

The Abyss, Part 1
Last Things
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Bible Text: Isaiah 25:6-8; Luke 8:26-33
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Bless this word, Lord, that I may be true to Scripture, Lord, that I may be practical, that I may be concise, and that my words may lead people into a true living relationship with you and prepare us who are here today that as we hear this word, Lord, we will not only hear with our ears and receive with our hearts, but we will be prepared to eat that word through Holy Communion. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

We have read Revelation 20:1-3, so I'm beginning a little sub-study, I like to do that. So, this is going to be a little sub-study on the Abyss, and I pray that this sub-study on the Abyss will be practical and profitable for you.

Why are some spirits currently confined in the abyss and some not? (Luke 8:31)

So, turn with me, if you will, now to page 1,607 and that's Luke 8, and this has to do with healing of a demon possessed man. And this man, if we look at the background of it, lived among the tombs, there were actually two of them, but like all partnerships, one was dominant, and so the dominant one is the one that's talking, and he's identified, and this pair of people lived in the tombs and they cut themselves.

Did you ever know anybody to cut himself? Sometimes that's an indication of some great pain that hasn't been dealt with. That's natural, but there's also a supernatural element in that in addition to the natural. Never forget that.

The world we live in does not divide up the way the modern world thinks it does into a natural and a supernatural. We're not in a post-Kantian world. Who was Kant?

Kant was a man who was a philosopher who said matters that have to do with the senses, the things we can see and smell and taste, are a part of the Phenomenal world, but the things that we can't examine are part of the Noumenal world, and never the twain shall meet.

His intention was to protect Christianity. Sadly, what he did was to destroy biblical Christianity with his philosophy, because biblical Christianity doesn't have this sharp delineation between the natural and the supernatural. Everything here this morning is natural, and everything here this morning is supernatural, and we need to get ahold of that truth and walk in it.

So now here is a man who is a wounded man. He doesn't wear clothes anymore, and God put into humanity a natural shame in the wake of the fall of our first parents in the garden of Eden, and so when people are nudists, they are resisting the natural thing that God put in humanity following their expulsion from the garden of Eden.

There's a natural shame that should be there, but people can get used to it not being there and so you read in Isaiah of certain people who had forgotten how to blush (Isaiah 3:9; Jeremiah 6:15; 8:12). They've lost that, and you can lose that just like you can develop a taste for cigars.

I bought my first cigar in 1959 because I thought it was cool, and back then nobody worried about whether you smoked or not or your age. And now, you know, people are more obsessed over that than they are about anything. And I got to where acquired a taste for it, can you imagine that? Can you imagine loving the taste of something that makes your breath smell like kitty litter and smoke, because I knew that from having been around a man, after I quit smoking cigars, who would breathe in my face. You can acquire a taste for things.

You can acquire a taste for nudity where it doesn't bother you anymore, and you can think, as you begin to inflict pain on yourself, that you're taking out the pain within that. But what I want you to understand is in both these cases with these two guys who lived in the cemetery—who wants to live in a cemetery except on November 2nd if you're living in Latin America? That's the Day of the Dead, where you go out and eat dinner with your dead relatives. Who wants to live in a cemetery?

So, you see here these two fellows are demonized and the one is the dominant one, the other one is not. They wear no clothes. They can't be held by chains because they have more than natural strength. I can tell you from dealing with some people, I've encountered that with people. I've encountered that with people.

You know, I used to believe that the stories recorded in the Gospels were like a catalog in a museum of natural history of extinct species, and then one day beginning in 1977, I began to realize, "Well, this isn't what I believe. This shouldn't be happening. Oh, oh, what do I do with that? What do I do when reality comes up against my theology? What do I do?"

I've got to re-examine the Bible, and see did my theology come from the traditions of human beings, or did it come from a strict reading of Scripture?

So, I had to change my mind. You see, the New Testament and the Gospels are like what Sandy and I occasionally take when we bird watch, which is a handbook of birds that we're likely to see. It's a field guide to identify what God is doing in the world today.

