

Over All Fears

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Preacher: Ben Ferguson

[0 : 00] I'm going to invite Ben Ferguson to come up. Ben's going to bring the word this evening. Ben's not a friend to most of us. He's involved in a home group. He helps lead the home group. He's been involved in music and leading and preaching and all sorts of things around here. So let's pray for Ben. Father, we thank you for your servant Ben. We thank you for the gifts that you've given him.

We ask that you would strengthen him now by your spirit and enable him to proclaim your word as you would have him. And grant us strength by your spirit that we may hear your word, receive it, believe it, and repent and turn to you by your power.

We ask this in your name. Amen. Amen. Well, good evening and reflective Advent to you. I think that's the proper way of introducing it. I don't know.

I can't really say Merry Advent because it's supposed to be a time of waiting, I think. But I don't know about you guys. I've been a student for, I think, nine years in a row now.

[1 : 10] And I find, I got a hand pump back there. There's some lifelong students in the room. And I find that the second week of December and the second week of April become the most horrible times in my life.

You know, like there's these 11 weeks where I just love school, right? I'm just loving school. And then it becomes the bane of my existence. And I find in December, I know December is a busy time for a lot of folks because it's the end of the year.

And I find that December just kind of passes me by. I'll get so wrapped up in my papers and my tests that all of a sudden I get done and Christmas is here. And I'm like, what has happened? And it just passes me right on by. So this year, me and my lovely wife, who's sitting in the first row, have gone through an Advent book, kind of an Advent reader every week and in a time of preparation for our hearts to get ready for the coming.

And I've learned two things. That the Latin word Adventus means coming. And also that the church historic, like Jim said, has celebrated not only the first coming of Jesus, but also his second coming.

[2 : 27] And one of the questions that's framed in the text that we're looking at tonight is, who is this man who stills the storm? And I think it's appropriate as we come to this time where we're looking for the second coming of Christ to ask this question to ourselves.

Who is this Jesus? In a sense, like who have I thrown my lot in with? Who is this man that I'm giving control of my life to? Who is this person that I worship?

And the second question I want to kind of address tonight is, who are we in light of this coming Jesus? So those are two questions tonight. If you want to look for my points, they're going to be framed by Jesus is, Jesus is, and then we are.

So look for those things. So in the spirit of Advent, I claim this text, and I pray the Lord will help us answer these questions. So pray with me right now. Father, we are so thankful that you saw that our need was so great that you would send your son.

Father, we pray that we would see your son tonight, that you would pull the scales away from even our eyes, long-term believers, maybe new believers. Lord, that we would see you glorified and be led to our knees in worship.

[3 : 45] Father, we thank you and we bless you for these texts. Amen. Well, last week we looked at, Jim looked at the parable of the sower.

And chapter 8 is framed in such a way that the chapter begins with Jesus preaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God. So the parable of the sower is kind of a description of what that kingdom is like.

And Jesus talks about how his work of sowing the word is either thwarted or accepted. So you have the word being stolen by Satan.

You have the word being choked out by the cares of this world. And you have the word also taking root. And then because it's shallow, burning up when trials come.

And finally you have the word taking root and multiplying. So you have this nature of the kingdom.

Today we are looking at four kind of accounts. I'm only going to deal with one of them.

[4 : 49] But just to give us a sense of what these accounts are doing, they are enacting the kingdom in a way. Like Jesus is talking about the kingdom and then he's bringing it. And you have these four kind of acts of power that Jesus does.

And what you're seeing here is this kind of cosmic battle where Jesus is coming up against Satan and coming up against sin in the world and defeating it.

So he has authority over nature. He has authority over the demonic. He has authority over sickness and death. And here we see what the ramifications of this kingdom is.

So the story goes that Jesus and his disciples are thankfully reaching the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee after almost meeting their end in the storm like we saw in the passage tonight.

I imagine there must have been a kind of quiet anxiety in the boat. Jesus said not only calm the storm with a rebuke, but he also kind of chided his disciples. And he had kind of given them a question saying, where is your faith?

[5 : 56] And the question might be framed as, why didn't you have more faith in me? If you had known who was in the boat with you, why would fearing death have been an option? In Psalms, though, it said that God alone controlled the seas.

And these guys were experienced fishermen. The seas don't behave this way, they thought to themselves. They decided who lived and died. You were supposed to respect the seas.

They were not supposed to respect Jesus. To see Jesus calm the storm was more than just a little startling. So with this kind of questions, we come to the shores of the land of the Gerasenes.

Now the text kind of demonstrates to us, or the grammar shows us, that it's almost as if Jesus is stepping out of the boat, and this crazy man comes upon him, right?

And let's describe him. In the ESV it says, it describes him as a guy who for a long time had not worn clothes, who had demons, and who did not live in a house, but among the tombs.

[7 : 02] And in another Gospel account, in Mark, and I think in Matthew, it also describes him as a guy who cuts himself. He has self-inflicted wounds. Now if we're reading this for the first time, which we probably aren't, but if we were, it would be shocking, I think.

Like, this is like an honest-to-God horror story of a person. Like, he's a horror story in person. This guy had lived in graves hollowed out of the hillside.

I've seen these in Israel. And they're just little tiny caves where dead bodies stayed. He slept with these dead bodies. And I think Hollywood should try to co-op this guy into some kind of scary movie, because I think he would be pretty valuable for that.

I don't know. I get a little nightmares just reading the text. Just staying in this too long, you know, this week. Not only was he very creepy, but he was possessed by demons. And not just one demon, but lots and lots and lots of them.

Jesus asks its name, the thing inside this man, and it names itself as Legion. Now to give us a sense of what this means, Legion is a militaristic term.

[8 : 12] It implies kind of a great standing army. A typical Roman legion was between 5,000 and 6,000 troops. If the voice emanating from this man was correct, then there were thousands upon thousands of demons inside this person.

Could you imagine that? And these demons had made the man strong. Luke gives us kind of this parenthetical remark that he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break his bonds.

And the Greek word here for breaking bonds is to shatter them. And you can't really shatter leather, so they're talking about steel bonds that he's shattering. This man, maybe more a monster now than a man, is extremely powerful.

Now if this was a movie, we'd expect these two characters to get into a battle, right? Like Jesus would walk out of the boat, pull out a flaming sword that wasn't there a second ago, and then a melee would ensue, right?

And Jesus would fight him and just barely win at the end, right? Because with his cunning and his power, he just figures out where his weak spot is and he just makes the fatal blow.

[9 : 28] That's the Hollywood version of this story. All right? This is not the picture we see, though. There is no question at who the victor is in this situation. It says that Jesus asks this army of demons to come out of the man and they cry, have mercy on us, son of the most high God.

These demons instantly relent because they know who this guy is. They know who Jesus is.

Demons are fallen angels. These two have been cast out of heaven by God.

And when Legion looks at Jesus, they do not see him as he is, like a Jewish carpenter with rough hands and dirty feet. They see and remember the glorified Jesus, the one we are revealed to in Revelation, the one that Jim talked about, the one with blazing eyes and bronze feet, the sword coming out of his mouth.

To them he is terrifying because he is and has with him the very power of God. And this is our first kind of insight into the passage. Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the powerful son of the most high God. He is the one that commands the chaos of the storm to cease. He rebukes sickness, raises the dead, and now does battle with thousands of demons who instantly grovel at his feet.

[10 : 57] The vision is given to us in a number of places in the gospel account. Jesus is the strong man who comes into Satan's house and binds him. And that's what we're seeing here, or at least the beginning of it.

And I think it's great against, I think, some of our most natural instincts about Jesus. Jesus. We often, I think, see him as meek and mild, as just a friend or companion, as gentle, and he is. You know, I pray that we would all be as gentle as Jesus is. But he's also a conqueror. He's spreading the kingdom of God, and that means defeating the demonic powers that hold the whole world captive.

Now, I think that some of us might be uncomfortable with this kind of military language. But I think we have to catch a vision of what Jesus is doing.

When Jesus sees the demon-possessed man, he sees a man. He sees a human being. He sees someone he pities. He sees a man. This Gerasene man has been troubled for a long time, a really long time.

[12 : 02] It says in the passage that the legion of demons had seized him many times, had taken him captive, and had driven him into the desert, driven him to the tombs, and left him naked and insane, also driven him to cut himself.

The picture we have here is of a man that's completely stripped of humanity. He's an animal. And he is made an animal by forces that he can never, ever overcome. Jesus goes to battle not simply for his own sake, but to release this man from the demonic madness that was slowly killing him. And this is our second insight. Jesus is. Jesus is the one who goes to battle for us, who fights on our behalf. The powerful son of the Most High God is on our side.

He wishes to free us from the dominion of darkness and from the deeds of darkness. And this is the power of the kingdom of God. It's not just a message, but a world-changing reality.

