



ON A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

By Judy Herminghaus

In my last message (Discovery Paper 8198) and in this one, I'm presenting two stories that show the heart of God for the lost from the Old Testament and the New Testament, respectively. I often hear people say that the God of the Old Testament seems so different from the God of the New Testament, and it grieves me, because when you study the Old Testament, you realize that God is constantly in motion to redeem his lost people. In the last message I shared the story of Rahab the prostitute. She was the only believer in the city of Jericho, and God came for her. God sent two spies from Israel to rescue Rahab, and then he gave her the mission of rescuing her family.

Now in this message we're going to read a story of one very unattractive man whom nobody would want to find. But Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee to get to a Gentile region called the Gerasenes to seek him out. Our story is found in Luke's gospel, the main theme of which is this: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, NASB). God considers all who do not know him to be lost, because he made man and woman to be in relationship with him. Without that relationship, we're lost even if we don't know it.

One of my favorite books that have come out in the past decade is Kelly Monroe's book *Finding God at Harvard*. It presents the testimonies of faculty, students, and alumni of Harvard, from all disciplines of the school. My favorite story from the book is that of a Hindu man who was found by Christ in high school. I remember him distinctly because his story was such a testimony to God's desire and power to reach any person, immersed in any culture and in any religious system, and a testimony to God's ability to use the most unusual circumstances to bring this about. Here is a little of Krister Sairsingh's story:

"Towards the end of my final year of high school, I had a bizarre experience which caused me to question the efficacy of my faith. I was sitting on my bed studying chemistry late at night in preparation for final examinations. I felt a slap on my face as I was thrown upon the bed. I felt as if something was physically strangling me. I could not easily breathe or move. Since I could not speak, I began to repeat in my mind the mantra which I was given by my guru. When that did not work, I tried the Gayatri mantra, the most sacred mantra of Hinduism. But that brought no relief....Finally, after much struggle, I broke free. I began to wonder if there were other powers in the universe which could deliver me from the fears that had begun to torment me—fear of death, and fear of the unknown." (1)

Sairsingh told a good friend who had become a Christian what happened to him. His friend said that his way of worship was making him "vulnerable to demonic attack." He suggested Sairsingh consider Jesus. Sairsingh began a search of the gospels to get relief from his unrelenting fears. He writes, "One night, after meditating on the account of the death and resurrection of Jesus in John's gospel, I asked Jesus to forgive my sins, to set me free from the bondage of karma, and to become the Lord of my life." (2)

It cost God enormously to make a way for all of us to live with him eternally. He had to sacrifice his only begotten Son on a cross so our sins could be forgiven and we could be raised to new life. I wouldn't give up my son for anyone. That's much more of a sacrifice than I would want to make. Why are the souls of humans so important to God? Well, we're important to God because he made us, and we are his possession (Psalm 139:13-14; Exodus 19:5). He *wants* us. Now, how cool is it that the God of the universe wants *you*, regardless of what

condition you are in? I think he's very wonderful and beautiful because of that.

We may be broken and distorted due to sin, but the image of God that is present in every person is still there, even though it's not perfect (Genesis 2-3). He wants to come and restore us to what we should be. The way I view people has changed entirely since I became a Christian. Now I can see that the image of God is in every human being, no matter how buried it is under sin and depravity and difficult circumstances. God wants us to choose Christ so that we can end up being the everlasting and splendid creations he designed us to be.

So we are of utmost importance to God. Jesus makes a dangerous boat trip one night across a very stormy lake for the sole purpose of arriving in a Gentile land, where there is a man so lost to himself and to this world, so unattractive, so truly scary, that most of us would hope to avoid him at all costs. Yet Jesus goes out of his way to find him, proving God's passionate love and mercy toward us. Luke 8:22-25 sets the stage:

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

"Who is this?"

