

Prayer

Great Creator and powerful Lord, come amongst Your people in power and restore Your church again. This is Your work, and You alone can do this. You alone can encourage Your people to aspire to greater things. You alone can empower the evangelist, the faithful church member, and the ordained leader to do Your will. You alone can guide prayer, direct work, and reveal Your will today. But do this work now, O Lord, and bless us by Your active presence. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Today, focus your thoughts on one of your friends, and pray especially for him or her. If possible, make contact by phone or social networking.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for disenfranchised people throughout the world:** *Pray for people of the Indian sub-continent, who have no voice because of poverty and illiteracy*
- *Pray today for people who live in fear of others within their own families, because of verbal, mental or physical abuse*
- *Praise God for books, for novels, poetry, biography and the many different categories of books readily available for us to read*

Meditation

Be generous, and imitate the Lord in your giving;
And be willing to receive as much as to give.

Give time to those who need your attention ... wholeheartedly:
Receive help from others when you need it ... graciously:

Give love to those who mean so much to you ... passionately:
Receive love from those who wish to give it to you ... affectionately.

Give away money to those who need it most ... unconditionally:
Receive money whether as a gift or as pay ... appreciatively.

Give your effort to whatever needs to be done ... without reserve:
Receive the benefits of work done for you by others ... unreservedly.

Give yourself to the work of the Kingdom ... unstintingly:
Receive the blessings God has given to you ... enthusiastically.

Give praise to God who has given you everything;
And receive from Him the blessings of life!

Bible passage - Luke 8:26-39

²⁶ Then they sailed to the territory of Gadara, which is on the other side of Lake Galilee. ²⁷ When Jesus stepped back onto land, He was met by a man from the city who had demons. He had not worn clothes for a long time, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he shouted, fell down in front of Him, and roared,

'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't disturb me'

²⁹ For Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. It had taken hold of him many times, and he was kept under guard with chains and shackles. He would nevertheless rip them off and be driven by the demon into the wilderness.

³⁰ Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'Legion'. Many demons had gone into him, and they begged Him not to order them to go back to the 'Abyss'.

³² Now a large herd of swine was feeding on the hillside, and the demons begged Jesus to let them go into these; so he gave them permission. ³³ The demons then came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴ When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and reported to both the city and surrounding countryside. ³⁵ Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.

³⁶ Those who had seen it told the people how the man who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷ All the people of the surrounding country of Gadara then asked Jesus to leave them; for they were gripped with fear. So He got into the boat and returned.

³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might stay with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying,

³⁹ 'Go home, and tell about everything God has done for you.'

So he went away, making known what Jesus had done for him throughout the city.

Bible Study

Review

This is a substantial story about a dramatic event in the life of Jesus and the disciples. Jesus had just demonstrated His authority over the forces of nature by stilling a storm on Lake Galilee. Now, He faced a different force in the powers of evil, in the form of large numbers of demons present within just one man. In Jesus' previous ministry, the impression is given that He healed people by casting out individual demons (e.g. 4:33f.). This story is clearly different.

After the storm, Jesus crossed the lake and approached Gentile territory. There is a lack of clarity about the exact location of Gadara (see translation notes below), but we know that Jesus had not been there before and the people there did not know Him. When He landed, He found a dehumanised man taunted by multiple demons, and named Legion, a name reflecting the fact that *'many demons had gone into him'* (8:30). There may be more to this name, however, because a 'Legion' was a whole Roman army, numbering around 6000 men. In addition, each army of Rome stationed around the Empire represented the whole authority of Imperial Rome. So is it possible that the man named 'Legion' represented all the forces of evil?

Jesus' miraculous deliverance of the man was different from any other healing or deliverance. Despite difficult circumstances, the shouting of the man (8:28), and the fear he created amongst any who came near (8:35), Jesus drew close to the man and addressed the situation calmly (8:30). He discussed the demons' demands and gave them permission to go into pigs, as they wanted. The man was then completely cured, and sat peacefully at Jesus' feet (8:35). The local people were fearful, but this is understandable; the power they had seen at work was beyond their understanding.

