

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your prayers for Dale Pond and me as we traveled to Uganda and Tanzania to train pastors and to preach in the churches. We worked with over a thousand pastors who are hungry to learn how to build a Healthy Church.

Greg Smith, our friend from Atlanta, joined us. Greg is a great guy, but like most of us he was pretty mischievous in college. Dale and Greg went to Hardin Simmons University back in the 1970s. During that time the movie "The Exorcist" was released. It was a scary movie, not really based on the Bible, but it spooked a lot of people about demons.

As I said, Greg was known to pull a few pranks. One day he took the speaker wires going from his stereo system and ran them out his window and up in through the window of the dorm room right above his. He had a master key, so while the students in that room were gone, he hooked his speaker wires to their speakers.

He waited until the guys in the room were asleep that night and then he cranked up his stereo. He and his roommate could hear the music blasting up above him. They heard the guys jumping out of bed. They tried turning down their stereo. Nothing happened. They tried turning off their stereo and even unplugging it but the music kept blasting. So, they ran out of their dorm room screaming that their speakers were demon possessed. That went on for a couple of nights until they were convinced their whole room was demon possessed. Not really, it was just Greg playing a joke.

But demons are no joke. In this message we're going to examine Jesus' remarkable power over demons. Remember, Jesus and the disciples had just come through the storm. And when they finally reached the Eastern shore of the lake, it was probably early morning. That's where they encountered another storm; and this storm was raging inside a disturbed man.

Mark 5:1-20. They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the evil spirits

came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

We know exactly where this miracle took place, because there is only one location on the Eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee where there is a steep cliff and there are still ancient tombs dotting the steep hillside.

This is one of the most remarkable miracles of Jesus. When I'm in Israel I always tell the travelers that when Jesus cast these demons into those pigs it was the first example of deviled ham in the world. Those animals went hog-wild and performed a perfect swine-dive into the water. They drowned themselves, so you might say it was soo-ey-cide.

Many people today don't believe in the devil or demons. But Jesus believed in them and encountered them on many occasions. C. S. Lewis, the distinguished professor of literature at Oxford University, wrote a fascinating book about demons entitled *The Screwtape Letters*. It's a fictional account of the letters written by a chief demon named Screwtape to his nephew demon, Wormwood. Wormwood has been assigned to a man in England to keep him from accepting Christ. Over Screwtape's objection, the man marries a Christian woman and converts to Christ. The book ends with the patient going to war and dying in battle, and then goes to heaven. Wormwood is a failure so he is recalled to hell where Screwtape consumes him in the fire, which is Satan's desire for everyone: Complete destruction.

The book is fictional, but don't miss the point that Satan and demons are real. In the preface of the book C. S. Lewis wrote: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."

There is a lot of confusion about the devil and demons, so I want to share four truths about this subject.

I. Demons are fallen angels who carry out the strategy of Satan

Some Christians have a Star Wars theology. They think Satan is the dark side of the force and almost as powerful as God. He's not some mini-me god. He's only a fallen angel himself. He isn't omnipresent—only God is. But he has an organized, demonized army who carry out his strategy.

We read about Lucifer's fall in Isaiah 14. Lucifer was a shining angel, but his sin was ambition. He loved himself. His favorite television show is "I Love Lucifer." He tried to ascend and be like God, but God kicked him out of his lofty position. Other rebellious angels chose to join him and they lost their position as good angels. Satan still has access to the throne of God as we see in the story of Job, Satan came before God and accused Job. That's why the Bible calls him the accuser of the brothers. But in the Book of Revelation, we learn Satan and his fallen angels will be cast further down—not to hell yet, but only to the earth.

John wrote, "The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."
(Revelation 12:9)

You may wonder since the devil and his demons cause so much misery and trouble, why doesn't God just do away with the old devil? Oh, He has a plan. In fact, Jesus said something interesting about hell in Matthew 25:41. He said on Judgment Day, He would say to some, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Hell was never created for human habitation. But the devil knows one day he will end up there for all eternity. He knows he is a defeated foe, so his plan now is to take as many people with him to hell as he can.

