

A common definition of “Faith” could be, “Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ”... But what does that mean?

In a lot of conversations I’ve had, a person may be very quick to assure me, “I believe in God”, as if “believing that God exists” equates to “faith”...; or if they’re someone who seems to have dropped off in their faith, they might tell me, “I still believe in God”... as if faith is about “believing that God exists”...

And even strong Christians, when they are talking about someone whom they love (especially if they have just died), they too can be very quick to say, “He had ‘a faith’ – he believed in God (in his own way)”... And I suspect they’re trying to assure themselves of what they know isn’t true... They desperately **want** their loved-one to be saved, but the closest thing, to evidence of that, is they believe God exists...

And so, if I’m in a conversation with someone and they tell me that they believe in God, I want to explore with them, “What does that mean for you? And how does Jesus make a difference to your life?”

And some folk can articulate that very clearly. Others aren’t sure...

And if they’re not sure, I then ask them, what do you pray about? And whether a person is praying or not, that reveals a lot about where they’re at with God... (If a person never prays/rarely pray, that says a lot about how their relationship with God is going {not too good})... ; And **what** we pray for, reveals a lot about where we’re at with God – whether

we're praying for things of God, or whether we're praying for things of the flesh...

You see, “believing that there **is** a God”, that’s not the sort of faith that saves.

In James 2, James uses a bit of sarcasm to make his point:

**James 2: (ESV) 19** You believe that God is one; you do well.

Even the **demons** believe – and shudder!

Believing that God is real, never saved anybody. Even the demons believe that. We saw that in today’s Bible reading. It is when we believe **in** Him; trusting **in** Him; Having faith **in** Him; - Being **in** Christ, and **Him** being in us... That’s what saving faith looks like.

And the mark of being a Christian – the way that God marks those who are His, is by filling us with His Holy Spirit. And if the Holy Spirit is in us, He will transform us and make us more like Him... And many of you have experienced that... I pray that every single person who’s hearing my voice today, would become firm in their faith, knowing that Holy Spirit is in them...

Where am I going with this?

In the Bible Reading today, Jesus encounters a man who has a different sort of a spirit – an evil spirit – actually it’s a multitude of evil spirits...

Now, when it comes to evil spirits, there's 2 extremes of belief. Some folk seem to worry that there's an evil spirit under every rock, and behind every disease, and they believe that if anyone (including Christians), if they have any significant problems in their life, it's because an evil spirit has attached themselves to them, or even possessed/oppressed them. And they get a great deal of excitement hunting down; naming; and dispatching multitudes of spirits and demons... That's one extreme, where every trouble is blamed on the Devil and his evil minions....

The other extreme is the more common, and that is to deny that evil spirits exist altogether. Some will say, "They were only prolific around the time of Jesus, but not anymore". Others will write it off altogether as the ignorance of the ancients – "They couldn't explain it with science or with medicine, and so they would just put it down to demons."

That's the 2 extremes. The truth of the matter, is what the Bible teaches us. Many human conditions are caused by sickness and disease. Some are the result of evil spirits. Many evils/evil deeds are the evil fruits of the sinful nature of man... Others begin with the sinful nature, but are also acting out the will of demons...

In today's reading, the man is described as being demon-possessed. The Greek word is actually a verb – a doing word – and it's a passive verb, which means the man was having something done to him – The man was being possessed by the demon.

Now, if you're like me, you're probably wondering, "Why did that happen? What did that man do, to let demons (that many demons) get a foot-hold in his life and to take over his body and his mind"... But, we're not told.

We are given a possible hint. Jesus crossed over Lake Galilee, from the Jewish territory, to Gentile territory. **the country of the Gerasenes** was Gentile territory – that's why there was a great big herd of pigs there – you'd never run pigs in Israel, because by the religious law, they're an unclean animal, and so nobody ate them...

So, they were in Gentile country, and the Gentiles worshipped other gods – they had a multitude of gods/idols (paganism). And God's word tells us there is only one God (Father, Son & Holy Spirit), and worship given to any other 'so-called god', is the worship of demons<sup>i</sup>...

