

Questions Jesus Asked, Part Eleven

Luke 8:26-39

1. The Decapolis.

2. The demoniac.

3. The Divinity.

4. The deliverance.

5. The dead pigs.

6. The dread of the people.

7. The Deity.

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



West Valley Church
August 22, 2021
Michael O'Neill

Questions Jesus Asked, Part Eleven¹

Luke 8:26-39

We're spending time this summer exploring some of the more than 300 questions that Jesus asked in the Gospels.

If you remember last week, I mentioned Jesus had an encounter with a demon possessed man on the other side of the sea of Galilee, and that we would look at the question in that encounter today. Remember the scenario: Jesus is teaching and healing the crowds on the Jewish side – the northwest side – of the Sea of Galilee. The crowds are growing, they are pressing in on Jesus, and they are demanding more from him. He needs a break and some space, so he convinces the disciples that they should go to the other side of the lake.

Then, on the boat with the disciples, they get caught in the squall and are afraid of capsizing and drowning (while Jesus deservedly naps in the boat), but Jesus awakens and commands the waters to be still.

As soon as they arrive on the other side of the lake, Jesus is met by a man with multitudes of demons in him. This is a strange and sad and supernatural and strong story, and there is a question in it that, like the question last week, reveals to us a great deal about Jesus. The question we're going to look at is not directed to disciples or to us; it is directed to the demons.

Would you help me honor God's Word and let's stand together as I read it to us?

Jesus and his disciples sailed to the Gerasenes land, which is across the lake from Galilee. As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, a certain man met him. The man was from the city and was possessed by demons. For a long time, he had lived among the tombs, naked and homeless. When he saw Jesus, he shrieked and fell down before him. Then he shouted, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" He said this because Jesus had already commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had taken possession of him, so he would be bound with leg irons and chains and placed under guard. But he would break his restraints, and the demon would force him into the wilderness.

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

¹ Resources:

- Bible Study Series: Best Questions in the Bible <https://jesusplusnothing.com/series/post/JesusQuestions>
- David Neale, *A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition: Luke 1-9* (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 2011)
- William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: Luke* (Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1975)
- Daniel Cash and William Griffith, *8 Questions Jesus Asked* (Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA 2017)
- Dale and Sandy Larsen, *Questions Jesus Asked* (IVP, Downers Grove, IL 2019)
- Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007)

“Legion,” he replied, because many demons had entered him. They pleaded with him not to order them to go back into the abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs. Jesus gave them permission, and the demons left the man and entered the pigs. The herd rushed down the cliff into the lake and drowned. When those who tended the pigs saw what happened, they ran away and told the story in the city and in the countryside. People came to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone. He was sitting at Jesus’ feet, fully dressed and completely sane. They were filled with awe. Those people who had actually seen what had happened told them how the demon-possessed man had been delivered. Then everyone gathered from the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave their area because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and returned across the lake. The man from whom the demons had gone begged to come along with Jesus as one of his disciples. Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return home and tell the story of what God has done for you.” So he went throughout the city proclaiming what Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:26-39, ceb)

Thank you, you can be seated. Before we go through this, let me plant a seed in your brain: there is intentionality in the sequence of this story: the story is sandwiched between the two sea crossings. Let that spin a little in your thoughts, and I’ll explain it later. But first, let’s see what’s important about *where* this encounter takes place...

1. The ***Decapolis***.

Luke calls it the area of the region of the Gerasenes, but we learn from Mark’s telling of the story that it is the area of the Decapolis, or the “Ten Cities.” The Decapolis was a large region mostly south and east of the Sea of Galilee. “The Decapolis was a confederation of ten cities that included the city of Gerasa. The cities were founded by Alexander the Great and the people who lived there were largely Greek, so in culture and nationality they were mostly all Greek.² This was Jesus’ first foray into Gentile territory and shows us that he always intended his mission to be beyond just the Jews, and all of us ought to be thankful for that!

But “observant Jews stuck pretty much to the northwestern region of the Sea of Galilee, because the “other side” represented all that was impure, decadent, sinful – and certainly not Jewish.”³ And yet that’s exactly where Jesus instructed his disciples to take him to. You get the strong impression that Jesus knew what he was doing and what waited for him...

So they arrived, and right away they are confronted with...

