

Fear No Evil

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Date: 21 May 2023

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, we just ask again for your help. Father, we are aware that, as we heard a couple of weeks ago, Satan can always come in and blow the word of God away.

So we pray that you would not allow him to do that today. Instead, let the word of God be planted deep down into our hearts so that we might see, again, who you are, that we might worship you, we might praise you, we might find our refuge and our security in you.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, we have always lived in a world where struggles for power are a constant. Just look at the headlines.

Why is there such a horrific civil war going on right now in Sudan? Because there are two sides engaged in a bitter struggle for power.

Closer to home, why does it feel like, occasionally, the stability of our present federal government is under threat? Once again, because there are people on a relentless quest for power.

[1 : 12] And often we feel powerless in the face of such struggles, don't we? Think of those civilians in Sudan. There's nothing they can do about the fighting.

And for many of them, yeah, lack of power is literally a matter of life and death. Similarly, we often feel powerless to do anything about the political maneuverings at work in our country.

The ballot box seems to make little difference. And even if we forget about those kind of things, on a more everyday level, we can still feel powerless.

We can feel powerless over our upbringing, our mental health, our relationships. We can feel powerless even over our ability to change ourselves.

So where is the power for change to be found? Since I'm a pastor, you might expect me to offer up religion as an answer.

[2 : 13] But if you're thinking, to be honest, pastor, I think religion is pretty ineffective too. Well, let me be the first to agree with you.

Yes, certain forms of religion can be powerless, useless, even worthless. But not Jesus.

It's a different story with Jesus. And that's what I hope we'll see today. For it is in Jesus and Jesus alone that we find real power, power to change, power to transform people.

That's what God's Word wants us to know today. And just to help you see that this passage is not just some fairy tale, let me tell you about how this same Jesus is still at work today in a man not too different from the man that we'll meet in today's passage.

Let me briefly tell you about my friend Massimo. Now, Massimo's dad is Italian. His mom is Malaysian. And growing up, he had a pretty cosmopolitan childhood, going to school in places like Switzerland, China and Germany as his dad moved around for work.

[3 : 28] But soon he got drawn into a life of fast cars and fast money. And eventually he got addicted to crystal meth. And before long, he was soon out of work, out of friends, out of society, out of any desire to continue living.

I think it wouldn't be a stretch to say he was slowly being overcome by his demons. But God interrupted his spiral of destruction.

An old friend came into his life, patiently walked alongside him, so much so that he finally asked her, Why are you still hanging out with me?

And her answer was, Because of Jesus. And so Massimo asked her, Well, friend, if I were to look for Jesus, would you be willing to bet my life on it?

Because if Jesus isn't the answer, then that's probably it for me. And she said, Yes, I am willing to bet your life on it. And the rest is history.

[4 : 40] Jesus came in and totally transformed Massimo's life. His addictions were slowly but surely dealt with. He slowly reintegrated back into society.

And today, Massimo is the director of the church planting group, Gospel City Network. You might even remember him speaking at our church a few years ago. And I tell that story because I want you to know that the Jesus we'll encounter in Luke 8 is the same Jesus who has the power to change lives still today.

Even lives that seem unreachable and unredeemable by any standard. And that's what Jesus is in the business of. You see, today's story is one in a series of four episodes in which Jesus confronts powerful forces, forces that we cannot control.

Last week, Jesus confronted the forces of nature as he faced down stormy and chaotic waters.

Next week, Jesus will confront the forces of disease and death.

And today, Jesus will confront the forces of evil as represented by the demonic. And as we look at each and every episode, we will find ourselves with a profound answer to the question that the disciples had last week.

[6 : 06] Who is this? For we will discover he is the one with the power to banish all that can destroy human life.

And that we can fall down and worship hallelujah who are the saviour. And so let's get into this story.

And in this story, Luke wants especially to draw our attention to three things. First of all, he wants to draw our attention to our desperate human condition.

Our desperate human condition. Now, last week, Jesus was on a boat and today, in verse 26, we finally find him reaching his destination, the region of the Gerasenes.

Now, there's some debate among the historians where exactly this place is, but one thing we know for sure is that it's Gentile territory. And the disciples must be wondering what they're doing there.

[7 : 06] It's unclean, it's unsafe, it's unsavoury. And they must believe that their worst fears are justified as soon as Jesus steps ashore of verse 27.

