

Luke 8:26-39

Freeing the Oppressed

Sermon

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Luke 8:26-39 NLT

Jesus Heals a Demon-Possessed Man

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So Jesus returned to the boat and left, crossing back to the other side of the lake. ³⁸ The man who had been freed from the demons begged to go with him. But Jesus sent him home, saying, ³⁹ “No, go back to your family, and tell them everything God has done for you.” So he went all through the town proclaiming the great things Jesus had done for him. ¹

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¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Lk 8:26–39). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. WE LIVE IN ONE OF MANY COUNTRIES THAT PRIDES ITSELF AS BEING “FREE”

A. IT IS WONDERFUL THAT WE HAVE SO MANY FREEDOMS

1. We can gather to worship freely whenever and wherever and whomever we want to
2. Overall we can come and go where we want, and within certain limits, do what we want
3. We are free from war, and relatively free from threats and dangers on the street and at home

B. AND YET AS MANY OF US KNOW ALL TOO WELL

1. Many people are not truly free

a) As Alan Brehm says,

They're bound by all kinds of things. Some are bound by fear--fear of dying, fear of illness, fear of becoming financially destitute, fear of being alone. Some are bound by pain--the pain of some disease. Or the pain of some trauma that was inflicted on them. Some are bound by addictions--to alcohol, drugs, food, and gambling, among many others. I find that many who are addicted to something are usually trying to cover over the pain of whatever trauma they may have suffered.

Then there are those who are bound by economic issues. Perhaps they simply cannot make enough money to support their family. Or perhaps they've made some bad choices and have gotten themselves into more debt than they can handle. Or perhaps they simply live in a place where a decent house costs more than a family can afford, and are strapped with a huge mortgage that they can barely pay.

When you look more closely, it doesn't seem like many people in our society are truly free. And if you asked them where freedom is to be found, I'm afraid not many people have a very good answer. These days, it seems that we as a people believe--I mean really believe--that all our problems would be solved if we had enough money. And so we have a fascination with playing

the lottery--which most people have about as good a chance of winning as I have of walking on the moon! Others believe that if they just meet the right person then all their problems will go away. And so we're just as fascinated with finding "the right one" with whom we're "meant to be." I'm afraid we're looking for freedom in all the wrong places.²

2. Though it might not be apparent on the surface of things, our Gospel lesson for today has something to say about true freedom and where it is to be found.

C. PRAYER

BODY:

II. LUKE 8:26-39

A. OUR PASSAGE TO DAY IS LUKE 8:26-39

1. The story about Jesus healing a demon possessed man

B. JUST BEFOREHAND

1. Jesus has been spending some time in Galilee
2. He and his disciples took a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee into the Gentile region on the other side
3. On the way there was the incident in which Jesus' calmed the storm

Luke 8: 24-25

²⁴ The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm. ²⁵ Then he asked them, "Where is your faith?"

The disciples were terrified and amazed. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "When he gives a command, even the wind and waves obey him!" ³

² Alan Brehm, Broken Chains Lk 8:26-39, <http://thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com.au/2013/06/broken-chains.html>

³ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Lk 8:24-25). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

4. Walter Liefeld explains the importance of the disciples' question:

“Who is this?” serves to show not only their amazement but also the slowness of their apprehension of the “Master’s” true identity. This question not only marks the climax of this story but is a key question in Luke.⁴

5. Jesus was demonstrating another aspect of who he was, and his power to deal with the chaos and threats the earth can throw up

- a) Part of his mission and the work of the Kingdom of God is to bring all things into order, redeem and restore all things that get out of kilter and out of control

C. SO NOW THEY ARRIVE IN THE GENTILE AREA

²⁶ So they arrived in the region of the Gerasenes,* across the lake from Galilee. ²⁷ As Jesus was climbing out of the boat, a man who was possessed by demons came out to meet him. For a long time he had been homeless and naked, living in a cemetery outside the town.

²⁸ As soon as he saw Jesus, he shrieked and fell down in front of him. Then he screamed, “Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Please, I beg you, don’t torture me!” ²⁹ For Jesus had already commanded the evil* spirit to come out of him. This spirit had often taken control of the man. Even when he was placed under guard and put in chains and shackles, he simply broke them and rushed out into the wilderness, completely under the demon’s power.

³⁰ Jesus demanded, “What is your name?”

