

LUKE 8:26-39 8-17-14

THE FRIGHTENING CHRIST

Luke 8:**26-34**

Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 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. 28 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. 29 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. 30 And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. 31 They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss. 32 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. 33 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. 34 When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country.

Now, you have to wonder how the swine-herders reported it. You wonder what slant they put on the story. One pastor said, "if you want to know what to think of Christ, don't ask the pig-farmers, ask the demoniac." I mean, not everybody is going to have the same take on Jesus are they? The animal-rights activists are going to be offended by what Jesus does here. They are going to be concerned about those poor piggies that got jumped on by demons. Maybe you are bothered by that too. Hey, I know what it is to love animals. My former neighbor had a bumper sticker that says, "I love animals. They're delicious." It's intended to poke fun at the animal right's people. Similar idea behind a billboard for a steakhouse that showed moose grazing in a field and said, "There's plenty of room for all God's creatures, right next to the mashed potatoes." But, I just read last week that verse in Proverbs that says a good man cares for the life of his beast. But c'mon people. What did Jesus say about animals? He said that the Father cares about sparrows but we are worth more than many sparrows. He rebuked the pharisees because they would pull an ox from a ditch on the sabbath but were upset when He healed a son of Abraham. He chided them for caring more about beasts than they cared about a man. Here in this story we have a man. He didn't act like one. He ran naked around the cemetery, like an animal, but he was a man with a soul that would never die, and the Lord Jesus has mercy on him and powerfully releases him from bondage to Satan. This is glorious, this is magnificent. Don't sweat over the pigs. Rejoice and give thanks! But that isn't

exactly what happened. **34-37a** *When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country. 35 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. 36 Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. 37 and all the people...asked Jesus to be their King, and to teach them everything about the way of God. Is that what your Bible says? Given what happened that would be the reasonable response, but what you get is far different. **37-39** *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. 38 But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him; but He sent him away, saying, 39 "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.**

Years ago I remember seeing an edition of the 700 club, a Christian talk show, in which Pat Robertson was talking to a famous Christian leader of our day. I mean, this guy was one of the best-known and most influential leaders in the church. And in the course of their conversation, this great leader was talking about how the gospel was prospering so in the country of India. And he said that the gospel was doing so well in India because the outreach to that country was not being led so much by preachers, but by business men who really knew how to present a product persuasively. And then, this dear man said this about Jesus : He said, "If you package Him properly and present Him positively no one can possibly turn Jesus down." (R) What do you think of that statement? My response was, "Well, apparently the real Jesus must not have known how to package himself properly or present himself positively because people certainly rejected him didn't they and rejected him with fear." That is what happened to these people of the Gerasenes. They said, "Please leave, Jesus." Why? It says they were gripped with fear. Now, why would that be? What is it that makes Christ so frightening? How can that man we paint up as having lovely robes and flowing hair scare anyone? That is the question I want you to consider with me, because when you read the New Testament (you may not get this from Christian art, from the Jesus we package properly nowadays but when you read the New Testament) you find that something was very frightening about Jesus of Nazareth. So, I'm going to offer today three possible reasons why the Gerasenes were afraid of Jesus. And you will see that the same three reasons are still around today.

