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Ein Prediger muss nicht allein weiden, also dass er die Schafe unterweise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen sein, sondern auch daneben den Wölfen wehren, dass sie die Schafe nicht angreifen und mit falscher Lehre verführen und Irrtum einführen.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bei der Kirche behaelt denn die gute Predigt. — *Apologie, Art. 24*

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? — *1 Cor. 14:8*

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## Rescued to Serve

Exegetical Digest of Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39

### I. The Destroyer

The narrow strip of shore on which we find Jesus, between the sea and the steep mountain, was unsafe for travel. For here a *savage being* might at any time rush out of one of the limestone caves overhead to pierce the air with wild unearthly shrieks and to pounce upon a traveler.

This was the madman of Gerasa. He lived among the unclean remains of the dead (Num. 19:16; Matt. 23:27), for here the unclean guests that possessed him felt most comfortable. The unclean swine were their second choice of a home.

*These spirits delight in destruction.* They dethrone this man's judgment, shatter his power to think, break up his personality. Once they have driven him mad, they grant him no relief, but hunt and haunt him night and day. In a helpless frenzy he bruises and cuts himself with stones and spatters himself with blood.

The beings who here drive a man to madness are not themselves mad. Their prince is capable of undertaking the threefold temptation of Jesus, a master stroke to bring ruin upon all. It may seem stupid to drown the herd of hogs in the sea. But *there was method in it.* The two thousand hogs are his key to the hearts of more than two thousand souls in this territory. The drowning of the hogs moved the people to send their Savior out of the country.

*The destroyer is at large in the world today.* It is unthinkable that human beings would without his driving force inflict such misery as we have seen on themselves and on others. The "dogs of hell" madden men to do as they do. Specters of the unseen world are happy to see the massacre, starvation, and demoralization of millions of this generation before the generation of World War I has left the scene.

Even *when normal people follow them, it is madness* and contrary to good thinking. People are in the power of Satan if without protest they go to their destruction. They are restored to a sound mind only if (like the prodigal, who "came to himself," Luke 15:17) they step out of their downward course and turn to the Physician of their souls.

*The chief objective of our enemy is to keep Jesus out of our life.* Lurking behind beautiful excuses to be endured by missionary workers, in the empty riches of a culture which has no heavenly purpose to pilot it, in an overload of amusements which crowd out holier interests, in the love of hogs and other possessions, he takes the eyes of men from the Crucified. "Then cometh the devil and taketh away the Word out of their hearts lest they should believe and be saved," Luke 8:12. He reaches his aim in people who live Christless lives, die Christless deaths, and go to a Christless eternity.

*He wants to destroy us.* The misery he inflicted on the madman

and the destruction of the hogs which rushed headlong over the cliff into the sea are examples of what the evil one would bring on us if it were in his power to do so. Peter (1 Pet. 5:8-9) says, "Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." And Luther says of the Christian, "He will certainly have the devil also about him, who with his lying and murdering day and night will let him have no peace within or without."

And *the end is damnation*. The unclean spirits beg Jesus "that he would not command them to go out into the depth," Luke 8:31. "The depth" is hell, Rev. 9:1-2. The spokesman of these spirits asks Jesus, "Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Matt. 8:29. The devil does not deceive himself as unbelievers do; he knows there is an "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels," Matt. 25:41. He knows he is "reserved unto judgment," 2 Pet. 2:4 (Jude 6). He knows what will happen to him on Judgment Day: "The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone," Rev. 20:10. And to that place of torment he will bring everyone of his victims (Luke 16:23, 28) unless someone delivers them from the hands of their destroyer.