II. The term "demon possession" isn't found in the original language of the New Testament

One of the spiritual questions I've been asked through the years is this: "Pastor, can a Christian be demon-possessed?" A few years ago, I wanted to study that word "possession" in the original Greek to see what it meant. I was surprised to discover our two-word phrase "demon possession" is an invention of Bible translators. Whenever you see the phrase "demon possession," it is a translation of only one word that isn't actually translated at all, it is transliterated. That means the word in Greek became our English word. The word is *daimonizomai* should just be translated "demonized." Every one of us, including believers is the target of some kind of demonic influence.

Dr. Ray Stedman recognizes this distinction. He wrote: "The New Testament never actually uses the term 'demon possession.' It is a term, which has been invented, but it may not be very accurate. The word in Scripture is always 'demonized.' Whether it means possession or control or influence, this is the word which is used. We have read into it the idea of 'demon possession.' But I do not think it wise to use it, because it is not used in Scripture. It is evident there are various stages and degrees to which demons, evil spirits, can affect or control human beings."

So don't waste your energy trying to distinguish whether you can be demon possessed or not. Instead begin to think in terms of how much demonic control are you under? How do you know? Let's examine some symptoms of demonic control.

III. What are some signs of destructive demonic control?

Some say that all sickness, including mental illness, is produced by the devil. But Jesus made a distinction. The Bible says He healed those with diseases and cast out evil spirits. So it is a mistake to see a demon behind every illness or dysfunctional behavior.

When we look at this demon-controlled man, the scripture mentions several symptoms. These four symptoms aren't exhaustive, there are many others, but these are the ones we recognize in this man, and we still see these behaviors today.

A. Sexual perversion

In Luke's account we are told that this man ran around naked. The Bible says, "He wore no clothing." (Luke 8:27) He was what is often called an exhibitionist. We live in a sex-saturated society. There was a time when in our culture when decent people didn't talk about sex openly; it was considered impolite and crude. Today, some people make their sexual behavior the main identifier of their life.

Sexual addiction, sexually deviant behavior, and pornography are some of the deadliest traps Satan sets for people. God gave everyone a powerful sex drive. But that sex drive should be fulfilled only within the bonds of marriage between a man and woman. The Bible says, "Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and illicit sex." (Hebrews 13:4 MSG) Satan wants to take any normal God-given desire and pervert it. Any sexual conduct outside of marriage is sinful and driven by satanic temptation.

B. Obsession with death

The Bible says, "This man lived in the tombs." (Mark 5:3) He felt more at home in the tombs than he did with living people. Sometimes a morbid obsession with death and dying can be evidence of demonic control. There are some troubled people who believed they can contact the dead and communicate with them. Involvement in séances and using objects like an Ouija board is an open invitation to allow demons to control your thoughts.

C. Violent behavior

The Bible says, "He had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him." (Mark 5:4) What makes a young man walk into a Batman movie in Colorado and start shooting the people in the theatre? That's too evil to simply attribute to a crazy person. We live in a violent culture where hardly a month goes by without a mass shooting. The cause of this isn't lack of gun control. Jesus said Satan is a murderer and a liar. He comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

D. Self-abuse

The Bible says, "Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones." (Mark 5:6) There is an epidemic among teenagers and young adults, and it's called self-injuring or cutting. According to ABC News, one in twelve teenagers have cut or burned themselves. This phenomenon isn't new; this disturbed man was a cutter.

I've heard some cutters who say they are hurting inside and they can't really kind find the source of their pain. So in a strange way, they feel better by doing something where they know the source of the pain. Statistics show that four times as many females are victims of self-abuse than males. Yet four times as many males commit suicide than females.

The suicide of Robin Williams has reminded us that many people carry such a heavy emotional burden that they decide to just end it all. But what they may not realize is death doesn't end it all. There is something after death. The Bible says, "People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." (Hebrews 9:27)

The reason the pigs killed themselves is because they had no moral restraint. This troubled man cut himself, but he still had a shred of moral restraint that kept him from taking his life. If Satan and his demons could have absolute control of you, you would do the same thing the pigs did. The most notable suicide in the Bible was Judas Iscariot, and the Bible says in John 13:27 that Satan had literally entered Judas.

IV. Jesus can deliver you from demonic control

The devil and his demons want to kill, steal, and destroy, but Jesus said He has come to give you life, so you can live it to the fullest enjoyment. There is hope in Jesus Christ. You may be listening to me and you think your life is so full of sin and depravity that there's no hope for you. But unless you're living naked in a graveyard, breaking chains, and cutting yourself, things aren't as bad for you as they were for this man. And the Bible describes the difference Jesus made in his life. "When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind" For anyone who needs help and hope, you should take the same three steps this man took.