First there is the fear of being disturbed. (R) Francis Schaeffer said the top two values of American society are personal peace and affluence. As a nation we have hung a *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door of our national conscience. We don't want to disturb the peace of our family or our work environment, or our community. But everywhere Jesus goes there is a disturbance. That is true of cities and its true of individuals. I mean, here he comes to the quiet land of the Gerasenes where all enjoy their peaceful coexistence. No one ruffles the status quo. Even the town demoniac knows his place. And as soon as Jesus arrives he stirs up a commotion. Things start to happen, changes take place. But people don't usually like change. We grow comfortable with the way things are, and even if the way they are isn't the way they are supposed to be - well, we are just comfortable with it and you had better leave us alone. What's incredible about this passage is in verse 35 *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.* Can you believe this? What is there in this verse to scare anybody? One day earlier they had a wild-man running around the outskirts of town naked and crazy, but that didn't bother them. You know why? They were used to that. "Oh that's the town demoniac, just stay away from him." But now, they see this same guy, sitting there at the feet of the Lord, with a clean shirt and a tie, acting cool, calm and collected. And it says they became frightened. Why? Because they knew that for this to happen required supernatural power. And supernatural power changes men in the most fundamental ways. If Jesus could change this guy, He could change anybody. And they didn't want that. You see the same thing today. People afraid that if they give Jesus control of their lives he will turn them into religious fanatics. And, in a sense the fear is justified. Jesus Christ does change things. Jesus Christ does change people and cities and churches. When He shows up He can never maintain the status quo, because it is always compromised, some, if not totally to immorality and sin. Someone has said that the term "status quo" is Latin for "the mess we're in." But folks like the status quo because we are used to it. The real Jesus, the one the Gerasenes met face to face, is by nature an agent of change. These who asked him to leave understood intuitively and immediately that either Christ had to go or sin had to go. They could not coexist and the people made their choice. They realized that if they welcomed Jesus some changes had to occur. The boat would get rocked, the apple cart would spill and they said, "No."

Millions in our land have said "No" to Jesus for the very same reason. Individuals and churches committed to personal peace have asked Jesus to leave them alone and hey, what does Jesus do? He leaves. He hops back in His boat and sails away. Let that be a lesson. You know Revelation 3:20 *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.* But if Jesus comes to the door of your heart and finds one of those "Do Not Disturb" signs, you will miss out. Fear of disturbance is the first reason that many fear Christ. The second reason that many fear Him is the fear of exposure (R). I think of Revelation 3:20 again. It seems there was a woman who visited a church on Sunday and during the week the pastor stopped by her home to pay her a visit. He knocked on the door and, even though the TV was going no one answered the door, so the pastor left the lady a little note that said, simply "Revelation 3:20, *Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone will open I will come in.*" The following Sunday the woman showed up again at church and handed the pastor a note which said, simply, Genesis 3:10. The pastor looked it up and read the quote from Adam, "I heard thy voice and I was naked, so I hid myself." Why did that woman not answer the door? She had a fear of exposure. This is a problem for a lot of us, a lot of us. Perhaps you have heard of the Peter Principle. This principle states that not only the super-incompetent person, but also the super-competent person is doomed to failure within the hierarchical structure of large corporations. Now, we all understand why the super-boob is doomed to failure, but why too the super-competent? The explanation is that the super-competent person is a threat to peers and to superiors and so is unwanted. Think about it and you will see it is true. When you were in school, were the super-brainy kids also super popular? No, high-schoolers tend to hate the guy who breaks the curve, who makes the 99 when everyone else came in at 70. That person's excellence exposes the laziness of the group. The same thing happens with those regarded as the morally super-competent. These are the high-profile Christians, pastors and so on. I mean we actually get paid for being good. You other folks are good for nothing. And one of the peculiar things about being a pastor is that when people cuss in front of you they apologize. Some will even apologize before they cuss, but you see, there is a certain level of intimidation there.

Now, honestly, if I can be intimidating on a moral level. How much more would Jesus be intimidating! His moral excellence exposes the sin, the hypocrisy of us all. Who was it who hated Christ the most? Huh? It was the supposedly righteous wasn't it. He came with a righteousness that was pure and true and it exposed all the phony stuff, the superficial stuff. And the embarrassment

Christ caused these people made them hate Him and plot for His death. So, individually we find that Christ always strips away the veneer, tears down the superficiality and the shells with which we cover ourselves. Spiritually speaking, when we come to Christ we come naked, so the man that fears such exposure will say to Christ, "Please depart Sir, you are not wanted here."

