

THE



OF JESUS

in Luke's Gospel

PART 2

WRITTEN BY DR. STEVE JONES

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Review the context and big picture every week – The goal of a book study is not just to learn each individual lesson, but to build understanding of the Bible, how it fits together, and how to study it.

Try not to use this guide as a script. The purpose of this material isn't to give you exactly what to say. Rather it is to give you the content you need to structure and develop your own lessons. Teach as much as you feel is important for your class. Feel free to go off topic if your own study leads you to approach the passage in a slightly different direction.

Don't feel like you have to cover everything. There is a lot of material in each lesson. Some classes like to cover a lot of ground. Other classes like to camp on one point and drill deep. Start by teaching the Main Point, then teach the Main Bullet Points. Use the extra detail and discussion questions as you see fit. The goal is to generate discussion, specifically regarding life-application. So don't worry if you don't get all the way through a lesson.

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LESSON 7 | POWER OVER SIN

THE PARALYTIC LET DOWN THROUGH A ROOF LUKE 5:17-26

In 1891, Irish Author Oscar Wilde wrote a novel entitled “The Picture of Dorian Gray.” It told the story of a young man who had his portrait made. He then sold his soul in exchange for one thing. He wanted to stay young and beautiful forever, so he made a deal with the devil that allowed him to stay youthful and beautiful while the picture would age and show the effects of time and sin. When he sees the effects of his sin on the portrait, he becomes ashamed and hides the portrait from view. Eventually the man in the picture is so disfigured by sin that it bears no likeness to Dorian.

This story is more than just a dystopian tale. It reveals something about human nature. The portrait is a representation of our soul. We routinely allow sin to damage our soul in order to avoid pain or experience pleasure in our bodies. But our soul is the realest part of us. Today we are going to look at a miracle of Jesus in which he demonstrated the fact that he has power over both body and soul.

In Luke 5, a paralytic man’s friends bring him to Jesus. Jesus takes this opportunity not only to heal but to reveal his true identity and to show us where his priorities really lie.

JESUS MEETS A PARALYTIC MAN (V17-19)

Jesus comes to Capernaum and begins to teach. The house is soon flooded with people coming to hear Him. Verse 17 says that in addition to teaching, “the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing.” Four men rush their paralytic friend to Jesus. When they don’t find a way into the house, they dig a hole in the roof and lower the man down on his stretcher before Jesus.

Most houses in Judea were made of mudbrick. The roofs were flat and sometimes had stairs or a ladder going up so that people could use the roof like a terrace in the cool of the evening. So we shouldn’t be shocked that they were able to get up there. What is amazing is that they were able to dig a hole in the roof big enough through which to lower a man on a stretcher. For some reason this always strikes me as a little bit comical. Do you think Jesus and the people below heard the scratching or noticed debris begin to fall on them? Do you think they were accurate in the first hole they started, or did they have to try again when they realized they were not digging directly over Jesus? However the

scene materialized, the men were successful in deconstructing the roof and in lowering their friend down through the opening in front of Jesus.

JESUS FORGIVES A PARALYTIC MAN (V22-27)

If that wasn't startling enough, what Jesus does in response definitely raises eyebrows. He comments on the faith of the man's friends and then proceeds to forgive the paralytic man's sins. The Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy. They realized that only God has the power to forgive someone's sins. They realized that Jesus was making a bold and scandalous claim. But there is another group that was also probably scandalized by what Jesus said. Think about it. Four men brought their sick friend to Jesus, destroying someone else's house along the way. They wanted their friend healed. Can you see them peeking in through the hole they dug? Maybe one of them whispered to another up there on the roof, "So, did he heal him? What is happening? I can't see." The other says, "Wait, Jesus is saying something... nope, he didn't heal him, he just forgave his sins." Then maybe another one of them hollered down, "No, Jesus, he can't walk! We brought him here for you to heal that."

