

Luke 8:26-39
An Unlikely Missionary

When you think of a missionary, what, or who comes to mind? A person radically committed to the Lord Jesus Christ? A person willing to sacrifice all the worldly pleasures and comforts of living in a first world country to journey to some place without running water and Direct TV? When people talk of missions, do you ever think “I could never do that”?

In this passage, Luke introduces us to a person quite unlikely, at first sight, to be a missionary. He is naked, screaming, self-mutilating, terrorizing the villagers, and under the influence of thousands of demons. Yet, this man ends up as a missionary, sent out by Jesus, Himself! It is a lesson that has as much to do with missions as it does with demons.

The connection with the previous passage is not only chronological but also topical. Notice that Jesus, having just quieted a raging storm, now quiets the demons causing destruction to this wretched man. Jesus had just demonstrated His power over the natural world. His great and wonderful power as Creator God is marvelous indeed, but in this passage He demonstrates His power over the spiritual world. This is even greater. This shows His ability to change not just the weather, but the lives of individual people?

A word of caution. We ought not to dismiss this passage because of its seeming irrelevance to today. Nor ought we to get caught up in thinking topics like demon possession are the exclusive niche for charismatic sects. The fact that overt demonic activity, such as demon possession, is rare these days does not mean that Satan is not at work. Recall 1 Timothy 4:1, “but the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.”

Yet we need not fear,

Ephesians 2:1-5, “¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”

Colossians 1:13-14, “¹³For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Satan is active, but so is the Holy Spirit. We need neither fear nor ignore the spiritual world around us.

Demons are Destructive

Following the quieting of the storm, “then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee” (v. 26). It seems logical that they arrived about daybreak, having sailed through the night. The place is variously referred to as the region of the Gerasenes (Luke, Mark 5:1) or Gadarenes (Matthew 8:28). There was a small village, Gerasa, from which Mark and Luke got the name, but Matthew is referring to a larger town, Gadara, nearby. As Scripture describes, it was an area of tombs cut into the

side of the hills on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Many of the tombs were used, others probably were not yet occupied.

The confrontation took place immediately. When Jesus got out of the boat, “He was met by a man from the city who was possessed with demons” (v. 27). The man was “from the city,” that is, he had been a normal person before his affliction. He used to live among his fellow men and wear clothes and behave normally. Unfortunately, now he “had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs” (v. 27). He occupied either the empty caves that had not yet been used as tombs, or even worse, slept among the rotting corpses himself.

It is clear that the man’s case was tragic. The demons had such possession of him that both his mind and his body were under their control. He behaved in a way that was beyond the bounds of decency. First, he wore no clothing. Contrary to our modern social mores, nakedness has usually been associated in western culture with shame. Our understanding of this began with the Fall when “the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings” (Genesis 3:7). This normal human condition will continue to the time of Armageddon, “blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame” (Revelation 16:15). While the man, himself, apparently had no idea of the embarrassment he should feel, he did feel the extremes of weather and discomfort of living without clothing. The effects of wind, heat, and sleeping on the bare ground had no doubt taken its toll on his unclothed body.

He man had also abandoned human society. He lived among the tombs. He was more at home among the dead than the living. Mark adds that “constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones” (Mark 5:5). Clearly he was now considered a public hazard. The people of the village watched him closely, and when they could “he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard” (v. 29). But the power of the demons within was greater than the bonds that held him for “he would break his bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert” (v. 29).

We are reminded of the miserable situation of those over whom Satan has control. Though this passage speaks of physical possession, more common but no less tragic is the man or woman whose heart is in the control of Satan. Self-abasement of every kind, dishonor, and self-destructive habits are equally prevalent today in those over whom Satan has extended his power and influence .

When the man saw the boat coming, he headed down to the water, perhaps looking to torment whoever dared come near. Upon recognizing Jesus, however, “he cried out and fell before Him” (v. 28). The man prostrated himself. The demons understood immediately who Jesus was. Furthermore, the demons within caused the man to exclaim, “what business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” (v. 28).