Today, people tend to be confused by what happened to the pigs. Certainly, Jews regarded pigs as unclean, and Jesus may have been unconcerned at what He did. But it grates on our feelings to know that Jesus allowed demons to possess animals. In the first century, it was common for exorcists to cast evil spirits out of people into animals, but in those days, people did not have the same sensibilities towards animals as we do today. Of course, it was not Jesus who killed the pigs, their deaths were caused by the manic demons. As we will see later, all this has symbolic significance. So we are obliged to swallow our contemporary concerns and focus upon the point of the story.

After the death of the pigs in Lake Galilee, people reacted in two quite different ways. Firstly, the local people who owned the pigs decided that they wanted nothing more to do with Jesus. They saw a man wielding great power and authority, and did not want evil spirits to be disturbed or their property destroyed! In contrast, the man himself turned to Jesus hoping to remain with Him (8:38). In a remarkable twist, Jesus directed the man to return to his home town and his own people. His testimony of deliverance was needed there.

The theme we uncovered at the beginning of the review can shed light on some of these dramatic events. For here, Jesus confronted the forces of evil and demonstrated His authority over them, and He passed this authority on to the early Christians. The story presents Jesus confronting the forces of evil successfully and releasing people from their bondage. Jesus did not destroy the demons completely, that is, He did not send them to the 'Abyss', because such a judgement belonged to God at the 'Last Judgment'. The movement of demons from the man to the pigs may therefore indicate a simple observable fact. Evil, in the form of demons or any other malevolent power, may be removed from individuals by the authority of Christ, but it continues to cause havoc in the world around us.

We have only scratched the surface of what may be found in this remarkable passage of Scripture; but read on to discover more.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- The deliverance of Legion
- The demons and the pigs
- A Gentile Mission

Notes on the text and translation

V26 'Then they sailed to the territory of Gadara, which is on the other side of Lake Galilee'

Other translations:

'They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee' (NIV)

'Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee' (NRSV)

There are three main points to consider in this sentence:

1. The Greek text says 'sailed', but some translations prefer 'arrived' because the geography of the journey requires land travel as well as sea travel. I prefer to accept the original, and have a theory about the region travelled to (see next).
2. This same story is found in Matthew 8:28, and Mark 5:1-20. The best reading of Matthew is 'Gadarasene'; of Mark, 'Gergasene'; and of Luke, 'Gerasene'. Now which one is correct, given that the original texts in each case present confusion? In this case, I reckon it is best to go by the geographical records of the day, which locate a town of Gadara, 5 miles from the Lake, and with territory adjoining the Lake on the eastern side. Modern scholars claim that there was a small town called Kersa adjacent to the lake, but it is no more possible to prove this than any other theory. I therefore stick with Gadara.
3. The last part of the sentence contains a Greek word meaning 'over and against', and the best way to translate this is to present the idea of crossing the lake to another side. Hence my translation. To talk of the territory of the Gerasenes, 'opposite Galilee', as in the NRSV, makes virtually no geographical sense.

V28 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't disturb me''

Other translations:

'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!' (NIV)

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

Again, there are a number of important issues here:

1. The first phrase of Legion's call is literally 'what to me to you', which is a colloquial expression. In general, it is a way of trying to create distance between people and can be translated in many different ways.
2. The last phrase of the sentence is often translated 'do not torment me', but the Greek word contains the idea of something not being moved, so I reckon that it is Legions request to be left alone and not touched. 'Disturb' is much better.

Going Deeper

The deliverance of Legion

Over the centuries, much has been said about the figure of Legion. For some, he represents people afflicted by large numbers of demons, who have many dehumanising problems and perhaps many illnesses, and who need help. In this Scripture, Legion is presented as naked, out of his mind, and living amongst tombs. It was common for outcasts such as this to live beyond city boundaries in or around burial grounds, because no other good land and no other good landlord would tolerate their presence.

With this in mind, some have attempted to analyse Jesus' methods of dealing with large numbers of demons, finding clues about how to help people with many problems today. There are a number of people in the stories of Jesus who have this kind of problem; one such is Mary Magdalene, mentioned by Luke as one of the women who supported Jesus' mission (8:1-3). Unfortunately, we know nothing about Jesus' ministry to her, so we cannot compare her story with that of Legion.

Nevertheless, if we follow the ideas above, we may find some helpful leads. The name Legion may be a clue, because it refers to the army. Could it be that this man was indeed a soldier in the Roman army? Were his many neuroses, illnesses and madness, the result of terrible things he had seen or done while in the service of his nation? Certainly, Roman soldiers had a reputation for terrible cruelty. So, did this man have some kind of post traumatic stress disorder? We do not know, but the name Legion is certainly descriptive, for it suggests a large, dominant and complex force of evil in the world. It is worth reflecting on the fact that Legion's demons left the man but were not destroyed. The evil that was the Roman Empire would one day be responsible for Jesus' death.

