

What Is Your Name? And How Much Has God Done For You?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 February 2025

Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

[0 : 00] We hope that you enjoy this teaching from Christ Church. This material is copyrighted and no unauthorized duplication, redistribution, or any other use of any part is permitted without prior consent from Christ Church.

Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

My name is Joan Benton. I participate in a community group for Kensington and El Cerrito, go to Women, Reading Women, and help once a month with CC Kids.

We're reading today from Luke chapter 8, verses 22 through 38, as printed in your liturgy.

One day, Jesus said to his disciples, let's go over to the other side of the lake.

[1 : 06] 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 the raging waters.

The storm subsided, and all was calm. Where is your faith? He asked. His disciples, and in fear and amazement, they asked one another, Who is this?

He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him. 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.

[2 : 15] 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 impure 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 the 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 Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the abyss.

The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, 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.

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.

[3 : 26] 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. And this is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ. Good morning, Christ Church. It's Super Bowl Sunday, so we're going to talk about demons, right?

[4 : 34] That's what you were expecting, right? You know, most secular people in the Western world don't believe that demons exist.

And that, I think, is a luxury. It's a very privileged thing to be able to believe. This man in Luke 8 doesn't have that luxury and that privilege, though, because he can't deny the darkness that's come into his life, right?

He's oppressed by some pretty dark powers. He's in pretty deep distress and misery. And what's amazing about the story is that Jesus puts him back in his right mind.

And he sends him out on this new mission. In fact, we read in verse 39, Jesus says, Return home and tell how much God has done for you. Go home to your people. Go home to your city.

He tells us that this man had an extended family, right? He had an old community of friends. He had a workplace. He had a city. He had this place where he used to be rooted and he used to be grounded.

[5 : 42] He used to belong. He used to be known and loved by people. And somehow, we don't know how, but he subtly and slowly came under the power of the darkness.

And I admit that it's hard for me to see myself in this man. And maybe you feel that way when you read it as well. But it's not hard for me to see myself in earlier stages of this man, in the earlier stages of his decline.

For example, you know, when I look at the hurts and the habits and hang-ups in my own life, and I think about the way that those hurts can easily turn into compulsions, when I think about the way those habits can so easily turn into addictions, when I think about the way that my hang-ups can so easily become obsessions, when I think about the heavy burden it is to walk around with the fear and the guilt and the shame that those things can produce in life, when I think about all the feelings that I've had in my life of emotional instability and mental confusion and spiritual agitation that just sort of accumulates over time, it's actually not that hard for me to relate to this man in some earlier stages of his life.

We don't know what kind of trauma he experienced. We don't know what kind of abuse he endured or maybe some violent act from another person or group of people.

But hell has somehow been unleashed in his life. And in him, I think we get a picture of how the dark powers oppress us and how they oppress our society, how they try to strip us of our identity, strip us of our sense of belonging, our sense of meaning and purpose in this life, and slowly but surely dehumanize us.

[7 : 41] Now, how does Luke describe this man's condition? He says in verse 27, And then down in verse 29, it says, Many times the demon 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.

Driven by the demon into solitary places. You're probably aware that the U.S. Surgeon General has declared an epidemic of loneliness, an epidemic of alienation and isolation in our society right now.

This guy's been driven out. He's living in the tombs, which means he identifies more as a dead person than as a living person. And he's become such a menace to himself.

He's become such a danger to himself and to other people that he's been chained like an animal. And these are the human solutions. These are the material solutions to his spiritual problems, and it's not helping him at all.

It's not helping the problems that he has in his soul at all. The Gospel of Mark, when it tells this story in Mark chapter 5, it says, And, you know, we look at the dramatic rise of anxiety and depression over the last 10 to 15 years among Gen Z.

[9 : 16] And that anxiety and depression is so often expressed in forms of cutting, forms of self-harm and suicidal ideation. And this man, that's what he's doing.

He's cutting himself and he's crying out, probably saying, Somebody help me. Somebody come and fill this unbearable void. Somebody stop the pain.

Somebody, please come deliver me from my distress and from my misery. I hope we don't write this man off, because I think more people are living and feeling like this man than we realize.

And maybe even that's some of us here today, that our humanity feels like it's being beaten out of us from the inside. We barely even know our name anymore.

We're not sure who we are. We feel oppressed. We feel enslaved. We sense a lack of hope. Maybe that's you. Maybe it's somebody that you love very deeply.

[10 : 16] But I want us to know that Jesus very deliberately seeks and saves the lost. And he seeks and saves this lost man. Right?

The same Jesus we talked about a few weeks ago in Luke 4, who in his first sermon, he said, You know what I've come to do? I've come to preach good news for the poor. I've come to release the captives.

I've come to bring liberation to those who are oppressed. That same Jesus has just rebuked the wind and the waves and taken this chaotic storm and subdued it and made it calm.

And now Jesus brings that same power, that same authority to this man to subdue and to calm the chaos of his soul. Right?

The chaotic storm of his life. And so I want to take a look at this story in a deeper way, thinking about a few things together. First of all, what we see in this story is kingdoms and conflict.

[11 : 18] We also see a transformed mind, and we see a new mission and message. So we're going to look at this kingdoms and conflict, a transformed mind, and a new mission and message.

First of all, kingdoms and conflict. Jesus is intentionally crossing a boundary in the story. He's crossing a boundary into Gentile territory, and he goes to basically the most unclean place that a Jew could think to go.

Right? He enters into these Gentile pagan cities that are full of idols and decadence. Jesus is, you know, walking through these pig farms that are the furthest cry from being kosher, you could imagine.

That pork is being raised to feed the occupying Roman legions, their armies. This man is hanging out in tombs with dead bodies and skeletons. He's filled with evil spirits and demons.

Why, Jesus, of all the places you could be, why would you want to be here? Jesus, of course, often shows up in places where he's not supposed to be.

[12 : 31] Right? Jesus deliberately crosses boundaries into places that are considered inappropriate. And what happens when Jesus does that? What happens when Jesus shows up in dark places?

Well, what we see in this story is that there's a power encounter of enormous proportions. There's a confrontation between these two opposing powers, these two opposing kingdoms.

And I want you to know that it's not like Star Wars. It's not like Star Wars where there's this unending conflict between the dark side and the true force.

Right? These two equal and opposite powers that really depend on each other. They depend on being balanced with each other. Right? The hate and fear of the dark side, the love and hope of the true force.

Both of them are essential. Both of them need to be there in tension and balance, push and pull, and yin and yang. That's not the New Testament. If you pay very close attention to this story, this demon is attempting to gain ascendancy over Jesus.

[13 : 38] And then Jesus is very intentionally triumphing over the demons. Right? Jesus is not content for the kingdom of God to be in balance with the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus wants to conquer the kingdom of darkness. Jesus wants to win a victory, a decisive victory over the kingdom of darkness. And so what does Jesus' presence and His power provoke here?

It says in verse 28 that 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. See, I think there's a conflict within this man between the desire of His true self to be in the irresistible presence of Jesus and to fall at the feet of Jesus, which is what we were made to do.

And there's a conflict with this other part of Himself, this darkness inside of Himself that is resisting Jesus, that's fearing Jesus, that's assaulting Jesus with questions, is saying to Jesus, What do you want with me?

[14 : 42] And why won't you leave me alone? You know, what's interesting to me is that these demons know Jesus, right?

That they, in fact, identify Jesus in the exact opposite way that most secular people do today, right? Most secular people say, Well, Jesus is merely human.

Jesus is an extraordinary teacher. He's a liberation theologian. Jesus is a social reformer. He's a peasant revolutionary. Jesus is the exemplar of heroic progressivism, right?

Any group of people, any person can remake Jesus in their own image. But the demons know who Jesus actually is. And what do they say? They say, Jesus, you are the Son of the Most High God.

And when they're saying that, they're not trying to honor Jesus. They're trying to subdue Jesus, right? Because that's how magic works. That's how witchcraft works. If you manipulate the name of the person, then you get power over the person.

[15 : 45] You bind the person. You control the person. And Jesus says, Hey, I know what you're trying to do. And he says, Two can actually play at that game. And so what does Jesus do?

He says in verse 30, Well, what is your name? And he says, Legion, he replied, Because many demons had gone into him. Of course, a legion is a regiment of about 6,000 soldiers.

And if a legion of the Roman army, you know, showed up into town, it was this big, powerful, overwhelming force. It's just absolutely impossible to defeat.

And when this man says, My name is Legion, what he's saying is, I'm an army. I'm a kingdom of dark forces, and it's resisting Jesus. It's intimidating Jesus. And all the while, this man is just raging.

He's this chaotic storm in front of Jesus. And Jesus, this whole time, is just completely calm. Completely calm. And Jesus is like, Okay, you're a legion.

[16 : 52] You're 6,000 soldiers. That's all you brought? Is that going to be, is that going to be enough? And see, verse 31, it says, They begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the abyss.

