



CAPITOL COMMISSION

The Risk of Confronting Jesus (Luke 8:26-39)

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Jeff Whitebread / 484-680-4260 / Jeff.Whitebread@capitolcom.org

The connection between Jesus calming the storm and the cleansing of this man possessed by demons is seen in both their chronological and thematic natures. In the sequence of events, Jesus and his disciples begin their voyage by setting sail from Galilee and ending up on Gentile soil faced with unknown surroundings and an unexpected confrontation. It appears this was not their intended destination when they began and the effects of the storm forced them to dock in this country. In turning to the common themes found in these two narratives, similarities are observed between the raging storm and the screaming demoniac, between the panicked disciples, and the frightened populace. When considering Jesus in these accounts, he is found endowed with majestic calm, in both his words and actions. It is possible that the complementary nature of the two stories was understood as significant in light of the description of God as one who stills: “the roaring sea, the roaring of the waves, and tumult of the people” (Psalm 65:7).

The Gospel writer might have employed the testimony in Psalm 65:7 to validate the identity of Jesus by connecting the divine power of his actions with a description of the activities one finds attributed only to the God in Zion. In demonstrating the second type of authority Jesus possesses, the power to cast out demons, he is found exerting his authority but not by trickery. He does not engage in some cosmic battle that is needed to expel these minions of the Evil One. He dominates on the basis of his authority, and for them their defeat was a foregone conclusion as they confess his true identity as the Son of the Most High. In this response, the demons answer the question that was left hanging on the lips of the disciples in the previous account, “Who then is this?” While this confession is of no value for the demons, this is exactly the proposition needed for those who would respond by faith to Jesus and reorient themselves on the basis of this truth claim.

In this encounter the demons are face-to-face with one who has complete authority over them. On the basis of this authority Jesus chooses to free the man of the corruption that has kept him in bondage. After his transformation, this man celebrates this liberty, and is called by Jesus to be a witness of what God had done for him. The crowds that gather to observe this spectacle have found their fear has shifted. They no longer fear the man who has undergone this change, but now they fear the one who has the power to bring about this transformation. In this account Jesus is presented as the one who possesses power over our lives. By our actions we reveal whether we embrace his presence, or whether we expel him from our midst.

Luke 8:26-39: (26) Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. (27) 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. (28) 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.” (29) 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.) (30) Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. (31) And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. (32) 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. (33) 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.

(34) When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. (35) 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. (36) And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. (37) 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. (38) The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, (39) “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.

ENTRANCE OPPOSED

Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes – After a long night on the rough seas those on the boat sit on a completely calm body of water. There is no breeze to propel them forward and they are forced to make for land through another means. Since the typical fishing boat for this time period was equipped with both sails and oars, they are forced to row to the closest shore available. The storm they just faced was greater in scale than anything they had ever encountered before, and likely they had been pushed off course a considerable distance. Their destination does not appear to be the first option and the disciples probably arrived on Gentile land with great hesitancy. The plan may have been to regroup quickly, possibly gathering some supplies, waiting for more favorable weather conditions and then set sail for the more familiar destination of Capernaum, their base of operations for Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. It is not hard to imagine the disciple’s reluctance in this matter; but no sooner had they landed that we see Jesus on shore and confronted with a wild man. Like us, the disciples are tempted to

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take a worldly view of the dangers facing them. And when we lose sight of the fact that Jesus journeys with us, we easily miss God's involvement in these encounters.

AUTHORITY DISCLOSED

For a long time he had worn no clothes – Make no mistake, it must have been a frightening sight to witness this man charging the boat in an uncontrollable manner. He is described in vivid detail to help us experience what this encounter must have been like for the disciples. Here this man is presented as one who has been naked for a long period of time with the strength to break the shackles that bound him. He was also one who lived among the tombs, these were either man-made or natural caves in the side of the hill where the dead were buried. This man's appearance was not only a scary sight, but his belligerent nature would have been even more disturbing. Even in his submission to Jesus' authority, his interaction is still aggressive as he seeks to negotiate with the Son of the Most High. The demon's control over this man is constant as it has seized him many times in the past, but this had no bearing on Jesus. He on the basis of his authoritative choice exercises divine power to release this man from his bondage, and no opposition would stand in the way of his restoring this broken individual.

When he saw Jesus - This man is initially unaware of Jesus' identity, it was just another attack on an unsuspecting group of people. Jesus only becomes recognizable by commanding the unclean spirit's to depart from his attacker. Immediately the demons see Jesus, not the man, but his true identity and they cry out falling on the ground before him. Even though the demon possessed man was not seeking help from Jesus, his actions brought him in contact with the Lord. This encounter demonstrates why those who follow Christ must engage the world. It is not only those who proactively seek Jesus who are able to respond to the power of his call. It is also those who approach Jesus in a confrontational manner, those who seek to do him harm and harm to those who follow. These individuals may find themselves called by the Lord. When Jesus speaks into one's life and his truth invades their hearts through the exercise of his divine authority, they are forced to see him. Going into the presence of Jesus is a risky venture; these demons sought only to do him harm, yet they quickly found themselves before the "Son of the Most High" who drives them out into a herd of pigs. This rushing of pigs to their watery grave serves as a visible picture of the demons removal from this man's life. When Jesus speaks words into the human heart they are the power to save and restore. The way one comes to him does not matter, what does matter is that Jesus has the opportunity to speak into the lives of those who cross his path, and the paths of his disciples.

FEAR EXPOSED

Asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear – It is easy to look upon the decision of those gathered to beg Jesus to leave the area as foolish. He had just eliminated one of the biggest menaces that had plagued their region. Of even greater value is the fact that this man had been transformed from his uncontrollable state, to being a valuable and productive member of society. Sure, there is the consideration of the pigs, but that seems to be a small price to pay for having one who could make such a radical difference in their society in such a short period of time. Yet, this ability to transform this man immediately shows the supernatural quality of what happened. In this lies the concern that faces all who come before Jesus. If he has the power to work in this tangible manner in any he chooses, we ask, "What does he expect of me?" This is the issue facing each person when coming before Jesus. Sure, our lives possess some rough edges that need his help in being smoothed out, but we wonder if we can entrust ourselves to him. For this reason, like the crowds, we seek to keep him at a safe distance.

MISSION IMPOSED

The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him – Now we find the man who was cleansed of the demons seeking to remain with Jesus. After this brief time with the Lord he does not want his fellowship to end. However, those from the area are adamant and desire Jesus to leave the area. In these antithetical responses to Jesus' presence we see the unique manner in which he responds to each plea. He heeds the requests of those who want no parts of him, but the one who desires closer fellowship he refines. In seeking Jesus we find this strange phenomenon of him saying no. He calls those who seek him to obey his commands; this becomes the indicator of their love and devotion to him.

Declare how much God has done for you - Only one specific thing was done for this man, especially when considering the limited amount of time that Jesus remained in the area. He had cleansed this man of the demons, and through this one act everything has changed. He was a completely transformed man, clothed and in his right mind. He was no longer forced to live among the tombs but could go back to his home. He could mend his broken relationships as he shared what Jesus had done for him. In this we see the image of forgiveness, because as one is cleansed from the corruption on the inside what is produced is an abundance of blessing from the Lord.

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