As soon as Jesus arrived in Gadara, Legion addressed Jesus and shouted at him, begging not to be disturbed; it seems that evil will often seek a place where it is settled and undisturbed! But the power of Christ will not allow this, and demons must be dealt with. They can indeed be removed, but they object to being sent to the 'abyss'. This word describes what people of the first century believed to be the 'place of the dead', a watery space beyond earth and heaven, where they believed spirits were trapped and came under God's ultimate authority.

We do not think of the world in such terms today, but that does not mean that we should not understand what Scripture teaches about casting out demons. The authority of Jesus is now available to us to stand above evil and remove them from people and from situations, but we do not always have complete authority over what happens to them afterwards, as this text suggests. Our duty is to be constantly vigilant and to use the power Christ has given us wisely.

The demons and the pigs

What is more important, pigs or people? If we are not to get bogged down in this story then we must decide whether people are more important than pigs, for this is Jesus' stance. Some who read this story today will have sympathy for the pigs, and many will have sympathy for those who owned the pigs. Such sensitivities arise naturally from the modern world, where the Christian must deal with the fact that many animals on the planet have a terrible life, due to cruelty and bad practice. Today, we do not have the same attitude towards pigs as the Jewish people, who believe they are unclean, but neither should we accept the more modern idea that some animals, even pigs, have characteristics that resemble the human soul!

The task of any reader however, is to look at the whole story, which is about the deliverance of Legion, not about the pigs. Legion was Jesus' priority, and for Him, a saved man or woman was always a priority. His utter focus on the salvation of individuals should inspire us to follow His example, and we should not be distracted by the pigs. The story of Legion simply does not give us any information about what we should think about animals or what attitude we should have towards their mistreatment. Personally, I am of the opinion that God has given us plenty within the Bible to justify a caring and responsible attitude to all species, wherever possible. But this is not the purpose of our passage today, which is the supreme importance of the salvation of humanity.

It might come as a surprise to the modern reader to know that in Jesus' day, there were a number of 'exorcists' who specialised in casting demons out of people and things. The practices can be found documented in various ancient scrolls and texts (for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls). Evidence also shows that such people were clearly aware of the difference between mental illness and demon possession. This should be borne in mind before the idea is put forward that demonic activity found in the New Testament is merely a cover for mental illness or seizures. When people of ancient times discerned the presence of evil, they genuinely believed that they were facing the forces of darkness, which needed eviction. Our discernment may not be exactly the same today, because people understand things very differently, but the principles have not changed and neither has evil gone away.

A Gentile Mission

Up to this point in Luke's Gospel, we have only heard about one Gentile, the Centurion whose servant was healed by Jesus (7:1-10). This is an example of Jesus' ministry to the Gentiles, which is recorded in each of the four Gospels. Other Gentiles are also remarkable people; the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:26), and

the Samaritan woman (John 4), and they are all commended either for their faith or their trust in Jesus. If we were to think that Jesus' positive reaction to these people means that the Gentile world was ready for the Good News, then we would be mistaken. The story of Jesus' dealing with Legion and the people at Gadara, warns us that many Gentiles did not warm to Jesus. There were people among the Gentiles who were ready for the Gospel, but many were not, and the Gentile mission of the early church would prove to be a substantial task.

Those who first read Luke's Gospel were fully aware of this. They faced a vast Empire full of people who were largely unconcerned about the Gospel they proclaimed, and although the church grew with the help and the power of the Holy Spirit, there were times during the first century when it was tough going. The reaction of the people of Gadara to Jesus will have encouraged the early Christians, by helping them to understand that the Gentile world would often turn away, afraid of the power of God's love. Their rejection was not necessarily the fault of the one who delivered the Gospel.

In the same vein, the story of Legion sent an important message to the early Christians, which was about the value of testimony when given 'at home'. After the demon was evicted, Legion was told by Jesus to go home, not in order to return to a life that he once had, but to be a witness to the life-saving power of Christ. He was called to speak to the people who might not otherwise understand the Gospel, that is, Gentiles who were his friends and companions, the people with whom he lived. It can be very hard to hear and accept such a call, for we are at our most vulnerable when being asked to speak to those we know and love.

