theology in which they think Satan is the “dark side” of the “force” and God is the “good side.” They make Satan almost as powerful as God—and that’s a huge error. There are three words we often used to describe God’s nature: (1) Omnipresent (God is everywhere); (2) Omnipotent (God is all powerful); and (3) Omniscient (God knows everything). Satan is none of the above. He isn’t omnipresent, he isn’t all-powerful and he doesn’t know everything. We pick up important clues from passages like Isaiah 14 that sometime before Adam and Eve, Satan was a shining angel named Lucifer. His problem was ambition—he wanted to ascend and become like God. You could say Satan’s favorite TV show was “I Love Lucifer.” So, Lucifer rebelled against God. Apparently other angels chose to join him, because there are other fallen angels as well, called demons.

There is only *one* devil, Satan (he has other names as well) but there are thousands of demons. If you want more information, I have a whole chapter on fallen angels in my book, *Do Angels Really Exist?*

You may wonder, “Since the devil and his demons cause so much misery and trouble, why doesn’t God just do away with the old devil?” Oh, He has a plan. In fact, Jesus said something interesting about hell in Matthew 25:41. He said on Judgement Day, He would say to some, “*Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*”

Hell was never created for human habitation. But the devil knows one day he will end up there for all eternity. Sadly, we get too much of our beliefs about hell and the devil from Dante’s *Inferno* rather than the Bible. For instance, the Bible never says Satan is in hell or has ever been in hell. He roams about the earth like a roaring lion seeking those whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8). But Satan knows one day he will end up in hell and that makes him so angry he is determined to carry as many of God’s precious people with him as he can.

2. The term “demon possession” doesn’t appear in the Bible

Years ago, when the movie “The Exorcist” came out, there was a rise of interest in the idea of demon possession. People still are interested in the subject. A recent Gallup poll of 1,200 adults revealed 55% of Americans believe in a personal devil and 49% of Americans believe a person can be “possessed” by the devil or demons. If you had gone to the Eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee 2,000 years ago, and asked one man, one Lord, twelve disciples, and 2,000 hogs if they believed in the devil or demons 100% would have said, “Yes!”

A few weeks ago, I wanted to study that word “possession” in the original Greek to see what it means. I was surprised to discover our two-word phrase “demon possession” is an invention of Bible translators. Whenever you see the phrase “demon possession” it is a translation of only one word that isn’t actually translated at all, it is *transliterated*. That means the word in Greek became our English word. The word is *daimonizomai* should just be translated “demonized.” Christians sometimes spend time debating about whether a Christian can be “demon possessed” or not. They split hairs, saying a Christian can be “demon influenced” but not “demon possessed.” I’ve used the term “demon possessed” myself. But the argument over whether a Christian can be “possessed” is really moot because the phrase “possession” doesn’t appear in the Bible. Every one of us is the target of some kind of demonic influence.

Again, I agree with Dr. Ray Stedman who correctly observes: The New Testament never actually uses the term “demon possession.” It is a term, which has been invented, but it may not be very accurate. The word in Scripture is always “demonized.” Whether it means possession or control or influence or whatever, this is the word which is used. We have read into it the idea of “demon possession.” But I do not think it wise to use it, because it is not used in Scripture. It is evident there are various stages and degrees to which demons, evil spirits, can affect and possess or control human beings. In this incident (Luke 8) we have an extreme case.

3. There are typical symptoms associated with extreme demonic control

Remember, I told you doctors have to look at symptoms in order to diagnose a problem. Many Bible scholars see in this man’s behavior some of the warning signs of extreme demonic control. First, there was sexual perversion. This man wouldn’t wear clothes; he was what we would label an exhibitionist. Sexual lust and pornography is one of the greatest tools and traps of the devil. Second, this man was obsessed with death and dying. He lived in a cemetery, feeling more at home with the corpses there than with living people. Third, he demonstrated uncontrollable behavior. The people in that area tried to restrain him with chains but in his rage and hysteria he refused to be confined. Fourth, he retreated into extreme isolation. Notice we are told the demons drove him into solitary places. He couldn’t relate to other people. Finally, the fifth symptom was that he suffered mental anguish and torment. Now, if you or someone you know exhibits some of these symptoms, it may be demonic influence is a factor in their behavior (I didn’t say they were demon possessed.).

