

Lord of the Demons

October 14th, 2012

Luke 8:26-39

²⁶Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷When 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. ²⁸When 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.""

This passage is fascinating, and I bet it provokes a lot of questions, especially about the world of demons. We'll try to answer some of those questions today, but this passage is not written mainly to inform us about demons. It is meant to make us tremble and marvel at and worship and admire Jesus Christ. As prominent as demons are in this passage, as much as we need to dig into this text to learn about them so that we can think rightly about them, they are parochial here. Jesus is supreme. Jesus is *always* supreme.

The Scriptures are clear that Jesus made the demons: "¹⁶By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him." These are the same rulers and authorities that Paul says were defeated by Jesus through His work on the cross (2:15). So we are superficial if we spend a lot of time talking about demons this morning, without looking beyond them to their purpose for existing, which is to call attention to the greatness and majesty and beauty and the praiseworthiness of Jesus Christ, which is what I hope we can do today.

An Introductory Parenthesis

Before we dig into this passage, I feel like I ought to say something to those who may be here who are a little more skeptical about the Christian faith and the Bible. Maybe the idea of demons is just something you have a hard time believing. Really, in the year 2012,

are there seriously people who believe in demons? Now I can't go into detail about this, but I think it's interesting that most of the people who would say they have a hard time accepting the idea of real, personal, supernatural evil in the world (that is, Satan and demons) are also the people who say that human beings are basically good.

Now that's a strange thing: if human beings are basically good, and if there is no personal, supernatural evil in the world, what is going on here? Where does Nazi Germany come from, or 9/11, or human trafficking, or child molestation, or innumerable other instances of gross, heinous wickedness that flood the headlines each and every day? There is something profoundly wrong in the world; that's indisputable. How did we get here? I think the biblical diagnosis is far more plausible than the secular diagnosis.

And that diagnosis is that human beings are sinful from birth, rebellious against God's righteous laws, and are aided and tempted to act out our wickedness by evil, supernatural, personal spirit beings called demons, who were originally created by God but fell from their position of glory because of their rebellion against God (Jude 6, 2 Peter 2:4). While demons are powerful and intelligent and malicious and at war with God, they are not (as we'll see in this text) outside the rule and reign of God, so we who have come to be a part of God's Kingdom need not fear them, though we do need to be sober-minded and diligent in waging war and protecting ourselves against their evil schemes.

Five Characteristics of Demons

All that is introductory, now let's take a look at Luke 8 and see what we can learn about demons...and more importantly, what we see about the greatness of Jesus as He interacts with the demons. Specifically I want to draw your attention to seven characteristics of demons that we see here in Jesus' encounter with "Legion".

1. Demons are powerful

We see this by the simple fact of what these beings were capable of doing in this man's life. After stilling the storm at sea (verses 22-25), Jesus and His disciples step onto the dry land and are met by "a man from the city who had demons" (verse 27). We know they're powerful because verse 29 tells us that this man was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds. The demons were so strong that human might and strength and resources could not contain them or restrain them.

We see another instance of this power in Acts 19, where we're told about the seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva, who try to invoke Jesus' power to exorcise an evil spirit: "¹⁶And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."

2. Demons are evil

Notice that Luke calls the demon an "unclean spirit" in verse 29. In the Scriptures uncleanness is not an issue of hygiene, but an issue of moral and spiritual purity. Their leader, Satan, is called "The evil one". In Ephesians 6 Paul says to believers that our war is not against flesh and blood, but against "¹²the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Our society seems pretty fascinated by the dark world of spirits, and can you see how when we entertain ourselves with what God says we're at war with, that we can desensitize ourselves to the evil and open ourselves up to some serious danger?

3. Demons are destructive

Demons are powerful and evil, and we can see them here wielding their power to destroy and ruin this man's life. That's another name for Satan, "The destroyer". The picture we get of this man is pathetic: he's been relegated to living among the dead, even chains and shackles can't

control him, night and day he is crying out and bruising himself with rocks, he's ripping his clothes off, constantly being kept under guard.

When Jesus drives the demons into the pigs, they immediately rushed over the bank and were drowned (v.33), again you see their aim is to destroy. I don't know why that happened, maybe only to show us that demons hate life, all life. They're murderers. They want marriages to die, friendships to die, families to die, churches to die. ⁸"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

(This seems like a good time for another parenthesis. This sounds like scary stuff, and a rational question is, "How did the demons get into this man? Can this happen to me?" We're not told everything we might like to be told about demons, but I think we can say safely that no child of God, with the Spirit of God dwelling in them, can be overtaken by the devil the way this man was: ⁴"You are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." "What fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵What accord has Christ with Belial?" Demons may try to attack us, tempt us, discourage us, but they cannot do believers what they did to this man.

Beyond that people speculate that gross sin or dabbling with the occult can produce this sort of demonic attack, and while there may be truth there, I don't see it affirmed by Jesus throughout His encounters with demons. You'll search the gospels in vain to see Jesus ever explicitly connect demonic oppression of this sort to a person's sin. It does seem like this sort of thing happens more commonly in third world countries, and we could speculate about reasons for that, but it does happen here in this country too.)

4. Demons are theologically astute

²⁸"What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." "Legion" has an accurate assessment of

Jesus' identity. In the gospels we're constantly seeing the disciples to struggle to grasp Jesus' identity; they didn't have a category for God clothed in human flesh. But the demon knows it from the second he lays eyes on Jesus. In this way demons are actually like many people in the church: they know who Jesus is, they acknowledge right things about Him, they just don't love him. It is not enough to know who Jesus is. He is to be loved and worshiped as God. Beware of this condition! That your heart would not be, "I know who Jesus is, He's the Most High God" but then leave here without really examining whether or not you love Him.

5. Demons are beggars

We've seen that demons are very powerful, they're evil and hateful and destructive and if left to ourselves, they ought to elicit a great deal of fear in us, and there are thousands of them present in this man as Jesus gets off the boat in the country of the Gadarenes. But from the second Jesus steps into this scene, there is no doubt who is in control of this encounter. Three times Legion begs Jesus for something:

*"²⁸When 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.**"*"

*"³¹And **they begged him** not to command them to depart into the abyss."*

*"³²Now 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."*

Nothing could show more powerfully that Jesus is Lord of the demons. They need His permission to act. With all their power, with all their evil, destructive hatred toward mankind, as much as they had tormented this poor, pathetic man, when Jesus Christ approaches them, they fall down at His feet. It's not hard for Him to do. Later in Luke, Jesus says, "²⁰But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." Massive demon possession,

thousands of them living in this one tormented and tormenting soul. Two thousand supernatural, suicidal, homicidal, maniacal, demonic terrorists living in this man. And Jesus says "Go," and they're out. That's pinky work for Jesus. That's why we sing:

*The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.*

6. Demons will be defeated

Not only does Legion know who Jesus is, he knows his own fate: "³¹They begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss" (cf. v.28). They're asking Jesus to withhold or delay their punishment. They know they are destined for hell. On this side of the cross and the empty tomb, we know Jesus defeated the devil by dying for sinners. As scary as demons may sound in this passage, there is really only one damning weapon of destruction that they can wield against you: unforgiven sin.

No one will be banished to hell with the demons because of bad dreams or other wild hallucinations or manifestations. They will go to hell because they have participated with the demons in rebellion against our Maker. Because we have followed "the prince of the power of the air" we are dead in our sins and by nature objects of God's righteous wrath. But Jesus overcame our sin -- and in doing so disarmed the demons of the one damning weapon in their artillery -- by His death on the cross:

"¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

Legion might seem like a crazy story to you, but there is a real sense in which, if you're in Christ, this is your story. You might not have been oppressed quite like this, but you were under Satan's dominion. You were a follower of the prince of the power of the air, under the power of Satan, an object of God's wrath. "4But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ 6and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

I don't know what kind of darkness you might find yourself walking in this week. But if our God could walk into this demonic darkness -- did anything look more hopeless, more like a defeat, than the Son of God being nailed to a Roman cross? -- and turn it into a place of triumph, if He could rescue you from this captivity, then He is absolutely bigger, better and brighter than the darkest darkness that you might find yourself in right now.

7. Demonic captives are transformed by Jesus' power

I'm sure you've seen one of those commercials or billboards, whether it's for weight loss or hair replacement or whatever, where they have those dramatic before and after shots. Well, the man known as legion provides one amazing before and after picture, highlighting the awesome, transforming power of Jesus Christ.

Look at him before his encounter with Jesus: uncontrollable, breaking chains, without clothes, screaming and crying out, beating himself with rocks, begging Jesus to get away from him. But after Jesus intercedes: clothed, calm, sitting at Jesus feet, in his right mind, begging Jesus not to go away without him. Jesus Christ changes people. Such a dramatic story, so many unanswered questions, but let's not fail to marvel at this one simple point. Jesus changes people, even the most seemingly

hopeless people, and makes them new! As He did for Legion, so He does today, because "8Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." He's the risen, reigning, Lord of all!

And I think that's where we should end today. Jesus Christ transforms dead, rebellious, captives of Satan and makes them new, holy, blameless, above reproach, beloved children, ambassadors of the risen Christ. Has He changed you? Not just, do you know some facts about Him? But has He changed you? Then like the maniac who became a missionary, go from here and proclaim throughout the whole city how much Jesus has done for you. Evangelism is really that simple. Go, brothers and sisters, and make this great God known!