JESUS HEALS A PARALYTIC MAN (V28-30)

What happens next shows that Jesus is orchestrating the moment to reveal something about Himself to everyone. In verse 23, He asks those present a question. "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'" The truth is that the first one is easier "to say." Why? Because there is no way to tell whether you actually did it or not. Telling a paralytic person to stand up and walk is incredibly difficult because there will be visible, tangible proof of whether you have the power to do what you say.

That is the point Jesus is working towards. He is demonstrating to people that He has the power to do what they cannot see by showing He has the power to do what they can see. In verse 24, Jesus says, "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home."

APPLICATION

In this moment, Jesus revealed several things about gospel priorities. Noticing them will enable us to organize our lives according to what matters most.

1. Jesus is God – Sometimes we try to make Jesus easier to handle by pretending he was just a good teacher. Some suggest that Jesus never claimed to be God. This is simply not true. Though we have no record of Him actually saying the phrase, "I am God," there are several places where Jesus clearly states that He considers Himself to be one with

the Father. This is one of them. Jesus claims to forgive sins. Jesus wasn't just claiming to forgive the wrongs this man had done to Him. He was claiming to forgive all the wrong that this man had done. The Pharisees knew what that meant. They were muttering to themselves "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (v7) When Jesus says the phrase "so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (v10), he is basically saying "so that you may know that the Son of Man is God" because only God has the authority to forgive sins.

You can choose not to believe that Jesus is who He said He is. But you can't pretend that He didn't claim to be God. It's a scandalous claim that prevents us from thinking of Him simply as a good teacher. Only three kinds of people claim to be God: crazy people, deceivers, and God.

As CS Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*:

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord.

2. Jesus Cares More About People than Property – Jesus isn't at his own home. This is someone else's house. Jesus doesn't seem to mind that these people have torn a hole in someone else's roof. He doesn't tell them to stop, to wait patiently outside, or to respect other people's property. He lets them do it, then marvels at their faith (v5). It is the faith of the friends, not the faith of the paralyzed man, that initially moves Jesus. This isn't the only time Jesus disregards personal property. Later in Luke 8:26-39, Jesus heals a man possessed by a legion of demons by casting the demons into a herd of pigs. Students and critics of this passage often ask how Jesus could allow a whole herd of pigs to be destroyed. The answer is the same as with the roof: Jesus cares more about people than property.

We live in a world where we value people more than things. We value a herd of livestock over the health of a soul. The priorities of the gospel are different. Our world tells us to love things and use people. Jesus calls us to love people and use things. Jesus calls us to adopt His priorities: to see all our time, talent, and treasure as instruments to be used to invite people into his Kingdom. He isn't saying we should intentionally destroy other people's property. He is saying we shouldn't value our own possessions more highly than people. In the gospel economy, people always come first.

3. Jesus Cares More About Your Soul than Your Body – We see the whole story and we know that Jesus both forgave his sins and healed his body. I wonder how it felt in real time. I wonder if during Jesus’s discussion with the Pharisees there was any nervous tension among the friends or a little twinge of disappointment in the mind of the paralytic man. What if the man had left still paralyzed? What is going on here? Again, Jesus is revealing His priorities and showing us how they are different than our own. In fact, sometimes they are the exact opposite of our priorities.

Jesus is showing us that He cares more for our soul than for our body. Don’t misunderstand. Jesus cares about our physical well-being. He constantly reassures His disciples that God knows and cares about these things as well. In Matthew 6:31-33, Jesus says:

31 Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

God cares about our bodies and our health; but they aren’t his primary concern. He will one day give you a new body. But your soul is something He is working on forever – starting now. What is more, Jesus isn’t just making a point in theatrical style, He is showing us a physical picture of what sin does to the soul. He looks at a man whose body is broken and incapacitated by disease and dares to suggest that the paralysis might not be his biggest problem. He wants us to see that sin is doing to this man’s soul what disease is doing to his body.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways that the world’s priorities differ from God’s? How does that sometimes affect how we serve God and what we ask from God?
2. What does it mean that Jesus cares more about people than property? How do we sometimes do the opposite?
3. What does it mean that Jesus cares more about your soul than your body? How do we sometimes do the opposite?
4. Have you ever seen people in church who are like the Pharisees, unwilling to listen to Jesus and unwilling to get out of the way?
5. How can we be like the four friends who did whatever they could to bring their friend to Jesus? What is the difference between trying to fix our friends ourselves and bringing them to Jesus?

LESSON 8 | POWER AND LORDSHIP

JESUS AND THE MAN WITH A WITHERED HAND LUKE 6:1-11

I love America. I mean, I know it's not a perfect place. No country is perfect. But I am glad I live here, and I am grateful for the many freedoms I enjoy. One freedom I am grateful for is that we get to elect our public officials. Everyone can find fault with how the system works, but having visited countries that don't have at least some choice when it comes to their elected offices, I am grateful for what we have. When it comes to politics, I agree with the old adage that says, "Politicians are like babies...they need to be changed often... and for the same reason."

There is one aspect of democracy, however, that does not help us when it comes to Christianity. The problem, which I will elucidate in a moment, is most clearly expressed in a hokey Christian bumper sticker that was attempting to make a culturally relevant point. Whether its a t-shirt, or a bumper sticker, or a social media post, it tries to grab your attention by taking a popular slogan and spinning it into a Christian saying. This one, which I saw in an election year, said simply "Elect Jesus Lord of Your Life!" I get the point. And it's a point worth making. Too many Christians whether they know it or not, view politics as the real source of their hope. This bumper sticker is trying to redirect the fever people pour into politics towards the ultimate source of meaning: Jesus. Here's the problem with that saying: you don't elect Lords. Lords are Lords whether you like it or not. Democracy doesn't prepare us to live under the Lordship of Christ. Democracy predisposes us to think that we are ultimately in charge, and that we have the final say on things. We make the decisions. We have no concept of someone else being in charge whether we like it or not, and there is nothing we can do about it.

The Christian call is not about inviting Jesus to be Lord of your life. It is about acknowledging that Jesus is Lord and willing submitting to his Lordship. In the words of Abraham Kuyper, who was both a theologian and a politician (he served as the Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1904), "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"

As Paul wrote in Philippians 2:10-11, "10 at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." One day, every knee will bow and every tongue will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. Learning to live under the Lordship of Jesus is one way of understanding what it means to live the Christian life.

Today we are going to look at a particular miracle that Jesus performs as part of a larger encounter He has with a group of people who followed him around finding fault with everything he did. As we look at it, perhaps we will gain insight into what it means to live under the Lordship of Jesus and be able to ask ourselves where we are currently residing.

THE DISCIPLES BREAK THE LAW (V1-2)

The story starts with a dispute about food. Verse 1 says, “Now it happened that He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain.” The Pharisees see them doing this and complain. Verse 2 says, “But some of the Pharisees said, ‘Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’”

When I was a child, the first time I read this, I thought the issue was that they were stealing. But that was not the case. Hospitality was an important part of Ancient culture. Jewish law and custom made allowances and provision for strangers and travelers. Deuteronomy 23:25 says, “When you enter your neighbor’s standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor’s standing grain.” The issue was that, according to the Pharisees, the disciples were breaking the law by working on the Sabbath. Specifically, they were reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing food. That is four demerits right there.

The Pharisees are clearly nit-picking and fault-finding. Most rabbis of the day had zero problem with what the disciples were doing as long as they weren’t using a tool to do it.

JESUS DEFENDS THE DISCIPLES (V2-4)

Jesus defends the disciples by referring to an episode that occurred in the life of David. 1 Samuel 21:3-6 tells how David was fleeing from Saul and comes to the tabernacle. When he asked for food from the priest, the only food that could be found was the ceremonial bread called the “bread of the presence,” which was placed before the Lord. It was replaced every week on the Sabbath. The bread from the previous week was to be eaten only by the priests. David and his men are hungry. Ahimelech gives him the bread provided he and his men are ceremonially clean. According to some Jewish traditions, this event happened on the Sabbath, because that was when the bread was replaced. From the story, it is unclear whether the bread is the new bread that was before the Lord, or recently removed bread from the previous week. Either way, the point is that Ahimelech put mercy before rigid adherence to ceremonial law.

By using this example, Jesus doesn’t enter into a petty legal squabble with the Pharisees over what constitutes work and what doesn’t. He simply places mercy above legalism. This is a point that Jesus has made elsewhere. In Matthew 9:13, Jesus says, “Now go and learn what this means: ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, RATHER THAN SACRIFICE,’ for I did not

come to call the righteous, but sinners.” He is quoting from the Old Testament. Hosea 6:6 says, “For I desire mercy rather than sacrifice, And the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

JESUS DECLARES HIS IDENTITY (V5)

Verse 5 says, “And He was saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’” This statement is more than a single utterance. This was a statement evidently Jesus kept making to them in other contexts as well. He is underscoring his identity to them. He is Lord of the Sabbath. Though not as explicit as other declarations, this is one of those moments where Jesus is claiming to be God. The Sabbath isn’t just any old command. It is one of the ten commandments, and it is rooted in the creation of the world and the character of God. To say you are Lord over such a divine institution is tantamount to claiming to be the one who instituted it.

Jesus is telling them that He is the one who instituted the Sabbath and that they are doing it wrong.

JESUS DEFIES HIS ENEMIES (V6-11)

It is in this context that Jesus performs the miracle we see today. He did it to pick a fight and to make a point. Verse 6 says, “On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered.” Verse 8 says Jesus knew what the Pharisees were thinking. They wanted to see if Jesus was going to heal this person. Not because they wanted to believe but had doubts. Not because they wanted to see a miraculous sign. Verse 7 says, “so that they might find reason to accuse Him.” Imagine being so hard hearted and hateful that you say someone in need and only hoped they would be healed so that you could hate your enemy more.

Jesus takes the bait. He summons the man, but before he heals the man, Jesus, in verse 9, asks the crowd a question, “I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?” This question isn’t just about whether healing is right or wrong. He is also calling out the Pharisees. They are working too. In fact, they are working pretty hard for people who aren’t supposed to be working. But instead of working to save life, they are hard at work looking for reasons to do harm to Jesus and to destroy his life. Then to make his point, verse 10 says, “after looking around at them all,” he healed the man. He intentionally looked every one of his enemies in the eye. He stepped onto their turf and said it belonged to him. The miracle is proof that what he said in verse 5 is true. He is Lord.

Verse 11 is proof that Jesus was right about what they were thinking, “But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.” This miracle did more than make them mad. They were filled with rage. They wanted to do harm to Jesus.

APPLICATION

In this encounter Jesus declares his Lordship. He also teaches us some important things about what it means to live under the Lordship.

1. Jesus’s Defends His Disciples: For those who follow Jesus, living under his lordship means living under his protection. All through the Old and New Testaments, God is shown to be the one in whom we can take refuge and who will defend his own. Jesus shows that here. He defends his disciples. This is what the Holy Spirit does for us now. He gives us aid when we are attacked and need defense.

2. Jesus Challenges His Detractors: Jesus doesn’t shy away from a fight. The Pharisees don’t realize every place is Jesus’s home turf. They are sitting in his chair, and he is going to push them off it. That goes for all of us. We will always be uncomfortable with the Lordship of Jesus as long as we are still trying to sit on a part of the throne in our own hearts. Jesus won’t let us stay comfortable until we get off of His throne.

3. Jesus Restores the Desperate: There is a forgotten person in this story: the man who was healed. We aren’t told whether he came that day to be healed. Perhaps he had accepted his lot and was simply in the synagogue that day to hear the word and find hope in God. He ended up receiving more than he ever imagined. That is what the Lordship of Jesus still does. Through Jesus, God is still able, as Paul says in Ephesians 3:20, “to do exceedingly abundantly more than we ask or think.” Living under the Lordship of Jesus means living in hope.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does the Lordship of Jesus mean? How/Why does the Lordship of Jesus make us uncomfortable?
2. In the Pharisee's eyes, what did the disciples do wrong? How does Jesus defend his disciples? What are some ways that we act like Pharisees in this story?
3. What does it mean that Jesus defends his disciples? What hope can we draw from that?
4. What does it mean that Jesus challenges his detractors? How does Jesus challenge our assumptions and make us uncomfortable?
5. What does it mean that Jesus restores the desperate? What hope can we gain from this miracle?

