

**Alex Cain:**

[01:00:06:16 - 01:00:07:14]

Pray with me, would you?

[01:00:12:06 - 01:00:13:00]

Our Father in Heaven,

[01:00:14:19 - 01:00:29:06]

we ask that you would bless the preaching of your word with the anointing of your spirit to the end that we may love Jesus more deeply and follow him more closely than when we first began. In the name of the Father, of the Son, the Holy Spirit, amen.

[01:00:34:19 - 01:00:40:07]

Evil is as endlessly puzzling as it is disturbing.

[01:00:41:22 - 01:00:43:23]

Philosophers debates the problem of evil.

[01:00:45:10 - 01:00:47:12]

Artists grapple with its reality.

[01:00:48:19 - 01:00:51:22]

Even children wonder and eventually ask that question.

[01:00:53:04 - 01:00:55:10]

Why do bad things happen to good people?

[01:00:56:22 - 01:01:09:11]

And somehow, I don't know about you, but oftentimes Paul gets quoted in response to this question. When he says in Romans, there is no one righteous, no one who does good, not even one.

[01:01:10:23 - 01:01:12:22]

And somehow that doesn't put us at ease.

[01:01:14:13 - 01:01:18:02]

Like, oh, okay, well, as long as Susie deserved the illness.

[01:01:19:04 - 01:01:28:22]

Sure, she's been a nurse for 20 years, volunteers down at the Salsbacher, but since she's not really a good person, I guess that clears everything up for me.

[01:01:30:03 - 01:01:48:23]

No, friends, of course not. The reason we are uneasy with that answer, first of all, especially, is because Paul is not answering and dealing with that question. Why do bad things happen to good people in that passage? So it's contextually irresponsible to use it to answer such.

[01:01:51:20 - 01:01:55:00]

Evil, we find over and over again,

[01:01:56:04 - 01:01:57:23]

is truly a puzzling thing.

[01:01:59:11 - 01:02:03:04]

And it's puzzling to us, I think, at least in part because it disturbs us so.

[01:02:04:05 - 01:02:04:13]

I mean--

[01:02:04:13 - 01:02:17:13]

Eventually, we get to the point where we have to turn off the news and close social media because we can't bear to see another shooting, another war, another genocide.

[01:02:21:17 - 01:02:23:07]

And it's always death.

[01:02:24:13 - 01:02:36:07]

Evil always leads to death, whether it's the literal loss of life death or the death of someone's humanity, the fullness of their being due to addiction, a wrongful conviction, or being without a home.

[01:02:38:01 - 01:02:40:11]

What are we to do with evil?

[01:02:41:19 - 01:02:46:20]

Or better yet, for our question this morning, what does God do with evil?

[01:02:47:22 - 01:02:56:07]

That's what we see in our gospel reading today. We witness and encounter with evil Jesus and the man with many demons.

[01:02:57:22 - 01:03:15:08]

Now at this point, if you're trying to connect to thoughts, you may be thinking about your own life, about the evil that you've seen in the world, about the horrible things you've come across in your own life. Perhaps you have in the past or now battling the effects of literal demonic forces.

[01:03:17:00 - 01:03:21:08]

But some of you are sitting there saying, "I certainly don't have demons possessing me."

[01:03:23:08 - 01:03:23:21]

What about that?

[01:03:25:03 - 01:03:37:20]

To which I say, "Great! I'm glad that you may not be possessed by demons." And if you are, if that is your story, I'd love to direct you to Fathers Charlie and Billy here. They would love to speak with you after the service about that.

[01:03:40:11 - 01:03:48:07]

Yes, friends, demons may not be literal demons, may not be your personal problem this morning.

[01:03:50:05 - 01:03:54:17]

But that doesn't mean that you're not affected by evil and therefore still need help.

[01:03:56:01 - 01:04:25:15]

Let's take another look at our passage. It tells us that Jesus and his disciples arrive on the shore of the Gerasenes, a Gentile region. And there they encounter something out of a horror movie, a deranged naked man sprinting towards them from out of a tomb. When he gets to Jesus, he falls before him and screams at the top of his lungs, "What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High? Please do not torment me."

[01:04:27:11 - 01:04:35:04]

Then we immediately learn that this is actually a response to the commands Jesus had just given the evil spirits to come out of the man.