You see, on the one hand, this kingdom of darkness, it postures itself as strong and tough and intimidating, this legion. And then on the other hand, it's begging Jesus, Please don't torture us.

Please don't send us into the abyss where we deserve to go and where you have the power to send us. And you see, at the most basic level, the reason we see this kingdom of darkness so aggressively coming out into the open in the three years of Jesus' public ministry is that they know their time of ruling God's good creation is coming to an end.

They know that the judgment day is just around the corner where God is going to judge them and send them and all their dehumanizing forces into the abyss, into this unfathomable depth from which they can never return.

And you notice that it's not Jesus that's theologizing about this, it's actually the demons that are the ones who are talking about the final destiny of all those who resist God and oppose God.

[18 : 11] And why are they doing this? Why are they freaking out in the presence of Jesus? Because they know they're in the presence of the Son of the Most High God. they're trembling before the one whom God has appointed to be the judge of all the world with justice.

And how does Jesus respond to their begging? How does Jesus respond to their repeated requests? Well, this speaks, I think, to one of the three biggest theological questions that pastors get.

Number one, we get asked the question, what happens when I die? Number two, we get asked the question, how can I be saved? And number three, we get asked the question, what is up with these pigs?

Right? It's like one of the biggest things that I'm sure was on your mind when you woke up this morning. What's up with the pigs? And some of you read this story and you're like, I love animals so much and this poor herd of 2,000 pigs drowning in the sea really makes me sad.

And some of us, you're like, I love business so much and when I see all this money and all this opportunity and all this potential just go down the drain, that makes me sad. And others of us, we love food so much, we're like, all the meat, all the bacon and all the ribs, what a waste.

[19 : 29] But the pigs are not Jesus' suggestion, the pigs are the demon's idea and the demons know that they're so powerless before Jesus that without his permission they can't even touch one single little piglet.

And so Jesus gives them permission to do to the pigs what they want to do to this man and what they want to do to all of us and that is to drive them into death and destruction, to drive them away from the abundant life that God intends.

That's what the kingdom of dark powers wants to do to human beings. But Jesus won't let it happen to this man. Jesus liberates this man from all of the oppression and all the bondage of the darkness and Jesus causes the kingdom of God to come erupting into his life.

And notice that when Jesus brings salvation and it's just a messy business with all the pigs and everything, when Jesus exercises his power he doesn't even roll up his sleeves.

Jesus is not breaking a sweat. Jesus is not trying hard in this moment. Jesus is not calling on a higher power because Jesus is the higher power.

[20 : 44] Jesus is an infinitely greater power. This isn't even a fair fight. It's no contest. This whole army, this whole kingdom, this whole legion of darkness just self-destructs in the presence of Jesus and it's no contest whatsoever.

This man who had been woefully oppressed by demonic powers is somehow now wonderfully released by the power of Jesus. So my question for you today is what is that big and overwhelming thing in your life that you're bringing to Jesus today?

what's that thing that's completely controlling you and dominating your life? When you think about your friends and your neighbors and your coworkers and your family members, what are the big issues?

What are the big problems that they're struggling with? And the question for us today is do you believe that Jesus has the power and the authority to handle that? Is His kingdom stronger than the kingdom of darkness that seeks to dominate and control and rule over us and our world?

You see what's interesting is these people in this region of the Gerasenes, they saw the power of Jesus but it says they were afraid of it. They were uncomfortable with Jesus' power and so in verse 37, and then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them because they were overcome with fear.

[22 : 16] They were afraid that inviting more of the kingdom of God into their lives, inviting more of the power of Jesus into their lives would kind of mess things up and so they'd said, Jesus, would you please go away from us?

And tragically, they don't realize how poor and powerless they're gonna be if Jesus actually does leave them. They don't realize that they're rejecting the greatest opportunity of their lives to welcome Jesus, the liberator, Jesus, the deliverer, Jesus, the savior.

I guess my question for us today is, do we see, when we look at our lives, when we look at our world, do we see these two kingdoms in conflict? There's no third alternative between these two kingdoms.

You either are wanting to live in that one kingdom that's familiar and comfortable yet dehumanizing, or you're wanting to live in this kingdom that comes with power and healing and freedom and salvation that Jesus brings.

Those are your options. Kingdoms in conflict, that's where we're living our lives. But secondly, I want us to see not just kingdoms in conflict, but I want to see this guy with a transformed mind.

[23 : 30] A transformed mind. Now, where does Jesus get his authority to reclaim and to save this man? What's interesting is at the end of the gospel, we see Jesus and this man actually changing places, right?

