

**Hot Topics**  
***Devils & Demons***  
**August 3, 2014**

**PRELUDE – We Are**

**Worship Songs – Great God Who Saves / One Thing Remains**

**Feature – If You're Going Through Hell**

Good morning everyone.

In the Gospel of Luke chapter 8 beginning in verse 26 we read an incredible story. Luke tells us that Jesus and his disciples sail across the lake of Galilee to the region of the Gerasenes ... which is Gentile territory. Jesus has been rejected by the leaders of Israel and now he is going to preach the gospel to those who are not Jewish.

*27 As Jesus was climbing out of the boat, a man who was possessed by demons came out to meet him. For a long time he had been homeless and naked, living in a cemetery outside the town.*

*28 As soon as he saw Jesus, he shrieked and fell down in front of him. Then he screamed, "Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Please, I beg you, don't torture me!" 29 For Jesus had already commanded the evil[b] spirit to come out of him. This spirit had often taken control of the man. Even when he was placed under guard and put in chains and shackles, he simply broke them and rushed out into the wilderness, completely under the demon's power.*

*30 Jesus demanded, "What is your name?"*

*"Legion," he replied, for he was filled with many demons. 31 The demons kept begging Jesus not to send them into the bottomless pit.[c]*

*32 There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby, and the demons begged him to let them enter into the pigs.*

*So Jesus gave them permission. 33 Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the entire herd plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned.*

*34 When the herdsmen saw it, they fled to the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, spreading the news as they ran. 35 People rushed out to see what had happened. A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been freed from the demons. He was sitting at Jesus' feet, fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid.*

*36 Then those who had seen what happened told the others how the demon-possessed man had been healed. 37 And all the people in the region of the Gerasenes begged Jesus to go away and leave them alone, for a great wave of fear swept over them.*

*So Jesus returned to the boat and left, crossing back to the other side of the lake. 38 The man who had been freed from the demons begged to go with him. But Jesus sent him home, saying, 39 "No, go back to your family, and tell them everything God has done for you." So he went all through the town proclaiming the great things Jesus had done for him.*

*Luke 8:27-39 (NLT)*

**Why This Message**

As Shannon said, today we are continuing in our “Hot Topics for Hot Summer” series and we’re going to talk about the devil and his demons. When I thought about the topics to cover for this series, I really didn’t want to do this one but I decided to include it for several reasons:

1. I knew I would be talking about the issue of mental illness ... and the symptoms of mental illness – especially in the more severe cases – often look a lot like what happened in this story (and others like it from the ministry of Jesus).

So, there’s a clash between our modern worldview and the people of Jesus’ day. A lot of what we see as “mental illness” they would have seen as demon possession. And what we see as “mental illness” – a chemical reaction within your brain cells – they would have seen as demonization.

The obvious question is ... who’s right – us or them? Or, is there some kind of middle ground?

2. We haven’t talked about this very much in the past.

In fact, I cannot remember ever doing a sermon like this one (and, quite frankly, given the week I had, I hope I never have to do one again because I think there’s a connection). Whenever we’ve talked about Satan and his minions, it’s always been very brief and in the context of other teaching. It’s not the main point.

And that’s been somewhat intentional on my part because it’s very easy for people to get so focused on what devils and demons do that they miss what Jesus does! That’s actually what happened to the people in the region of the Gerasenes. Instead of being encouraged and emboldened because of the power that Jesus had, they became afraid because of the power the demons had.

In addition, I’ve seen a lot of people through the years who, instead of taking responsibility, will shift the to blame Satan. Every bad thing that happens is because they are being “attacked” when, in reality, it’s their own deliberate choices that are producing the negatives. (By the way, the same thing is often true when it comes to mental illnesses). So, I hesitate to encourage that by talking about this subject.

3. Even though we haven’t talked about it very much, the kind of encounter with the demonic described in the story we just heard was actually pretty normal for Jesus.

It seems incredible and spectacular to us, but in nine of the 30 miracles described in the first three Gospels, Jesus performs an exorcism similar to the one we just read. That’s 30% of his miracles in which he does battle with a demonic being<sup>1</sup> (an angelic spirit who, along with the Satan, rebelled against God at some point before this world was created).