[01:04:36:11 - 01:04:45:15]

You see, Luke has rearranged the order of events in this narrative as opposed to telling us how they happened in real-time in chronological order.

[01:04:46:20 - 01:04:49:05]

And this happens several places throughout the whole passage.

[01:04:50:15 - 01:05:07:02]

Here Luke has rearranged the initial exchange between Jesus and this demon-possessed man in order to foreground this interaction. He wants this cosmic clash front and center, right in our faces.

[01:05:08:10 - 01:05:29:13]

And as it unfolds, we're told that the demons are demanded to give their name by Jesus. And interestingly, the demons give more of a stand-in name. It replies, "Legion," Luke tells us because many evil spirits had entered him.

[01:05:31:01 - 01:05:46:02]

Legion was a military designation for a group of Roman soldiers consisting of somewhere between five and six thousand. We might think of a battalion of soldiers, though our battalions only get as big as a thousand soldiers.

[01:05:47:04 - 01:05:51:12]

So this is five to six battalions of demons.

[01:05:52:16 - 01:05:53:04]

The point?

[01:05:54:14 - 01:06:18:00]

There are indeed a lot of demons here, and thus the stakes are high. And this term furthermore may even indicate that they're an organized enemy. They're not Tasmanian devils, as it were, that iconic Looney Tunes character who's a whirlwind of destruction without a thought or a cause. No, not Tasmanian devils, but tactical devils.

[01:06:19:06 - 01:06:25:17]

Furthermore, this emphasis on names underlines the cosmic clash aspect of this interaction.

[01:06:26:21 - 01:06:35:19]

One commentator explains that the idea was that if you had the name of a person that gave you power over that individual.

[01:06:37:16 - 01:06:44:22]

And so we see in real time, putting the events back into chronological order, what happens is that Jesus and the demoniac meet.

[01:06:46:01 - 01:06:53:08]

Jesus commands the evil spirits to come out, and they reply by naming Jesus son of the Most High.

[01:06:54:22 - 01:07:22:01]

Then Jesus demands their name in turn, and he gets it. To the original audience, the picture is clear. This is a clash of cosmic powers. It's a conflict. The evil spirits don't immediately come

out at the first command. They even try to use Jesus' name as a counter to that very command. But as we quickly see, it's not exactly an even match-up.

[01:07:23:03 - 01:07:30:03]

The demons use Jesus' name not as a full frontal assault against him, but as a means to negotiate.

[01:07:31:15 - 01:07:36:10]

There's no real fight here, friends. It's over before it even began.

[01:07:37:13 - 01:07:40:20]

It's as if they're armed with silly string against what?

[01:07:41:23 - 01:07:43:11]

All the power in the universe?

[01:07:44:20 - 01:07:45:11]

It's laughable.

[01:07:46:23 - 01:08:02:11]

In the narrative, they beg Jesus. They beg him three times over. The first is after they use Jesus' name. They say, "Please don't torment me," which is ironic given that all they've done is torment this man in the community.

[01:08:04:02 - 01:08:15:14]

The second is after Jesus demands and receives their name. They say, "Please do not order us back into the abyss," which seems to be the place where evil spirits are bound.

[01:08:17:17 - 01:08:21:14]

The third is after we're told a large herd of pigs is somewhere nearby.

[01:08:22:18 - 01:08:26:14]

They look over and they say, "Please, let us enter these pigs instead."

[01:08:27:16 - 01:08:36:06]

This request seems to be the best alternative the demons had to not being sent back to the abyss, so Jesus grants their requests.

[01:08:37:10 - 01:08:43:01]

And ironically, to their own destruction, the pigs are driven off the cliff and drown.

[01:08:46:05 - 01:08:53:23]

So, friends, this is the great conflict between God and these, we'll call them anti-God powers.

[01:08:55:02 - 01:08:59:10]

One of the things this narrative confronts us with is the reality of evil.

[01:09:00:19 - 01:09:19:19]

This picture of a man oppressed by thousands of evil spirits is horrific. He's been cut off from community, stripped naked, and made vulnerable to the elements in all others. The text says that he no longer lives in a home, but in tombs, in a cemetery.

[01:09:21:06 - 01:09:24:13]

The place of death has become his home.



[01:09:26:19 - 01:09:32:13]

These demons have seized him and driven him into deserted and desolate places many times.