It is remarkable that the demons within had answered the question the disciples had been asking on the boat, “Who then is this?” (Luke 8:25). The demons recognized Jesus as the Son of God. This had happened before to Jesus (Luke 4:34) and even Satan, during the temptation of Jesus in the desert, had acknowledge Who Jesus was (Luke 4:3).

Knowing Who Jesus was, the demons cried “I beg You, do not torment me.” (v. 28). The demonic world is aware of their future. They understand that on the day of final judgment their freedom to move about will end, and they will be plunged forever into the punishment reserved for them. There is that “eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). The concern of the demons was with the timing. They do not know the particular details of the end times, and upon seeing Jesus, they wondered if that end of time had now come.

This also is a reminder that mere head knowledge of Who Jesus is, is not the same as saving faith. “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder” (James 2:19). We must not ever be content with mere head knowledge. As we share the gospel with others, and especially within our families. We must be cautious that church and Sunday school attendance, VBS, AWANA, and youth camps, as important and fundamental as they are, never be considered an equivalent for saving faith.

Demons are Defeated

Jesus was moved with compassion and pity. Jesus began by asking him “What is your name?” (v. 30). Was this to help the man recognize himself under the power of the demons? Scripture does not say. The answer given was ‘legion’ a word, if taken literally in the context of the times meant 6000 demons. Perhaps that was the case, but probably the meaning is figurative, implying a vast army of occupation and destruction.

Jesus “commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man” (v. 29). Again the power of Jesus was demonstrated. The demons could do nothing but obey. It was another testimony to the deity of Jesus. Demonic forces are fallen angels, and as such are “angels who are greater in might and power” (2 Peter 2:11) that we are. No man can command an angel, they are solely under the jurisdiction of God.

These impertinent demons made a request, though. “They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss” (v. 31). This is the bottomless pit of Revelation 9:1-2, “¹Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. ²He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.”

Some demons are imprisoned there already, but will be released during the tribulation (Revelation 9:1-11). Others, apparently, are there permanently awaiting judgment, “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;” (2 Peter 2:4). These particular demons asked Jesus to defer their going to the abyss to await final judgment. Since “there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; the demons implored Him to permit them to enter the swine” (v. 32).

Mark 5:13 says there were “about two thousand of them [pigs],” so one gets an image of the demonic activity involved here. The demons ask permission to go into the herd, which Jesus allows. Perhaps the fact that pigs were unclean in themselves made them an appropriate receptacle for the demons. We are reminded of the relentless destructive power of demons. They are willing even to destroy animals if it suits their purposes. And as “the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned” (v.

33), we recognize the utter self-destructiveness under which the man suffered. But more importantly, we see the pervasiveness of the power of Jesus. Even pigs cannot be harmed (these are Jews remember) without His allowing it.

Some have questioned how to justify the property loss inflicted by Jesus on the owners? After all, they had done nothing wrong. Why was their livelihood allowed to be destroyed. Two thousand swine was a significant financial investment. The loss would have been devastating for the owners.

Perhaps a response, simply put, is to recall that God is sovereign over all possessions. After all, nothing is truly ours. He can use what He has given us to be stewards of to suit His purposes. Also, the owners, and many others, were to be given the opportunity of seeing evidence of the Messiah. They were to have before them the demonstration of a powerful lesson on the sovereignty and redemptive power of God. Finally, it should go without saying that the redemption of a man's soul is worth more than any property.

Two Responses

There were two very different responses to this miracle. The men tending the pigs had seen the encounter. "The herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country" (v. 34). They certainly were aware of the previously demon possessed man, and they clearly recognized they had lost their herd of pigs and would have some explaining to do to the owners. The obvious conclusion was that there must be a connection between the man being restored to his senses and the pigs rushing headlong over a cliff. They were not about to take the blame for the loss of the herd. They wanted the owners to know who was responsible. So they spread the news throughout the countryside.

Matthew says "the whole city came out to meet Jesus" Matthew 8:34). News spread quickly and people came to see. And what they saw astonished them. When "they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind" (v. 35) it was amazing. They knew the man. He had lived among them remember, before the demonic invasion. They had tied him up again and again, only to have him break free and run about naked. The loss of the pigs was quickly forgotten. Notice that Scripture makes no particular mention of the owners, or the financial ruin they suffered. All attention was turned toward the man.

