

DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE DEVIL?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

Do you believe in the devil, in demons, and demon possession? According to a recent Gallup Poll taken among 1,236 adults and reported last week in local papers, more than one-half believe in the devil (or 55%, with 8% not sure and 37% who don't believe the evil one exists). One in ten claim to have talked to the devil. Some 49% believe that people are at times possessed by the devil, and 22% are not sure, leaving 35% of the population who do not believe in demonic possession.

Ever since the days of Adam and Eve, each new generation has struggled with the question, "Do you believe in the devil and the spiritual beings called demons?" Of course, if we had the opportunity to do a Gallup Poll with Adam and Eve, their son, Cain, Job, Saul, the prophets, Jesus, the disciples, Judas and Paul, they would all confirm that Satan and his demons are alive and well, and are allowed for a season to bring temptation, destruction and death to the lives of believers and non-believers. Once, the apostle Peter's faith was weakened by the influence of Satan. At Jesus' trial, the apostle denied he was a disciple of the Lord. Yet some years later, an older and wiser Peter wrote about the reality of Satan when he warned the second generation of Christians in Asia Minor, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world" (1 Peter 5: 8-9).

In our studies in Luke's gospel, today we come to chapter 8, verses 26-39. Here we will walk alongside our Lord as he teaches his budding disciples another lesson from the course called "spiritual realities." He has just taught them that he is the Master over the devilish forces of nature, and now he is about to teach them that he is the Master over evil forces, forces that are present, personal, invisible and deadly.

In the beginning of our Lord's ministry, Peter, Andrew, John and James were confronted with a demoniac in the synagogue of Capernaum. The disciples also witnessed Jesus' casting out seven demons from Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2). So the spiritual battle between God and Satan over the lives and souls of men and women went on in the days of our Lord's ministry, in the days of the early church, and it has and will continue to rage in every generation until the Lord comes again and Satan and all his angels will be cast into the bottomless pit forever (Rev. 20:10). In this modern day, we need more than ever to be spiritually aware of the activities of the flesh and the devil. We must not be bound by fear of the presence and power of the evil one, but have a clear understanding that our power to defeat the devil and all of this demonic influence resides in the strength of the Lord's might, not our power and strength.

Our story today is a beautiful illustration of the theme from Luke 5:31-32, that it is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. This tale will remind us also of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 61 concerning the ministry of the Messiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives..." This story is another pearl of salvation being placed on the string of redemption, as we have often described these incidents which Luke relates in his gospel..

The question we want to ask today is, "Do you believe in the devil ?"

I. A man named 'Legion' did!, Luke 8: 26-28

And they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He had come out onto the land, He was met by a certain man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. And seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice,

'What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me.'

The disciples had just come through a life-threatening experience on the sea of Galilee. A devilish gale-force wind had almost taken their lives, and in a moment of weakness they thought that Jesus had forsaken them. Awakened in a panic, they cried out, "Save us or we perish!" The Lord spoke to the demonic forces behind the murderous winds and said, "Be muzzled" and the winds and the waves were stilled. The Lord then rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith in him and all that he had taught them by way of word and miracles. They responded with humble hearts and were in awe of their Lord as the boats drew close to the shores of Gerasene.

Gerasenes was a seaport village located six miles northeast of Capernaum, in Decapolis. This area had ten major cities built by Alexander the Great in the 3rd century BC, and rebuilt by the Romans in 65 BC. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this story. They each add a few different details to make up the whole, so I will bring in Matthew's and Mark's accounts when it helps to fill out the story (Matt. 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20).

Once the boats were beached, at least two nude demoniac men from the tombs immediately met Jesus and his disciples. They had come from the local cemetery, which was a set of caves formed or cut out on the side of the hills, where they made their homes. These men were so violent they stopped anyone from passing by on the road that ran alongside the cemetery. On several occasions some of the men of the city had gone out and wrestled them to the ground and put chains around them, but because of their strength the demoniacs would simply break the chains and continue to threaten the lives of all in that district.

According to Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, before Satan was cast out of heaven following his rebellion against God he was called the "Morning Star." This spiritual being was created by God, and he was full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. He was the highest of all angelic creatures, blameless in all his ways before God until unrighteousness was found in him. His sin was pride, resulting from his desire to become like God. Then God cast him out of heaven along with a host of angels who joined him in his rebellion. He is now called the "Prince of the demons" (Matt. 12:24). Some of these rebellious angelic beings are now confined, awaiting the final judgment, and some are free to do Satan's bidding on earth by seeking to control the minds and hearts of men so that they too will rebel against their Creator. Jesus called Satan a murderer, a liar and the father of lies (John 8: 44), and the demons have the same unholy characteristics. They can inflict diseases (Matt. 9:33); they can oppose the spiritual growth of believers, and use false prophets and teachers to disseminate false doctrine. They are also called "unclean spirits" because once they possess a person they cause him or her to participate in all kinds of immorality. They are also able to possess men and animals, as we shall see in this story.

There is a lot of confusion about "demonic possession," or, as the term may more correctly be correctly stated, "having a spirit." To "have a spirit" is different from cases of ordinary sickness, insanity, leprosy, blindness, lameness, deafness and other natural defects and diseases. Perhaps the following definition from Charles C. Ryrie will help clear up some confusion: "Demon possession means a demon residing in a person, exerting direct control and influence over that person, with certain derangement of mind and or body. Demon possession is to be distinguished from demon influence or demon activity in relation to a person. The work of the demon in the latter is from the outside in demon possession it from within. By this definition a Christian cannot be possessed by a demon since he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. However, a Christian can be the target of demonic activity to such an extent that he may give the appearance of demon possession."

Why does Satan and his demons want to possess men and animals? We need to keep in mind that the devil is a counterfeiter and an angel of light. Before the world began, Satan was opposing God in the spiritual world. Then, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Because of this godly incarnation on earth, Satan and his demons have endeavored to incarnate themselves in human beings in order to oppose Jesus and his work of redemption. Satan, as it were, also wanted to become man. This becomes clear when Jesus told the disciples at the last supper that one of his men would betray him. When they asked which one, Jesus answered "that is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him...he took and gave it to Judas, and Satan then entered into him. Jesus therefore, said to him, 'What you do, do quickly'" (John 13: 21-29).

How does one become demon possessed? Paul reminded the Christians in Ephesus, a city given over to witchcraft and demonic activity, of their condition before they invited Jesus Christ to become their Lord and Savior: "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which your formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). So before we became "born again" we were all one among those who were "born dead" and became the "living dead." In that condition Satan was free to roam among the graveyard of the "living dead" and freely select a human being willing to give him his soul in exchange for power, possession, or some position on earth. In return, the victim then become an instrument of death, destruction and deception. Victims are to be found in the cult of Satan, in witch covens, and in New Age channeling activities around the world at this very moment. The end result is that victims are soon placed on a greased skid heading to eternal ruin and doom. Today we are discovering that Satanism is once again on the rise here in this community and around the world. Once the Colossians gave their lives to Jesus and allowed him to become their Lord and Savior they discovered another spiritual reality. Here are Paul's words,

"For he delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his well-beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col.1: 13-14).

These two men who approached our Lord and his disciples from the cemetery are a perfect description of a demoniac. They were 1) demon-possessed (by an unclean spirit); 2) they came out from the tombs (a symbol of death); 3) they were exceedingly violent (out of control); 4) naked (loss of human dignity); 5) no one could subdue them and no chains could hold them (they had amazing physical strength); 6) night and day the one would cry out and gash himself with stones (tormented, a picture of hell on earth). Mark and Luke single out the one who was the leader. In his book, "According to Luke," David Gooding wrote,

There are spirit powers that seek man's destruction...The demoniac is an extreme example of what satanic forces can do with a human personality that has come under their complete domination. Unlike the Holy Spirit, who always sets a man free, develops his personality and increases his self-control and dignity, satanic forces seem to strive to overpower a man's personality, and ultimately to break down his self control and to rob him of self respect, as they did the demoniac. Spiritual beings can indeed give people amazing power, but in the end those powers will prove destructive of human personality and self control.

"And seeing Jesus, the leader of the two cried out and fell down before him (in fear) and said in a loud voice, 'What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the most high God?'" Here, the demons answer the question the disciples asked in verse 25, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" "I beg You, do not torment me." It is interesting that time and time again when the demons came face to face with Jesus on earth, they immediately knew he was the Son of the Most High God. They also knew of his sovereign power. They made their victim bow down, thus acknowledging Jesus' deity and manifesting fear of his power. The Pharisees, on the other hand, and many of the people did not really understand who Jesus was, what he was doing or why he had come to earth. All systems of belief that have their beginnings in the occult ask their victims to deny the deity of Jesus.

