

Luke 8:16-39

A Lamp on a Stand

¹⁶“No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. ¹⁷For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. ¹⁸Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”

Jesus’ Mother and Brothers

¹⁹Now Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. ²⁰Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.”

²¹He replied, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.”

Jesus Calms the Storm

²²One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and set out. ²³As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

²⁴The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!”

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. ²⁵“Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

The Healing of a Demon-possessed Man

²⁶They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. ²⁷When 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. ²⁸When 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!” ²⁹For 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.

³⁰Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. ³¹And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

³²A 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. ³³When 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.

³⁴When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, ³⁵and 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. ³⁶Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. ³⁷Then 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.

³⁸The 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.

Luke 8:16-39

1. In Jesus' story about the lamp, what does the lamp stand for?
2. Have you ever tried to hide your Christian identity or beliefs from other people?
3. What sorts of things would God have you bring "out into the open?" (Vs 17)
4. In light of Verses 16-17, what is the meaning of Verse 18?
5. In Verses 19-21, it sounds as though Jesus rejected his natural family. Did he?
6. In what ways do you put your family ahead of the needs of others?
7. What would help you put God's word into practice?
8. Have you ever felt overwhelmed by events you couldn't control? (Verses 22-25)
What did you do? How can you build up your faith in Jesus to help you?
9. What was the demon-possessed man's life like? (Vs 27, 29)
10. How did the demon-possessed man respond to Jesus? (Vs 28) In what ways do people today ask Jesus to leave them alone?
11. Why did the demons beg Jesus not to order them into the Abyss? (Vs 31, Revelation 9:1, 20:1-3)
12. What emotion gripped everyone except the man who had been possessed by demons? (Vs 35, 37)
13. Do you believe that demons are active today? What situations or forces have left you not in your right mind? What are powers of evil that hold people in bondage in our day and age? How does naming those powers help break their power?
14. Often Jesus asked those that he healed to be quiet about the healing, but he told this man to tell others about it (vs 39). Why? If Jesus touched your life, would he ask you to be quiet about it or tell others about it?

Leader's Guide — Notes on Luke 8:26-39
Healing of a Demon-possessed man

Introduction

This unforgettable narrative is both inspiring and problematic. Its inspiration derives from its being a narrative of conflict between supernatural powers--Jesus and the demons--and the victory of the former over the latter. Its difficulty arises from two points: (1) the apparent “bargaining” of Jesus with the demons and the resultant economic damage caused by the healing, when none was strictly necessary; and (2) the rather spare description of the demoniac, where one would have expected a more nuanced picture if Luke, as the tradition says, was a physician. Mark’s description of the activity of the demoniac, for example, is much richer than Luke’s (Mk. 5:1-20).

We shouldn’t be unaware, however, of Luke’s literary design in the story. Note the contrasts in the story:

a man had demons (27) / the demons went from the man (35)
he had worn no clothes (27) / he was clothed (35)
he didn’t live in a house but in tombs (27) / return home (39)
he fell down and shouted (28) / he sat at the feet of Jesus (35)
the demon seized him; out of control (29) / in his right mind (35).

Of such contrasts is an engaging narrative born.

I. The Man’s Condition

Luke’s narrative stresses that Jesus has now crossed the Sea of Galilee and arrived in Gentile territory. Instead of a welcoming committee commensurate with Jesus’ status, he is met by a man possessed by demons. The description continues. “For a long time” this man was unclothed. This certainly set him off from others and made him a social outcast. Indeed, the narrative confirms this: he didn’t stay at home, but he lived among the tombs. Jewish readers would have been “put off” by this--it marked out the man as unclean.

Why does he live among the tombs? Why naked? Perhaps among the tombs because this was the only place where he could find some fellowship with those who wouldn’t cast him out of their midst. Perhaps he lived there because there was still a glint of humanity in the man, and he knew enough to have a sort of “longing for death,” a condition which is shared by many people today who are afraid to mention it.

In any case, we see a man of conflicted mind in v. 28. He sees Jesus, runs to him, falls on his face before him as in worship and then says, “Don’t torment me.” His spirit(s) recognize immediately that a more powerful spirit is with him. But why does he run towards Jesus rather than away from him? It is the first of several indications in this passage that people are drawn or things are driven almost irrespective of their will. The presence of the divine and of spiritual power in our midst leads to inexplicable “drawing” or “driving” among us. Thus, we have a scene of what we might call “overcharged power” as the demon-possessed man falls before Jesus.

II. Jesus and the Demons

The story tells us (v. 29) that Jesus had already commanded the demons to come out of the man. But either the demons are reluctant to do so or have not been properly commanded, because there ensues a rare event—a brief conversation between the demons and Jesus, a sort of bargaining session. The discussion centers on the issue of the demon’s name. In antiquity the name signified the power of an entity. Know the name and you may have power over it. The demon(s) knew Jesus name—the “Son of the Most High God” (29) but could do nothing with this knowledge but tremble. But still Jesus was in the dark about the demons. An indication of that is in verse 30, where the singular is used: “Jesus asked him his name.” Well, that is reasonable, but it indicates that Jesus is still trying to “size up” the situation.

The demon coughs up its name. It is “Legion.” The Roman Legion was the most feared aggregation of men in classical antiquity. Consisting of 5,600 soldiers, the Roman Legion conquered land from England to Persia in the centuries just before and after Jesus’ life. The man may have seen Roman legions training in the nearby plains, and had internalized their power to his soul—believing that the powers that controlled him inside were as powerful as this most potent human force. But once Jesus learned the name of his opponent, he could do with it as he would. Now it is the demon’s turn to ask a favor. ‘Don’t cast us into the Abyss,’ they requested. Apparently that is the place where even demons fear to go as we see in Revelation 9:1 and 20:1-3.

Why did Jesus honor Legion’s request that they not be sent into the abyss? Instead, he sends them into the herd of pigs (an unclean animal for Jews) which was feeding nearby. I haven’t seen a satisfactory explanation of why Jesus acceded to their request. The explanation that human life is much more important than that of the swine may be true, but it is not applicable here, especially as the swine supplied the means of livelihood for people. Possibly we need to dig deeper into the psychology and power-struggle between divine forces, at least as antique writers understood these struggles. In that regard, neither side obliterates the other; you only win temporary victories, and you respect your opponent because you realize that he may come back to burn you pretty badly if you become too overconfident. Thus, Jesus may have “compromised” with Legion as a way of making sure that the “rhythm” of the battle with the Evil One continued properly.

III. The Response

As with almost all of Jesus’ miracles, so this one provoked widespread interest. However, the crowds that subsequently gathered were not interested in the proclamation of the good news. The emotion highlighted by Luke is fear (v. 35). But Luke often doesn’t take care to unpack the layered meaning of emotions, and so we don’t know if the fear was because they recognized that someone who could re-orient and upset their lives was here; that they were afraid because the economic base of their city had fallen away; or for some other unnamed fear. In any case the man tells how he was delivered by Jesus. Now, Luke says they “were overcome with fear.” That is the psychology of fear. Fear is something that we first control and then takes over our lives. And so it did to the people in the area. So they ask Jesus to leave. But the man begs Jesus for something else—to join him. Jesus, paradoxically, honors the first request and refuses the second. He leaves the area, never to return to Gentile country. But the demoniac man stays behind, now clothed and in his right mind.