

Galatians 3

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)

²³ Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Luke 8

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²⁶ Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me'— ²⁹ for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times 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 wilds.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. ³¹ They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

³² Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 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 was drowned.

³⁴ When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they 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 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave 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 Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

There's a pattern emerging
as Luke continues to take us
through a series of healings and miracles

first Jesus healed a Roman Centurion's slave
Romans were definitely persona-non-grata in Jewish eyes

And to this add the possibility that this slave
described by Luke as "highly valued" by the Centurion
could well have been his Gay lover
and you see a degree of tolerance
which is way beyond human understanding

Jesus then touched the funeral bier of a widow's son
Dead bodies were most certainly regarded as untouchable
Except by the priest and the pall-bearers

And again, Jesus is stretching the limits of grace
Way beyond anything seen up to then

He now comes into Gentile territory – hence the pigs

For Jews of course, pork is unclean
it was not only against the Law to eat pork
but to come anywhere near the stuff
So people who come into contact with it daily
Were definitely considered out of bounds

there were no pig-farmers in Israel
and yet, Jesus deliberately headed to this region

Lesson one - Jesus will cross any border
no matter how much of a "no go area" that might be

the slave
maybe even the *gay lover* of a Roman Centurion
the unclean body of a dead man
the people living way outside the Jewish way of life

there are no boundaries Jesus won't cross
in order to reach out with God's healing
and life transforming love.

This universal love, which covers us all like a blanket
May well be what inspired Paul to write...

*There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

Luke tells us that the man is possessed
So is he sufficiently in control of his senses

to recognise Jesus, and to know who He is?
Or is this the demons within him calling

“What have you to do with me,
Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”

We know, from other places in the gospels
that demons do recognise Him – *and fear Him*

Lesson two – when dealing with demons
Do it in no other name but Jesus.

I need to add a serious health warning here
If you are ever asked to help someone
who thinks they may be demon-possessed
NEVER – I mean NEVER – try to go it alone

Call me – call Gill – call any priest

If the person in case has come to you
because they know and trust you
then come with me to see them
but DO NOT go alone

Deliverance ministry is very dangerous
it must be left to the professionals
and even then
ministered with a great deal of prayer support

remember what Jesus said about demons
once evicted, they look for the next nearest place to squat
and who’s standing closest by?

It’s vital to go into such battles
with the right personnel and equipment
fully armoured and protected

notice too
that Jesus has already identified the man’s condition
and He begins to deal with the problem
even before any niceties of introduction take place
not terribly British is He?

Jesus cuts directly to the chase
He sees a human being in distress
And begins to deal with it immediately

Lesson three - God loves you –
He wants you to have *life in abundance*
Without pain, torment, hardship or hindrance

So why do we put up with all the stuff life throws at us?
Without so much as a “please Lord help me”?

Here's a question for you
do you think God invented the common cold?
Do you think He wants you to suffer from it?
But would you ever think of praying for a cure?
Why not?

They say Bird Flu may be transmutable to humans
But don't worry ladies; man-flu is definitely for the boys!

The point I'm making here is that we don't pray enough.

God's love crosses all borders, knows no boundaries
His one, underlying will is for us to have LIFE

So before life's troubles bring us to our knees
we should already be on them - in prayer

another thing to notice
is how Jesus remains calm throughout this encounter

Just a few lines earlier,
Luke was telling us how He calmed the storm on the lake,

when all around Him thought they were drowning
Jesus was sleeping in the back of the boat

Where is He in your boat?
At the helm - or in the back
sleeping out of sheer boredom?

And here, faced with a Legion of demons
Jesus isn't at all fazed

I watched a repeat of Foyle's War the other day
I love the way Foyle is so unruffled in any situation

There he was, confronted by a man
who'd just tied up a poor hairdresser
and broken through the wall of her salon
to blow the safe of the bank next door

and the man -
threatening to throw a bottle of TNT to the floor
and blow them all to kingdom come
demanded of Foyle
"How did you find me copper?"

and Foyle calmly answered
"I just walked through that hole in the wall"

brilliant!

Do you sometimes wish you had a script-writer like that?

We *have* someone - a thousand times better!
If only we'd ask Him for the right words occasionally

Then we come to the first of four rapid pleas to Jesus
The demons beg Him not to send them into the Abyss
(roughly translated – that means Hell)
and Jesus grants them their wish

then they plea
"Send us into those pigs over there"
and Jesus duly obliges

even demons – it would seem – can plea-bargain with Him
is there no end, no limit to God's grace?

So He orders them into the little piggies
And they all go and take a running jump

And Doctor Luke
comes up with another of those medical terms
the man sat at His feet, "clothed and in his right mind"

and they all lived happily ever after
except of course – they didn't
the story doesn't end there!

human beings, being human, aren't happy

the locals don't see pigs flying over that cliff
they see dosh! Wonga!
They see profit, they see currency,
they see their very lifeblood disappearing over the edge!
So they beg Jesus to leave!

Lesson four

you can't please all of the people all of the time!

And – you know the best part of that lesson?
Jesus *knows* you can't!

Remember His swipe at the Pharisees? *From Matt 11*
"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

I'm so glad we worship a God
who knows what it's like to be part of the human race especially being a leader!

I have a cartoon in my study
Of Moses leading the Israelites across the Red Sea
And one of them whinges "It's a bit muddy!"

GET A LIFE!

Get it in abundance

Yes there are going to be a few ups and downs
It gets a bit muddy now and then

But we follow the God of surprises
And the only thing that really surprises me
Is how little faith people place in Him
(and that includes myself by the way)

it's true: the only thing that never ceases to amaze me
is the fact that I never cease to be amazed

you'd think after nearly 30 years
I'd have come to know things would turn out OK

Lesson five

When you're a disciple of Jesus
Expect to be amazed every now and then!

So Jesus has granted the first three wishes
The demons don't go to hell
They go into the pigs instead
And when the Gerasenes beg Him to leave town
He leaves

But – take note - He doesn't always say "yes"

when the man who'd been healed
begged that he might stay with Him
Jesus sent him away

this is the God we serve
if it's about healing
if it's about making us whole
if it's about giving us life in abundance
our God is abundant in grace

if – on the other hand – it's about passing on that healing
that wholeness and abundant life - to others
there is no choice

Jesus told him
'Return to your home,
and declare how much God has done for you.'

And "legion" or "mob" does as he is asked
proclaiming throughout the city
how much Jesus had done for him.

So – at the end of the day
We can conclude three things

One – when it comes to spreading His love and grace
God knows no bounds

Two – when it comes to granting us favours
God knows no limit

And three – when it comes to sharing that love
With the people around us
We have no alternative

That's why He made it a commandment
For us to love one another