And there were probably many more than that because the first chapter of Mark’s gospel describes the beginning stages of Jesus ministry as “preaching in the synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.” And when Jesus calls his first disciples he tells them to go do the same thing! Mark writes that He appointed the twelve “that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.” (Mark 3:14-15)

Since this was a normal part of Jesus’ ministry, it seems like we should, at some point, give some thought to how

what happened in His day might relate to what's happening in ours.

4. And there's one more reason for deciding to include this topic. (And this will tell you what I think about the question of whether or not Satan and his angels of darkness are for real). *I think it is highly likely that more than a few of us are dealing with demonic forces in our lives.*

Right now, at this very moment, there are some of us in this room and some listening or watching online who are being directly influenced if not harassed and oppressed by demonic beings. Some may even be possessed as was the case in the story we read earlier.

As the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Ephesus ...

*We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*  
*Ephesians 6:12 (NLT)*

And since that's true (at least, I believe that it's true), we need to talk about this. Specifically, we need to talk about how Satan and his minions operate and, more importantly, we need to talk about how to overcome them. And I should say right up front that there's so much that *could be said* that I'm not *going to say* because of time constraints, but I want to give you what I think are probably the most important things for you to know.

### **Limitations of Evil**

But before we get into that, I think it would be wise to talk about a few things that satanic forces cannot do.

**Limit #1. If there is a demonic force at work in your life, it's very unlikely that it is Satan himself. Satan is not "omni" (like God).**

In fact, there are only three times in the Bible where Satan is portrayed as personally interacting with someone.

- Genesis 3: Satan slanders God to man ("Did God really say? Nah.")
- Job 1-2: Satan slanders man to God ("He's only following you because you make his life easy.")
- Matthew 4: Satan slanders the God-man, Jesus ("if you are truly the son of God")

I think this is important to understand because ...

- Satan is not omnipotent – all powerful. As a created being, he has limits. For example, He cannot create ex-nihilo ("out of nothing") as God can.
- He is not omniscient – all knowing. As a created being, his knowledge is limited.
- He is not omnipresent – everywhere at all times. As a created being, he can only be in one place at one time.

Practically speaking, what all this means is that whenever you say "yeah, Satan is really doing a number on me today" you're giving Satan more than his due. You're putting him on a level with God ... which is kind of what he wants. That

was the reason he rebelled – he wanted to be like the Most High.

## **Limit #2. Believers-in-Jesus cannot be “demon possessed” since they are “possessions” of God.**

In Colossians 1:13, Paul writes to believers that God “has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.” If we are delivered from Satan’s kingdom, we certainly cannot be possessed by the evil spirits of that kingdom.

In fact, if you are a believer, your body is *the temple* of the Holy Spirit. You’ve been purchased with a price – the blood that Jesus shed on the cross. And God does not share his temple – nor his property – with demons (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

Believers can only be influenced or oppressed externally but never controlled internally.

## **Limit #3. Demonic activity can cause illness (including mental illness). But not all illness (including mental illness) is demonic in origin.**

For example, Matthew tells us that when Jesus was going around and preaching in the synagogues ...

*People brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them.* Matthew 4:24  
(ESV)

Even though the symptoms may sometimes look the same, some things are just physical (the result of the cursed world in which we live as we talked about last week) and some are spiritual (the result of a demonic spirit).

What this means, practically speaking, is that there are people who have legitimate physical issues (such as chemical imbalances in the brain) that can and should be addressed with the right medication. But when normal medicine and therapy do not result in a cure, it’s possible that these symptoms could point to a demonic influence.

## **How the Demonic Operates**

With those limitations in mind, let’s talk about what demonic forces *can* do.

And, again, there’s so much in the scripture – especially in the writings of the New Testament – that it’s impossible to do this justice in the time we have so I’m going to grossly oversimplify and just share four ways that they operate.

### **1. Demons appear as “angels of light” in order to deceive us.**

In fact, in the scripture, that’s exactly what Satan himself is called – an angel of light ... which means that a key strategy of demonic activity is to disguise itself as anything but evil.

