



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

What does the Bible say about...

Addiction

Luke 8:26-33,38-39

02/17/2019

Main Point

American Character Builders: Opioid Awareness

The opioid problem in America is pervasive and present in every facet of society, but the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to free any life from the bondage of addiction and redeem that life for the plan and purposes of God.

Introduction

Connection from the video

In the American Character Builders opioid awareness video (<https://youtu.be/FKVSWz0UtV4>), each person's path to opioid addiction is shown under different circumstances. Regardless of the circumstances that lead to abuse, addiction is all around us, even in what we would

consider to be the most unlikely of places. We must recognize that opioid addiction is a significant problem in our community and that we are called to help those in need. The best way for us to do this is through the hope of the gospel of Jesus.

Ask your group to tell you what they know about the opioid problem in the United States. Be sure to prompt them to share as much information and statistics as they can. If they have known someone who has dealt with opioid addiction, invite them to share should they feel comfortable doing so.

Introduction

Once they have shared, take a moment and read the following statistics to them:

- 2 million Americans abuse prescription opioids every year
- 66,324 people died of opioid-related overdose from January-May 2017
- In 2012, health care providers wrote 259 million prescriptions for painkillers, which is the equivalent of 1 bottle per American citizen (and has since increased)
- Between the years 2001-2014, the amount of deaths caused by prescription opioid analgesics have increased by three-times
- Among Americans addicted to opioid-based drugs, more than 75% are addicted to prescription opioids received from a physician or a friend/relative
- More teenagers regularly abuse prescription opioids than marijuana, alcohol or any other drug

Now take a moment and ask your group a series of questions:

- Were you aware of how pervasive opioid addiction is in America? Explain.
- Now that you have heard these facts concerning the opioid problem, how do you feel?
- Were these facts worse or better than you had originally presumed? Explain.

The purpose of this activity is to communicate the stark reality of the opioid crisis that is taking place all around us. If we do not already know someone who has dealt with opioid related addiction, the odds are that we will at some point. Seeing these kinds of startling statistics causes us to ask the question: why do we find ourselves in such addiction? The answer is engrained in our need for a Savior. Say something like:

• When we hear these facts, it is truly overwhelming how many people are in the midst of addiction all around us. With so many struggling with addiction in so many different circumstances, a universal response to help hurting people seems impossible. What can we possibly do to help solve this issue? Why do we find ourselves in such addiction? In order to answer these questions, we need to turn to the pages of Scripture.

Understanding

The book of Luke is written specifically with Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians in mind in order to give a clear picture of the power of Jesus as the Son of God. As Jesus began His ministry, He performed many signs in order to show that He was God's Son. In Luke 8:26-33, Jesus meets a man who was isolated and alone; a man who was possessed with many demons. Unable to help this man break free from his imprisonment, the people in his village had sent him away. In this passage, Jesus shows the ultimate expression of His grace and power by freeing the possessed man from his imprisonment and releasing him to serve God. Jesus has the power to heal all people in any circumstance and redeem their lives for the sake of God's glory. Although Jesus does not specifically free this man from substance abuse, He desires to use this same power through the gospel to redeem the lives of the addicted.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 8:26-33,38-39

I. We Are All Living in Brokenness (Luke 8:26-27)

In this passage, we see Jesus approached by a man who is described as one who "had many demons." We know the man had been abandoned by his family and friends because the passage tells us that he was from the city and yet without clothes or a

home in which to stay. The man had lost everything because of his bondage to these demons, and he was isolated and alone. Nothing and no one could free him; he was broken.

Most of us would say with confidence that we are not in bondage to supernatural powers. But we would be right to acknowledge that some of the demon-possessed man's situation is not

completely foreign to us. His loneliness and isolation, his desperation for freedom and healing, and ultimately his brokenness are feelings that many of us have experienced in some measure.

