

Luke 8:26-39

Introduction

If you hear that story and your overriding concern is for the pigs, you can be sure that you've missed the point. Of course, we could spend the next twenty minutes talking about the pigs, and things like the relative value of human life and animal life, the economic cost to their owners of losing them, their lack of value in the eyes of the Jews, and so on. But that wouldn't be the best use of our time. This story isn't about the pigs. It's about a breathtaking display of Jesus' power.

I remember the first time I saw footage of a car press in a scrap yard. The power of this machine that could crush a car into a small cube of broken metal in just a matter of seconds, made quite an impression of me. But that's nothing compared to the power of Jesus. We've already encountered that power as we've been reading this chapter of Luke's Gospel. If you glance back up to verse 22, it reminds us that Jesus had set out with his disciples to cross the lake known as the Sea of Galilee. As they crossed the lake, a huge storm had descended on them, convincing the disciples, many of whom were fishermen, that they were going to die. Yet with a simple command, Jesus had calmed the storm, bringing peace out of chaos and life out of death. Perhaps that incident might have helped prepare the disciples for what was coming next. Luke now tells us that his goal all along had been the region of the Gerasenes. And he's heading straight into a massive confrontation. If the storm was the warm-up act, then we're about to get the main event. What we read here is a truly awesome display of power.

The awesome power of Jesus

Let's read the story again. And notice that, like any good storyteller, Luke doesn't worry too much about chronology. He jumps around a bit, adding details as we go, to build up the picture.

Verse 26.

They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man has not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, 'What do you want me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!' For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

The region of the Gerasenes is Gentile territory. It's part of the world beyond Israel. As we've already observed, there are pigs there. And tombs of the dead. To the Jewish mind,

this is a place of impurity. It's unclean. It's Satan's home turf. We might wonder why Jesus, a Jew, would deliberately choose to go there. But we find out straight away. The moment he steps off the boat, Jesus comes face-to-face with the forces of evil and enters a confrontation of epic proportions. The instant he sets foot on shore, he's met by a man who, Luke tells us, is possessed by a demon. And the power of this demon is immediately evident. This man had once lived in the nearby town. It's quite possible that he had grown up there. It was his childhood home. But that was long in the past. Now he had become alienated from his own people. For a start, he was naked. He had long since stopped wearing clothes. No doubt he was dirty and smelly and wild looking. And he was terrifying. The local people had tried to chain him and keep him under guard. But he was too strong. He had broken free and run away. Of course, a man such as this no longer lives in a house. He made his home, now, among the dead, in the tombs. Imagine that. What a pitiful sight this wretched man must have been. He's scarcely human. This poor man, whose home is among the dead, is as good as dead himself. He's wholly captive to the power of this demon. And it has destroyed him. Yet this is the man that Jesus has come to find. And having found him, immediately, Jesus commands the evil spirit to come out of him. The man cries out and falls at Jesus' feet. The word that's used here, in the Greek, is a word that's used of someone who's bowing down in worship. But although the posture may be one of reverence, the demon's attitude is defensive and resistant. **'What do you want me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!'** he shouts out. In other words, 'Leave me alone!'

Notice that it's a demon who supplies the answer to the question the disciples had asked on the lake, when Jesus had calmed the storm. 'Who is this?' they had asked. The demon knows all too well who this is. This is Jesus, Son of the Most High God.

In naming Jesus, the demon might well have been trying to exert some form of control over him. To name someone was regarded as exercising authority over them. But Jesus counters by demanding the demon's name. Look down with me, again, at verse 30.

Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'

'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

Now we discover that this man is not possessed merely by one demon but by a whole legion of them. A legion was a term used by the Roman Army to describe a unit of 5,600 men. Jesus isn't up against one demon. He's up against a whole battalion of them. It's an almighty confrontation. And yet it's barely a contest. It's over as soon as it begins. These demons cower before Jesus, submitting to his authority, and begging him not to send them into the Abyss: the prison reserved for the punishment of the devil and his forces.

They ask instead to be allowed to go into a herd of pigs that is feeding on the hillside. Luke tells us that this was not a small herd of pigs but a large herd.

Jesus gives his permission. And the destructive power of the demons is immediately displayed once again. As soon as they enter the pigs, the entire herd goes into a panic, rushes down the steep bank of the hillside, and into the lake, where they drown. The demons' attempt to stay in the land has apparently failed. The death of the pigs indicates that the demons have finally been removed from the land. Then, Luke describes a complete reversal in the man's condition. Please look down at verse 34 and 35.

When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had done out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

Previously, he had been possessed by many demons. Now, the demons have gone out from him. Previously, he had fallen at Jesus' feet, shouting at the top of his voice. Now, he's sitting quietly at Jesus' feet, as a learner before his teacher. Previously, he had worn no clothes. Now, he is dressed. Previously, he had behaved as a madman. Now, he is in his right mind. And in verse 39, this man who, for years, had not lived in a house, is sent home to his community. This poor man has been fully restored. The one who made his home among the dead, has received new life.

It's an amazing transformation. And it's a wonderful picture of what Jesus has come to do for each one of us. Without Christ, this man's condition is our own. Of course, our condition may not be as dramatic. We may not go around naked or live in tombs. But, without Christ, like this man, we are all held captive under Satan's power. It's not that we're all demon-possessed and out of control like this man, although some may be. But, by nature, each one of us has fallen for Satan's lies. We have each followed him in his rebellion against God. And Satan's intent is clear. His desire is to destroy life. And it always has been. Satan may tell us that we don't need God; that we're better off without him; that we can't trust him; that we'll be happier without him. But it's all lies. He is the father of lies. And his intention is to enslave us and destroy us.

The apostle Paul writes, in Ephesians chapter 2: **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.**

But Jesus has come to defeat Satan and save us from his grasp. It's the victory he won, supremely, at the cross. At the cross, Jesus has brought life out of death. He has won freedom for those who were enslaved and powerless. He has restored the alienated back into fellowship with the God who made them. He has brought light and hope to those who

live in the land of the shadow of death and secured new life, eternal life, for all who believe in him. As we read of the healing of this demon-possessed man, we should marvel at the power and the sheer goodness of Jesus. And to those who have experienced such wonderful mercy, he says, go and tell how much God has done for you.

That's our second heading: Go and tell.

Go and tell

Please look down with me at verse 36, where we're told of the reaction of the people who had come to see what had happened.

Luke tells us that: **Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.**

The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return home and tell how much God has done for you.' So the man went away and told all over the town how much Jesus had done for him.

The people don't get it. They see the awesome power of Jesus and they are terrified. They hear about the dead pigs, which no doubt represents a significant financial loss to their owners. They see the amazing transformation in the appearance of the demon-possessed man. And they are overcome with fear. They *had* feared the demon possessed man. Now, they're terrified of the one who healed him.

We might marvel at how they could send someone away who had just done such amazing good. Yet their fear in the face of Jesus' power is understandable. It's the same fear we might have at the thought of letting Jesus get too close. What might he do? How might my life change with him in it? What might he ask of me? What might it cost me? But fear can blind us to the truth about Jesus. He didn't come to terrify people but to save them. He *is* powerful. But he is for us not against us. He came as the friend of sinners not their enemy. His coming is good news not bad.

If you still doubt that and are keeping Jesus at arm's length, ask yourself what difference he has made to the lives of the believers you know. How have their lives been changed; for the better or for the worse? How has his power been at work in them; for their good or to their harm? What do you see? When the people in the story see that the demon-possessed man has been cured, they look at Jesus and see someone who is only to be feared. And they send him away. Please don't make that mistake. Because Jesus goes. He gets back in his boat, and he leaves.

But notice that he doesn't abandon them. As he leaves, he commissions the man he has just healed to be his witness. This man from whom the demons had gone is now a trophy of

God's grace. And though he begs to go with Jesus and leave these people behind, Jesus sends him to them to tell how much God has done for him. Every time they saw him and heard him speak from now on, they would be reminded of what Jesus had done. And perhaps some would yet have a change of heart.

This man has received a new life and a new purpose. And we, who trust in Jesus, have received the same. Jesus has given you and me the same task. He sends us out to the people of our town to tell them how much God has done for us. He wants us to talk to people about the difference he has made to our lives.

We, who know Jesus, have experienced his compassion. We have received the life that he alone can give. We know the certain hope of heaven that he has won for us. And the security that we enjoy in his hands. We know all these things, because we have experienced them ourselves. And all we need to do is to open our mouths and tell people what he has done for us. We don't need special training to do that. We just need to open our mouths and speak of our own personal experience of our Saviour.

Jesus crossed to the region of the Gerasenes to show that the message of salvation is for the whole world to hear. And we share in his ministry, as we open our mouths and tell of all that he has done for *us* here in Hastings.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for the salvation that we have received through faith in Jesus. Thank you for the life that he won for us at the cross, where he freed us from Satan's grasp once and for all time. We praise his name. Please help us to tell others about all that you have done for us in him. Please give us opportunities to speak and the words to say. And as we do, please build your church here in Hastings. For we ask it in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen.