

3. The banishing of Legion

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we come now to our reading from the scriptures, and perhaps you turn with me to Luke's Gospel, chapter 8, and you'll find this on page 865, 865, Luke chapter 8, and I'm going to read from verse 26 to verse 39.

This is the story of Jesus meeting a demon-possessed man and cleansing or delivering the demon-possessed man from the demon or demons.

So here are the words that the Lord God, the Holy Spirit, inspired Luke the Evangelist to write, these true words, which are for our blessing. Luke chapter 8, verse 26.

Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 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. 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.

[1 : 1 7] 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.

Then Jesus asked him, What is your name? And he said, Legion. For many demons had entered him.

And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. 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. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. 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.

[2 : 2 6] And they were afraid. And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. 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. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, 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. Amen.

The word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us this evening. Well, friends, perhaps you'd turn with me again to Luke's Gospel, chapter 8, on page 865 in our church Bibles.

I'd like to begin at verse 28.

- [3 : 34] When the man 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. I read it rather more fiercely than that, didn't I, a few minutes ago? I hope it didn't frighten you, but I was trying to get the feeling of what it really might have sounded like. Those are devilish words, aren't they?
- A human voice was uttering them in a way, but really this is the voice of a demon in mortal terror, as he looks at Jesus and realizes who this glorious figure is that is confronting him.
- This is the Son of the Most High God, and the demon knows it all too well, and it terrifies him. What have you to do with me? I beg you, do not torment me. Well, this is our passage for tonight.
- It's about the transformation of legion from a state of utter wretchedness and demon possession to a state of sanity and good health and good order.
- [4 : 38] Now, it's not primarily about the healing of a deranged mind, though certainly that element is involved. But first and foremost, this is about the confrontation of Satan's army by the invincible Son of God.
- And therefore, it's a foretaste of the ultimate and complete victory that Jesus will have over Satan and all his works. Now, the agnostic, the rationalist agnostic, might well look at a passage like this and might say, I rather like this passage.
- There's a great truth here, and I'm not wanting to deny everything about it at all. After all, we have a massive confrontation in this world between the forces of good and the forces of evil.
- That's obvious to all of us that human beings have a great potential for goodness and kindness and noble deeds, but equally can behave in ways that are degraded and wicked.
- So this passage about Jesus and legion surely describes the forces of good and evil, battling over this man's life and his future. And happily, God seems to win good, sorry, good seems to win out over evil in this man's life.
- [5 : 50] But the agnostic goes on. What I find hard to accept is this idea that behind the evil in this world, there is a personal devil or personal demons.
- And equally, that behind the good in this world, there is a personal God or a person called Jesus Christ. The force of good and the force of evil I can accept, but not the persons of God and Satan as the Bible portrays them.
- Well, against this more rationalist approach or this agnostic approach, it needs to be said that we will misunderstand the Bible badly if we think of it as no more than a collection of semi-mythical stories which are designed to shed light on the power of good and evil at work in human lives.
- If it were like that, it would be rather like the story of Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf. Think of that well-known story. You have two characters there who represent all that is good and sweet, Little Red Riding Hood and her kindly granny.
- And you have the power of evil in the figure of the wolf. And just when everything seems to be lost and the lovely granny has been devoured, a saviour figure in the form of the woodcutter rushes in with his mighty axe, kills the wolf and miraculously restores the granny to the little girl.
- [7 : 10] And they all sit down to tea and fruitcake and the whole thing ends happily. Now that is a comforting myth. Evil seems for a while to get the upper hand, but good triumphs in the end.
- Now is our passage here in Luke chapter 8 really like that? No more than a colourful myth designed to illustrate the truth that life can reach rock bottom. Things can get into a terrible state, but goodness has a wonderful way of triumphing in the end.

So let's put a brave face on things and we'll hope for a brighter future. No, no, no. The first and fundamental difference between the literature of fairy tale and the literature of the Bible is that the Bible is historical.

We're dealing here with events that actually happened. Luke the evangelist tells us very straightforwardly at the beginning of his book, but what he has been writing down and recording has been carefully researched for its historical accuracy.

So we have history here. And the second big difference between fairy tale and the Bible is that the books of the Bible from Genesis right to Revelation uniformly understand and teach that God is real, objective, all-powerful and personal, and that the devil and his minions, his helpers, are equally real and personal.

[8 : 33] Personal in the sense that they are self-conscious, thinking, purposeful beings who hate God and hate human beings who are made in the image of God.

So if we're to understand this passage well, we need to see that Jesus is truly a historical man, that he's fully human and yet truly the son of God and divine.

And we need to grasp that the man that Jesus rescued was a true human being and yet greatly diminished because he was gripped and possessed by real malignant demons.

Demons are real. Demon possession is real, and it's a horrible condition. Thankfully, it seems to be rather rare in this country. I'm not quite sure why that should be, but it does seem to be more common in other parts of the world.

Demon possession is not a code name for mental illness, although it may manifest itself in bizarre behavior. But it's a real condition in which a demon or demons get hold of a human life and get right inside it and take it over.

[9 : 38] And inevitably do great damage. And let me add this before we get into the story itself. It is impossible for a Christian to be demon possessed.

Satan, our enemy, will frequently assail us and tempt us and harry us. But once we're Christians, the Holy Spirit, God himself, comes to live within us and he will not share his dwelling place with an evil spirit.

So if you're a Christian, you'll be conscious of the devil's malicious intentions. But you can rest assured that the Lord to whom you now belong, who in the best sense possesses you, he will not allow any evil spirit to get inside you or to take you over.

Well, let's look at our passage. I've got three points, three headings. And here's the first. Luke shows us the life wrecking power of demon possession.

Here is a man whose stature as a human being has been virtually destroyed. He's lost all dignity and all self-control. We start picking up the clues in verse 27, where we get little glimpses of his past life.

[10 : 53] Do you see how verse 27 tells us that he was a man from the city, from the city? We don't know which city it was, but it was over on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, the country of the Gerasenes. So he'd come from a city. He'd started off living with other people, no doubt in a family.

And even now, he still seemed to have connections. Because if you look on to verse 39, you'll see that Jesus tells him to return to his home. Go back to your own home.

So there's his home waiting for him. But he has long since left it. And as verse 27 puts it, he had for a long time not lived in a house. And for a long time he had not worn clothes.

And he lived in a cemetery amongst the tombs. Now, cemeteries are not great places at the best of times, are they? You don't go to a cemetery for a picnic on a sunny Sunday.

But this particular cemetery, beside the Sea of Galilee, had a naked man running about it with a deranged mind. You can be sure that nobody took their picnics there. But there were still people, it seems, trying to help this man and bring him under control.

[11 : 59] Because verse 29 tells us that he was regularly bound with chains and shackles. But the demon, just as regularly, would seize him and give him such physical strength that he could break his chains and go rushing off into the desert.

Naked, fierce, hating, violent. Self-mastery and dignity all gone. But there's something else that he had lost as well.

In verse 30, Jesus asks him, what is your name? And all he can say is, Legion. When he was a baby, his mother and father must have called him John or Michael or Joseph, mustn't they?

But the thing that most conveys human identity, his personal name, seemed to have been swallowed up in his new identity. No longer, I'm so-and-so, the son of Mr. and Mrs. so-and-so, but simply Legion.

A Legion, by the way, was a division of the Roman army and it numbered 6,000 infantrymen. 6,000 men. So we have a very lost soul here.

[13 : 06] A man degraded to the point where his humanity has almost disappeared. It's hard to imagine, really, how any person could be in a worse position than this man was.

If I were an alcoholic, there would be places I could turn to for help. If I were broke, I could beg. If I were homeless, I could go to the Salvation Army.

But if I were in the grip of a legion of demons, what power on earth could help me? So there's the first thing. Luke shows us the life-wrecking power of demon possession.

But secondly, Luke shows us that Jesus is Satan's absolute master. Look again at these words in verse 28, uttered by the demon.

As soon as the demon is confronted by Jesus, he says, What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the most high God? I beg you, do not torment me. Now, do you notice there's no sense of bargaining there?

[14 : 05] There's no sense that Jesus may have most of the advantages, but the demons perhaps have a few tricks up their sleeves as well. Not at all. They are utterly powerless before the one that they rightly recognize as the son of the most high God.

And there's a verb there which is used three times of the demons in this passage. And this verb shows how they have no power in the face of the son of God. It's the verb beg.

So verse 28, I beg you, do not torment me. And look on to verse 31. They begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. And verse 32, they begged him to let them enter the pigs.

You don't beg if you have a certain amount of power. You beg when you're powerless. And there's something else that these demons clearly understand. And that is that they have a limited amount of time in which they can wreak havoc with human lives.

There is an end point to their activity, and they know it. When they beg Jesus in verse 31 not to command them to depart into the abyss, why do they say that?

[15 : 13] They say it because they know that in the end that is exactly what he will do. In fact, in Matthew's version of this same story, the demons cry out to Jesus, Have you come here to torment us before the time?

Before the time. They know that the time will come eventually. Satan himself knows that he has limited time. You remember how in the book of Revelation, in chapter 12, a voice from heaven cries out, Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short.

That's why he does as much damage as he can while he can. But then at the end of the book of Revelation, in chapter 20, we're shown the final end of Satan, that this devil who has deceived so many people is to be thrown into the lake of fire, and that will be the end of him.

So what the Bible teaches is that Jesus and God the Father have complete mastery over the devil. The Bible never wavers in that conviction.

And we need to see just how clear the Bible is in this matter, because the way of the world around us, the non-Christian world, is to see the powers of goodness and the powers of darkness engaged in a kind of tug of war, which seems to go one way for a while and then back the other way.

[16 : 35] And the outcome seems to be in doubt. So typically an individual who's not a Christian might feel that 2011 was a bad year, when several things went very badly wrong in that person's life, and the powers of darkness seem to have the upper hand.

Whereas, let's hope that now we're into 2012, it's going to be a better year, and the forces of goodness will exert a bit more pressure. When people, we've stopped doing it about three weeks ago, but when people wish each other a happy new year, it may be that there's just a touch of that pagan thinking lurking behind the greeting.

A happy new year to you. May the fates be with you. May the sun shine upon you. May your barns be full of corn and your styes full of piglets. That kind of thinking, possibly.

But that kind of dualism, dualism, the idea being that Satan and God, or good and evil, are somehow equal and opposite powers, that is completely foreign to the Bible.

In the Bible, God is totally sovereign. And Satan, although he's active and fierce, is slated for destruction when the time comes. And let me develop this just a little bit further, and then we'll get back into our story in Luke.

[17 : 50] The Psalms speak eloquently of God's sovereignty. Let me give you four quotations. Four verses, each of which is a first verse from one of the Psalms.

Psalms 24, verse 1. The earth is the Lord's. Psalm 93, verse 1. The Lord reigns. He is robed in majesty.

Psalms 97, verse 1. The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice. Psalm 99, verse 1. The Lord reigns. Let the peoples tremble.

However, John the Apostle, in his first letter, chapter 5, verse 19, says this. We know, this is we Christians, we know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

So, are the Psalms and the Apostle John contradicting each other? They may appear to be, but in truth, they're not. The true situation is that God is in absolute control of all events.

[18 : 55] He controls the whole life of the whole earth. But he has given Satan certain permissions, a limited power and authority. And you can trace this right back to Genesis chapter 3.

Do you remember the words that the Lord God says to Satan in Genesis 3, just after the rebellion of Adam and Eve, when God is pronouncing judgment upon both the man, the woman, and the serpent? He says this to the serpent.

I will put enmity. In other words, I shall dictate this relationship. I shall put enmity between you, the serpent, and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. So, as a consequence of man's rebellion, God has caused and permitted enmity to spring up between Satan and the human race for a limited period, until finally the woman's offspring, who is Jesus, will crush the head of the old serpent and bring his activity to a complete end.

But that end has not yet come. And until it does, although the Lord reigns in heaven and earth, the world, to go back to the Apostle John, the world, which means human life, human society, in its rebellion against God, the world does lie in the power of the evil one.

[20 : 18] So, this means that every person who is not a Christian is still in the devil's grip and power. People in that position are still believing the devil's lies.

So, for example, his denial that Jesus is the Son of God. If a person is not a Christian, he or she may well believe that Jesus is not the Son of God. Or they may well believe the devil's denial that the Bible is the word of God.

Or his denial that hell and heaven and judgment and salvation are real. This is the devil's propaganda. It's what people believe. He deals in denials of the truth.

He is the father of lies. So, until a person is a Christian, that person is still believing the devil's denials of what is true. And, therefore, that person is still part of Satan's kingdom.

Still under his grip and power. And all of us lived there at one time. None of us was born into the kingdom of God. We all belonged originally to Satan's kingdom. That was our natural habitat.

[21 : 21] Now, that's not to say that we were all once demon-possessed. Certainly not. Demon-possession is an extreme form of Satan's grip. But every one of us belonged to Satan until we came to Christ.

And the consequence of belonging to Satan is that our humanity is damaged and diminished. Our capacity to see and to understand what is true is diminished and darkened.

Our moral strength becomes hollowed out like a rotten tree trunk. Our ability to love and serve other people is much reduced because we get caught up so much with looking after ourselves and the need of self-gratification.

And when a person is so overcome by Satan that he is demon-possessed, his humanity then is almost completely extinguished. And he becomes like this man, violent, naked, not even knowing his own name.

Now, to go back to Luke, chapter 8, verse 35. As soon as Jesus drives out the demons, the man is transformed instantly, just like that.

[22 : 28] He's clothed. He's in his right mind. And very strikingly, he's sitting at the feet of Jesus, no doubt listening to him in love and trust and wonder.

So Jesus has complete mastery over Satan and his minions. And this display of his mastery given us here in Luke, chapter 8, is a foretaste of the way that Jesus will drive out and banish Satan and all his minions when the limit of their time is finally reached.

And for us to understand this makes such a big difference to our lives. It is a real comfort to us and a real strength to know that Jesus is Satan's master.

The Christian, therefore, is not like the man of the world who worries that perhaps evil will get the upper hand in the end. It means that as we look out at the world and see the evidence of Satan's handiwork everywhere, we are not ultimately dismayed.

Yes, as the Apostle John teaches us, the whole world is in the power of the evil one, and therefore we see tyranny and violence and oppression and fraud and greed and many other horrible things taking place daily, and these things upset us and unsettle us.

[23 : 43] But we know that Jesus is Satan's master and will bring Satan's activity to an end finally. And just look at the two stories that Luke places on either side of this healing or deliverance of Legion.

In verses 22 to 25, you'll see that Jesus calms the storm at sea. And that makes the point that he is the master of the wind and the waves because he is their creator.

Now, we still live in the period when storms at sea send ships to the bottom. We had this very nasty incident a week or so ago with the Italian cruise liner running aground and people dying there.

The sea remains a dangerous place. But ultimately, in the new creation, after Jesus has returned, the sea will pose no more threat to us than Satan will.

In fact, the book of Revelation tells us that it will be gone in its threatening form. And then look on to the last section of Luke chapter 8. Because here we have two incidents which are woven into one story because these two things happen simultaneously.

- [24 : 50] There's a woman here who has been discharging blood for 12 years, a sick person. She comes to Jesus and touches him and immediately is healed. And then just afterwards, Jesus goes to the home of Jairus, whose little daughter, age 12, has died, and he raises her from death.

So when you look at Luke chapter 8, from verse 22 through to verse 56, you can see four miracles in which Jesus shows his mastery over the wind and the waves and thus his mastery over all the forces of the natural world, then his mastery over Satan, his mastery over the spiritual world, and then his mastery over human sickness, and finally his mastery over death.

Jesus is the master. That's Luke's message. That's what he wants us to understand. And if he is the master, it means that we can trust him whatever our circumstances.

Why then does the Lord still allow storms to sink ships and people to be demon-possessed? And why does he allow all of us, sooner or later, to succumb to terminal illness and finally death?

The answer is because the time has not yet come. We're still living in the old order, in the era between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus.

- [26 : 13] When he returns and brings in the new world, the old order, which is characterized by suffering and pain and sickness and death, will be done away with. We wait for the new creation with patience and with great longing.

But it's not here yet. So why does Luke record these demonstrations of power and authority? The answer is he is showing us something of the shape and character of the world to come.

He's saying to us, this is what it will be like. In the new world, there will be no place for storms or demons or sickness or death. So hang on in there in the old world and don't lose heart and don't lose hope because life in the new world will be glorious beyond our wildest dreams.

So these miracles of Jesus are recorded not only to show us the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, but also to teach us something of the character of the world to come.

And if we know what the world to come will be like, we'll be given great strength to go on enduring the difficulties of life in the old world, frustration and sickness and aging and all the things that make life at times so difficult for us.

- [27 : 27] Let me say this. If you're a Christian, just think for a moment of the thing, the thing, whatever it may be that is most troubling you at the moment, the thing that you're finding most difficult, most painful, most sad, most frustrating.

In the new world, whatever that thing is, it will be utterly gone. Jesus is Satan's master.

We can be sure of it. Now, thirdly, let's get back into our story. Point number three. Luke shows us two strikingly different reactions to Jesus.

On the one hand, we see the reaction of this man who has just been delivered from the demons. As verse 38 puts it, he longs to be with Jesus. I want to be with you, he says.

But on the other hand, there are the local people who in verse 37 ask Jesus to leave them. So one says, one reacts by saying, let me be with you, and the others say, please get out of here.

- [28 : 36] And this surely is a picture of the two ways in which all people respond to Jesus sooner or later. All of us, in the end, will either want to be with him or want to be rid of him.

Let's look at the local people first. Now, this is a pig breeding area. We know that it must have been, therefore, a largely Gentile part of the country.

Bacon, pork, and ham, much loved by the British people, are not on the Jewish menu. So we know that this was a largely Gentile country. Now, the demons have just left and departed into this great herd of pigs.

And the large herd of pigs, now demon-possessed, have rushed down the steep side of the lake and have been drowned in the lake. In fact, in Mark's telling of this same story, we learn that there were about 2,000 pigs in this herd, an enormous herd, worth a great deal of money and a lot of food to eat as well.

Now, in verse 34, the herdsmen, seeing the pigs have been drowned, are appalled and shocked. And they run off and they broadcast the story both in the city and in the countryside.

[29 : 44] And the consequence is, in verse 35, that lots of people come and see for themselves. And they find Jesus and the man who is now healed sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind, obviously transformed and obviously thoroughly well.

And, says Luke, they were afraid. Verse 37 says, they were seized with great fear and they asked Jesus to leave them and he did.

He doesn't press himself upon those who don't want him. Now, why should they so much have wanted Jesus to leave them? You'd think that once they saw this man that they knew completely restored to health, they'd be delighted and they'd welcome him to stay and want him to stay and help other people.

But they don't. Well, now, to help us to understand this, let me suggest a parallel. Imagine a man who is an alcoholic and his life is in ruins.

There would be people, friends of his, not necessarily Christians, there would be friends who'd be very interested in helping him to get well and free of his alcohol and they would be prepared to put time and effort into helping him.

[30 : 55] But just imagine if this man heard the gospel and was rescued and changed by the power of Christ and was made into a sane and whole Christian man. His friends might be happy enough to see him delivered from his addiction, but they might still want nothing to do with the one who has changed him.

Quite possibly, they wouldn't want to become Christ's disciples themselves. A person who's not a Christian can see a friend of theirs becoming a Christian and yet still be very wary of getting too close to Jesus because discipleship means commitment and submission and they want to retain the governorship of their own lives.

Well, here in Luke 8, there's another element involved as well. These people have just lost 2,000 pigs and that loss would have made a big hole in their local economy.

It would have diminished both their bank balances and their larders. So they might have thought we're happy enough to see Mr. Legion delivered of his demons, but this Jesus, he's a threat to our financial security and to our whole way of life.

We must send him packing. And so, they prefer pigs to people. They prefer their financial security to the rescuing of a lost soul.

[32 : 10] So that's one reaction to Jesus. Please leave us. Please go away. But let's look at the other reaction now. Look at verse 38. The man begs that he might be with Jesus.

Well, of course he did. He was so thankful to have his humanity and his life restored to him. The people who have been rescued last week from that Italian cruise liner, they must have been so grateful to their rescuers.

Well, how much more would this man have been grateful to Jesus for ridding his life of a nest of demons who were destroying him? Of course he wanted to be with Jesus. But interestingly, Jesus says no to his request.

The Lord Jesus has granted three requests in this story so far. First, he grants the demons' request not to be sent into the abyss. Second, he grants the demons' request to be allowed to go into the herd of pigs.

And thirdly, he grants the people's request in verse 37 that he should depart from their region. So he grants three requests to people or demons who are hostile to him.

[33 : 18] But the one request that comes to him from someone who now loves him and belongs to him, he doesn't grant. Why not? Because he has something better for this man to do than just tag along behind him.

he immediately commissions him to serve him and to be an evangelist. And so he says to him in verse 39, return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.

And the man, it seems, couldn't obey quickly enough. He went straight off and he proclaimed, you see, throughout the whole city. He didn't just publish a small announcement in the personal columns on the back page of the local paper.

He told everybody who would listen to him. And what did he tell them? Look at the final words of verse 39. He told them how much Jesus had done for him.

Now, isn't that a great way for Luke to end this story? And surely he's holding this man up to us as an example for us to follow so that one of our life's aims might be to tell everyone who will listen how much Jesus has done for us.

[34 : 30] Has he done a great deal for you, friends? Of course he has. Let me just give you a little idea in your mind as I come to a close. When you get home tonight, if you're not too tired, take out a pen and a piece of paper and make a list of the things that Jesus has done for you.

You might find that it's quite a long list. And then, here's my suggestion, stick it up next to the kitchen sink because you'll be spending hours there over the next few days, won't you? and memorize that list over the next few days.

And then, when somebody says to you, and why are you a Christian, you will have plenty to say to them because it will be there in your head.

So, verse 39, return to your home, says the Lord, 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.

Well, let's bow our heads and let's pray. Our dear Lord Jesus, how much you have done for us who belong to you and believe in you.

[35 : 43] You have turned our lives around, not perhaps with driving out demons, but you've turned us around in so many ways and profoundly. You've changed our values, our way of looking at others.

You've enabled us to believe the scriptures as the very word of God and you are shaping our lives and everything that goes on inside our heads and our hearts by them. How much you have done for us and do for us every day.

And we pray, dear Lord, that you will give us the grace, the courage, and the joy to tell lots of people that you are a wonderful savior and that you have done great things for us.

and we ask it to the honor and glory of your name. Amen.