[01:09:34:00 - 01:09:42:01]

The text is showing us, simply puts, that evil is real and it's oppressive in all its forms.

[01:09:44:22 - 01:09:48:20]

In my opinion, one of the best movies to come out last year was Robert Eggers' *Nosferatu*.

[01:09:50:06 - 01:09:58:05]

It's a remake of a 1922 silent horror film by the same name and is based on the original Dracula story.

[01:09:59:10 - 01:10:22:11]

It's not a family film, so we won't be showing it as part of our Family Flicks and Parenting Fixes series, but it's a striking film that grapples with evil from many angles. One character, a professor and scientist, is trying to get the people to see the reality of evil. He's trying to get them to deal with the real problem here.

[01:10:24:14 - 01:10:31:17]

But he's up against an audience that exists in a post-enlightenment world, much like us, and no longer believe in monsters.

[01:10:33:07 - 01:10:57:18]

He says to them, "I have seen things in this world that would make Isaac Newton cower in fear. We are not so enlightened as we are blinded by the gaseous light of science. I have wrestled with the devil as Jacob wrestled the angel and Peniel, and I tell you that if we are to tame darkness, we must first face that it exists.

[01:10:59:18 - 01:11:06:17]

Dear friends, if evil is to be dealt with in our own lives, we must first face that it exists."

[01:11:11:02 - 01:11:13:01]

We all live in a fallen world.

[01:11:14:05 - 01:11:29:03]

Whether that's the effects of that fall that we're dealing with, whether that's the effects of literal demonic forces in our lives that we're dealing with, we do not yet experience the full range of the freedom offered to us in Jesus.

[01:11:30:05 - 01:11:37:22]

We still struggle with addictions, broken relationships, pride or envy of others, keeping up with the Joneses.

[01:11:39:13 - 01:11:43:13]

And sadly, we find ourselves complicit in the mistreatment of others as well.

[01:11:45:16 - 01:11:57:20]

Paul, contemplating this situation, says, "I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand."

[01:11:59:11 - 01:12:13:20]

And what's interesting is that your and my response to evil in our own lives, the evil that seeks to master us, to oppress us and torment us, however slowly, is much like the response to these evil spirits in our passage.

[01:12:15:06 - 01:12:22:04]

Look at this passage in verse 29 just before the halfway point in your bulletin. It's that sentence that's in parentheses.

[01:12:23:21 - 01:12:48:04]

It says, "For many times it had seized him, the demons 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 wilds." This is an ostensibly strong attempt by the townspeople at restraining this evil of controlling it.

[01:12:49:04 - 01:12:55:08]

Many times the demons had seized this man and made him do what? The text doesn't tell us.

[01:12:56:09 - 01:13:06:09]

But we know that whatever the demons were making him do, it wasn't pleasant because the townspeople's solution was to bind him with chains both in hands and feet.

[01:13:07:17 - 01:13:21:15]

But binding him, they thought, wasn't enough. Apparently, he also needed to be guarded. But this strong solution actually reveals itself as a feeble attempt at conquering and controlling the evil.

[01:13:22:20 - 01:13:47:08]

The man breaks the bonds and is yet again driven into the wilds. The original language of this text has the sense that this was not a one-time occurrence but happened over and over again. No matter how many times they chained him up, no matter how many guards were stationed, he broke the chains like a couple of sticks and evil controlled him.

[01:13:48:21 - 01:13:54:13]

We come up with all sorts of ways you and I to restrain and control the evil in our lives.

[01:13:55:14 - 01:13:57:14]

Sometimes it's as simple as hiding.

[01:13:58:22 - 01:14:06:10]

Other times we build elaborate systems or structures and seek to manipulate the right people around us so that things will go smoothly.

[01:14:07:20 - 01:14:15:10]

There are endless ways, creative ways, that a decent amount of money can be used in attempts to control and restrain evil.

[01:14:17:04 - 01:14:35:21]

But eventually, if we are to be free from its grasp, you and I have to come to that same place of Paul. I want to do good, but evil seems to always be present and it seeks to rule me.

[01:14:37:12 - 01:14:39:01]

And what does he say next?

[01:14:41:01 - 01:14:47:07]

So I need to try even harder. I need to dig in my heels, grit my teeth. It's hard work that rescues us, right?

[01:14:48:17 - 01:14:49:11]

No, friends.

