

## Understanding Power, Bondage, Fear, Freedom, Witness

2<sup>nd</sup> Sun. after Pentecost – 06/22/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 8:26-39 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 39, [Jesus says to the man He had rescued from demonic possession,] **“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.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ This story in our Gospel Reading today is filled with mystery and wonder. I mean, how many of us here have seen a man displaying these kinds of obvious signs that he is possessed with demons?

➔ Right, this seems like the stuff we might see only in horror movies, where the power and the bondage and the fear are bigger than life; too much for any of us to think that it could actually happen.

✘ But then we remember that this is a text from Scripture; from God’s holy, perfect and infallible Word. And so, not only is it an event that really did take place, but God has caused it to be recorded for you and me to read, learn and inwardly digest; for us to apply into our lives here today; as a warning; as a comfort; as God’s guidance for us in our Christian walk with Jesus.

✘ It makes me think of a phrase in that classic hymn *Rock of Ages*. The first verse of that prayer starts out: “Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee; Let the water and the blood, From Thy riven side which flowed,” – now here it is – “Be of sin the double cure; Cleanse me from its guilt and pow’r.” (LSB #761)

➔ Have you ever stopped to ask, “What is this ‘double cure’ business all about?” The first cure is what we think of all the time as Christians; how Jesus, as the Son of God suffered, died, and was raised from the grave to forgive us of the guilt of all of our countless sins in life.

➔ But the second cure, this is what our Gospel story today teaches us about; the cure of the power that sin has over us; the freedom that only Jesus can give to us because only He is able to break the chains of Satan and sin that have sought to bind us in prison, away from Jesus; away from the freedom He wants for us all.

✘ So let’s step for a moment more deeply into this story that took place when Jesus “stepped out on land” with His disciples in “the country of the Gerasenes” on the southeast shore of the Sea of Galilee.

➔ The goal is that when we are done today, God will have given us a better understanding of five important Biblical concepts: Power, Bondage, Fear, Freedom and Witness.

### **I. Power**

✘ As we explore these concepts, remember that there are three primary characters in play in this Biblical story. You’ve got 1) Jesus, 2) the “man from the city” (v. 27), and 3) the demons who had taken possession of him.

➔ Jesus makes a clear distinction between the human man whose fleshly body was standing before Him and the evil power that had taken over his flesh. Verse 28 says that “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’.”

➔ You might ask, “Was that the man or the evil power that is speaking there?” Jesus separates the two for us when He asks in verse 30, “What is your name?” And the answer comes back, “Legion.”

✘ This shows us how powerful the devil and his demons are, because a legion was the Roman military term for a group of up to 6,000 soldiers. Folks, we all need to take this seriously, because the devil and his demons are not messing around when they see the opportunity to gain control of a person. They are “all hands on deck.” It’s a “pull out all of the stops” approach to their intent to take over a person’s soul and turn him/her against the one true God.

➔ And they are absolutely more powerful, both physically and spiritually than any of us humans by ourselves. Verse 30 says that this man had been “bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.” You see, at the core of their nature is destruction. 1 Peter 5:8 warns us all, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

➔ And that someone, dear Christian, is you! And me! Precisely because we are Christians. That irks those demons more than anything else – to see you here worshipping Jesus, because He is the one power – along with the Father and the Holy Spirit of course; the only power that the devil, his demons and all of the evil human forces they can muster under their control cannot match up against.

✘ Verse 31 shows us that these devils know exactly where they belong; where their final destination will eventually be. “They begged [Jesus] not to command them to depart into the abyss” – that’s the Bible’s word for hell. They are entirely at Jesus’ mercy; totally under His power – an important truth that we must never forget.

## II. Bondage

✘ Because, between Jesus, the demons and us human beings, we are absolutely the weakest of the three. We are the ones, like that man in chains and shackles that come into this world in bondage to sin, death and the devil.

➔ You heard me right folks, this man in our text today is not the only one that has been or is demon-possessed. Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us about our human nature at conception and birth. Paul says, “you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air (i.e. Satan), the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” That right there is the very definition of demon possession and Paul says “we all once lived” in that bondage. As Jesus said John 8:34, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.”

➔ So, raise your hands, is there anyone here who is able to never ever sin at all? You see, even now, as Christians, we still struggle against those chains and shackles that the devil and his lackeys are trying with all of their power to wrap around us; to turn us away from Jesus; to pull us down into hell with them when we die or when Jesus returns.

✘ As we see with the Gerasene man, living in bondage to demons and sin really is a living hell. It makes a person do things completely against his will. It made that man a menace in the community and pushed him into a lonely, inhospitable place. Paul described our bondage to sin in Romans seven like this, “I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” (Rom. 7:18-20).

## III. Fear

✘ That leads to the third concept we see in this story, and that is fear. The reason that all of this talk of demon possession is ignored and brushed aside as nonsense by so many people – even

many Bible-believing Christians today, is because when they see and consider the kind of immense power and bondage that we are talking about, it makes them afraid.