Some may feel that these broad brush strokes depart too much from the text, but they give helpful hints for interpreting and applying the message of this passage. Another hint may be found at the very beginning of this passage, which tells us that Jesus crossed Lake Galilee to do this great miracle. Yesterday, we read about Jesus' power to still a storm, and realised that it was an example of God bringing salvation through water. The key Old Testament example of this is the people of Israel passing through the Red Sea. So here in this story, Jesus crosses over the water to the other side of Lake Galilee in order to minister to the Gentiles. This was a clear indication to the early Christians that in order to preach the gospel and do God's will, they had to travel! The Acts of the Apostles records that it was only when Paul and Barnabas began to travel across the Mediterranean Sea that the gospel began to spread rapidly around the Roman Empire.

Application

This passage of Scripture raises questions about how we confront evil. It is easy to see the great amount of trouble and distress all around us, and feel that it is all too much for us. Nevertheless, Jesus confronts the 'Legion' of demons in the same way that He confronts any single demon, and the results are the same. We can argue about what happens to demons when they leave one place and move on somewhere else, but we cannot deny the importance of using the authority Jesus has given us as his followers, to deal with the problems in front of us.

It is possible to exercise Christian ministry and never come across extreme examples of demonic oppression, or anything like the complicated situation Jesus found here. However, it is my observation that those who engage regularly and often with pastoral ministry quickly discover that they are dealing with all manner of evil with problems previously unknown to them. God will bring to the door of the faithful pastor people who suffer terrible abuse in the home of all kinds, He will bring people whose personal experience has caused them to self harm, and also those whose illnesses are not a result of natural disorder, but the consequence of mental breakdown or serious strife. The faithful pastor or counsellor may quickly feel swamped. This is where Jesus' example of this passage of Scripture is most helpful. He deals with the situation calmly without stress or rancour, using the authority that has been given Him and not diverting one iota from the pathway God has given.

This passage warns us that people's reactions to Jesus will always be very different. There will be many who wish to know more about Jesus Christ once they come to know about His love. There will also be many people, perhaps a majority in society, who want nothing to do with the love of God their Maker and Redeemer. They wish to remain undisturbed, and are happy with the demons they know. It is far better to be wise about the proclamation of the Gospel and the results that may be expected, than imagine that God should always reward our efforts with success.

Lastly, the story of the deliverance of Legion ends with the healed man being sent back to his own people to be his testimony. This is a tough call. Many people whose lives are transformed, and who eventually train for Christian ministry, do not get sent back to where they came from. There may be good reasons for this, but there is much evidence in Scripture of Jesus sending people back whence they came. Those whose lives have been truly changed have an important witness to bear to the people who have known them for a long time.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In your group, make a list of the many complexities of the story of the deliverance of Legion, and discuss them.
2. What does this passage of Scripture teach us about Christian ministry today, including deliverance ministry? How is God's authority over evil demonstrated in our world today?
3. If someone is delivered of an evil spirit today, what happens to that evil spirit, where does it go, and if it is not destroyed, why not?

Personal comments by author

There are many strands of meaning within this passage of Scripture. I have certainly heard a number of sermons based on this story, but I have rarely been satisfied that a preacher has got to the heart of it. This is why I am keen to present the idea that this story is designed to give a general description of Jesus' confrontation with evil. I know that when faced with evil, I need the good guidance given by interpreting the text in this way. The calm, confident, and purposeful Jesus of this story is a good example to me.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Think back over recent years, and consider whether you have been faced by anything that you might call a 'demon', or 'an evil spirit'. What do you mean by those terms? The more books you read, the more confused you may be. If possible, use a book of reference or the Internet to look carefully at how these words are used in Scripture.*
- *When praying, remember that the devil does not like what you are doing. You do not have to make a great show of this, but make sure that you are sure of what you are doing and the authority of Jesus, and claim His ultimate victory.*

Final Prayer

Jesus, my Lord and my Saviour. You are the source of all power and authority. You alone can inspire in me the love, compassion, kindness and sympathy that I must show for other people, especially those in need. I open my heart to You, and I ask You to use me in any way you see fit, to bring help succour and relief to other people around me. May I be fully used in Your service. AMEN