This story of the calming of the storm on Galilee Lake and the story of the Gerasene demoniac that follows are connected. The simplest way to see the connection is in the first sentence, verse 22. Jesus sets out from the shore of Galilee to go across the lake. Where is he going? To the demoniac. Before my preparation for this message I had never put these two accounts together. Probably this is so because there is so much to apply in the calming of the storm that it requires a whole sermon itself. We won't get into this story in great detail, but will apply what is pertinent for an understanding of the demoniac's story.

The storm on Galilee Lake is ominous and portends their meeting with the demoniac. The word "rebuke" in verse 24 is the same word used in other passages for Jesus' expelling demons, which might mean that there is some sort of demonic influence involved in the storm, and/or it might itself foreshadow Jesus' encounter with the demoniac.

Two significant questions are posed in the calming of the storm passage. The first is posed by Jesus to the terrified disciples: "Where is your faith?" Jesus is looking for faith in his followers, and at this point the disciples demonstrate that they do not yet understand who Jesus is. As far as this faith test goes, they have not done well. The second significant question is posed by the disciples to one another: "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." This question sets up the immediate context for the passage we're going to study. This question should be answered in their hearts and also in our hearts as we see Jesus in action with the Gerasene demoniac: This Jesus is the Son of the Most High God.

Let's read Verses 26-31:

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 had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you,

don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the evil 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.

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

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

Jesus' will and power to rescue

What's happening in this dramatic scene is unusual in many ways. First off, it is terrifying. What a man to greet a boatload of men in the night! If we were first-century Jewish hearers of this story, we would wonder why on earth Jesus was going to a Gentile territory in the first place, for the Gerasenes was a region that was opposite Galilee in many ways beyond just its physical location. It was a Greek region made up of ten cities called the Decapolis. The people were idol-worshippers and keepers of pigs. No Hebrews were among them, seemingly, for Hebrews were forbidden to keep pigs. It is very unusual in the gospels for Jesus to go to Gentile territory. Gentiles came to Jesus for physical and spiritual healing, but Jesus traveled in Jewish areas for the most part. So there seems to be no reason for Jesus' visit other than to find this demon-possessed man. This has a lot to teach the disciples, who neither know who Jesus truly is, nor whom the gospel is for.

Jesus and his disciples left Galilee at the end of the day, and it should have taken them around four to six hours to cross this small lake, which is seven miles across, considering the storm. So it is the middle of the night when they arrive on the shore. There they would have seen very high limestone cliffs lining the beach, with many caves in them that were used for tombs. This demoniac is living among the caves, our text says. He is living in a cemetery. Jesus steps out of the boat first, and maybe he is the only one who steps out of the boat. If I were a disciple that night, I don't know that I would have gotten out of the boat, because the first thing that happens as they land is that this demon-possessed man comes running at them! Seeing Jesus, this man falls down before him, indicating Jesus' authority, but what a fearsome sight he is. He is dirty and naked, and he has chains hanging all over him. I picture him just as wild as can be, but Jesus is very calm. The demoniac shouts, "What business do we have with each other?" (NASB.) In other words, "Go away!" He's trying to scare Jesus off.

It's really hard to tell who is actually talking in this scene. Is it the demon or the man speaking? If it is the demon who is speaking, then what he means is, "Go away! It's not yet our time to be judged!" Now, demons were angels that fell with Lucifer, and they are what the New Testament calls "the rulers...the powers...the world forces of this darkness...the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12, NASB). They oppose God and his will. What they like to do is mess up the lives of the people God loves. This demon is being very rebellious and defiant. He's saying, "We're not consigned to the Abyss yet, so go away! We have free rein for a while." You can read about the Abyss in Revelation 9:11 and 20:1-3. It's a place of judgment reserved for Satan and his demons.

The demons have so overtaken this man that it becomes apparent that they are using his voice to speak. But "What business do we have with each other?" is also a question fitting for the Gerasene man. For this man is a Gentile. What business does Jesus have with a man who is not part of his covenant people, Israel? Why would God regard this man as having any importance? And that's the point, actually. From a Hebrew perspective this man is unclean in every way. Being a Gentile, he is not part of God's covenant people, so he is unclean. He is possessed by an evil spirit, and that makes him unclean. He lives among the tombs, a place of death, which is unclean. We'll read a little farther on that there are herds of swine in the area, and for Hebrews, pigs are the ultimate picture of animal uncleanness. This is a most unsavory and distasteful scene for a Hebrew follower of Christ—unclean in every way, and to be avoided. Throughout the gospels Jesus gets in trouble because he hangs out with tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners—people who are considered unclean, not good, who should be avoided. But, Jesus doesn't avoid them. Rather, he embraces them and calls them friends throughout Luke's gospel.

What do Jesus' early followers learn from this scene, then? What Jesus wants them to learn is that *all* people are included in his salvation, not just the clean, the attractive, the sinless. Sinless people don't need a Physician—sick people do. It is integral to Luke's gospel that inclusion of all outsiders is possible through faith in Christ. Jesus' compassion is so total, his love so all-encompassing, that there are none to whom he will not reach out to heal and make them whole, no matter how radically odd they look.

Verse 28 is really interesting. The demoniac is able to answer the question that the disciples couldn't. Who is Jesus? The "Son of the Most High God." How does the demoniac know that? Well, demons know the unseen realm. That is why the demoniac was thrown down before Jesus. Demons don't like it, but Jesus is sovereign over them, and they have to bow to his authority. In the gospels the demons always know who Jesus is. Usually Jesus tells them to be quiet when they identify him. But here he doesn't stop the demon from speaking out his identity. Why? Perhaps he allows the demon to declare his identity because he wants the disciples to understand who he is. He also wants this Gentile man to know who he is, and there are no others around to misinterpret the declaration.

Jesus asks the demon his name. The demon answers, "Legion." A legion was the largest military unit in the Roman army, six thousand men. The demon is saying, "There are many of us in here." This man is totally taken over. The war these demonic forces have been waging against him is tremendous. His problems at this point totally define him. He is owned and driven by evil forces beyond his control. But he isn't beyond the control of Jesus. Jesus has both the love and the power to rescue him. We often talk about the love of Jesus, but do we talk about the power of Jesus? This Savior has teeth: he can save! So he's going to use his power to save this demoniac. And thank goodness that Jesus has power, because he can save us as well from all that ails us.

Usually, in life, when it rains, it pours. In other words, one problem can lead to a series of problems. Have you ever noticed that? I was watching a documentary on Discovery about homeless families in America the other night. In the opening scene of this documentary there was a very rough-looking, dirty man that the camera was following around. This man wasn't completely out of his mind, but he wasn't completely in his right mind, either. He was nervously pushing a shopping cart around containing all his possessions and two small children. He was speaking with real love and graciousness to these children while he was pushing them in the shopping cart from one shelter to another. I was thinking as I watched this, "This is a terrible way for these children to live!" But you could also see that this dirty man really loved and cared about his children. The image of God was still there. He had just been taken over by a drug habit that had gotten out of control. It turns out he had started his life as a normal guy with a job and a wife and a couple of kids and a small drug habit. The drug habit was probably controllable when he started. But sin starts with one small thing, and it finally takes you over. That's the work of the evil one. So by the time they showed him in the documentary, he was completely submerged in his drug habit.

When we look at people like this man in the documentary, do we see them with loving eyes, or do we see them with distaste? I always have to ask myself that question, because I'm always a little afraid of what I don't know. And I am rebuked at my unkind ways when I realize that Jesus looks at them with loving eyes, even in such extreme conditions. What do you and I think our sin looks like to a holy God? Just as bad? Do we believe he has the will and the power to heal *us*? I think sometimes problems seem so relentless and so overwhelming that we forget that Jesus is the Great Physician. There's nothing that he can't do, nothing that he's not willing to do. So we need to think about that for a while.

