

The Gadarene Demoniac

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus has power and authority over evil spirits.

I've had several jobs over the years. Some jobs I loved. Others, not so much. But there is one thing all of these jobs had in common—there was always a boss. Either I had someone in authority over me or I was in authority over someone else. Like it or not, authority exists, but authority is limited. There isn't a single person on Planet Earth who possesses *all* authority.

? What types of bosses (authoritarian, democratic, servant-like, etc.) have you experienced in your workplace?

? What was it like to work for different kinds of bosses?

In contrast to bosses with limited authority, Jesus has *all* authority. He didn't have an impressive appearance (Isa. 53:2). He didn't have all the luxuries you'd expect to come with such authority (such as a corner office). Yet He had and still has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18).



Voices from Church History

"We must wage war against this enemy with an understanding and application of Kingdom Authority... 'For the battle is not yours, but God's' [2 Chron. 20:15]."¹

—Adrian Rogers (1931-2005)

In this session we witness the power and authority of Jesus Christ over evil spirits. Jesus showed His care and concern for a man who was isolated from society and controlled by evil spirits. After delivering the man from his bondage, Jesus called him to testify to the goodness of God. As those who trust in the authority and power of Jesus and who have been delivered from our bondage to sin, we too are called to testify to the goodness of God.

1. Jesus cared about the demoniac who was isolated from society (Mark 5:1-8).

¹ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. ³ He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, ⁴ for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. ⁶ And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. ⁷ And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." ⁸ For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"

People were fearful of this man for obvious reasons. First, they were afraid because he had incredible strength. They tried everything they could to restrain him from harming others. They put chains around his hands and feet, but nothing they tried could overcome him. The shackles were no match for his strength.

Second, they were afraid because of his self-mutilating behavior. He was an outcast. He didn't fit in. And since they couldn't control him, they banished him. He was completely ostracized from culture and society.

Wherever you live, in whatever city or area God has placed you, there are people like this demoniac—men and women who are created to be in a loving and worshipful relationship with God but who suffer under the power and reign of sin. They are in desperate need of the healing power found only in the gospel. The demoniac serves as the embodiment of the damaging effects sin can cause, and this causes us to ask, "How can we who have experienced the gospel share it with those on the fringes of society?"



What are some reasons we tend to shy away from serving people who may be labeled “hard cases”?



How do Jesus’ actions challenge that tendency?

Unlike those who tried to bind the man and ultimately cast him out to live among the dead, Jesus met this man on the shore and engaged him. Jesus didn’t turn His back on this needy sinner. In fact, it was for people such as this that Jesus came in the first place.

The Savior cares for sinners. Jesus was moved to the core when He saw the effects of sin on people (Matt. 9:36). If that was His heart attitude toward those trapped in the bondage of sin, then what should we feel toward those who are in the same condition today? Since we have the Spirit of Christ, shouldn’t our hearts break over the sin that plagues our family, friends, and coworkers? Shouldn’t we feel a deep anguish over the sin that ravages countries and the world at large? When what breaks the heart of Jesus doesn’t break our hearts, there’s a problem. An area of our heart that does not break over sin is an area of our heart that isn’t conformed to Christ.



Voices from Church History

“Unbelief about the existence and personality of Satan has often proved the first step to unbelief about God.”²

–J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)



When was the last time your heart broke over the consequences of sin? How did you respond?

2. Jesus confronted the evil spirits in control of the demoniac (Mark 5:9-17).

⁹ And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” ¹⁰ And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, ¹² and they begged him, saying, “Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.” ¹³ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

¹⁴ The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ¹⁶ And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. ¹⁷ And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region.

One of the main truths we glean from this story is that all demonic forces, including the Devil, are subject to the power of Christ. No demonic spirit has the final word. The Devil and his demonic forces are subject to One who is much greater and much more powerful. Note the significance of these statements in verses 10 and 13: “And he begged him earnestly” and “he gave them permission.”

While we don’t often see today the same kind of demonic possession witnessed in the New Testament, we still believe that Satan opposes our mission in every way He can—including through demon possession. Because evil stems from the heart (Mark 7:20-23), we should take care not to give too much credit to demonic work, but neither should we rule out demonic influence in all circumstances.



Voices from Church History

“The helpfulness of Jesus is strikingly contrasted with the heartlessness of demons and men.”³

—William Hendriksen
(1911-1982)

The Bible clearly delineates the difference between demonic *possession* and demonic *oppression*. While a believer cannot be controlled by a demon to the point that they are unable to obey God, we are still encouraged to resist the Devil because our “adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8; cf. Jas. 4:7).

From time to time, believers can be susceptible to demonic oppression (cf. Luke 13:16). By this I mean that there are seasons of heightened spiritual attack that challenge our faith in God. These seasons are often characterized by a lack of faith in the truth revealed to us in God’s Word. The key to fighting this spiritual battle is to expose the lies of the enemy to the truth of God and by faith believe and act on the truth.



