

INTRODUCTION

A couple of weeks ago when we read that Jesus cast out demons, I didn't say much about it because I said I would devote more attention to demons in a later message. Today we're going to talk about demons.

Through the years I've learned the devil and his demons don't want information damaging to their work to be revealed. Years ago in Alabama, when I was preaching about Satan being a defeated foe, right in the middle of the message, a huge wasp started dive-bombing me in the pulpit. I had to swat him away several times. I wanted to say, "Demon of the wasp—get out of here!" Maybe it was just coincidence, but that's the only time a wasp has ever interrupted my preaching. And this week has been a challenge as well. Whether it's the East Texas crud, or sinus drainage, or demonic intimidation, I could hardly speak above a whisper on Friday. But I had already determined I was NOT going to miss the chance to preach today even if I have to whisper it, or even whistle it. I'm not going to let anything stop me from sharing this important truth about how you can say goodbye to your demons.

Let's read about this miracle in Matthew 8:28-34. "When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. 'What do you want with us, Son of God?' they shouted. 'Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?' Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus, 'If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.' He said to them, 'Go!' So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region."

Matthew mentions there were two demonized men, while Mark and Luke focus on the worst of the pair who speaks and claims to have a legion of demons controlling his behavior. Whenever I travel to Israel we always go to the very spot that this miracle occurred. There's really only one place on the eastern side of the lake where there is a steep cliff that matches the description in the text. The element of the demons going into the pigs makes it an interesting story. You might say this was the first example of deviled ham. The demonized hogs ran off the cliff and performed a perfect swine dive into the water. You might say they committed suey-cide!

In this message I want to answer five questions about demons. But the point of this message isn't just to give you information. I want to tell you how you be liberated from the influence of demons like these two men.

I. Who/what are demons?

A. Demons are fallen angels (spirit beings) who carry out the strategy of Satan

Satan is a fallen angel himself, he isn't some mini-me god, he's just an angel named Lucifer who decided to rebel against God and was kicked out of heaven. In the process, he took some other

rebellious angels with him. The Bible says, "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) Notice Satan and his fallen angels are operating on the earth. Don't get the impression that the devil is confined to hell and he's down there shoveling coal into the furnace with his pitchfork. Jesus revealed hell was created for the devil and that it will be his final address. Jesus said, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41) Hell wasn't created for human habitation.

Satan isn't omnipresent. He can't be everywhere at once like God can, so he has a mobilized, demonized army of fallen angels who carry out his work. It's much like during World War II; the allies often said they were fighting against Hitler. That didn't mean they were going one-on-one against Hitler himself. It meant they were fighting against the armies and the philosophy of Hitler. In the same way we are fighting against Satan and his evil influence.

There are two dangerous extremes to avoid when it comes to demons. On one hand some people deny their existence and say demons are like ghosts and goblins—they don't really exist. The other extreme to avoid is being so afraid of demons that you see a demon behind every bush. I've honestly known people who when someone hiccupped they said, "I rebuke you demon of hiccups!" Demons exist, but they aren't everywhere and we don't have to be afraid of them.

In 1972 I was in college doing a research paper about devil worship and the occult when the movie "The Exorcist" was released. I was also a student minister at the time, so I went to see the movie so I could warn our kids about it. If you saw it, you'll remember it was a scary movie with the girl played by Linda Blair turning her head 360 degrees and screaming obscenities at the priests in a deep sinister voice. Since "The Exorcist," Hollywood has produced dozens of horror pictures about the devil and demons. This has caused many Christians to be so afraid of the topic that they get the heebie-jeebies just thinking about demons.

If the thought of the devil and demons makes you want to change the subject and talk about something else, the devil has successfully snared you in his trap of fear. Satan knows if he can keep the whole topic of demonic control in the realm of horror movies that produce nightmares that people won't ever discover the real truth—that he is a defeated foe.

II. Is it possible for a person (a Christian) to be demon-possessed?

A. No. The term "demon possessed" is a mistranslation. The New Testament language says that a person is "demonized" (20X) or "has a demon (6X)."

A few years ago I was studying the original Greek language to see what the phrase "demon possessed" really meant. I was surprised to learn that the word "possessed" doesn't appear once. Nada. Zip. There is just a single word used to describe a person who was under the influence of demons. The word is *daimonizomai*, which should be translated simply as "demonized." It means that a person is under the influence of a demon, like a drunk person is under the influence of alcohol. But you never say an inebriated person is alcohol-possessed. Even though the Bible still mistranslates it as "demon-possessed," I try to avoid using that term. When something has

been cleaned, I say that it is sanitized not sanitary-possessed! When you spray something to make the room smell better we say it was deodorized, not deodorant-possessed! So, I think it's best to say that people are demonized rather than demon possessed.

Six times in the New Testament it says a person "has a demon." Some folks like to hang on to their pet sins. So it actually may be more accurate to say people sometimes possess demons than that demons possess people!

Dr. Ray Stedman 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." 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. There are various stages and degrees to which demons, evil spirits, can affect and possess or control human beings."

III. What are some signs of demonic control?

When you compare the descriptions of the demonized men here and in Mark and Luke's account, there are four evident symptoms of demonic control. I believe these are some of the same ways demons try to influence people today as well.

A. Violent behavior

Matthew reported these men were so violent that nobody could pass that way without the risk of being hurt. Mark tells us one man had been chained up, but he was so strong he had broken the chains and that no man could subdue him. Sometimes, violent, uncontrollable behavior may be the result of demonic influence. Not everyone in a mental institution is affected by a demon, but there are modern accounts of some people being so agitated they cannot be restrained and display almost superhuman strength in their agony.

B. Morbid Obsession

Luke tells us at least one of the men lived in the tombs. There are still tombs in that area. This demonized man was so troubled, he felt more at home among the corpses of the cemetery than with living people. Very often an obsession with death and dying can be the direct result of demonic control. A few years ago, I did some research into the life and songs of shock rocker Marilyn Manson. He wears white make-up to make himself appear as a corpse. He is known for his death-music and even wrote a song entitled, "The Death Song." You think there are any demonic influences there?

By the way, that's why it's dangerous for young people to play around with Ouija Boards and to go to a spiritualist or a medium to try to contact the dead. To do that is an open invitation to allow demons to invade your mind.

C. Sexual Perversion

Luke points out that the demonized man didn't wear clothes. He was what psychologists call an

exhibitionist, a flasher, to use street language. He got a thrill out of people seeing him naked. Sexual perversion and sexual predators are a greater problem today than ever before in history. The availability of internet pornography has opened the gateway of the minds of millions of people for the invasion of demonic influence.

There's nothing wrong with sex. God created sex for the deepest expression of physical love between a husband and a wife. Any other use of sex is an abuse of sex.

D. Self-abuse

Mark points out that this man lived in the tombs crying out night and day cutting himself with stones. Psychiatrists are familiar with the practice of "cutting." People who are struggling with emotional problems often cut themselves. I've spoken with some cutters who say they are hurting inside and they kind find the source of their pain. So in a strange way, they feel better by doing something where they know what 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. Most cutters aren't suicidal, and they are usually so embarrassed about their cutting that they go to lengths to hide the scars from others. These four symptoms may be signs of extreme demonic influence.

IV. In general, how do demons try to influence us?

A. They attack us at our point of weakness (stronghold)

You may not display any of these four symptoms of extreme demonic control in your life, but that doesn't mean you are totally free from demonic influence. When we read this story it sounds like something from a fairy tale. We don't encounter too many people who behave like those two demonized men. However, when this passage is read in Africa or Haiti and other places where devil-worship is prevalent, people aren't surprised by this story. Our missionaries tell us Satan and demons are much more open in their activity in other cultures. But here in our "civilized" American culture, demons are much more subtle. The Bible says Satan disguises himself as an angel of light so we can assume demons disguise themselves as well.

The Bible uses military language to describe Satan's strategy against us. We read, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." (2 Corinthians 10:4) A stronghold is like a fortress or an outpost that Satan's demons construct in our lives. It involves an area of weakness where they constantly attack us.

In his book, *Victory Over the Darkness*, Neil Anderson wrote: "Strongholds are negative patterns of thought which are burned into our minds either through repetition over time or through one-time traumatic events. They are the result of a number of subtle steps that lead us away from God's plan for us." (Common strongholds: pornography, hostility, inferiority, manipulation, homosexuality, eating disorders, compulsive behavior, alcohol and drug abuse).

I asked my Facebook friends to share with me how they think demons disguise themselves. I got some pretty good responses. Marian Collins wrote: "Christians own their own demons...they are hidden in closets like skeletons and we become quite comfortable with these imps in our lives. Our shame is from past sins that we hang onto keeping these demons real in our lives."

The final question I want to answer is the most important:

V. How can I get free and stay free from demonic influence?

Here are four steps you can take over and over again to rid your life of demonic influence.

A. Immediately run to Jesus and cry out to Him for help

In Mark's account we read, "When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him." (Mark 5:6) The very first thing you need to do is to cry out to Jesus and ask Him for help. It's always a good time to cry out to Jesus. The Christian singing group Third Day has a great song entitled, "Cry out to Jesus." Here are the powerful lyrics: "There is hope for the helpless; Rest for the weary; Love for the broken heart; There is grace and forgiveness; Mercy and healing; He'll meet you wherever you are; Cry out to Jesus, Cry out to Jesus. For the ones who can't break the addictions and chains; You try to give up but you come back again; Just remember that you're not alone in your shame; And your suffering... To the widow who suffers from being alone; Wiping the tears from her eyes; For the children around the world without a home; Say a prayer tonight. There is hope for the helpless: Rest for the weary; Love for the broken heart; There is grace and forgiveness; Mercy and healing He'll meet you wherever you are; Cry out to Jesus, Cry out to Jesus!" Will you fall on your knees and cry out to Jesus today?

