

They Met Jesus:  
*Something To Get Excited About*

Polls tend to show that Americans are a largely religious people, with something like 95 percent claiming a belief in God, and large numbers saying they think that heaven exists, and so do angels.

But the people who respond to those polls seem to have an easier time personalizing religious concepts of good than of evil. As a New York Times article put it: Apparently this is a nation inclined more to theological optimism than to pondering literal representations of faith's dark side.

The Barna Research Group polled Americans and reported that nearly two-thirds of us don't believe in the devil as a living entity.

In a nationwide survey of randomly selected people, Barna's pollsters asked them if they agreed with this statement: "Satan is not a living being, but is a symbol of evil." Sixty-two percent agreed, 8 percent had no opinion, and only 30 percent disagreed.

The results echo an early Barna survey in which people were asked whether they thought hell existed as an actual location, "a place of physical torment." Only 31 percent said they thought it did.

So what you have is 70% of Americans who don't believe in hell or Satan.

Now my guess is, that it's a matter of convenience for most people.

It's fun to believe in angels, but who wants to believe in demons. Let's keep demons in the horror movies where they belong!

Along with that, heaven is a great idea. We'd all like to go there if such a place existed, but who wants to believe in hell?

Postmodern America is very creative when it comes to religion. We want to construct our own beliefs. We have a lot of very personalized, tailor-made religion. That's why you hear people say "I'm spiritual but I'm not religious."

The problem with home-brewed religion is it has no standard of measurement. It's totally subjective. It ignores truth.

I have discussions with people about eternal issues and they try to dismiss the whole thing by telling me what they don't believe. I've had them say, "I don't believe in heaven or hell so I'm not worried about what happens when I die."

My question to statements like that is always the same. "How did you come to the determination that heaven and hell don't exist? What evidence did you look at? How did you do that study?" The same thing happens all most every time. They look at me with a blank stare because no one's ever asked them to substantiate their beliefs. They just believe.

Well, in 350 BC Aristotle popularized the belief in spontaneous generation. When a piece of meat rots eventually maggots appear so animal life must develop spontaneously. You and I know that's ridiculous but it was accepted as scientific fact for 2000 years. It was only 150 years ago that Louis Pasteur proved the germ theory.

In 1800 Franz Josef Gall, proposed the "science" of Phrenology. Gall was a physiologist who specialized in brain function. He came up with a supposed way to measure personality and intelligence by measuring the bumps on a person's skull.

Less than 80 years ago Belgian colonial authorities in Rwanda used phrenology to explain the assumed superiority of Tutsis over Hutus.

This quote is from the U.S. Congressional record in 1875: "Horseless carriages propelled by gasoline might attain speeds of 14 or even 20 miles per hour. The menace to our people of vehicles of this type hurtling through our streets would call for prompt legislative action."

In 1932 *Albert Einstein wrote*, "There is not the slightest indication that [nuclear energy] will ever be obtainable. It would mean that the atom would have to be shattered at will."

"There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home." That's a quote was made in 1977 by Kenneth Olsen, president and founder of Digital Equipment Corp.

Belief, no matter how sincere, does not equal fact.

Now, if that's true in physical sciences, how would we ever know anything about things we can't measure like eternity, spiritual issues, heaven & hell? Obviously we need a source of authority.

The Bible claims to be that source of authority. Listen to this: *We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place... Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* (II Peter 1:19-21 NIV)

The Bible is a book written over a period of 1500 years by 40 different authors that fits together in one book. It has a central theme running from beginning to end without contradiction.

Unlike the other books of history it has been shown again and again to be 100% historically accurate. It contradicts no known facts of science even though it was written at a time of what we would call "scientific ignorance." Only the Bible contains clear, specific, verifiable prophecies that are 100% accurate. To top it off the Bible has changed the lives of millions and millions of people and given them hope.

Over the years a lot of people have sat down to investigate the Bible and in the process have changed from skeptic to believer. From Lew Wallace who ended up writing Ben Hur to Simon Greenleaf, law professor at Harvard, whose books on jurisprudence are recognized as being on the level of Blackstone, to Lee Strobel, Law Reporter for the Chicago Tribune, honest skeptics have become committed believers.

I believe when all the evidence is considered, the Bible stands as the one trustworthy source of spiritual authority. I believe the Bible first of all, gives us the reasons to believe, then it gives us the answers to our questions about the supernatural.

Today we're going to look at one passage from this God-breathed book, Luke chapter 8, beginning in verse 26.

### **Turn Luke 8 page 1015**

We're in a series we've titled "They Met Jesus." We're looking through the Gospels to see incidents where people came face-to-face with Jesus Christ.

Today we're going to look at a really unique meeting between Jesus and a man who had been spiritually tormented for a long time.

He started his meeting with Jesus as a tormented man but he ended up spiritually excited because of what Jesus does in his life.

The day had started off with Jesus teaching the crowds on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus spoke in parables and His disciples didn't have the slightest idea what He was talking about.

They had to sheepishly come to Jesus, who they had been traveling with for a year and a half and say, "Help! We don't know what you're talking about."

Later on Jesus says to the whole group, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." So they get in a boat to travel across what we call The Sea of Galilee. While Jesus sleeps a storm whips up, the boat starts to take on water, and the disciples have to wake up Jesus saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" As if He was going to allow that to happen.

Earlier they were embarrassed, now they're terrified. Jesus wakes up, rebukes the storm, and the raging sea is suddenly calm and peaceful. Now the disciples are really afraid. They say, "Who can this be? Who is this guy we've been following for the past 18 months that can control the weather?"

Finally their boat arrives on the eastern shore of the lake. They probably thought, "Man, are we glad this day's almost over. Nothing else could possibly happen."

### **Read verses 26-27**

As Jesus steps ashore, all of a sudden, a wild man, buck naked, comes running towards him. We're going to find out that he begins screaming at the top of his lungs. What a welcoming committee!

What we're also going to read in a minute is that there are pig farmers in the area tending their herds. These are Gadarenes, they're not Jewish, they're raising pigs. But, can't you just see a couple of them sitting up on the hill watching this whole thing play out.

These guys were gazing out on the lake below, and saw the boat approaching. They probably had watched the storm which had threatened this boat on the lake. When they realized that the boat was going to land here, in this virtual "no man's land," they must have been expecting that their day would have a little excitement.

Of course they knew that the demoniac guy was nearby. I'm sure they kept their distance from him. They knew that no one ever used this road. No one ever landed on the shore near the graveyard. I can see these guys nudging each other in the ribs, saying, "Dude, watch this. This ought to be good."

They watched as the demoniac swooped down on the unsuspecting disciples waiting for him to brutalize these men, sending them back to their boat running.

For the pig farmers this was a little entertainment. For the disciples this was a bad end to a tough day.

But for us, the question is this, what's going on here with this guy? If we're going to look to the Bible as the source of spiritual truth then it becomes obvious that the Bible teaches the reality of demons and demonic control.

### *I. Demonic Forces Are Real And Want Control*

This man had demons, and because of that he exhibited some bizarre behavior. In the *Screwtape Letters* CS Lewis wrote: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."

So it would be totally wrong for us to just dismiss the whole idea of demons as some outmoded folklore from the ignorant past. But it would be just as wrong for us to become obsessed with demons. The New Testament speaks of demon possession as a reality but it doesn't dwell on it.

It's not a main theme.

We're never commanded to cast out demons. We're never given formulas or rituals for casting out demons. Those things are all man made.

What we do know is this. Satan was a creation of God. His name was Lucifer, which means "shinning one." According to Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, Lucifer stood in the most privileged position in heaven. He was second only to God. But that wasn't good enough for him. He wanted to be in control. He said, *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.* (Isaiah 14:14)

So Lucifer rebelled and a third of the angels followed him. The rebellion failed, his name was changed to Satan (the opposer), and the fallen angels exist today as demons.

Satan hates God and his demons share that hatred. Since human beings are the crown of God's creation, Satan has a special hatred for us. Demons cause disruption, confusion, and chaos. Their ultimate goal is to control.

I believe that everyone of us are unwittingly influenced at times by demons. But the Bible goes beyond that to say that some times demons may even possess an individual.

It's interesting that at the time of the first coming of Christ there seemed to be a outbreak of demonic activity.