A. Run to Jesus and cry out to Him in desperation

This man probably told himself before that he could correct his bizarre behavior. But he discovered self-help is a cruel oxymoron. Finally, he was so desperate he went running down the hill and fell at the feet of Jesus.

You'll never find the power of Jesus to change your life until you reach the point of total desperation and put your pride in the dust and run and fall at His feet and cry out to Him. Don't be deceived by the lie of self-help. Jesus is your only hope.

B. Be willing to identify your demons

When the man came running to Jesus, the demon cried out and called the name of Jesus. The demon said, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" That should

remind us of the verse in James that teaches us that to simply believe in God isn't enough. James writes, "Even the demons believe and tremble." (James 2:19) It's not enough to simply acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of the Most High God—the demons did that. You must trust Him with all your heart.

Jesus asked for the demon's name and he said, "Legion," because there were thousands of urges and conflicting emotions and desires in the man. A Roman legion was 6,000 soldiers. This poor man was so tortured he felt an entire regiment of demonic soldiers was marching through his personality. Jesus wanted the man to admit the name of his problems.

We are all demonized in different ways. Any obsession, addiction, or impure habit is a demonic influence that must be addressed. And before you can find healing, you must admit that you have a problem—you have to name the demons in order to be set free.

C. Tell people about the difference Jesus has made in your life

This man wanted to go with the Jesus and the disciples. He was ready to join Jesus and become the 13th disciple. But Jesus had a better idea. He said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him." (Mark 5:19-20)

The word "home" Jesus used doesn't mean hometown; it means "household." It indicates this man had a wife and children. They had probably been tormented and abused by this man. Although he had left to live in the tombs, there was an empty place at the dinner table each night. But one afternoon there was a knock on the door and the wife answered it only to cringe in fear when she saw her husband at the door. Can't you picture the children huddling in fear behind their mother? They could only recall the terrible, troubled man who had caused so much pain and turmoil in their home. But this changed man walks in and smiles. She immediately notices there's something different about him. He takes his wife's hand and says, "Darling, today I met Jesus and He has changed me. He had given you back your husband." Then he gathers his frightened children into his arms, and says, "Children, forgive me for how I've behaved. But now Jesus has given you your daddy back."

Your testimony of how Jesus has changed you can be the greatest tool in helping someone else. At this point, some of you are struggling because you have problems, addictions, and desires you think are beyond help. You really don't think Jesus can do for you what he did for that man 2,000 years ago. But Jesus is still changing lives, and when He changes your life, then it's your job to go home and tell about the great things God has done for you.

CONCLUSION

There's one detail of this experience that always amazes me. Do you remember the last message on how to "Faith the Storms of Life?" Before they left the western shore, Jesus said, "We're going to the other side." Why do you think Jesus told them to get into the boat and cross the lake in the first place? It was because He knew there was a deeply troubled man who needed to be set

free from some nasty demons. Somewhere deep in the troubled soul of that man, he had called out to God for help. And Jesus came to answer that prayer.

After Jesus cast out the demons, He didn't do anything else there. He got back in the boat and sailed back to Galilee on the other side of the lake. The ONLY reason He crossed the lake was to deliver this demonized man.

What's the point? If Jesus was willing to cross a dangerous, stormy body of water just to help one troubled man, you need to know He cares for you in the same way. He crossed the great gulf between heaven and earth to bring hope, healing and forgiveness to you. If you had been the only one who needed help, He would have made the trip just for you. Jesus is here right now. Will you cry out to Him? Will you admit that you have a need? Then will you go out and tell people the difference Jesus has made in your life?

OUTLINE

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- II. The term "demon possession" isn't found in the original language of the New Testament
- III. What are some signs of destructive demonic control?
 - A. Sexual perversion
 - B. Obsession with death
 - C. Violent behavior
 - D. Self-abuse
- IV. Jesus can deliver you from demonic control
 - A. Run to Jesus and cry out to Him in desperation
 - B. Be willing to identify your demons
 - C. Tell people about the difference Jesus has made in your life

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For the Joy...
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