[01:14:50:13 - 01:14:59:23]

He cries out in response to that reality, that situation, "Oh wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?"

[01:15:02:17 - 01:15:08:11]

And our passage plainly shows the answer to Paul's question and the outcome of this so-called conflict.

[01:15:09:20 - 01:15:45:19]

Ironically, it's found in the voice of the demons themselves, for it is Jesus, son of the Most High. Jesus arrives on the scene and in a word liberates this man from the oppression of evil. The herders who were in charge of the pigs saw the whole thing and they ran to tell the people and when they get back, they find an amazing reversal of the situation. The man who had demons has them no longer. He was naked, but now he is clothed. For the demons had fallen at Jesus' feet to beg for their situation, he now sits as a disciple.

[01:15:47:00 - 01:15:49:10]

He was seized and out of control.

[01:15:50:18 - 01:15:54:03]

But friends, now he is at peace and in his right mind.

[01:15:55:13 - 01:15:57:19]

And how do the townspeople respond to this?

[01:16:00:01 - 01:16:01:17]

Now they are the ones who are seized.

[01:16:02:18 - 01:16:05:01]

They're seized with great fear.

[01:16:06:09 - 01:16:32:04]

And before we pass any judgment on them, let's remember that this man has been a terror to himself and the community for quite some time. They tried to stop it with chains over and over and this human being snapped them over and over. They had no power over this evil and then all of a sudden this strange man shows up, has one conversation with the demon-possessed man and he's back to normal.

[01:16:34:01 - 01:16:47:13]

I find it quite reasonable that they would be afraid of such power, especially given that in the event of conquering these evil spirits, it resulted in the destruction of their pig herd.

[01:16:48:19 - 01:16:59:02]

So in light of all of this, seized with great fear, they request that he kindly leave their region to which he obliges.

[01:17:00:19 - 01:17:36:04]

But Jesus does not leave them alone. Jesus never leaves us alone, friends. The man who was once enslaved to evil begs to come with Jesus, which is a natural response for one who has been liberated from such oppression. But this time when begged, Jesus does not grant the request. He completes the man's restoration by sending him home, giving him a job. Jesus restores his dignity as one made in the image of God and commissions him to tell everyone what God has done for him.

[01:17:37:04 - 01:17:52:07]

And if you notice what Luke says in that last line after Jesus has told him, "Tell everyone what God has done for you," Luke says, "So he went away proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him."

[01:17:53:09 - 01:18:02:21]

It's a not so subtle declaration that Jesus himself is God. And what I find truly fascinating here is the content of this man's proclamation.

[01:18:04:03 - 01:18:36:16]

The gospel that he preached was not, "Hey, everybody, I realized that I was in the tombs. I was in a horrible situation, a horrible life. So I got up and I asked Jesus to free me from this way of living." No, he was completely and utterly lost. He had no control over his life. There was nothing that he could do to better himself. His only hope was that this Jewish man would sail his boat across to the Gentile city and tell the evil to get lost.

[01:18:38:03 - 01:18:48:01]

He didn't earn that freedom. He literally did nothing but come into contact with the God who made him and loved him.

[01:18:49:23 - 01:18:56:06]

And what's so wonderful about that proclamation is that that's your story too.

[01:18:57:14 - 01:19:10:02]

You've done nothing to earn your relationship with God. There is no way that you could ever have victory over these anti-God powers that sought and still seek to oppress you.

[01:19:11:04 - 01:19:22:17]

Thanks be to God that Jesus has come. And as Colossians says, "Disarmed the rulers and authority," these anti-God powers, "and he put them to open shame, triumphing over them."

[01:19:24:01 - 01:19:38:05]

And just like that Gentile city, he has not left you and I alone, but has given us his word, his messengers, and his spirit to proclaim to us the work that he has done on our behalf.

[01:19:40:01 - 01:19:53:09]

Now, it's not recorded in Luke's gospel, but in Mark. As Mark tells this story, the newly liberated man proclaims this good news in the city, and they receive the message and marvel at God's work.

[01:19:55:12 - 01:20:08:06]

Friends, how appropriate is it for us to marvel at God's love and his work to free us from sin, death, and the devil?

[01:20:09:20 - 01:20:10:01]

Amen.

[01:20:10:23 - 01:20:23:19]