A class of cosmic forces that vie for the control of human hearts. Now this passage forces us to acknowledge a couple things. That firstly, there is a spiritual battle that exists even now.

[13 : 20] The spiritual world is not neutral. And as Christians, we can't play with the occult and expect to come out unharmed. We can't play with astrology or tarot or fortune-telling or seances because these things are demonic at their very core.

However, the Bible tells us that God has an enemy and his name is Satan and he wishes to undermine and destroy every one of us. And he has a lot of friends to help him do it. So be warned, if you're dabbling in this stuff, it will not go well.

And if you're dabbling in this stuff, seek God's forgiveness because he can release you from its influence in your life. But the demonic is not only this kind of occultist stuff, this kind of stuff of movies.

The devil attacks the church by undermining our marriages, chipping away our trust, making us greedy or proud. He wishes to divide us or undermine our belief in Jesus.

He desires to enslave us to addiction, to bitterness, to our own insecurity. He wishes to make us into individualistic animals, living out every desire that occurs to us, no matter whom it hurts.

[14 : 30] He's crafty, but most of the time he doesn't need to be because his victims, including myself, are many times willing to be victims. But the good news is that Jesus is the son of the most high God and he is the one that goes to battle for us.

And let me say this as well, the war is already won. Though the battle still raged, the war was won 2,000 years ago when Jesus died, entered the grave, and resurrected.

He said, taking the keys of death and Hades. Now, Jim read that passage just a second ago when he started the service that I'm the one that is and who is to come and I hold the keys of death and Hades.

And when I was in Chicago, I heard an African-American preacher preach on this passage and he had this great illustration. and he said, he was describing this passage and he said, the grave called up hell.

And he talked to Satan and he says, we got him, we got him. And Satan says, you hold him tight. So for three days, hell celebrated.

[15 : 43] They danced, they ate, they sang. And three days later, Satan got a phone call again. And the grave says, he got out and he took the keys.

He took the keys with him. See, I'm not allowed to do things like that, but now that I'm telling a story, I can. Jesus has taken the keys.

He's taken the power of death and hell and he holds them in his hand. And this is the guy who goes to battle for us. At the end of the star, we see that the garrison is clothed and in his right mind.

In a Jewish perspective, clothing is tied to identity. We're not truly ourselves when we are naked, but when we're clothed. The clothes almost symbolize Jesus giving him back his humanity and his sanity.

He was no longer a slave to those demons. Jesus says that everyone has a master in this world and either we are enslaved to sin, a slave of the evil one, or we are a bondservant of God.

[16 : 56] And this brings me to my third thing. We, we are those that are rescued from the kingdom of darkness. We, in a sense, are the spoils of war. The battle is already over.

Jesus has forcibly broken into our prisons and set us free. That doesn't stop us from wanting to go back in those prisons sometimes. But he's forcibly broken into our prisons and set us free.

Like the garrison, Jesus is closing us with a new identity. A few weeks ago, we read about the woman who anointed Jesus' feet. She was forgiven much and so she loved much.

The garrison had been saved from much and so wishes not to depart from his savior. He had been plagued his whole life and now he wanted nothing but to be by the side of Jesus.

And I pray that we're the same. I pray that we would look at ourselves tonight and see how much we've been saved from. We are the rescued. And what does Jesus do with the rescued?

[18 : 02] In verse 9-6, it says, or 9-1, he says he empowers them to join the coming kingdom. He gives them a foyer over demons and sickness and Jesus, I think, is empowering us too.

In Revelation, he asks the churches to overcome by the blood of the Lamb. And this is not a victory in overcoming by force, but he's calling us to be victorious in the same way that Jesus is victorious. He's calling the church to follow Jesus in being faithful to the Father's will and give their lives sacrificially for others. So how do we battle? How do we bring the kingdom?

By living as the rescued and the forgiven. By showing people mercy, but not reviling when we're reviled against. By loving our neighbor, sharing the gospel as an overflow of what God has done for us.

By continuing to throw ourselves on the mercy of God in order to have strength to do his will. the celebration of Advent uses candles because it celebrates the coming of God's light into darkness.

[19 : 08] When Jesus sent his spirit to the church of Pentecost, we become those light bearers. We carry with us the Christ and are asked to light up the city with the light we have been given to us.

Jesus goes with us as we leave today. and he is the powerful son of the most high God. He battles for us and we are the rescued who join in that battle by his power.

Amen.