



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 8:26-39  
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## Man of the Tombs

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

When 26-year-old Ashley Smith began reading *The Purpose Driven Life*, she had no idea how the best-selling book would factor into the capture of a fugitive wanted for multiple murders.

Early on Saturday March 12, 2005, when the single mother returned to her suburban Atlanta apartment from a nearby convenience store, she was ambushed by Brian Nichols. Nichols was the focus of the biggest manhunt in Georgia history, wanted for the murders of four individuals in a killing spree that began the day before.

In the hours that followed Ashley engaged the fugitive in conversation. She told him her husband had died four years earlier and that if anything happened to her, her five-year-old daughter wouldn't have a daddy or a mommy. Nichols untied her.

She proceeded to pull out her Bible and a copy of *The Purpose Driven Life*. He agreed to her request to read to him. Opening the book to where she'd left off, she began to read from a paragraph that deals with the gifts and talents God gives each person. Ashley looked into his face and told him he needed hope for his life. Nichols responded, "Look at me, look at my eyes. I am already dead."

She countered, "You are not dead. You are standing right in front of me. If you want to die, you can. It's your choice. You are here for a reason. You're here in my apartment for some reason."

Attempting to get him to turn himself in, she said, "You need to be caught for this. You need to go to prison, and you need to share the Word of God with them, with all the prisoners there."

After hearing Ashley read from the book and observing her faith in God and genuine interest in his life, Nichols was willing to contemplate turning himself in. Nichols told Ashley he believed she was an angel sent from God because he was lost, and that God had led him right to her. When he allowed Ashley to leave the apartment, she called 911.

I wonder what is it that could deal with a man like that? Is it possible, even, for a man like that to change? If so, how does that happen? What is it that could really change him? Whatever it is, it would have to be very powerful.

In Luke 8 Jesus confronts a man whose life is not all that unlike Brian Nichols. This man was torn apart by the power of the evil one. This story is a case study in power. In it, two great powers clash. The power of the evil one and the power of Jesus Christ. The battleground is the life of this man.

### The Power of the Evil One

**"Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He came out onto the land, He was met by a man from the city**

**who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. Seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, 'What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me.' For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard, and yet he would break his bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert"** (vv. 26-29).

Jesus and his disciples have traveled five miles across the lake to the eastern shore of Galilee. They're in a region called Decapolis, which was mainly inhabited by Gentiles. Jesus had just demonstrated his power over nature by calming a great storm. But here he encounters a storm of a different kind, meeting a man with a storm in his soul. Literally, he is being demonized. It's interesting to think that if the purpose of the trip across the lake was to liberate the demoniac, you can understand why the enemy didn't want him there. It makes sense then that the storm at sea was the deliberate attempt by the enemy to prevent Jesus' arrival.

Luke paints a vivid picture of the power of evil. This is an extreme case, even by biblical standards. There are different degrees and ways that the enemy works in a person's life. Most of us will never encounter a man quite like this, but if we interviewed missionaries from around the world they could tell us some graphic stories of demon possession. We might even see this kind of thing in one of our psych wards. Sometimes it's difficult to distinguish between demonization and a psychological disorder. More and more, as our nation drifts into its own form of paganism, this kind of thing is seen in America. Notice a number of characteristics of a demonized person.

There is a disregard for personal dignity. This man had been walking around naked for a long time. Along with that, we see his social isolation. He lived among the tombs. This sounds pretty spooky. Ancient cultures believed that evil spirits were present in graveyards so folks didn't like to hang out there. This man was cut off from everyone. That's what the enemy does – he cuts people off from community.

Notice also his supernatural strength. Efforts had been made to bind this man, hand and foot, with chains. But he tore them apart. Nothing could hold him down. I've heard stories of the unbelievable strength of people under the influence of demons. No doubt this man was violent and dangerous. That has to make us wonder about what's behind some of the brutality we see in our own day and age.

We also see a tormented personality. He's being

controlled by something greater than himself. We're told that he's "driven" by the demon into the desert and it had "seized" him many times. There is demonic control of his voice. And the demons were splitting his personality apart; he's literally disintegrating. In v. 28 they say, **"What business do WE have with you...?"** Then in the next breath he says, **"I beg you, do not torment me."** See the change of pronouns? Who is speaking, the demons or the man? This man's personality is coming apart.

Finally, notice that these demons seem to recognize who Jesus is. Remember after the disciples saw Jesus still the storm, they were astounded and said, "Who then is this?" Well, here the demons answer that question! They identify him correctly as "the Son of the Most High God." They get an A+ on their theology quiz!

This is an extreme case of demonic power in a person's life. Not all demonization is so blatant. 2 Cor, 11:14-15 tells us, **"Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness..."** Demonized men and women can also appear utterly conventional. They can be very religious; even leaders in the Christian community!

We also need to realize that not all human disorders are the direct manifestation of the demonic. Scripture also speaks of our own sinful nature which leads us into sin. Sometimes it's not the devil; it's us. We need the honesty of the young girl who had a fight with her little brother. Her mom came in as they were fighting, pulled her off the boy, and said, "Why did you let the devil make you pull your brother's hair and kick his shins?" The little girl thought for a second and said, "Well, maybe the devil made me pull his hair, but kicking his shins was my idea!" We're capable of doing evil ourselves!

But demons still drive people to the depths of degradation. Some of you have found yourselves saying or doing vile and obscene things. Some of you are isolated; cut off from all community. Or perhaps our personality is fragmenting. You're not even sure who you are anymore. Or maybe you're doing things you know in the end will destroy you. Perhaps you are held in the grip of some addiction to drugs or sex. Don't underestimate the power of the enemy. You may be up against a power far greater than you ever dreamed. One of the things that's interesting about this man is that he is portrayed as a total victim. There is nothing he can do about his situation. He's helpless. That's why he's never told in this story to repent or to have faith. His only hope is for someone more powerful than the demons to deliver him.

### The Power of Jesus Christ

As we read on we get another vivid picture. It is a vivid picture of the power of Jesus Christ. We see it in how these demons react to Jesus. Look at vv. 30-31.

**"And Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss."**

In those days of the Roman Empire everyone knew that a legion of Roman soldiers numbered as many as

5,000. We don't know how many, but there is a whole battalion of demons tormenting this man. Why did Jesus ask his name? Some see this as a prerequisite for exorcism. They say to throw out a demon you have to first know his name, but I'm not so sure. This is the only time Jesus ever asks for a demon to identify himself. I think Jesus did it to reveal to the people watching the extent of the bondage he was in. Knowing that there was a legion of demons in him would make what he was about to do even more amazing.

The demons beg Jesus not to throw them into the abyss. The abyss was a place of confinement for evil spirits where they awaited final judgment. They know that Jesus has the power to send them there and they didn't want to go. Meanwhile, a large herd of pigs are feeding on a nearby mountain. Look what happens next.

**"Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and the demons implored Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission. And the demons came out of the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned"** (vv. 32-33).

In Mark's gospel we're told this amounted to about 2,000 pigs. Why do the demons want to enter the pigs? It's possible that they didn't want to be disembodied spirits because that would mean going to the abyss. Jesus grants them permission and the next thing you know all 2,000 of them are high diving off of the cliff and drowning in the Sea of Galilee. This is amazing because pigs don't normally act in unison. I mean, they're not cattle! But here we see that the shock of demonization causes them to uniformly charge into the lake. I hope you see the humor in this. Remember, Jews hate pork; pigs are unclean animals to Jews. Only Gentiles would have a herd of pigs in the first place! I mean, we love pigs. We have Miss Piggy and Porky Pig and Piglet, but to the Jews a pig was the most vile animal on earth. So any Jew who saw this would think this was wonderful. All those vile pigs are dead! Hooray!

Animal rights aside, why did Jesus allow this? I think it was because it gave this man and everyone else there a powerful, visible picture of the fact that he had been set free. No one would forget the sight of 2,000 pigs falling headlong into the lake. It was an unforgettable illustration of the fact that the power of Jesus Christ was greater than all the power Satan could muster. Jesus turned the tables on the demons. They thought entering the pigs was a good option; they thought they won the negotiations; but now it seems that they got what they dreaded – now they go to the abyss, after all.

And then look what happens next.

**"When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country. The people went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well"** (vv. 34-36).

After the herdsmen watch their pigs sink into the sea they run back to town to tell everyone about what happened. Then the townspeople come to check it out and the first thing they see is

the former “man of the tombs” sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. I don’t know if the disciples ran down to the Men’s Warehouse and got him a suit or not, but there he is all dressed up and normal! He’s even thinking straight! He’s whole!

Demons are powerful. They can wreak havoc in a life. But the power of Jesus Christ is greater. We need to be careful that we don’t give the enemy too much credit. C.S. Lewis said that there are two opposite and equal errors we can fall into about demons. One is to disbelieve in their existence, and the other is to have an excessive interest in them. Demons are pleased with either error. I’ve seen people so obsessed with ranking and naming and locating demons that it seems they know more about demons than about Jesus! Kent Hughes says, “If Satan can’t pull you down he will just as soon push you overboard.” Satan is powerful. He is organized. Don’t underestimate him. But he’s not all-powerful. The apostle John writes, “**Greater is he than is in you than he that is in the world**” (1 John 4:4).

Someone in this room is thinking right now, “Look, you don’t know me. If you did know me you wouldn’t make a statement like that. I’ve got filthy habits. I’ve got desires and addictions. I’ve tried everything. Nothing works. I’m beyond hope.” I wish the demoniac could be here right now. He would say, “I beg to differ with you. It doesn’t matter how bad it is, there is hope. There is hope in a person. His name is Jesus. He’s alive today. He delivered me and he can deliver you.” He would not talk about self-improvement. He would not talk about religion. He would not talk about therapy. He would talk about Jesus!

### The Power of a Witness

As we read on we get another vivid picture of power. We’ve seen the power of Satan and we have seen the power of Jesus Christ. In this section we see the power of a witness. “**And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat and returned**” (v. 37).

You would think that after an awesome display of power like that, these townspeople would say, “Praise the Lord! Our friend has been restored.” You would think they would want to make Jesus the mayor. You would think there would be a revival. You would think that at least they would be happy that they wouldn’t have to worry any longer about this this creepy and dangerous man. At least the children will be safe now that he’s taken care of. But instead they ask Jesus to leave. Why?

Luke says “they were gripped with great fear.” There is a good kind of fear and a bad kind of fear. The good kind is more like awe in the presence of power and holiness. You’re in awe of it but you’re drawn to it. The disciples had that kind of fear when Jesus calmed the storm. The bad kind is more like being scared; you want to run away from it. You’re afraid of what it might do to you. One of the things they were afraid of was how he might impact their bank account. I mean, they just lost a whole lot of revenue. Two thousand pigs is a lot of bacon! To these people, pigs and profits are more important than people. Here they have a man who has just been delivered from a lifetime of suffering and they’re upset over the fact that they have just been hit in the tenderest part of their anatomy – their pocketbook. Here they have a living witness to the power of God in Jesus, but they can’t see it because they are blinded by the almighty dollar. It strikes me how the power of the enemy is seen in this story not only in

the man possessed BEFORE the miracle but in these townspeople AFTER the miracle. These are normal, hardworking people; upstanding citizens of that area, but they’re in the grip of the enemy no less than the demoniac was. Greed and materialism and just the fear of change can be a powerful force in our lives. Some of us need to be delivered from that. It takes an equally great power to deliver a materialist as it does a demoniac!

John Oxenham wrote a poem about these people who sent Jesus away. It goes like this:

*Rabbi, begone! Thy powers  
bring loss to us and ours! Our ways are not as  
Thine -  
Thou lovest men - we, swine!  
O, get Thee gone, Omnipotence  
And take this fool of Thine!  
His soul? What care we for his soul,  
What good to us that thou hast made him whole,  
Since we have lost our swine?*

The tragic thing is that Jesus granted their request. Jesus started back for Galilee. You can push away the power of God. The rest of the poem goes like this:

*The Christ went sadly,  
He had wrought for them a sign  
Of love and tenderness divine -  
They wanted swine!  
Christ stands without your door and gently  
knocks,  
But if your gold or swine the entrance blocks,  
He forces no man's hold, He will depart  
And leave you to the treasures of your heart.*

But what about this man who had just been delivered? Look at vv. 38-39.

**“But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him; but He sent him away, saying, ‘Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you.’ So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.”**

Up until now Jesus has granted every request in this story. The demons want to enter the pigs and Jesus says “Be my guest.” The townspeople want Jesus to leave and he says, “Where is my boat?” But this man, the one guy that really wants to follow Jesus, gets turned down! Jesus says, “You can’t come. You need to stick around here and tell everyone what the Lord has done for you.” And he did just what the Lord said. Except he didn’t tell them about what GOD had done; he told them about what JESUS had done. But he knew it was the same thing.

That’s the power of a witness. A witness is not necessarily a gifted evangelist; he just tells people the story of what the Lord has done in his life. You don’t need a theology degree for that. It’s probably better that you don’t have one because then people won’t understand you. Just tell the story of what God has done for you. Of course, this man would be a witness by his life as well as his words. He would walk back into town and people would say, “Hey, isn’t that the

guy we used to run from? Imagine him returning home, his parents meeting him at the door. They must have run for cover when they saw who it was. But then they saw the change. You might say, "But I don't have a story to tell like the demoniac. My story is like a nursery rhyme compared to his." That's okay. There are people who cannot relate to a story like his; there are people who need to hear your story. The power of God is seen in a variety of ways. When Jesus invades any life, that's a story worth telling.

In order for our witness to be powerful we have to be willing to let Jesus set the agenda. This guy wanted to go with Jesus. He wanted to be like the disciples – a traveling evangelist. He wanted to get as far away from possible from these wicked people who had turned Christ away. But Jesus says, "Stay right here. This is where I need you the most." I always laugh at this because when I became a Christian I wanted to get as far away as possible from my hometown. It represented to me everything I didn't want to associate with. If someone had told me I would not only be living in the town but the very house I grew up in I would have told them to have their heads examined. But that's where I am and from time to time I get a chance to tell people who have known me for 48 years what the Lord has done for me.

A lot of people are upset with God because he tells them to stay put. They want to get out of this fast-paced, expensive, worldly place we call the Bay Area. But often Jesus says, "No. I want you to stay. I need you here. I need you in that neighborhood. I need you in that job." Do you know why God has you in that neighborhood and in that job? Because he loves those people. He loves those people more than pigs.

## CONCLUSION

Tony Campolo tells the story about being in a church in Oregon and praying for a man who had cancer. In the middle of the week he got a phone call from his wife. She said, "You prayed for my husband. He had cancer."

Campolo said, "Had?" He thought *Whoa, he's healed.*

She said, "He died," and Campolo's heart sunk.

She continued, "Don't feel bad. When he came into that church last Sunday he was filled with anger. He knew he was going to be dead shortly, and he hated God. He was 58 years old and he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He was angry that this all-powerful God didn't take away his sickness and heal him. He would lie in bed and curse God. The more his anger towards God grew the more miserable he became to everyone around him. It was hard to be in his presence. But after you prayed for him a peace came over him and joy came into him. Tony, the last three days have been the best days of our lives. We've sung. We've laughed. We've read Scripture. We prayed. They've been wonderful days. And I called to thank you for laying your hands on him and healing him."

And then she said something very profound. She said, "He wasn't cured, but he was healed." That's the power of Jesus Christ. He doesn't always choose to cure us, but if we come to him in faith, he will heal us.