

October 27, 2013  
Weird Stories in the Bible

*Unmasking Halloween*  
Luke 8:26-39

**Opening words:** The end has finally come. This is the last message in my six-part sermon series, *Weird Stories in the Bible*. Each one of these stories came from the Bible but they did not sound Biblical. Do you remember the stories we have looked at to this point? We have heard about Elisha's curse, Noah's drunkenness, Lot's incest, Enoch's eternity and Balaam's talking ass. Each one of those stories came from the Old Testament, but today's weird story comes from the New Testament.

This is the Sunday before the highest day on the satanic calendar, Halloween. The story of Legion is timely. I consider it to be one of the creepiest stories in the Bible. The issue at the center of this story is demon possession. The ancient world was obsessed with demon possession. The label was used too often. They blamed just about everything on it, mental and emotional illnesses, epilepsy and most physical illnesses. Did you know the ancient Egyptians believed the human body could be divided into thirty-six parts? Any of those parts could become demon possessed. Our world has gone to the other extreme. Most dismiss demon possession as a term only used by the uneducated. It is important that you know I believe in demon possession.

Today's scripture lesson deals with a man who was demon possessed, "Legion". His story is found in each one of the synoptic Gospels; Matthew, Mark and Luke. This is Luke's version. May God give you ears to hear this morning's Gospel lesson, Luke 8:26-39. Let me call this message *Unmasking Halloween*.

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**Luke 8:26-39** <sup>26</sup> They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. <sup>27</sup> When 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. <sup>28</sup> When 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!" <sup>29</sup> For Jesus had commanded the impure 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.

<sup>30</sup> Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. <sup>31</sup> And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

<sup>32</sup> A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. <sup>33</sup> When 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.

<sup>34</sup> When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, <sup>35</sup> and 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. <sup>36</sup> Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. <sup>37</sup> Then 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. <sup>38</sup> The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup> "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.

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This morning we find ourselves in the eighth chapter of Luke. There is only one way to say it. It is a weird story. It is weird from beginning to end. The story begins with Jesus and the disciples sailing on the Sea of Galilee. They land in an area largely comprised of Gentiles, who show very little interest in Jesus. As a matter of fact, only one person comes out to meet him, the weirdest man in the entire community - the demoniac, Legion. We are told his name is derived from his spiritual condition. A legion of demons have infected his soul. He lives in isolation because no one wants to live with him. That is fine with him, because he simply wants to be left alone. There is no hope. There is no earthly cure for his condition. The only thing that he has to forward to is his own death. The tombs that surround him were his earthly future. He had no clue at the beginning of the day a cure was so near. Yet, by the end of the day he had reclaimed his life because Jesus came into his life. The story ends in a weird way. You would think the community would have wanted to thank Jesus. Instead, they insist that Jesus leave. I told you - it is a weird story from beginning to end.

Can I make a confession? I like this story because it is so weird. Maybe the best word is creepy? I have read this story for nearly forty years and I understood the divine truth from the very first time. The story of Legion is a story about Jesus' authority over demons. As a matter of fact, all of the stories in the eighth and ninth chapters of Luke deal with Jesus' authority over something. Trace them with me. Jesus has authority over leprosy. Jesus has authority over paralysis. Jesus has authority over Jesus over sickness. Jesus has the authority to call the disciples. Jesus has authority over nature. Jesus has authority over fasting. Jesus has authority over life, and in this story Jesus has authority over demons. The question is not whether Jesus has authority. The question is, do you believe in demons? Everyone must answer that question for themselves. I have to answer that question for myself. I believe in demon possession. Do you believe in demon possession? If you have an opinion about demon possession, say, "**Amen!**" Let me tell you my story.

Her name was Pat and she changed the way I look at Halloween forever. When I was pastoring in the Cleveland area, I received a random phone call. The young woman's voice on the end of the line said she needed some help. I was prepared to give her a bag of food or a voucher to the local grocery store.

However, she was quick to say she didn't need financial help. She had a job to cover her expenses. She just needed to talk to someone about some experiences in her life. I said, I would be glad to meet with her. We agreed to meet at my church and at a certain time.

When the day arrived, she came early. She drove an old light blue Pontiac, complete with rust and some bald tires. From my office window, I watched her sit in it until the magic hour. I met her on the sidewalk in front of the church and stuck out my hand to welcome her. She didn't respond. She could not even make eye contact, but I examined her. In short, not yet seeing her thirtieth birthday, she was a victim of life. Her clothes were faded and baggy. Her hair was long and ungroomed. Her shoes were worn-out. There is no other way to say it. She was as nervous as a cat. The church building was empty as we sat in the narthex. In those days, my office resembled a closet, so the only place we could talk comfortably was the narthex. The right words were hard to find. I tried my best by making small talk. I wanted her to calm down, but she never did. The only thing she did was look at her watch and tug on the sleeves of her sweat shirt. Realizing our conversation was going nowhere, I asked her this question: How can I help you? Using broken thoughts and sentences, she told he about a past surgery. I don't remember anything about it. However, what I do remember was her uneasy spirit. Fidgeting in her seat, she told me she suffered from some form of post-traumatic stress disorder. I said, "I am not sure I can help you. I am not really a counselor. I am a preacher; I am a theologian." We sat there in uncomfortable silence for a few minutes, when she announced it was time to go. She asked me, "Can we meet again?" I said, "Yes!" and gave her a card. She promised me she would call and she did.

The next time we met, she arrived in the same old light blue Pontiac. She was wearing the same shapeless clothes. Just like our prior meeting, her eyes were down and her spirit was broken. We sat in the same seats in the same empty church. However, this time she did something new. She looked at me and said, "I have to confess, I lied to you last time." She continued, "I lied to you about the source of my problem. The problem is not my surgery. The problem I can't get over is my childhood." Without a single emotion, she began to tell me about her summers.

Annually, she would travel to Canada for the family vacation. They would visit her uncle, who lived on some remote lake. Her parents were both alcoholics. They drank the entire day, so they entrusted Pat and her siblings to their uncle. The uncle was a Satan worshipper, who exposed his nieces and nephews to some of life cruelest experiences. There was no form of abuse they didn't endure. She told me she was buried alive with an air tube to keep her breathing. She told me he forced her to attend satanic worship services, where animal sacrifices were common. She told me she hated Halloween, because on that highest day of the satanic calendar, human sacrifices were expected. I asked her just one question, "How did you survive?" She answered with red, moist eyes, "I am not sure I have?"

She pulled up the sleeves of her sweat shirt and revealed to me the signs of a cutter. She said, "My psychologist wanted me to come and talk with you. He wants you to teach me about the truth about God and Jesus' love." For the next several years, we met. I told her about the Good News of Jesus Christ. She taught me about a world that I wished didn't exist, Satanism. If this whole topic makes you uncomfortable, say, "**Amen!**" With this thought in mind, let us look at the Gospel lesson together.

Because of my discussions with Pat, I began to research that dark world. I learned the people who organized modern Satanism were Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) and Anton LeVey (1930-1997). Crowley believed he had harnessed the power of Black Magic. LeVey established the Church of Satan in 1966 in San Francisco. The combination of these two men was truly sinister. The church of Satan is the counter universe to the Christian world.

**We worship in the open; they worship in hiding**  
**We worship in churches; they worship in covens**  
**We exist to help others; they exist to help themselves**  
**We see Jesus as the Lamb of God; they value the goat**  
**We sacrifice ourselves to serve; they sacrifice others to gain**  
**We are taught to love; they are taught to hate**  
**We believe in angels; they believe in demons**  
**We are taught to welcome; they are taught to intimidate**  
**Our cross is right side up; their cross is upside down**  
**We give our praise and glory to God; they embrace Satan**

The more I learned, the sicker I grew. The story of Legion is the story of a man who was completely overwhelmed by Satan and his forces. I sat there with Pat for years, and saw a young woman whose life had been destroyed by Satan, and a young woman who needed God's love. It did not hit me until later. The bravest thing I have witnessed was Pat walking into that church for the first time.

It is almost comical. Pat came to me for help, but I learned so much from her. Do you know what I learned from her? I learned to stand close to Jesus. Without Jesus, Legion would not have been healed. Jesus isn't just our friend. Jesus is our Savior and protector. When I was young, my friends and I played an Ouija board to get answers. When I was young, I wondered about mediums and communicating with the dead. I know people who use tarot cards to see into the future. I know people who sit in the dark in every closed hospital and school, looking for paranormal activities. I don't dismiss those things because I don't believe in them. I dismiss those things because I do believe in them. They are so seductive. I know they can lead us into a dark world, where I don't want to go. I just want to stand near Jesus where it is safe. No wonder Legion wanted to go with the Master. He just wanted to be safe.

It has been years since my time with Pat. Our time together ended when I moved here. However, I still think about her during the Halloween season. The last time we met,

we sat in the narthex of my church and talked. She thanked me for my time and wanted to give me a gift. I didn't want a gift, but she insisted. She told me she wanted to give me something she didn't need anymore. She reached into her pants pocket and handed me her knife. It was the same knife she had used to cut herself. She reached out her hand and asked me to pray with her one more time. I prayed that Jesus would protect us from the dark world.

This Thursday evening, I am planning on being home. I have to be home to pass out candy. I like passing out candy, because I like seeing all the children arrive in their Halloween costumes. There will be a handful of football players. There will be some princesses. There will be some with masks of frightening characters. There will be some old enough to shave. When the last one comes, I will turn off my front porch light and pray. I will pray that Jesus keeps all of those trick-or-treaters safe, but I will also pray for those souls who are lost in the dark world of Satanism.

Will you pray with me?