Let's look at the rest of the story and see how Jesus solves this demoniac's problem. He does this in a rather humorous way.

Darkness must flee

Verses 32-33:

A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them,

and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

Mark 5:13 says there were two thousand pigs in this herd. The first time I read this, I thought, “Oh no, he drowned two thousand pigs! That’s terrible!” But upon further exposure to this story and Hebrew culture, this scene is rather humorous. To a Hebrew, a pig was a completely unclean, disgusting creature. Demons were completely unclean creatures. Jesus gives these demons permission (he doesn’t command them) to go into the herd of pigs. They think they’ve tricked him. So the unclean demons go into the unclean pigs, but the pigs run off the edge of the cliff. They were pretty silly to think that they could trick Jesus. The joke was on them. Isn’t that what sin does? You think you’re going to get away with just this little bit, and then you run into a big ditch. I have found that to be true in my life.

Jesus expels what is unclean. He will do so in our lives as well, for he is committed to seeing his people healed. This is really a victory scene. Good prevails over evil! A man is worth many pigs (my joke)! It is a wonderful picture of the kingdom of God. Jesus has come, and the kingdom of darkness must flee from his presence—for the demons are gone!

Now what happens to the tormented man?

The witness of a changed life

Verses 34-39:

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 gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 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 town how much Jesus had done for him.

After the pig-herders give their report, the people come out to see what has happened. What do they see? They see two thousand dead pigs down in the water. That’s weird enough. But this man of whom they were terrified, whom they chained up and guarded, who was a very scary character to them, is now calm, in his right mind, and totally put back together again. He is sitting at Jesus’ feet, which is the position of a disciple or learner. He is clothed, a picture of dignity and having a place in human society. He is healed!

When God comes to someone, he brings health to the whole person. Look at all the reversals that Jesus brought about in this man’s life:

- He was demon-possessed, and now he is free of demons.
- He was naked, and now he is clothed.
- He was a tomb-dweller, and now he can live at home again.
- He was out of his mind, and now his mind is clear.
- He was shouting at Jesus to leave, and now he is learning from Jesus at his feet, and wanting to follow

Jesus.

- He was useless, and now he is given a purpose.
- He was not one of God's people, and now he is a child of God.

When Jesus heals, it's completely. This man is a wonderful, moving illustration of Acts 10:15: "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (NASB). I like this picture of Jesus as the holistic Great Physician. He doesn't just leave the man with a spiritual cure; he clothes him, takes care of his physical needs, restores his dignity, and sends him off on a mission. James 2:15-16 says, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" Jesus heals totally, if not in this life, in the life to come. He leaves an example for us to follow in our ministry to people as well.

Interestingly enough, the people don't rejoice over this man's healing. They are terrified of Jesus and ask him to leave. It even says, "All of the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave." None of them respond to Jesus' healing with faith, or a request for him to heal them of anything. It is complete rejection, except for the healed man. How can that possibly be? The text doesn't tell us, so I'll speculate. Perhaps they are thinking that the material loss of the pigs is too much. They might have to lose more livestock or material goods if he hangs around. Some of us don't want to follow Jesus because we're afraid he might change our lifestyle too much, or ask too much of us. But what I actually think is the most important factor in their rejection of Jesus is that they don't care about this man at all. They can't see their common humanity. They don't really see him; they don't love him. So they don't see themselves, either. For them, this man was a continual problem. When he is healed, they still see him as a problem. They don't see him as someone to rejoice over.

Clearly portrayed here is the choice to receive Jesus or reject Jesus. They ask him to leave, and he does, and he never goes back again, although he does leave them a witness in the healed demoniac. Jesus will not force himself on anyone. He affords us all way too much dignity for that. John 3:19-20 says, "The Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." (NASB.) You hide evil when you want to hang on to it, and you expose evil when you want to get rid of it. This is a principle we can apply to our lives today. The demoniac wanted to be different and to rid himself of evil. The others did not recognize their need and wanted to hold on to unto their ways. There is never total acceptance of the gospel.