One of the most common ways this happens is thru what I would call “generic spirituality.” A lot of people believe that any kind of contact from the spirit world is benign and even friendly. And a lot of people – Christians even – are misled or, should I say, *led away* from Christ who is the way, the truth and the life.

This happened repeatedly when Christianity began to spread in the first-century world. Often Jesus or the Apostles

would run into someone who was able to tell the future or communicate with the dead (which leads people not to Christ but to idolatry) and it was a demon at work.

The Book of Acts tells us that there was a young woman who was a fortune-teller was following the Apostle Paul around and disrupting his ministry day after day.

Finally, he got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And instantly it left her.

### **I think the application here is pretty clear.**

*Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

*By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. 1 John 4:1-2 (ESV)*

If you’re having experiences with the spirit world or you’re around people who are inviting you into “spiritual experiences” you better be careful.

## **2. Demons lie and deceive us in order to destroy us.**

Jesus once said that ...

*Satan was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.*  
*John 8:44 (NLT)*

And he said that Satan was a thief who came only to steal, kill and destroy.

Demons tempt us – and temptation is a form of lying: “oh, this is no big deal.”

- “Did God really say you would die if you ate that fruit? Nah, go ahead”
- “Are you really going to hurt you if you sleep in instead of going to church today? It’s only one Sunday.”
- “If you take that money, no one will know. Besides, that guy has way more than he needs and, let’s face it: God really hasn’t been coming through for you lately in the finance department so He has no right to be upset with you.”

“It’s no big deal” (whatever “it” might be), whispers a demon. But in the end, there is always death and destruction in some form.

## **3. Demons accuse and condemn in order to discourage us from drawing near to God.**

In fact, one of the recurring titles for Satan in the scripture is “the accuser.”

Here’s how it works. Have you ever sinned and then had the thought go through your head: “You’re not a Christian. Who are you kidding? A Christian would never do what you just did. God doesn’t want anything else to do with a loser

like you.”

I’m pretty sure you *have* had thoughts like that, because I have.

But you know what? Not every thought that goes through your head originates with you. That could very well be the work of a demon. Why? Because Satan and his minions are accusing and condemning.

And when you believe that kind of stuff to be true, what will you do? You will avoid God. You’ll do what Adam and Eve did when they sinned in the garden: they ran and hid from God ... and so will you.

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Now, notice with these first three activities that all of the action takes place in the mind. But, with this next one, the activity can begin to produce physical manifestations.

**4. Demons take “territory” and create strongholds when we repeatedly give into their “light”, their lies and their accusations.**

And this is where they begin to really impact us and inflict pain. This is where oppression and even possession (for those who are not in Christ) come into play. This is where you start losing control of your emotions; control of your body; control of your mind ... and you start doing and thinking and feeling things that are not “you.” This is where things start to happen to you that just don’t make a lot of sense.

**For example, Paul writes:**

*Don’t sin by letting anger control you. Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. Ephesians 4:26-27 (NLT)*

What’s Paul saying? If you don’t deal with your anger correctly – if you allow it to fester and become rage – you are actually opening the door to demonic forces. It’s quite possible that the demon-possessed man we read about at the beginning of this message had done something like that. In fact, this – giving a foothold to the devil because of unresolved anger – is one of the more common ways in which demonic oppression manifests itself in mental illnesses of anxiety and depression.

As another example, the Apostle James writes:

*Jealousy and selfishness are not [products of] God’s kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. James 3:15-16 (NLT)*

In other words, keep giving in to jealousy and selfish ambition and you can expect demonic forces to bring disorder and evil into your life.

One more example ... and I see this far too often in believers. If you habitually listen to demonic accusations whenever you sin and agree with them instead of reminding yourself of the gospel – of the good news that God has paid for every sin – eventually, you are going to give some demon a foothold and that demon, if not turned out, will turn it into a stronghold over you.



spiritual warfare by believing truth about very specific things. As Paul wrote:

*Put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.*

Then he goes on to explain what you wear:

*Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.*

Paul is saying "you're in a war, there are demonic influences, things are happening to you, and you need to stand in the truth that you are covered by God's righteousness not your own," because if you try to get into some kind of shooting match with a demon, you're done. You stand in the righteousness that Jesus gave you on the cross.

Then he goes on to say:

*For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.*

You walk around in peace. Satan is telling you what a loser you are and you say, "God's already taken care of me. I'm in peace, baby."

Then he says:

*In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.\**

Here's what's going to happen. Bad things are going to happen. Satan's minions are going to be shooting at you but you hold up the shield of faith and you say, "I know what Jesus did on the cross. I know God is for me. Go away. You're not messing with me. I know what the truth is. I have faith that the cross says no matter what happens now, God is for me."

Then Paul says:

*Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.  
Ephesians 6:13-17 (NLT)*

And when Satan and his demons send lies to you, you come back with the truth of what the scripture says.

That's how discipleship works. It's an active approach to learning and living more and more out of God's truth that sends the demons running.

But sometimes the oppression is too strong. The stronghold is too deep. And in that case you need deliverance which, again, simply means confronting whatever demon is present and impacting your life.

And that's just what it sounds like. You do what Paul did when he cast out the spirit from the fortune-teller. No amount of truth and discipleship was going to get rid of that demon so Paul told it to leave, just as Jesus did the demon-possessed man in the Gerasenes.

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Now, at this point, a very practical question might be which strategy should you choose? If you think your problem



might be demonic in origin should you go for discipleship or deliverance?

Most often the answer is discipleship. So much of the New Testament is about thinking and believing truth. “Be transformed,” Paul wrote, “by the renewing of your mind.”

**But if you’re in doubt, cast it out. But know that deliverance without discipleship (learning and living in truth) is not a long-term solution.**

Jesus once said that if you get rid of a demon and you don’t put God’s Spirit in its place, it will come back and bring seven more spirits with it!

### Response

Now, we’ve gone through a lot of material in this message. And a lot of it has been details and minutia, and that’s OK ... but I want to make sure that the big picture is clear on this because when you get into the details and minutia it can sound like the outcome of this demonic battle is in doubt. You might win or you might not win.

But there is no doubt. The victor is already determined.

According to the New Testament, the central thing Jesus did was drive out the “prince of this world” (Jn 12:31).

- He came to “destroy the works of the devil” (I Jn 3:8).
- He came to “destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” in order to “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb. 2:14-15).
- Jesus lived, died and rose again to establish a new reign that would ultimately “put all his enemies under his feet” (I Cor 15:25).
- Though “the strong man” was “fully armed,” one who was “stronger than he” had finally arrived who could attack and overpower him” (Lk 11:21-22).
- While the cosmic “thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy,” Jesus came into the world to vanquish the thief so that all “may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).
- Jesus “disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them...” (Col 2:15).

In a word, Jesus came to win the cosmic war that had been raging since time began and to set Satan’s captives free (Lk 4:18; Eph 4:8).<sup>ii</sup>

**And because of that, here’s the point/payoff ...**

*The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 1 John 4:4 (NET)*

In light of this big picture truth, this morning what we would like to do is to offer everyone an opportunity to receive a spoken blessing specific to this issue; a declaration of protection. So, in just a minute, I'm going to invite you to get up from your seat and walk to where one of our pastors are standing. They're not going to do anything weird; they're just going to speak this simple declaration over you that comes right out of the scripture. Here's what we're going to say:

Jesus is greater than Satan.  
In his name we declare deliverance  
And command any demonic influence to depart.  
We bless you with God's peace and the light of truth.

If you would like to receive that blessing over you, we'd love to give it to you. In just a minute, come to one of the pastors, and then after we're finished, please have a seat because we have one more thing to do this morning as part of this service that I think will be very encouraging to you.

### **Response – One Thing Remains (instrumental)**

<Prayer>

### **Feature – Greater (Mercy Me)**

### **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> See Matthew 9:32-34; 12:22-24; Mark 1:21-27; 3:11-12; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29; Luke 8:2-3; 13:10-17

<sup>ii</sup> <http://reknew.org/2008/01/the-christus-victor-view-of-the-atonement/>