

JESUS HEALS A DEMON-POSSESSED MAN

Luke 8:26-39

Key Verse: 8:30a

“Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’”

In today’s passage Jesus meets a demon-possessed man. In the entire Bible, this is the definitive passage that deals with Jesus’ healing of a demon-possessed person. Most people want to avoid the topic of demon-possession, because it is too horrible to think about. But the Bible says that demons are real. We must know this. It helps us realize how much we need Jesus. Only Jesus has the power to heal the demon-possessed. Yet, it is not just Jesus’ power that heals this man; it is also the love of Jesus. This story is somewhat gruesome. But it has a happy ending: Jesus heals this demon-possessed man. Our Lord Jesus is awesome; Jesus is indeed God Almighty and the Savior of the world. May God help us to know Jesus better through this study.

First, a demon-possessed man from the town (26-29).

Look at verse 26. “They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.” The region of the Gerasenes refers to the area east and south of the Sea of Galilee. It is also known as the Decapolis. It was a confederation of ten cities under Greek and Roman influence which governed major trade routes. It is said that some Jewish children, rebelling against the strict religious life in Israel, dreamed of going to the Decapolis to enjoy wild living, like the prodigal son in the parable. This area was not governed by Jewish law, but by Greek philosophy and Roman military power. It was Gentile territory. After their harrowing experience of the storm at sea, Jesus and his disciples landed in the region of the Gerasenes. They were dog-tired and looking forward to some rest and relaxation. After all, they were on vacation. But as soon as they stepped ashore, they were met by a terrible welcoming committee. He was a demon-possessed man from the town.

Look at verse 27a. “When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town.” Luke says plainly that this man was demon-possessed. Demons are the evil spirit, the agents of Satan. As spirits they are invisible; in nature, they are evil. The Bible tells us that God alone is good. Man is good and evil. But evil spirits are always evil all the time as their full-time job. Jesus characterized the evil spirit as a liar and a murderer (Jn 8:44). Demons had come into this man and made him their possession. Now he was no longer himself, he was the property of demons. How on earth did he become like that?

Luke does not tell us directly how this man had come to be demon possessed. But he goes into specific detail to describe this man’s condition. And this gives us some clues to understand him. Look at verse 27b. “For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.” Clothes are very important to human beings. In fact, clothing was invented by God for Adam and Eve to cover their shame after the Fall. Since then, clothing has been essential for men to form a decent society. At one time, this man had worn clothes. But one day, at school, he was ridiculed by his classmates for wearing ragged and unfashionable clothes. Maybe they were all he had. Maybe he wore Payless shoes, while all his classmates wore Nike shoes. It was time for him to pray to God for help. But instead he fell into self-pity. His pride was hurt. So he decided he was not going to wear clothes anymore. Stripping off his shirt and pants, he said, “No one is going to make fun of my clothes ever again.” It was an emotional reaction out of a bruised ego. He had no consideration for God or others. In short, he was selfish and rebellious. At that moment a demon channeled into his heart.

In addition, he did not live in a house. To live in a house requires a sense of responsibility, stewardship and cooperation. Perhaps his job was to take out the garbage and mow the lawn. He did it a few times and stopped. When his parents rebuked him, he got mad at them for “infringing on his human rights.” He hardened his heart and said to himself, “When I turn 18, I am out of here.” Then another demon crept in. As a student, he did not do his homework. Then he got all F’s on his report card. It was time for him to repent and make a new decision to study hard. Instead, he blamed his teachers, saying that they were all stupid and unfair. As he did so, another demon channeled into his heart. Most likely, he really wanted to drive a car, but he was totally unteachable. So the driving instructor gave up on him. But he forged a fake driver’s license and drove around, parking wherever he wanted. He said, “Nobody tells me where to park.” So he got many parking tickets. But he tore them up and threw them on the street. After he had accumulated ten parking tickets, the city workers came to put a yellow boot on his car. But he threatened them so violently that they ran away. He laughed with a shrill howl. Then another demon came into his

heart. When the police came to arrest him, he fought until both he and many policemen were badly beaten and then he was taken to jail. Several more demons came into his heart. He gained the strength of demons. So he snapped the chains on his handcuffs and escaped. But he had nowhere to go. He hated to be around people. So he went to live in the tombs among the dead. He liked dead people because they didn't bother him. At last, he was completely cut off from everyone; there was no one to bother him. But he was not happy. He wandered the hills of the graveyard yelling in anguish and cutting himself with stones (Mk 5:5).