B. Continually draw close to God and resist the devil

When the demonized men approached Jesus they were drawing close to God. The Bible says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you." (James 4:7-8). There is a spiritual truth I call the "Proximity Principle." The closer you are to God, the farther you are from the devil, and the farther you drift away from God, the closer you are to the devil.

The only way you can resist the devil and his demons is in the name of Jesus. It is okay to say, "Satan, and all of your demons, I stand against you in the name of Jesus: Get out of my life!" Somebody asked me once, "Isn't it wrong to pray to the devil?" I said, "You're not praying to a cat when you tell it to scat!"

You don't have to be constantly running from the devil, he should be running from you! Someone said when the devil comes knocking at your door, just send Jesus to the door to say, "Who is it?" And the devil will say, "Sorry, wrong address!" And he will turn and flee.

C. Consciously reject tempting thoughts

The battleground against Satan and his demons takes place in your mind. The Bible says the

devil is a liar, an accuser, and above all, a liar. Demons cannot MAKE you sin, they can only plant suggestions in your mind; that's what temptation is. The best way to resist temptation is to reject the tempting thought when it first enters your mind. If you hang onto a tempting thought and keep analyzing it, before long, you'll find that you have fallen into that trap.

The comic strip "Cathy" is about a woman who struggles with "the four guilt groups" of life: "food, love, mom, and work." In one strip Cathy is on another diet and in frame one she says, "I will take a drive, but won't go near the grocery store." In frame two she says, "I will drive by the grocery store but I will not go in." In frame three: "I will go in the grocery store but will not go down the aisle where the Halloween candy is on sale." Frame four: "I will look at the candy but not pick it up." Frame five: "I will pick it up but not buy it." Frame six: "I will buy it but not open it." Frame seven: "I will open it but not smell it." Frame eight: "I will smell it but not taste it." "Frame nine: "I will taste it but not eat it." And in frame ten she says, "Eat! Eat! Eat! Eat!"

That's a great example of how temptation works.

The way to demolish these mental strongholds is found in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." The key is to bring all our thoughts into obedience to Christ rather than letting our thoughts wander into sin. I know this is a double negative, but the best way to overcome temptation IS NOT by NOT thinking about the temptation. If you're tempted to look at porn, you aren't going to resist it if you keep thinking about it. Take your thoughts captive for Christ and instead, think about Jesus Christ dying of the cross for your sins. So when a tempting thought enters your mind, capture that thought for Jesus.

D. Joyfully claim your victory in Jesus' name over the devil and his demons!

You and I have authority in Jesus' name over the enemy. Jesus sent out 72 disciples on a mission of mercy. The Bible says, "The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' He replied, '...I have given you authority...to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'" (Luke 10:17-20)

There are two things you need to remind Satan and his demons. First,

1. The devil is a defeated foe

The Bible says, "The devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." (1 John 3:8)

On the cross, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent. He destroyed Satan's plan. Satan and his demons are already defeated. They are in retreat, but they are trying to cause as much damage as possible before they are put away forever.

The second truth you need to know is

2. The devil's doom is certain!

I love a Bible where there is no devil in the first two chapters of Genesis and the last two chapters in Revelation. The Apostle John had a vision of what is going to happen to Satan. He wrote, "I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him...And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Revelation 20:1-2,10)

Did you notice what the demons asked Jesus in our story? They said, "Have you come to torture us before the APPOINTED TIME?" Even the demons knew there will come an appointed time when they will be tortured for their rebellion.

The main thing I want you take out this message is that you don't have to fear the devil or his demons. Peter writes that the devil "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8) A lion roars to frighten his prey into submission. His greatest tool is fear. So, don't let Satan's roar scare you: He is a toothless, clawless lion.

The shortest and perhaps the strangest of Aesop's fables is called "The Lion in Love." It's only five sentences long. "A lion demanded the daughter of a woodcutter in marriage. The Father, unwilling to grant, and yet afraid to refuse his request, came up with this plan to deal with the Lion. He expressed his willingness to accept the Lion as the suitor of his daughter on one condition: that the lion should allow him to extract his teeth, and cut off his claws, as his daughter was fearfully afraid of both. The Lion cheerfully assented to the proposal. But when the toothless, clawless Lion returned to request to marry his daughter, the Woodman, no longer afraid, set upon him with his club, and drove him away into the forest." That was a pretty smart daddy and a pretty dumb lion. I like the part of the father driving the lion away. That's a great picture of what we can do in Jesus' name.

CONCLUSION

There's one detail of this experience that always amazes me. Do you remember last week's message about Jesus calming the storm? Why do you think Jesus told them to get into the boat and cross the lake in the first place? For one reason. He knew there were two deeply troubled men who needed to be set free from some really nasty demons. After Jesus cast out the demons, do you know what else He did? Nothing. 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 meet those two demonized men. What's the point? If Jesus was willing to cross a dangerous, stormy body of water just to help two troubled men, you need to know He cares for you in the same way. He crossed the great gulf between heaven and earth 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? When you do you can say, "Goodbye to your demons."

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes