

Luke 8:26-39

Legion

We need our faith during these times. But we've said often that faith isn't in our faith. Christian Faith isn't just being optimistic about a future. Christian Faith isn't just feeling like the sun is going to shine again. The Christian faith has Jesus Christ as its object.

So let's look to Him, and see him today in Luke as the one who triumphs over the darkness and restores a person who seems irreparably broken.

**Luke 8 "26 Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.**

So Jesus and his disciples sail to the region of the Gerasenes, near the modern day Golan Heights. It wasn't a Jewish area at the time, it was Gentile. It had Syrian and Greek occupants. Back in the days of the great kings of Israel, it was a conquered land and they brought tributes to King Solomon in Israel. They had many dealings with the Jews, and even some encounters with the God of Israel. But, by and large, they had rejected the God of Israel.

To follow the God of Israel would have been costly for them. They would have to admit that their gods were false gods or, worse, demons.

They'd have to follow the restrictive laws in Judaism, laws that would no-doubt change their lifestyles.

Their morality would have to change, their lifestyles would have to change and involve sabbath keeping and trips to the temple to worship. They'd have to adopt all kinds of dietary restrictions like, "No eating bacon", which is certainly a major sacrifice.

So the culture over there was very different from the culture in Israel where Jesus carried out most of his ministry.

And there was a man living there who had become legendary in those parts. We never

learn the man's actual name:

**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.)**

So a wild man lived among the tombs that were cut into the hills there. He didn't live around the people anymore, he lived among the corpses. He no longer communicated with people - he just screamed and cut himself with stones (according to Mark's Gospel.) He doesn't wear any clothes. This guy is the EXPERT at social distancing. Say what you will about this demon-possessed naked man, he knew how to follow CDC recommendations.

So in the village, when things got quiet at night, you'd hear this guy shrieking in the mountains as he sliced his skin.

If you took your family to visit the grave of a relative, you just might have to grab your kids and cover their eyes because a shrieking, bloody, naked muscle man might come streaking through.

And there was nothing anybody could do about it - they tried everything, and this was more power than anybody knew how to handle.

We don't know how this guy got this way: we just know that it got worse over time.

Luke says (8:29) that they had kept him under guard and bound him with chains and shackles, but he would break them.

**Mark 5:3 He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain...**

Nobody could bind him *anymore*. So at one time, he was controllable, at one time he could be subdued. But not anymore. He had grown too strong, and even when the ironsmiths would make shackles for him, he would break them.

The most extreme forms of evil in people's hearts don't usually emerge in an instant. They usually start small.

A desire to please people.

A desire for wealth.

A desire for pleasure.

A desire for a relationship.

They're not even bad desires. But you run after those things, believing the lie that they are ultimate and they can satisfy and that you must have them.

And time and time again they disappoint. They make big promises that they never fulfill, and they leave you mired in bitterness and regret and anger. Or you never quite get them and you always feel like you lost your chance at happiness.

And left unchecked, the anger that comes from huge disappointment, or anger at people who've wronged you, that isn't dealt with can provide an opportunity for the devil.

**Ephesians 4:26-27 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil.**

You get angry, you let it fester, you become bitter: and the opportunity is there for a demonic attack.

So whatever it was, something happened that opened this man up to evil.

And a real demon took the opportunity, walked through the open door, and took up residence there. Soon that demon invited his friends, and they destroyed this man, who in turn terrorized the town that could do nothing to stop him.

If the devil was allowed the power, he would bring us all there. He would make us obsessed, he would disconnect us from community, he would dehumanize us, and would lead us to destroy ourselves and our communities. If you took that sinfulness that's naturally in all of our hearts and pushed it out to its extreme, we'd all become like this nameless man that they ended up calling the Maniac of Gadera.

So that's where this man is.

And this man became stronger, more evil, inhabited by more demons. He was a desperately unclean man with unclean spirits who lived in an unclean nation in an unclean place among the unclean tombs. This guy was as hopeless as you could get. So again verse 28:

**Luke 8:28 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.)**

The demons know Who Jesus is, even though the disciples don't yet. And they know his power, and bow before him, and beg him not to torture them or to send them out of the country where they were preying on the people.

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

So Jesus asks this guy his name.

It had probably been years since anyone had cared about his name. Normally they just ran away and covered the eyes of their kids. They cared about preserving themselves and their families, they cared about safety, they didn't care to get to know the crazy naked demon man who lived among the tombs.

But Jesus looks him in the eye and asks his name. He's a mighty God who can speak and calm a storm, but even in the darkest times of your life, will look you in the eyes and seek a personal relationship with you.

And this stood in stark contrast to what many of these people believed about God.