2. The ***demoniac***.

² Ken Heer, 130.

³ <https://drivethruhistory.com/jews-and-gentiles-in-the-gospels/>

As we read in the passage, this a wild, naked guy filled with thousands of demons. You could say *he was a rude nude dude filled with a multitude*. That should be the title of this sermon – *The Rude, Nude Dude filled with the Multitude!* Jesus was met by a man possessed by demons. His situation was so severe that he “lived in the tombs and wore no clothes” (Luke 8:27).

In Jesus’ day, there were many illnesses and psychological disorders that would’ve been considered demon possession, and Jesus’ healing ministry involved liberating people from these unseen forces.⁴ One author writes, “Regardless (of what we might diagnose it as today) ...Jesus sets people free from whatever bonds or...forces entrap them, and the story of the...demoniac is one of the most powerful in the Gospels. From a tortured existence in a tomb, a whole and restored human being emerges and sits calmly at Jesus’ feet.”⁵ So here’s this deranged, wild, supernaturally strong man that everyone is afraid of, and Jesus deals directly with him. “Society had tried to control him with chains and guards, but under the powerful influence of the evil spirit in him, he broke the chains and was driven into a life of isolation. (Despite the possibility that there were other issues,) demon possession was a very real problem in those days, either because of extraordinary spiritual warfare against the ministry of Jesus (directly), or a high level of superstition and openness to evil spirits (remember, this was a Gentile region with multiple gods); or (consider this:) demon possession has always existed at this level but (we’ve not always been willing to acknowledge it).”⁶

So let me take a minute to talk about this.

I don’t think any pastor can be in genuine ministry for very long before he or she has to deal directly with the demonic. Of course, we are always dealing *indirectly* with the demonic, and I’ll explain that in a bit. But sooner or later, we will run into a situation in someone’s life that is a direct confrontation with the enemy. I could tell you several stories of direct encounters we’ve had with the enemy over the years in our ministry. But I won’t, and I’ll explain why I won’t in a bit, too.

But I’ve always said that one of Satan’s best strategies is for people to believe he doesn’t exist. If you don’t think the devil and the demonic are real, then you are less likely to take seriously the sin in your life and the evil that is in this world. But the enemy *is* real, and as we see in the Bible, Jesus dealt with Satan and his demons a great deal.

Now let me give you some basic understanding, that maybe you already know, but I’ll assume maybe you don’t, because unless you watch a lot of horror movies, you probably don’t think about this much (and if you do watch horror movies, your information is entirely wrong!).

First of all, Satan is *not* equal to God. Satan is a fallen angel, and is the leader of all the fallen angels. God is allowing them a degree of freedom in this world, mostly because of *us* – in our abuse of free will, we’ve invited them to be here, until that time that God will throw and lock them into the abyss for eternity, along with all those who refuse to repent and trust in Jesus.

⁴ Neale, pg 196

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Ken Heer, 130-131

In the Bible, Satan is equal in power to Michael, the arch-angel. But the number of Satan's demons far outnumber the number of humans in this world. And none of us deals with Satan directly. Satan can't be in all places at all times; Satan is a finite being that can only be in one place at one time, so honestly, none of us are a serious enough threat that he would concern himself with us. But we *do* deal with his demons on a regular basis, even if we don't always know it. But none of us deals with Satan himself. It's a bit like, in World War II, when the allied troops came across a group of Nazis and fought them, they were fighting *the enemy*, but they were not fighting Hitler himself. Make sense? Still, the weakest demon is far more powerful than any human. They are not to be played with. Got that so far?

Now, about demon possession. There is a difference between *oppression* and *possession*. Despite what the movies might want you to believe, possession rarely happens. Because we have free-will, neither Satan nor God can have control of us without our permission. God has given us free will. So, God is a gentleman; he will not fill us with his Holy Spirit until we surrender to him.

Similarly, Satan cannot possess us unless we give him permission. Now, there are ways that can happen. It can happen at once, like if someone actually surrenders to the demonic. But again, that rarely happens, except in the movies. However, we can gradually surrender areas of our life to the enemy, through continual sin and disregard for God, and it is possible that over a period of time we end up having given more ground to the enemy than not. But again, no one is possessed without permission, whether in one large decision, or a lifetime of small ones.