In your spiritual journey of following Jesus, what have you found helpful in resisting the schemes of the Devil?

The man in Mark 5 wasn’t merely a maniac but a demoniac. He was possessed by devilish, demonic spirits—a legion of them, in fact. But by the power and authority of His word, Jesus delivered this man from all the torment and destructive behavior that once characterized his life. Therefore, we learn this powerful truth: The power of Jesus Christ changes lives.

There are a few things to notice about this change. First, it was radical. The text says that the man was “sitting there, clothed and in his right mind” (Mark 5:15). His life had completely changed when he met Jesus. He did a complete 180-degree turn. What once marked his life—demonic possession, hostility, and rage—was all gone, and his life was completely different because of Jesus.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

33. Demons

Demons are angelic beings who sinned against God and now continually work evil in the world today (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1; Luke 10:18). Demons oppose God and seek to destroy His work, as seen in the Bible’s description of Satan, the head of demons, who seeks to “steal, kill, and destroy.” Though demons have power, they are limited by God’s control and can only act within the constraints of what God permits. In the end, all of the demons will be cast into the lake of fire, for which it was originally created.

When a person realizes his or her inadequacy apart from Christ and then repents and trusts in Christ, that person is given new life in Christ that is remarkably different than the old life. That doesn't mean that past struggles or even consequences of past sins go away. But a new heart changes the way a person thinks and behaves.

Second, this change was evident to others. When you and I gave our lives to Christ, something changed inside us. This change inside of us also changes us on the outside. What Christ has done on the inside of my life begins to spill out of my life on the outside. And when it does, people notice. When fellow believers begin to see our walk with Jesus change the way we live, they rejoice!

What are some radical changes you've seen in the lives of people who trust in Christ?	What changes would you point to in your own life since you became a follower of Jesus?

3. Jesus called the man to testify to God's goodness toward him (Mark 5:18-20).

¹⁸ As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. ¹⁹ And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." ²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

All followers of Christ have a mandate—to tell those who don't know God about what He has done for them. Jesus said, "Go home to your friends and tell them." Therein lies the power of a personal testimony. While God does use seminary-trained preachers who proclaim the Word of God to see people come to faith in Christ, the Great Commission is not reserved for preachers alone. Rather, the Great Commission is for all Christians to take the good news of Jesus to new people and places.

With access restricted for pastors and ministry professionals in many countries around the world, it is even more imperative today that we heed Scripture and unleash people like teachers, businessmen, medical professionals, and construction workers. When all disciples of Jesus grab hold of the mandate—to report what God has done—the mission of God is advanced to unreached peoples and places in powerful ways (Rom. 15:20-21). Is your "yes" on the table?

As Jesus followers, we have a mission. This mission is local, but at the same time it is also global. Jesus wanted this man to share what the Lord had done for him at home but also throughout the cities of the Decapolis, which was a conglomeration of cities largely under Greek influence. So this former demoniac did just that, going about the region telling people about Jesus had done in His life by showing him mercy and freeing him from his demonic possession.

Isn't it amazing that God invites us into His mission of seeing His kingdom expand to the ends of the earth? God doesn't need us, but He invites us to share in accomplishing His global mission. Each member of His body has certain jobs, skills, and passions that He desires to be used as platforms to engage the culture and the world with the gospel of Christ.



How might God want to use you, based on your unique wiring as a Jesus follower, to accomplish the mission locally and globally?



How are you engaging right now in spreading the gospel in your community, city, and among the nations?

Conclusion

Deliverance from sin always—eventually—leads to a deployment into mission. Jesus calls us to leave the wrappings of sin to pursue the worship of Him among people who don't know God at all. Through our own salvation, we come to realize that forgiveness leads to freedom. And freedom leads disciples of Jesus to go to the ends of the earth so that all people may know and fear Him. The reason why we can fearlessly forge ahead in the mission is because He has sovereign power and authority over all things, including evil spirits. God's sovereignty doesn't negate our going—it empowers it!



Voices from the Church

“‘Tell them how much the *Lord* has done for you,’ commands Jesus. The man then went out and told ‘how much *Jesus* had done for him.’ For this man, the Lord and Jesus are one and the same.”⁴

—James R. Edwards

CHRIST CONNECTION: In this account we see Jesus' compassion for those held captive to the Evil One as well as His confrontation with the dehumanizing powers of evil. With one word, Jesus delivered the demon-possessed man. This account points forward to the end of the Gospels when Jesus would give His life on the cross, appearing for a time to have lost His battle against evil only to rise triumphantly, having defeated sin, Satan, and the grave forever.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to report, like the former demoniac, how much the Lord has done for us and how He has shown us mercy.

1. Who are the people isolated in our community, and how can we as a group/ church reach them with compassion and the gospel?

2. How should Jesus' absolute power over evil spirits affect our perspective of our mission?

3. What message can you share of what the Lord has done for you and how He has shown you mercy?

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