On June 12, 1990, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published the following article:

"Bennett Blames Satan for Drug Abuse Epidemic." To the shouts of Baptist preachers yelling, 'Amen,' federal drug czar William Bennett yesterday blamed Satan for the national epidemic of drug abuse. 'It is a product of the great deceiver,' Bennett told an assembly of about 2,500 Southern Baptist pastors and other church leaders. 'We need to bring to these people in need the God who heals,' said Bennett, a Roman Catholic. 'I have seen the face of evil and if you don't think there is evil in the world today, travel with me on the drug circuit. The drug problem is fundamentally a moral problem-in the end a spiritual problem.'

The following day the paper ran an article entitled:

"Drug Czar's Satan Remark Assailed." A leading drug-treatment clinician reacted with outrage yesterday at federal drug czar William Bennett's contention that the national drug abuse epidemic is the work of Satan. Dr. Alex Stalcup, medical director for the Haight Ashbury Free Medical Clinic in San Francisco, said Bennett's remarks undermine the work of the professional in the drug-treatment field. Blaming the devil for drug addiction further stigmatizes drug abusers who already bear a heavy burden of shame and guilt when they seek treatment. 'We're thinking of applying to Bennett's office for an exorcist. It is shocking to me, and very disturbing,' said Stalcup. Dr. Wayne Pernel, director of chemical dependency treatment services at Ross Hospital in Marin County, called cocaine addiction a disease that responds to a variety of treatment. He agreed with Bennett's urging that 'Early intervention is vital, but to say it can only be treated by turning over to God, that's bad news...Crack is not the devil and it's not going to be treated by going to church.'

Do you believe in the devil? A man named "Legion" did and,

II. Jesus and his disciples did!, Luke 8:29-33

For He had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard; and yet he would burst his fetters and be driven by the demon into the desert. And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And they were entreating Him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and the demons entreated Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission. And the demons came out from the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned.

A Roman Legion was a regiment of 6,000 soldiers. We are not sure that there were 6,000 demons in the man, but this number is used as a figure of speech to demonstrate that many, many demons of destruction, corruption and power had possessed him.

The demons were entreating him "not to command them to depart to the abyss"-the bottomless pit, hell itself. These demons had not been sent there yet like so many others before them, but they were well aware that once they experienced the final judgment of God, hell would become their eternal fate. For the time being they were given a limited freedom to carry out Satan's wishes on earth by being allowed to house and express their evil spiritual nature in and through a human being. Now that habitation was being threatened by the Son of God, so rather than be cast out of these men and sent to hell they saw a herd of pigs, "feeding there on the mountain; and the demons entreated him to permit them to enter the swine. And he gave them permission. And the demons came out from the man and entered the swine, and the heard rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned" (about 2,000 swine; see Mark 5:13). Jesus did not tell the demons to drown the pigs.

Rather, he gave permission to them to possess them. Once the demons went into the pigs, however, the animals panicked and drowned. The issue is not the 2,000 dead pigs, but the redemption of the demoniac and the confirmation to the disciples that Jesus not only had power over nature, but over the evil one and all his demons. The death of the herd of pigs was a living demonstration of the death that would have eventually have come to "Legion" had Jesus not healed him. The herd of pigs became the demoniac substitute. And, although the demons had asked Jesus not to send them back to hell, I suspect that after they had lost their fleshly habitation, to hell they went after the drowning of the pigs.

Do you believe in the devil ? The demoniac from the tombs did, Jesus and his disciples did, and now we see that

III. The Gentiles did!, Luke 8:34:39

And when those who tended them saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it to

the city and out in the country. And the people went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. And those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to depart from them; for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat, and returned. But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him, but He sent him away, saying, "Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you." And he departed, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

First, the good news, then the bad news. The herdsmen were in deep trouble because they were responsible to the owner for the well-being of the large herd of pigs. These men ran and told all in the city and countryside the good news that a man named Jesus had arrived on the beach and cast the demons out of "Legion" so that people didn't have to fear him anymore. The bad news was that the demons, some 2,000 of them, went into the pigs. Before they knew it, they reported, the pigs had run off the steep bank into the lake and drowned. It wasn't their fault, they said, but the fault of the demons and a man named Jesus.