I believe that the closer we come to the second coming of Christ the more of that activity we'll experience.

For the man in Luke 8, demonic possession wasn't a matter of speculation. We're doing the armchair kind of thing here. He couldn't have an armchair discussion about the different theories of demonology.

For him it was painfully real.

*I. Demonic Forces Are Real And Desire Control* but I want you to notice something else about demons. It's something we might not expect at first.

*II. Demons Have Faith*

### **Read verses 28-31**

I read that and you what my first thought is? Apparently demons have more faith than a lot of 21st century Americans. They believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with the authority to command them. They believe in a future judgment. They even believe in prayer. The demons brought their request to Jesus! James 2:19 says: *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!*

The word "tremble" in James 2 is *phrisso* in Greek. Hear our word frizz in that? It means to stand up like hairs on the back of your neck. Demons believe that God exists and that He's so awesome and fearful that they tremble.

Isn't this fascinating? The tortured man, who has been living in the tombs among the dead, no clothes, and out of his mind, is begging the Prince of Peace not to torture him. Well that's because it's really not him that's speaking. It's the demons speaking through him.

In Matthew 8 demons say to Jesus, *What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?* (Matthew 8:29)

The demons believe and tremble but there's one thing the demons can't believe. Acts 16:31 says to us *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.* In John 6:47 Jesus said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.*

According to the Bible Lucifer and his angel cohorts aren't the only ones who rebelled against God. They're not the only ones facing judgment. We're rebels too. The difference is that God has provided a way for us to be forgiven of our rebellion.

See, when Lucifer rebelled God pronounced his judgment. Matthew 25:41 *Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*

What we call Hell was actually created for Satan and his demons. God pronounced Satan's judgment but hasn't carried out the sentence yet? Why? Because God is establishing His character for all creation.

If God had dumped Satan in the lake of fire, Satan would have gone down with a sneer on his lips. Before all of the angelic hosts he would have questioned God's character.

You can just hear him, "Oh yea. God claims to be love, mercy, and compassion but obviously He's not. He's all wrath and judgment."

To demonstrate, once for all, His true character God created us. He created us knowing that we'd sin. He created us knowing that we'd break His laws. He gave us the freedom of choice, full well knowing what choice we'd make.

God says, *The wages of sin is death.* (Romans 6:23) Our punishment for sin is the lake of fire. But then God robed Himself in flesh as Jesus Christ and went to the cross to die in our place.

In forgiving us and making us part of His Body God has silenced Satan's accusations once for all. He is holy, just and righteous. But He's also love, grace, and mercy.

We have something to believe that the demons could never comprehend. We can trust our God to be our Savior.

*I. Demonic Forces Are Real And Desire Control*

*II. Demons Have Faith*

*III. People Fear The Unfamiliar More Than The Familiar*

### **Read 32-33**

I wonder what the pig farmers were thinking now! I have to believe this whole scenario turned out a little different than they had expected.

How about this: Jesus answered the prayer of demons! And there were a lot of them. A Roman legion was a regiment of 3,000 to 6,000 soldiers. The parallel passage in Marks' gospel says, *And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.* (Mark 5:13)

This guy was in bad shape. How he got that way we don't know. We're not told. In fact, there is only one person in Scripture who was said to be tormented by an evil spirit, that we know what led up to the demon influence. That was Israel's King Saul.

In Saul's case it was his open rebellion against God.

Saul's sin was that he deliberately rejected God's authority in his life. He tried to be free from God's restrictions and responsibilities. And his rebellion manifested itself in a kind of arrogance that opened him up to demonization.

Over 40 years ago now I spent time in a mental hospital after flipping out from taking a lot of drugs. I got to be good friends with one of the maintenance workers and one day he took me into an area that was closed off from the rest of the hospital.

The patients there were the worst of the worst. Sitting in that room was a young man in his 20's. He refused to wear any clothes. He only had a leather strap around his waist.



He wouldn't let anyone touch him, and he would cut himself anytime he could get a hold of something sharp enough.

Now I'm not trying to diagnose the guy. I don't know anything more than what I've just told you. But look at the peculiarities of this man living in the tombs. He would wear no clothes, he would break his restraints, and listen to this: Mark 5:5 *And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.*

There's no reason to see a demon around every corner, but there's no reason to believe that demons were only a first century phenomenon either.

The Bible clearly tells us that there is a spiritual battle being waged, an angelic conflict, and we're living in the battle field.

Listen to this: *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

*Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17)*

The spiritual battle is real. Demonic influence is real. Our victory comes only through Jesus Christ.

### **Read vs 34-35a (through mind)**

Then every body was thrilled, right? No. The rest of verse 35 says, *And they were afraid.*

### **Read 36-37**

It didn't take long for the word to spread quickly. The pig tenders reported it far and wide, in city and country so the residents came to see for themselves what had happened.

Everybody showed up and everybody wanted Jesus out of there. The usual explanation is, they were pig farmers and they didn't want to loose any more pigs. They'd lost enough already.

But notice, it doesn't say anything about money here. In both the accounts of Mark and Luke, the primary motivation is fear. Fear solely because of what happened to the demon possessed guy, not because the loss of their pigs.

This was not the same kind of fear that the disciples felt after Jesus had calmed the sea. This was the fear of superstition. They didn't rejoice over the healing of the demoniac.

They were surrounded by demonic activity and they became more afraid then ever. Not only had they lost their pigs, but what would the evil spirits do next to harm them? They were so blinded by fear and superstition they couldn't even think to ask Jesus who He was or why He had come to their town. They couldn't see their need for spiritual healing.

It's ironic that while the demons didn't want to leave the country, the people who lived there didn't want Jesus to stay. Here is one of the few times that a miracle drove people away, rather than drawing them to Jesus.

People fear the unfamiliar more than they fear the familiar. But the man who met Jesus and was delivered from being a walking Hotel California had a whole different response.

### **Read 38-39**

As Jesus was getting into the boat to return to Capernaum, the man, now possessed of a right mind and a new heart, approaches him. He begs Jesus to allow him to accompany him to Galilee. He wants to join up with Jesus and become a disciple. That's what happens when God radically changes your life. You want to follow Him.

But Jesus had other plans for the guy. He wanted this new believer to be a witness for Him right where he lived.

So here's a man who went from being a messenger of terror to a messenger of the great things God had done for him. Jesus left the area with a missionary of the good news on the job. We don't know the end of the story of the lives of the men and women who were so fearful of Jesus. Maybe as this former demoniac went around the countryside sharing his story, over time people would rethink and trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.

All we are left with is the statement: *they were seized with great fear.*

Are demons real? Sure are. They're real and they desire control. If you don't believe it just look at Josef Stalin, Adolph Hitler, Maj. Nidal Hasan, or Anders Breivik who slaughtered 77 young people in Norway last year. And says that his only regret is that he didn't kill more.

Demons are real. They're powerful. But they know their end. They know they're headed for the abyss.

They know that's where they're headed, but they don't want you to know where you're headed. They don't want you to have the same spiritual knowledge that they have because there's hope for you and they know it.

Jesus Christ died for you. He didn't die for them. There's no hope for them. But there's hope for you and me.

Do you fear what it would mean for you to put your trust in Christ as Savior? Are you like the townspeople, fearing the unfamiliar more than the familiar? Are you afraid Christ might revolutionize your life. Move you out of your comfort zone? Get you excited about God and telling other people about Jesus?

Let me assure you, the God who sent His Son to die for you has nothing but the best for you in mind. There's nothing to fear. God only wants to heal your life and forgive your sins. God wants you to be excited about Him.

I have no doubt, there's some here today that need to be healed. You might not be demon possessed like that man in graveyard, but you've struggled with your own personal demons for too long. You've struggled with the demons of failure, of guilt, of shame, remorse, addiction. Whatever it is.

Despite what the culture may tell you, you can't solve all your problems on your own. There are demons in your life that only Jesus Christ can heal.

Matthew's gospel says that there were, *two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.*

Mark and Luke only speak of one. How come? I believe it's because they wanted to focus on the one that was delivered. They wanted us to concentrate on the one that was

made whole by the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

That's the story of the Bible that's played out over and over again. The opportunity's given and one says "yes", and the other says "no." Some people fall at Jesus' feet and worship. Others send Him away.

What's your choice today. What decision will you make?