

Tombs to Testimony

Luke 8:26-39

Introduction

Regularly Scheduled Programming: Today's passage might seem odd to preach knowing that we'll have a guest from Kids Week attending. But this is as good a passage as any to demonstrate something about our church. We preach God's Word, even the hard parts. You are not here for a clever, inspirational message but to hear from God. So last week, we preached the passage before this, and next week, we'll preach the passage after this!

- This also helps you get a sense of the context of the gospel story when you hear it in order week after week.
- In this section of Luke, we've seen Jesus heal the sick and calm the storm. He has authority over nature, disease, and death.
- He is the unstoppable, all-powerful God and everyone is called to surrender to and worship him.
- He is not merely a human teacher, moral example, or inspired prophet. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

U Can't Touch This: MC Hammer's iconic 1990 song, proclaimed boldly that his skills and accomplishments are unmatched. His game is impeccable and no one can compete with his level of excellence. As a result, "you can't touch this." Despite his brash confidence, he, in fact, was not untouchable. Despite earning an estimated \$33 million, in 1996 he filed for bankruptcy citing more than \$13 million in debts. Only one, and it is not, Mr. Hammer, is untouchable.

- In this week's passage we see Jesus' undeniable authority over Satan as he graciously frees a man from the demons that are tormenting him.
- "When Satan seems to be his strongest, Jesus stands ready to show himself stronger in one way after another. 'The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers' (2 Cor 4:4), but Jesus opens the eyes of the blind. 'The prince of the power of the air... is now at work in the sons of disobedience' (Eph 2:2), but Jesus is at work in us, slowly shaping us into sons of righteousness. 'For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 Jn 4:4). As strong as Satan may seem, as powerful as sin's pull may be, as enslaving as our shame feels, as dire as our circumstances appear, Jesus is stronger. He is stronger than Satan, stronger than sin, stronger than shame, stronger than any storm and fire of suffering and pain, and stronger even than death itself" (Mathis, *adapted*).

Jesus' authority delivers us from bondage and transforms us into witnesses.

1. Desperate Struggle of the Demon-Possessed Man (vv. 26-29)

²⁶ Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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.”²⁹ For 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.)

Setting: They sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. Jesus and his crew sailed something like 20 miles southeast (opposite Galilee) into Gentile territory. This passage is sometimes called “the healing of the Gerasene demoniac” (Gerasene demoniac sounds like a late-70s pop-punk band).

The Man: There Jesus “met him a man.” Three things stand out about the tormented state of this man.

- **(1) Possessed** by multiple demons. Who had demons (plural, ἔχων δαιμόνια). Sometimes the demon or unclean spirit is described singularly. Later when named, the unclean spirit is called Legion because many demons had entered the man.¹
 - **What is a demon?** By way of definition, from various Biblical texts,² demons, like angels, were created by God. They became evil through their rebellion against him. They work alongside Satan against God’s purposes, seeking to undermine his kingdom and deceive humanity. They tempt individuals, spread false teachings, and in some cases oppress or possess individuals causing various forms of distress.
- **(2) Naked.** For a long time he had worn no clothes. I certainly prefer this option than the opposit, cf. Acts 19:16: And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded (Acts 19:16). Later we see that being clothed is a sign of his restoration (v. 35). Getting the clothes back on is a win but it’s a bigger win because it’s a sign of being in his right mind.
- **(3) Isolated** among the tombs, “a particularly graphic and somber image.” Rather than in community with the living, he is surrounded by death and decay. Technically “alive” but living among the dead (which is no way to live).³ The modern (e.g., 19th c.) movement to make cemeteries serene places with ornamental plants makes for nice places to walk but can’t hide the reality of death (especially at night).

Demon-possession: I think there are basically two errors we can fall into when dealing with things like **demon-possession** (there’s a ditch on two sides of the road; the slope is slippery on both sides of the mountain, etc.). “There are two equal and opposite errors into which [we] fall about [demons]. 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” (C. S. Lewis). **(1) Deny** or **(2) Obsess**.

¹ Cf. Mk 5:2, 9

² 1 Sam 16:14, Mk 5:1-20, Eph 6:12, Rev 20:10

³ In Judaism, being in the presence of the dead results in ritual impurity and uncleanness.