For, here comes a man. Or, wow looking, with bloodshot eyes, looking like a maniac. And this isn't just some eccentric beggar.

Luke tells us, verse 27 again, that this man was actually demon-possessed. And of course, as soon as we hear talk of the demonic, our curiosity gets aroused.

What are demons like? What can they do? How are they organised? And how do they possess people? And it's important to recognise that while the Bible as a whole does hint at some answers, it doesn't necessarily tell us everything we wish to know.

Because Luke's not actually all that interested in the demons. It's Jesus he wants us to know. He only gives us as much information as is necessary for us to see more clearly who Jesus is.

[8 : 21] Because it is Jesus who should capture our attention, not Satan and his minions. But what can we say about these demons from these initial verses?

This passage gives us some insight. When Jesus converses with them, they say, I and you, they use personal pronouns. So they are not just impersonal forces of evil, but personal spirit beings. These demons can communicate, demonstrating intelligence, they have emotions. In verse 28, they are clearly afraid.

They have a will of their own. They can make requests. They are impure, verse 29, indicating their unholy nature.

And they can oppress people. This man, after all, is demon-possessed, or more precisely, demonised. The word possessed isn't actually there in the original Greek.

[9 : 31] This means that the man has come under the influence of one or more demons in such a way that they exercise some degree of control over him.

We're not told how he ended up in such a situation. But this passage gives us a sober reminder. Demons are real, and we shouldn't make light of them.

We shouldn't allow them to gain such a firm grip of our lives. For they are here to cause distress and anguish and harm. Just look what has happened to this man.

He's naked, verse 27. He wears no clothes. He's like a prisoner of war. He's been stripped of his dignity. He is exhibiting his shame.

And yet, paradoxically, at the same time, he is totally shameless. He has no sense of what is decent and proper. He's socially isolated, verse 27 again.

[10 : 38] He doesn't appear to have a home any longer, but he lives among the tombs. He may be from the town, but he lives outside the town, unable to do work of any kind.

He appears devoid of any human ties, cut off from family, friends, even casual acquaintances. He may not be literally dead, but his only companions literally are.

And he may as well be. And as a graveyard dweller, he is unclean, unclean. He's someone virtually impure. He's someone associated with social taboos and phobias.

He's literally pantang. And what do you do when you encounter a man who arouses all your deepest fears? You try to control him.

You keep him under lock and key. But, verse 29, all you do is cause this man to fly into a demonic rage. Now, such a man is able to do things that are normally beyond the capability of human beings.

[11 : 48] He becomes fantastically violent, able to break his chains and run wild. And all in all, this man has become thoroughly dehumanized.

He is no better than a wild animal. He's become so subhuman that even his speech has been hijacked. When his mouth opens, verse 28, it is the demon who speaks.

He cannot speak for himself. He has no voice to even be unable to articulate your own story.

Well, what a tragedy that is, isn't it? After all, isn't that what distinguishes humans from the animals, that we have a voice, and it's taken away from him.

And although Luke doesn't record this detail, Mark adds one more thing in his telling of this story. This man was also cutting himself with stones.

[12 : 55] He was engaging in self-sabotaging behavior. He's become his own worst enemy. And so, as the Pentecostal scholar Gary Tyra notes, in reality, the demons were slow playing him, killing him by degrees, and terrorizing everyone around him in the process.

Because, he concludes, the demonic impulse is ultimately about the destruction of the host. After all, it's not the devil, fundamentally described as a murderer.

And that is what his forces are up to here. They want nothing less than to kill this man, either by his own hand, or by causing him to be so violent, he forces others to bring about his downfall.

Wow. What a sobering picture this is, isn't it? Because Luke wants to make sure we get how desperate this man's condition is.

It's hard to think of anything worse. But perhaps some of you are thinking, well, yes, I can see that in this story. But, at the same time, I'm not sure whether I can relate.

[14 : 19] After all, maybe I've heard a story or two from this uncle or that auntie, but I don't think I've ever met someone who is demonized, and certainly not to the degree mentioned here.

And, well, you know, this guy's not me. So, what has this got to do with me? But, let's slow down and think a little bit more.

What is this guy? Well, he's a picture of someone who is in bondage. For one thing, he's lost self-control and he's out of control.

he looks strong, but actually he's enslaved. And is that not a picture of humanity as a whole? We say that we're strong, we're free, we're independent, we can put man on the moon, we can invent artificial intelligence, we don't really need God.

But in reality, we find ourselves unable to even master ourselves. too often we're in the grip of something else. Our hands just keep reaching out for another drink.

[15 : 35] Or our hands just keep clicking on Shopee to purchase stuff with money that we don't have. Or our hands keep clicking on the next episode button on Netflix, or swiping to the next video on TikTok, or even the next pornographic image on our iPhones.

or our hands keep typing comments to say things that we shouldn't. We're enslaved to algorithms which feed on our worst inclinations.

And sometimes it's entire communities that get enslaved. Just think of the famous history of our Loon Bawang brothers and sisters almost a century ago, as they found themselves in the grip of alcohol.

Or think of segments of American society today, whom I think it's not unfair to say are enslaved to guns and gun violence.

And so all these slave masters eventually take us to the same destination. Destruction. Even death. This is a picture, Ephesians 2 verse 2 says, of what it means not just to follow the ways of the world, but to come under the dominion of the devil himself.

[16 : 57] Perhaps what afflicts this man is not as remote from us as we think. Or take social isolation. How many of us have not at times cut ourselves from others by the words we say, by the

things we do?

how many of us have turned to non-living things, food, comic books, virtual reality, and so on, for connection instead?

And tragically, for some, the way that they have cut off relationships have escalated into a larger pattern, such that it leads to broken marriages and broken homes.

And it manifests itself even at a societal level. Ever heard of the hikikomori, for instance? The hikikomori describe a group of people in Japan, numbering at least a million, who have chosen to become complete loners, spending almost their entire time at home, avoiding all social contact, with no interest in going to school or working, often playing nothing but computer games, or think of another group sometimes described as incels, that's short for involuntary celibates.

Now, these are males who look for romantic or sexual partners, but because they are unable to get one, they spend lots of time on online forums, expressing shocking amounts of misogyny and encouraging real-life violence.

[18 : 39] people or more simply, think of how many workplaces treat their employees simply as another number, another statistic, as something less than human.

And my point with these examples is not to say that we should blame the devil for every single act of sin or reckless behaviour. that would not be a biblical thing to say.

The Bible is keen to stress that we are accountable for our moral transgressions. But it is to say that the devil is more than happy to keep encouraging and promoting such behaviour.

He wants to afflict individuals and even entire societies with whatever that will take us further and further away from God. he wants to leave his destructive fingerprints everywhere.

And whatever he can exploit, he will. In churches, for example, he loves to make sure that different groups maintain a high degree of separation such that he can eventually build walls of division such that these churches will never become places of reconciliation.

[20 : 04] Nothing makes him happier than to see us enslave, dehumanise and destroy. Now, just this week, someone was telling me about a friend of his who is a pharmacist.

This guy is an educated guy but he keeps experimenting with drugs from work. He thinks he's in control. After all, he knows the right doses.

He's even combined the drugs with alcohol sometimes to get a high. He's engaging in risky and frankly, self-sabotaging behaviour.

And that is exactly the kind of thing that the devil is more than happy to get behind. He is, 1 Peter 5 verse 8 says, like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

And this is how he often does it. Not like some horror movie with some dramatic manifestation, but by deception, corruption, and pollution.

[21 : 10] And so this is what the demons want. To lead us and keep us trapped in our desperate human condition. But, Luke says God has a different plan.

For look at Jesus' powerful transformation. Jesus' powerful transformation. That's the second thing Luke wants us to see today. You see, ever since the fall, there has been a spiritual conflict in our world.

On one side is the devil and his army, but on the other side is God. And back in Genesis 3 verse 15, God has already promised that one day the devil will be put down.

This serpent will be crushed. And these demons, they know it. And so, when they see Jesus, they fall into a state of mild panic.

They shout, verse 28, what do you want with me? Jesus, son of the most high God, I beg you, don't torture me.

[22 : 20] You see, this is not a fight between equals. This isn't like the two sides fighting in Sudan. Compared to Jesus, the demons are nothing.

In his presence, they have no power. Now, just how powerful is Jesus? This passage gives us a few indications.

For one, look at verse 30. When Jesus asks, what is your name? They give a number instead. They say, legion.

In the Roman army, a legion consisted of between 5,000 to 6,000 troops. So, given that it's one versus thousands, you would have thought that the advantage is all on the devil's side.

But their reaction says it all. They know the truth. It doesn't matter how many of them they have. Jesus is in total control. He has complete authority over the demonic.

[23 : 27] And then notice what this legion asks of Jesus. They beg him, verse 28, not to torment them. Now, quite an audacious request to make, isn't it, when they have obviously been tormenting this man?

And then verse 31, they beg him not to order them to go into the abyss. Now, what is the abyss? It is the place where Satan and his gang will be confined forever and ever.

It is the underworld prison, if you like. And these demons, they have got good eschatology. They know that the abyss is their ultimate hand.

And here is the thing. They know that it is Jesus who has the power and authority to send them there. It is Jesus who holds the key of death and Hades, as Revelation 1 verse 18 puts it.

No one else does. That's how much power Jesus has. So they beg Jesus, don't throw us in just yet. Matthew, in his telling of this story, tells us that the demons say it is not yet the appointed time.

[24 : 46] So where do they want to go instead? Verse 32 tells us, the demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission.

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. Now when we look at this verses, we might have some questions.

Why pigs specifically? What about the pig farmers? what happened to the demons afterwards? And the truth is, we're not told.

Luke is simply not interested to answer those kinds of questions. All he's focused on is showing us how mighty Jesus is. You see, I think part of the reason why Jesus allows this is simply because he wants to give vivid and visual evidence of his power and authority.

He wants to leave us in no doubt that the demons have really left the man on his orders. And more than that, he wants to make clear that these demons are defeated and doomed.

[26 : 03] That's why the pigs drown. As these unclean creatures die, it's like a picture of these impure spirits meeting their end.

And it is all Jesus' doing. Do you see? Jesus has power. He has the power to push back against the demonic.

And he has the power to transform lives from the inside out. come back to the passage again and look at this man. Once he was naked, but now, verse 35, he is clothed.

His dignity has been restored. His shame is covered. Once he was a wild man, out of control, but now he is in his right mind, all at peace.

Verse 35, once he was homeless, but now he is able to go home. Verse 39, once he was among the dead, but now he is among the living.

[27 : 11] Once he was denied a voice, but, verse 39, now he has his voice back. Once he was far from God, but, verse 35, he is now seated at the feet of Jesus, just like the sinful woman back in Luke 7.

Do you see? His pitiful condition has been completely reversed. Jesus has transformed him totally. My friends, this is the good news.

Without Jesus, we are in a pitiful state, and we cannot change ourselves. We have no power.

Neither can anyone else.

They cannot change you. They have no power either. But Jesus does. And Jesus wants to. Did you notice that verse 29 actually happens before verse 28?

That is, the very moment Jesus encountered this man, he acted decisively. He said, demons, come out. And quite possibly, Jesus came to this very place precisely because he had heard of this man, and he wanted to seek and save the lost.

[28 : 38] That's his mission. I'm not sure where some of you are. Perhaps you're in a dark pit, you feel cut off, you're lonely, you're isolated, you're voiceless, if you're out of control.

And Satan is whispering to you words of condemnation. He's telling you there's no way to turn back. He's telling you you're stuck. He's telling you Jesus doesn't want damaged goods.

He's telling you you're as good as dead. But my friends, Jesus specialises in resurrection. He restores what is broken.

He brings the dead to life. And if he can do it for this man, he can do it for you. Did you notice that last week we saw God, the creator at work as Jesus steals the storm?

And did you notice that this week we see God at work in recreating a human being? He gives this man a relationship with him.

[29 : 53] He gives him a community. He gives him a commission. It's almost as if he's remaking Adam all over again. He is, if you like, re-humanising him.

And if he can do it for this man, he can do it for you. For God is at work through the person of Jesus. Like this man, Jesus has no home.

Later on in Luke 9 verse 58, Jesus will say, foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. Like this man, Jesus is in the desert.

But unlike this man, he can resist the devil. More than that, he can conquer the devil. But he does it in the most unexpected way.

He does it by making his home among the tombs, abandoned by his closest friends, despised by his enemies, taking on the curse that should have been ours, so that he can reverse the devil's work.

[31 : 08] The death and resurrection of Jesus, you see, achieves nothing less than transformation. And that's why today I urge you, grab hold of Jesus.

There is nothing more precious than him. For you see, we can have contrasting reactions to Jesus. That's the third thing Luke wants us to see this morning, the contrasting reactions. Not surprisingly, what Jesus has done gets reported, verse 34.

Verse 36 says, those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. And how did the people respond? Not quite what you expect.

They're overcome with fear, verse 37. They are like the disciples in the boat last week. The very power of God has been at work in their midst.

[32 : 10] The power that purges and cleanses and does away with all evil is very much on display. Yet they are afraid. Why?

Well, let's try to get inside their minds, shall we? You see, we all have a very high tolerance for evil. Don't we? When we think about it. We read about wars and rapes and corruptions every day and we shrug it all off.

We learn to cope with it. We learn to cope with the evil around us and even the evil that is inside of us. We're experts at excusing our selfishness and our self-centeredness and our anger.

We can have a high tolerance for evil. But ironically, sometimes we don't have as high a tolerance for Jesus.

[33 : 17] We know that we cannot control him. We know that we can't take away his authority. So sometimes we prefer not to have him around because that would mean living his way.

and well, sometimes we think that's too hard. So we prefer instead just to live with the evil that we know. That's what the townspeople chose.

And tragically, they went one step further than the disciples of last week. They asked Jesus to leave, verse 37. And even more tragically, Jesus complied.

He got into the boat and left. You see, here's the saddest thing about this passage. By the end, the demonized man is free.

But the townspeople are still very much in the grip of Satan. They reject Jesus even though they've just witnessed this act of liberation.

[34 : 25] It is possible, isn't it, to hear the gospel and yet still refuse your liberator? And Jesus isn't going to strong-arm you into his kingdom.

Persist in your rejection of him and he might very well wave goodbye to you. But there is another response and that is the response of the man himself.

Notice what he wants. Verse 38. Unlike the demons, unlike the townspeople who beg Jesus to get as far away from them as possible, he begs instead to go with Jesus.

He wants to be close to Jesus. He wants to follow him. This is not a case of okay, thanks Jesus for what you've done.

Bye now, see you later. Luke is showing us that someone who is truly redeemed is always someone who wants to be with Jesus. Someone who is truly ransomed is always someone who wants to follow Jesus.

[35 : 34] A genuine convert is always a keen disciple. And so this morning, if you call yourself a Christian, but you have zero desire to have anything to do with Jesus, you have zero desire to know and follow his words, it might be a good idea to take a good hard look at yourself.

Are you sure you are one? Or are you fooling yourselves? But ironically, Jesus, having granted the townspeople requests, does not grant this man's request.

for he has a different purpose in mind for this man. Not all of Jesus' disciples serve him in the same way.

And so Jesus says, verse 39, return home and tell how much God has done for you. And Luke is a very careful storyteller.

Look at what he says the man does. So the man went away and told all over the town how much Jesus had done for him.

[36 : 56] Do you see? Jesus says, go and tell what God has done. And the man goes and tells what Jesus has done.

Luke couldn't be clearer. If you meet Jesus, you meet God. If you see the power of Jesus at work, you see the power of God at work.

And so today, if we are in Christ, and Christ lives in us, we have all the power we need. There is no need to fear the devil.

There is no need to fear the demonic. There is no need to fear any evil spirit. There is no need to fear our past. There is no need to fear the present.

There is no need to fear the future. For we can bring all our fears to Jesus because he is stronger than anything in this world.

[37 : 56] No wonder the man went all over town to proclaim these good news. And notice, once again, it is the word of the gospel that has priority.

Because if the gospel is being proclaimed in this region, that means although Jesus has left the place physically, he is still at work in that region spiritually.

My friends, as we proclaim the gospel, we are bringing Jesus into the darkest places in this world. And it is why we want to remain committed to declaring this message.

for in the end, it is this simple, humble message of what Jesus has done that will conquer all evil.

It is Jesus alone who has the power to change you and I. So this morning, today, keep trusting him.

[39 : 03] In his hands, you have all that you need. Let's pray. Father, as we come here, as we have heard your word, we pray indeed that we would fall at your feet, we would sit at your feet, we would listen to your word, and that we would recognize that you are the one who has all authority, all power, and help us to find comfort and security in that.

This morning, if there is anyone who is troubled in any way, afflicted in any way, I pray, Lord, that we will experience the life-transforming power of the gospel. Please bring change into lives today as you did all those centuries ago.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.