However: while very, very few are fully possessed by the enemy, *all of us* are *oppressed* to a certain degree. All of us have to deal with the enemy's "Klingons," as a friend of mine who has a deliverance ministry calls them. We live in a world of sin and evil; all around us are the consequences of sinful and selfish choices that we've made. So relationships are dysfunctional, people are abused and exploited, accused, and judged by others, there is racism and poverty and politicism, people abuse power and privilege and are greedy, we're exploiting and are destroying God's creation in the environment... that's all driven by our sinful choices and then fanned furiously by the enemy. So on the one hand, we are all dealing with oppression as the result of general evil and sin in this world. But all of us, too, deal with demonic oppression in our personal lives. If you are not a believer, the enemy simply has to keep you that way, and that's not hard at all, to be honest. You can keep on being oblivious. But if you are a believer, then the enemy's Klingons are at work trying to keep you defeated and ineffective for Christ; keeping you from loving people, telling people about Jesus, and bringing the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in Heaven, keeping you from being filled with the Holy Spirit and mired in sin. The degree to which the enemy can oppress you in your life is determined by several things. A big one is areas of sin and unbelief in your life; they allow the enemy more room to work. Another is playing around with the occult – that can open the door for oppression; playing games, playing with witchcraft, playing around with spells and chants. Don't mess with that stuff.

But there's another way: if you have experienced trauma in your life, like if you were abused as a child, the enemy will try to exploit that and keep you oppressed, if he can.

I'm not saying that's always the case, but sometimes it can be. The longer it goes unhealed, the more room you are giving the enemy. So please: God longs for you to be healed: seek professional counseling, and invite people you trust to pray for you and with you, and let God bring healing into your life.

We don't know what it was that brought about this guy being possessed by Legion. A legion was a roman military group of about six thousand soldiers. We don't really know why he was possessed by so many, but we know that the place he lived and the way he lived meant he was isolated and deeply unclean: he lived in an area Jews considered unclean. He lived isolated and in caves and cemeteries and went around naked. He was violent with himself and others. All of these tell us how sinful, unclean, and lost the man was.

But as soon as Jesus sets foot on that side of the shore, the demons in the man bring him racing toward Jesus begging for mercy, because they recognized...

3. The *Divinity*.

Amazingly, the disciples still weren't sure who Jesus was, but the demons knew immediately. They drove the man to his knees before Jesus – not as a sign of worship, but in total fear of Jesus' authority and divinity.

There is some incredible power-playing that is going on here, with the demons trying to threaten and trick Jesus, but Jesus didn't budge. Let me show you what I mean: did you see in verse 28, the man says, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" To us that sounds like, "Please don't hurt me!" But what they're *really* saying is, "What we are doing is no concern of yours." They tried deceiving Jesus, saying that they weren't doing anything that he should be concerned with, or that he didn't have the power to do anything about it. Then the demons use Jesus' name. This is an attempt to control Jesus. To name something gives authority over it. Remember in the Garden of Eden, God gave humans permission to name the animals? He was giving us authority. So the demons are trying to gain an edge over Jesus. They called him "Most High" – it's the word that's used to describe God – Elyon in Hebrew. But that same name was used for Zeus in non-Jewish, non-Christian Greek writing. So "the unclean spirit(s) identify Jesus as only a 'son of Zeus,'" it is a double-edged attempt to control him by naming him and reducing him to the category of one of the pantheon of Greek Gods. His attempt to name Jesus is a power play."⁷ Then, when he says, "I beg you, don't torture me," he is using the same words that Jewish exorcists would use when expelling demons. The demon is using a deliberate parody, using it as a way to mock Jesus, thinking Jesus might be intimidated by them.

But Jesus is unmoved. He simply says, "*What is your name?*" There's our question. Power!! Why did Jesus ask it? This is really cool. Every other time that Jesus cast out demons, he didn't bother to ask their names; he just told them to get out and they did. Jesus even authorized the disciples to do this. So why does he ask this question? Jesus

⁷ Neale, pg 145

is God. He knows everything. Do you really think that Jesus did not know what was going on in the man, and who was doing this to him?

When Jesus said calmly and powerfully, “What is *your* name?” it sent shockwaves through the supernatural. Jesus refuted everything the enemy was trying to do to him, he turned the tables, and showed his absolutely, total, power: when Jesus asked that question, he showed that he is DIVINE. Jesus is God. There is no one above him. Everything in all creation is subject to him. This question shows he is God, and is the turning point of this entire story. Jesus, by asking this question, shows his disciples, the demons, and us, that he is God.