➔ And the easiest way for the devil to get and keep his teeth into us is if he can make us so frozen in fear that we hide our heads in the sand and say, "It isn't so."

- ✘ That's what happened in verse 35 when the people went out to the desert to see what happened. When they saw the result of Jesus' victory over the demons and the transforming power that Jesus had worked within the man, we're told that "they were afraid."

➔ Likewise in verse 37, the people "of the surrounding country" came and asked Jesus "to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear."

- ✘ You see, even when the people should have been celebrating and praising Jesus for His miraculous and saving work, the devil was twisting things in their hearts so that they became afraid; afraid because of their own guilt; wondering perhaps whether Jesus would do to them what He did to demons and the pigs instead of the demoniac.

➔ In verse 37 we see that the people's guilt and fear was so deeply engrained with their unbelief that Jesus "got into the boat" to leave. Jesus will go to all extremes to save any and every soul from Satan and his evil influence, but if a person sees and hears of His saving power and still clings to the devil and his influence in unbelief, Jesus will not force him/her into His kingdom when he/she wants nothing to do with Jesus.

#### **IV. Freedom**

- ✘ But understand, that is never ever His desire for any human soul on this earth. Just as destruction is the demons' nature, salvation and freedom from bondage to sin and Satan is what Jesus is all about!

➔ He loved that demon-possessed man so much that He sailed across the Sea of Galilee and sought him out. And the moment Jesus had exorcised those demons from that man, he wanted nothing but to "sit at Jesus' feet" and soak up His love and learn all that he could from Jesus, His God and Lord.

➔ In fact, when Jesus got ready to leave, the man "begged that he might be with" Jesus. He never wanted to be away from His Savior. His life had changed completely because of Jesus.

- ✘ This is the same kind of reversal that Jesus has worked for each one of us here in our baptism. Did you know that all of you who have been washed clean in the water and Word of baptism have literally been through an exorcism?

➔ As Scripture told us earlier, we were all born as "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3) and "slaves to sin" (Jn. 8:34). But now in baptism Galatians 3:27 says that we "have put on Christ" so that we have now "received adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:5) and daughters into God's family of believers.

- ✘ At the time of Martin Luther and the Reformation, the people were much more comfortable than our world is today in acknowledging the evil work of the devil and his demons in our lives. In fact they had a healthy fear of all things demonic. They wholeheartedly embraced Christ's work in kicking the devil out of a person's soul at baptism and then being filled with the Holy Spirit instead.

➔ Here's a quote from a prayer in the Lutheran baptismal service in 1523, "Therefore you miserable devil, acknowledge your judgment and give glory to the true and living God, give glory to His Son Jesus Christ and to the holy Ghost, and depart from this person, His servant; for God and our Lord Jesus Christ has of His goodness called him to His holy grace and blessing, and to the fountain of baptism so that you may never dare to disturb this sign

of the holy cross ✠ which we make on his forehead; through Him who comes again to judge...

So hearken now, you miserable devil, commanded by the name of the eternal God and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and depart trembling and groaning, conquered together with your hatred, so that you shall have nothing to do with the servant of God who now seeks that which is heavenly and renounces you and your world, and shall live in blessed immortality. Give glory therefore now to the Holy Ghost who comes and descends from the loftiest castle of heaven in order to destroy your deceit and treachery, and having cleansed the heart with the divine fountain, to make it ready, a holy temple and dwelling of God, so that this servant of God, freed from all guilt of former sin, may always give thanks to the eternal God and praise His name forever and ever. Amen.

I command you, you unclean spirit, by the name of the Father ✠ and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Ghost ✠ that you come out of and depart from this servant of God..." (*Luther's Works*, vol. 53, pgs. 97-98).

- ✧ Just as that prayer acknowledges and as the Legion of demons also admitted in verse 28, Jesus is the "Son of the Most High God". And His power is so far above any and all powers, including that of any devil or demon; any temptation, sin or unbelieving soul alive.

➔ Yes, Jesus has broken their power at the cross and He has freed and cleansed us all by His blood to sit at His feet with eagerness and joy in His love and grace.

## V. Witness

- ✧ And it is Jesus' deepest desire that all people of all nations will know and see His work for them and among them just as the Gerasene man did in our text. That's why Jesus told that man, just as He does you and me today, that he; that we don't need to fear being separated from Jesus because He now lives inside of us through His Spirit in His baptismal power and grace.

➔ Just as Jesus wanted that man to stay and "declare how much God [had] done" for him, so He calls on you and me today to be His witnesses here in the towns and cities where we live. He doesn't expect us to convince or prove to anyone that Jesus is their God and Savior. No, that's His Work through His Spirit and Word.

➔ All you and I need to do is be a good witness. Just share the facts that you've seen personally and that you now believe. Let everyone know what you still experience as a transformed child of God; how much Jesus has done and continues to do for you! To Him be the glory. Amen.