When we come to Holy Week, when we come to Good Friday, we'll see the Son of the Most High God being stripped of his clothes and being naked like this man. We'll see Jesus being bound with chains like this man.

We'll see Jesus being cut and bleeding. We'll see Jesus crying out on the cross in agony. We'll see Jesus being driven into the tombs. And why does Jesus do that? Because he came to bear the darkness.

He came to bear away this man's misery on the cross. He came to absorb it all into himself. And the resurrection of Jesus will be a signal to us, it is a signal to us that somehow, some way, Jesus managed to destroy evil and to destroy death without destroying any of us.

See, the crucified yet risen Jesus came to conquer over sin and death and hell and the devil in order that he might give us eternal life, in order that he might give us abundant life.

[24 : 46] And that's what we see in this man in verse 34. It says, when those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and the countryside. And the people went out to see what had happened.

And 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. Here's a man who had been a chaotic storm, raging, wild, untamable.

Neither men nor chains could constrain him. No one was strong enough to subdue him. And everybody was asking, who can save this man? Who can save us?

But what does the Son of the Most High God do? It says that when Jesus comes in his presence and his power, there's a total reversal in this man's life.

First of all, he's liberated from the occupying power and the demons are completely gone. Secondly, it says that he's sitting at Jesus' feet, which is the place where a disciple sits.

[25 : 46] It's the place where a disciple learns the word of God and the way of God and the will of God. Thirdly, it says that he's clothed, which means that he has a new dignity.

He has a new identity. He has a new name. He has a new sense of belonging. He has a new life. And thirdly, it says that he's in his right mind.

He's been given a sober mind. He's been given a self-controlled mind. He has the mind of Christ himself being formed in him. And so it says in verse 38, the man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with Jesus.

You see, earlier when he had been under the influence of these dark powers, what did the man say to Jesus? He said, what do you want with me, son of the most high God? Please go away from me. Please leave me alone.

But now that he's been set free, now that he's a disciple at the feet of Jesus, now that he's in his right mind, what does he beg Jesus for in his prayers now? He says, Jesus, please let me go with you wherever you're going.

[26 : 54] And that, I think, is the mark of a transformed mind. It's the mark of a true disciple that you talk to Jesus, that you want to go with Jesus, that you have a personal relationship with Jesus, that you have a new bond and a new union and a new attachment to Jesus.

So you say, I want to follow you. I want to learn from you. I want to obey you. I cannot get close enough to you. And I think that's an acid test of our own discipleship, that when we wake up in the morning, are we saying to Jesus, Jesus, I want to go with you today.

I want to be with you today. Whatever that means, I'm in with you. And of course, one of the first lessons we have to learn as disciples of Jesus is that Jesus doesn't always give us what we want.

Right? He doesn't give us what we ask for. He doesn't answer our prayers the way that we want Him to. He very often redirects our requests because He has something better in mind, which is what happens here. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with Jesus, 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. And that's the relational dynamic of discipleship. It's not that we issue commands to Jesus and He submits to us.

[28 : 14] It's that He issues the commands and we submit to Him. Right? He tells us what to do and we obey. That's what it, when we say Jesus is Lord, that's what that means.

But it's not an oppressive lordship. It's a very liberating lordship. It's a freeing lordship because it means I no longer have to carry the burden of being the Lord of my life anymore.

I no longer have to figure out what I'm doing and where I'm going. What a relief. Where does Jesus send this man? Jesus sends this man home.

And what that tells us is that Jesus not only heals us mentally and physically, He not only forgives us spiritually and morally, but Jesus restores us socially and vocationally.

This man had been alienated from his home. This man had been driven away from his home. This man is now sent back to his home as an agent of reconciliation. That's what Jesus wants to do.

[29 : 15] He wants to put us back in family life. He wants to put us back in friendships. He wants to put us back in a community where we were made to have a new identity and a new belonging and a new meaning and a new purpose.

That's what discipleship is. And because this man has a transformed mind, when Jesus says, no, I have a better plan for your life than your plan for your life, how does he respond?

He says, great. Awesome. And I guess that's my question for us is, do you have this transformed mind? Are you in your right mind where what you want to do is sit at the feet of Jesus, go with Jesus, talk to Jesus, let Jesus redefine your plans for your life and say, awesome.

What I want us to think about today is that we live in the midst of these kingdoms and conflict and that what it means to follow Jesus and become a disciple of Jesus is that you have a new mind, a transformed mind and mindset.

