

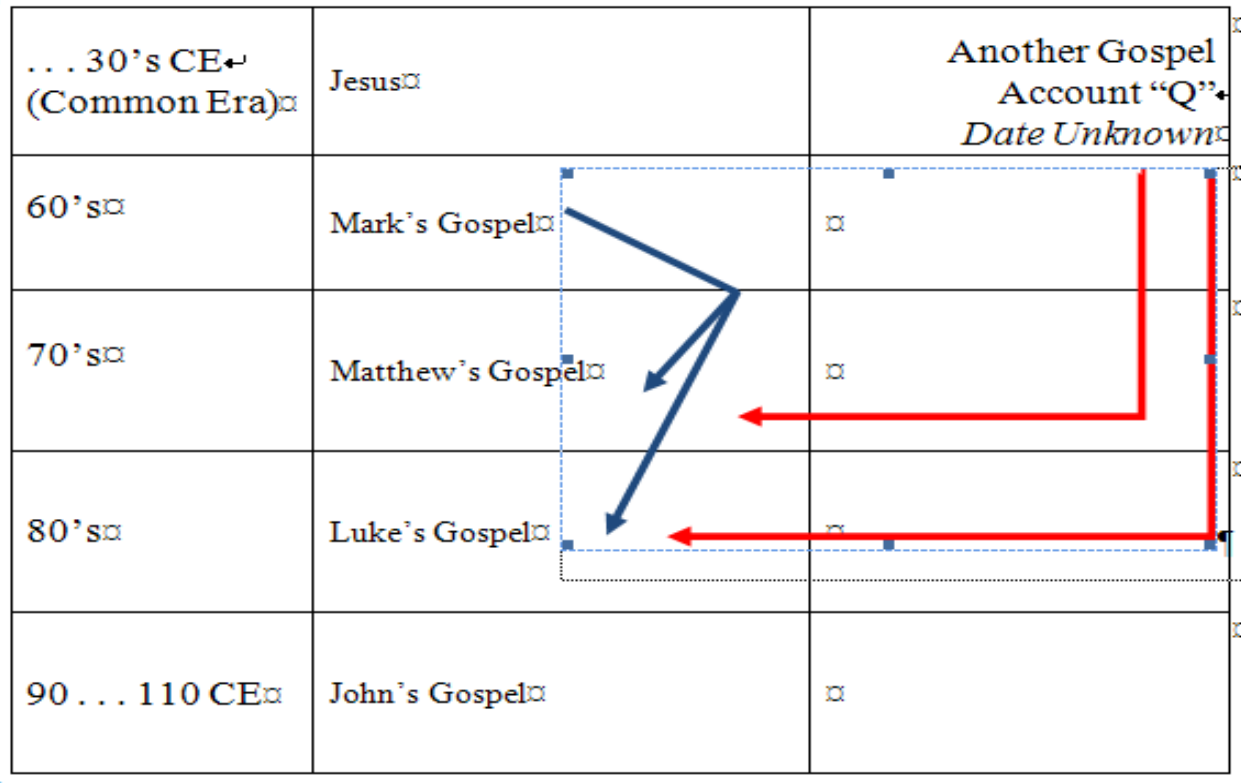
Scripture Reading

Luke 8:26-39 (as seen in parallel gospels)

Matthew 8:28-34	Mark 5:1-20	Luke 8:26-39	John
<p>²⁸ And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes,</p> <p>Two demoniacs met him, coming out of the tombs.</p> <p>So fierce</p> <p>That no one could pass that way.</p> <p>²⁹ And behold,</p> <p>They cried out, "what have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"</p>	<p>¹ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.</p> <p>² And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit,</p> <p>³ who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴ for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones. ⁶</p> <p>And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him; ⁷ and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." ⁸ For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit?"</p> <p>⁹ And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for</p>	<p>²⁶ Then they arrived</p> <p>At the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.</p> <p>²⁷ And as he 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 lived not in a house but among the tombs.</p> <p>²⁸ 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 beseech you, do not torment me." ²⁹ 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 fetters, but he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the desert.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said "Legion;" for</p>	

Matthew 8:28-34	Mark 5:1-20	Luke 8:26-39	John
<p>³⁰ Now a herd of many swine was feeding at some distance from them. ³¹ And the demons begged him, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine.”</p> <p>³² And he said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the swine; and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and perished in the waters. ³³ The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, and what had happened to the demoniacs. ³⁴ And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, They begged him to leave their neighborhood.</p>	<p>We are many.” ¹⁰ And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; ¹² and they begged him, “Send us to the swine, let us enter them”</p> <p>¹³ So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine; and the herd numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. ¹⁴ The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the county. And people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine. ¹⁷ And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood .</p> <p>¹⁸ And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. ¹⁹ But he refused, and said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” ²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marveled.</p>	<p>many demons had entered him. ³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³² Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them leave. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. ³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them ow he who had been possessed with demons was healed. ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but he sent him away, saying, ³⁹ “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And we went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.</p>	

How the Story of the Gerasene Demoniac Came Through Luke



Take a look, if you will, at the time chart (above) showing approximately when the gospels were written.

When Luke was sitting at his desk in the 80's of the first century, he likely had a copy of Mark's manuscript (that Mark had hurriedly written in the 60's). Luke did not have Matthew's gospel (which was written in the 70's) – ten years before him. In addition to Mark's gospel, Luke is thought to have had another manuscript that scholars have called "Q." Matthew also had this "Q" document on his desk when he was doing his writing. This other gospel account, that we don't have a copy of today, explains why Luke and Matthew had a lot of text in common. But as we look at what the four gospels contain on this story, a few things seem obvious.

(See *parallel gospels above*) John, over on the right, either hadn't heard about this story or he felt that it wasn't as relevant to his more theological telling of the Jesus story. Matthew,¹ over on the far left, mentions the exorcism but renders it as two possessed individuals who scare everyone half to death but Matthew has it end the same as Mark and Luke. So Mark and Luke are the writers who seem more interested in this event because they provide all of the detail.

Wouldn't it be fascinating to jump in a time machine and go back and sit Mark and Luke down, next to each other, and ask them a few questions. Better yet, it would be great to go back and watch Jesus heal this man but we don't have the resources for that this morning. Some of the parts on the church's time travel machine are on back order. Here are a few things, though, that are really interesting.

The guy was clearly as screwed up in the head as you can get but he must have had people who loved him. Just because he traumatized everyone with his running around naked and hiding in the graveyards, somebody must have cared. He probably had a family.

First of all, if he actually had done any harm to

¹ Matthew 8:28-34

anyone – attacking people and doing violence – the locals would have stoned him to death – putting an end to the unfortunate man's miserable existence. So he wasn't hurting anyone, just terrifying them.

Imagine sitting in your back yard patio, entertaining a few friends, and all of a sudden there's this wild-eyed naked guy who jumps up over your back yard fence, where your kids are playing crochet, and he starts screaming like he's got Turret's syndrome on steroids.

People clearly knew him and his family and Mark² and Luke³ take the time to tell us that some apparently caring people actually tried to restrain him with chains and manacles. He had probably begged those who knew him to tie him down before he would go into one of his fits of insanity. But it got to be too much and at some point, he broke his chains, escaped those who were trying to guard him and he fled into the desert⁴ and the mountains. Sometimes he'd be seen screaming and hitting himself with rocks while he languished alone in the graveyards. Think, not only, of how messed up this guy was – pity his poor family for their years of heartbreak.

It's also curious that when this bloodied, bruised and totally deranged guy sees Jesus from a distance,⁵ he comes running up to Him, kneeling down, crying out "What are you having to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Don't torment me." At which point Jesus commands the so-called 'unclean spirit' to come out of him.⁶

At first, it's a little strange that Jesus asks the demon's name. 'My name is Legion but you can call me Leagie if you like or Sybil – there's a whole bunch of us in here. We're back.'⁷

And then in one voice, the multitude of demons

² Verse 4

³ Verse 29

⁴ According to Luke

⁵ Mark 5:6

⁶ Luke 8:29

⁷ Obviously facetious, not literal, but remember "The Exorcist" movies or Michael Keaton's 'Beetlejuice'?

beg not to be sent into the abyss⁸ (what's the abyss?) or out of the country.⁹ *What, were they having passport problems?* "If you're casting us out," the demons say, . . . "how about that herd of pigs over on the hill?"