Obviously, this was a deeply disturbed man. There is still a thread of sanity and hope because something in the man makes him run down the hill and fall at the feet of Jesus. He was so influenced by these evil demons; they are even the voice that comes from his lips. The demon speaks the name of Jesus first and calls Him, “Son of the Most High God.” Even demons know who Jesus is. In the next scene we see:

SCENE II: A DEMONIC PRAYER

Jesus asked for the demon’s name and suddenly the single demon reveals that he is “Legion” because there were thousands of conflicting emotions and desires in the man. A Roman legion was 6,000 soldiers. This poor man was so tortured he felt an entire regiment of demonic soldiers was marching through his personality.

The demons make an unusual request. They were afraid of being cast into the Abyss (Matthew says, “before the appointed time.”) You see, the demons knew something you may not know. Even then, they knew one day in the future, Jesus will banish the devil and all the demons into a bottomless pit called the Abyss. You can read about it in Revelation 20:2-3: “He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him ...”

The demons knew they were under Jesus’ authority, so they requested He cast them into the herd of pigs on a nearby hillside. It’s obvious demons feared disembodiment and they can influence animals as well as humans, but why pigs? Why not some of the other people in that village? Why pigs? Are you listening? You may be expecting a theological answer, but here’s what I think: *Demons aren’t very bright.* I mean, how bright is it to follow the devil and rebel against the Lord God? Duh! So, fully knowing what was to happen next, Jesus granted the prayer of the demons and they entered into the pigs. That leads to:

SCENE III: DEVEILED HAM

You can visit this very spot on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. There is only one cliff that would have allowed the pigs to rush into the water. Try to picture 2,000 swine going hog-wild

and doing swine dives into the water—you could say they were committing soie-cide. Synchronized pig swimming is not an event in the barnyard Olympics. The demons went into the pigs, and the pigs went into the water, and the water went into the pigs—and they were drowned, and some say sending the demons into the abyss at that moment.

Now a couple of things need to be said about pigs at this point. First, this side of the lake was inhabited by those who were not good Jews, because a devout Jewish man would never have a herd of pigs. Pigs were not kosher; they were ceremonially unclean, good for nothing. These were the descendants of the tribe of Gad who stayed on the wrong side of the Jordan and they were now raising pigs. To a Jewish audience, the report of 2,000 pigs dying would have been great news! Second, pigs aren't the cleanest animals around. To put it bluntly, they stink. A realtor was showing a prospective customer a home in the country. Realtors are experts at putting a positive spin on property. This realtor said, “The bad thing about his house is that it is near a pig farm. The good thing is, you can always tell which way the wind is blowing!”

You ask me if I think demons can inhabit pigs. I don't have any trouble with that because I've seen the devil and demons transform a person until they live and act like a pig. In Luke 15, Jesus tells a story about a decent young man who ran off and soon found himself living, acting and eating just like a pig. Yes, I believe it can happen in both directions.

The pigs' behavior reveals to us a great deal about the strategy and purpose of the devil and demons. I believe those pigs did exactly the very thing the demons had been trying to get the poor man to do—kill himself. Thankfully, the man still had enough restraint and control that he resisted that urge but pigs don't possess human moral strength, so off they went into the deep.

When I was in college, I used the Four Spiritual Laws from Campus Crusade to witness to people. I can still remember Law #1: God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. I still think that's true. But there is also a statement that can be said about Satan and demons: The devil hates you and has a miserable plan for your life. What is it? Jesus told us in John 10:10. “The thief comes only STEAL, KILL, and DESTROY ...” Satan wants to steal your joy, kill your marriage and family, and destroy your life. The pigs' behavior serves as a warning to each of us of what Satan's ultimate plan is for us. The story doesn't end with the death of the pigs, however. We see in:

SCENE IV: A DELIVERED MAN

Why did Jesus get on the boat in the first place and lead the disciples into the teeth of a storm? Because He knew there was a man on the other side of the lake who needed what He could give him. In verse 35 we see the man “sitting at the feet of Jesus, dressed, and in his right mind.” What a difference Jesus can make!