But then finally, that you have a new mission and a new message. That as a disciple, you've been given a new mission with a new message. And we saw this when in Luke chapter 5, when Peter encountered the power of Jesus.

[30 : 43] And Jesus immediately gave Peter this new mission and he said, from now on, Peter, you are going to fish for people. From now on, Peter, you're going to share my mission to catch people for the kingdom of God.

And this is the task of every Christian disciple. This is the task of every Christian church is to become a vehicle through which God's redemptive power can go pouring into the lives of other people.

And what Jesus did for Peter, Jesus also does for this guy. This most unlikely guy is turned into an ambassador for Jesus.

Having been reconciled to God through Jesus, he's now sent out with a new message and a new mission of reconciliation. And it says this again in verse 39, 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. Isn't this amazing? The first person that Jesus sends to share his mission in Gentile territory is this guy.

[31 : 53] Super broken and yet incredibly delivered. And he's told by Jesus just go and share the gospel and make disciples.

And Jesus thinks it's a wise idea. He just sends him out without a class on evangelism. He doesn't have a master's in theology. He doesn't know anything about apologetics.

All he has is a transformed mind. All he has is his own story of God's grace and healing. All he has is two ears with which he can listen to people as they pour out their pain to him and their loneliness and their longings and their questions and their concerns.

All he has is a heart to pray for people and just engage them in conversation and Jesus says that's enough. That's enough. I want you to return home and tell your people how much God has done for you.

Go tell them that the power of God and the grace of God is on the move. Go tell them that the kingdom of God is coming from heaven to earth right now.

[33 : 03] And what does the man do? He tells all over town not how much God had done for him. He tells how much Jesus had done for him. Did you notice that? Does he misunderstand the mission?

Is he misunderstanding the message? No, he understands it perfectly well that Jesus he's got the lesson. Jesus is not merely human he's the son of the most high God. So when God the Father acts he acts through his son.

And when God the Son acts God the Father is working. What Jesus does God does. And if we are going to tell people about the wonderful works of God we have to be talking about Jesus.

We have to say the name Jesus. Because Jesus is the one through whom the only true God is working out his saving purposes in this world.

And this is how disciples on mission speak the message that Jesus has given. And so he goes home he goes home knowing that God is already at work in the lives of the people back there where Jesus has sent him.

[34 : 12] He goes home knowing that it's Jesus' power and not his own that's the basis of his missionary activity. He goes home knowing that God's work through Jesus is the heart of the message.

And does everyone accept his message when he gets home? No. All the people in this region have already told Jesus to his face please go home.

Please leave us. I'm sure this guy was just as rejected just as ignored just as neglected as Jesus was. But I also imagine that there were a handful of people some people of peace that God had prepared because why would Jesus have sent him if there weren't people there to receive the message?

People that were open people that were ready people that were ripe people that were low hanging fruit people that were primed to say man this thing you're telling me about Jesus sounds pretty amazing.

You know back in November we invited you to begin praying for three people that you would like to see begin to explore the faith and just to pray on a daily basis that God's kingdom would come breaking through into their lives.

[35 : 28] and I want to just remind us of that. I want to encourage us that you don't need a story as extreme and dramatic as intense as this guy.

All you need to engage in the mission and message of Jesus is just a heart to pray. All you need is just a willingness to invite somebody to coffee or to your table for a meal.

All you need is just ears to listen to their story. All you need is just a willingness to share what Jesus has done in your life and just to sit back and watch God work. Some of us have people who are ready to be invited to Alpha over the coming weeks where we're just asking them to come share a meal with us, come and engage in some video-based discussions with us, come and explore their questions about life and meaning and God and faith.

Some of us have people who are saying, you know, thank you but not yet and what they really need is just more Christ-like hospitality. They just need someone to lovingly listen to their doubts and to their questions.

Someone who can compassionately engage in their loneliness and their pain. Someone who can just patiently walk with them as God is working to soften them and open up their hearts to Him.

[36 : 44] And we actually don't have any idea what God wants to do in the lives of any of the people around us. We don't know when He wants to work or how He wants to work or where God wants to work in their lives but here's what we do know and this is from the Apostle Paul 1 Timothy chapter 2.

God our Savior wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all people.

And that's why Jesus says, go 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. Friends, Jesus is sending us just like He sent that man.

Jesus is saying to us, go tell how much I've done for you. Go tell how great is the grace, how great is the mercy, how great is the power, how great is the healing, how great is the love that's come pouring into your life through me.

Are we up for that mission? Are we down with that message? I hope so. In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.