

Luke 8:26-39
May 26, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Luke has changed his focus from Jesus' teaching and preaching to Jesus's power. There are four miracle stories, the first of which we processed last week. We learned that Jesus has power over nature. Today, we will learn that Jesus has power over nature. Let's begin.

V.26:

- They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.

V.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.

V.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!"

V.29:

- For Jesus had commanded the evil (unclean) 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.

V.30:

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

V.31:

- And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

V.32:

- A 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.

V.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.

V.34:

- When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside,

V.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.

V.36:

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

V.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.

V.38:

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

V.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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Q: How are we to live in light of this text? Jesus proved his power over demons, which allowed a tortured man to become a follower of Christ. There is no one who is out of Jesus's reach. He has the power to change lives for eternity. Ask the Lord to help you recognize how His power operates in your life.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 202). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Satan (vv. 26–39). Two demonized men met Jesus when He landed at Gadara (Matt. 8:28), but one of them was the more forward and did all the speaking. Both were pitiful cases: naked, living in the tombs, violent, dangerous, a menace to the area, and controlled by a legion of demons. (A Roman legion could have as many as 6,000 men!) Satan is the thief (John 10:10) who robs his people of everything good and then tries to destroy them. No amount of man-made authority or restraint can control or change the devil's servants. Their only hope is in the Savior.

Demons have faith (James 2:19), but it is not saving faith. They believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with authority to command them. They believe in a future judgment (Matt. 8:29) and in the existence of a place of torment to which Jesus could send them ("the abyss," Luke 8:31). They also believe in prayer, for the demons begged Jesus not to send them to the abyss. They asked to be sent into the pigs, and Jesus granted their request.

Did Jesus have the right to permit the legion of demons to destroy a herd of 2,000 swine and perhaps put the owners out of business? God owns everything (see Ps. 50:10–11) and can dispose of it as He pleases. Furthermore, these two men were worth far more than many pigs (see Matt. 12:12). The community should have thanked Jesus for ridding their neighborhood of these two menaces, but instead, *they begged Him to leave!*

What a transformation in these two men! You would have expected the people who saw the miracle to ask Jesus to stay and heal others who were sick and afflicted. Apparently, money was more important to them than mercy, and they asked Jesus to leave.

The one former demoniac kept pleading with Jesus to be allowed to travel with Him and help Him. What a noble desire from a newly converted man! He had more spiritual discernment than all the other citizens put together. The man was not yet ready to become a disciple, but he could serve Jesus as a witness, starting at home among his Gentile relatives and friends. Jesus did not want Jews who had been healed to say too much about it, but it was safe for the Gentiles to tell others what Jesus had done for them, and that is what he did.

Martin, J. A. (1985). *Isaiah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 226-228)

b. Jesus' power over the demonic realm (8:26–39) (Matt. 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20).

8:26. Whereas Matthew wrote that Jesus met two demon-possessed men (Matt. 8:28–34), Luke wrote about only one of the two. There is some confusion as to the place where the miracle occurred. What is meant by **the region of the Gerasenes**? Apparently, the area was named for the small town Gersa (now the ruins of Khersa) on the eastern shore, **across the lake from Galilee**. Matthew mentioned "the region of the Gadarenes" (Matt. 8:28), which was named for the town Gadara, about six miles southeast of the lower tip of the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps the territory around Gersa belonged to the city of Gadara (cf. comments on Mark 5:1).

8:27–29. **When Jesus stepped ashore, He was confronted by a man who was demon-possessed.** The man's manner of life showed that he was totally under the demon's control. He did not take part in normal human amenities (v. 27) and was often forced **by the demon** to go **into solitary places** (v. 29). As with most "demonized" individuals in the Gospels, this man was **shouting at the top of his voice**. The demon recognized **Jesus**, for the man called Him **Jesus, Son**

of the Most High God. The words, **Don't torture me** show that the demon recognized that Jesus had control over him even though men could not (v. 29).

8:30–33. In answer to **Jesus** the demon said that his **name** was **Legion**, a Latin term denoting a group of about 6,000 Roman soldiers. The point of the name was that a large number of demons were inhabiting the man. The demons asked that Jesus not torment them (Matt. 8:29 adds “before the appointed time”) by asking that they not be sent **into the abyss**, which was thought of as a place of the dead. The abyss was also thought of as a “watery place,” which made the outcome of this encounter all the more ironic and climactic. At the request of **the demons** Jesus let them enter into **a large herd of pigs** nearby which immediately **rushed** over a cliff **into the lake** and were **drowned**. Thus the request not to be sent into the abyss was granted by Jesus, but they were sent to a watery place anyhow.

