

# **What is Your Name**

*The Healing of the Possessed Man in Luke 8*

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A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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## **'What is Your Name?'**

Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, 'What have you to do with me, 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 many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Legion', for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:26–39)

May God grant that we too receive a blessing and a salvation such as this man received.

We are told that there are somewhat over three thousand languages on the earth, and in each one of those languages there are literally thousands upon thousands of thousands of words, so that there are millions of words spoken on earth. Yet out of all those millions of intelligent sounds, there is one sound that is especially dear to each one of us. It will call our attention, even if we are absorbed in a book; we shall catch its sound above the roar of the traffic in a busy street. It's a sound that throughout all of life is especially dear, and that sound, of course, is our individual name.

It may not be a very wonderful name, nor altogether unusual. We may share it with hundreds of people; nevertheless, that sound is particularly dear. Whether it is unusual in the area where you live, like Maximilian or Emiline, or common, a mere John or Betty — far more important than the tag that is the name, is the thing that name stands for. You may share your name with a multitude of people, but there's only one you.

I wonder if you have ever sat and pondered how unusual, how important, how unique you are. That wonderful thing that your name stands for: the you behind the name. I am not

flattering you, nor would I wish to do so. I am merely pointing out what is the truth, that you, whether you are called Tom or Betty, are unique. There has never been, and never again will there be, another you. You are a mysterious thing, a human personality. Who can trace all the long heredity that's gone into making you, you? Even starting from the time when you were in the cradle, thousands of experiences, common and uncommon, most of which you have now forgotten, have gone into making you, you. There's never been another like you.

The great Creator, who makes endless blades of grass and no two are the same, who scatters his snowflakes and no two are the same, made each one of us. Outwardly very similar in certain things, yet inwardly each of us is unique. Have you ever tried to think what you are? The medics would count you by so many bones and veins and organs; the psychologists will go deeper and talk about your conscious and your subconscious mind. But way beyond it all is that mysterious something: the you that God says is going to last somewhere for ever. You are almost a frightening thing! I don't mean your looks; I mean the fact that you, standing by yourself as a unique personality, are going to last for ever somewhere. How important you are, and what a tremendous lot that name of yours sums up.

### **The healing of the demon-possessed man**

Judge then how far this poor man had fallen. We read that when our Lord stood in front of him and said, 'What's your name?', he answered, 'Legion'. That wasn't his name; that wasn't the real *him*. That wasn't him as he had been born. 'Many demons had entered him' (v. 30). Demons from Satan himself had entered into that man and were in process of tearing his personality apart, making him a freak of a thing. What a tragedy. He was so far gone that he no longer recognized himself, and when he was asked, 'What is your name?' pathetically he replied, 'Legion'.

You say, 'He was an extreme case'.

He was indeed.

'The man surely had had a mental breakdown.'

Perhaps he had, but the Bible makes it clear that behind all his suffering was the fact that Satan himself had got hold of his life and was in process of tearing it apart.

You say, 'Why quote such a man, so far gone, to people like us? Surely you don't think that any of us are in that plight?'

Of course I don't, but can we not see here a vivid warning? Here on earth, this side of the grave, is a man whom Satan has taken almost to the limit. We begin to see what it will mean to be lost. What it means for a human soul, made in the image of God for happy fellowship with God, in all its mysterious, wonderful joy and gladness, to be now in the grip of Satan and almost lost on earth. He is a sad example of what it will mean to perish — to perish in body, to perish in mind — and land on the scrapheap of eternity.

### **Is there really a devil?**

Many modern people have ceased to believe in the devil. They think he belongs to the historic times when religious people talked in crude terms, and were frightened with awful visions of hobgoblins and fiends. They say, 'It's not appropriate; it doesn't fit the gospel of our blessed

Lord Jesus and the idea of a kind, heavenly Father, that he should allow a real, personal devil anywhere. It isn't kind to tell people that they are under the grip of the devil.'