Let me explain what I understand Demon possession to be.

Think of it as being the **opposite** of being filled with the **Holy Spirit**.

When a Christian repents of sin, and surrenders their life to **Jesus**, through the blood of Jesus, our sins are forgiven; we are created anew; and the Holy Spirit comes inside us and takes up residence in us. And He transforms us, making us more like our Lord and master Jesus Christ.

The opposite of that, is when a person **embraces** sins, and surrenders themselves to a life of sin, and they embrace the

evil one. Especially when they worship other gods (demons); or dabble in the occult; or perhaps use mind-altering drugs which help them to connect with the dark spirit world – their life is being surrendered to Satan. And so the Devil's evil minions (demons) move in. And by demons taking up residence, the person will become more and more like their lord and master (the evil one)...

That's probably the simplest way I can explain it.

So, what do we learn from this reading?

Firstly, demons are real. When a person surrenders themselves to evil, a demon can be given a foothold in their life, and the more control that is surrendered to the Evil One, the more control the Devil takes.

In most cases, when Jesus encountered a person with an evil spirit, there would be only one. In this case, there were many. When Jesus asked the man "**What is your name?**" ... he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him.

I don't think "Legion" was his name – it was his way of saying there's lots of us here. And in a Roman Legion, that numbered in thousands. There were certainly enough demons there, that every pig was taken over by one or more demons when Jesus drove them out...

And as this encounter unfolds, it becomes obvious that demons are **personal** evil beings. They're not just a spiritual

force. They have names; they communicate; they have emotions (terrified); they have a will.

And how did they affect the man? Well, they had control over him. And it was a **destructive** control.

- There was a disregard for personal dignity. He wore no clothes.
- There was social isolation. He'd withdraw from interactions with people and live out in the wilderness.
- There was a macabre fascination with death – He lived in a cemetery.
- There was a demonic control of his speech. When he saw Jesus, he screamed in terror!!!! and then he begged Jesus, “Don’t send me to the abyss...”

The Abyss BTW, is the bottomless pit spoken of in Revelation, where the Devil and his demons are going to be chained until they await the day of judgment. Just before the Day of Judgment, they will be released for a short time, and then On the Day of Judgment, they will be thrown into the lake of fire – that’s their fate. But the abyss (or the bottomless pit) is in the step between...

And so they could speak. And did you notice that a characteristic of the demonic, is shouting!!!. He cried out!!!; He used a LOUD voice... ... There’s something gentle in the way the Godly speak, whereas ‘yelling’ is more akin to the demonic... I’m not sure I would trust

the spiritual credentials of ‘a shouter’ – it doesn’t fit well with the Holy Spirit fruit of gentleness...

And the demons enabled supernatural power. That’s why the occult is so attractive to some – because there is supernatural power at play. It is an inferior power, and it’s an evil power, and it’s a destructive power.

- This bloke had super-human strength. When those who tried to control him bound him in chains and shackles, he’d break them.
- And he had supernatural knowledge. As soon as Jesus turned up, he knew exactly who Jesus was.  
“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.”

And so he was violent; he rejected authority; and demons ultimately lead to destruction. Everything about this man, is a picture of oppression and destruction.

And as soon as Jesus cast the demons out of the man, and they entered the pigs, the pigs hit self-destruct mode. **the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.**

Now, a lot of what’s described here, can be confused with mental-illness, because some of the symptoms are very similar. And I suspect that in earlier years, many cases of

mental illness have been incorrectly put down to the work of demons. And I also suspect that today, some folk who are possessed by demons, are diagnosed as being mentally ill.

But the good news is, Jesus has power over demons.

On the banks of Lake Galilee, a battle took place. The **only** Son of God, up against a **Legion** of demons (possibly thousands of them). And they screamed in terror because they knew what they were up against.

And Jesus didn't shy from this battle. In fact, He crossed the lake to get there.

And what a comfort it is to know, that The Lord Jesus Christ is able to

- deal with the worst of sins/evils;
- He is able to take the broken and restore them; and
- He is able to bring a person to rightness of mind.