So now see...

4. The *deliverance*.

As soon as Jesus demands their name, they know their time is up. The possession is over, and they know it. They have to answer Jesus, so now they are in complete submission to him. Their power play and threats to intimidate Jesus are over, and then they beg him not to “throw them into the abyss.” The abyss was considered the bottomless pit, the underworld abode of the dead, the place where God will eternally confine the devil and his angels. The term also means “the sea” – the same word used to describe the abyss, or the chaotic waters, that the Spirit of God hovered over at the beginning of creation. They were literally begging Jesus to let them stay on dry land. There is some powerful imagery here, that has to do with the boat trips across the water. You haven’t forgotten about that, have you? Good, because we’ll come back to that in a bit. But the demons beg Jesus not to send them to the abyss, and offer instead to go into the pigs. I’m sure you know that pigs were considered unclean animals to the Jews. So it was fitting that the demons offered to go into the pigs, and Jesus let them. And as a result, this crazed man is now a calm disciple. Once thrown at Jesus’ feet by demons begging for mercy, he is now willingly at Jesus’ feet, worshiping his deliverer. The contrast is incredible in this deliverance.

Let me take a couple more minutes here to give a bit more teaching: remember that I said the best thing the devil has going for him is that nobody believes in him? Well the *opposite* is also true: if he can’t have that, then he’ll get believers so obsessed with him that they’ll start looking for him behind every bush, and they will blame him for everything that’s wrong in their lives. Listen, we are so fully capable of screwing things up ourselves that we give the devil too much credit. I imagine he would say, “As much as I’d like to take credit for that, that’s all on you!” Just as bad as not believing in him is giving him *too much attention*. That’s why I’m not going to tell you any of the stories of our experiences.

Don’t be overfocused on the enemy. We hear the stories of deliverance like this, and we become fascinated by it and give the enemy too much attention. The best defense is a good offense! Be so busy living for God that you don’t need to worry about the devil! Because I’ll tell you, our enemy is no better than just a bunch of...

5. The *dead pigs*.

That sounds like the name of a heavy metal band, doesn't it? Christian: you are a child of the King. If you fully live for Him, the enemy has no more power over you than a bunch of dead pigs.

This part of the story is almost a funny image if it didn't involve all that wasted bacon. Tragic! But the thought of these poor pigs minding their business when suddenly they are attacked by a herd of demons and sent hurdling like lemmings into the ocean – you gotta admit, it's a little bit funny. The very place the demons did *not* want to go – into the water – is the very place that, in their chaos they send themselves into.

This raises a lot more questions than answers: how can demons possess pigs? We don't know. But we do know that Jesus didn't slaughter all these pigs; he gave permission to the demons to enter them, but the demons did the rest. You might say, "How could Jesus allow that kind of loss of animal life?" The Gospel writers in that time would have said, "What is the cost of a herd of swine compared to the life of a human in God's image?" No one wanted the pigs dead, but ultimately the greater story is the deliverance of the man.

But that deliverance brought about a different response from the townspeople and the pig herders. Because next in the story we see...

6. The *dread*.

This demoniac dude has been delivered, but the folks aren't focused on him; they're thinking about the dead pigs.

Those who were tending the pigs rushed into town to tell everyone what they had just witnessed. When the crowds gathered, they found the previously possessed man "sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind" (8:35). His life had been radically changed—physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually—by the power of Christ. Regardless of how entrenched Satan may be in a person's life, God has the power to bring freedom. Whatever it is that keeps you from being the person God intends, He has the ability to break its hold on you.

A social misfit could now return to a productive life back in town with his family. (But instead of) being overjoyed by this, "the people... asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear" (8:37). Why were they afraid? (That's the key question for us!) Maybe they were afraid because there were other more "respectable" demons that Jesus might expose, and exposing them would make the people uncomfortable.

