

My Chains Are Gone

Luke 8:26-39 (07-14-19)

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There are some things only an omnipotent, eternal God can do. Only God can create a universe out of nothing. No angel or chance can cause something to come out of nothing. Only God can give life. Man manipulates the beginnings of human life, but it is God who actually causes conception and knits babies together in their mothers' wombs. Only God can forgive sin. We've seen that in Luke's gospel. When Jesus told that woman who came weeping over her sins, "Your sins have been forgiven," everyone present was shocked. They knew only God can forgive sins, and He does that through His Son! Last week we were in the middle of a raging storm with roaring winds and waves crashing into a sinking boat. But Jesus was in that boat and did something only God could do. He commanded the wind and waves and instantly the lake was calm.

Today we get to the end of that six-mile voyage across the Sea of Galilee and Jesus is going to do something else only God can do. He is going to thoroughly change a wild maniac of a man into a Jesus-loving, obedient follower. Only God can do that. Only God can give sinners new hearts and change them on the inside. We call that regeneration. Only God is able to turn a sin-loving, self-serving person into a humbled, Christ-loving believer. Has God done that amazing work of regeneration in your life? This morning we're going to follow this story about a maniac, demons, pigs, rejection and transformation of a life.

Jesus is pursuing a clear and obvious purpose.

Luke 8:26-27 Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 And when He came out onto the land, He was met by a man from the city who was possessed with demons...

When Jesus and His disciples launched out from Capernaum on this night voyage, it wasn't just to enjoy a midnight cruise in the moonlight. There's nothing wrong with that, but Jesus had something else in mind. He knew of two men over there across the sea who needed Him. The disciples landed the boat at a Gentile populated area today called Kersa – thus the pigs, pork, bacon. Matthew tells us two men approached them. Mark and Luke focus on this one man, probably the worst of the two. Jesus came to seek and to save those who were lost, and that's His mission right here.

Jesus knew where they were going early that morning: "to the country of the Gerasenes." And when He clambered up the steep riverside, right on time by divine appointment, He met this man from the city. On this day His purpose was to do something only God can do in the life of this crazy man. And we're going to see how crazy he is.

God has a purpose for your life every day, even today, right now. That purpose is to conform you more and more to the image of Christ. One night last week at Camp Reveal Dylan St. Pre introduced me to a young camper named Ty. Dylan said, "Ty has something to tell you!" Ty said confidently, "I learned about progressive sanctification. It means to become more and more like Jesus!" He was right and that's Christ's purpose in every believer's life right now - Romans 8:28-29. This morning in Gentile territory we see Jesus pursuing a clear purpose – to minister to this miserable maniac.

Jesus ministers to a man who is a total human wreck.

Luke 8:27-30 And when He came out onto the land, He was met by a man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. 28 Seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me." 29 For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard, and yet he would

break his bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert. And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him.

Imagine the worst case scenario of a human being, thoroughly steeped in wickedness and evil, enslaved to the worse kinds of sinful habits, acting more like a monster or beast than a human being. Is Christ able to save someone like that? My dad had a business in the very center of Philadelphia, the Reading Terminal Farmers Market, covering a city block. We unloaded the truck of chickens and produce we brought to market in the back alley behind the market where the dumpsters and derelict men hung out. I can still picture a poor drunkard standing there one morning, one of those alcoholic purple noses, his clothes stained and filthy, face all puffy, eyes bloodshot, and saliva drooling from his bottom lip. He was a pitiful picture of a human being made in God's image. There were many like him. Can Christ save people like that?

This man coming from the city to meet Jesus is infested with demons. Thousands of them. We know nothing of his background or family. We don't know how he got into this pitiful condition. But he's been a terror to the entire area, even in the middle of the night. He's so crazed that he's walking around naked. He lives in tombs, a homeless person. Mark says he was constantly screaming day and night in the tombs and in the mountains and Matthew says he was so extremely violent no one dared get near him. Can you imagine the families hearing him yelling and screaming in the middle of the night out there in the darkness? Not only that, but Mark also says he would gash himself. How desperate and pitiful and uncontrollable. But remember, God is the God of the impossible. Some things only God can do.

No one knew what to do with this man. Some strong men would try to restrain him with shackles and chains, but he had superhuman strength and would tear off the chains and break the shackles in pieces. The demons were controlling his life and would drive the man into the wilderness or desert. When Jesus asked the man his name, the demons spoke through the man's vocal chords and identified themselves as "Legion." A Roman legion of soldiers was 6000 men. We don't know if there were 6000 demons in this man or just 2000, since we'll see shortly, they destroy 2000 pigs. You might wonder how so many demons could be in one man. Demons are spirit beings. They don't take up any space.

What an awful condition this man was in. Human resources were worthless in trying to deal with him. He was a sinner. We don't know if he had dabbled in the occult or had somehow chased after evil stuff but here he is. When he sees Jesus he falls down before him, and the demons in him confess who Jesus really is. Demons know the truth. They know Jesus is the Son of the Most High God. They know they are face to face with deity and that terrorizes them. James 2:19 says the demons believe God is one, and they tremble. They are trembling right here as they fall down before Jesus.

Are there demons in the world today? Martin Luther described this world "with devils filled." They hate God and anything that represents God. They love to destroy God's people and attack godly standards. We are probably seeing demonic influence as our culture descends quickly into moral and spiritual chaos. No one in their right mind would vote in favor of cutting up little babies in their mother's womb, and then applauding themselves for the vote. Hitler and his evil men surely were stirred by demons to destroy as many Jews as possible.

But people find something fascinating about the occult and spiritism and the paranormal. They can have something of the spirit world without having to bow to Jesus, but it's a wrong place to be. Don't even think of dabbling. Stay clear of the occult and fortune tellers. And beware of so-called Christian deliverance ministries. Some think they can identify demons in your life and free you of them. Today bishop Montoya in Buenaventura, Colombia, is flying in a helicopter sprinkling holy water over the city in an effort to purge the city of all its demons, surely a futile effort. The only thing he'll accomplish is make the news.

What about demons in the Bible? There is almost nothing in the Old Testament about demons. Saul went to the witch of Endor and she called up Samuel's spirit. Some think it was a demon imitating Samuel. There are two cases of demons in the book of Acts and nothing in the epistles except letting us know there is a spiritual war going on and we are to resist the devil by being strong in the faith. Demons emerge in the future tribulation period just before Christ returns. So why is there so much demon activity

in the Gospels? We don't know a lot about this, but probably it's because of Jesus' presence. When Jesus appeared, the reality of His deity and the fact that He is their judge drew them out as we see in Luke today. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and they know their punishment is coming. Jesus' presence terrorized them.

Jesus powerfully delivers the poor man from his demons.

Luke 8:31-33 They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss. 32 Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and the demons implored Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission. 33 And 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.

Demons have no hope, unlike humans. You can be forgiven in Christ and live with a sure hope of eternal life, but not these unclean spirits. The abyss is a holding place for demons before the final lake of fire. In the Tribulation period, demons will be released from the abyss to the earth and cause havoc. Then when Christ comes back to set up his millennial kingdom on earth, an angel will bind Satan in the abyss, the bottomless pit (see Revelation 20:1-3), and all Satan's demons will be with him for those 1000 years. At the end of the 1000 years Satan and his hordes of demons will be released and foment one last rebellion against God. But their end will be in the lake of fire, along with all those who refuse to come to Christ in repentance and faith. Revelation 20:10, "And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur...and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

These hopeless demons, thousands of destructive, unclean spirit beings housed in this crazed man, beg Jesus to permit them to go into those unclean pigs over there. Have you ever hung out on a pig farm? Pigs stink and make awful noises, grunting and snorting, squealing and burping and who knows what else as they fight for the slop. So there are those 2000 pigs (Mark 5:13) over there and Jesus gives the demons permission to enter them. Somehow those demons flew into the heads of the pigs like a swarm of hornets making them crazy, causing them to take off and run down a steep incline grunting and squealing and flopping right into the water with a horrendous noise until you heard the last squeal and grunt and then silence as their carcasses floated on the water. I wanted to bring a picture of drowned pigs, but it's too gruesome. Hurricane Florence in September, 2019, drowned 5500 pigs. One monster rainstorm in southern China in 2015 drowned 16,000 pigs!

You may wonder where those demons went when the pigs drowned. There's more here that we don't know than we do know. Probably after all that commotion, they went into the abyss and are still there. Did you expect to hear all this about demons and dead pigs when you came to church this morning? But I'll tell you what you are really seeing this morning: the incredible power and compassion of Jesus Christ our Lord! He is our Champion, our great Conqueror of all God's enemies. Demons hate God and try to destroy everything God represents, but Jesus said in Luke 11:20, "If I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come near you."

Only Christ is able to completely transform a human being into a Jesus-loving child of God.

Luke 8:34-36, When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country. 35 The people went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. 36 Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well.

Here is something only Christ can do – totally and eternally change the heart of the most pitiful wretch on the face of the earth. This man has been delivered from those demons and completely changed in his heart. Look at him now. He is sitting down at Jesus' feet. No more chains and shackles. He is clothed and in his right mind. Let's apply that. When you come to Christ, God tames your wild heart and clothes you with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. Sitting at Jesus feet, clothed, and he's in his right mind! His mind has been transformed. He is thinking clearly and knows and loves his Deliverer! What a wonderful picture of salvation, of total transformation. He is a new creation! Old things are gone, new

things have come. He's saved and sticking close to Jesus. And you don't have to chain him there. That's where he wants to be.

But what about all that pork and bacon floating off the shore of the lake? The guys responsible for those 2000 pigs had to go and report and they spread the word around the whole territory that something amazing had happened. Local residents came and saw this man, the man who had caused so much trouble, screaming and shrieking in the night time, scaring the daylights out of the children. We don't know how long it went on. This story reminds me of an angry father who yells every night and maybe beats his children mercilessly to the point the children are afraid to even walk near him. And then he gets saved and his wild and angry heart is subdued by the Spirit of God and the children and wife and neighbors are aghast at the transformation in his life. He's reading his Bible and taking his family to church and treating them with kindness and patience. Only God can do that.

Now you would think these people who saw this event would come and be amazed and ready to celebrate the change in the wild man's life. But no. What happens? They became frightened! They are struck with sheer terror in the presence of this Man who has these kinds of powers over man and beast. It wasn't a believing fear. It was more of a dread.

Jesus sends His new follower on a mission back to his family with a new message.

Luke 8:37-39, And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat and returned. 38 But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him; but He sent him away, saying, 39 "Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

Here you have two totally opposite and stunning responses to Jesus. The people were right there in the presence of Jesus and knew Jesus had the power to transform the wild man's life. They should have drawn near. They should have rejoiced. They should have invited Jesus back to the city, like Matthew invited Jesus to his house. They should have embraced the transformed man. But no, like so many, they wanted Christ to leave. Maybe they were thinking about the pig loss. Whatever the reason, they begged Jesus to leave. Maybe you've felt that way. Don't bother me. I am not interested. I don't want to be one of those Bible thumpers. Maybe the people thought, "We're not going to sit beside that loser. We're too good for that." Have you ever been like that? "Go away, Jesus. We really don't want you here." And Jesus obliges them. "He got into a boat and returned."

But what about this man whose heart Jesus had cleansed and made new? He wants to stay close to Jesus. He can't get close enough. He wants to go along with Jesus. Who wouldn't? And you'd think Jesus would say, "Sure, my friend, jump in the boat." But no, Jesus has a more important mission for him and says, "Go back and tell everyone what God has done for you." So he went back and told everyone what Jesus had done for him. "My chains are gone, I've been set free!" Didn't you do that when you first knew Christ? You wanted to tell everyone about your Savior. Maybe you went to your parents or siblings or friends. They may not have received it, but you told them what great things Jesus had done for you, saving you by pure grace without works. Let's keep doing it. Go back to your family, friends, school, office, shop and tell all the great things Christ has done for you; how He changed your heart, your desires, your affections. No one has to tell you to read your Bible now. No one has to bring the law down to get you to church. God has done great things for you and you find great joy in Him. If we took a few minutes right now to tell the person sitting next to you what great things God has done for you, what would you tell them? Think about it. Be ready to tell as many people as possible what great things Jesus has done for you through the gospel.