When Jesus cast the demons out of that man, he was completely changed. He sat **at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind...** And when the villagers heard about it and came to see for themselves, it was all just too much for them. They were afraid. Were they afraid because the pigs were killed? I don't think so. It was the total turn-around in the man that made them afraid...

Now, I find this astonishing. On the Jewish side of the lake, whenever Jesus healed somebody or drove out a demon, they'd bring along everybody else for healing or to be set free



from their demons,, But didn't happen here. They were so afraid, "Jesus can you go away – we don't want you here..."

And we still see that same reaction today, don't we... For some, when they encounter the activity of God, it opens their eyes, and "I want to be a part of this", But for others, it challenges their whole world-view, and it's not something they want to be a part of...

You see, they had never seen spiritual power like this before (ever!)... And the power that Jesus displayed, is the sort of power that demands a personal response... For them, it would've meant repentance – changing their whole way of life... Simply by the power of Jesus, He was challenging their culture/religion/idolatry/belief system...

The Gospel does that...

And so the choice was there for them, to either accept Jesus, or reject Jesus. And Jesus got His marching orders.

But of course, there was one person in Gerasene, who **didn't** reject Jesus, and that's the bloke who had been set free from many years of bondage by evil... And what a good news story that is...

So, what do we learn from the Spiritual victory that Jesus achieved here?

## 1.

Jesus is the one who has **power** to overcome evil.

Jesus is the One who can set us free from **any** spiritual bondage. Disciples of Jesus have no reason to fear Satan or his demons. Our God is so much stronger. And our God is with us.

## 2.

The second thing we learn from this spiritual victory, is what a blessing it is, to be restored to having a “**right mind**”.

When the man was set free, he became “prudent” – he had “self-control”. Those were things that (for many years) he did not have. But Jesus restored him to a rightness of mind.

We live in a world that is becoming increasingly godless, and at the same time, it shouldn't be a surprise that mental illness is on the rise. I don't know how much of it is genuine mental illness, and how much of it is “spiritual”. But I believe Jesus has the power to heal, and Jesus has the power to set us free from evil – Jesus has the power, to restore us to a “right mind”.

## 3.

The third thing we learn from this spiritual victory, is once we've been saved, we know we want something different.

As soon as this man was set free, he just wanted to be with Jesus. As Jesus was getting into the boat to leave, “Let me

come with you”... He wanted to flee his old life, and that’s a good thing.

In his home town, he would be surrounded by idolatrous pagans. He’d much rather be with other Christians...

And I get that. And I notice this more among younger Christians:

*When they start getting serious about their faith, they want to be with others who are the same age as them, who are serious about their faith too... And when it comes to rural churches, that’s actually a pretty big drain on the Christian witness in a country town... Some, when they get a taste of a thriving city church, “Wow, there’s a lot more Christians here – I want to be there!”*

#### 4.

But the 4<sup>th</sup> thing we learn from this spiritual victory, is to be a witness wherever we are.

The man begged that he could go away with Jesus, but Jesus said: <sup>39</sup> **“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”** And that’s exactly what he did.

And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

Jesus has set us free. He has set us free from sin and all sorts of spiritual bondage. Sometimes we want to flee from where we are because we feel we’re going to be much more spiritual if I’m at the right spot... But Jesus would say the same to us –

don't flee. Be where you are, **and declare how much God has done for you."**

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,  
We give You thanks, and we worship You,  
for sending Your Son.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have Power and Authority.  
Satan and his demons cringe before You...

You overcome evil;  
You overcome death;  
You overcome sin;  
and corruption  
and wickedness;

You restore to right-mindedness.  
And we praise You.

Lord, we thank you  
that You have saved us from evil.  
By Your Holy Spirit,  
You produce in us, a "rightness of mind".  
And Lord, we want to flee from evil,  
and glory in You.

But give us strength and joy,  
as we declare (right where we are);  
as we declare in this very town and district,  
“How much God has done for us” ...

To You be the glory,

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:20