When we take an honest step back and look at our lives and the world around us, it is evident that things are messed up. Something is simply not right. Things are not the way that they are supposed to be. And in our effort to fix what is broken in our lives we retreat to anything that will help us feel momentarily better. The problem is, these placeholders miss the mark because they are just that: placeholders. The result of the pursuit to heal our brokenness is only greater brokenness, and this road often manifests itself in addiction, sinful habits and meaningless direction in our lives. People who are struggling with opioid addiction and abuse are facing a drug-related problem, but the problem is only a symptom of a much greater issue – the brokenness caused by their sin before God. This demon-possessed man was trapped in his bondage because of his brokenness, and he could not break free.

Ask your students the following question:

- What are some things that people often use besides opioids to fix the brokenness in their lives caused by sin?

The point of this exercise is to show your students that we find ourselves in addiction because we find ourselves in brokenness. Like the demon-possessed man, all our efforts to heal our own broken lives simply lead to more brokenness. But the man's encounter with Jesus would completely change his hopeless state.

II. Only Jesus Can Address Our Brokenness (Luke 8:28-33)

Have you ever tried to use the wrong key to unlock a door? You won't get very far. The fact of the matter is, there is only one key that was designed to open that particular door. When it comes to our brokenness, only Jesus can heal and restore our lives from addiction and hopelessness to freedom and purpose.

When the demons recognized who Jesus was, they fell to the ground in fear of his power and authority. It is at this point that Luke reveals the lengths at which this man went to free himself from his broken state. The town seized him, chained and bound him, and yet he still broke free! There was nothing he and his friends could do to heal his broken state. Yet, when face-to-face with the power of Jesus, the demons begged not to be destroyed.

All of us are broken in some way, whether through addiction or some other sin before God. And we cannot free ourselves from that brokenness, but Jesus can. It doesn't matter what kinds of brokenness you are facing; no addiction can stand against the power of Jesus Christ. Like the demon-possessed man, our addictions and sinful habits can be overcome because of what Jesus has done for us. What has Jesus done?

The Scriptures tell us in Romans 6 that "the wages of sin is death," which means that the punishment for our sin before God is death and separation forever from Him. And Romans 3:23 tells us that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,"

meaning that everyone is deserving of this death we have earned because of our sin. But Scripture also tells us in Romans that even when we were still sinners, "Christ died for the ungodly." Jesus died the death that we deserve because of our sin before God so that if we surrender and trust Him with our lives, we can be forgiven and freed from our brokenness. This results in "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

For those struggling with addiction to prescription opioids or any other form of addictive behavior, Jesus died so that they would no longer have to try to fill the void in their lives where Jesus belongs. When we trust in Jesus' sacrifice and ask for

healing, He will forgive us our sins and mistakes and will help us on the road to physical healing and redemption.

III. Jesus Wants to Redeem Our Lives for His Purposes (Luke 8:38-39)

Overwhelmed with thankfulness for what Jesus had done for him, the man healed of his demonic oppression sought to go with Jesus. But Jesus wanted to use the man right where he was. Instead of the man leaving the place associated with his trials, Jesus sent him back into the local village to share what God had done for Him. God wants to use every story of brokenness as a testimony of the power of Jesus. He wants the world to know that He can use the brokenness of people for His glory and kingdom. He wants to do the same for people who struggle with opioid addiction and abuse. Jesus desires to forgive us of our sins and heal our deepest need, but He also wants to invite us into the work of God throughout the world.

Many times, people who struggle with opioids or other kinds of drug abuse are considered a risk in the church. They are often looked upon differently than others who have sinned against God and are dismissed as people who are not qualified to

serve God. But Jesus desires to use all redeemed people for His glory, and we should not discount those who have struggled with these issues.

Before we close today, we should acknowledge that forgiveness in Christ is the beginning of a relationship with Him. When we surrender to Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and we are saved and welcomed into God's family. But this does not mean our struggles and temptations disappear. Instead, the apostle Paul says that we are to take off our old selves and put on Christ.

For those who struggle with opioid abuse and addiction, the gospel is the hope they need to overcome the evil present in their hearts. This is the first and most important step but healing also comes through rehab and programs designed to equip the addicted people to overcome their addiction. For those addicted to opioids, this is the first step towards being used by God in the future. Encourage them to lead people they know towards this practical healing.

Application

- How do you cope with brokenness as a Christian? How do the people without Jesus cope with brokenness?
- Does Jesus really heal brokenness in our lives, in our world? How have you seen examples of this?
- How has God taken the hard things that have happened in your life and used them for to minister to others?
- How could God begin to use you to respond to the opioid crisis?

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Visit <http://www.americancharacterbuilders.org> for more resources.

Pray

Close your time in Prayer. Invite your students to pray for:

- Their generation, their country, and their community as all of us wrestle with responding to the opioid crisis
- Those who are struggling with brokenness who do not know the Gospel
- For your church to be a light in the midst of this darkness

Commentary

LUKE 8:26-39

Context

The second example describing Jesus' might and power involves his casting out a demon. The account consists of seven parts: (1) Jesus' arrival, 8:26–27a; (2) a description of the demoniac's condition, 8:27b, 29; (3) the demoniac's recognition of Jesus, 8:28; (4) the

exorcism itself, 8:30–32; (5) the proof of the exorcism, 8:33; (6) the people’s reaction, 8:34–37; and (7) the conclusion, 8:38–39. The majority of differences between the accounts in Mark and Luke are due to literary considerations rather than theological ones.²⁰⁷ The changes that bear theological significance are found in 8:26, 28, 31, 39 and will be discussed under “Comments.”

Numerous criticisms have been leveled against the historicity of this account. Some argue that since Jesus’ action toward the swine is cruel—and he would not have done anything cruel—the story is not historical. Similarly, some argue that Jesus would never have caused so great an economic loss to the swine’s owners by having them drown. Others argue against there being swine raised in the area, since Jews could not eat pork. The problem of the city’s name is a classical one and goes back at least to Origen’s time. The city of Gerasa lies approximately thirty miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee, and as one commentator somewhat sarcastically states, “The stampede of the pigs from Gerasa to the Lake would have made them the most energetic herd in history!” In the heyday of theological liberalism it was also objected that Jesus could not have been so superstitious as to believe in demons, so that the account could not be historical on that basis. The latter objection was sometimes answered by a theory of accommodation, i.e., Jesus himself did not believe in demons, but in speaking to people who did, he shaped his healings and teachings to accommodate the naive beliefs of the people to whom he was ministering. Others have explained the story “mythically,” i.e., such stories are due to the early church’s expressing its religious ideas and ideals in the concrete forms of myths. We will deal with other objections under “Comments.”

Comments

8:26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes. There is a major textual problem involving this geographical designation. The three main readings are: (1) Gerasenes—Gerasa (modern Jerash), which lies thirty miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee; (2) Gergesenes—Gergese (modern Kersa), which lies on the Sea of Galilee; (3) Gadarenes—Gadara (modern Umm Qeis), which lies five miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee and possessed lands extending to the lake; but Gadara has no steep slope leading to the lake. There are serious geographical and historical implications involved in this issue that cannot be ignored. Already in the first half of the third century Origen in his commentary on John wrestled with this problem. It is impossible, however, even to be certain about which word Luke actually used when he wrote his text. As a result we cannot be sure that the first alternative (Gerasenes) is the correct one. As for the other two, they do not create as significant a geographical-historical problem. For Luke the key issue was not the question of “where” this took place but “what” took place and its significance for understanding who Jesus is.

Which is across the lake from Galilee. Since this account takes place during Jesus' Galilean ministry, Luke integrated the account into his scheme.

8:27 A demon-possessed man. "A demon-possessed man" is literally a certain man having demons. Luke used the plural (demons) in light of the later reference to their number. Contrast Mark 5:2, where the singular is used. Luke again sought to avoid Mark's "unclean spirit" by using the term "demon." See comments on 4:33.

For a long time. This phrase goes better with what follows (so NIV, RSV) than with what precedes.

But had lived in the tombs. For a Jew this description might have overtones of ceremonial uncleanness, but for Luke and his readers it described the demoniac's terrible condition of alienation from other people and perhaps even his and the demons' association with death.

8:28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting. At this point the demons acted in unity, so that singular pronouns and nouns are used—he, me, I, demon.

What do you want with me? This phrase is literally, "What [is it] to me and you?" Compare 1 Kgs 17:18 (LXX).

Jesus, Son of the Most High God? The demons provide a partial answer to the question of Luke 8:25. Because of the supernatural sphere from which the demons came, the man possessed preternatural knowledge of who Jesus truly was (cf. 4:41). For "Son(s) of the Most High," "Most High God," cf. 1:32; 6:35; Acts 16:17.

I beg you. Luke changed "swear to God that you won't torture me" (NIV) or "I adjure you by God, do not torment me" (RSV) in Mark 5:7 because it seemed ludicrous for a demon to "adjure" Jesus by God. Luke's wording accurately discloses the impotency of the demon(s) before Jesus.

Don't torture me! We are not told what this torture consisted of until 8:31. Matthew 8:29 adds "before the appointed time" and indicates that what the demons feared was that Jesus would enact the torture of 8:31 immediately rather than on the final day of judgment.

8:29 For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit. The verb is best understood as an inceptive aorist and translated, "For Jesus had begun to command the evil spirit."

Many times it had seized him. The terrible condition of the man existed over a period of time. This is revealed by "for a long time" (8:27); "many times" (8:29); and the tenses of the verbs

“had seized,” “was chained,” and “had been driven” (iterative imperfects, which emphasize the continual repetition of these past actions). Luke gave a flashback and incorporated these details to describe the demoniac’s condition. The comment about the demoniac’s frequent breaking of his chains serves to emphasize the demon’s power and thus Jesus’ greater power.

8:30 What is your name? This is the only incident in the Gospels in which Jesus conversed with a demon. Luke did not indicate that Jesus’ power over the demon was somehow linked to his knowing the demon’s name, even if this was a popular belief.

“Legion,” he replied. The demon gave to Jesus a name that also was a number. Multiple possession has already been mentioned in 8:2, but this man’s condition was far worse than that of Mary Magdalene, who possessed seven demons. A legion in the Roman army consisted of six thousand men.

Because many demons had gone into him. Luke directed this explanatory statement to his readers, whereas in Mark 5:9 it is addressed to Jesus.

8:31 And they begged him ... into the Abyss. This is the “torment” the demons were seeking to avoid in 8:28. The abyss is the final destiny of the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41; 2 Pet 2:4; Rev 20:3). See comments on 4:34.

8:32 A large herd of pigs was feeding.... The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them. Pigs are forbidden and unclean for Jews since they do not “chew the cud” (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8). For a Jew therefore pigs would be a very appropriate home for the demons.

And he gave them permission. This permission allows the man’s healing to be verified in the story when the swine were destroyed.

8:33–34 And the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. The demons were conquered, not converted! The swine’s destruction proves that the demons truly left the man as does the description of the man’s condition in 8:35. For the reference to the steep slope and the lake as a historical-geographical problem, see comments on 8:26.

Although Luke omitted the number of the swine (Mark 5:13 states that there were two thousand), he still mentioned that it was a large herd (Luke 8:32). None of the Gospel writers seemed to be troubled by the economic loss that the drowning of the swine would have caused their owners. For the Evangelists the spiritual issues involved in the story are far more important than financial considerations (cf. 12:31). Various commentators’ concern for the owners’ economic loss may be due to a greater sensitivity for the property of others than the

Evangelists had, but it may also reveal a lesser concern for the spiritual issues involved. The Gospel writers saw the story as involving a man's deliverance from enslavement to the demonic. The demoniac's deliverance and the demons' judgment were their primary concerns.

8:35 The demoniac's conversion is now described. Instead of being driven by the demon (8:29), he was "sitting" (8:35); instead of being without clothes (8:27), he was "dressed" (8:35); instead of being among the tombs (8:27), he was "at Jesus' feet" (8:35; cf. 10:39 and Acts 22:3); and instead of being "chained hand and foot and kept under guard" (Luke 8:29), he was "in his right mind" (8:35). This, even more than the drowning of the swine, demonstrates that the demons had left him. The demons' prisoner had been freed from their oppression (cf. 4:18).

8:36 The demon-possessed man had been cured. Luke added the word "cured" to his account. The Greek word *esth*, or "saved," is a favorite Lukan word to describe the healing-salvation Jesus brings. The man had not simply been cured of his demon possession but of everything that separated him from God. Thus he sat at Jesus' feet as a disciple (cf. 10:39; Acts 22:3).

8:37 Then all the people ... asked Jesus to leave them. Much of the seed had fallen upon unfertile soil and bore no fruit (Luke 8:4-15). Despite the healing they saw, the people of Gerasa did not want Jesus to remain.

Because they were overcome with fear. The people's fear is mentioned again (cf. 8:35). Luke added this comment (cf. 7:16; Acts 2:43; 5:5, 11). The cause of this fear is not given, and it is of little value to speculate about what caused this fear in Jesus' situation. For Luke, however, it was clear that just as hearing God's word is not enough (8:12-14), so seeing God at work is also not enough. Even a greater miracle (16:31) cannot compel faith. Apart from a noble and good heart, God's presence produces only fear. For the believer such fear turns to a holy awe, but to the unbelieving it is only a fearsome dread from which they seek to rid themselves. God can be rejected, as the people of Gerasa in fact did. Peace, however, came to the demoniac. He who was last became first.

So he got into the boat and left. In "orderly" (1:3) fashion Luke finished the people's encounter with Jesus before he completed the demoniac's story.

8:38 The man ... begged to go with him. The man wanted to join Jesus and his disciples, but Jesus commanded him to a life of discipleship in his own village. The request to join Jesus was not rejected but refocused in that he was to join in the proclamation of the good news to his own village.

8:39 Return home. The man, who previously was unable to live at home but instead lived in the tombs, was directed to "return home."

Jesus' command to "return ... tell ... what God has done" is paralleled by "went away ... told how much Jesus had done." Did Luke mean here that the man told what God, i.e., Jesus, had done for him and that he was thus calling Jesus God? We find parallels in 9:43 and Acts 20:28 that may support such an understanding, but there is a textual problem associated with the latter verse. More likely Luke here tied Jesus' works and ministry so close to that of God the Father that what Jesus does and what God does are one. We find the same idea in chap. 15, where Jesus' association with publicans and sinners (15:1-2) is likened in the three parables (15:3-32) to God's love for the outcasts. Even if Jesus is not directly referred to as God in this verse, he uniquely possesses rights and honor that in Luke belong only to God. Compare 5:24.

Told all over town. Mark 5:20 has "in the Decapolis," but for Luke the mission to the Gentile world would begin in earnest only after the resurrection. Marshall notes, "The story is a paradigm of what conversion involves: the responsibility to evangelize."

The Lukan Message

The story of the demoniac in its present context serves primarily a Christological function. Jesus' greatness is shown in his mastery of the demonic. Jesus defeated the demons, a legion in number (8:30) and with superhuman power to break chains (8:29). The supernaturally powerful demons, however, could only "beg" (8:28) Jesus, for they had no ability to counter the power of the "Son of the Most High God." The attempt to see in this story a "duped demon" who sought to circumvent Jesus' power by not giving their name but only their number and by asking to enter swine rather than the abyss (only to be "fooled" by Jesus, who caused them to drown) is highly imaginative. Luke, however, did not in any way suggest such an interpretation. Jesus did not outwit the demons. He dominated and defeated them. Jesus' mighty works are such that to proclaim them is to proclaim what God has done. "Who is this" (8:25)? He is the Son of God, the Lord of all creation, whether the physical world (wind and waves [8:25; cf. Ps 65:7]) or the spiritual world of demons.

For Luke this story also prefigured the future mission to the Gentiles. Already in Jesus' ministry a Gentile was converted, for this took place across the Lake of Galilee among people who raised swine. Even though Luke wanted to maintain his geographical scheme and thus omitted mention of the Decapolis (cf. Mark 5:20), the scene nevertheless foreshadows what we find in Acts. Already in his ministry Jesus had a concern for Gentiles and ministered to their needs (cf. also Luke 7:1-10).

Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 254-259.