8:34–37. The effect of the miracle on **the people** of the area was **fear** (vv. 35, 37; cf. 7:16; 8:25). This fear was enough to cause them to ask **Jesus to leave**.

8:38–39. In contrast with those people the previously demon-possessed **man** was, on Jesus' command, spreading the news of what had happened to him. This was the first recorded witness of Jesus in a Gentile area.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1474, 1529). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

8:26 For more on the location of this event, see note on Mk 5:1 - The place of this miracle is somewhat confused in the Greek manuscripts of the NT, with testimony divided among Gerasenes, Gadarenes, and Gergesenes. (The best reconstruction has Mk and Lk naming the region of the Gerasenes, while Mt has the region of the Gadarenes.) All three places were cities or villages east of the Sea of Galilee. Gerasa was the most important village, but only Gergesa (modern El Kursi) is close enough to the lake and possesses a suitable geography (steep cliffs) to fit the story. It is likely that early in the transmission of this story the name of the lesser known Gergesa was replaced by the better-known and similarly pronounced Gerasa. Or perhaps Gerasa was an alternative spelling of the name of the village, later confused with the well-known namesake city. Others argue that Gergesa was a village in the territory of Gadara, prompting Matthew to use the regional designation for its inhabitants in his version of the story.

8:27 For more on the number healed, see note on Mk 5:2 - While Mk and Lk mentioned one demon-possessed man, Mt mentioned two. Some understand Mt to have increased the number for theological reasons, but it is more likely that Mk focused only on the more prominent of the two men.

8:32–33 For more on Jesus' sending the demons into the pigs, see note on Mk 5:11–13.

Stein, R. H. (1992). *Luke* (Vol. 24, pp. 254–259). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

The second example describing Jesus' might and power involves his casting out a demon. The account consists of seven parts: (1) Jesus' arrival, 8:26–27a; (2) a description of the demoniac's condition, 8:27b, 29; (3) the demoniac's recognition of Jesus, 8:28; (4) the exorcism itself, 8:30–32; (5) the proof of the exorcism, 8:33; (6) the people's reaction, 8:34–37; and (7) the conclusion, 8:38–39. The majority of differences between the accounts in Mark and Luke are due to literary considerations rather than theological ones. The changes that bear theological significance are found in 8:26, 28, 31, 39 and will be discussed under "Comments."

Numerous criticisms have been leveled against the historicity of this account. Some argue that since Jesus' action toward the swine is cruel—and he would not have done anything cruel—the story is not historical. Similarly, some argue that Jesus would never have caused so great an economic loss to the swine's owners by having them drown. Others argue against there being swine raised in the area, since Jews could not eat pork. The problem of the city's name is a classical one and goes back at least to Origen's time. The city of Gerasa lies approximately thirty miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee, and as one commentator somewhat sarcastically states, "The stampede of the pigs from Gerasa to the Lake would have made them the most energetic herd in history!" In the heyday of theological liberalism it was also objected that Jesus could not have been so superstitious as to believe in demons, so that the account could not be historical on that basis. The latter objection was sometimes answered by a theory of accommodation, i.e., Jesus himself did not believe in demons, but in speaking to people who did, he shaped his healings and teachings to accommodate the naive beliefs of the people to whom he was ministering. Others have explained the story "mythically," i.e., such stories are due to the early church's expressing its religious ideas and ideals in the concrete forms of myths. We will deal with other objections under "Comments."

Comments

8:26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes. There is a major textual problem involving this geographical designation. The three main readings are: (1) Gerasenes—Gerasa (modern Jerash), which lies thirty miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee; (2) Gergesenes—Gergese (modern Kersa), which lies on the Sea of Galilee; (3) Gadarenes—Gadara (modern Umm Qeis), which lies five miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee and possessed lands extending to the lake; but Gadara has no steep slope leading to the lake. There are serious geographical and historical implications involved in this issue that cannot be ignored. Already in the first half of the third century Origen in his commentary on John wrestled with this problem. It is impossible, however, even to be certain about which word Luke actually used when he wrote his text. As a result we cannot be sure that the first alternative (Gerasenes) is the correct one. As for the other two, they do not create as significant a geographical-historical problem. For Luke the key issue was not the question of "where" this took place but "what" took place and its significance for understanding who Jesus is.