## II. The Savior

Only One was found among men who could challenge the destroyer. As He steps on the shore, He is a stranger unknown and unwanted by the people of this land. But the devil instinctively senses who He is. "What have I to do with Thee," he says, "Jesus, Thou Son of the most high God?" Mark 5:7. He knows *our Champion is mightier than he is*. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world," 1 John 4:4. Jesus calls Himself "Lord" and "God" (Mark 5:19; Luke 8:39) when He speaks of what He does to these spirits. The evil spirits in the man were strong; they had given him power to tear chains and to break away from the guards who tried to tame and control him, Mark 5:4. But He who drove out seven devils out of Mary Magdalene has the power to subdue a legion of them. The legion was a well-organized unit of the Roman army, the instrument of power that crushed kingdoms, turned cities into a wilderness, and spoke a terror before which Jewish fanaticism had quailed. "Legion" is the name of this horde of devils. But before Jesus speaks, this "legion" runs towards Jesus and bows to the ground before Him. "Though devils all the world should fill," they are at the command of Jesus.

*The devil recognizes Jesus as his Judge*. He knows: here is Righteousness come to right the wrong; and my days are numbered, Matt. 8:29. As he issues from the cave, he may have wished to be as violent as usual. But he instantly realizes that this Traveler is the Herald and Bearer of his coming punishment.

He feels his condemnation, and in terror he begs, "I adjure Thee by God that Thou torment me not," Mark 5:7 (James 2:19).

*When the devil is judged, man is delivered.* Banishment of the tyrant is liberty for his victims. For the name of the Judge before whom the devil bows is "Jesus," our Savior. And when Jesus tells us, "The prince of this world is judged," John 16:11, and "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven," Luke 10:17, our hearts know that these are Gospel messages for us sinners, "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

Why does Jesus help this possessed person? This soul is uninviting and dark. There is no spark of a higher life to be fanned into flame, nothing for divine grace to co-operate with. There is no longing for freedom, no cry for redemption, no prayer "Deliver me from evil." Moreover, here was no mind to grasp what was being done to him; but the word of Jesus is effective just the same. The human mind, as we see it in the others, in its saner functioning, in its nobler reaches, is no better than the impulse that controls it: The normal population thinks its way through to reject Jesus. If we want to point out any advantage in the man possessed, it would be this, that he couldn't think as well as the others. He was helped because the power of love and *pity*, Mark 5:19, *reached out to a helpless victim* and was made perfect in weakness.

Less than twenty-four hours ago the waves of the sea — beating against the shore a few yards away — had threatened to swallow the boat of the disciples. They had cried, "Lord, save us, we perish!" Matt. 8:25. At a word from their Creator the waves had calmed down. These spirits also know the voice of their Creator and Lord though they have rebelled against Him. *When Jesus says, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit,"* Mark 5:8, *they obey.*

The madman is mad no more. The impure spirits have yielded their place to the pure Spirit of God. Working by the Blood, this Spirit purges the soul from sin and from the power of sin. The terror of the community has been overcome by something more effective than chains; divine love has taken over the controls. The man is *sitting at the feet of Jesus*. Here *he finds health and happiness* — and good sense: he is clothed.

*To be with Jesus is heaven* here and hereafter (Luke 23:42; Phil. 1:23). And altogether desirable. Peter catches a glimpse of that heaven and quickly makes his choice: "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles," Matt. 17:4.

Even though Jesus had less of a home than the foxes and birds, as He had said the day before, *the healed man wants to be with Jesus*. In the company of Jesus the horrors of the past can never return; for these spirits could not even enter the herd of hogs without His permission. With Jesus he can live a decent

life. And there those who knew him when he was "crazy" cannot mock him.

Jesus grants the request — of devils who want to go into the herd of hogs, of the selfish crowd who want him to leave; but *the request of this healed man He declines*. He tells him to go home. The disciples look on wide-eyed. On the previous day two men whom Jesus had called to follow Him had asked to go home first, and Jesus had refused to let them go (Matt. 8:19-20).

*The granting of a request isn't always a proof of God's love.* It may prove His anger (Ps. 78:29-31; Ex. 10:28-29). And His refusal to grant a request may be a proof of His love (2 Cor. 12:8-9). A Christian possesses a unique privilege. It is this assurance: no shortsighted impulse expressed in my prayers will keep the all-knowing and all-loving God from shaping my life in a way that will make me more fruitful, and in this way happier.

