

**Luke 8:26-39****Spirits and Swine: The Sovereign Messiah**

Today, we are continuing our journey through Luke's gospel account of Jesus of Nazareth. Our passage today is found in Luke 8:26-39, and it's...a doozy. The heading in your Bible might be something like "Jesus casts out Legion" or "The Gerasene Demoniac."

It's a familiar story to most - perhaps overly familiar. We may have forgotten what a strange, jarring story this is, especially if you've never heard this story before. I remember reading this story in my Bible when I was a child, and this story perplexed me and scared me, but at the same time, filled me with wonder of the supernatural (mainly supernatural evil), and how Jesus is portrayed as powerful and mighty.

But also, this story could produce far more questions than answers. Indeed, it does. Many pages have been written trying to solve this puzzle of a story. Why are the demons named Legion? Why did all those pigs have to die? Is this just a random, "best hits" story that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all felt they had to include in their biographies of Jesus?

Aside from the questions, this story may also produce more fear (or even obsession) in the supernatural, rather than security in who Jesus is and His sovereignty over the forces of evil.

My hope is that throughout today's teaching, we will possibly have some questions answered, learn about how this story is far more interconnected to the Old Testament than we maybe have ever imagined, and finally, the ultimate hope is that we would see Jesus as the sovereign King over all things - including the forces of evil.

Luke 8:26-39 (ESV)

[26] Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

[27] When 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.

[28] When 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."

[29] For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.)

[30] Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him.

[31] And they begged him not to command them to depart into the Abyss.

[32] Now 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.

[33] Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

[34] When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country.

[35] Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.

[36] And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed.

[37] Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.

[38] The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying,

[39] "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

I love comedy, especially satire.

Silly jokes are kinda funny, they can make you laugh.

But great jokes include layers, patterns, misdirections, and subtlety.

Great comedy contains satire, call-backs, word plays. It's an art form.

The best comedy, especially the best political satire, is often loaded with assumptions and implications that you, as a listener, know the context, the background, the culture, the news.

If the context of the joke, comic, or skit has to be explained...well, it just won't be as funny.

For example, today, when a politician or cultural figure has a major gaffe in real time, you just know that Babylon Bee will have a hilarious headline later in the day, or that Saturday Night Live will turn it into a sketch the next Saturday night.

The SNL sketch or Babylon Bee fake headline will be funny because you know the context, and the writers will find ways to satirize and maximize the comedic impact of real life events.

However, try watching SNL political skits from 1992. I guarantee they won't be as funny...

How do I know? I went back and looked up old skits from the early 90's. I know the major events during that time, but at times, the live studio audience would laugh absolutely hysterically at a phrase one of the actors says. I had no idea why it was funny. But I'm sure in 1992, it must have been wildly funny.

For maximum impact - you have to already know the entire context.

And when you know the entire context of a historical, cultural, or political moment, I could say just one small phrase, and it would upload into your mind an entire catalog of images and memories.

For example: "If the glove does not fit..."

The Juice, Nicole Brown, White Bronco, Kardashian (not the daughters...)

Another one: "Let's Roll"

Flight 93, 9/11, Twin Towers, Pentagon, terrorist attack

To someone who wasn't alive during these times, even those words don't mean too much. They might recall learning about both those events, but it may not pack the same punch as it does those of us who lived through these monumental, historical events.

Today's story is exactly that. There are words, places, and images that have deep history and meaning throughout the Biblical story. Very specific words and phrases that, if you were an ancient Israelite, they would upload the entire context of the Hebrew Scriptures into your mind.

Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has chosen to word this story in a way that would maximize the importance of this story.

I mean, this story is a powerful one in-and-of itself, one who's point is pretty self-evident at a surface-level reading: that Jesus has authoritative power over supernatural evil. Easy enough.

But, if you know what to look for, this story packs an even greater punch than what you may have ever thought. That in this story, Luke doesn't just portray Jesus as an exorcist, but as the long-awaited solution to the conflicts and problems that have been raging throughout the Old Testament.

The west side of the Sea of Galilee, demons, Legion, Son of the Most High, the Abyss.

All of these are inter-connected, and intentionally used by Luke to maximize his message.

The message in this story is that Jesus is the Sovereign Lord of all, who has brought the Kingdom of Heaven down, and has disarmed the forces of evil.

Today's story obviously isn't a joke, but it's an event that has been crafted into a story by Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

So, I'm going to have to explain it today...

Get the ancient Israelite in our heads

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Last week, our passage was the story of Jesus calming the storm. We're actually going to come back to that in a bit - it's a connected story to today's passage.

That story ends with the disciples terrified, marveling, at Jesus. They had seen Jesus heal lepers and the paralyzed before in this short time they've observed their rabbi's ministry.

But to them, Jesus' power over the wind and the waters was entirely something else. They cry out, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" The

forces of nature itself are under the control and authority of Jesus. The winds and the waters obey Him.

So, then, the question just before our passage lingers - Who is Jesus?

Our story today is the answer to that question.

**MAIN IDEA: Jesus' authority over the spirits and the swine demonstrate that He is the Sovereign Messiah - the one who has authority over all forces, both natural and supernatural.**

Throughout the Old Testament, there is the longing anticipation for someone - a special someone anointed by God - to make all things right.

We see this first in Genesis 3, right after the fall of Adam and Eve, who listened to the lies of the Serpent. Now the humans realize they are naked and ashamed, but Creator God, full of grace, promises that one day, the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the Serpent. But in the meantime, there will be enmity, or hostility, between the Serpent and humanity.

Who will crush the head of the enemy of humanity?  
Man, that would certainly be someone powerful...

But as the story progresses, humanity gets further and further away from this hope.

You have story after story that just plunges humanity further and further into chaos and death.

In Genesis 6, you have another crazy story about spiritual beings further corrupting humanity. This leads to the Flood. But, Creator God, full of grace, chooses one family to restart humanity. Does that work? No, no it doesn't.

In Genesis 10, you have the story of Babel, a crazy story about humanity trying to ascend to heaven. This leads to the scattering of all people. It leads to the creation of the hostile nations of the ancient world.

But Creator God, full of grace, chooses one nation - Israel - to restore humanity. Does that work? No, no it doesn't.

In the books of Kings and Chronicles, you have the story of the Kingdom of Israel trying to be like all the other nations. They want a king. Instead, they end up worshiping all the false gods of the surrounding hostile nations.

But Creator God, full of grace, chooses one king - David - to restore the kingdom. Does that work? No, no it doesn't.

In the books of the Prophets, you have the story of Israel scattered - exiled among the hostile nations. The Temple is destroyed. The story looks dark as ever.

But Creator God, full of grace, promises that He hasn't forgotten. An anointed human will bring restoration.

Someone who will restore the Temple, someone who will restore the Kingdom of Israel, someone who will unite the nations, someone who will put an end to spiritual evil, someone who will crush the head of that Serpent, someone who will put an end to Death itself.

It seems, though, that many in Israel had forgotten about that hope. Who could do such a thing? By the time of Jesus' birth, Israel was occupied by yet another hostile nation - the Roman empire - and the hope of the Messiah was drastically minimized from the cosmic hopes of the Psalms and Prophets.

Many self-proclaimed "messiahs" had arisen in these decades and centuries before Jesus. All it took to be a "messiah" was to fight the Romans in guerilla warfare. "Forget the prophets, we just need someone to free us from Rome!"

But, of course, Jesus comes on the scene...and He's not interested in fighting the Roman army.

No, he's healing people. He's commanding nature, and now he's casting out demons. "WHO THEN IS THIS?"

Luke's account of Jesus' life is showing us the answer. He is restoring EVERYTHING. Jesus is everything that was expected of the Messiah - and much more than that! He **IS** the sovereign, Creator God - upholding **ALL** His promises throughout the ages.

So, let's dive into this passage - seeing the key words and phrases - that reveal all this context. This isn't just a random story. It fits perfectly in Jesus' mission of restoring all things, and fulfilling all the Scriptures pointing to him.

Starting in verse 26:

"Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee."

Does that mean anything to us? Probably not...

To Luke's audience, that would've definitely meant something.

This land, starting at the northeastern shores of the Sea of Galilee, in the Old Testament was the land of Bashan. It was now called Gerasa under the Romans. But any literate Israelite knew that was Bashan in the Hebrew scriptures.

The region this story takes place in is hinting at a supernatural showdown.

Bashan was absolutely notorious in the Old Testament. It was home to Israel's greatest enemies, it was home to the infamous Giants (that's a deep rabbit hole), and it was generally seen as a place that was under the domain of supernatural evil.

The land of Bashan literally translates to: the place of the serpent

So, of course, as soon as Jesus steps foot on the shores of Bashan, supernatural evil comes out to meet him.

Verse 27: “When 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.”

Supernatural evil having a grip on a human. Naked. Surrounded by Death =  
Echoes of the Fall? Do you see it?

Verse 28: “When 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.”

The demons’ response to Jesus through the man is to ask incredulously, “what have you to do with me, Jesus?” It’s like he’s saying, “what are you doing...HERE?”  
In Matthew’s account of this story, this line is added, “before the time.”  
“Jesus, why are you HERE and NOW?”

In the Gospel of Luke, this is the first time Jesus sets foot on Gentile land. In other words, not the land of Israel. Apparently, that’s a big deal for the demons. They know that this now marks the beginning of the end of their reign of terror over humanity.