But, surely, it is kind. Christ didn't blame that man altogether for the state he was in, and God doesn't blame humankind as a whole for the state we are in, merely by ourselves. Would you take all the sin that there is on earth, all the strife, the wickedness and vice, all the heartbreak and untruthfulness, all the uncleanness, and make men and women solely responsible for the whole lot? Would you? That would be cruel, wouldn't it? To lay the blame altogether on humankind, and to say it was humanity that started the whole business, would be cruel indeed, if you said it was humanity's fault alone. God is kinder than you if you say that. God says that isn't true.

Admittedly, mankind fell and sinned, and disobeyed God; but behind the fall, says God, there was a personal devil. With cunning wisdom and super intelligence, he tempted innocent mankind away from God, spun the yarn that they would be happier without God; happier to go their own way. He said that God was keeping them down, and it would be a miserable thing to live with God and obey him. How much freer they would be if they went their own way. They believed that slander about God and fell, and the human race came under the heel of Satan's mighty, powerful intelligence.

You don't believe in it? You would if you preached! When God in his book clearly offers the likes of you and me eternal life, how else would you account for it that men and women don't want it, unless they are being deceived?

When the Bible says as clearly as it can that God loves people, and he has a salvation to give them—a salvation without works, how can people sit and listen to it and go out and say, 'Well, I'm doing my best, I'm trying my hardest'?

You say to them, 'No, it's not by works at all; salvation is a free gift.'

Still they say, 'I wouldn't dare to say that I've got it, but I'm doing my best to earn it.'

How does it come that ordinarily intelligent men and women cannot see the thing, if it were not that the god of this world has blinded their minds?

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:4)

The Bible everywhere says it is so. It talks about a prince of this world, and says that men and women in general are walking according to his power. He makes it out that it's not the done thing to talk about God; it's a thing to be looked down upon to talk about being saved. He sets the fashion and the atmosphere; so, rather than being the odd ones out, men and women keep off the subject of being saved. Crafty, isn't it?

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. (Eph 2:1-2)

He's getting them along through life, shepherding them nicely, until he gets them beyond the point they can be saved, and they'll be lost for ever. And if they are religiously inclined, he will blind their eyes with all sorts and kinds of religion. To one person, it's a great effort of

good deeds and self-sacrifice, and to another it's asceticism and hair shirts, and whips, and fasting and prayers. It all seems so good; and the trick of it is that there isn't anything of that in the Bible. The salvation that God has doesn't depend on any of those things, it's a free gift. The 'god of this world' is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus but his satanic majesty, and he blinds people's eyes even with religion to stop them getting saved.

We don't have to be in the state of the poor man we are discussing this evening, but we all are born in the power of darkness (Col 1:13). Shall we not be warned of what the end is by that loving, kind heart of the Saviour himself, and by the man whom our Lord came to save that day? The lake of fire was never designed for humanity at large; it was designed for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). But if the human soul remains in the power of darkness and is never saved, it will go out to perish in hell and in the lake of fire with that same devil and all his angels.

You say, 'that's grim.' Yes, it is exceedingly grim, and for that reason our Lord came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to deliver us so that we may not perish. So I ask you this evening to think again with me for a moment or two over this vivid, extreme example, so that we might learn how all can be delivered out of the power of darkness and brought into God's most wonderful light and salvation.

### **Powers that this man could not control**

'Tell me more about that man,' you say. 'How did he get into that state?'

I don't know. He was born like any other child, I suppose, and you may picture his parents fondly leaning over the cradle. They were going to name their child. What a great moment it was. They carefully gave him his name, as the Hebrews would do, choosing some special name that would sum up the good qualities they hoped the child would have. Was he a John—'God is gracious'? Or Solomon—'peaceful'? Anyhow, they gave him his name, and he grew up. But there came the day in his life when he discovered for the first time that there were powers within him that he couldn't control. It had been fun as a child to kick over the traces, as we all did; but when at last he reached adult life and was standing on his own two feet as an individual responsible for himself, he found there were powers in him that he could not control.

He began to struggle. He was determined to be decent, but it was no use. The powers grew bigger and one after another the battles were lost. His friends tried to help. They chained him up, they re-clothed him, they bound the chains tighter. He tried all sorts of recipes for being decent and good, but they all failed. He was a victim of powers he could not control.

I wonder about you. It was fun when we were children to do as we pleased and kick over the traces whenever we were allowed. It isn't quite such fun when we're grown up and have to stand on our own two feet, and wake up to the fact that we've got within us powers that we cannot control. We are sinners, as God would put it (Rom 3:23). We try to do our best and determine we're not going to do that particular thing again, but it gets the mastery. Maybe it's a vicious tongue, and time and time again we're determined that we'll never let it rip anymore. But we find it does rip. Or maybe it's thoughts that we hate but we cannot control. Or a temper we cannot subdue, or selfishness and envy, or the spirit of jealousy that turns us green, and we find we're victims to it.

We're not the men and women that we would like to be. Why not? It's because we are all sinners and it's not nice to think about it in the quietness of the moment. I imagined myself being special, but I'm not, and I see how far short I've come of my own ideal. I'm not the David that I would really like to be. God says we have sinned and do constantly come short of his required standards.

### **Only Christ could help him**

As the Saviour came by he began to speak, and the man cried out, 'Let me alone; I've had enough of it.' And you can understand his exasperation. His friends had said, 'Try this and try that. Try that remedy, try this treatment.' He tried all the treatments and was no better, and he was getting utterly fed up with the whole business. It was no use his trying; he had abandoned himself, for he felt he never would be any different. It was a pathetic situation.

'What is your name?' said Christ (v. 30).

'Legion,' said he.

He'd given up the struggle. He'd decided it would never be possible for him to be saved and get rid of it.

I wonder if I'm talking to somebody here this evening, and you say to me, 'I have heard the gospel a thousand times and I'm tired of the whole business. It never did me any good. I've been told to say prayers, read my Bible, go regularly to church, engage in charity work, and I've done all these things, but I'm no better. Leave me alone now; I'll go my own way and if I'm lost I shall be lost, that's all.'

'Let us alone,' he said, but he didn't understand who this was that had come, nor how our Lord proposed to save him. He was used to the chains. We don't use iron chains these days, except perhaps for the most outrageous criminals, yet we have chains that we use to try to chain in the evil. We have chains of social custom and convention. Let me not say a word against it; we should thank God for it. Chains of decent moral behaviour, chains of psychiatry; thank God for all the psychologists and psychiatrists, and the good work they do. But God says that the real cause of the trouble lies deeper. We were made for God, he made us in his image. A real man and woman is a man or woman who lives daily in happy fellowship with God, talks with God, has friendship with God, knows God and loves him. That's how God originally made man and woman.

People who don't know God, that do not have the Saviour within them, are only half alive. That's not how humanity was meant to be. The trouble is that we have all sinned and the friendship with God has been broken; we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). How shall we get free? How shall we break the chain of sin and guilt and once more restore ourselves into favour with God? That cannot be done by human effort. The best and most honest intentions and struggles will not do a thing. There is only one way of being saved and that is through our Lord Jesus.

I wonder if you would listen carefully for a moment, and watch precisely what happened that day when our Lord came to this desperate man. You may feel that you've tried so many times to help yourself, and it's never happened. You've given up on yourself, and go on now as you've always gone, thinking nothing will happen. Watch and see how this man was saved when the Saviour met him that day.

'What is your name?' he said.

'Legion,' said the man.

'No, that's not your name. That's not the real you. Who are you? Who is the real you, and where do you stand? What will you choose?'

Far gone as the man was, thank God he still had the power personally to choose Christ. He was powerless to break the power of Satan and powerless to break the bonds. There was a tremendous battle as the powers of evil on the one side raged to keep their hold on that man's soul, and Christ on the other side was waiting to save him. A battlefield indeed, as one human soul stood face-to-face with Christ who had come to save him, and had to decide whether he would open his personality to Christ or whether he would keep Christ out and remain a prisoner in the home of his own soul.