Look at verse 28. "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!'" He immediately recognized Jesus as the Son of the Most High God. He knew that Jesus had all authority in heaven and on earth. Yet, his response to Jesus was ambivalent. He cried out like a madman, and at the same time, he fell at Jesus' feet. He wanted to come to Jesus and, at the same time, he didn't want to come to Jesus. Though he had degenerated terribly under the oppression of the demons, he still had the image of God in his inner man. So he was split between his humanity made in the image of God and the demons who had taken over him.

His question, "What do you want with me?" reveals his dark assumption that God did not want anything to do with him, that he was "washed up." This was nothing but the devil's deception. The man also said, "I beg you, don't torture me." This was also the devil's deception. Jesus was not going to torture the man; Jesus was going to heal the man. This man was suffering unbearably from the demons' torment.

No one could help the demon-possessed man. When the evil spirit seized him, he became uncontrollable and dangerous. People bound him with chains, but it didn't help, for he broke the chains and was driven by the demon into solitary places. There is no human solution for demon possession. We must acknowledge that there is a spiritual world and that demons exist. Those who ignore God's word, despise basic humanity and indulge in rebellion are candidates for demon possession. Those who live according to their sinful cravings for such things as drugs, sexual immorality and occult practices are all candidates for demon possession. God will not be mocked. Nevertheless, God is merciful. How did Jesus help this man?

Second, Jesus asks, "What is your name?" (30-33).

According to verse 29, as soon as Jesus saw this man, he commanded the evil spirit to come out of him. This man had committed terrible sins against God. He had damaged many other people. He was too degenerated to be recognized as a man. But as soon as Jesus saw him, his heart went out to the man. Jesus knew immediately what the man's problem was—demon possession. Jesus did not blame him. Jesus only wanted to save the man. Jesus was like a mother whose child was being bullied. Wasting no time, Jesus commanded the evil spirit, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" In the previous passage, Jesus rebuked the wind and the raging waters. Then the storm subsided and all was calm. Here, Jesus commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. The evil spirit shuddered. The evil spirit is never afraid of anything. But at Jesus' word he was terrified. He knew his time was up. He knew he had to leave the man he had tormented. But demons are very stubborn. They did not come out right away. They tried to throw their host into great confusion to have him stand on their side. How did Jesus help the man?

Look at verse 30. "Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'" Jesus saw this man as a human being made in the image of God. As a man, he had a name. A man's name represents his personality. A man's name is his identity. Jesus spoke to him most tenderly, like a mother calling her child to have an intimate conversation. To Jesus, this man was precious. His problem was that he had no shepherd to talk with him and take care of him. Jesus came to be his shepherd. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, "calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (Jn 10:3). Jesus asked this man his name to lead him out of demon possession. This man had lost his identity because of wicked demons. Jesus asked him "What is your name?" to restore his identity, personality, and humanity. Jesus asked this man his name to restore the kingdom of God in his heart.

How did the man answer? Look at verse 31. "'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to send them into the Abyss." This man must have had a name, like "Lucius," "Julius," or "Maximus." But he did not say his given name. He said his name was "Legion." A legion was a unit of the Roman army composed of 6,000 soldiers. So many demons had gone into this man that he called himself "Legion." It was an honest evaluation of his inner man in light of Jesus' question. Jesus accepted his answer. Jesus accepted him as he was. It was the beginning of a personal relationship between Jesus and the man. Now he

belonged to Jesus and Jesus belonged to him. He was freed from the deceit of the demons. He had come back to his good shepherd Jesus. The demons lost their foothold. They were about to be evicted and they knew it. They began to beg Jesus not to send them into the Abyss, that is, the fiery lake of burning sulfur. What did Jesus do?