So, here these guys are, running around naked, can't be held down with chains, cutting themselves, shrieking and howling, and basically driving everybody crazy and terrifying all the neighbors. Hmm, hmm, sounds like some cities. And so, Jesus encounters them, and he commands the spirit to come out of the man, and notice, look at verse 30, "Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'"

Why do people ask that question? Why did Jesus ask that question? Because in the ancient world there is a connection between knowing the name of something and having power.

You know, that's why you should never take God's name in vain because God's name is powerful. Powerful. Powerful. At the name of Jesus, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). And so, to name something is to begin to have power over it.

You know, it's interesting the Bible never gives us the name of Satan, nor does it give us in the canonical Scriptures the names of fallen angels.

"So, I thought his name was Lucifer?" No, that's just what St. Jerome came up with as he translated some verses in the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 14:12). His name isn't Lucifer; it just means light-bearer. His name isn't Satan. That's the nickname he got because he was an opponent of God and of God's crown of creation, human beings, and then their accuser.

What's his name? I don't want to know. I don't want to know. I don't need to know. Do you know why? Because messing around with evil is very, very, very dangerous. Just ask the seven sons of Sceva in the book of Acts (Acts 19:13-16).

And we're warned about that, but Jesus is involved in an act of conquest over Satan and his demons as he asked that question in verse 30, "What is your name?"

Now, notice what's the reply, "'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him." Many. A Roman legion, and we don't know that there were 6,000 demons here, a Roman legion was comprised of 6,000 soldiers. So, this demon says, now remember this, do demons tell the truth? Of course not. Of course not. Why?

Because they're under the authority of the boss, and the boss is Satan himself. But there were a number of demons there. How many? We don't know, but they said, "Well, we're legion, got 6,000 here." Well, there were a lot of them, there was enough to drown a whole bunch of pigs.

So, notice, then, "'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him." And look at verse 31. This is a critical verse. You should know this verse. "And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss."

"What? Do you mean to tell me these were free-range demons? Do you mean these demons just were able to go out and wander all over creation just like in that John Wayne movie about the Chisholm Trail?" These were free-range demons. They wandered wherever they wanted to. They weren't fenced up like Joe Norwood's prized longhorn. What's her name? "Harriet," that's it. They weren't like Harriet; she's fenced in.

"You mean they were free-range demons? Do you mean that there are free-range demons on the day of the Super Bowl, the day when more young males and females are traded for money than any other day in America? What?!"

I'm not against football, but isn't that a strange thing? Did you know that today is the day when more underage boys and girls are sold for evil purposes than any other day in American life? Isn't that a sobering thought, human trafficking? Free-range demons. I bet a lot of free-range demons are down in Tampa today, really whooping it up, "Woohee!" Hmm, really?

Free-range demons, February 7, 2021. There are probably some free-range demons in here right now, whooping it up. No, no, they don't whoop it up,

they're different kinds of demons; they're religious demons (Matthew 12:45; 1 Timothy 4:1-3). "Oh, it feels so holy in here."

I never will forget, because I used to sing for money, and I had my backdoor neighbor who belonged to a cult and she was very involved in the cult, and she asked me if I would come sing in her "church," and I said, "Well, sure." She was my neighbor, and I was going to sing "The Holy City." And she said, "Oh no, it talks about the blood!"

What? You see, she had religious demons and that particular cult, which doesn't have pastors but lay-readers and reading rooms, "Don't talk about the blood. Oh no!" Religious demons.

So, these free-range demons can make you feel really good in church, especially if it's not a really Christian church, especially if it's a church that is not Bible-based, preaching the gospel:

"Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he rose again the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), he ascended to heaven, and he's coming back.

"Well, but I feel, I just feel so, so worshipful!"

Well, those are demons. That doesn't mean you're demon possessed. That's not what I'm saying. It just means they want you to just feel so religious, so religious. Wow. One of the men that we met yesterday on our walk talked about why he didn't go to church anymore after we talked to him, and he said, "Well, they ran the preacher off." Why did they run the preacher off?

"Well, the preacher said we're going to stop as long as I'm pastor here, we're not going to have a Halloween carnival here anymore, because that has to do with demons." Well, what happened?

The deacons got together, you can identify that particular kind of church, the deacons got together without calling a congregational meeting and secretly fired the preacher: "We can't mess with Halloween. There's nothing harmful about Halloween."

The preacher said, "Well, you know, that thing was founded in paganism. It's about worshiping the devil. It's about dealing with the dead." And they ran him off.

People will mock the idea of Satan. You know, that's one of the things that you discover in reading the book of Jude and the book of 2 Peter that deal with these fallen angels. People speak evil of dignitaries, and don't even understand what they're talking about (2 Peter 2:10-12; Jude 1:8-10).

What is he saying? He's saying they mock the idea of a devil; they mock the idea of demons. They make fun of it, "Oh," like what was his name, Flip Wilson? "The devil made me do it."

Well, that's funny, isn't it, but do you know what? Ha, ha, there really is a devil, there really are demons, and there are some flying around in here. What do they want to do? They want to distract you. They want you to look at this (my watch) rather than looking at this (the Bible). They'll distract. "Will we get out of here before the Super Bowl begins at 5 today?" I don't know.

So, anyway there are demons; they do affect people; they do eventually gain sufficient control over a human being based on that human's experiences and sometimes what went before him in his bloodline, to where they can control that human's thinking, and that's exactly what we have here in Luke 8. And they're begging Jesus. This lying group of demons are begging him because they are terrified that Jesus is going to do something to them and that is, he's going to throw them into the Abyss, because there are demon spirits, there are fallen spirits who are right now are in the Abyss and that will be later on we'll get to that study.

But before we leave here today, I want you to look with me at three verses. I want you to turn with me to the book of Job 18:14, because this is really something. So, go to Psalms, turn left. Job 18 and look at these words here. This is page 810. Now, notice in verse 14 and this is one of Job's "miserable comforters."

Here's a lesson you need to remember about the book of Job, all those guys said truth, but it was mixed with their own views and errors. So, you can't quite go by everything Job's miserable comforters say, because God himself said they spoke incorrectly about him (Job 42:7-8), but they do reflect the basic belief system that existed in the ancient Near East in the time when the Bible was written.

Notice what they say in verse 14, and they're speaking about an evil man. Verse 14, "He is torn from the security of his tent and marched off to the king of terrors." Who is the king of terrors? The king of terrors is death. Now in the belief system of the ancient Near East, this is what they saw death as being, they saw death as a giant mouth whose bottom lip touched the earth and whose upper lip touched the heavens. That's a big mouth. Wow, a big mouth. The top of his mouth reaches heaven, the bottom of his mouth reaches the earth to swallow up everything.

‘The Canaanites understood death as a god with one lip touching the earth and the other touching the heavens so that he swallowed up everything. According to Bildad, “the firstborn of death,” following in the footsteps of his father, eats away the skin and devours the limbs of the wicked. According to Is. 25:8, the Lord will “swallow up death forever.”’ (Sproul, R.C., eds. (1995) *The New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc.), p. 721)

Now notice, look at the verse about it, “It eats away parts of his skin; death’s firstborn devours his limbs.” Who’s death’s firstborn? Death’s firstborn, the son of death in Canaanite religion, which obviously affected the belief system of many people who were involved in the Bible and particularly when they wrestled with unbelief.

When they wrestled with unbelief, they didn’t have the insight you and I do in light of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus who has brought life and immortality to light in the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10), people sometimes thought of life after death as a kind of hibernation.

“Again, as in 7:7–10, Job expresses the standard OT view, shared by his friends. There is no afterlife worthy of the name. The torpor of the shades in the netherworld cannot be regarded as life.” (Pope, Marvin H. (1974), *Job. The Anchor Yale Bible*. (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 108)

So, they had this very confused idea of life after death, and in their view of life after death, they were swallowed up by death, a monster that devoured everything, and the son of death came along to chew on their bodies, to eat them, chew them. Wow. And that’s what they believed.

In fact, sometimes when you read the Old Testament, you wonder, “Well, did they really believe in life after death?” Yes, they did believe in life after death, but Old Testament believers and Old Testament unbelievers reflecting the belief system of the pagan ancient Near East, believed that death was like an animal going into hibernation, an animal going into hibernation. What’s it like when an animal goes into hibernation? Well, find a cave where a bear’s hibernating and go in there with a stick and slap that bear right on the nose and start screaming. What will happen?

So, for the ancient Near East, the person with their view of reality, that’s how they saw death. That’s how they saw death.

Now, I want you to turn one other place and I want you to turn with me to the book of Isaiah for a moment, Isaiah 25, and I’m only going to reference

the last enemy, and the last enemy we're told in the Bible to be destroyed is death.

That's the last enemy. In other words, when Jesus has finished mopping up every single solitary thing, and that helps us to understand something of how the book of Revelation is laid out as a series of seven visions. The very last enemy to be destroyed according to the book of 1 Corinthians 15:54, don't turn there, is death, and death is cast into the lake of fire along with his boy.

Now let's look at verse 7 of Isaiah 25, page 1,095, and with this we close. "On this mountain," Isaiah 25:7, page 1,095, "On this mountain," what mountain is that? That is the mountain, Mount Zion, that is Jerusalem. That's the earthly city of Jerusalem. That's what Isaiah is thinking about. "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines."

Look at verse 7, "On this mountain," that's Jerusalem. What happened at Jerusalem? Well, the temple was there, but the temple really wasn't the most important thing. What the most important thing about Jerusalem is: that's where the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, that's where the Lord Jesus Christ was buried, and that's where the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead and thereby defeated Satan and death.

Now, look at this, look at verse 7, "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations."

Look at verse 8. Remember the Canaanite belief? Death was a monster with a mouth that touched the earth at the bottom and touched the heavens at the top and he had a boy who went around chewing people's bodies up.

Now, look at verse 8. You see, death swallowed everything in the ancient Near Eastern belief system. But look at verse 8, "He," He, He, it's the mountain of the Lord, that is the mountain of Yahweh and remember that the Lord Jesus Christ in his deity is Yahweh, in his humanity, he is one with us. "He," that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at this, this is so beautiful. Look at it. Verse 8, on this mountain, on the mountain where the Lord Jesus died and was buried and rose again, he opened his mouth and he swallowed up death. He did it.

"On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever." The Lord Yahweh, "The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he

will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken."

Listen, listen, listen. I want you to understand something with me this morning as we prepare to take Holy Communion, because we are going to remember our Lord's death until he comes. I want you to understand the enormous privilege that is yours and mine. We're remembering the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are remembering the precious blood that he shed. We are remembering the victory that he won over death.

There's that big-mouthed monster, death, that was basic to the belief system of the ancient Near East, and taking on that belief system, not embracing that belief system, Isaiah sees that the Lord Jesus Christ has a bigger mouth than death. And when that tomb opened, the Lord Jesus' mouth opened, and he swallowed up death. He swallowed up death. He swallowed up death forever.

That's the thing that makes people afraid, isn't it? Do you know the devil holds people in captivity all their lives because they're afraid of death, and I don't care who you are, unless you're hopped up on drugs, deep down inside, every single, solitary human being on this planet has a deep-seated fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

"I don't want to die!"

You look at the great atheists' deathbed experiences, and you hear them, "I don't want to die!"

But the Lord Jesus swallowed it up.

Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you that Jesus has defeated death and, understanding the richness of the ancient Near Eastern mythology, that the Bible does not embrace, and yet it reflects what the Bible actually teaches in a very different way, that death is actually something demonic and not simply some natural process. But the Lord Jesus is greater than all the hosts of hell. Lord, what a privilege, what a privilege is ours to remember the death of the Lord Jesus Christ because his death is the death of death. Lord, may we all know him and love him and walk in the joy of the Lord that is our strength. For Jesus' sake. Amen.