### **Each of us has the power to choose**

What is your name? Where do you stand? Thank God, there's never been a man or woman on earth so far gone that they do not have the power to choose, even on the very brink of hell. Salvation is on these terms: the Saviour has come right to where we are in our struggle, and he doesn't ask us for the tiniest effort of struggle in self-improvement. He has come to *save* us. He came to die on the cross so that the guilt of our sin before God might be put away, so that God might be free to bless us with salvation and give us his Holy Spirit. Our personal will is the last locked gate that holds up the tide of God's salvation as it comes streaming to us. There's no person outside of hell who cannot decide for himself or herself what they will do with this Jesus.

As I speak to you, perhaps there is another battle going on in many a heart here. Christ comes to you right where you are, and he stands outside your personality. He died for your sin so that its guilt might be put away, and he has secured an eternal salvation for you (Heb 9:12). Your own personal will is the only locked gate that will stop that salvation coming into you. God made you that unique personality that you are, but he will never force it. Satan with all his evil hosts may come and snatch away your dearest treasure of personality and rend it to shreds, but God never will. God gave you a will and a personality; he meant you to stand on your own feet, and God's own Son will honour that. He stands outside and knocks at your door. He asks and he pleads, but he'll never come in unless you ask him. Only you can decide.

Can we get this clear: he's not asking you to reform, nor to promise him anything at all. If you are willing to let him come in, he will save you from sin and from its guilt and power. But he waits. Will you let him in?

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Rev 3:20)

But our personalities are so precious to us, aren't they?

'I want to run my life my own way. I don't want to be dictated to, not even by Christ himself. I want to go my own way and I want to decide for myself. I want to be free.'

We don't want to give up dominion of our personality to anybody, and quite rightly. But, tell me, are you free? You say you want to be free. Are you? You say you want to decide your



own destiny. Have you decided it, and do you know where you're going? You want to decide for your life and your eternity, but have you? Are you sure of heaven?

You say, 'I'm not sure.'

Then you haven't decided it, have you? When are you going to be sure and decide?

You say, 'I don't think I can.'

Then you are not master of yourself. You are just drifting to eternity under the plea that you want to settle things for yourself and you're not going to let Christ in. But that's not being free; you're a slave to anything that may happen and you're drifting uncertainly through life with that precious cargo of a human personality. Let me tell you, you're not free at all. The very fact that you are unsure of heaven and eternal life, when common sense would say that if you loved yourself you would grasp it with both hands, is evidence enough that you're not free. It's an idle daydream, that. You're being shepherded along by a bigger power than you know; without Christ and without hope, and slipping through life into eternity.

Would you allow me to become very personal just here, and to plead with you? I can't help it if you think I am emotional. God counted your one soul so valuable that his own Son suffered the death of the cross to save you. Do you doubt that Saviour as he stands outside your life tonight and says, 'What's your name? Where do you stand?'

Faced with Christ himself who died for you, Tom, Joan, what is your name really—the real you? Have you heard his knock and let the Saviour in? Is the real you, you-plus-Christ? Are you a Christian? Don't hesitate to let him in, nor think he will make your life a prison house. It is the wickedness of our archenemy, Satan, to slander God, and people are afraid to let in the very Son of God, lest he make them unhappy.

In the house next door to where I was born there was a young man, older than myself by far, but I still remember it. In difficult days, when employment was difficult, he answered what seemed to be a bona fide advertisement in London. In his middle teens he went up to take this job and his parents heard no more from him, no letter, no card, nothing. The weeks went by and they began to get worried. They wrote and wrote, 'John, do write and tell us how you're getting on,' but no answer came. At last the father determined that he would go and seek out this place, and to his horror he found the address was in some disreputable quarter. He went to the police and they said, 'Sir, we're very sorry, but we daren't go down there alone; we go in pairs. But you go down, and we will be in plain clothes on the other side of the road.'