Which is across the lake from Galilee. Since this account takes place during Jesus' Galilean ministry, Luke integrated the account into his scheme.

8:27 A demon-possessed man. "A demon-possessed man" is literally *a certain man having demons*. Luke used the plural (demons) in light of the later reference to their number. Contrast Mark 5:2, where the singular is used. Luke again sought to avoid Mark's "unclean spirit" by using the term "demon." See comments on 4:33.

For a long time. This phrase goes better with what follows (so NIV, RSV) than with what precedes.

But had lived in the tombs. For a Jew this description might have overtones of ceremonial uncleanness, but for Luke and his readers it described the demoniac's terrible condition of alienation from other people and perhaps even his and the demons' association with death.

8:28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting. At this point the demons acted in unity, so that singular pronouns and nouns are used—*he, me, I, demon*.

What do you want with me? This phrase is literally, "What [is it] to me and you?" Compare 1 Kgs 17:18 (LXX).

Jesus, Son of the Most High God? The demons provide a partial answer to the question of Luke 8:25. Because of the supernatural sphere from which the demons came, the man possessed preternatural knowledge of who Jesus truly was (cf. 4:41). For "Son(s) of the Most High," "Most High God," cf. 1:32; 6:35; Acts 16:17.

I beg you. Luke changed "swear to God that you won't torture me" (NIV) or "I adjure you by God, do not torment me" (RSV) in Mark 5:7 because it seemed ludicrous for a demon to "adjure" Jesus by God. Luke's wording accurately discloses the impotency of the demon(s) before Jesus.

Don't torture me! We are not told what this torture consisted of until 8:31. Matthew 8:29 adds "before the appointed time" and indicates that what the demons feared was that Jesus would enact the torture of 8:31 immediately rather than on the final day of judgment.

8:29 For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit. The verb is best understood as an inceptive aorist and translated, "For Jesus had begun to command the evil spirit."

Many times it had seized him. The terrible condition of the man existed over a period of time. This is revealed by "for a long time" (8:27); "many times" (8:29); and the tenses of the verbs "had seized," "was chained," and "had been driven" (iterative imperfects, which emphasize the continual repetition of these past actions). Luke gave a flashback and incorporated these details to describe the demoniac's condition. The comment about the demoniac's frequent breaking of his chains serves to emphasize the demon's power and thus Jesus' greater power.

8:30 What is your name? This is the only incident in the Gospels in which Jesus conversed with a demon. Luke did not indicate that Jesus' power over the demon was somehow linked to his knowing the demon's name, even if this was a popular belief.

"Legion," he replied. The demon gave to Jesus a name that also was a number. Multiple possession has already been mentioned in 8:2, but this man's condition was far worse than that of Mary Magdalene, who possessed seven demons. A legion in the Roman army consisted of six thousand men.

Because many demons had gone into him. Luke directed this explanatory statement to his readers, whereas in Mark 5:9 it is addressed to Jesus.

8:31 And they begged him ... into the Abyss. This is the "torment" the demons were seeking to avoid in 8:28. The abyss is the final destiny of the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41; 2 Pet 2:4; Rev 20:3). See comments on 4:34.

8:32 A large herd of pigs was feeding.... The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them. Pigs are forbidden and unclean for Jews since they do not "chew the cud" (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8). For a Jew therefore pigs would be a very appropriate home for the demons.

And he gave them permission. This permission allows the man's healing to be verified in the story when the swine were destroyed.

8:33–34 And the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. The demons were conquered, not converted! The swine's destruction proves that the demons truly left the man as does the description of the man's condition in 8:35. For the reference to the steep

slope and the lake as a historical-geographical problem, see comments on 8:26. Although Luke omitted the number of the swine (Mark 5:13 states that there were two thousand), he still mentioned that it was a large herd (Luke 8:32). None of the Gospel writers seemed to be troubled by the economic loss that the drowning of the swine would have caused their owners. For the Evangelists the spiritual issues involved in the story are far more important than financial considerations (cf. 12:31). Various commentators' concern for the owners' economic loss may be due to a greater sensitivity for the property of others than the Evangelists had, but it may also reveal a lesser concern for the spiritual issues involved. The Gospel writers saw the story as involving a man's deliverance from enslavement to the demonic. The demoniac's deliverance and the demons' judgment were their primary concerns.

8:35 The demoniac's conversion is now described. Instead of being driven by the demon (8:29), he was "sitting" (8:35); instead of being without clothes (8:27), he was "dressed" (8:35); instead of being among the tombs (8:27), he was "at Jesus' feet" (8:35; cf. 10:39 and Acts 22:3); and instead of being "chained hand and foot and kept under guard" (Luke 8:29), he was "in his right mind" (8:35). This, even more than the drowning of the swine, demonstrates that the demons had left him. The demons' prisoner had been freed from their oppression (cf. 4:18).

8:36 The demon-possessed man had been cured. Luke added the word "cured" to his account. The Greek word *esōthē*, or "saved," is a favorite Lukan word to describe the healing-salvation Jesus brings. The man had not simply been cured of his demon possession but of everything that separated him from God. Thus he sat at Jesus' feet as a disciple (cf. 10:39; Acts 22:3).

8:37 Then all the people ... asked Jesus to leave them. Much of the seed had fallen upon unfertile soil and bore no fruit (Luke 8:4–15). Despite the healing they saw, the people of Gerasa did not want Jesus to remain.

Because they were overcome with fear. The people's fear is mentioned again (cf. 8:35). Luke added this comment (cf. 7:16; Acts 2:43; 5:5, 11). The cause of this fear is not given, and it is of little value to speculate about what caused this fear in Jesus' situation. For Luke, however, it was clear that just as hearing God's word is not enough (8:12–14), so seeing God at work is also not enough. Even a greater miracle (16:31) cannot compel faith. Apart from a noble and good heart, God's presence produces only fear. For the believer such fear turns to a holy awe, but to the unbelieving it is only a fearsome dread from which they seek to rid themselves. God can be rejected, as the people of Gerasa in fact did. Peace, however, came to the demoniac. He who was last became first.

So he got into the boat and left. In "orderly" (1:3) fashion Luke finished the people's encounter with Jesus before he completed the demoniac's story.

8:38 The man ... begged to go with him. The man wanted to join Jesus and his disciples, but Jesus commanded him to a life of discipleship in his own village. The request to join Jesus was not rejected but refocused in that he was to join in the proclamation of the good news to his own village.

8:39 Return home. The man, who previously was unable to live at home but instead lived in the tombs, was directed to "return home."

Jesus' command to "return ... tell ... what God has done" is paralleled by "went away ... told how much Jesus had done." Did Luke mean here that the man told what God, i.e., Jesus, had done for him and that he was thus calling Jesus God? We find parallels in 9:43 and Acts 20:28 that may support such an understanding, but there is a textual problem associated with the latter verse. More likely Luke here tied Jesus' works and ministry so close to that of God the Father

that what Jesus does and what God does are one. We find the same idea in chap. 15, where Jesus' association with publicans and sinners (15:1–2) is likened in the three parables (15:3–32) to God's love for the outcasts. Even if Jesus is not directly referred to as God in this verse, he uniquely possesses rights and honor that in Luke belong only to God. Compare 5:24.

Told all over town. Mark 5:20 has “in the Decapolis,” but for Luke the mission to the Gentile world would begin in earnest only after the resurrection. Marshall notes, “The story is a paradigm of what conversion involves: the responsibility to evangelize.”

The Lukan Message

The story of the demoniac in its present context serves primarily a Christological function. Jesus' greatness is shown in his mastery of the demonic. Jesus defeated the demons, a legion in number (8:30) and with superhuman power to break chains (8:29). The supernaturally powerful demons, however, could only “beg” (8:28) Jesus, for they had no ability to counter the power of the “Son of the Most High God.” The attempt to see in this story a “duped demon” who sought to circumvent Jesus' power by not giving their name but only their number and by asking to enter swine rather than the abyss (only to be “fooled” by Jesus, who caused them to drown) is highly imaginative. Luke, however, did not in any way suggest such an interpretation. Jesus did not outwit the demons. He dominated and defeated them. Jesus' mighty works are such that to proclaim them is to proclaim what God has done. “Who is this” (8:25)? He is the Son of God, the Lord of all creation, whether the physical world (wind and waves [8:25; cf. Ps 65:7]) or the spiritual world of demons.

For Luke this story also prefigured the future mission to the Gentiles. Already in Jesus' ministry a Gentile was converted, for this took place across the Lake of Galilee among people who raised swine. Even though Luke wanted to maintain his geographical scheme and thus omitted mention of the Decapolis (cf. Mark 5:20), the scene nevertheless foreshadows what we find in Acts. Already in his ministry Jesus had a concern for Gentiles and ministered to their needs (cf. also Luke 7:1–10).