On now to the third reason why people will reject Jesus and reject Him with fear. This is what RC Sproul has termed "The Trauma of Holiness." (R) There is a dread of what is holy, a trauma, a terror before the numinous. Now, when we use the word "holy" in reference to God we mean two things. First we mean the God is morally pure, spotless, without sin. And secondly we mean that God is ontologically higher than us. He is categorically greater, and thus mysterious. As you read the Bible you run into stories of individuals who have an encounter with God. These people actually see God and the reactions are both uniform and peculiar. In Genesis 32 Jacob was amazed when he realized that he had seen God and lived. In Exodus 20 the people said, "Don't let God speak to us lest we die." In Judges 6 Gideon cried out and said, "Oh no, I've seen the angel of the Lord." And God responds by saying, "Don't worry, you won't die." In Judges 13, Manoah, the father of Samson cried out, "We shall surely die for we have seen Yahweh." You see there is in the presence of the Holy a feeling of helplessness, a disintegration of the personality, a dissolution, you come unglued, you fall apart at the seams. Nothing is so terrifying as the presence of God for a sinful man.

Now, I am from Florida where you can develop a healthy respect for the impersonal forces of nature. Florida is the lightning capital of the world. Lightning is awesome isn't it? And then too we know a little something about hurricanes. It is reasonable to be afraid in the midst of lightning and winds. But look at this story in Luke 8:22-25 *Now on one of those days Jesus and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they launched out. 23 But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. 24 They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing! And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. 25 And He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"* I mean, these guys were afraid enough during the storm, but when Jesus demonstrates the ability to calm the storm with only a word- well, now they were terrified. Mark's version of this says they were afraid of the storm, but they were very much afraid

of the One who stopped it. They would have stood in the boat with their mouths wide open asking, "Who is this Guy? Who can this be, that the wind and the waters obey Him?" They realized they were in the presence of God and they were afraid.

When you look closely at the biblical accounts of those who have seen God you find that the major characteristic of their fear, their trembling in the Lord's presence is a conviction of sin, an overwhelming sense of moral uncleanness and filth. In Job 42, Job speaks to the Lord after God had spoken to him, reminding him of just who he was complaining against for all his terrible woes. **5,6** *I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; 6 Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.* Job says, "Lord, I heard of you in Sunday School. But now I see you for the holy, awesome God that you really are. Shut my mouth. I repent. H. A. Ironside pointed out that if you were to ask people if they expected to go to heaven they would reply affirmatively. When asked upon what grounds they hoped to enter heaven they would reply with some form of personal works or moral goodness. Ironside noted that people who plead good works before the heavenly court have never seen God as He really is. It is the epitome of pride to think that I have made myself acceptable with God. But this is where most of our world is. A man who was a millionaire, and never been to church, found that he was likely to die within a few months, so he called his wife's pastor and asked, "Pastor, if I donate half of my money to the church, will I go to heaven when I die?" The pastor thought about it for a minute and said, "Well, it's worth a try." But you see, anybody who has had an encounter with God, who, like Job, has seen God as He really is, would never, ever even think to ask a question like that or to suppose they can make themselves pure before a God of such blazing holiness. My friend, if you are one who thinks that you can make yourself acceptable to God you are in for an eternally rude awakening. Job, described as the most morally upright man in the world, sees God and repents in dust and ashes.

A similar thing happened to Peter. In Luke 5:**1-7** *Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; 2 and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. 3 And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. 4 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." 6 When they had done this, they enclosed a*

great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; 7 so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. Now, what would you do here if you were Peter? If you were a smart business man you would have a contract before Jesus immediately wouldn't you? This guy is the greatest fisherman in the world. Sign Him up. Offer Him half the profits. Half the apostles too for that matter. Whatever it takes, just get a piece of his action. But Peter's spiritual vision is too keen to care about the fish and to care about the money. Look at what he says **8** *But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"* Now, wait a second. We heard that request earlier didn't we? Isn't this the same thing the Gerasenes said? Depart from us? Peter says it too, but for a very different reason. Peter doesn't say, "Jesus, I know you are God, but I really don't want to be disturbed this year." He's not saying, "Please leave me Jesus you are going to ruin my reputation." But the trauma of holiness is here, and he says, 'Lord I am unworthy to be in your holy presence. The request is the same: "Depart from me" but the motive is entirely different and so is the response of the Lord. Peter had fallen apart, come unglued before the Master, but Jesus puts Him together again with the words, "Do not fear.'"(R) Then, he gave him his commission, his license to fish for men and Peter left his nets, his boat, his family and followed Jesus. Now, how do you think Peter felt doing that? You don't think he was scared? He was scared silly but he went anyway. Why? Later there came a time when many deserted Christ. Jesus was teaching some hard things and many couldn't take it. They bailed out. And as they were going the Lord turned to Peter and said, "Will you leave also?" And Peter said this, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life." (R) By God's grace Peter saw something the Gerasenes had missed. He saw the Lord's terrifying, holy power, but He also saw His grace and mercy. Sure, He was intimidated by Jesus, but he knew this man was the way to the waters of life. And Peter was thirsty.

In a C. S. Lewis' book called the Silver Chair in the Chronicles of Narnia Series, there is a young girl named Jill who finds herself in a forest in the mythical land of Narnia. And as she walks through the forest Jill develops a terrific thirst, when she hears the luscious water of a running brook. As you can imagine, the very sound of the brook intensified her thirst. So, Jill starts to look for the brook and very soon comes into an open, grassy glade, and there, just a stone's throw away is the brook. The water is as bright as glass. The sight of water made her ten times thirstier. Now you would expect Jill to go running to the brook and scoop up the water, but she did not. In fact,

she stood as still as if she were stone, with her mouth wide open. And she had a very good reason. Just on this side of the stream lay the lion, Aslan. It lay with its head raised and its two forepaws out in front. Jill knew at once it had seen her, for its eyes looked straight into hers for a moment and then turned away. *If I run away it will be after me in a moment*, thought Jill. *And if I go on I will run straight into its mouth.* Anyway she couldn't have moved if she tried. And she couldn't take her eyes off it. How long this lasted is hard to say, but to Jill it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the Lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.

If you are thirsty you may drink, said the Lion. Now this frightened Jill even more. Again the Lion said, *If you are thirsty you may drink.* Jill stood shaking. *Are you not thirsty?* said the Lion. *I'm dying of thirst*, replied Jill. *Then drink*, said the Lion. *May I, could I, would you mind going away while I do?* As soon as she said this Jill realized she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside at her convenience. But now the delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. *Will you promise not to do anything to me, if I do come?* asked Jill. "I make no promise," said the Lion. Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer. "I dare not come and drink," said Jill. *Then you will die of thirst.*

Oh dear, said Jill, all the time moving closer to the Lion. *I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.*

There is no other stream. It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion. No one who had seen his stern face could do that.

Jill's story has much in common with what you may be going through. You have a great thirst for the water of life. You want the abundant, eternal life promised in the gospel, but to get it you must place your life in the hands of a threatening, fierce lion. As I read of Jill's predicament I remembered the previous adventure in Narnia. A girl named Susan saw Aslan and asked if He was tame. The answer came, "No" He's not tame, but He's good (R) Like Aslan to Jill, Christ makes no promise of a comfortable, care-free existence. No doubt He will demand some changes, changes that are anything but comfortable. You see He is not tame. He's good. Many of you stand in Jill's shoes today. You are paralyzed. You have a thirst for true life but a fear of the Lion of Judah. You want something more in life but you are afraid of what a radical commitment to Christ will do. You are in a predicament. You are too sinful to enjoy your religion and too religious to enjoy your sin. A lot of people are in that predicament (R). There is only one smart move. It is not safe to run away

from Christ, you will die of thirst. You must run to Him. What did Jill do? Lewis writes, *Suddenly, her mind made itself up. It was the hardest thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted.*

In the name of the Holy One of Israel, even Jesus Christ, I plead with you to screw up your courage and flee to the fountain of living waters where you will find satisfaction for your soul, and a Master, who though He is not tame, is very, very, wonderfully good.

Please join me in prayer. *Father, we pray for those who need you, who need the gift of faith. Come and wipe away all doubt and break in their souls the power of sin, and the power of fear. Give them holy courage and a saving thirst to come and find cleansing and refreshment in Jesus. "We taste Thee O Thou Living Bread, and long to feast upon thee still. We drink of thee the fountainhead and thirst our souls from thee to fill." Father, come and meet with your children today. Thrill us with your mercy, thrill us with your power. And call us into service, as you did with Isaiah and as you did with Peter, pick us up, dust us off, heal our wounds and send us out for you, we ask in Jesus ' name.*