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³² There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby, and the demons begged him to let them enter into the pigs.

So Jesus gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the entire herd plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned.

⁴ Walter L. Liefeld, Luke 8:24-25 in Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 8, p. 911

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³⁴ When the herdsmen saw it, they fled to the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, spreading the news as they ran. ³⁵ People rushed out to see what had happened. A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been freed from the demons. He was sitting at Jesus' feet, fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid. ³⁶ Then those who had seen what happened told the others how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷ And all the people in the region of the Gerasenes begged Jesus to go away and leave them alone, for a great wave of fear swept over them.

So Jesus returned to the boat and left, crossing back to the other side of the lake.

³⁸ The man who had been freed from the demons begged to go with him. But Jesus sent him home, saying, ³⁹ "No, go back to your family, and tell them everything God has done for you." So he went all through the town proclaiming the great things Jesus had done for him.

D. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF THINGS HAPPENING HERE

1. So we will work our way through some of the ones that help us understand what this story tells us about Jesus, his mission and the kingdom he brought, and will bring in its fullness in the future
2. We have already noted
 - a) The time and the location

III. THE MAIN CHARACTERS

A. JESUS

1. The man possessed
2. The demons
3. Herd of pigs
4. The herdsmen
5. The crowd
6. The man freed

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B. THE MAN HAS BEEN SUFFERING FOR A LONG TIME

1. He has been oppressed, and suffered terribly *inwardly*, in his mind and being

a) He was “completely under the demon’s power”

2. As a result, he suffered *outwardly*

a) He has been homeless, naked and living in the cemetery outside the town

3. Liefeld,

The basic tragedy of the demoniac lay not in mental or physical symptoms; in his case a human being was being controlled by powers totally antithetical to God, his kingdom, and the kingdom blessings of “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit “ (Rom 14:17).

4. But Jesus, who had already showed who he was, and thus his power through previous healings and the calming of the powers of the wind and rain, commanded the oppressing evil spirit to come out of the man

a) The spirit recognized Jesus, and used the title “Most High God”

5. Liefeld tells us this term was commonly used as a general term for *diety* apart from worship.

* 8:29 Greek *unclean*.

- a) The falling at Jesus' feet is not in worship, but is a desperate plea to escape punishment, presumably the final judgment of the "bottomless pit", or the *abyss*.

³⁰ Jesus demanded, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied, for he was filled with many demons. ³¹ The demons kept begging Jesus not to send them into the bottomless pit.*

C. JESUS WASN'T AN EXORCIST

1. He didn't use magic incantations or formulae or invoke another authority to drive out demons or heal people of whatever ailed or oppressed them, physically, mentally, spiritually, or emotionally.

- a) He was the Son of God, the Christ, and as Luke is pointing out through various stories, he had the power and the desire to free people from whatever internal or external force was oppressing them and causing them to suffer

- b) Particularly those forces that kept them from God and his love and life of peace and love

D. THE MAN GAVE HIS NAME AS LEGION

1. This wasn't who the man really was, but it described his oppressed and diminished state from being possessed by a *legion* of demons

- a) The man had lost his true identity, his humanity, his being—made in the image of God

2. Kathy Donley

All the identity he has left is the very thing that has robbed him of his health and sanity, destroyed his connection with his community, and made him a danger to himself and others. He has become identified with his disease, with that which keeps him bound.⁵

3. Addictions, mental and physical afflictions and traumas can dominate and sometimes distort our thinking and our identity

* 8:31 Or *the abyss*, or *the underworld*.

⁵ Kathy Donley, *What About the Pigs?*, Luke 8:26-39, July 14, 2013, Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary [mailto:PRCL-L@LISTSERV.LOUISVILLE.EDU]

4. People can become lost in their affliction—their self-image, their priorities, their ability to make sound decisions, or to take care of themselves—can be severely impaired
 - a) Emotions such as fear, fight and flight reactions dominate
 - b) People in such situations can go deep within themselves at one extreme, or on the other become almost dissociated with themselves, with the result that they lose themselves
 - c) They often lose the desire and ability to relate to others in a rational and caring manner
5. This is what we see with the man in the story
 - a) We also see how he has been ostracized and harshly treated by his community
 - b) And this has a devastating impact on his personhood
6. Andrew Prior points out that in Mark the man was bashing himself with stones.

In Mark's story, the man is gashing or beating himself with stones. (Mark 5:5) He is stoning himself! He is accepting, in some way, the verdict of the mob.

[Hammerton Kelly](#) says of this:

He carries his persecutors inside himself in the classic mode of the victim who internalizes his tormentors. ...compulsively belaboring himself with stones and crying his own rejection. He imitates his persecutors to the extent that he becomes his own executioner ...

It makes him the living dead: He has no clothes and lives in the tombs. ([Baillie](#))

At this point the story is grimly familiar for anyone with the least exposure to hospital mental health wards, where people self harm, and quite often insist on being naked. The correlation between those who are mentally ill and those who have suffered traumatic abuse is striking. And one particular mental illness which I have met reflects another aspect of this story. [Dissociative Identity Disorder](#), living as Legion, also has strong correlations with abuse, and with self-harm.

.... The man and his city are a symbol of what is wrong— the disease— with all our cities. ⁶

E. WHAT DOES THE TERM “LEGION” REMIND US OF IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS TIME AND PLACE?

1. Roman military unit of thousands of soldiers
2. The whole of Israel was “possessed” by the Romans and their legions of soldiers
 - a) They all needed deliverance from the oppressive political forces that had enslaved them and took away their identity as a people
3. Human history is in many ways the story of political oppression by those who misuse their power and authority
 - a) Too many families have similar problems
4. So in a sense this possessed man stands as a type of the predicament of Israel, and all nations, as well as families and individuals that have been controlled, as Liefeld puts it, “controlled by powers totally antithetical to God...and his kingdom...”
5. In complete contrast to God’s original intention, we have all, “For a long time” ... “been homeless and naked, living in a cemetery outside the town.”

F. BUT JESUS’ COMMANDED THE EVIL SPIRITS TO COME OUT OF THE MAN

²⁸ As soon as he saw Jesus, he shrieked and fell down in front of him. Then he screamed, “Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Please, I beg you, don’t torture me!

²⁹ For Jesus had already commanded the evil* spirit to come out of him. This spirit had often taken control of the man. Even when he was placed under guard and put in chains and shackles, he simply broke them and rushed out into the wilderness, completely under the demon’s power.

1. He was now freed, no longer under the demon’s power

⁶ Andrew Prior, Luke 8:26-39, No longer possessed by the mob - Luke 8:26-39, andrew@THEPRIORS.Net

* 8:29 Greek unclean.

G. THIS IS WHAT JESUS' DOES

1. He is the Saviour and Redeemer of all
2. He came to reinstate the Lordship and Kingdom of God
3. To heal, to free, to restore all people and nations and brings us all back into relationship with God so we can be who he created us to be in his image, fully and completely his people
4. Jurgen Moltmann

The lordship of God drives out of creation the powers of destruction, which are demons and idols, and heals the created beings who have been damaged by them. If the kingdom of God is coming as Jesus proclaimed, then salvation is coming as well.”⁷

H. HERD OF PIGS

³² There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby, and the demons begged him to let them enter into the pigs.

1. This was a Gentile area and pigs were a popular and valuable animal

So Jesus gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the entire herd plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned.

2. This isn't what Jesus did, it was what he let the demons do
3. This is all a reversal of the normal pattern of abuse and oppression
4. Jesus' presence and authority reverses the order of things, and the individual is freed from the oppression surrounding him
 - a) The legion of demons, the persecution and oppressing forces and powers that had control and caused chaos and destruction for the oppressed, are the ones who end up in chaos and self-destruction

⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 104

5. Karl Barth commented on how Jesus' casting out of demons,

...reveal the total and absolutely victorious clash of the kingdom of God with nothingness, with the whole world of the chaos negated by God, with the opposing realm of darkness.⁸

I. THE HERDSMEN

³⁴ When the herdsmen saw it, they fled to the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, spreading the news as they ran.

1. The herdsmen fled

- a) They were deeply alarmed and shocked by what happened
- b) They told the community what had happened and they were all curious to come and see

J. THE CROWD

³⁵ People rushed out to see what had happened. A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been freed from the demons. He was sitting at Jesus' feet, fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid. ³⁶ Then those who had seen what happened told the others how the demon-possessed man had been healed.

