

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #42: THREE UNUSUAL PRAYERS (AND ANSWERS)

By John Temples

In Luke 8:26-39, there is an amazing account of a man possessed by demons:

“Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, ‘What have I to do with You, 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 it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness. Jesus asked him, saying, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion,’ because many demons had entered him. And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss. Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He permitted them. Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned.

“When those who fed them saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. They also who had seen it told them by what means he who had been demon-possessed was healed. Then the whole multitude of the surrounding region of the Gadarenes asked Him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. And He got into the boat and returned. Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, ‘Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you.’ And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.”

Demon possession apparently was a temporary phenomenon in which Satan was granted power by God to send evil spirits into human bodies. The vast majority of demonic possessions happened during the ministry of Christ, who without fail was able to cast out the demons, proving His divinity. Demon possession had apparently ceased by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians--casting out of demons is not among the list of miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. Direct and involuntary control of a person's body by Satan is not possible today.

Many lessons can be drawn from this amazing account, but think about this: during this encounter, there were three prayers asked of the Lord and three different answers given.

THE FIRST PRAYER

The first plea was made by the demons. Faced with expulsion at the word of Jesus, they begged that they be permitted to enter into the bodies of pigs who were nearby. Remember Satan boasting to Jesus in Matthew 4:9 that he could give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory? For all the devil's boasting about his power, in reality *he could not even take over the body of a pig* without the Lord's permission!

Jesus granted their plea. The pigs, newly possessed of the demons, ran into the sea and drowned. This gives us some important insight into the nature of Satan: he evidently cannot know the future. He did not foresee the drowning of the pigs. It was the same in the case of Job. Satan predicted that Job would renounce God. When Job passed the test of faith, Satan was humiliated. And he certainly did not foresee that Jesus would rise from the dead and give him a mortal blow!

But here is the interesting thing: God said "yes" to the prayer of a demon! Why? Because it accomplished God's will.

THE SECOND PRAYER

The second prayer was asked by the citizens of the city. When they saw that their pigs were dead, they besought the Lord to depart from them (verse 37). Brother

Burton Coffman has these pertinent comments: “What an incredible thing it is that those people would not have seized upon the opportunity to have brought their sick and afflicted to the Master. Such blindness and short-sightedness are amazing.” These people were more concerned about the loss of their swine than the casting out of the demon or the healing of the poor man. Like so many today, they were more upset over the destruction of their property and the loss of income than the loss of their souls.

What was their prayer? “Depart from us.” What was the Lord’s answer? Again, it was affirmative. Jesus promptly got into the boat and left (verse 37). As far as we know, Jesus never returned to that place again. These people had a great opportunity and blew it.

THE THIRD PRAYER

Verse 38 records the prayer of the demon-free man: “Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him.” The man was asking Jesus to take him on as a disciple. But Jesus said no.

Here is the interesting thing about this situation: The demons prayed, and their prayer was answered, but to their own destruction. The worldly citizens of the region prayed for Jesus to depart from them, and their prayer was granted. The man who was healed--who was filled with gratitude--prayed, and his request was denied!

Why did Jesus say “no” to this man? Here are two possible reasons:

First, there were loved ones who needed this man. Jesus said to him, “Return to your own house” (verse 39). His family needed him, and Jesus would not deny them the pleasure of having him back again.

Second, this man had a story to tell, and he could tell it powerfully. Like Jonah, he could give first-hand testimony about his deliverance from suffering. Jesus would not be back, so He needed for this man to stay and testify of God’s great works.

So, think about these three unusual prayers and their answers. The demons had their prayer answered--God sometimes even answers Satan's requests when they are in accord with His will. The people prayed for Christ to depart, and He did so; He will force Himself upon no one. The healed man prayed, and Jesus told him "I have something better for you to do." We always want our prayers answered with a "yes," and promptly! But maybe God has something better in mind for us. --John Temples