So the father went and a wizened old woman came to the door. (He found out later that they were members of a thieving gang. They had got this young lad and taken him to the platforms of the great London railway stations, and said, 'Pick up that, that, that, and put them in the van.')

'I've come to take my son,' he said.

'We haven't got your son!'

'Jack Wade is in here, and I demand my son.'

'We haven't your boy. I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Get out of the way,' he said.

At the top of his voice, he called into the old house, 'Jack, it's your father. I've come to take you home. Come down, Jack.'

And presently the lad came down the stairs, all confused.

'No, Dad,' he said, 'go home, I want to stay here.'

'Come on, my boy,' he said, and put his arm around him and pulled him out. He was so doped that when he saw his father he didn't want to come out.

Dear friend, it's the Saviour standing outside your heart tonight: a Saviour who came all the way from heaven to die for you on the cross so that you might be delivered. I assure you that if you don't believe in sin and you don't believe in Satan, he did. It's that same wounded Saviour who stands in front of your personality, saying, 'What's your name? Where do you stand? What will you choose? Come out, I'm your Saviour.'

Whether you understand much of what he was doing or not, when Christ died on that cross, do you not believe that he died there for you? He stands outside your personality saying, 'Let me in while you still have the power to choose.' If you let him in now, I'm not saying that your troubles will immediately be over, but the war will be won.

### **From the power of darkness to light**

When they came back they found this demon-possessed man, sitting now, clothed and in his right mind (v. 35). It doesn't mean to say that the man never sinned again. The Bible tells us bluntly that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8). But the battle was won and he was sitting at the feet of Jesus. The Lord, so to speak, had conquered him; his whole heart and life were given over to the Lord, and the Lord for him was supreme. He was his guarantee of safety and as the years went by the Lord would take hold of his life more and more until the last bit of darkness had gone.

If you let Christ into your heart tonight, the war will be over. You'll still have many a battle with sin, but the war is won and the Saviour is within. You'll have peace with God because of his sacrifice at the cross; the guilt will be gone and you'll know what you've never known before, that you are a child of God. What a difference that makes.

The real you will be able to say: 'to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God' (John 1:12).

#### *Choosing Christ means rejecting sin*

So the man was saved, but I think the saddest thing about all that story is not the man with whom we began, bad as his case was, but the very polite and refined neighbours who came out to see what the fuss was. They were extraordinary people. When that poor fellow had been in the grip of these evil powers, they had shown him all the human kindness they could. They had helped to restrain him, re-clothed him, tried to stop him gashing himself, and hurting himself (v. 29; see also Mark 5:1-20). And now when the Saviour came and saved him, they grew afraid and they asked Jesus to leave them alone (v. 37). They didn't understand this business about being saved, and they'd nearly rather have had the man as he was. They weren't quite sure whether it had been the right thing to do.

It was forbidden in those days for those people to eat pork. It was a temporary regulation that God had laid down for the health of his people in those ancient days. So, part of the reason why they didn't want the Saviour was: 1. because they knew they didn't understand this

business of being saved; and 2. the demons had gone out of the man into the pigs, the pigs had been drowned in the lake, and that was their pigs gone. It was forbidden food, really.

Many people would do their level best to help the mentally ill and the poor, and oppressed countries if need be, but it's the business of being saved they don't like. They know that if they came to Christ, having such contraband would be sin, and some sins are enjoyable.

In the face of it all, what is your name? In these moments you can say, if never before, 'Lord Jesus, I do trust you and I do receive you as best I know how. Come in and be mine. I will trust you for salvation now and eternally.' His promise is that he will come in.

*Rejecting Christ means being without him eternally*

I wonder if any of us will leave the Saviour still standing outside and go from here just as our former selves, to pass through life alone and into eternal perdition without a Saviour, and to perish on the scrapheap of eternity.

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He has published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.