So Jesus gave them leave and they went into the herd of pigs who next did what demon possessed pigs tend to do – they jump in the lake. Two thousand of them, Mark tells us,¹⁰ but pigs can't swim so they all drowned. Stupid demons, I'd say. But if you got your pay check by taking care of pigs, how is it that you're going to tell your boss that the whole herd of swine committed suicide by jumping in the lake?

What seemed even more crazy was for everyone around to see *Weird Harold*, here,¹¹ putting on a leisure toga and sitting down and talking with Jesus in his right mind. Why was this so terrifying for people to see this? Mark, Matthew and Luke all say that the people asked Jesus to leave. Luke, being more regionally minded, said all the people from the entire Gerasene county asked Him to leave.

'Get out of here!' they must have said. 'We just can't have this kind of commotion around here' their local politician probably haltingly said. 'It's gets people excited and we're trying to keep the peace here.'

But it ends with yet another twist. Once the guy is healed of his craziness, he wants to follow Jesus – probably to be a devoted disciple – but he is told to go back home. So he does return home but then he launches out on some kind of crusade – spreading the wonderful good news of his healing. He goes throughout ten metropolitan centers of northern Judaea,¹² telling everyone of how Jesus changed his

⁸ Luke's verse 31

⁹ Mark's verse 10

¹⁰ Mark's verse 13

¹¹ "Weird Harold" is just a contemporary idiom inserted in the telling to convey what would likely be the crowd's combination of judgment and awe of this remarkable miracle for this man who was obviously a social outcast.

¹² The **Decapolis** (Greek: *deka*, ten; *polis*, city) was a group of ten cities on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire in Syria and Judea (renamed Palestine in 135 AD). The ten cities were not an official league or political unit, but they were grouped together because of their language, culture, location, and political status. The Decapolis cities were centers of Greek and Roman culture in a

life.

So we've got a no-less-than-spectacular miracle that transforms a total train-wreck of a human being. But why did the locals fearfully ask Jesus to get out of town? I'm guessing that the Presence of God was just too much to take.

What do you have when you experience the actual Presence of God in your life? A lot of things.

You have unconditional love – Someone loves you no matter how screwed up you are or have been. You're with Someone Who is so powerful that just being with Them makes you feel at home. At home with them. At home with the One Who made you. At home with yourself.

That is more power than any of us can casually face. Because if Someone has the power of peace, amidst the fiercest, angriest, physically strongest and most powerful forces known to society, it must be supernatural.

There must be a God.

And to slow down from this rushed, shallow, self-absorbed, ridiculously materialistic and prejudiced life we lead for even three seconds . . . and to contemplate that there really is an all-powerful, personal, all-knowing, compassionate Being (Who is right next to us and Who loves us even more than we love our own kids) – that's terrifying.

The reality of the actual Presence of God in our life should cause us to ask ourselves: 'just what are we doing with our lives?' Why on earth are we spending our time doing what we're doing and bent out of shape, half the time, about pathetically little things?



It's the early morning hours and I'm walking from my car into my office downtown. It's still dark and usually there are a number of others coming and going from their shifts at the nearby businesses but not this morning. About 500 yards from my office door I hear a voice from behind me.

region that was otherwise Semitic (Jewish, Nabatean, and Aramean). With the exception of Damascus, the "Region of the Decapolis" was located in modern-day northeastern Israel, northwestern Jordan, and southwestern Syria. Each city had a certain degree of autonomy and self-rule.

“Excuse me, sir, but I’m an African American male and I not gonna’ hurt you. I just want to ask you a question.” I turn around and face the man approaching me in the darkness. He’s about six foot tall and wearing a jacket too skimpy for this cold winter morning.