### III. The Missionary

From farm and city *the owners* of the hogs, when they were told about the loss of the herd, *came to see who was responsible* for the damage that had been done. What right had Jesus to destroy their property? As a stranger visiting their shore, none. But as the Owner of the cattle on a thousand hills, as the One who wields earthquakes, floods, and wars, shall anyone forbid Him or call Him unjust?

*There may have been a special act of justice in the destruction* of this herd. Perhaps the owners were Jews. (1) This eastern shore was part of the land of Manasseh and now in the tetrarchy of Philip. (2) Josephus tells us that a number of Hellenizing Jews lived here. (3) Directly across the sea were populous Jewish cities. (4) The Gerasene calls Jesus the Son of "the Highest," Mark 5:7; this was a Jewish term, which expressed the superiority of Jehovah over the gods of the Gentiles. (5) If the owners had been non-Jews, it is likely that they would have been sharper towards this Stranger and would have commanded Him to leave; they were afraid, Mark 5:15, and did not scold Him; they act like people who for gain have broken the Law of Moses, who know it is wrong for them to have hogs; they are a large crowd, yet they cannot firmly face this Teacher of the Law. If these people were Jews, their transgression was flagrant and called for a major act of justice, which in this case was executed through devils.

Two thousand hogs in one day was a big blow. The people are panic-stricken by the thought that they may lose the rest of the herds. (See Acts 19:23-29.) Unanimously they ask Jesus to leave. They pray, as it were, Go, Lord Jesus, don't be our Guest, and don't let Thy gifts to us be blest. The full realistic evidence of the salvation that is to be found in Jesus is before them, but *no desire for spiritual help* stirs within the fat hearts of a stomach-minded people who must eat.

Seeking their life, they lose it. For such selfishness cannot enter heaven. *Jesus* is deeply concerned about them. He therefore gives them a missionary, the man He has healed.

The man had not expected this assignment. But soon we find him joyfully active in the great service which the Savior had outlined for him. He is living to bring to others the Christ he knows. Again he is "possessed," or "enthusiastic," that is, "filled with God." The powers of body and mind, scattered for destruction by the first possession, are now, by the second, harmoniously co-operating for the rescue of men.

His wish to be with Jesus implies a loneliness. He had no friends. Those who by blood or earlier companionship might have been his friends had publicly expressed their preference for the herd. But there was, on the other hand, no social obligation to encumber him. "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord," 1 Cor. 7:32. *With a whole heart he is busy speaking to relatives, friends, the whole city, the whole territory.*

His special qualification as a missionary is that *he knows the value of a soul.* All else is worthless by comparison. Two thousand hogs are a small price to pay for that which is bought by the blood of the Son of God. The whole world of herds and pasture lands would provide no ransom for a soul, nor even a bribe to influence the destroyer to lessen his hold on his victim. An understanding of the price and of the power needed to free us fills us with love for Him who freed us and with zeal to rescue the re-deemed that He may not have died in vain.

Jesus startles us as a Master in the ways of teaching. This man needed a clear picture of the power of Jesus to free a soul. He had experienced this power in himself. But he was given more than that. He was permitted to see the herd of hogs rush with a huge splash into the sea. Unforgettable. It was like seeing the bodies of the Egyptians washed upon the shore of the Red Sea. The rod of the oppressor was broken. And *who is there that couldn't tell of it?*

Like the shepherds at Bethlehem, the healed man tells of all he has seen and heard, of all that God has done to him. However uneducated, inexperienced, untrained, socially maladjusted, he penetrates and fills the Ten Cities with his story. (See Mark 7:31 to 8:9.) For *he could tell* in words that rang true of the saving power of Jesus which dissolves chains, gives strength to the helpless, and fills His servants with the joy of living for others.

W. F. BECK