When the demoniac is changed, healed, and made whole, he is called. What he wants to do is go with Jesus—and why wouldn't he? Jesus has healed him, and it's safe with Jesus. Everything good that has happened to him has come from Jesus. Obviously, the townspeople have no love for him and don't really care if he's around. But Jesus says no to his desire and sends him away with a mission: "Return home and describe what great things God has done for you."

Perhaps we can apply this to ourselves. We might want to hang out at church 24-7 after we come to know Christ. It's fun here. The other people think like we do. We're learning a lot. We all believe the same things. We have a lot in common. It's safer. Perhaps there aren't as many conflicts. But are we staying in our own little Christian cocoon because we're afraid of what's out there? That's the opposite of what this passage is teaching. We need to go out where the lost people are.

That's what Jesus did, and that's what he calls this man to do. Jesus sends him back to the very family that he's probably afraid of. Fear isn't from God; it's from the evil one. "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18a, NASB). Jesus calls us to be and do his ministry in his place. So he says to the demoniac, and hence to us, "Go and tell how much God has done for you." The healed man's life is now useful to God, so he is commissioned to carry on Jesus' mission in the Gerasenes. A changed life is the best witness to God. Jesus said to his followers, "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men..." (Matthew 5:14-16, NASB.)

Proclaim the good things God has done for you.

I'm hoping that this man's example and another one I'm going to close our study with will make it plain that there is no one who cannot be used by God. There is nothing you've done in your past that disqualifies you. As a matter of fact, your past itself is probably the thing that will qualify you to reach people who are hurting in the same way you were.

God continues to write salvation history through each redeemed life. One of the people God saved is a man named Racehoss Sample. I discovered his story in an internet quote from Lewis Smedes' book *Shame and Grace*. Racehoss was an abused child, and became an extremely violent criminal. He was so full of rage that even when imprisoned with other violent offenders, Racehoss, being so much more violent, was often put in solitary confinement—usually referred to as “the tomb.” During his sixteenth year of confinement, he was once again put in “the tomb.” But this time, he couldn't take it any more. This is what he wrote about that experience in his memoirs:

“I...ran around the walls...I mauled myself, scratching and tearing at my body. Exhausted, I covered my face with my hands and cried out, “Help me, God! Help me!” And then...a ray of light between my fingers. Slowly uncovering my face, the whole cell was illuminated like a 40 watt light bulb turned on...Engulfed by a presence, I felt it reassuring me. It comforted me...I breathed freely. I had never felt such well being, so good, in all my life. Safe. Loved. The voice within talked through the pit of my belly. ‘You are not an animal. You are a human being.’...After that, God was real. He found me in the abyss of burning hell, uplifted and fed my hungry soul, and breathed new life into my nostrils.” (3)

After Racehoss realized he was loved by God, his life completely changed. He went on to be the first ex-convict to work out of the governor's office, he won the Liberty Bell Award, and he was named the Outstanding Crime Prevention Citizen of Texas in 1981.

God in his mercy came to Racehoss Sample in a prison cell. He came to a demoniac in the Gerasenes. He came to a Hindu in Trinidad. If you know God, he has come for you as well. Whatever he is doing now in your life, he wants to use you to reach others with his message of saving love and power. As a child of the Light, consider before God what the great things are that he has done for you. Then go and proclaim these things in your home, throughout your city, or even to the whole world.

NOTES

(1) Kelly Monroe, *Finding God at Harvard*, © Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan. P. 182, 183.

(2) Monroe, p. 185.

(3) Racehoss Sample, quoted in *Shame and Grace* by Lewis Smedes; internet, www.pastornet.net.au/chmentor/sermons/lessonsonlove7.doc.

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