



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

Saved From the Insanity of Sin...

Luke 8:26-39

^{NIV} **Luke 8:26**...They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. ²⁷ When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "**What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!**" ²⁹ For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. ³⁰ Jesus asked him, "**What is your name?**" "**Legion,**" he replied, because many demons had gone into him. ³¹ And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. ³² A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. ³³ When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. ³⁴ When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, ³⁵ and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ³⁶ Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. ³⁷ Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "**Return home and tell how much God has done for you.**" So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Young William was a sensitive boy. Looking at his life, it is not particularly surprising that he was. His father, a respected minister, was always too busy for William. And when he did take time out for him, they were both so uncomfortable that neither one of them knew how to act. But that was all right with William. He still had his mother.

William's mother loved him; she doted on him. He was so small and frail that she could not do otherwise. She read to him and pampered him. And then without warning, William's mother died. He was only six years old. His nurse tried to comfort him but he was inconsolable. Desperate to help him get control of himself, she told William that his mother had gone on a trip and that she would return tomorrow. Pitifully, William waited at the window the next day, and the next, and the next but she did not return. William began to withdraw inside himself.

His father, not knowing what to do with so small and frail a child, decided to send him off to boarding school. It was a terrible thing to do. By the time William arrived at school he was almost catatonic. And the older boys started in on him almost immediately. They beat him and savaged him both mentally and physically. He withdrew into himself even further but somehow he survived.

He began to throw himself into his books. He was natural-born student. The same obsessive traits that plagued him late at night in his loneliness served him well in his studies. He had a gift with words. By the time he was a teenager he was a noteworthy scholar. He moved on to study at Westminster. It was the first happy time in his life. It was a short-lived happiness.

In his thirties, William's life and sanity fell completely apart. His best friend drowned. His father died. His fiancé, at the insistence of her parents, broke off their engagement. He was penniless and isolated, drifting in and out of sanity. In one of his few moments of clarity, William decided to kill himself. In a period of two days, he tried to kill himself three times.

First, he tried to poison himself but was discovered by a chambermaid and had to throw out the poison. Next, he tried to stab himself in the heart but the blade of his knife broke.

Finally, he resolved to hang himself only to have the fabric cord he used break. When he was discovered, he was still lying on the floor with the broken cord about his neck. Completely incoherent, they promptly placed him in an insane asylum.

And...we will, I think, leave young William there for a few minutes. We will return to him but we'll leave him there for now. We'll look instead at the young man in our text, a young man also living in a world of insanity but with one important difference. The man in our text was possessed.

Now, I should tell you there is a difference between insanity and possession. One is the result of natural, even biological effects, and the other is brought on by the invasion of supernatural beings. Both are unusual, one exceedingly so. But there are similarities; similarities I hope our study will bring out this morning. Let's look again at Dr. Luke's introduction to this young man.

^{NIV} **Luke 8:26**...They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. ²⁷ When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.

The first thing I notice about the young man is that he was completely devoid of any sense of shame. Luke tells us that he...**had not put on any clothing for a long time,**

It is a characteristic, I think, of spiritual poverty to begin to lose one's sense of shame. The law, which has been placed in the heart by God, is cast aside. The restraints of conscience and even of culture are jettisoned. The very actions that should invoke a sense of shame become badges of honor. Such men not only take pride in the flouting of God's law, they encourage others to do so as well.

I remember, vividly, reading Arnold Dallimore's life of the great, Puritan evangelist George Whitefield. The people of God loved Whitefield but those who hated the gospel desperately hated him. Once when he was preaching to a huge crowd in the open countryside, one man, trying to distract the mass of people from listening to the gospel, climbed up a tree took off all his clothes and swung upside from a tree branch naked.

You see the same thing today in many of the public demonstrations pitched by those of a reprobate lifestyle. They not only take pleasure in their sin; they want to force others to accept their sin as normal or even preferential. They justify their own sin thinking the volume of their outcry will make it acceptable. The man in our passage this morning, unlike Adam and Eve who hid from God in their spiritual nakedness, exposed himself in open rebellion toward God. He had lost all sense of shame. He makes Paul's words ring especially true.

^{NIV} **Romans 1:32**...Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

The second thing I notice about this man is that he lived in perpetual isolation.

Luke tells us that this man was...**not living in a house, but in the tombs.**

I think that statement is particularly important. It is, of course, a statement of fact. But there is a sense in which the language is also metaphorical. This man lived in the tombs physically but he also lived there spiritually. He was as dead in his alienation and sin as he could get. He slept in places most vile, in places filled with corruption and all manner of putrefaction. He lived with the dead. He slept there. He raved there. He even, and this makes me shudder to think of it, dined there. He was an outcast before men and God.

But as believers that is not so difficult for us to understand. He was what we once were. And sometimes we lose sight of our own sinful past. We begin to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. But Paul reminds us:

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:1**...As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

There is a sense in which our sin is the most isolating thing in the world. It can isolate us from friends or family; it can separate us from parents or loved ones.

But most importantly, our sin separates us from God. This man was about as isolated as any man could get.

The third thing I notice is that he was prone to violence. Further down in verse 29 Luke tells us:

^{NIV} **Luke 8:29...** For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. ³⁰ Jesus asked him, "**What is your name?**" "**Legion,**" he replied, because many demons had gone into him.

Apparently, the people of his village tried to control him. He would not be controlled. They bound him with chains and shackles and posted guards. But the demons within him would not allow him to be subdued. They tormented him.

They empowered him. They drove him.

Mark tells us more in his gospel. He says there:

^{NIV} **Mark 5:3...** This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

I do not see how it possible to imagine a more pitiful sight. This man was, in every sense of the word, alone. He had no friends, no family. They had given him up. He was alone, crying out day and night from his abode among the dead.

And then he saw Jesus.

NIV Luke 8:28...When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, **"What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!"**

I can see the disciples moving behind Jesus as this naked, possessed man ran down the hill toward them. He was no doubt a mess with matted hair and wild bloodshot eyes. And he was running straight towards them. Then in amazement they watched as he threw his naked body down before Jesus. It is interesting, I think, that the demons in this man knew Jesus. But they didn't know Jesus as the Good Shepherd or Jesus as the meek and lowly. They knew Jesus as the Righteous Judge. What a city could not do with chains and shackles, Jesus did just being there. This deranged, possessed man fell on his face before Him begging mercy.

Look again at what the demons say: **"What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me."**

Matthew makes the nature of their request even clearer.

"What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

It is an interesting question. Very seldom do we ever think of Jesus as the righteous Judge. Usually, we think of Him as meek and mild but here the possessed man, rather the demons in him, recognize Jesus for what He will be, the Judge of all things. We too would all do well to ponder that meeting. Let me ask you, what righteousness will you offer? What justification will you plead?

But we'll return to that thought too in a moment.

The demons asked Jesus for something very specific. Look at verse 31.

^{NIV} **Luke 8:31**... And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. ³² A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission.

Now scholars are divided as to why the demons wanted to go into the swine. Some think it is because they did not want to be without a physical body. I don't know the reason why they asked to go where they wanted to go. But I do see one thing as clearly as they did. They were coming out.

And then, wonder of wonder, Jesus grants their request. With language so simple, maybe with just the wave of the hand, He tells them, **"Go!"**

Luke tells us:

^{NIV} **Luke 8:33**...When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

It was a scene extraordinary. Mark even tells us how many swine there were, about two thousand. And the text hints that there was one pig for each demon. This man was genuinely possessed with a multitude of demons. It is not surprising that Luke would then tell us that:

Luke 8:34...And when the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country.

I can imagine what that conversation must have been like.

“Brothers, you know that lunatic out by the lake?”

“Do you mean the crazy man who lives in the tombs?”

“Yes, that’s the one. Anyway, another man came by and the lunatic raced out to meet Him. He fell at his feet. Then, we heard these voices, these awful, hideous voices. And the next thing we knew, all of our swine stampeded down the hill and threw themselves into the water and were drowned.”

“What happened next?” the listening crowd asked.

“Ummm...we do not know; we had already departed the scene.”

I love what Luke tells us next.

^{NIV} **Luke 8:35**...and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

Now, I think that is remarkable. They had become accustomed to the possessed man living in the tombs. They had become accustomed to his ravings and his violence. But seeing him clothed and sitting in his right man they became terrified. They were not afraid of him possessed; they were afraid of him sane because something had happened beyond their ability to understand.

That something was the man’s regeneration, his being born anew. It is something

that we as Christians know something about. There is not a one of us here that doesn't understand something of the insanity of sin. We understand the bondage we were under. We understand that we too were shameless, isolated and prone to violence and enmity.

But Christ bore our shame on the cross.

But Christ bore our isolation on the cross.

But Christ bore our judgment on the cross, suffering in our place the just penalty of our sin. And just like this possessed man He clothed us too, in His own perfect righteousness.

It is not that we are perfect; we have no illusions about that. It is rather that we have been wakened from the insanity of our sin. We have been put in our right mind. We have been awakened to our new life in Christ. We understand, as we never have before, the dreadful curse we were under. And now we serve Him with a new resolution, with a new gratitude.

And like this man rescued we want to follow Him. Look at verse 38.

^{NIV} **Luke 8:38...** The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ **"Return home and tell how much God has done for you."** So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Now, if you're here this morning and you know what I am speaking of I encourage you to lift up your heart in gratitude for all that Christ has done for you, both as we sing and as we go our way taking the gospel out into the world.

You don't have to do it in any prideful manner either. Think on your sin; think on your deliverance from that sin and gratitude will flow from your heart just as naturally as it did from this man.

On the other hand, if you are not a Christian I want to plead with you to throw yourself on God's mercy. You have no need for me to tell you of the dreadfulness of your own moral failure; you know that well enough. But I can promise you this, there is mercy to be had.

There is forgiveness to be apprehended. You have the promise of Jesus Himself, who said: **"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.**

If you find yourself this morning with an interest in Christ don't cast that interest aside. Plead His mercy. If you want someone to talk to, at the end of the service I'll be here at the front. I wouldn't embarrass you for the world. But I beg you don't let this moment pass.

Now, if you don't mind...I want to return to William.

William, as I mentioned earlier, found himself at 30 years of age without friends and without hope in the world. He found himself in an insane asylum. But William also found a friend there. There was a kindly old doctor that talked to him plainly of sin and of redemption.

In due time, William found that it was not the ignoring of his sin that brought him relief. He found that relief came only when he looked it straight in the face. He found that it was only when he contemplated his failure before God that he was also able to take refuge in God's own provision for his sin.

William began to write. He met a godly pastor, a man named John Newton, who agreed to spend time with him, encouraging him in his Christian growth. Newton also wrote hymns with him. Before long, William began to come out of his depression. Not all of his problems went away. He still battled depression but he was never the same. When he faced his own demons, he found power in Christ's forgiveness. When he meditated on his own unworthiness, he found peace in the blood of the cross. He wrote many hymns. We have already sung one this morning. In a moment we'll sing another.

The first line goes like this:

*There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stain.
Lose all their guilty stain; lose all their guilty stain.
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stain.*

Whenever I think of that song, I am reminded, as was William Cowper, that in Christ we are indeed saved from the insanity of our sin. Let us rejoice and be glad.

Let's pray.