

# Demons, Witchcraft, and Jesus

## Luke 8:26–39 (ESV)

**INTRODUCTION:** The text before us today is one that many of you will be tempted to ignore. It will seem at first to be antiquated and impractical to life as you know it. However, I want to warn you not to check out. Before this sermon is over, you may be shocked at how much influence the demonic world has over your daily life and the lives of your kids and grandkids.

**CONTEXT:** The story comes on the heels of Jesus calming the storm, which we looked at last week. There, we saw Jesus' absolute authority over the created order. Remember, just before they got into the boat, Jesus said, "Let us go over to the other side." Well, the other side is the country of the Gerasenes, named for the city of Gerasa or Jerash, which is located about 30 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

**Gerasa** was a Greco-Roman city - it was filled with pagan temples to the Pantheon of Greco-Roman gods. Now, that is significant. You see, Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians that there is a sense in which an idol is nothing; it is simply a piece of stone or wood carved by the hands of a man. But also, he tells us that demonic spirits hijack the idol and use it to deflect the worship of the true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Other accounts call this the area of the Geresenes - that is a reference to the tribe of Gad who settled here on the West Bank of the Jordan River rather than crossing over with the other tribes.

So you have a long history of **Jewish** settlement in this region, and you also have a significant pagan influence of the Greek idols. Remember, as we discussed in the opening sermon about the Intertestamental Period, a significant attempt had been made to erase the Jewish culture and replace it with a Greek culture. This process was called Hellenization.

One of the places where **Hellenization** was most embraced was here in the regions of the Gadarenes. The idolatry of the Greeks had heavily influenced these descendants of the tribe of Gad. This may explain why you have a massive herd of swine being cultivated in a land inhabited by Jews - who viewed pigs as unclean according to the Mosaic Law. This also explains the conclusion of the story before us.

### **TEXT: Luke 8:26–39 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup> When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons.

What city? The city of Gerasa, the Greek city we mentioned earlier. It appears that there in the city he had fallen under the influence of an initial demonic spirit and that

demon was joined by more, and more, and more... until his soul was literally infested with evil spirits.

NOW - I think it would be helpful at this point to do a **quick primer on evil spirits** so that you have a proper understanding of who they are and what they intend to accomplish.

- **CREATION OF ANGELS** - Before the first sunrise, before the first nano-second was measured, God existed. We pick up in **Genesis 1:1–2 (ESV)**  
<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

So there we see a beginning, not of God but of everything else. We see that in this beginning, there are heavens, plural and earth, singular. Earth is uninhabitable, and the Holy Spirit is hovering above this primordial planet.

The question arises: HOW LONG did the earth exist in this state before God said, “Let there be light”? Well, that is a tricky question to answer because, technically, time does not yet exist. Time begins with the creation of light and the first day.

This could have been just prior to the creation of light, or it could have been millennia; the construct of time just doesn’t function the way it does afterward.

Nevertheless, at this time we know the angels were present. We read that in **Job 38:4–7 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding...<sup>7</sup> when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

So there we have the sons of God...that is, another name for the angelic race, shouting for joy as God worked through the 6 days of creation.

So imagine that - myriad upon myriad of holy angels. We know from a study of scripture that there are different kinds of angels. There are:

- **Seraphim**...the name means burning ones. The seraphim have six wings, two to fly with, two to cover their feet, and two to cover their faces (Isa 6:2).
- **Cherubim** are mentioned ninety-two times in thirteen different Bible books. God originally put a cherub outside of the Garden of Eden to keep humans from eating from the tree of life (Gen 3:24). In the ark of the covenant, golden cherubim were placed above the mercy seat—probably symbolic of real cherubim guarding the presence of God.
- **Living Creatures** are mentioned in Revelation 4. They work closely with humanity to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth.
- **Archangels** are the ruling class of angels. We are given three in the scriptures - Gabriel, Michael, and Lucifer. It is supposed that each of these

archangels oversees 1/3 of the angelic race.

This innumerable host of angels is there, joyfully praising God as the earth is created. Then, on the 6th day, the pinnacle of creation, the image bearers...man and woman, Adam and Eve.

- **FALL OF LUCIFER** - *After the creation of man, but before the fall of man*, we are told that one of the archangels, Lucifer, sinned. Pride was found in his heart. Immediately and irrevocably, the judgement of God fell on him.

**Ezekiel 38** tells us that he was cast down from heaven. Jesus said it this way - "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.". There are indications that as many as 1/3 of the angels followed the rebellion of Lucifer. These are what we know as demons or unclean spirits.

It is important that you recognize that there is no discernible difference between an angel and a demon other than their heart motives. They are the same race of creature. From that point forward, Lucifer is called Satan and the fallen angels are called demons.

God could have eradicated the fallen angels at that very moment. He could have, with a word, cast them into the abyss of hell - but in His infinite wisdom, before Satan fell, before man fell, God determined to use demons in the storyline of His glory that would unfold throughout history.

Their ultimate judgement would wait until the end. They would be relegated to the earth. It is there on earth that Satan and demons attack the most godlike creature, the image bearer - mankind.

- **FALL OF MAN** - In **Genesis 3**, we see Satan inhabiting the body of a serpent. That is significant because, in our text, demons will possess a herd of swine. So we know this is possible. Before any man was possessed, we see a possessed animal. Satan tempts man to disregard the word of the Creator and eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - man sins, and death follows.

In the issuing of the curse, God states that he would set things right through the seed of the woman, a male offspring that would ultimately judge Satan and, in the process, be severely bruised.

- **SATAN AND DEMONS WAGE WAR ON THE IMAGE BEARERS** - From that time onward, Satan sets up his kingdom on earth. His demons serve him by attacking mankind. They have a two-fold strategy.
  - Their primary task is to redirect the worship of man toward anything but the Creator; this is why they use idols, anything that can distract the image bearer from the worship of the one true God.

- Secondly, they wish to destroy the image bearer. They are *masochistic* - they do not destroy quickly. They drag it out, causing as much pain and torment to as many people as they possibly can.
- **Nephilim** - We see early in human history, before the flood, that some demons transgressed the created order and procreated with human women.
- **Genesis 6:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown”.

Incidentally, remember this when scientists tell you that they have found evidence of a non-human species that was able to breed with humans...the Neanderthals, Homo erectus, and the like. It is very likely that these were what scripture calls the Nephilim.

So, just before the flood, when there was evil so rampant that God would wipe man off the planet and start over with Noah and his family, you see just how evil things had become.

**Jude** tells us that these demons who transgressed were bound until the end. John tells us in Revelation that they are bound by the river Euphrates and will be set free once again to wreak havoc during the time of the great tribulation.

Until then, the remaining number of demons are tempting, oppressing, and at times possessing people with the goal of tormenting them and ultimately destroying them.

### **NOW - what about demonic possession? We see it throughout the scriptures.**

- There is a certain sense in which all unsaved people are enslaved to Satan. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil”, **2 Timothy 2:25–26 (ESV)**. Paul says that we teach the Word in order that... “they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being ***captured by him to do his will***”.

This happens **ignorantly**, slowly over a lifetime. The bonds of Satan’s control become stronger and stronger, until you are trapped, you are addicted, you are enslaved.

- But there is another category where this happens **knowingly** ... we see throughout the Bible that a number of people knowingly engage with Satan and demons.

So, throughout the Old Testament, we see **magicians, mediums, witches, necromancers, and diviners** who knowingly and intentionally enter into a working relationship with evil spirits. Israel was commanded to cleanse their nation of such people. WHY? Because they are gateways to demonic strongholds.

**ILLUSTRATION:** We see this obscure passage in **1 Samuel 28**. King Saul has been tormented by an evil spirit, driven to murder David, but then we see that Saul is seeking the counsel of a witch. The two things eventually go hand in hand.

**Satan and demons are very transactional** - They always offer something in exchange for your service, but there are always, always, strings attached. There is fine print, there are clauses that you never see.

**ILLUSTRATION:** During my time in Cuba, my translator was a former Priest of Santeria, which is a form of witchcraft. He said that his journey into satanism began with a curiosity and a desire to have things; perhaps it was knowledge, perhaps it was money. He would dabble in the occult, and, to his surprise, sometimes it would work. But, over time, he discovered that the demons wanted something in return. He found himself suicidal, depressed, enslaved, and ready to end it all. BUT NOTICE, it began with simple curiosity, dabbling.

**While we tend to think of this as something the ancient world dealt with, the OCCULT has experienced a type of revival in recent years. It appears to be happening due to three things:**

1. **The Uncertainty of the World** - COVID-19, political unrest, and wars have caused some to look to the occult for direction in a time of uncertainty.
2. **The Occult has gone Online** - From apps, to websites, zoom meetings with your online reader and the like has opened the occult up to a new market. TikTok witches are one of the most popular groups on the social media platform. The hashtag #witchtok has more than 35 BILLION views.
3. **A Massive Rebranding of Witchcraft** - Ancient occult practices are re-emerging amidst the new age movement, alternative medicines, and some yoga practitioners.

A Trinity College study conducted in 1990 estimated only about 8,000 Wiccans (Witches) in the U.S., but according to Newsweek Magazine that number has risen to 1.5 million practitioners currently. That's more than the mainline Presbyterian Church.