Look at verses 32-33. "A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. 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." These pigs were quietly munching on their fodder. They felt they were very cute, like their favorite movie star, "Babe." But when the demons came into them, they lost all their cuteness. It was too much. They already had an inferiority complex because Jewish people called them "unclean" animals. Now these pigs were demon-possessed, too. They couldn't take it. So they rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

It is very significant that Jesus gave the demons permission to go into the pigs. It was not to show mercy to the demons. It was to show the man who had been demon possessed how much Jesus valued him. It was to teach the people of the region how much God loves one person, even a seemingly useless and dangerous person. The value of these pigs was probably more than one million dollars. Jesus was willing to sacrifice a herd of pigs to save one demon-possessed man. That's not all. Jesus was willing to sacrifice his own life to save this man. This is God's sacrificial love. In John 10:11 Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Saving a man from demon possession was more than a spiritual power struggle. This passage does not only emphasize that Jesus "drove out" the evil spirit. Jesus "cured" or healed the man who had been demon possessed. True healing from demon possession comes through a personal relationship with Jesus. True healing from demon possession comes through the sacrificial love of Jesus for one person. To help the demon possessed, we must trust in Jesus alone and study the Bible one-to-one until Jesus calls them by name. We must know the value of one person and be ready to sacrifice for their healing.

Third, tell how much God has done for you (34-39).

The former demon-possessed man was no more wild and violent, tortured by the demons. Now he was dressed and in his right mind (35). More than anything else, he wanted to study the Bible with Jesus. So he sat at Jesus' feet, listening intently. The peace of God came into his heart. He must have sung a hymn, "I've found a friend in Jesus, he's everything to me; he's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul." However, the people of the region were not happy about the healing of the demon-possessed man. Instead, they were afraid. Probably they feared losing their other businesses, as they had lost the herd of pigs. When they asked Jesus to leave, he got into the boat and left (36,37). Jesus and his disciples were having a hard time. With no chance to rest, again they had to get in their boat and go back across the lake. Nevertheless, Jesus was happy because one man had been saved from demons.

Look at verses 38-39. "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 the town how much Jesus had done for him." When the man was healed from demon-possession, he was so happy in Jesus. He wanted to be with Jesus and follow Jesus wherever he went. But Jesus did not let him. Jesus told him to return home and tell how much God had done for him. It was to teach this man obedience. This man's problem had been disobedience. When he was disobedient to God and man, he became a prey of demons. Now he was free from demons. But he had to learn obedience. Jesus trained him immediately by telling him to return home, instead of coming with him.

Through the former demon-possessed man, Jesus wanted to spread the good news of the kingdom of God to the entire region of the Decapolis. The man obeyed Jesus and went all over the town telling what Jesus had done for him: "You know, I was a demon-possessed man. I had hair down to my shoulders and I lived a wild and crazy life. But Jesus, the Son of the Most High God asked me, 'What is your name?' Jesus became my friend. Now demons stay far away from me." Like this man, those who have received Jesus' grace must remember and share it with others. Without remembering Jesus' grace we can become arrogant and then disobedient. But when we remember Jesus' grace we are thankful to God and can be obedient children of God. May God help each of us to remember Jesus' grace and share it with others.

Today we learned that the power of demons is real. Demons work mightily in those who disobey God's word and despise basic humanity (Eph 2:2). But Jesus can cure demon possession. Jesus asks, "What is your name?" to have a personal relationship with each of us. Jesus gave his own life as a ransom sacrifice to save us from the power of demons. May God bless you to have a personal relationship with Jesus, the Son of the Most High God and enjoy the kingdom of God in your heart.