

## The Cast | People Engaged in the Story of Jesus Christ

### *The Powers (A Trip to Bizarro World)*

Luke 8.22-39

February 11, 2018

*Now on one of those days Jesus and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they launched out. <sup>23</sup> But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. <sup>24</sup> They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. <sup>25</sup> And He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"*

*<sup>26</sup> Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup> And when He came out onto the land, He was met by a man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. <sup>28</sup> Seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me." <sup>29</sup> For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard, and yet he would break his bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert. <sup>30</sup> And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup> They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss. <sup>32</sup> Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and the demons implored Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission. <sup>33</sup> And the demons came out of the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. <sup>34</sup> When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country. <sup>35</sup> The people went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. <sup>36</sup> Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. <sup>37</sup> And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat and returned. <sup>38</sup> But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him; but He sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup> "Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.*

We've been looking at the characters in the Four Gospels... there are a lot of them... important persons and nobodies...AND they're NOT all... HUMAN. We've looked at animals...like the unbroken donkey Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem and we've looked at spiritual entities like the tempter whom Jesus met in the desert... after Jesus was baptized.

Today, we meet two forces or powers that plague the human race and that have inspired fear in people in the ancient world AND in the modern world... Lots of popular movies deal with natural disasters and deal with supernatural forces/entities, exorcisms and demonic possession... It's

like we'll never lose our fascination with earthquakes, fires, tornadoes and asteroids AND vampires, zombies and evil entities.

The Storm and Legion... the forces of nature AND of super-nature... they act as a kind of foil for the Gospel writers – in other words – they stand in contrast to the main Character and provide opportunity for Him, for Jesus Christ, to reveal His identity... Jesus Christ and the Powers – that's our topic. Let's look at:

- 1) How these episodes fit the flow of the story
- 2) What they reveal about the main Character

Jesus Christ has just told a story/parable about the absolute necessity of listening... He is the Word/Seed from heaven and WE are all like soils receiving Seed but in different ways – hard soil, rocky-shallow soil and receptive – ways people respond to who Jesus IS.

And then we begin to see examples of these different responses... some who believe/receive Jesus Christ, others who reject Him or start but don't get rooted.

And while we're watching people's different responses, Jesus keeps preparing His students for their first big test... when the Rabbi will ask, "Who do you say that I AM?"

You can see from v.25 how they're beginning to ask that question themselves – "Who then IS this...?"

These two miracle stories where Jesus Christ shows His authority over creation and over the unseen world... each episode moves the 12 disciples closer to answering that big question.

In Galilee...the home region of Jesus Christ and the disciples, the crowds are lit up...everyone wants to see this Miracle-worker who speaks like no one they've ever heard (4.31). And in order to simply move, Jesus and His students have to get away from the crowds...So the Teacher suggests a trip to the Other Side... and that was a thing!

That was Bizzaro World... the other side of the Sea of Galilee was where the Gentiles lived... sometimes called the Decapolis, "ten cities" where Gentiles were the majority and where Jewish people didn't venture. You see it in the first verse of each paragraph, "The Other Side" (v22) and then in v 25, "The country of the Garasenes which is opposite Galilee" and it really was opposite not just geographically but culturally/spiritually/ethnically.

Maybe the disciples thought, "Wow! I guess He really wants to avoid the crowds... 'cause He's taking us to the Other Side...to Bizzaro World!"

And then... Jesus obviously exhausted by serving and teaching the teeming masses of people, He falls asleep on what must've been a pretty big boat (at least 13 people aboard). And that's when the first of the powers appears, "a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake and they began to be swamped and in danger."

Now, these guys were fishermen and Jesus was a land-lubber, a construction worker... So you'd THINK they could handle themselves (they've seen plenty of storms before) but this storm was a killer... the wind and water was surging... It's specific vocabulary taken from the story of Jonah... The words of Jonah in Greek are the same words Luke chooses (he wants us to see a connection) – there is One greater than Jonah here!

So Jesus gets up and rebukes the wind and waves (as if they are characters in the story!) and IF the disciples WERE afraid (of the storm), AFTER their Teacher controls the weather with a mere word...now they're both (v 25) "fearful and amazed" and they ask, "Who IS this Person who commands the uncontrollable forces of nature (winds/waves) and they obey Him?"

Then, they press on toward "the opposite of Galilee" and as soon as they arrive on "the Other Side", in Bizzaro World – they find that it's ever weirder than they'd heard... the rumors are TRUE and more!"

Everywhere these Jewish men look there are the clearest, loudest indicators of the UNCLEAN! On their side, everyone is always concerned with the Law of Moses and the clergymen (the Monitors as we saw last week) are always pointing out the smallest deviations from the moral/ceremonial purity that the Mosaic Law required – "you're hands are not clean...your clothing is wrong...you've touched a sick person... you can't eat that..."

But HERE, on the Other Side, there ARE no monitors; the Pharisees don't even come here... because on this side EVERYTHING is unclean. There's a man who's not wearing the right clothes – not wearing clothes at all! He's unclean in every way! He's possessed by an unclean spirit (he unclean to the core). He's NOT living in a house...outside the city (away from people). He not only has an occasional brush with the unclean DEAD – he dwells IN THE TOMBS! He emanates uncleanness and chaos.

It's the image of God...but it's been so defiled and ruined in every way that it's barely recognizable and the shell of the man (note the word "man" repeated six times) the shell is now only a host for spiritual parasites... He's naked like a beast and has to be chained...but he's wild and escapes...animal!

He's isolated...no community or conversation or love. He's like the embodiment of "the Other Side."

And then a short conversation: the man correctly identifies the Rabbi – “Jesus, Son of God”. He’s far ahead of the disciples (he’s prepping them for the test!). He uses the Name of his opponent in an attempt to get over on Him... to control Jesus Christ.

But Jesus asks his name and the spirits IN the (unnamed) man speak, “Legion” – that was a military term for a regimen of soldiers up to 5,600 in number. And this shell of a man has a whole hive of spiritual beings living in him (if that’s what we could call it – more like just using him). The spirits try to negotiate with Jesus and He sort of plays along... and allows them to go into a herd of swine. Mark’s account says it was some 2000 pigs (another exhibition of uncleanness here in Bizzaro World – the uncleanest of all unclean animals – no wonder the Pharisees never went to the Other Side!).

And Jesus Christ sends these unclean spirits, these messengers of death and defilers of God’s image, He sends them into the herd and the pigs immediately succumb to the death-impulse and they go over the cliffs and drown themselves in the lake.

The pig-herders run off to tell the city what happened and when the townsfolk arrive they find this horror of a sub-human zombie... now rescued and restored to humanity: “clothed and in his right mind” sitting at Jesus Christ’s feet...like a learner... in the posture of a disciple. Everything in Bizzaro World has been made right. The demonic spirits are gone – the man has his will returned to him...he’s dressed and thinking and learning like a man (not a beast). And he’ll be restored to his own home (39) no longer among the dead...but “with the living” (Natalie Merchant).

And when the people see it... everyone rejoices and they all lived happily ever after! Nope!

Remember, there’s more than one way to respond to this Word from God that Jesus Christ is... The townies preferred “business as usual” in Bizzaro World to the power of this All-powerful Liberator and they ask Him to leave...and He does.

But before Jesus sails away, the new man...asks for a seat in the boat...and Jesus denies the request...and instead makes the man a preacher...and sends him home to tell everyone what “God” has done for him... And in one final irony the man goes and tells everyone what “Jesus” had done for him... Did the man think that Jesus was God?

Well, all the evidence that came in from this little expedition to the Other Side probably took a long time for the Twelve to process... but they are starting to put it together and by the next chapter they will rightly identify Jesus Christ as the Messiah – Peter’s famous words, “Thou art the Christ, Son of the living God” – that comes in CH 9.

They will know He’s the Messiah... even though they really DON’T know what a Messiah IS... and that’ll be the next big lesson Jesus Christ teaches them, “I AM the Messiah...and I’ve come to die for the sins of My people...THAT’S what the Messiah does!”

And they won't pass the next test... they CANNOT accept the idea of a Messiah who dies... Maybe because they didn't see themselves as NEEDING that big a remedy...Now, people on the Other Side...THEY need a big remedy...but we good Jewish guys living in morally clean Galilee... all we need is a little help, a little wisdom and instruction...some "how-to" stuff.

Too bad they didn't see (although they eventually would see it all) but they weren't YET seeing the whole story being told in this weird little excursion to the other side. But they would...after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ...then they'd see.

They'd see that Jesus in that sinking ship, Jesus Christ was the Better Jonah. When Jonah fell asleep with those pagan sailors...and they woke him up and Jonah realized, "I am the problem...and the only way for you to be saved is for you to throw me into the raging, surging sea..." And they DID.

And later the disciples would see, "Our Jonah, Jesus Christ – in order to save this sinking ship – PLANET EARTH – He too had to be thrown into the raging sea of God's justice... He will have to face the penalty of our sin... and on the Cross He did! That's why the sea in the Book of Revelation is as calm as glass. "And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire" (Rev 15) Justice has been satisfied and the debt of everyone who believes is paid in full... the sea of wrath is calm...because the Greater Jonah was thrown in.

The second scene too...actually tells the whole story of Jesus Christ's identity and purpose... Why would Jesus go to the other side to save (36) this hideous beast who's no longer even human...just a shell ...just a host for parasites? Why would Jesus go to Bizzaro World for this one lost sheep...why would He go to the Other Side?

Well, don't you see...that's the very nature of His whole mission? Don't you see that WE live in Bizzaro World and that YOU are the lost sheep...and that the New Adam has come to claim you, to clothe you in His record... and make you right?

Do you see that He finds us all, guilty and dead, dwelling in the tombs...residing among the dead...waiting our turn to die and terrified:

(Hebrews CH 2) "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." (14-15)

Jesus Christ had to come to the Other Side – He had to cross the Great Divorce, the yawning gap between Heaven and Earth (much further than the distance between Galilee and Decapolis!) – God had to enter our situation... to come into this fallen world, where His own image is so marred...and where there is death.

God in Jesus Christ came into “this world with devils filled that threatens to undo us” – but He came for us... He crossed the Raging Sea... ain’t no mountain high...ain’t no valley low...ain’t no river wide enough – to keep Him from getting to YOU!”

“Hello from the Other Side”, says Jesus Christ – “I am the Ultimate Adam – I’m showing you what it will look like when I have fully reclaimed the Garden the first Adam surrendered to evil... ONLY listen to what I am – the Final Word, the Savior of all who believe.”

“Only believe!”

Now you may think... “T.J. ...I don’t even believe in evil spirits...demonic possession... And a Man who can literally control the sea and the wind?...I mean come on!”

Well, let me remind of Hamlet: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy...”

Maybe this fixation with disaster movies and with supernatural movies... MAYBE it’s all hardwired into our souls... Maybe there IS a Grand Narrative... and maybe it all ends with everyone who believes clothed and in our right minds in a restored world where everything IS as God intends it to be.

Please don’t miss out on that... join the ransomed sinner train...come talk to me.