Biblical scholar Michael Heiser writes, “the fact that Jesus ventured into an area under Gentile governance in his day let everyone know that he was not merely the Messiah for Yahweh’s portion. He was the Lord of Gentile lands as well.”

That’s even seen in how the demon-possessed man addresses Jesus: “the son of the Most High God”

This title, the Most High God, is actually a very specific title. It has a massive context.

Every single time God is referred to as the “Most High God” in the Old Testament, or in the Hebrew, “El Elyon”, it is in the context of all the other nations. To Israel, Creator God revealed His name - Yahweh.

But in view of all the gods of all the other nations, Yahweh was “The Most High God”, “El Elyon”, or as he is often called the “King of kings and the Lord of lords.” These titles mean something. They are not just random synonyms for Creator God.

Luke recounting how the demons addressed Jesus, “the Son of the Most High God” was proving that Jesus was the Savior, not just for Israel, but for all nations, and the sovereign King over all the forces of spiritual evil.

Remember, in our text, the last speaking line was the disciples crying out, “Who is this?”

The demons correctly answer that question: “The Son of the Most High God”

I wish we had time to unpack all these passages where God is specifically called “The Most High God”:

Deuteronomy 32 - a retelling of the Tower of Babel story

Psalms 82 - a description of God judging the forces of spiritual evil

Again, Dr. Heiser comments, “The exorcism of Legion is therefore more than a strange tale of suicidal swine. It’s about theological messaging. Legion recognizes that Jesus is the rightful Lord of the country of the Gerasenes—old Bashan now under Gentile occupation.”

There are so many details in this story we don’t have time to go over. The binding of chains and shackles, the strength of the man, the driving out into the wilderness. In Matthew’s account of this story, the man “cut himself with stones.” Again, very significant.

All these images are loaded with the context of supernatural evil from the Hebrew scriptures. After Jesus’ ordeal with Satan tempting him in the wilderness, this was Jesus’ next massive confrontation with evil forces.

How would Jesus defeat this spiritual foe? Would Jesus yell and scream at the demons? Would they do battle in a heated exorcism?

Nope. Jesus simply says, “What’s your name?” Who am I dealing with here?

Verse 30: “Legion, for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.”

Spiritual evil trembled and begged at the sight of Jesus - the Son of the Most High. “Please, don’t send us into the abyss.”

Now, remember where we are in this story. At the banks of the Sea of Galilee.

Why do the demons beg Jesus not to send them into the water? But not just any water...

The Abyss...once again, we have a loaded term, conveying a loaded supernatural reality.

The Abyss is more than just physical waters, it represents judgment and death, flood and fury.

The first time we have a mention of the abyss is in Genesis 1, where the spirit of God is hovering over the abyss - the deep, dark, void - before God speaks Creation into existence.

The next time we see the abyss is in the Flood of Genesis 7, where the abyss is opened up by God as an act of judgment over the immense spiritual evil.

In the Psalms, Yahweh God alone is the one who controls the deep waters of the abyss. Psalm 77:16 "When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the [Abyss] trembled."

So although the Abyss can refer to physical, deep waters, the Biblical authors often use it in conjunction with these ideas of judgment, death, and God's wrath upon evil.

In the story of Jonah, specifically chapter 2, when Jonah goes into the waters and is in the belly of the sea monster, he cries out to God in a poetic prayer that he is in the heart of the sea, that he is in the flood, that he is in the abyss, and what's more...that he is in Sheol - the Hebrew word for the "realm of the dead."

Again, you see this word "abyss" is a loaded term in the Biblical language. It is the place of judgment and death, flood and fury.

The demons don't want that. "Please do not send us into the Abyss!"

Verse 32: "Now 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. [33] Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned."

You see. The pigs drowned in the Sea of Galilee. The demons suffered a far worse fate, and were sentenced into the Abyss. This story is the beginning of the end of Jesus destroying all the spiritual forces of evil.

But why did the pigs have to die? This is the subject of much speculation. All these pigs dying is what makes this story especially perplexing!

Some have simply argued that the pigs were collateral damage to Jesus vanquishing the demons. That certainly could be it. It could just be a random detail.

Some have argued that in the same way Jesus was casting out an unclean spirit, he was casting out the unclean animals. This may be a bit more compelling of a reason, but it doesn't make sense with statements Jesus made earlier in the Gospels, nor with Peter's vision in Acts 10.

Now, I truly don't believe this is a random detail. It's a detail that's here for a reason. Jesus didn't do anything randomly.



I think there was something Jesus accomplished in the killing of all these pigs. I don't know this for certain, but I'm pretty convinced. And Luke's ancient readers would have certainly known this context. This is wild, so buckle up!

Remember, Jesus is in Gentile-country. In the country of the Gerasenes, or for short, the city of Gerasa. Gerasa was one of the cities in the Roman region known as the Decapolis. Bashan in the Old Testament, the Decapolis under Roman occupation.

