

What Does Jesus Want With You? (Luke 8:26-39)

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A few years ago I experienced a pretty severe blow to my mental and spiritual health. I began to have episodes of crippling anxiety and depression that left me unable to enjoy the things I usually loved. As things got worse I couldn't sleep at night because I was so afraid of what the next day would be like, and then during that day I was so exhausted that I couldn't do the things I needed to do...which of course only fed my continued fears of what the next day would bring, and so on. There were times where I was so anxious that I would shake and cry, but I wouldn't be able to tell you what was causing the anxiety. Day by day I could feel myself losing more and more control and filling with despair.

Thanks to some pretty incredible people in my life, including my wife (Alison) and many folks from this church community, I was able to talk to the right people, get connected to the right counselors and doctors, and start the hard work of unpacking exactly what was happening inside my head and my heart. The short answer is "it was a lot", but one important discovery that I made during this time that I want to share with you was this: I was afraid to ask God the same question we find the troubled man in this passage asking of Jesus. I was afraid that if I asked, "*What do you want with me, Jesus*" the answer might be more than I could give, or, that Jesus would look me over and decide he wanted nothing with me, because there wasn't anything there to really want.

"What do you want with me, Jesus" -- I desperately wanted to know the answer, but I was so scared of what it might be.

Have any of you ever felt this way? Maybe about this very question, or maybe there is some other angle to this, some other way to ask, that better fits your life, your insecurities, your weaknesses, your sins. And part of you wants to ask God the big important question that sometimes keeps you up at night...but part of you is also too afraid of what that answer might be.

Our passage this morning is going to allow us to see the experience of a man who did ask Jesus this question, and he did it at a moment of his greatest need and desperation. And when he asked it he was full of plenty of fear and doubt and quite literally other voices in his head making it more frightening to put it out there.

But once he did, once he brought that question before Jesus...everything changed. And it did so because of who Jesus is, and what Jesus wants with you, and for you.

What does Jesus want with you? Let's find out together.

Our passage begins with Jesus and the disciples arriving "*to the region of the Gerasenes...across the lake from Galilee*". These geographic details may not mean much to us today, but to anyone reading this story in the 1st century, they likely would have immediately wondered what on earth a man like Jesus is doing in a place like that.

The area Jesus had landed was known as the Decapolis, or the "ten cities", and it was a thoroughly pagan land. Everywhere you went there were temples dedicated to the worship of false gods. Pigs, which the people of Israel regarded as unclean, were sacred to the people of the Gerasenes. And perhaps worst of all to the Jews, the cities of the Decapolis were home to a large force of the Roman military, meaning that this was the land that housed the power and strength of Israel's oppressors. Many Jews at this time believed this region was a place where Satan lived. It was enemy territory, both spiritually and culturally. It was not a place any respectable Jew would want to go...especially not a Jewish teacher.

Except, apparently, Jesus.

Back in 8:22 Jesus made it clear that he very much wanted to go “to the other side of the lake.” There was something he wanted to do, or someone he wanted to meet, in that hopeless and despised land. So, he and the disciples set sail to cross the Sea of Galilee, and in 8:27, just as Jesus steps ashore in this place for the first time...

...he is immediately confronted by a man possessed by demons.

(You have to wonder if some of the disciples would have been muttering “I knew this would happen” or “I told you so” under their breath.)

27 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. 28 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!” 29 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 his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

Luke 8 (NIV)

This is arguably the most wretched, broken, hurting human being Jesus meets during his ministry on earth. This man is possessed by demons; afflicted by the infiltration of evil spiritual beings into his body, mind, and soul. We are told that he is naked and homeless. At some point in the past people had tried to chain his hands and his feet to keep him under control, but he had broken from those chains and fled, driven by his demonic tormentors to live alone among the graves outside his home town.

We are never told how this man became possessed by demons. We don’t know if it was because of sins he had committed, mistakes he had made, if he had somehow invited the demons in, or if they somehow had overwhelmed him. And for some of us, probably most of us, it may be hard to understand what he is going through or what it might be like to be him. But if you look beyond the immediate circumstances and consider broadly what he is experiencing...maybe then you can relate.

This man is alone. He is alone because what has happened in his life has made him an outcast. The weight of sin and shame, and a struggle against things he cannot understand or overcome on his own have driven him away from his home, his friends, his family, and into complete isolation. I’m sure he felt like no one could help him. Perhaps he felt like he deserved all this, or that alone with his demons was where he was supposed to be.

That’s a place and a feeling that many of us, I think, can understand. We know what it’s like to feel alone and to have no hope. We’ve been there before. Perhaps some of you are even there right now, this morning... burdened by feelings of fear or shame, or struggling against what seems like an enemy you cannot see and don’t know how to fight. And you feel like all you know for certain is that you are on your own in this despair, because who could possibly want to come find you? To help you? Who could want anything to do with someone like you? Or even if they came, what could possibly be done?

