

## ***WHY DOESN'T CHRIST TAKE US FROM THE BAPTISTRY?***

If you have been reading and participating in the New Testament Studies that we began January 1<sup>st</sup>, then you are familiar with the story of the man in the region called the Gerasenes. Matthew refers to it as the Gadarenes, referring to the region surrounding the ancient city of Gadara. And no doubt, as you read, a vivid impression was made on your mind. It is one of my favorite stories involving Jesus. One of the reasons for that is because of several things in it that are just plain curious.

If you brought your Bibles, and I hope you did, and always do, please open to the **8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke**, and let's read together this account, beginning in **verse 26**.

*Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27) When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. 28) When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." 29) For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it 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 desert.) 30) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. 31) And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. 32) Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33) Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. 34) When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. 35) Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. 36) And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. 37) Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 38) The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39) "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.*

Now, if you are like me, there are several things in this passage that arouse your curiosity. Let me go ahead and get one thing out of the way before I really delve into the passage further. Here in Luke, and also in Mark's account of this (in chapter 5), you get the clear impression from reading that there is one man, and yet Matthew in his account has two such men possessed of demons. Some suggest that this is a contradiction. Is it?

Well, the answer is "no." The reality was that there were two men, and while Matthew reveals that fact to us, Mark and Luke focus in on the conversation that Jesus had with the one man. A good illustration of that kind of thing might be found in what happened to our sister Genie

Turner. Most of you, I am sure, have heard of that by now. She and another lady were seriously injured by a pair of dogs two weeks ago. In truth, however, only one dog bit and injured Genie. And so while there were two dogs present, Genie's confrontation was but with one. Luke and Mark do not disagree with Matthew; they simply narrowed their focus in relating that event.

But what about these demons? Who are they, or perhaps we should say, "what are they?" To the best of my knowledge and study, the Bible really doesn't answer those questions for us. Whatever you read or hear or think is purely speculative. Some people believe—and I guess this would be my best guess—that they are angels who have sinned. Other people believe they are the spirits of evil men who were dead. Perhaps they are something altogether different, neither fallen angels nor spirits of evil men. Whatever they are, they are spirit beings completely given over to evil and destruction. They are called "unclean spirits," meaning spirits who God will no longer allow into His presence.

But what about such beings? Are they still roaming about today, are they still inhabiting people today? When you take the case of someone like Adam Lanza who killed 25 people out in Newtown, Connecticut, you have to wonder sometimes! There are a number of things about this that we would like to know more about. I am of the opinion that their appearances in the days of Christ were an exceptional occurrence, permitted by God in order that Christ might have the opportunity to demonstrate His power over all forces, both natural and spiritual.

Another thing that is a bit puzzling, however, is what the demons said when Jesus approached. **Verse 28** says, they said, "*What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.*" Matthew's account of that, in chapter 8, has them saying, "*What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?*" We have to wonder, what "time" were they talking about. Curious, isn't it? We need to give special attention to what is said about the demons in scripture. It is for sure that they have seen and experienced things that we haven't. I think about that passage over there in **James 2**, where James is trying to admonish Christians about having more than just an intellectual faith. He says faith is not in the saying, but in the doing, and then in **verse 19** he says, "*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder!*"

What's that, does he say? They do what? They "shudder!" Now why do you suppose demons shudder? Have they seen the holiness and wrath of God? Have they seen things that we have yet to see? Why was the legion of demons inhabiting that poor man terrified at the thought of what was coming? What was the prospect that awaited them?

Well, another oddity of this passage, and I really hope I can stimulate your curiosity when you are reading scripture, is how at one point it looks like Jesus is talking to just one demon, but at another point, there are many. Notice **verse 29** says, "*For he had commanded the unclean spirit (singular) to come out of the man.*" And then it goes on to say, parenthetically, "*(For many a time it 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 desert.)*" But then it goes

on to say in **verse 30**, Jesus asked him—meaning the man—“*What is your name?*” “*And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. 31) And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.*”

And that brings us to something else that arouses our interest, doesn't it? This abyss that is mentioned there in verse 31, what is that? The word means something deep and dark, hidden from view or light. In Revelation 19, the word is found several times, and translated as *bottomless pit*. Maybe it has some connection with those so-called *black holes* that scientists theorize about. Whatever it is, it appears not to be that final appointment for the devil and his angels that we call hell. Nevertheless it is a place where these foul beings do not want to go. The **6<sup>th</sup> verse of Jude's** short epistle tells us, “*And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.*”

And then of course, as we return to our text here in Luke, we come next to the herd of pigs. Those pitiful brutes became unwitting objects of the demons evil nature. But I want you to notice something here. Peter tells us that we have an adversary, who roams about like a lion, seeking someone to devour. In Job 1:7, when God asked Satan where he had been, the devil replied that he had been going to and fro upon the earth, from walking up and down on it. It appears that the devil and his angels, as well as these unclean spirits, are not omnipresent, nor are they omniscient. They are not everywhere at once; they do not know everything about everything. They are limited but they had spotted this herd of pigs and verse 31 says that the demons “begged” Jesus to let them enter into them.

