

**Sermon Series: Outsiders**

**Sermon Title: Jesus Heals a Demon Possessed Man**

**Sermon Text: Luke:8:26-39 (Mt 8:28–34; Mk 5:1–20)**

**Sermon Presenter: Dr. Jeff Nave**

In today's sermon, we will encounter a real outsider; a man separated from his family and community by his bizarre and violent behavior. The scripture tells us that this man was possessed by not one, but many demons. Demon possession is a scary notion. Even faithful Christian people may experience a primal fear when this subject comes up in conversation or in a movie. As we will see this morning, God's word assures us that as Christians, a people purchased by the blood of our savior, we need not fear that we could ever be possessed by a demon. But the story of the demon possessed man encountered by Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, still holds important truths for us as we continue in our sermon series titled "Outsiders." Before we begin exploring our scripture passage this morning, let's go to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to open our eyes and stir our hearts through His word.

**Luke 8:26-39 NIV (Mt 8:28–34; Mk 5:1–20)**

Luke 8:26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.

Luke 8:27 When 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.

Luke 8:28 When 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!"

Luke 8:29 For Jesus had commanded the impure 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.

Luke 8:30 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him.

Luke 8:31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

Luke 8:32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission.

Luke 8:33 When 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.

Luke 8:34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside,

Luke 8:35 and 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.

Luke 8:36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.

Luke 8:37 Then 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.

Luke 8:38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying,

Luke 8:39 "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.

Do you have questions about this story? You're not alone. There is more to the story than demons and broken chains and drowned pigs, but we may be well served to spend a few moments acknowledging some of the dramatic details of this well known account of demon possession and the casting out of demons by Jesus. This story of demon possession and the dialogue between Jesus and an apparent host of demons who collectively refer to self as "legion" is one of the most famous stories in the New Testament to those outside of Christianity. As I was preparing to examine this passage with you, I listened to an hour-long podcast in the popular series "Stuff to Blow Your Mind." While avoiding the spiritual significance, hosts examined all the influences the story has had on literature and modern media.

As faithful students of God's word, we do not deny or skip past the curious details in this and other passages because we want to understand God's intended message to us in this challenging text. The Bible contains some accounts of historical events that are difficult to understand. If we want to receive all that God has preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures, we must wrestle with these difficult passages and work together as a community of faith to find application in our lives.

There are some accounts of events in the ministry of Christ that leave us with questions about what was actually witnessed by those who were present. I love the story in John, chapter 8 of Jesus writing in the sand before the crowd who intended to stone a woman for adultery. Apparently he wrote things that convicted the hearts and changed the minds of the crowd. I sure would like to know what he wrote, but we are left to speculate about what members of the crowd saw written in the sand that day.

We see an account of the encounter between Jesus and the demon possessed man beside the Sea of Galilee in Matthew and Mark as well as our passage in Luke. The presence of the account in all three synoptic Gospels tells us that all three authors viewed the event as a pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry. Though they were writing to different audiences (Luke for a Gentile audience, Matthew for a traditional Jewish audience, and Mark for Roman Christians) the authors relate to us direct eye witness accounts that preserve each meaningful detail of the story. This leaves us not with the question, "what exactly happened?" but with the bigger question, "what does it mean?"

**The timing of Jesus' encounter with the demon possessed man.**

**The very idea that a man was actually possessed by a legion of demons.**

## **Jesus' response to the demons and the man he delivered.**

### **The response of the local townspeople to the deliverance of one of their own.**

In our limited time this morning, I would like for us to wrestle with the significance of: the timing of Jesus' encounter with the Demon possessed man in relation to other events, the very idea that a man was actually possessed by a legion of demons, Jesus response to the demons and the man he delivered, and finally, the response of the local townspeople to the deliverance of one of their own. And I believe that along the way, we will discover some important truths about our relationship with Christ and his response to the things that are separating us from a full and meaningful relationship with him.

### **The timing of Jesus' encounter with the demon possessed man.**

Every Gospel account of the man possessed with many demons opens with Jesus stepping out of a boat he shared with his disciples and immediately being confronted by the demon possessed man. Luke says he was "met" by the man. Mark says he was "immediately met" by the man. Some translations reflect the Greek language emphasis by saying that the man "ran up to" or "confronted" Jesus. This may cause some readers to conclude that Jesus was surprised by the encounter. The broader context of our passage suggests otherwise.

Each of the four Gospels in our Bible, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John bracket the events of Jesus' earthly ministry with his baptism by John the Baptist at the beginning, and the Passion Narrative of his death, burial and resurrection at the end. The order of events in between varies between the different authors. We are not troubled by this because none of the Gospel writers claims to have provided us with a specific timeline. The general timeline is, Jesus' earthly ministry began at his baptism by John and ended with his death, burial and resurrection, and here are some of the awesome things he did in between. Our scripture today is an exception to this loose narrative arrangement. Including the events that occur prior to and immediately after our selected scripture, Matthew, Mark and Luke all follow the same narrative sequence; Jesus was ministering to groups of people along one side of the Sea of Galilee, He got into a boat with his disciples to sail across to the other side and encountered a dangerous storm that frightened the disciples. He calmed the storm in an instant and they arrived on the other side. As Jesus stepped out of the boat, he was confronted by the man possessed with many demons, and he cast them out. Afterwards he was asked by the people of that region to leave. Jesus and his disciples got back in the boat and returned to the other side where he continued to teach and heal and perform other miracles. Two weeks ago, our Associational Missions Strategist, Don Pucik shared with us a message based on the words of Jesus we find recorded later in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 15:4 “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?”

Jesus left the crowds and traveled across the Sea of Galilee to deliver one man from darkness. If you will allow him to come to your rescue, he will do whatever it takes to reach you and save you. No distance, no storm, no evil force will keep him from saving your soul.

### **The very idea that a man was actually possessed by a legion of demons.**

Modern claims that demon possession is an ancient superstitious belief that has given way to an enlightened view of mental illness are simply not compatible with any orthodox Christian treatment of scripture. While there is clear evidence that some diseases of the body or mind have been wrongly labeled demonic, the number of explicit references to demons and demon possession in our New Testament, and similar descriptions in the Old Testament, simply do not allow us to ignore the idea that evil spiritual beings are at work in our world.

Many enlightened modern thinkers scoff at the idea of demons or demon possession because they fundamentally reject the concept of evil as a spiritual force and any notion of Satan as a real individual personality of evil. I sometimes fear that a competing dilemma for God’s people is the distraction that comes from dwelling on Satan, demons and the demonic too much. Here’s a concise statement about demons from the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible. The authors of this reference work are trusted conservative Biblical scholars.

**Angels were created to worship and praise God, to serve him, and to act as his messengers. The Bible states that they are “ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation” (Heb 1:14). The fallen angels have a similar function, but a different master. Their allegiance is to the devil, whom they serve out of fear and delusion. They desire to work with human beings, but their purpose is to carry out the schemes of Satan and to oppose God. They tempt, deceive, and delude people so as to bring them to eternal damnation. In opposing God they attack, oppress, hinder, and accuse the people of God.**

We cannot afford to entirely dismiss the schemes of evil that are at work in our world. The Apostle Paul admonishes us to take this issue seriously.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Ephesians 6:12 For 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.

But here's some assurance that we are safe from any eternal threat that might be posed by the forces of darkness.

Ephesians 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

Ephesians 1:14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Romans 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

Romans 8:39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As Christians we can rest assured that our eternity is sealed, but that doesn't mean we won't face difficulties or temptations that are intended to harm our relationship with our savior. The apostle Paul tells us that these may lead to what he calls "strongholds."

2 Corinthians 10:3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.

2 Corinthians 10:4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

2 Corinthians 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Paul gives us the prescription for responding to any evil influence that impacts us or those around us: focus on Jesus. So let's consider:

### **Jesus' response to the demons and the man he delivered.**

The demons who had possessed the man in our story made quite a scene when Jesus stepped out of the boat. It is interesting to note that the first thing that we know Jesus spoke out loud was a question. Much has been made of Jesus asking for the demon's name. Some have turned this question into the central feature of exorcism rituals and claim that if you can get a demon to tell you its name, you will have power over it. It is probably not a great idea for us to build any type of conclusion about the demonic world on Jesus' question. It was not a part of his other encounters with the demonic recorded in scripture. It is reasonable for us to conclude that there was more going on here than

the actual words the disciples and others heard Jesus say. Luke uses a past tense verb to describe Jesus' work to cast the demon out in verse 29 of our passage.

Luke 8:29 For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man.

The Greek verb, *parangellō* is used here in its inceptive aorist tense to indicate an action that was undertaken in the past and continues. Jesus had begun the work of casting the demons out before the very dramatic exchange witnessed by others. Another way to think about this is that Jesus' very presence expelled all spiritual darkness. He began driving out the evil spirits as soon as the boat drew near the shore. I am afraid we will not have adequate time this morning to fully explore the significance of the pigs into which the legion of demons fled. It is true that pigs were considered unclean by practicing Jews of Jesus day and there may be an illustration there, but unclean or not, the herd of domestic pigs was being cared for by herdsman and their demise was a tragedy to their owner. I will briefly point out a couple of things I recently learned about domestic pigs. Stampingeding or rushing blindly into danger is not a common behavior, and secondly, pigs are excellent swimmers. This would seem to reinforce the notion that something very strange happened to these pigs and the general notion that the primary goal and function of demons is to destroy life. After the demise of the herd of pigs, the formerly demon possessed man sat quietly before Jesus and expressed his desire to follow his deliverer. This scene brings to my mind the words of Jesus found in Matthew 11:28. While the demons raged, Jesus called to the soul of the desperate man inside:

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

### **The response of the local townspeople to the deliverance of one of their own.**

The uncharacteristic and violent stampede of a large herd of pigs (Mark says about 2000) into the lake and their subsequent drowning would have been hard to forget, but our scripture tells us that the thing that stirred fear in the herdsman and the locals was the change that had taken place in the man formerly possessed.

Luke 8:35 and 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.

Luke 8:36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.

Luke 8:37 Then 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.

What a tragedy that the people of this region failed to receive Jesus and the deliverance he offered to all of them. We have reason to believe that the people living in this area had been influenced by a number of religious ideas, including Judaism, but had failed to choose any particular faith system. Like so many today, they had heard things, some good, some bad, about a number of religions. They were likely people who held to some meaningful community values, but had not embraced accountability to God. They probably did not deny the existence of God or gods, but no one in their community had ever had a personal encounter with the Almighty. Sure, they had a violent, demon possessed man living in the tombs, but they had just gotten used to it without really thinking about the spiritual significance. Then Jesus came. It was through the miraculous deliverance of the man they had come to know as a hopeless case that they were confronted with undeniable evidence of the God of the Universe. That their initial response was fear is not surprising. When he saw the Lord in all his glory, God's chosen prophet, Isaiah, said:

Isaiah 6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

When John, the author of the book of Revelation saw Jesus on his throne, he fell at his feet as though dead.

Revelation 1:17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

When we truly see God, we cannot help but tremble because if we understand who he is and who we are, we know that we can never be worthy of his love. If we have truly seen him, we know that we must accept him for who he is and surrender to him, or reject him. For many people, it is easier to pretend he doesn't exist than to make this choice. As long as we have a general idea of who Jesus is we can pretend that he was a good man with some good ideas. This is a comfortable place to live; doing what I think is best, following my own judgement. When we finally see the truth; when we have that experience that demands we make a choice, fear and trepidation are natural responses. We may fight it, or insist that our way is better. Many will ultimately choose to deny Him, but still Jesus calls,

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

The Praise Team is coming to lead us again. We call this a time of invitation. Jesus invites you to a relationship with him that will save you from the harm intended by evil forces and from the consequences of doing things your way. We invite you to talk with

us about how you want to respond. We invite you to share with us your struggles so that we can pray for you. Our pastor and other staff members will be here in the front if you want to talk with us now and we're here all week if you want to have a cup of coffee or just sit and talk. Give us a call or send us an email and we'll be waiting to spend some time talking about what God is doing in your life.

Let's Pray