As soon as Jesus steps foot on the shores, the demon, whose name is Legion approaches Jesus. Legion was the name of the standard Roman military unit, comprised of anywhere from hundreds to thousands of soldiers.

Ready for this? First wild historical fact:

The Legion that was stationed in this very region, was called Legio X Fretensis - the 10th Legion. It was the Legion led by none other than Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1, "in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus..."). Now, all Roman Legions carried an emblem of an animal or a god or goddess.

Anybody want to guess the animal the 10th Legion chose for their emblem? Yes, a pig. It had been a bull, but to further insult the Jews, they changed it to a boar when they invaded that entire region.

The other reason they changed their emblem to a pig? This area, the Decapolis, had a patron deity and a massive temple dedicated to it in Gerasa. It was the Temple of Artemis.

What animal represented Artemis? Yes, a boar.

What animals were sacrificed to Artemis in the pagan Temple? Yes, pigs.

I don't believe these are coincidences.

When Jesus sent these demons into the pigs to their destruction, Jesus destroyed the method of worship for these malevolent spirits. He was cleaning house. Purifying the land.

To the man who was freed of these demons, this was freedom.

To the herdsmen and people of the town, this was scary.

Not only was the loss of the pigs a huge economic impact, but I believe they were fearful of retribution. Retribution from the Roman Legion of soldiers, or worse, retribution from the spiritual forces of evil that pervaded that land.

The freed and healed man got it right. He fell down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and worshiped Him.

This man knew who Jesus was - the sovereign Messiah, the powerful Deliverer, the only One who rules over the Abyss and all spiritual evil. He had experienced what Jesus could do, and he wanted nothing more than to be with Jesus.

Jesus, however, wanted him to be the first missionary to the Gentiles.

Verse 39: "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city (throughout the Decapolis) how much Jesus had done for him."

His neighbors, however, didn't get it right away. Spiritual evil had gripped their hearts with fear.

You want to hear another coincidence?

Luke, not only wrote this Gospel, but he also wrote the book of Acts. Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, carefully structured his books. Luke and Acts are jam-packed with patterns and mirrored stories.

So, let's briefly recap the story, assuming the speculation about the Temple of Artemis is true: Jesus casts demons out of a man. In doing so, a herd of pigs is drowned in order to destroy the means of worship used at the Temple of Artemis in Gerasa. One man is joyful and worships Christ, but the herdsmen are fearful and beg Jesus to leave.

Do we find another story, in Luke or Acts, that happens near a Temple of Artemis?

Yep... Acts 19. Paul casts a demon out of a man in Ephesus. The demon possessed man, by the way, was very strong. The healed man and surrounding people see this mighty work of Jesus through Paul, and they destroy all their silver idols and divination books - not in water, but in fire. The text says, thousands of silver pieces are destroyed. But, the silversmiths who made the idols are fearful, and beg Paul and his companions to leave.

Do you get it? That's amazing.

There's yet ANOTHER mirrored passage to this one, but it's coming up in a few chapters. That one is really cool...but no time for today.

There is heavy duty context, layers, mirrored stories. It's amazing. The Bible is simply amazing.

And it's not just amazing because it's a work of art, it's amazing because it points us to the truth of who Jesus is.

That He is the Sovereign Messiah, the Lord over all.  
The Lord over spiritual evil, over the wind and the waves.  
The Lord over not just Israel, but all nations.  
The Lord who is bringing restoration to all things.

That is the point of this story.

This story also serves as a stark reminder that spiritual evil is a reality.

The default reflex of most modern, western, post-enlightenment people is to believe there is no such thing as the supernatural realm. All that exists is physical material. This is completely antithetical to the Biblical worldview.

It's also not a sustainable worldview, in my opinion. It is really difficult to believe that this material world is all there is.

This has led to movements in the complete opposite direction of unrestrained "spirituality" in the last few decades - a resurgence in New Age practices, magic, hallucinogenic drugs, astrology, worship of other deities. To put it bluntly, these are utterly dangerous practices.

C.S. Lewis famously said: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves (that is, evil spiritual beings) are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist and magician with the same delight.

But, praise be to our Lord and Savior that he is still active, delivering people. Delivering people from both the demonic lies of empty materialism, and delivering people from the demonic lies of New Age spirituality.

This story serves as a powerful reminder of the King we serve.  
The King who is restoring all things, in and through His Kingdom.

May we, just like this man who was delivered from the grips of spiritual evil, realize we have all been delivered from the grips of spiritual evil and death, into life. He has saved us from The Abyss.

May we continually fall down at Jesus' feet in worship.

And may we continually obey Jesus' command, "Return to your home, and declare what God has done for you.