- (1) **Deny**. There is a type of modern (Western?) view that sees any talk of demons, Satan, etc. as superstitious (or at least a little stitious). People more readily accept a belief in God than Satan! We think we are wiser and that everything has some sort of medical explanation and we can leave demon possession to the backward and undeveloped world (despite prevalent belief in ghosts, psychics, etc.).
 - We have more information, but I dare to say we are not wiser (e.g., chronological snobbery).
 - Babylonians discovered trigonometry 1,500 years before the Greeks (ca. 1822-1762 BC). “Unlike today’s trigonometry, Babylonian mathematics used a base 60, or sexagesimal system, rather than the 10 which is used today. Because 60 is far easier to divide by three, experts studying the tablet, found that the calculations are far **more accurate**.” We’ve conflated technology for intelligence!⁴
 - One reason we might see less demonic activity is because we explain it away or aren’t looking. In cultures that understand the reality of unseen forces, it is easier to see their activity (e.g., W. Africa). We see what we want to see and don’t see what we don’t want to see.
 - The Bible is clear that there are unseen realities at work in the world and one of Satan’s great strategies is camouflage. His work is more effective when you don’t see him coming.
 - For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12).
- (2) **Obsess**. When we blame everything on the devil (or demons), we over-emphasize. Every sin is a demon of this or a demon of that. The Bible is clear that demons instigate temptation and can even inhabit *unsaved* persons. But the Bible says that “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (Jas 1:14). Stop blaming the devil for all your bad choices.
 - The devil is limited (as are demons). As powerful as they *may* appear, their power pails in comparison to Christ.
 - They cannot be everywhere (or even two places at once).
 - You can’t be the temple of the Holy Spirit and the residence of the devil.
 - You can’t be possessed by a demon if you’re possessed by the Spirit of God.
- There are real physical, emotional, and mental problems that aren’t the devil, and Scripture is aware of that.⁵
- Mental illness is a real disease and needs to be talked about more openly and freely in the church, but this story isn’t about mental illness (as much as anti-supernatural interpreters want all the demonic in Scripture to be).
- Isn’t it possible that the devil would see a real physical, mental, or emotional weakness in you and use that to tempt, attack, and manipulate you?

⁴ Jonathan Edwards went to Yale at the age of 13 (when entrance required fluency in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew). He graduated in four years as valedictorian and gave his commencement speech in Latin (“but tell me again how much smarter we are today”).

⁵ Timothy’s stomach issues (1 Tim 5:23), Elijah’s despair (1 Kgs 19:4), David’s grief (Ps 6, 22, 42), Nebuchadnezzar’s madness (Dn 4), etc.

Both of these errors miss the point (arguing why everything is demonic or why nothing is demonic). The demonic circumstances are a **given** in the story, the point is the authority of Jesus

The Plight: As a pastor I sometimes get called to tense ministry situations. Even the most difficult marriage counseling isn't as bad as the situation that Jesus walks into. If I get a call that there is a naked, demon-possessed man living in the cemetery that needs my help, I'd say that's why we have deacons. This man's condition is beyond any human remedy. Thankfully, the one person who can do something about his problem is the man standing before him right then.

Undeniable Authority: 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."

- What have you to do with me? What is there between us? Could you please leave me alone? (Bock)
- One of the best ways to see the truth of Christ's authority is to understand how the demons view him.
 - Even the demons are subject to us in your name (Luke 10:17)
 - Even the demons believe—and shudder (Jas 2:19)
- There is no fight; this isn't Luke vs. Vader, good vs. evil, light vs. dark. This isn't 50/50; maybe he'll win, and maybe he won't. They don't have a "puncher's chance." This is a "please don't hurt me." This is me climbing in the ring with a professional fighter. Jesus is completely transcendent. When Jesus and the devil interact, it is not a fight. This is not *The Exorcist*; there is no battle.
- For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. This isn't a request or a discussion but a command.
 - "The reason Christianity is mocked and ridiculed is because Christ is a real threat to sin and evil... The real Jesus changes people. Satan hates that" (Medders).
 - In the Gospels, Jesus is mocked by Roman soldiers before His crucifixion. They place a crown of thorns on His head, drape a purple robe around Him, and sarcastically hail Him as "King of the Jews" (Mk 15:16-20). This mocking is because His claim to kingship and power threatens their authority and the established order. Mocking usually highlights your fear of the thing you mock.
- A little sidenote is given to show the strength of these demons and by implication, the greater strength of Christ: (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.) Shackles couldn't hold these demons, yet Christ has complete authority over them with a simple word.

Salvation: The story of this man is our story in one way or another. We are in the shackles of sin, isolated from God and others, helpless to rescue ourselves. But Jesus meets us, speaks to us, delivers us, and transforms us.

2. Destructive Designs of the Demonic (vv. 30-33)

³⁰ Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. ³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³² Now 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. ³³ 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.

Legion: What’s in a name? If we take *Legion* at all literally it comes from the Roman military meaning a group (Legion) of soldiers in the thousands. It is one against thousands! Yet it is no contest at all. He has to give them permission.

Destination: They know their destination (the abyss) and they beg Jesus not to send them there. They know that their rebellion has consigned them to the abode of the dead⁶, the place where Satan is kept. This is a **cosmic sneak preview**: And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while (Rev 20:2-3). These demons know their end is destruction, so they want to enjoy their ‘freedom’ a little longer.

- Anything would be better than the abyss, so they ask to go into the swine on the hillside.
- **Why the pigs?**
 - I would have hoped it was cats because they’re already demon-possessed.
 - Some speculate because pigs are ritually unclean in Judaism these “unclean spirits” could have a natural home there (e.g., why Jews and Muslims don’t eat pork).
 - **Would that really matter in a Gentile region?** The fact that a herd of pigs was nearby reminds us that this is a Gentile region.
 - Maybe they just happened to be the nearest vessel. **Who knows?**

Destruction: 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. **What a waste of bacon!**

- The animals are sacrificed rather than the man.
- The demons didn’t want to go into the abyss, yet they went into the abyss of the sea anyway. The devil’s path always takes us into destruction. The devil will drag you into deep water. This is a physical illustration of a spiritual reality.
- Every one of Satan’s temptations are lies that will lead to your destruction, not your flourishing (e.g., Adam and Eve). Jesus’ commands are for your good and flourishing. **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10).**
- Jesus has come to give you real life, eternal life, and a life worth living. But you have to stop believing the destructive lies of Satan. **What lies of the enemy are you believing that are destroying you?**

3. Fearful Response to Jesus’ Power (vv. 34-37)

⁶ Ps 107:26, Rom 10:7

³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then 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 afraid. ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷ Then 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.

Surprising Response: Notice the townspeople's crazy response. When they saw what had happened, they wanted nothing to do with Jesus! They were afraid and wanted him to leave! Rather than leading to faith, their fear led to rejection.

- You would think they would be happy, if not for their fellow countryman who has been healed, for themselves not having to live in fear of this deranged man. But they're not!
- **What would cause them fear rather than joy?**
- Fear is really an act of worship. We give authority to what we fear. We submit to what we fear. That's why the Bible says to "fear God" but *not* to fear man.⁷ The only one we should rightly fear (God) tells us not to fear him because he loves us.⁸
 - When our heart is set on the world, so are our fears. As a result, everything in the world scares us. This is why so many people see the world as a great, big scary place. The world isn't scary. Sure, it's broken by sin, but behind the brokenness we see the beauty and promise of God. Behind the pain, we see the longing for redemption. I think this is why one theologian called "[misplaced fear]" the "greatest false idol of modern Christianity."

Cost and Control: The power of Christ should produce fear that leads to worship, but for them it leads to rejection.

- Some suggest that the destruction of the pigs was enough to make them reject Jesus. The loss of property was too much. "That the price of pork bellies was bound to jump higher wouldn't much cheer those with no hogs left to sell." The herdsmen didn't want to lose anymore. **Following Jesus is inconvenient.**
- **Some of us fear letting Jesus into our lives because it might cost us our stuff!**
- If Jesus can command the demons to depart, then he can tell us what to do. The power they've just witnessed is far outside of their control.
 - We're happy to try and fit Jesus into our lives. But Christ doesn't fit into your life, he is your life. Your life conforms to his. Your life is hidden with Christ on high.⁹
 - There are few things more dangerous to the cause of Christ than the nominal Christian that tries to squeeze Jesus into their life rather than surrendering their life to Jesus.

⁷ "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28).

⁸ Lk 2:10, Is 41:10, Josh 1:9

⁹ Col 3:3

- They remind me of the Seven Sons of Sceva in Acts 19 (the ones that got beat up and ran naked out of the house by a man possessed with evil spirits). Here's what the demons said to them when they tried to command the demons out of the man: "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" "I fear that the enemy is hardly alarmed by our weak Christian lives that lack the power of Christ" (Lawless).
 - We are more afraid of a disruption to our comfort than surrender to Christ's call.
 - We are more worried that Jesus would inconvenience us than desiring of him to transform us.
 - They would rather this man continue to be in distress than have to cede control of their lives to Christ.
 - How many of us choose to stay bound by our sin because it lies to us that we are in control, rather than experience the freedom of Christ because that would require us to give him control?

Transformed Life: 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.

- I think this is the glory and terror of the moment. What power could have done this? Only Jesus. This is the power of salvation¹⁰: that the lies of Satan can be made untrue, that the death of sin can be overcome, that the destruction of the evil one cannot hold us, and that Christ can change you, remake you, heal you, and save you!
- Jesus had undone what Satan had attempted to do to this man. The isolated outsider has been brought in. The untamable man who couldn't even be restrained with chains is now sitting calmly, learning at the master's feet.
- I've witnessed it with my own eyes that encountering Jesus transforms people!

4. Faithful Obedience of the Delivered (vv. 38-39)

³⁸ The 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.

Staying as the Sent Life: We say every week "you are sent." The most fruitful and important missionary assignment this man has, is to go back to the people that saw him at his worst to visibly demonstrate and verbally declare the salvation of Jesus.

- This man rightly wants to "go" with Jesus. He begs to go with Jesus, but sometimes Jesus says, "No."
- Your situation is not an accident; it's an assignment. It's an opportunity to glorify God.
- Sometimes going with the gospel looks a lot like staying where you are. "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you."d has done for you" (Lk 8:39).
- Jesus has called this man to the mission field of his community. Often, the best missionaries are those who are "from a place."

¹⁰ Rom 1:16

- The same mission Jesus gave this man is the same mission he has for you: declare how much God has done for you. We make evangelism so hard with strategies and memorized plans. **Start with this, tell everyone how much God has done for you.**

Conclusion

Jesus wants to free you (**surrender**) and send you on a mission (**transform**) to tell the world what he has done for you.

- Will you surrender?
- Will you tell?