(Sometimes, our sin is like a scarred over infected wound. We know there's infection under our skin, and to be cleansed we have to have it cut open and cut out. But out of fear of the pain, we pretend it's not there and reject the doctor who can heal us. We had a lady in another church who had a fear of hospitals. She thought that was where people went to die. One day she started having a growth over her eye, on her forehead. She was afraid to go to the doctor, so she denied it was there. We'd tell her that she ought to have it looked at, but she'd say, "it's nothing." But it got larger and larger, to

the point where it covered her eye. She still denied it was there, or that it was serious. Had she gone to the doctor sooner, she could have had it removed and been fine. Instead, it was the very thing that killed her. That was these townspeople. Out of fear and the sin of self-preservation they rejected Jesus – the only One who could heal them and set them free.

Maybe they were afraid that if this cure cost a whole herd of pigs, how expensive might it be to have Jesus around?

Were they afraid because they could not deal with the mystery and power of Jesus, this one who had authority in the spirit world? The cost of a miraculous healing was more than they wanted to bear, so they asked Jesus to leave. Some people find it uncomfortable to have Jesus around.

His demands can be considered to be too great.⁸

The response of Jesus to their request that he leaves is summed up in just a few sad words: “So he got into the boat and left.” (8:37). Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost. He would go anywhere and endure anything to find a lost sheep. He intentionally went to Gentile territory. But He would not force himself on people who did not want Him. So He left, never to return to the area. They lost the opportunity to experience His life-changing truth and compassionate healing.

There *was* one person who was grateful that Jesus made the trip across the Sea of Galilee, even if He did pull up anchor and leave shortly after arriving. The man that Jesus delivered from the demons begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away (8:38). Jesus had asked others to follow Him, and they turned Him down. Now a man begged to follow, but Jesus said he couldn’t. Instead, Jesus told the man, “Return home and tell the story of what God has done for you” (8:39). (As one author says,) Not all disciples climb into boats to follow Jesus. Some go home to tell their story and share their faith. Some people would prefer working for Jesus on the other side of the lake than having to go home and try to live out their faith with people they know. Though the man begged to go, he obeyed the command to stay, and “So he went throughout the city proclaiming what Jesus had done for him.” (8:39).⁹

Did you notice: Jesus said, “Go tell others what God has done for you.” So he went and told everyone what Jesus did for him. Again: God and Jesus – the same. Jesus is...

7. The *Deity*

...he is God. In all of the events surrounding this event, culminating in the question Jesus asked, and with the final words of the story, we see that Jesus is God. But there’s something else incredibly significant happening here, too. Remember the water – remember that the story is sandwiched by Jesus and the disciples sailing across the

⁸ Ken Heer, 131.

⁹ Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 132.

water – chaotic on the way over, calm on the way back? *Now* we're going to talk about that.

Okay – remember that the creation story starts with God hovering over the chaotic waters, and he speaks creation into life? Remember in this story the demons begged not to be cast into the chaotic waters of the abyss, but they ended up there anyway?

What is happening in this story is God placing his stamp of approval, his exclamation point, on Jesus. God created out of the chaos of the waters. Jesus is Lord over the chaos of the water's storms. God brings life into the world, and the enemy, Satan, enters in and gets a foothold. Jesus speaks a word, and casts the legions – the armies – of hell into the abyss in order to set free a man – and a non-Jew at that. Jesus leaves him to tell others the good news of God's love and power, with smooth sailing across the once chaotic seas. There is a reason this story is sandwiched by waters. Jesus undoes what we did in the Garden when we invited Satan into this world.

Jesus is Lord. He is Lord over chaos. He is Lord over storms. He is Lord over creation, and He is Lord over the legions of Hell. He is Lord over it all – *to set people free*. Jesus can heal you and set you free from whatever demons have you chained – real or otherwise – and create you into a person who is whole and restored.

The rude nude dude with the multitude became the calm, clothed, complete convert of the Creator.

What do we take away from all this? Submit to Jesus. He is God! Don't think the enemy doesn't exist, but don't go looking for him either. Submit to Jesus. Seek his healing spiritually and emotionally and mentally. Don't resist what God can do for you. It might be frightening sometimes and costly and even painful, but it will be worth it. Submit to Jesus. He will set you free.

Prayer

Pastor Jason is coming to send us out with a benediction:

The One who commands demons by name, calls you by name. He knows you and loves you personally. May you be set free by Jesus himself, may you find healing and wholeness, and may you go to your home and neighborhoods and tell others what Jesus has done for you.