

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. Stephen Thomson

Luke's Gospel: Legion - Luke 8:26-39

Today we continue in our present series of studies in Luke's Gospel. As well as taking up interesting biblical topics, it is the desire of the *Truth for Today* team to systematically teach the Word of God. We have always made room in our broadcasting schedule for chapter by chapter exposition of the Scriptures. In the present mini-series, we will be looking closely at Luke 8:16-56. Whilst it is our intention to continue these studies of Luke's Gospel in the future, we must always say, "if the Lord wills" (see James 4:15). We expect the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is coming for His church in accordance with 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and therefore all our plans are only "if the Lord wills." If you want to hear this message again, or download the transcript of this, or other talks in the series, then you can do so via our website.

Sometimes in our talks it is not possible, due to time restrictions, to read all the Scriptures under consideration, but I think today, as we are focussed on Luke 8:26-39, we should read all the verses. In recent times, I have become increasingly aware of the need to read the Scriptures as we endeavour to preach the Word, so that our comments can be anchored on the solid rock of the Word of God. We live in times when it seems that everyone has an opinion on every subject, and we are told that everyone's opinion is equally valid. Well, when it comes to our understanding of biblical truth, our opinions do not count. The question is always, "What saith the Scripture?" (see Romans 4:3). Oh, that the Word of God might have its rightful place in our lives!

So let us read together the passage from Luke 8:26-39: *"And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him."*

What a truly remarkable story! We are not surprised to find it is also recorded by both Mathew and Mark in their Gospels (see Matthew 8:28-34 and Mark 5:1-20). As is often the case when incidents are recorded by more than one Gospel writer, we would expect there to be slight differences, not only in style and length, but in substance. For example, Matthew tells the story in less than half the words used by Mark and Luke, but interestingly he tells us that there were two demon possessed men (see Matthew 8:28). Mark and Luke focus on the man who was called Legion. Matthew says it was "the country of the Gergesenes" (Matthew 8:28) Mark and Luke say it was "the country of the Gadarenes" (Mark 5:1 and Luke 8:26). Having checked this out, I understand that this is the same place and in fact in other Greek manuscripts this region, found on the east of the Sea of Galilee, was called the country of the Gerasenes.

Are you concerned about the differences in the Gospel accounts? You shouldn't be. There really is no conflict between the Gospel writers. Actually, in terms of accuracy, would you not be more concerned if they all gave identical word for word accounts? If you and I witnessed the same incident and wrote about it later, surely there would be small differences in our accounts, but that does not mean our accounts were inaccurate. The main thing, however, is that there is no conflict as to the main points of the story. Perhaps it is worth saying, too, that the Gospel writers had a different audience in view as they wrote. Matthew was writing for the Jews, while Mark was writing for the Romans.

Luke wrote for the Greeks, and John wrote for the whole world. It is good to repeat these things as it gives us an understanding as to why the Gospels differ from each other, and why we need them all, each writer (under the control of the Holy Spirit) bringing before us a particular view of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whilst Mark, we believe, follows a more correct chronological order, and Matthew has more of a dispensational order in his Gospel, Luke has a particular moral order to his writings. I'm sure many of our speakers will have said this in our studies in Luke's Gospel.

Just looking back for a moment to the previous verses in our chapter, and looking on to those which follow from where we stopped reading today, we see how Luke keeps to the chronological order of events, as collectively they show the extent of the hostility which the Lord Jesus Christ encountered in the world. Note, too, that in Luke 9:1, Jesus sends His disciples out to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. And this was in direct response (I might suggest) to the opposition recorded in Luke 8. Luke does not pause to consider the interlude as recorded by Mark in Mark 6:1-6. So we find that the Devil (who was behind the storm on the lake, (see Luke 8:22-25)), and the demons (who had taken control of Legion (see Luke 8:26-39), the sickness of the woman with the incurable blood disease (Luke 8:43-48), and the death of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-42, 49-56), all combine to show the opposition that is in the world to the Son of God. But we see that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, had power to deal with every situation. Whether it be danger, demons, disease or death, the Saviour is the Master of every situation! No wonder the disciples could exclaim, "*What manner of man is this!*" (Luke 8:25)

The sea is often a picture of the nations, and in going over to the "*other side*" (Luke 8:26), we have a picture of the Master showing God's power and grace to those who were outside the nation of Israel. Mark 4:36 tells us that there were other little ships caught up in the storm. It would have been terrifying for those who were in these ships too, and no doubt they were very glad of the calm conditions brought about by the Master as He said, "*Peace be still*" (see Mark 4:39).

Gadara was in the Roman province of Peraea, and I would think that Legion would be a Gentile (that is a non-Jew). The fact that there were pigs being kept in the vicinity is a strong hint that the people of Gadara were Gentiles, as the Jews were forbidden to eat the meat of pigs (see Leviticus 11:7, Deuteronomy 14:8). So in going to the "*other side*", we see that the Lord Jesus was reaching out to the Gentiles. You will note that Legion did not ask Jesus for mercy or deliverance, which is very interesting. The Lord Jesus was about to demonstrate the sovereign grace of God to him. Remember the Lord said, "*They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick*" (see Luke 5:31). He had come "*not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*" (see Luke 5:32). The scribes and Pharisees didn't recognise their true position before God as needy sinners, but who could argue against Legion, the woman with the blood disease and Jairus' daughter needing the Great Physician's touch? These were extreme cases, but that is the point! If they could be blessed, then everyone can be. God's grace is to "whosoever"! (see John 3:16)

But we need to restrict our thoughts today to the story we have in Luke 8:26-39 about Legion. You will have to listen to next week's broadcast to hear more about the woman, and Jairus' daughter. Legion was going to experience, and the people of the city were going to witness, the mighty power and sovereign grace of the Son of God. Again I say, this was both unmerited and unasked for. How wonderful is God's love for sinful man! We read in Romans, "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*" (see Romans 5:8). It has often been said, and rightly so, that God hates the sin but He loves the sinner. We will see as we come to the end of the story what the response of the people of the city to such power and grace was. Sadly it was just the same as is often the response of people today, when the Gospel of the grace of God is preached. In effect, they said to Jesus, "Go away and leave us alone". How desperately sad!

I am often reminded of an old Gospel hymn I sang as a boy which has the lines,

*"Come!" for angel hosts are musing
O'er this sight so strangely sad:
God "beseeching" - man refusing
To be made for ever glad!*

© John J Overholt (1918-2000)

Of course, the story we have read is a historical one, but as we have said, Luke wants us to learn a moral lesson. We read that Jesus arrived in Gadara to find this demon possessed, naked, homeless man, coming to meet Him. Matthew 8:28 tells us that he was "*exceeding fierce*", and Mark adds that no man could "*tame him*" (Mark 5:4), and that he was "*in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones*" (Mark 5:5). What a desperate plight Legion was in, and he knew it! Here we have a graphic picture of man in his true condition as away from God, but the problem is that so many people do not (or will not) recognise this. And just in case we are inclined to think that this only applies to the "heathen" (or non-religious person), we will do well to remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to the church at Laodicea (see Revelation 3:14-22). Doubtless they called themselves Christians, but they were unaware that Christ was outside the door, knocking, seeking an entrance into their lives (see Revelation 3:20). They had high opinions of

themselves, but the Lord's estimation was that they were *"wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked!"* (see Revelation 3:17).

I read from the King James or Authorised Version of the Bible which speaks of the man being possessed by 'devils'. Other translations may say 'demons', and this is more correct. There is one Devil but there are many demons. We need to remember this, and realise that as Christians, our battle is a spiritual one. The Apostle Paul says, *"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [or heavenly] places"* (see Ephesians 6:12). These demons are real and powerful adversaries, doing the Devil's work. The Devil is very powerful, but he is not God. God is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing) and omnipresent (everywhere at the same time). The Devil is not. Although the Apostle Paul refers to him as the *"god of this world"*, it is with a small "g" (see 2 Corinthians 4:4). He is a mighty enemy to the Christian, but we need to remember what the Apostle John wrote to the believers at the end of the first century. To the children of God he says, *"Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world"* (see 1 John 4:4).

I don't know much about demon possession except for the instances we have recorded in the Scriptures. I know some Christians have experience of this, perhaps especially whilst abroad in countries which still practice witchcraft. I have no doubt though that there will be persons in our own country who are completely under the control of the Devil and his demons. This is not a matter we should speak glibly about. I know there are many books to read on the subject, but I have always thought what the apostle Paul said to the Christians at Rome is the best advice in relation to these things. He said *"[he] would have [them] wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil"* (Romans 16:19). For that reason, I personally don't want to know all the ins and outs concerning demon possession. But I recognise that it is real.

The man was called Legion, because many demons had entered into him. Now whilst we don't know how many was 'many', I understand there could be up to 6,000 men in a Roman legion. Mark tells us in his Gospel that there were about 2,000 pigs destroyed as the demons were cast out of the man and into them (see Mark 5:13). So I would suggest that there may well have been more than 2,000 demons in this poor man. They were in full control and he was out of control. Yes, that's the Devils work! The way he looked, the things he did and the words he spoke were all evidences that the demons were in control. They knew who Jesus was! Be in no doubt about that! The Apostle James tells us that the demons believe there is one God, and tremble (see James 2:19). They know, too, that their time is short and that the 'Lake of Fire' is their destiny. They spoke through the man saying, *"I beseech thee, torment me not"* (Luke 8:28) and Matthew adds *"before the time"* (Matthew 8:29). Yes, they knew that one day the Lord Jesus Christ will send them forth into everlasting torment (see Revelation 20:10 and Matthew 25:41). Although James says that the demons "believe" (see James 2:19), it is not to be confused with the belief necessary for salvation. The force of the word "believe" in relation to the Gospel is to have faith (or trust) in the message, or more exactly in the One whom the message is about. People may believe today in a historical Jesus of Nazareth, just as they believe in other historical people, but that is not the belief of faith which brings eternal life.

The demons were no match for the Master, and they knew that He had the power to cast them out of Legion. They asked to be sent into the pigs, and Jesus allowed that to happen (Luke 8:32). The pigs then ran violently down a steep slope into the sea and were choked (Luke 8:33). Whilst it must have been an awful sight to witness, it was absolute proof that the demons had been cast out of Legion and into the swine. Little wonder that the herdsmen who were looking after the pigs were afraid! (see Luke 8:34-35). What a lesson for us in our day, and well we know it; the Devil and his demons always leave a trail of destruction and death in their wake. How many lives have been ruined by the enemy of man's soul! Sin and Satan leave their marks on the lives of men and women who have not God. Surely we recognise this in the post Christian, godless society we live in today.

What a tremendous display of the power and grace of God is seen in the transformation of Legion. Formerly he had been out of control: naked, crying, cutting himself, and out of his mind. Now we find him sitting, clothed and in his right mind. Luke (who often gives us just a little more detail), tells us that not only was Legion sitting, he was *"sitting at the feet of Jesus"*! (see Luke 8:35)

There is a wonderful old Gospel song, which was often sung by George Beverly Shea called, 'Then Jesus came'. The second verse and chorus says this,

*From home and friends the evil spirits drove him,
Among the tombs he dwelt in misery;
He cut himself as demon pow'rs possessed him,
Then Jesus came and set the captive free.*

*When Jesus comes, the tempter's pow'r is broken;
 When Jesus comes, the tears are wiped away.
 He takes the gloom and fills the life with glory,
 For all is changed when Jesus comes to stay.*

Oswald J Smith (1889-1986)
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What was the reaction of the citizens of Gadara? Were they pleased for Legion (and his companion, remembering that Matthew 8:28 tells us that there were two men)? Were they drawn to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ? Were they joyous that the men who had been demon possessed and in such a terrible state were now free? Sadly not! Their reaction was to beseech Jesus to depart from them (Luke 8:37). What a strange thing to do, to send away One who had shown such power and such grace. But this was the case all through the Lord's life on earth. The crowds, who were sometimes curious, eventually turned against Him. The prophet Isaiah said, "*He is despised and rejected of men...*" (see Isaiah 53:3). Energised by the Devil (no doubt), the crowds finally cried, "*Away with him, away with him, crucify him*" (see John 19:15). Man rejected the Saviour, choosing instead one who was a murderer. Can we wonder then at the condition the world is in today! The Gospel of God's grace is preached, and the Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the only One who can save sinners, setting them free from sin and Satan, but all too often the response is, "We will not have this Man"! (See Luke 19:14)

Legion wanted to follow Jesus, and what a noble desire that was, but he was told to return. There was work to be done in his own locality. The Master said to him, "*Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee*" (Luke 8:39). The man who formerly could not be bound by chains, went and did exactly just as the Master had commanded him. There is work to do for the Master today, and often it begins at home with our family and friends. What are the words of the children's chorus?

"You in your small corner and I in mine"!

Susan B Warner (1819-1885)

May God bless you all.

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