If you feel like this today, I need you to notice something important here in the first few verses of our passage. Jesus sails across the width of the Sea of Galilee to the Decapolis, 5-10 miles apart. Recall that on the way he and his disciples are hammered by sudden, terrifying wind and waves, but that does not stop him or throw him off course. And then, of all the places he could have landed along the roughly 13 mile long coast of the lake, Jesus “just so happens” to step off his boat in the one place where the only living soul he could possibly meet was this man who so desperately needed him.

Jesus intentionally, and without reservation or hesitation, set his sight on the one place nobody else wanted to go so he could find the one person nobody else wanted anything to do with.

Why would Jesus do this? What could he want with this man? And if you can relate to any part of this man's story...what could Jesus want with you?

There is a clash of supernatural power in this initial exchange (vv27-29). The demon-possessed man encounters Jesus, and Jesus immediately commands the "impure spirit" to come out of the man (v29). The man (and possibly the demons screaming through the man) panics at this sudden assertion of authority and at the realization of who has come to visit them -- "*What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!*"

There is a moment here where the man and the demons resist and perhaps even try to gain the upper hand on Jesus. But although the demon-possessed man had been strong enough to break his bonds and strike fear into the towns and cities that were filled with Roman military professionals, neither the man nor the evil host within him are any sort of a match for the Son of God.

30 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. 31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. 32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. 33 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.

Luke 8 (NIV)

A Roman legion typically had somewhere between 5600-6000 soldiers. I cannot say for sure if that means this poor man had 6000 demons somehow living inside him, but no matter their number, they were not enough to stand against the power of Christ. From the moment he arrives on the scene, these supernatural and evil beings are in an absolute panic, desperate to get away from Jesus and escape their fear of being sent to "the Abyss" -- a place of eternal punishment for all satanic forces mentioned a few times throughout Scripture.

So great is "Legion's" desperation to flee from the presence of God's Son that they beg to be sent into a herd of pigs, which Jesus allows. Those same pigs suddenly rush down a bank, into the Sea of Galilee, and drown.

In vv27-29, we read about a man who has lost control of his life. Almost every last little bit of his humanity had been destroyed by his demons. He's naked, he's homeless, he's dangerous to be around, and he's rolling around on the ground, shouting and screaming.

And then the man meets Jesus. And everything changes. Because what Jesus wants with this man, what he wants with you and with me...is a ***wholly changed and transformed and saved life.***

34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35 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. 36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.

Luke 8 (NIV)

The pig herders run back to town and tell everyone what they had just witnessed. The people come to see for themselves, and what do they find?

A man who is no longer possessed by demons. A man who is now dressed, calm and in his right mind, sitting peacefully at the feet of Jesus, listening and learning to the Son of God. They find a man who was once deeply troubled and completely lost to his demons...and that man is now cured.

In his most desperate moment, in his pain and his fear, this man had cried out: *“What do you want with me, Jesus?”*

What did Jesus want with him? What does he want with you?

It’s real simple: *Jesus wants to save you.*

Jesus wants to save you. Don’t treat this like some trivial, obvious, little kid’s answer to a Bible trivia question. Because this is astounding, incredible, incomprehensible Good News.

Jesus wants to save you.

Jesus, the Son of God, looks at you with all your pain and your anguish. He finds you with all your brokenness. He seeks you out knowing all that you have done wrong and all the wrong done to you. And it is the desire, the passion, the sacrificial ambition of the Lord of all Creation to save you from the darkness and despair that could crush you forever. Not only is it well within the power of the Almighty God to rescue you...it is also what he wants to do.

Now, someone might say, *“Sure, Jesus showed up and did something amazing for this guy, but what about me? When or where is he going to show up in my life and save me?”*

I absolutely asked that question during my darkest, anxious, frightened moments.

Remember how I said in 8:22 Jesus had made it clear his intention was to go to the other side of the lake, despite the dangers, to find and save this doomed man? Well, in Luke 9:51, we see Jesus set a similar course with far greater implications. It’s just one quick verse, but the story that unfolds after it means everything:

51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Luke 9

Jesus intentionally, and without reservation or hesitation, set his sight on the one place he had to go to do the one thing nobody else could do: *He had to go and die. To be crucified on a cross. He had to be sacrificed to satisfy the punishment for our sins and disobedience, so that we can one day be clothed in righteousness, restored to eternal life, and worship at the foot of the throne of the Almighty God, forever.*

What I’m saying is Jesus wants to save you, and has already done the work necessary to do so. He has already shown up. He has already looked at your life, with all its mess and mistakes, and said ***“yes, that one -- that one is mine. I want to save that person. And I’ll die and defeat death to make it happen.”***

This truth -- that Jesus wants to save me and has already done the work to do so -- is part of what set me on my path to find peace in my anxiety and hope in Christ that would overcome my depression. It’s not the whole story...but it is a tremendously important and miraculous part.