The people from the village come out to investigate this strange event. Their way of handling the man was to chain him up. Now he was set free. Instead of rejoicing, the people of the village told Jesus to leave. Why? Some say, they were financially ruined. If you figure \$100 a head for 2,000 hogs, they just saw \$200,000 jump out of their pocketbooks and into the lake—that's nothing to snort at! But I suspect they were afraid of Jesus for another reason rather than a financial one.

These people were in the pig-business. They didn't want anyone coming in and changing their lives. They were content with the way things were. They looked at the demon-crazed man sitting there, transformed into a good man, a different man. And they said, "We don't want that." So they asked Him to clear out.

It's the same today. People want to talk about God and they want to believe in the Lord as long as He doesn't mess up their lives and change anything. What would happen if I traveled to the gambling boats in Shreveport every Friday night and stood out front with a Bible in my hand and preached about how Jesus can change their lives? I'd be asked to leave. What would happen if I went to some of the strip joints around East Texas and stood at the front door with my Bible and preached that God loves those guys and He can make them good? They would ask me to leave.

Some people just don't want what Jesus has to offer. You may think it incredible these people would ask Jesus to "go away, leave us alone." But in a few minutes when we sing, "Come, Just as you Are," the spirit of Jesus will be speaking to some people in this room saying, "Let me change your life. Let me deliver you from your addiction. Let me set you free from your sinful bondage." And do you know what some people will do? They will say, "Go away, Jesus. Not today. Leave me alone." As we conclude, let's examine four brief

PERSONAL LESSONS:

1. You often have to reach the point of total desperation before you will run to Jesus for help

This man had many problems, and before this day, he probably told himself a hundred times he could handle things. But on this day, he became so totally desperate, he literally ran down the hill falling at the feet of Jesus. The truth is, most of us are so hardheaded we have to get to the point of utter desperation before we will truly and humbly seek the Lord.

I think of old Jonah in the Old Testament. God called Jonah to go to Ninevah and Jonah ran from God. It took three days in the belly of a fish until Jonah cried out to God. He had to get to the point of desperation.

I once knew a guy who had been extremely overweight most of his life. He had been on and off dozens of diets. He used to say he lost thousands of pounds, only to find them again. However, there was a time in his life when he truly got serious about his eating problem and he slowly and gradually began to lose weight and to keep it off. He said something had happened that pushed him to that point of desperation. He had bought a couple of Big Macs to go and was going to sit in a park to eat them. He was approaching a grassy hill and lost his balance. He rolled to the bottom of the incline with Big Macs and fries flying everywhere. A group of children nearby was laughing at him. It was a cruel thing to do, but he said at that moment he reached his point of desperation and turned to the Lord to help him. He said although he had been on dozens of diets before, he had never before been desperate. The Point of Desperation is a painful place to be but it is where we often come running to the Lord. Are you there yet?

2. You’ve got to be willing to name your demons

Jesus asked for the demon’s name. The demon said, “My name is Legion.” It was as if a mob of demonic impulses and desires were controlling the man. Did you notice how Jesus separated the demon from the man himself?

Respected Christian author and psychologist, Dr. Edward Peterman, writes:

Over and over again in the gospels, Jesus was able to distinguish the demon from the person by naming it. Then He would expel the demon from the person without demonizing the person. We should do the same. Instead of saying, “You are anorexic,” you say, “It appears as though anorexia is trying to take over your life.” That gives the person the opportunity to see how it is that anorexia creeps into her life and to explore ways in which she might be able to hold anorexia at arm’s length. Instead of saying, “You are depressed,” you say, “It seems as though depression at times would like to control you and drive all your friends away.” That affirms the person in his own right, and it allows him the freedom to see depression and not himself as the real enemy of friendship and love.

I think we can make the mistake of trying to determine whether our problems are demon-induced or not. Remember, we saw the Bible never uses the term “demon possession.” We are all demonized in different ways. Any obsession, addiction, or impure habit is a demonic influence that must be addressed but you must admit it—name it—before you can deal with it. You can’t just shift the blame to some “demon,” because we are all ultimately responsible for all of our actions and reactions, but admitting your problem, naming the demon, is your first step toward wholeness with Jesus.

3. Your greatest mission field is right where you live

In the very last part of this story, the changed man wants to go with Jesus. He wants to become the 13th disciple, but Jesus gives him some important instructions. In verse 39 He says, “Return home, and tell how much God has done for you.” And even though some cults still insist Jesus is not God, look at the next sentence. Jesus told the man to tell how much *God* had done for him, and it says, “So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.” Part of this man’s testimony was that Jesus *is* God. This man had a home. The word “home” Jesus used is one that usually means “household.” It’s not too much to imagine this man had a wife and children. They had been tormented and abused by this man. Although he had left to live in the tombs, there was an empty place at the dinner table each night. But one afternoon there was a knock on the door and the wife answered it only to cringe in fear. I can picture the children huddling behind their mother. They could only recall the terrible, troubled man who had caused so much pain and turmoil in their home. But the man walks in and smiles, taking his wife’s hand and saying, “Darling, Jesus has changed me, and he has given you back a husband.” He gathers his frightened children into his arms, and says, “Children, forgive me for how I’ve behaved. But now Jesus has given you your daddy back.”

Oh, what a wonderful day it would be for that to happen in some of the hearts of men in East Texas. There are some broken homes and families right now only Jesus can heal. But He can make a difference!

Dads, moms, teenagers, children, your greatest mission field is *right there where you live*. That’s where your family needs to see Jesus in you. Before you ever consider going on some mission trip to some foreign land or city, hear the word of Jesus saying to you, “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.”

Your testimony of how Jesus has changed you can be the greatest tool in helping someone else. At this point, some of you are struggling because you have problems, addictions, and desires you think are beyond help. You really don’t think Jesus can do for you what he did for that man 2,000 years ago. When someone hears me say, “Jesus can change your life,” they say, “Oh yeah, that’s your job to say that, you are the preacher.” Well, I’ve said it: Jesus can change your life.

There you have it. Jesus can *still* set people free! Will you come to Him today?

CONCLUSION

Melvin Trotter was an alcoholic living in Chicago. He had become so debased and dehumanized by this powerful craving, his depravity knew no limits. When his baby daughter died, Mel sneaked into the funeral home and removed the shoes from her corpse. He took the shoes to a bar and slammed them down on the counter and said, “I don’t have any money, but I’ll trade these shoes for a drink.” The bartender told him he wouldn’t take the shoes, and poured him a drink anyway. Mel Trotter looked at those shoes and realized just how low he’d sunk. He came to the point of total desperation. He attended a service at a rescue mission and Jesus delivered him. In his own words, Mel Trotter said, “There was not anything I knew about that I had not gone through. I had taken cure after cure. I had taken everything known to science, and had made resolution after resolution. But just one glimpse of Jesus Christ, and I have never wanted a drink from that instant to this!”

Jesus is **STILL** setting people free—will you come to Him today?

OUTLINE

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"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."
Matthew 25:41

2. The term "demon possession" doesn't appear in the Bible
3. There are typical symptoms associated with extreme demonic control

SCENE II: A DEMONIC PRAYER

"He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him ... he threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him." *Revelation 20:2-3*

SCENE III: DEVILED HAM

"The thief comes only to STEAL, KILL, and destroy ... " *John 10:10a*

SCENE IV: A DELIVERED MAN

PERSONAL LESSONS:

1. You often have to reach the point of total desperation before you will run to Jesus for help
2. You've got to be willing to name your demons
3. Your greatest mission field is right where you live



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes