

What Jesus Has to Do with You Luke 8:26-39

The Word of the Lord from Luke 8: "When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have You to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" This is the Word of the Lord.

I. The Man Who Lives among the Dead

What does this man have to do with Jesus? He is the most unclean of those unclean. He's a Gentile, not a Jew, but that's the least of his problems. Whether it was because of his participation in the local pagan religions or some other cause, the man is now demon possessed: not just by one unclean spirit, but by many of them. So look at the man's condition: for one thing, he wears no clothes. Ever since the fall into sin, clothes are a means to cover shame; but this man wants nothing to do with them and is trapped in a life of shame. He is alive, but he is driven to live in the tombs, perhaps dwelling in a cave among other caves that are used for the internment of remains. He's a danger to others, and he's been kept under guard before; but when he's been bound with chains and shackles, the demons have provided him superhuman strength to break the bonds and flee to the desert.

Look what the devil has done to this man: he lives a life of shame among the tombs, cut off from everyone else. And where the demons give him strength, it is only to run away from others. You and I might be startled, even fearful if one who is obviously homeless approaches us on the streets of the city: imagine such a one who is naked, tormented, possessed and strong enough to break shackles. He is a man to be avoided, and he is a man who would rather have nothing to do with anyone else. It's like he has every ingredient of hell, except that he's still alive on earth.

This man has nothing to do with the other people living in the area: he's far too lost and gone. So what does he have to do with Jesus?

That is the question he poses when Jesus arrives: "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." The man reveals a lot with this opening salvo. For one thing, he knows who Jesus is: while everybody on the other side of the lake is still speculating whether or not Jesus might be the Messiah, this man declares Him to be the Son of the Most High God. It's not likely that he put two and two together himself: the man is seething with demons who know full well who Jesus is, and he's working off of what those demons have told him. Furthermore, he begs that Jesus would not torment him. That's significant, too: he doesn't challenge Jesus to a duel or rant and rave to see if he can scare Him off. The demons know full well who Jesus is, and they know that they're no match for the Son of the Most High God. They just want to get away from Jesus, but note this: they can't without His permission. So much more powerful is Jesus that they have to stay and squirm in His presence until He lets them go away.

So we have this surprising scene: the demons are begging Jesus. They're begging Him to let them go away, but they're also begging Him not to send them to the abyss. They know that their end is the lake of fire because of their evil, but they do not want that yet. They have to go somewhere, though. They have to get away from Jesus; so they ask permission to enter a nearby herd of pigs. Jesus grants their request; and as soon as the demons enter the pigs, the herd rushes down the steep bank and drowns. For now, the demons are spared the lake of fire; but in a foreshadowing of what is to come, they and their victims (the unfortunate pigs) are drowned in the lake that Jesus and His disciples have just crossed.

The demons are gone because Jesus has sent them away. The herdsman who witnesses the destruction of his pigs goes into the city and tells the people what has happened, and a big crowd comes out to see Jesus. They find the man who's been troubling them for so long. He's no longer running helter-skelter, though; instead, he's sitting at Jesus' feet. He's clothed and in his right mind. Now that the demons are gone, the man isn't trying to get away from Jesus. As one made clean, he wants to be with his Savior. He wants to hear His Word and remain a holy child of God.

As for the crowd, now it's their turn to be afraid: not of the formerly-possessed man, but afraid of Jesus. One would expect them to be grateful for the miracle Jesus has performed, but instead they are afraid. It may be because they had a lot invested in that herd of pigs, and He's cost them an awful lot of money that day; in that case, they've chosen to worship bacon as an idol rather than the Son of God who would provide them with daily bread and all good things. It may be that they're well aware that this Jesus won't get along well with their local paganism, and they rightly see Him as one who has come to deliver them from it. But they don't want to be delivered by Jesus. In fact, even though they're not possessed by a legion of crazed demons, in their unbelief they have the same response as the demons: they're afraid of Jesus and they want to get away from Him. And since this is their turf, they ask Him to go away.

Although they respond the same way as the demons, Jesus treats them differently. Against the demons, He stood His ground and demonstrated His power over evil as He sent them away. But Jesus treats the people differently than the demons. He doesn't overpower them. He leaves. It's not that He's too weak to do anything else. Rather, it's that while He has grace and life to give them, grace and life are gifts—and gifts are never compelled. Jesus will not force Himself on anyone. So when He delivers the man from the demons, He announces to the Gerasenes, "I have come to deliver you from sin, death and devil." But they don't want the deliverance. They want Him to go away. They too are saying, "What have You to do with us? We don't want you around." So Jesus gives them what they want—their sin, their isolation, their death before God. But He does not leave them without a witness, so that they might continue to hear His offer of grace.

For as for the man who was healed, he wants to stick with the Savior and be in His presence. But Jesus sends him home. He sends the man to go and tell those at home what God has done for him. The man does so: in fact, throughout the city of people who want Jesus to go away, the man proclaims what Jesus has done for him.

He is now God's instrument to declare salvation there, God's merciful witness in hopes that those who send Jesus away might still believe in Him.

That's what he has to do with Jesus. And that's got everything to do with Jesus.

II. Lessons to Be Learned

Martin Luther retells a story that used to float around in medieval times. As the story goes, the devil went to church one day. As the people recited the Nicene Creed, it was customary for them to bow at the words "and was made man," a recognition of Jesus' Incarnation for our salvation. When the man next to the devil didn't bow in reverence, the devil hit him so hard as to make his head spin and said in part, "If God had become an angel like me and the congregation sang: 'God was made an angel,' I would bend not only my knees but my whole body to the ground! Yes, I would crawl down into the ground. And you vile human creature, you stand there like a stick or a stone. You hear that God did not become an angel but a man like you, and you just stand there like a stick of wood!"

It's just a story of course, but it makes a good point. Jesus didn't become an angel to save fallen angels. He became man to save fallen man.

We see the Lord dealing with both fallen men and fallen angels in our Gospel lesson. He shows no mercy to the demons: aside from the reprieve from the abyss for a while, He simply forces them to go where He wants them to be. He's there not to negotiate or give demons a fair fight, but to deliver people from the devil's power. On the other hand, behold how merciful He is to the possessed man among the tombs. He is the most unclean of the unclean, but he is not below the Savior's mercy. Jesus speaks to deliver him from the Legion's grip. He sets him free from sin, death and devil. He makes him clean and holy in God's eyes. That's certainly all His doing: it's not like the demon-possessed man was even asking Him for help.

But while that cleansing and deliverance is all His doing, He doesn't force it upon anyone. Grace is a gift, and gifts are never compelled. When the other people don't want Him, He doesn't say, "You're stuck with Me." He departs.

That's one of the lessons of the text: behold how merciful is the Lord in His dealings with you.

Another lesson is this: no one is too far gone for Jesus. If anyone would be, it would be the raving, naked Gentile who lives among the dead. But it's not so. Jesus finds him. Jesus saves him. The man is delivered and has eternal life.

That's comforting news: that man wasn't beyond the mercy of Jesus, and neither are you. But the devil is a crafty one, and he'll twist this miracle to convince you of something else: namely, that Jesus is really only necessary for people who are in that bad of shape.

So let us be clear: think of the naked man among the tombs, possessed by the devil, and know this: that's where the devil would have you. No matter how much wealth, power or personal satisfaction any sin seems to promise, the end goal is to leave you eternally ashamed, tormented and dwelling among the dead. That's hell.

How foolish are you, then, to indulge carelessly and willingly in sin. Your sins may not leave you dwelling among the tombs, but they may take you to the village of the Gerasenes—in other words, they may gradually lead you to be like the villagers, who say, "We're doing fine on our own right now, so we'd really like Jesus to be somewhere else." That's the plight of so many today: they don't feel particularly opposed to Christ and His grace, but neither do they see the need for him. But like the villagers, when Jesus comes in power on the Last Day, they will be afraid. They'll want nothing do with Him. They'll really want to be somewhere else.

That's why we continually pray that the Lord would continue to make His Gospel known throughout all nations. It's why we continually proclaim His saving grace, because it's His saving Word that transforms the enemies of God into His beloved people. That's why you rejoice to be like the man in our text, sent back to his home; for as one who has been redeemed and made clean by Christ, you now have Good News to tell to others.

The news you proclaim is that there need be no fear of God. People live in fear all the time—fear of death, fear of trouble, fear of what might happen, fear of the consequences of what's already taken place. All of that fear is the result of sin, and all of that fear leads people to fear God. But by faith, you know better: Christ has not come to bring fear, but to bring relief from fear, to bring grace and life. The Lord does not come to spread terror and send you away. He teaches you His Word so that you know of His grace. He declares that He has died and descended into hell for you so that you don't have to; and that He is risen again to give you life. He has clothed you with Himself and His own righteousness, for "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). He sets you in your right mind, trusting in His unflinching love for you.

By His grace, you are not one who fearfully demands, "What have You to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" Instead, you know and confess the Good News that Christ has everything to do with you, for He's cleansed you of your sin and joined you to Himself forever. It is by His work and by His Word that you are delivered from sin, death and devil, because you are forgiven for all of your sins.