



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

Jesus Has the Power to Set You Free

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Rev. Steve Kramer

TEXT: Luke 8:26-39 (ESV)

Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. 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? I beg you, do not torment me." For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (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.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

Freedom. We treasure that word, don't we? Tomorrow we will be celebrating our freedom as American citizens, once again, remembering the Declaration of Independence and the founding of our democratic nation. We've always cherished our freedom as Americans. We cling to the Bill of Rights and protest loudly if we feel those freedoms are being violated. As citizens, we value the freedom and right to vote for our

leaders and to live as free, responsible citizens who respect other people's freedom. It's really quite a grand experiment, isn't it? We look at other nations around us with autocratic leadership and shake our heads and think to ourselves that we'd never want to live like that. No, siree, give me freedom and liberty. What a privilege it has been to be living in the land of the free and the home of the brave. What a blessing to have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. So may freedom always ring in our nation for all its citizens.

As a Christian, I have found freedom to be an important part of my vocabulary as well, because the Christian faith is all about freedom. You and I know that as human beings we can be living in the land of the free and still be held helplessly in bondage to powers greater than ourselves. We have an example of that in today's reading from Luke's Gospel. It's a freedom story. There was this man, he was a non-Jew living in the land of the Gerasenes, which was Gentile territory. He was in bondage, captive, possessed by demons, a terrible plight. He lived in a graveyard on the outskirts of town, running around naked and howling at the moon. He was a social outcast. Of course, people were afraid of him and were afraid for him. They tried to keep him contained from hurting anyone or himself. They even managed to put him in chains and shackles on various occasions. But he popped those chains like they were made of paper and escaped into the desert. He was totally out of control.

Now you may be wondering, is there really any such thing as demons and the power of evil holding people captive? And my response to that question is an unequivocal yes. I have seen evidence of this reality and how it can destroy a person's life. I've seen it as I've observed addictions as well that possess people and ruin their lives and the lives of loved ones around them. I've also seen twisted values at work in people's lives which ignore the commandments of God and have them convinced to pursue living life only for themselves and their personal gain. Of course, I can't help but look at what's going on in the world around me now. With all these school shootings and with the war in Ukraine and sense there's a diabolical evil at work in people committing human atrocities such as we've witnessed lately. We must recognize that there is a war going on. The Apostle Paul puts it like this in his letter to the Ephesians, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." C.S. Lewis once wrote, "There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch is claimed by God and counter-claim by Satan. Therefore, it follows that

every person on the face of the Earth serves, worships, witnesses to, and supports the work of God or Satan. There are these are the only options.”

So in this story, we have a man who is possessed, captive to an evil power – a supernatural power that was beyond anyone’s abilities, including his own to break free from. But then along came Jesus, the Son of God, with power and authority over all things. The man came rushing towards Jesus and the disciples and fell down before Him in deference to Him and shouted hysterically, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the most high God. I beg you, don’t torment me.” Jesus was being recognized for who he really is by the demons: the son of the most high God. No one else had recognized this in him so far. Luke, our gospel writer, explains that Jesus had already commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Perhaps it was when he saw the man approaching him and his disciples, or even off from a distance. Jesus asked the man his name, and the man said, “Legion.” See, it turns out that this man had not one demon, but many demons that had entered him. A battalion of demons. He had his work cut out for him, this Jesus, a whole army of powerful demons, were lined up against him. And with the word [fingers snap] Jesus sets the man free from his personal hell. Pork prices in the country of the Gerasenes suddenly skyrocketed that day as the demons entered a whole herd of nearby pigs and the pigs jumped off a cliff into the sea and drowned. And now there’s a pork shortage in the land. But the man was suddenly, miraculously free from his bondage – in his right mind again.

We learn something important about Jesus in this passage. Jesus is the freedom-giver as the son of the most high God. He has the power to set people free to live in the grace of God. I’m reminded of the message that Jesus declared at his hometown synagogue in the fourth chapter of Luke when he said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He is anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering a sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” Did you catch it: to set at liberty those who are oppressed? And he did exactly that in this story, didn’t he? And as the risen Lord, he still does. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever as Scripture tells us.

Notice there are two human responses to the freedom-giver in this story. First, the townspeople rejected Jesus asked him to leave them alone. For some reason, they were afraid of him and wanted nothing to do with him. “Jesus, you’ve upset things around here. Enough already. So can’t you just leave now?” they said. “Stay out of our lives. We

have our own gods and ways of doing life. And how can we be sure that you're not evil yourself, since you can control demons? Just go back from where you came back to Galilee. Back to your own people and your own religion. Just leave us alone." That kind of response to Jesus still happens today where people respond, "You don't understand me and I'm afraid to get involved with you. Things might get worse for me. You might make my life more complicated. You really can't help me. So go back to the church, folks that you've brainwashed and leave me alone." It really was, and it really is, too bad when that happens. What might have happened, think about it, if those Gerasenes folks had invited Jesus into the community to learn more about him. Could there have been another woman at the well type of ending with many more non-Jewish people believing in Jesus as the savior of the world? More folks set free from their lostness, darkness, and self-destruction because of their personal encounter with Jesus? Many more lives change for the better? But they missed out, didn't they? It still happens today. The Gospel of Jesus Christ can be ridiculed and rejected and ignored, even persecuted by many in every nation of the world. And Jesus is often depicted as some sort of fraud or a lunatic or evil himself in the flesh.

But in this story, there's a second response to Jesus. It's a positive response. The freed man's worship of him and obedience to him. He has experienced the power of God at work, in his life through Jesus. And now He sits at the feet of Jesus, which is a position of worship, faith, subservience. And He wants to go with Jesus now and serve Him. And when Jesus tells him no, just tell what I've done for you to everyone around here, the man obeys and proclaims throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. A mad man turned missionary. Imagine! He's now a servant of Jesus Christ. A grateful servant.

Here is a personal question I want to pose to each one of you today. What has been your response to this freedom giver? Jesus, who has all power and authority to set people free. Because he's come to set you free to live with him and to live for him. Because of the sacrifice that he made on the cross, there's a great spiritual freedom to be received from Jesus. He came to set you free from sin and its consequences, through His suffering and death and resurrection. He sets the sinner free from death's grip through his victory on Easter. I can be Heaven-bound because of what Jesus did at the cross and grave. His atonement sets one free from the power of sin. His sacrificial death was a ransom paid to purchase us, freeing forgiveness and a new start as a born-again free child of God. At the cross, Jesus went to battle for you and me to rescue us from

captivity to Satan, who wants nothing more than to keep me from a saving personal relationship with God and destroy my life and have me end up in hell. That's why I, as a believer, can sing his praises. I'm so glad Jesus set me free. I was hopelessly, helplessly imprisoned. But Jesus set me free, just like that man in our story for today. And he can still set anyone free from the destructive things that hold people captive and ruin so many lives, like addictions or twisted values, materialism and crazy priorities that do nothing but bring about devastation in our lives. He can free you.

Darrell Bock, a biblical commentator, shares a story about a close friend of his who experienced the freeing power of Christ in his life. He writes,

I'm reminded of a close friend of mine who grew up on drugs, was alienated from his family, had dropped out of school several times, and was sent to a psychiatrist for treatment. Nothing helped. Then he was led to the Lord. His life was cleaned up and his demeanor changed. His relationship to his family was restored. His psychiatrist was amazed, as were his parents. If you ask him what did it, he will tell you it was not religion, though it was the more culturally neutral term many of his unchurched relatives used about it. Neither was it growing up – another popular secular answer. No, it was Jesus, pure and simple. The grace of God gave him a new heart. He would tell you that Satan had a solid grip on him until he came face to face with Jesus. And so he identifies with this story in Luke 8, for Jesus delivered him from the depths that were leading him to self-destruction. Praise be to God.

In my own ministry. I've seen that happen in people's lives. I've seen gambling and sexual and pornographic addicts rescued by the power of Jesus. I've seen people who have gotten their lives so messed up by their spending and needing to have more and more and more. And then they met Jesus, who straightened them out. This Jesus is a very powerful savior to surrender yourself to. So, I encourage you today to turn to him, whatever your situation. He's powerful. Follow him as your powerful leader and trust him with every aspect of your life. He is the powerful freedom-giver that every human being needs. And Jesus has said, "If the son sets you free, you shall be free, indeed." May freedom ring in your life with Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let's pray. Lord, we know what you have to do with us, Son of the most high God. You came to rescue us and make us free to follow you all the way to Heaven. Thank you, oh powerful Savior and Lord, for the freedom that is ours in you. And if there's anyone

listening to this message who is struggling with some sort of bondage in their lives, by the working of your Holy Spirit, turn them toward yourself. Move them to surrender themselves to your care. Amen.