The man had been changed completely and immediately. He was in his right mind. He was clothed. He was sitting attentively at the feet of the rabbi. (We are all in our right minds when we are at the feet of Jesus). He was restored to himself. He was at peace. Scripture does not record of how long the man had suffered the demonic possession, but it had been long enough to have developed a reputation among those in the area that he was a danger to others. Now here he was among them. Testimony was given by witnesses as to how this had come to pass. "Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well" (v. 36). There was no possible earthly explanation for these indisputable and indescribable facts.

As had happened before, the power of Jesus caused people to be frightened. Like the disciples in the boat after the storm, they could not abide such power, such holiness. One would think that, like other crowds, they would begin to bring their sick and physically afflicted to Jesus to be healed. But instead "all the

people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear” (v. 37).

The restored man had responded with loving attachment to his Savior. The local crowds responded with fear.

Two Requests

Then two requests were made of Jesus. They were very different, and He granted the one that seemed less appropriate.

The fear these people felt was not a reverence for the presence of God. It was something else. It is also interesting that these people seem to show no interest in the restored man. They certainly did not rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15).

And it was not just a few who felt this way. The whole region was unanimous in their opinion. It is sad to think that people deliberately chose destruction. Despite the testimony of those who saw, the people in the village and surrounding countryside simply refused to believe. Like the Pharisees, no amount of proof was sufficient. Their hearts were hardened, and their minds were closed. They were the rocky soil into which the gospel could not penetrate.

They asked Jesus to leave them. Notice there is no mention that Jesus take the man with Him. They preferred the company of a former lunatic (for that is how he must have seemed) to the Messiah. No thanks is recorded for ridding their community of the demons, no praise for restoring their former friend to himself. All they wanted was for Jesus to leave.

Why? Did they love their sin so much? Were they afraid of what Jesus might do if He stayed? Perhaps it was that curious feature of fallen humanity that actually resents when someone else is reformed from their wicked ways. Unrepentant sinners do not like to lose their own to the light.

Graciously, Jesus did as they asked. He granted their request. He did not force Himself upon them. He did not compel them to accept His presence in their town. “He got into a boat and returned” (v. 37). Yet Jesus, knowing what was best for them, did not leave them absolutely. In His compassion He made provision for them to continue to hear the gospel. And He did so by responding to a second request.

The restored man asked to come with Jesus. The people of the town wanted to be as far from Jesus as they could, but “the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him” (v. 38). His willingness to leave whatever he had behind and follow Jesus shows that his restoration was spiritual, as well as physical. He had truly been saved.

Curiously, Jesus declined his request. Instead “³⁸He sent him away, saying, ³⁹Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you” (v. 38-39). The man was told to say what great things God had done for him. The relationship between God and Jesus is clearly stated. What Jesus had done, God had done.

Why did Jesus not allow the man to come with Him? Clearly the man was grateful for his salvation. Perhaps his zeal needed more grounding to be effective for the kingdom of God. He had, after all, just been restored to himself. It is a good reminder that enthusiasm alone is not always sufficient for fulfilling a spiritual calling. Jesus denied the man's request to accompany Him because it was better for the man, and it was better for the kingdom of God. After all, we do not know how many Gadarenes eventually came to faith through the man's testimony of these events.

Another lesson is that since the man knew enough to be saved, he knew enough to be a missionary. No record is indicated of the man's intellectual ability or of his training in the Jewish Law prior to his falling into the hands of the demons. If his learning had been great, it was likely to have been mentioned. He probably had no more knowledge than anyone else. But he did have a story to tell. As do we all. We must remember that the best place we can serve Christ is where He wants us at any particular moment.

He obeyed Jesus, "he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him" (v. 39). We can be reminded that when God says no, it is not because of our sin or His disfavor. He knows what is best for us and of His kingdom.

Take Aways

This passage is a great example of the great change brought about by encountering Jesus. We, too, are transferred from Satan's control to that of the Holy Spirit when we come to faith.

We all have a responsibility to go about "proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done"