

I'll admit it: I'm a sucker for a good action movie. Many people seem to believe that just because a man becomes a pastor, he ceases to be... well... a guy. That couldn't be further from the truth. And like many guys, I love good, cheap action. Oh, I know I'm not supposed to say that, what with all the violence and sex and foul language that pervades action movies today. And, to be fair, I don't go looking for that sort of thing.

Which is probably why one of my favorite genre's of action movies has always been comic book action movies. I was never a big comic book buff growing up. But in recent years I have grown to love many of the movie adaptations based on them. The Avengers fighting Thanos. Batman fighting the Joker. We've got a couple new big ones coming up in a just a few weeks, with the Fantastic Four fighting Galactus and Superman fighting Lex Luthor.

And, of course, they're all about heroes. Men who fight for truth, justice, and the American way. Men who know that with great power comes great responsibility. All of them with their special powers that give them an edge in every battle. Powers that most people only dream of. Powers that could change the course of a person's life.

We hear about someone with powers like that in our Gospel lesson today. No, I'm not talking about Jesus. I'm talking about the man possessed by demons. *"For many a time 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 desert."*

Talk about power. This man had the strength to rip chains apart. The ability to overwhelm an armed guard. The skill to evade all capture, even when those pursuing him knew exactly where he lived. He sounds like a character from a comic book.

And yet, he wasn't a fictional character, either superhero or supervillain. He was just an ordinary guy living by the Sea of Galilee. An ordinary guy under the control of demons.

Now, we don't know exactly how these demons had possessed him. It's possible that it was by no fault of his own. Or it's possible that he had invited them in. It's possible, in fact, that he had sought them out specifically to gain this great strength that had now isolated him from the community and driven him into living in a graveyard. We don't know.

We just know that he is very definitely possessed. There are many places in the New Testament that you can try and argue that what is described as demon possession isn't actually demon possession. That it's actually epileptic seizures or mental illness or rabies or some other medical reason.

But you can't get around this one. You can't ignore this kind of supernatural strength. You can't ignore Jesus' conversation with the demons. You can't ignore an entire herd of pigs inexplicably running down a cliff and into the lake at Jesus' command.

It just doesn't work. Like it or not, in this account we are faced with the reality of the demonic realm. And it's frightening. It was frightening for the people of Jesus' day too. It was frightening enough that when they saw what he had done, they threw him out of the city. Even though he had just healed a man that they had tried time and time again to help with no success. They wanted nothing to do with someone who confronted them with the reality of spiritual forces of evil.

There's a great line in the movie *The Usual Suspects* that goes, "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." And it's very true. Because while I'm willing to grant that many of the acts of evil in this world are purely the result of human corruption and a fallen world, there are also others that show the definite influence of demonic forces.

Take, for instance, the founding of Islam by Muhammad, or the founding of Mormonism by Joseph Smith. There are lots of religions around the world founded by all different people under all different circumstances. And many fall into what St Paul refers to in the first chapter of Romans as human beings worshipping and serving creatures rather than the Creator. Native American and African paganism. Hinduism. Buddhism. Taoism. They could all be said to fall into this category.

But what sets apart Islam and Mormonism is the inspiration under which these were created. For Muhammad and Smith both refer to seeing visions of an angel of light who gave them their messages. Just like the one that St Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 11: *“For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”*

Now, Islam was founded in 610 A.D., just a few hundred years after Christ. But Joseph Smith... he founded the Latter Day Saints in 1830. Less than 200 years ago. And both religions are alive and well and two of the fastest growing religions in the world today.

Satan is real. His demons are real. And though he may have done a very good job of tricking the world into believing that he doesn't exist, we have to be on guard for his assault. For he is powerful and he is tempting. He can offer you strength to break chains. He can offer you the entire world if you only bow down to him. But I guarantee you all you'll get in return is a life of loneliness. All you'll get in return is a home among the dead.

And really, on the last day, do you want to be among those cowering at Jesus' feet, crying out in terror, *“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.”* Don't send me into the Abyss! For that is the future that God has ordained for Satan. That is the future that God has ordained for his demons.

And that is the future that God has ordained for all those of humanity who seek out the works of Satan. Who seek out strength and wealth and power, rather than humility. Who seek to allow creatures to take the place of the Creator. Who seek out their own comfort and security, even when it means sending the Savior out of their lives.

It's so tempting to do so. Because if you're looking for a god to worship, it's a lot more tempting to bow before the one who can tear apart chains of iron than the one who gets led like a lamb to the slaughter and nailed to a cross. But it's all an illusion. Because for every physical chain that Satan may break, whether it's strength or wealth or power or any earthly thing, for every chain he breaks he also binds you to death and loneliness and the grave.

And those are chains that only one man can break. And on that cross when he looked to be his weakest, Jesus Christ was breaking those chains for you. He was bound so that you might be set free. He was stripped naked so that you might be clothed with righteousness. He was stretched upon a cross so that you might sit at His feet. He was cast out to the tombs so that you would never be forsaken.

He faced the demons so that you would be delivered. And He still does it today. Not with spectacle or show, like in so many action movies, but through His Word, through His promises, through His gifts.

This Jesus is not the hero the world wants—but He is the Savior we need. Not with fists, but with forgiveness. Not with firepower, but with pierced hands. He is the stronger man who binds the evil one and sets the captives free.

And He has not only freed you. He has clothed you, called you, and sent you. *“Return to your home,”* He says, *“and tell how much God has done for you.”* You are no longer among the tombs. You are seated at the feet of the living Christ. You belong to Him. You are baptized. You are His. And you are sent into this dark world to declare the good news of what he has done for you.

So when Satan comes again with his lies and chains, you can stand firm. Not by your own strength, but by the Word of the Lord. Because the One who cast out the Legion still reigns. He is Jesus Christ, Son of the Most High God. And in Him, you have nothing to fear. Amen.