There was a great philosopher named Philodemus who was born in Gedara here in 58 BC. And he was an Epicurean philosopher. The epicureans believed in the Roman gods, but believed there was no way that the gods were interested at all in what humans did. They were too far above us, they didn't get involved in human affairs.

And here is God, concerned about the guy that was the least likely to be cared about. And he looks him in the eye and asks his name.

And this should give tremendous hope about the heart of God toward us, especially in this Coronavirus crisis. We don't know all that God is doing in this, but in Jesus we know what God is like. What it can't be is that God has left us. In Christ, God shows that He cares, He's involved, and no situation is so messed up that Jesus doesn't go near it.

He's near us by His Spirit.

Individually, we get this idea that God must be so far removed, so disinterested in us. We've gotten so evil and so hard that he must have walked away a long time ago. But here's a guy who's hard, who's evil, who's destructive, who has been this way for a long time - and Jesus asks his name.

The last few times he came close to people, they treated him like an animal and put him in chains. Jesus makes the first loving and humanizing gesture toward this guy in years.

And this is his heart toward us. He is after relationship with us.

And the man answers, "My name is legion, for we are many."

"Legion" was the word for a group of Roman soldiers that originally, formally, had 5000 men, but had come to just mean a large band of soldiers. So this guy was inhabited, not just by one demon, but by thousands.

And now, the only name he went by, was Legion. His whole identity was the demons. He was no longer Michael the Cobbler's son. He was legion.

And this is what sin can do to us. It can so consume us that it becomes our identity - it names us.

Bitter old men started out as bright-eyed optimistic kids. Angry old women had dreams and desires once. But as their hearts were broken and never found healing in the gospel, the sin just festered and defined who they were: bitterness and anger became their identity.

*CS LEWIS - "Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming*

*others... but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever like a machine.*

But even if you have come to be defined by your sin, even if everyone else on earth knows you as the crook, or the guy with the temper, or as the greedy guy, or as the alcoholic, or as the glutton - Jesus asks your name.

His design is that sin should not define us anymore.

In the Bible, Adam and Eve were given authority over the animals, and they got to name them. When people were captured by a foreign country - like Shadrach, Meschaach, and Abednego, they were given different names by that country. It was a symbol of authority.

And here, the demons have claimed this man. They've said, "His name is legion because of the many demons in him."

But Jesus is coming to make this man his. To reclaim him and to rename him.

And this is one of the pictures the Bible uses to describe the fact that we get a new identity when we come to know Christ - we're given a new name:

**Revelation 2:17 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'**

Jesus gets the naming rights over us.

And the demons knew that if God was looking this guy in the eye and loving him, he would certainly not allow them to stay there and destroy him

**Luke 8:31 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.**

So Jesus enters this unclean land that had rejected Him in the past. He meets an unclean gentile man from there with a unclean spirits. And nearby, there was a herd of what, for a little while longer, would be considered unclean animals.

And these demons, unlike this man, were beyond hope. They were completely corrupt, they would never have desire to change. They don't come asking Jesus to change them, they just ask him not to torture them.

And now, by nature, they will only steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus knew that, and they knew he wasn't just going to let them go do this same thing to some other people. So they beg to enter into the unclean animals - the pigs.

So Jesus gives them permission. And the pigs, in response, storm down the bank and drown in the sea.

So Jesus dramatically shows his power and authority: over all lands, not just Jewish lands but gentile lands, over demons, and over this man.

He shows how he is so much more powerful than every other human solution: their chains couldn't change this guy, but the presence of Jesus did.

And to see this would certainly be memorable.

Imagine you're with your family, rowing in the sea of Galilee, and from the cliffs above pigs just start dropping - and all of the crazed oinking turns to gurgling turns to silence and 2000 bloated waterlogged pigs floating around you. You'd definitely be instagramming that.

**Luke 8:34 When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country.**

So the herdsmen, tragically, did not try to salvage the bacon. But went and told everyone.

And this was a bad day for them. A herd of 2,000 pigs is huge and very costly. In dollars - it costs about \$300 for a decent sized pig today. This is \$600,000 worth of inventory drowning out in the sea.

This would be like Jesus encountering the maniac at a car dealership and casting the demons into 30 cars that all then went and drove off a cliff. That's a serious loss, and you'd probably have some upset car dealers.

And that's what you had in the herdsmen:

**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.**

Afraid?

You'd think, "And they had a party! And they worshipped Jesus!"

But there's fear.

And it doesn't say why, but we can guess based on the next couple of verses:

**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.**

So they hear the story: Jesus shows up on a boat, legion streaks up to him, the oinking, the bubbles.

Of course, we want Jesus to come and save and restore. Who doesn't want that?

But they're so afraid they ask Him to leave.

Because they recognize Jesus's power and of course they love his benefits, he can heal this man. But he is also the Lord - and when he comes to save, he also comes to rule over everything. Over EVERYTHING. And often, the cost is too steep: what would it mean for me if I came to Jesus. I'd lose so much.

So they begged him to depart.

And we will do this too. We'll say, "Of course I want Jesus to change this in my life." But when he offers the remedy for us, we say, "Well, I couldn't do that. I couldn't give that up. I'd be AFRAID to lose that."

*Tim Keller writes: "One of the signs that an object is functioning as an idol is that fear becomes one of the chief characteristics of life. When we center our lives on the idol, we become dependent on it. If our counterfeit god is threatened in any way, our response is complete panic. We do not say, 'What a shame, how difficult,' but rather 'This is the end! There's no hope!'*

Of course, they wanted a solution for Legion. They wanted to stop this guy from haunting their town. But they didn't want a Lord - they didn't want someone to claim every area of their lives, including their livelihood.

**They wanted a savior who would bless, but not one who would rule.**

And in our response to this epidemic, as we call out to God for mercy and deliverance, we have to remember that the Jesus who delivers is the Jesus who rules.

We so want His benefits, but we don't want the cost. We want a nice spirituality, a sense of peace for eternity, guilt lifted. But not a Lord who can send out pigs charging down the cliff, upend our lives, and change everything.

We want his benefits, but not his rule.

I want my business to be blessed by the Lord, but I don't want to follow any of his standards for integrity and honesty, then I wouldn't be competitive.

I want his financial blessings, but not the financial burden of giving and generosity.

I want him to bless my marriage, but not if it means doing things his way and ordering our lives around His priorities.

For years, their land was suffering the consequences of kicking out God. They wanted his benefits but not his rule. Now he shows up, demonstrates his love, his compassion, his power, the results he brings.

It's like he's here giving them another chance to accept his rule.

And they begged him to leave.

As we cry out to God in Corona crisis - do we want His benefits without His rule? When we come out of this crisis and are praising God for what He has done, will we also be coming out with lives that are newly ordered around his priorities, his gospel, and his commandments?

Because that can happen too. We see in this story, there was one guy who loved the idea of Jesus ruling and didn't want to kick him out:

**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.**

And so word spread all over this city, so much so that soon thousands are following Jesus in this region, this is the region where Jesus did the feeding of the 4000.

So that region, though hardened to Jesus, changed as that one guy brought word.

Applications:

Hope for intractable sins. Intractable hardness of heart. You don't have to be that way.

When we emerge from the crisis of a lifetime, we can emerge having been delivered by God, and also having lives arranged around His priorities.

But it won't happen just by making resolutions. God if you rescue us we will do this for you.

It will happen as we believe the gospel and recommit ourselves to it.

For Jesus to rescue the man nobody could bind, Jesus had to be bound:

**Mark 15:1 And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole Council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.**

IF they couldn't contain legion, they certainly couldn't contain Jesus. But he gave Himself for our sins.

This Jesus who showed up to meet with this man that nobody could bind showed that he

was stronger than him, expelling the demons with a word.

But even though Jesus had that kind of strength: stronger than the man nobody could bind, Jesus allowed himself to be bound for us.

Gospel message is the message of his substitution for us.

## **Legion**

### **Luke 8:26-39**

The story of Jesus casting the demons out of Legion (and the pigs out of Gaderra) gives us an opportunity to reflect on His Gospel and what it means to receive deliverance from Jesus. As we cry out to God from our worldwide crisis, are we crying out with a willingness to be like the man at the end of the story, wholly devoted to Christ? Or are we more like the masses who ask Jesus to leave because the cost of his presence is too high?

#### **I. A Hopeless Situation**

Legion was as desperately broken as a person could be. Demons had come to inhabit him, own him, and name him.

What sins threaten to own you? What sins can sometimes define you?

What do you think C.S. Lewis means when he writes, *“Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others... but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever*

*like a machine.”*

Have you seen that play out in your life before?

## **II. Jesus Asks His Name**

Legion had been locked in chains and broken them. He had acted like and been treated like an animal. But Jesus asked His name.

How does that show us the heart of God for people?

What does this say about the image of God in even the most evil and broken people?

How is this a comfort in our present distress.

## **III. The Masses Ask Him to Leave**

The masses asked Jesus to leave after the curing of Legion and the destruction of the pigs.

In what ways do we want the Lord's blessings but not His rule? What demands of Christ on our lives can seem too costly?

## **IV. The Gospel vs. Self-Improvement**

How does the helplessness of Legion remind us of some central truths of the Gospel? Why does the Lordship of Jesus go hand in hand with the life-changing power of Jesus?