Jesus wants to save you. That much, I hope, is obvious from this passage. But there is an important secondary lesson to be learned here, and it is this: Jesus wants to save you...but you also have to be willing to be saved by him. You have to recognize your need and not turn him away.

We’ve seen how this man, overwhelmed by how Jesus changed his life, immediately sat down at Jesus’ feet and began to enjoy remaining in His presence. He loved Jesus, learned from Jesus, and (as well see in just a moment) devoted the rest of His life to following Jesus.

But that's not how everyone reacts. The townspeople, unable to understand what is going on and unwilling to open their hearts to possibility of God acting in their lives, respond in fear:

37 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.

Luke 8

Jesus isn't going to force you into belief. He's not going to make you follow him. His love and forgiveness and compassion are offered freely to change your life and save you from your sin...but if you ask him to leave, if you turn him away, he'll get back into the boat and give you your space.

I want to speak for just a moment directly to anyone with us who does not believe in Jesus, or who is struggling with their faith. I think it is extremely important, eternally important, for you to accept the salvation that Jesus has to offer. I think you need the love of God to save you from yourself and from the evil that is in this world. And if you feel led, if you feel like this is the right time, I want you to do this today, this morning, even right now. When the band comes to lead us in our closing worship I will go stand in the back of the room. If you want me to pray with you this morning to follow Jesus, or even just to speak with God for the first time, come back and find me. We'll get it done, and then we'll rejoice.

However, if you're still not ready, I want you to know I understand that, and that I can freely acknowledge that following Jesus and becoming a Christian is a big decision. It can be daunting to take that step. You may feel more like the townspeople than the saved man from our story. You may decide you want Jesus to get back in the boat and go away. I don't want you to do that, but I also won't hold it against you or judge you in any way for it. I also very much want you to return to this church, and to continue your search for truth. We love every believer, non-believer, and those who struggle somewhere in between here at Faith. Keep coming back.

But again...if you're to take the step and follow Jesus, come meet with me here in a moment.

And now I want to speak just a moment directly to those who do believe. You each have a story. You have a testimony. You have experienced the transformative power of Jesus in your lives and you probably know the immense value of hearing another believer share their story. There is a reason sharing our stories of Jesus' love for us is so powerful. It's because it is part of his plan to change the hearts of those who turn away.

Look back at the final verses of our passage:

38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 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.

Luke 8

Jesus wants to save you...and He wants you to share your story of salvation with others.

As followers of Jesus Christ it matters, *it matters so much*, that we are people excited to tell others how much God has done for us. This doesn't mean you have to be able to present a theologically perfect explanation of the Bible or the Gospel to every person you ever meet. I'm going to let you in on a little secret...*I can't even present a theologically perfect explanation of the Bible or the Gospel to every person I meet.*

What God is looking for is for you to eagerly share what matters most to you with others. If Jesus has brought you peace in a troubled time, share that story. If He freed you from the guilt of a particularly painful wrongdoing, share that story. If you feel the glory of God well up in your heart at the sight of the sunrise or the sound of the wind crackling through the autumn leaves or in a moment of quiet and stillness...share that story.

At Faith we want to make disciples of Jesus who love God, love one another, and love their neighbors too. And part of doing this is being willing to talk to others about all the wonderful ways God shows up in our lives. Because maybe, just maybe, telling your story will lead those still considering Jesus to seek Him out instead of turning him away.

And if you need proof, go look at the Gospel of **Mark 7:31-37**. You'll find an account of Jesus returning to the Decapolis -- returning to the place he'd been rejected, but left behind that one saved man to go and tell others what God had done.

And this time he's not turned away by the people. This time they embrace him, and once again Jesus shows that what he wants with us is to save us. This time he heals a deaf and mute man, and the people of the Decapolis -- that that dark and terrible land of the enemy -- "were overwhelmed with amazement" and remark that Jesus "has done everything well."

So, what does Jesus want with you?

Jesus wants to save you.

If you'd like to accept this offer of salvation for the first time, come meet me in the back, or fill out the connection card and let us know you'd like to talk to a pastor about becoming a follower of Christ.

Jesus wants you to share your story of salvation with others.

If you are already a follower of Jesus, I want you to do at least one of these three things this week:

- Pick one person that you know that does believe in Jesus, and commit to praying for them for 5 minutes a day each day next week. Write that person's name down somewhere.
- Spend some time reflecting on one story of when you felt connected to God in some way. Review that story in your mind and your heart to be sure you are ready to share it with someone else.
- Go and tell someone what God has done for you. Be bold. Pick one person this week and simply share something you love about God. You might be surprised how interested they are to hear it, and what impact it might make on their own journey with Christ.

I am no longer afraid to ask Jesus, "*what do you want with me?*" Because I now know the answer. Jesus, the Son of God, Lord of the Universe...wants to save me. And he has already done all the work necessary to do so. Because he loves me. It's as simple and as beautiful and as amazing as that.

Jesus wants to save you, because he loves you too. The work is done. I hope you'll accept what he wants with you today.