

Sermon: A Fearful Encounter

Text: [Luke 8:26-39](#)

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Introduction: From the beginning of Luke's gospel record we see fear connected with angels bringing messages to people. Zechariah is afraid of an angel ([1:13](#)); Jesus' mother, Mary ([1:31](#)), and the Bethlehem shepherds ([2:10](#)) are fearful because God was speaking to his people.

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry we see an encounter with Satan who is looking for a sign of weakness. The devil will be continually disappointed. As Jesus launches his ministry with his hand-picked disciples, we see fear in them. It is hard to explain what Jesus does, and how - for that matter. The disciples will be reassured later that they are cared for and watched over by a God who loves them. But every miracle, every sign, and every inexplicable event bring the disciples closer to confession and more aware that they are in the presence of God.

You might remember the last verse from last week's text:

[Luke 8:25 \(NIV\)](#) ²⁵“Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

This new day Jesus will provide further evidence even from the mouth of his adversary as to his real identity. He is certainly LORD. Later we will hear that voiced by Peter; but for now, we simply watch and listen to Jesus.

Let's listen to this latest revelation that helps bring more light to the disciples' question: “Who is this?”

[Luke 8:26 \(NIV\)](#) ²⁶They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.

Note: As you look at the different gospels there are variations in the location name for our story. Also in numerous translations, because they use different manuscripts, the designated place varies. The best understanding is that this is “Gergesa, from which the name Gergesenes is taken, *it is an old town in the neighborhood of the lake now called Tiberias. On the edge of it there is a steep place bordering on the lake...in the time of Origen, the meaning of Gergesa is the ‘dwelling of the one who drives out.’*” - *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Mark, p. 67

Luke 8:27-39 (NIV) ²⁷When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. ²⁸When 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!” ²⁹For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. ³⁰Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. ³¹And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. ³²A 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. ³³When 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. ³⁴When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, ³⁵and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ³⁶Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. ³⁷Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Except for the initial “they” in the first verse of our text today, it is as if the disciples are in the wings, certainly not on stage. This story is about the lordship of Jesus, the Messiah of God. Today I would like to explore with you three *different* responses to Jesus that still occur today.

Jesus’ first encounter in our story is with the demons who have taken up residence in a man. There are so many demons they are called Legion. Literally that could mean there were nearly 6000 demons. Even if the designation is figurative, it requires we think in terms of very many! It is difficult to know initially who is speaking: the man or the demons. Nevertheless, the idea is clear. The demons are saying:

I. Don’t Punish Us!

A. The demons recognized Jesus.

Satan had also recognized Jesus as the “Son of God” during the temptation in the wilderness (4:3, 9). We should not be shocked that demons knew him as well. What is surprising - is the townspeople, and even Jesus’ disciples, would remain in the dark as to his true identity.

B. The demons had abused their host.

This demon-possessed man had been forced to live out in caves which were used as tombs. He was unclean in, oh, so many ways. He ran around naked. He more than likely smelled very bad. This demon-possessed man had been chained from time to time for his protection as well as the general population. The townspeople kept him isolated and confined, but eventually could do so no longer. Mark adds:

⁵Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones (5:5).

In one of these moments of non-confinement the man possibly sees a boat approaching and hears voices as they pull the boat upon the beach, and goes down to investigate - and shout at Jesus (Mark 5:2ff).

C. The demons wanted to postpone the end.

There is a fixed pattern to exorcisms in the Scriptures (see Craddock, *Gospels*, p. 36).

1. The demon recognizes the exorcist and puts up a struggle.
2. The exorcist threatens and commands.
3. The demon comes out with loud and violent demonstrations.
4. The spectators are amazed.

While Jesus is repeatedly demanding these demons come out of this poor man, they are trying to make a deal.

Matthew’s account adds this: [Matthew 8:29 \(NIV\)](#) ²⁹“What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us *before the appointed time?*”

The demons beg not to be sent to the Abyss. The Abyss is “the abode of the dead” and a place of judgment, a prison of disobedient spirits (*TDNT*, Jeremias 1:9-10). This is a precursor to hell. It is a place in Hades where all the evil and disobedient will reside in advance of “final” judgment. We hear about this place in Revelation.

Revelation 20:1-3 (NIV) ¹And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ²He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

See my booklet *Afterlife: Where Do the Dead Go?*

The demons also ask for permission to use the pigs for their new “house of torture.”

Mark tells us there were about 2000 pigs affected (5:13). Jesus allows the demon’s request, and the text tells us the pigs are so startled by their new house guests that they stampede and run over the cliffs down into the water below and drown.

After reports got back to the town from those who had tended the pigs, they came out to see Jesus, and told him:

II. Leave Us Alone!

The townspeople had been deathly afraid of the demon-possessed man, but strangely they felt more threatened by Jesus.

A. The townspeople did not understand.

The townspeople did not understand what had happened to their pigs. What or who had caused such a catastrophe? They only knew they were out a lot of money. The value of the pigs was no small deal.

It may be that Jesus used such a dramatic miracle to assure the previously demon-possessed man that everything was going to be fine. Some are critical of Jesus for having such little sensitivity about animals. But, first of all, Jesus is Sovereign! We can wonder, but have no right to be critical. Demonic powers do much worse things to people everyday. Children are aborted, children are abused, children die from starvation and preventable disease - I could go on.

Technically these pigs also were unclean animals. Sacrifices of clean animals were made to develop and restore a relationship with God in the OT. Later Jesus would sacrifice his own innocent blood - not for one person, but for the whole world.

The townspeople did not understand the changed condition of the man they used to chain up for their own safety. Things we do not understand always make us uneasy and fearful. Here the man they had known in his depraved condition was before them in his right mind, dressed, and clean. Hard to explain!

B. The townspeople were afraid.

The townspeople must also have wondered what was going to happen next. Was the man going to revert back to his old ways and attack them again? Would these thousands of demons now attack them?

Just like the demons the townspeople ought to have feared God. We should, as well, if we are not right with Him.

C. The townspeople counted the cost.

They certainly did not want or need another financial loss. Yet they had the Owner of everything in their midst. You can see the symptoms of demon possession, what Darrell Bock calls “destructive indulgence” today (Luke, p. 243). Whenever things become more important than God or other people, Satan is there. Jesus could have and would have saved them if they had wanted. They did not realize the greatest asset anyone can have is salvation, and they were willing to reject God’s offer.

It is a very dangerous act to ask Jesus to leave. We have no biblical record of Jesus ever returning to this area of Decapolis. Sadly, all the people saw were *their* losses rather than a man made whole. What is the worth of one soul? the world?

The Gerasene people, just like the demons, wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Still there was one who said:

III. Don’t Leave Me!

A. The man knew he was whole.

There is a huge difference between sick and well. You can see it in a person’s disposition as well as physical qualities. Jesus had restored him to what God had wanted him to be all along.

The man also knew the truth of what Paul told the churches of Asia: **Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)** ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

In the gospels, demons are found in the synagogue and by the seashore, in ordinary people and inner-circle disciples like Judas. Demons are real. And demons are certainly nothing to mess with, but certainly a more important warning is don’t mess with Jesus. Unfortunately, some people have been in darkness so long they may not know what light looks like.

C.S Lewis wrote, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about demons (devils). One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They (*the demons*) themselves are equally pleased with both errors ...with the same delight.” [C.S. Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters*. (New York: MacMillan. 1971) p. 3]

B. The man wanted Jesus present.

Jesus had been the only person who cared about him. Who wouldn't want his savior close? There was still so much to know and learn about God.

Jesus almost always tied teaching and miracle together. In our episode there does not seem to be any teaching by Jesus. Yet, it has been suggested that in [v. 35](#) where the townspeople see the healed man sitting at Jesus' feet that maybe he was taking in a lesson.

The man also needed some direction for his new life, after all:

C. The man was unsure about his future.

It might have seemed easier to go with Jesus and become one of the disciples who travelled with him, but Jesus had another plan.

Why not stay among your own people and be a witness to the power? Each day the townspeople see you they will be reminded of what they lost. Each day you remain well and demonstrate in real-life form the love of God, the townspeople will be reminded of what they lost. And one day you can do for them what only you can do: Tell them about me.

Notice what Luke says in the last verse. He treats God and Jesus as equals.

[Luke 8:39 \(NIV\)](#) ³⁹“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

In the Greek text the last word, the word that is to receive the most emphasis is: JESUS! Jesus had changed the man's looks, but he had also changed the man's outlook. How is it with you?

Conclusion: Since Jesus has made *you* whole, who have *you* told? Or, have you, up to now, rejected Jesus' lordship because you don't want to give up how you are living? My friends, there will be a time of judgment for everyone. The results of that fast-coming verdict depends on your response to Jesus. I hope you will allow Jesus to remove the control Satan has in your life. Jesus is willing, but you need to tell him you want to be free to follow his will for your life.

“But, Legion, didn’t you put on some clothes before you went to Jesus?”

No! I ran to Him just as I was, stark naked.

But, Legion, didn’t you clean up and hide your bloody wounds before you went to Jesus?”

No! I looked hideous.

But, Legion, didn’t you try to get rid of your demons before you went to Jesus?”

No! The demons were shrieking through my voice when I ran up to Him. He saved me just as I was.” - (Illustration from a sermon by Steven J. Cole)

No matter who you are - Jesus can save you if you will only ask him. He is available right now to remove you from the devil’s bondage. He can utterly change you and make you new!