Now notice the last part of that verse: “*So he gave them permission.*” Please understand that nothing happens in God's creation—whether natural or spiritual except as He wills or permits, and everything is orchestrated according to His divine purpose. **Romans 8:28** says, “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*” Now we must say, there are many things about which in the outworking of that divine purpose that we do not understand. We cannot explain why this man, or these two men were allowed to suffer the invasion of these demons, but suffice it say, not for one minute did God lose control of the situation. *He gave them permission.*

And look what happened when he did. **Verse 33** says, “*Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.*” That too might arouse our curiosity. Luke tells us that it was a “large herd.” Mark calls it a “great herd.” Either way, it could not have been an insignificant loss to the herd's owners. While it is true that swine were considered unclean to the Jews, was Jesus just being calloused towards the owner's loss? Well, we probably do not have all of the back story on what happened that day, but think about what **Psalms 50:10,11** says, “*For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. 11) I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine.*” Let's never forget who the real owner of every herd and every flock and every business is!

I wish we had the time to really think about why the demons wanted to be sent into that herd of pigs and then immediately drove the pigs insane enough to run and drown themselves in the sea. I say that because the scriptures seem to hint at the thought that where those beings come from is a little short on water. The rich man who died and lifted up his eyes in Hades longed for even a drop of water. Speaking about unclean spirits in Matthew 12:43, Jesus said, *“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none.”* Apparently there is no respite from the torment experienced in those waterless places, and I am confident they found no rest that day either, even though they sought in vain for a watery grave.

And of course, we might also wonder at the reaction of the herdsmen and the townspeople. **Verses 34, 35** says, *“When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. 35) Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.”* They came, they saw what happened, they saw the man, or men, who had formerly terrorized the area, now sitting, clothed, in his right mind, and they probably saw dozens or hundreds of dead pigs floating in the water or washed up on the shore. It is understandable that they might be afraid of whomever, or whatever was behind all of that, but were they so spiritually blind that they could not connect the dots and recognize that in spite of their personal losses, an incredible, benevolent miracle had just taken place. They saw everything else, but they didn’t see that! So, in **verse 37** we read, *“Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear.”* Many a heart, hardened by sin has wanted nothing to do with the Lord. Paul talks about those whose minds have been blinded by the god of this world. They don’t want to have anything to do with Christianity. They don’t want to have anything to do with His church. They don’t want to have anything to do with His Word. They just want to occupy their time with their own pursuits. Living as if there is no God, they will die in the same way.

Yes, there are many things about this story found in Luke 8 that arouse our curiosity, but the thing that I find the most interesting is what Jesus told the man, or men, as he and his disciples got back into their boats and leave. Beginning in the last part of **verse 37**, we read,

“So he [Jesus] got into the boat and returned. 38) The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39) “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.”

It isn’t hard to understand why the man, or men, didn’t want to stay there. And it isn’t hard to understand why he would want to go with Jesus, and there is no doubt that he would have been happy to be Jesus’ shadow the rest of his life. But surprisingly, that isn’t what Jesus allowed. Yes he came to make disciples and there were many others that Jesus did allow to follow him, but not these men. Hopefully we are curious enough to wonder why.

Have you ever wondered why Christ doesn't take us from the baptistery? I mean, when you think about it, if the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation, then when we obey the gospel and we are saved, wouldn't that be the best possible time for us to go on and be with the Lord?

Why hang around and run the risk of backsliding and falling away? Wouldn't it better to just let that be the last thing you do on earth? Of course, if it was, that might have a *chilling* effect on people getting baptized!

But that isn't the reason why Christ doesn't take us from the baptistery. No, I think the reason for that is what we find in the first half of **verse 39**. After even begging Jesus to go with him, Jesus said, "*Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.*" That's why God doesn't take us from the baptistery. He has work for us to do. He doesn't just want to save us. He wants to save others as well. Peter tells us that God is *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). We have been saved to help save others! In some form or fashion, God wants to use us as instruments by which still others might be reached with the gospel.

And do you know what is interesting, this guy, or these two guys didn't have the luxury of enrolling in Jesus' school of discipleship for three years like some of the others. The only exposure they had to Christ, the only thing they knew about Christ, was what they had seen and experienced that day. And that's what Jesus told them to go and tell others. And that's what they did. The rest of **verse 39** says, "*And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.*" Mark's account tells us that they went to the region called Decapolis—a region of 10 cities—and told everyone what Jesus had done.

Think about that for a moment. We know what they did, but we can only guess how they did it. What did they say to people? Did they just walk up and say something weird like, "I've seen the Lord; he saved me?" We have no way of knowing, but I believe we can be fairly certain of these three things: 1) He told everyone he could, 2) he told them about Jesus, 3) he told them what Jesus had done for him.

That's our job, isn't it? And it isn't just a job; it is a privilege. To 1) tell everyone we can, 2) to tell them about Jesus, and 3) tell them what He has done for us. That's our calling and I hope it is something we are passionate about! And if we're not passionate about it, is it possible that's because we've begun to take our salvation for granted? Have we grown lukewarm and satisfied? I am afraid that too many Christians have that attitude, "I've got mine, why worry about anyone else!"

Christ didn't take you from the baptistery, did he? And hopefully, you now know why, so what are you going to do about it? What I hope you will do, is commit yourself to being like that man Jesus healed that day, that you will spend the rest of your days doing everything you can to tell others about the great things God has done for you.

Of course, some of you have yet to join Christ in the baptistery. You have been putting off that decision, hoping for what, I don't know. But I hope you won't put it off any longer. If you need to put on Christ in baptism, please do it today. Don't put it off any longer. And if you haven't been faithful in being the disciple Jesus saved you to become, don't leave that alone. This might be a good time for you as well to get going again. If you need to come, please do it while we stand and sing.