1. The word "healed" can also mean "saved"

2. The man freed from demons was earlier described in the original language as simply a "male" or "man" "of the city" (8:26)

- a) As we saw he was less than a complete human being
- b) Also he was of the city, or his world, apart from God

3. Now he is called a human being

- a) As Andrew Prior tells us;

As he arrives, Jesus is met by a man [*aner male*] of the city, (8:26) who lunges at him. Later...this man, now in his right mind, is called a "human being." [*anthropon*] ... And this human being sits at Jesus' feet rather than seeking to drive him away.⁹

⁸ Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics 4.2:230

⁹ Andrew Prior, Luke 8:26-39, No longer possessed by the mob - Luke 8:26-39, andrew@THEPRIORS.Net

b) Instead of wanting to flee *from* God, he wants to be *with* God

³⁷ And all the people in the region of the Gerasenes begged Jesus to go away and leave them alone, for a great wave of fear swept over them.

4. William Loader

The gospel brings upheaval. It disrupts economic and social arrangements. And that makes people fearful. Because another thing that drives us out of our minds is unpredictability. We like our routines. We like knowing who the crazy people are and who our enemies are and we feel safer when they don't change. "We are willing to trade the freedom to grow and change for the security of knowing that things will be like they have always been."¹⁰

There is a chance here for not just one man's healing, but an entire community's liberation. Instead of seizing that opportunity, they opt for the predictable, the routine they know, and they ask Jesus to leave.^{11 12}

K. THE FREED HUMAN

So Jesus returned to the boat and left, crossing back to the other side of the lake.

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1. Liefeld,

Now healed and a new man (observe the contrast between vv. 27-29 and 35), the former demoniac is commissioned by Jesus, not to go with him as a disciple, but to be a witness where he lived. Jesus has different ways for different believers to serve him.¹³

2. The freed man wants to stay with Jesus, to go with him

a) But Jesus wants him to go back to where he had been a victim, and to live as healed and whole back there

¹⁰ Herbert Anderson, *The Family and Pastoral Care*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), p. 41

¹¹ William Loader, Pentecost 5: 19 June, Luke 8:26-39, <http://www.staff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/LkPentecost5.htm>

¹² Alan Brehm,

You would think that they would welcome one who could set them free from the powers of evil that oppressed them. But this was Gentile territory, and perhaps they simply valued their pigs more than they valued the freedom Jesus offered. Or perhaps it was because they were afraid of Jesus because he had the power to say the word and free a man who had been horribly tormented for years?

Fred Craddock says,

the fear is evoked by the recognition of a power present which was greater than the power of evil spirits.

¹³ Liefeld, p. 914

3. This witness will have a much greater impact on his family and local community than it would if he left

4. J.A. Martin makes the important point that,

This was the first recorded witness of Jesus in a Gentile area.¹⁴

5. He will be an ever-present witness of the power and love of God in Jesus

CONCLUSION:

I. WHAT CAN WE LEARN

A. ALL SORTS OF THINGS CAN LEAD TO DEPRESSION AND TORTURED BEHAVIOURS

1. Kath Donley,

Addiction can take us out of our right minds, creating such a craving that we set aside all other plans or hopes or relationships just to satisfy that desperate need.

Oppression can do it too. Whether it comes from one person, like the cycle of abuse in some households, or the systematic messages of racism and homophobia and misogyny present in our culture, the repeated violence of those words and actions eats away at our self-esteem and self-understanding until we begin to believe those messages and think that we deserve the treatment we're getting. Then we are no longer in our right minds.¹⁵

2. Alan Brehm,

the healing miracles were intended to demonstrate that through Jesus God was present among them and at work carrying out the compassion and mercy of his kingdom. In the same way, I think that the exorcisms were intended to demonstrate that through Jesus God was setting people free from all that kept them bound.

¹⁴ Martin, J. A. (1985). Luke. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 227). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁵ Kathy Donley

The real source of freedom from all the evil and pain and trauma and injustice that binds people in our world today is the power of God's kingdom at work among us and through us.

I wish it could be as simple as "saying the word" and granting freedom to those who are suffering from the powers of evil in our world.

Unfortunately, true freedom may only come for some people after years of work--whether it's overcoming trauma or digging out of debt.

But I think the journey for those who are bound begins by those of us who have experienced God's freedom carrying out our calling to live as witnesses to that amazing good news. We can show them our broken chains as a testimony that God can give them the freedom they've always longed for.¹⁶

B. PRAYER

¹⁶ Brehm