The whole countryside then ran to the beach to see what had happened to the former demoniac. They found Jesus by the sea, and the former demoniac sitting at his feet, calm, fully clothed, and in his right mind. This healing had affected him physically, emotionally, intellectual and spiritually. Instead of being dead in his sin and living in the tombs, he had been risen by the power of Christ into the newness of life. Instead of being naked he was fully clothed; instead of being violent he was calm and joyful; instead of being insane he was now in his right mind; and instead of being destructively possessed with Satan he was now possessed and indwelled by the Son of the Most High.

The people were so frightened by this healing that they asked Jesus to depart from their town. This was not the same kind of fear-reverence and respect that the disciples felt after Jesus had calmed the sea. No, this was the fear of superstition. They did not rejoice over the healing of the demoniac. They were surrounded by demonic activity and they became more afraid than ever. Not only had they lost their pigs, but what would the evil one do next to harm them? they wondered. They were so blinded by fear and superstition they couldn't even think to ask Jesus who he was or why he had come to their town. They couldn't see their need for spiritual healing. All they could think of was the fact that Jesus had cast out the demons in this man named Legion and they had lost 2,000 pigs. They could not afford to have him stay around and cast out other demons because in time he would wipe out all their livestock, thus they all asked Jesus to leave town immediately. When the demons asked Jesus to leave them alone, he overruled them in order to bring the demoniac back to his right mind. Then the man could make a conscious choice about Jesus as Savior and Lord. When the people in their fear rejected Jesus with their eyes wide open, he complied immediately and got into the boat. He was not going to force salvation on anyone. Their fear was of the supernatural. They seemed to be more at home with the demoniac than the Christ who cast out the demons.

As Jesus was getting into the boat to return to Capernaum, the man, now possessed of a right mind and a new heart, approached him. He begged our Lord to allow him to accompany him to Galilee and become his disciple. But Jesus wanted this new believer to witness for him among the Gentiles. Thus, rather than being a messenger of terror throughout Decapolis he would become a messenger of the great things God had done for him through Jesus. Our Lord left the area with a missionary of the good news, returning good for evil. "...and everyone marveled," says our text. We don't know the end of the story of the lives of the men and women who were so fearful of Jesus. Perhaps as the former demoniac went about the countryside sharing his healing, many in time would rethink and accept our Lord into their hearts as Lord and Savior.

About seven years ago I met a young couple from southern California who wanted to join our intern program. I was impressed with their deep spiritual commitment to Jesus Christ and his word. In time we invited them to join us and to work with me in our singles' ministry. It soon became evident that they had developed a wonderful evangelistic and teaching ministry. Again and again I was amazed by their spiritual walk and their love for the Lord, and their deep commitment to the hurting community around them. About a

year into the internship the husband came to me and asked me to pray with him because he was very frightened. I asked him the source of his fear, and he reminded me that as a youth he had gotten involved with Satanism. After he had given his heart to Jesus as Lord and Savior, he had gotten rid of all his paraphernalia and left the Satanic group. However, each time the Lord blessed his ministry an "evil being" would appear at the foot of his bed at night to torment him. At times he was so terrorized he had to wake up his wife to pray for him. We did pray then and for many months after that, and in time the "evil spirit" stopped appearing. Both of these former victims of Satan, the man in Decapolis and our intern, became missionaries for Jesus Christ, telling all who would listen "...what great things God had done for them." One went to the regions of Decapolis in his generation, and my friend went to Europe in our generation.

Do you believe in the devil, in demons and demon possession? According to an ancient "Gallup Poll," Jesus and his disciples, Legion and the total population of Gerasenes (as well as 2,000 pigs!), 100% believed in the existence and power of Satan, and 100% believed that a person or animal can be possessed by Satan or demons.

The scriptures are given to us to teach us that more is going on in our lives than what we experience by means of our five senses. As Christians, we need to be aware of the spiritual world, the good and the bad, by the Spirit, without fear, keeping in mind what Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6: 9-12).

Our ministry and message is the same ministry and message our Lord had-a message of hope and deliverance. As Paul reminded the Christians of Colossae, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His well-beloved Son, in whom we redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col.1: 13-14). If our Lord Jesus can do that for us, he is willing to do the same for each and every one who will humbly ask him to become their personal Lord and Savior.

Catalog No. 4139
Luke 8:26-39
24th Message
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August 12, 1990

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