I look him in the eye and say “I’m a Caucasian male and I don’t expect you to hurt me because I am a brother and you can ask me a question any time you’d like.”

This momentarily confuses him because he’s not prepared for such a response but he continues. He says, “Have you ever heard of Lupus?”

“Yes I have” I say, remembering that he goes by the name of Jordan¹³ and he previously told me a story of his wife who has Lupus and he was trying to get some food for her.

“Hi Jordan” I say with a smile, shaking his hand and reminding him of my name. “We both know that Lupus is a chronic and long-lasting autoimmune disease where the body attacks its own cells and causes a lot of other complications. How’s your wife doing today?”

My knowing him scares Jordan but as I shake his hand, he relaxes a little but his eyes nervously dart about in what seems like embarrassment. He says, “I’m just looking for some food.”

“Where have you been eating these days Jordan?” I ask him.

“Well they were mean to me up the street” he says, pointing up Main Street. And in the next few minutes he tells of numerous instances where he has been mistreated or denied services from a shelter for one reason or another. So after I gave him a few dollars and pointed him in the direction of the City Mission for breakfast, he muttered something undistinguishable and slipped away into the shadows.

Inside I feel a sense of sadness because of Jordan’s poverty of mind and spirit – his living from hand-to-mouth. I want to magically take charge of his life, get him some serious psychotherapy, a job, a home and some friends. I wonder if he actually has a wife with Lupus. I want to miraculously “fix” his life and yet I know I can’t. And no matter how bad I feel for him, my day begins in a climate-controlled office in front of a computer and amidst friendly colleagues.



¹³ Not his real name

All these homeless street people – many of you have seen them as you helped out with Friends of the Night People. But we kind of give up on them, don’t we? They seem hopeless with their post-traumatic stress syndrome and alcoholism¹⁴ from their military experiences; their paranoia, their wild schemes and their endless stories of how the world is out to get them. “Tough luck but that’s not my job” we half say to ourselves.

And yet when we get back into our office, there’s that know-it-all over in the corner. There’s the boss with the entitlement schemas who makes us do everything three or four times because he micromanages everything and he’ll never delegate authority to someone who is far more competent than him.

And there’s that crazy who works on the next floor up. You hate to even go near her because not only does she just not get anything – she’s constantly too busy to talk to you – even when you’re trying to save her hours of work or help her out.

We draw all these lines, in our minds, between us and those other people – but our exclusionary lines make them homeless. The people with whom we’ve given up. The people with whom we’ve absolutely had it. The people we talk about as if they’ve been dropped out of the sky for no other reason than to torment us and make our life hard. *The people whom God personally loves.*

You see, whether we are walking into work or to another cubicle in work or across the room in our own house, God is right next to us but we’re forgetting this. We’ve missed the memo. We’ve been too busy to see the PowerPoint presentation and we’ve unconsciously erased all the emails – treating God’s hundreds of messages¹⁵ to us like spam.

You and I have continually been placed in the presence of needy people but we’ve turned away, saying “That’s not my job!” “This person is such a piece of work, somebody ought to do something.” And then we go and obsess about their neediness with others as if there isn’t an all-powerful, all-knowing, infinitely compassionate Being by our side Who has personally directed our life’s circumstances so that we can be present in this person’s life.

¹⁴ The fact that over 17% of individuals returning from the military suffer from mental illness should stop us in our tracks from sending individuals into such horrible life experiences.

¹⁵ Usually through other’s spoken or printed words

So we have missed the memo which was written directly to us, saying that this is our job. But “if you do it to the least of these, you’re doing it to Me” Jesus said. The memo is telling us that all (that has transpired in our life) has brought us to this time and place so that we can be truly present in this needy person’s life.

So what is the job before us? What do we have to know for the test?

The job is to be present and real in this person’s life in such a compassionate, wise and spiritually mindful way, that this person feels the respect. That this person feels the presence of God through our presence. So that this person can come, through time, to feel “at home” – no longer “homeless.”

At home with you. At home with themselves.
And at home with God.

That’s your job and you just got the memo,
didn’t you?