**Which explains why -**

- Demand for products like crystals, magic stones, and sage is through the roof as people believe they will cleanse their space and ward off negativity.
- According to Allied Market Research, the global **astrology** industry has risen from \$2.2 billion in 2018 to \$12.8 billion in 2021. By 2031, it's expected to rise in excess of \$22.8 billion.<sup>1</sup>
- Astrology which is based on the premise that the Earth is the center of the Universe and constellations revolve around the Earth, is practiced by an alarming number of people. More Americans know their Zodiac sign than their blood type, and likewise, as many as 70 million Americans check their horoscopes daily.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2023/06/13/astrology-millennials-gen-z-science/#>

- Fortune Magazine reports that young people are almost as likely to consult fortune tellers as financial experts.
- The use of Ouija boards to communicate with the dead are also on the rise. In April of last year Jose Ospina, 17, was found dead, naked, and wrapped face down in a sheet after playing with his three best friends on an Ouija Board.
- Exeter University in Great Britain now offers a degree in Magic - I don't mean the pull a rabbit out the hat type of magic, but true occult practice.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Julie and I were walking through downtown yesterday. I was trying to be a good husband, but honestly, I was a little distracted with the need to wrap up this sermon. Little did I know the illustrations I would find.

- One store had this book, “**Manifesting for Beginners**” by Victoria Jackson, a step-by-step guide to attracting the life you want. It teaches you how to visualize the future, raise your vibrations, and pay attention to synchronicities and signs. One review describes it as perfect for little witches.
- Next to that is a **Dream Journal** - where you can analyze your dreams with a convenient moon cycle that helps to aid the interpretation.

Pastor, you are really reading too much into that, it's all innocent teenage stuff... not witchcraft.

- **Spirit Allies Card Set** - Guidance is available to you on each step of your journey— be open to receiving it and welcome in the many blessings your “Spirit Allies” have to offer. Once you do, get ready to see the signs everywhere! Their support, guidance, and protection arrive in many forms, be it symbols and synchronicities, or dreams and whispers. Tap into your intuitive gifts and their uplifting presence through this 60-card oracle deck and reflect upon its meaning in the guidebook. You'll have the pleasure of connecting more deeply with the plant, animal, crystal, goddess archetypes, and cosmic allies that are present to encourage your highest self to blossom from within.

Still think I'm reading too much into it?

How about a nice selection of crystals with a book titled, “A Guide to Crystal Healing”? Or a guidebook to show you which essential oil works best with your Zodiac sign?

All of these things are doorways to the occult. Demons use them to gain entry, control, and domination.

Most likely that was the sort of thing the man in our text had dabbled with. He had likely been exposed to this sort of thing at the pagan temples in Gerasa.

What started out as a mild curiosity had developed into an obsession, then a full blown possession. One demon after another entered the man and wrecked his life.

27b, “For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tomb”.

There is something about demons that causes a person to retreat from the community. They have as their aim the disintegration of things.

- Disintegration of the community
- Disintegration of the church
- Disintegration of the family unit
- Disintegration ultimately of the person

### **John 10:10 (ESV)**

**10. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.**

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.)”.

**We read in Mark 5:5** 5 “Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.”

This is one of those strange things that to this day will manifest itself in people who are under the influence of demons; a desire to cut oneself...self-mutilation, self harm.

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.”

See, they knew what was ultimately coming. But they also had some understanding of the timeline. They knew that it was early.

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.”

We are told that the eye of God is on one least little sparrow. God cares for animals. BUT, when it comes down to a decision between an animal and a man... there is NO competition. Jesus will gladly sacrifice 2000 hogs to save a man.

Why did Jesus allow the demons to enter the swine? Not only would it kill the pigs, it would also destroy the livelihood of the owner. Well, keep in mind, it was unlawful for

the Jews to partake in pork anyway. So, to some degree, this was a judgment for not obeying the law of Moses.

<sup>34</sup> “When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup> 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.”

Interestingly, it is the same response that the disciples had to Jesus when he calmed the storm - fear.

<sup>36</sup> “And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him.”

So the people in the area begged Jesus to leave, but the man who had been delivered begged to stay with Jesus. By the way, that is one way you know you’ve been truly delivered...you want to stay so close to Christ.

<sup>38b</sup>. “but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup> ‘**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.”

**CONCLUSION/INVITATION:** I wonder if today, demons have begun to influence your thinking. Are you dabbling with what any prophet of the Old Testament would have described as witchcraft? Repent! We see when the Gospel came to Ephesus, they burned their magic books.