

**“Conqueror of Demons”**  
**Luke 8:26-39**  
**August 14, 2016**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

We are in a series this summer on the miracles of Jesus, and we have just completed the seven miracles John selects in his Gospel to be signs pointing to Jesus true nature. We turn today to a section of Luke where he groups together four miracles that show Jesus’ power over destructive forces. The Bible says that we are all broken people living in a broken world. Our situation would be utterly hopeless but for the ability of Jesus to restore broken things. The first of the four miracles describes Jesus’ authority over destructive weather. He is able to calm ferocious wind and waves with a mere word of rebuke. In the third and fourth miracles, Jesus reverses the destructive power of illness and even of death.

We are looking today at the second of these four miracles, in which Jesus restores a man broken by thousands of demons from Satan. As we get into this topic of demon possession, it is important to remember the words of C. S. Lewis in his famous book *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.

Something you may notice when you read the Bible is the fact that demon possession is concentrated in the four Gospels. There is only one incident of demon possession mentioned in the Old Testament (1 Sam. 16:14ff), and two more in the book of Acts. Outside of that, all other cases of demon possession occur in the Gospels in association with the public ministry of Jesus. Why were there so many demons present in the ministry of Jesus? Some answer that talk of demons was simply a characteristic of pre-modern people as they sought to explain things they didn’t understand. But that doesn’t explain why they are so common during the ministry of Jesus and almost completely absent in the rest of the Bible. I think the most likely explanation for the abundance of demons during Jesus’ ministry is simply the efforts of Satan to mimic the work of God. God became incarnate in Jesus, and now Satan wants to become man through demonic possession of humans. But in doing so, he reveals his purposes and his vulnerability that we might stand against his designs.

**I. The Unmasking of Satan’s Purposes**

In the incident appearing in today's passage, Satan reveals his true intentions. Before looking at the details of that, we need to ask another question. Does demon possession still happen today? I have heard of cases of demon possession, though I have never encountered one myself. I think it significant that there are no directions in the Bible about how to deal with demon possession. What we do find in the Bible is abundant warnings about the efforts of Satan to deceive and destroy human beings. One of the most striking of these warnings is from 1 Peter 5:8. **"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."** I have been hunting only a few times in my life, but I know that stealth is an important component of the hunt. The hunter, like a lion, must not reveal his presence to the animal being hunted until it's too late to escape. Satan seeks to remain undetected by us until he's ready to pounce and destroy. I think one of the ways he seeks to remain undetected is to focus our attention on such unusual things as demon possession while doing the majority of his damage in other ways. This story shows us what some of those other ways are, the ways he seeks to destroy us. I notice four of them.

The dominant feature of this man's life is his social isolation. He lives outside the city, staying in the tombs among the dead rather than the living. His nakedness is another component of this isolation. If you're going to live in community with others, you simply have to wear clothes. There is a great deal of sadness in this man's isolation. Luke tells us that he was from the nearby town. Presumably, he had not always been like this, but had at one time lived peaceably in this town. Perhaps he had been a husband and father. Maybe he had a mother who grieved the complete lunacy of her son. Mark paints a fuller picture of the sad state of this man, telling us that **"night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones"** (5:5). Perhaps some of his family members never got closer to him than hearing his mournful, raving voice.

Satan still attempts to destroy through isolation, at times because everything is going right, and at other times because everything is going wrong. When things are going well, we tend to think we don't need others and we step back from the demands of living in community. Or sometimes when our lives are in trouble, we feel such shame that we withdraw from others. Satan doesn't care why we withdraw, only that we withdraw.

Another feature of the demoniac is violence against others. Luke tells us that many times the men of the community had captured him and bound him with chains. But the demons gave him a superhuman strength, and he would break the chains and escape captivity. I infer from the attempts to place him in captivity that there was something about the behavior of the demoniac that required captivity. He was a violent man. It is even likely that his confrontation with Jesus came about because of his purpose to do some harm against Jesus and the disciples.

A third quality of the man was his tendency toward self-destruction. Mark tells us in his gospel that he cut himself with stones. What a miserable life this man lived! He would sit among the dead, howl in misery and cut himself. His only contact with living people was to attempt to do violence against them.

A fourth feature of Satan's work, seen in the life of this demoniac, is to deceive us about commitment. Here was a man who lived without commitments, doing whatever he wanted to do. He would wake up each day, never having to be concerned about a boss, a spouse or anyone else telling him what to do. There are many in our day who think that such a commitment-free life is the best life, and they actively seek to live in that way. Such a person is being deceived by Satan as he seeks to devour and destroy. Notice that this man, after Jesus cast out the demons, is given an obligation. **"Go to your home, and declare how much God has done for you"** (v. 39).

Luke's description of this pitiful man shows us the purposes of Satan. When he is given full reign in a man's life, this is what he does. Is there some unifying purpose Satan has in mind with his actions toward this man? I believe there is, and I can best summarize it by saying that his purpose is to do all he can to mar the image of God in all humans. Remember that God created humanity in his own image. This is the glory of humanity compared to the rest of creation. We alone are God's image bearers. We are created by God to look like him. Satan sees the similarity, and he hates God's image bearers because he hates God. If you saw the picture of your greatest enemy everywhere you turned, you would be greatly troubled by that. Satan sees a picture of God, the one he hates, everywhere he turns. So he attempts to mar that image.

God is a social God, and as his image bearers we are created to be social creatures. Satan seeks to destroy that by isolating people. God is full of kindness, and we are God-like when we show kindness to others. The demoniac was a violent man, the opposite of kindness. Part of being created in the image of God is to treat your own body with respect, but this man mutilated his in an attitude of self-destruction. As God's image-bearers, we are created to make commitments, because God is the most committed being in the universe, being committed by his promises.

## **II. The Undoing of Satan's Purposes**

This must have been quite a sight to behold as Jesus and his disciples landed on the shore of this Gentile region. A naked, shouting man comes to attack Jesus and the disciples. Jesus immediately discerns the presence of the demons, and we learn that there are thousands of them. A Roman legion consisted of 6,000 foot soldiers, as well as 120 horsemen and technical personnel. The image was one of an efficient fighting organization and of

relentless strength. I don't think Luke meant to say that there were exactly 6,000 demons. But undoubtedly there were many and they were powerful.

Jesus is completely outnumbered. It seems that Satan, who had fought Jesus earlier in the wilderness temptations, now tries to fight him by an overwhelming advantage in numbers. But it is no contest. I like the story of the marine officer who, when he saw that he and his men were surrounded by the enemy, said, "Men, we are surrounded by the enemy; don't let a one of them get away." Jesus defeats this vast army of demons with the power of his word, just as he calmed the sea the night before with the power of his word. He speaks to them and commands them to come out.

As soon as Jesus speaks to command them to come out, they surrender and start begging for mercy, using the voice of this pitiful man. They make two requests of Jesus. First, they beg repeatedly not to be tortured by being sent to a place called the Abyss. Second, they ask if they can go into the herd of pigs. I am struck by the orthodoxy of belief in these demons. They understand the true nature of Jesus, calling him "**Son of the Most High God,**" and they understand that Jesus has the authority to render eternal punishment upon them by sending them into the Abyss. Jesus grants their requests and allows them to go into the pigs. But in their desire not to be left without a host body, the demons had not calculated the outcome of their request. Due to the shock of the sudden demonization, the pigs stampede unexpectedly and run blindly off the cliff into the lake below.

Something to notice about this passage, and the rest of the Bible as well, is its focus on Jesus rather than on details about demons. There is a great deal of natural curiosity in our minds about demons, and this passage does very little to answer our questions. As a matter of fact, it seems to raise more questions than it answers. Why did the demons want to go into the herd of pigs? Why were they so frightened of being sent to the Abyss? What happened to them after the pigs were drowned in the sea? The Bible focuses on Jesus, not on demons, for the simple reason that Jesus is the all-sufficient answer to anything demonic. We need to keep our eyes on Jesus and not on the Satanic. As long as we stand under the banner of Jesus' love, the demons tremble and beg for mercy. To fear the demons is to doubt the power of Jesus' word.

### **III. The Response to Satan's Purposes**

There are two responses to this whole incident, one by the townspeople and the other by the healed demoniac. The townspeople hear the report from those tending the pigs and ask Jesus to leave them. They seem to care more for pigs than for people. Jesus has disrupted the normalcy of their lives, and they want it to end. As one commentator said, "More people hate Jesus because he disturbs them than for any other reason."

The response of the man who had benefitted from Jesus' healing is quite different. He was found **“sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind”** (v. 35). The essence of sanity is to sit at Jesus' feet. When Jesus decides to leave this region, at the request of its hard-hearted citizens, this man asks to go with him. Jesus refuses to allow it, and asks the man instead to **“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you”** (v. 39). It's interesting to me that of the three requests made of Jesus in this passage, only this one is denied. The demons were given what they asked for and allowed to enter the pigs. The townspeople were granted their request when Jesus decided to leave. But this man, the one who was the special object of Jesus' love, has his request denied.

It is often an example of the judgment of Jesus when he gives people what they want, and an example of God's mercy when he denies us what we want. The desire of the demoniac to go with Jesus was intense, indicated by the urgency of his request. Luke tells us that he “begged” to go with Jesus. In denying his request, Jesus is calling him to be a missionary, testifying to the love and power of Jesus by simply telling his story. Ultimately, that is an act of compassion on the materialistic people of this area. They would not abide Jesus' presence, but Jesus left one who could still testify about him. Perhaps you and I will be able to meet several of these people in heaven one day who came through the testimony of this demoniac.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Let me close with two applications. First, remember who your enemy is. It is often the case in our conflicts with one another that we let ourselves start to believe that the person with whom we are in conflict is our enemy. The truth is that your real enemy is the one who is lying to you about who your enemy is. Satan, the great deceiver and destroyer, is your enemy, not your spouse or your boss or that person with whom you are in conflict.

Second, give thanks to the one who has delivered you from your true enemy, Satan, and tell others what he has done for you. Jesus has released us from the isolating effects of sin and Satan. Jesus has delivered us from the self-destructive effects of sin, from the attempts of Satan to blind and deceive us about the glory of Jesus, and from the bondage that comes from the fear of death. His deliverance is costly. It cost the loss of 2000 pigs in our passage. But the ultimate cost was far greater, requiring the life of the Son of God. And, like the demoniac, Jesus has come a long way to deliver us. Jesus crossed the sea here, and Luke records no other work on this shore than his deliverance of this man. Jesus has come a long way for you, as well. He's travelled far and delivered completely because of his love.