LESSON 9 | POWER AND AUTHORITY

A CENTURION'S FAITH LUKE 7:1-10

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “drill sergeant?” Most of us see a man with a flat brimmed hat, dressed in fatigues, standing nose to nose with a fresh recruit, looking him in the eye, and shouting at the top of his lungs. If I asked you to imagine what the drill sergeant was yelling about, you probably saw that he had picked some minor infraction to nit-pick the trainee about, and no matter what he said, the recruit was going to end up doing pushups, scrubbing the latrine, or running laps around something. I remember hearing a lecture from a Marine Core Sergeant. He was describing not just why he did what he did, but how. He said that he wanted the recruits to pay attention to every detail about what he said. He even said that one reason drill sergeants shout is so that other recruits can hear what is being said. In fact, the drill instructor said that before he would “dress down” a trainee, he would make sure he had positioned himself in a place where his voice would carry over the most people. He wanted the other trainees to hear what he said, take notice, and try to avoid the punishment that was about to be inflicted.

Though he is no drill sergeant, Jesus frequently said things like “He who has an ear let him hear.” Such phrases should cause us to look closely at what is going on and see if what our attention is being drawn to is either something we should be avoiding or something we should be doing.

One example of this is what Jesus marvels at. Jesus is only recorded as marveling or being amazed at something twice. Mark 6:6 says He marvels at the unbelief of the people in Nazareth. During the first week of our study, we looked at why Jesus was not able to do any miracles in his hometown and how we could avoid being like the Nazarenes. The other time occurred when Jesus saw the faith of a centurion. Luke 7:9 says, “Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, ‘I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.’”

Jesus commended people for their faith throughout his ministry. But the only time he marveled at someone's faith, it wasn't a Jew he marveled at. In his whole ministry, the person Jesus met with the greatest faith was a Roman centurion. It is probably, therefore, worth looking closely at his faith to see how we can emulate it.

A COMPASSIONATE FAITH (V1-3)

The story starts with a centurion worried about his slave. Verses 2-3 say, “2 And a centurion’s slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. 3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave.”

Slavery is a complex and controversial subject; but it is important to know a couple important facts. Nowhere does the Bible excuse or condone slavery. Ancient slavery was slightly different than the slavery of our recent past. It wasn’t motivated by concepts of inferior classes or races. People frequently became slaves due to defeat in war or through debt. Ancient slavery developed into a system of reciprocal obligation between slave and master. In fact, many slaves, after they gained their freedom, took the name of their former “masters” and continued to work for and with them.

Here we have a centurion who owns a slave, but he also cares deeply for him. When he exhausted the limits of medical attention, he didn’t give up. He heard about Jesus and sent some Jewish elders on his behalf. He has profound compassion and wants to do all he can for this person.

The word “compassion” literally means “to suffer (passion) alongside (con).” It is an attribute that Jesus manifests on several occasions. Matthew 9:36 says, “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” Matthew 14:14 says, “He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.” To have compassion means to be broken hearted about a person’s situation and desire to do something about it. Jesus was compassionate and healed the sick. The centurion had a similar compassion and though he couldn’t heal him, he went to the one who could.

A GENEROUS FAITH (V4-5)

Another aspect of the centurion’s faith was his generosity. Verses 4-5 say “4When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, ‘He is worthy for You to grant this to him; 5 for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue.’”

This was not an ordinary Roman soldier. He was a centurion, the backbone of a Roman army. His was the face of Roman oppression. It was people like him who took advantage of their positions of power to enriched themselves by plundering and robbing the provinces that they ruled. But this particular centurion has used his power not to oppress, but to bless. You could say that this was only a public relations stunt intended to curry favor with the locals. But most people can see through such buttering up. The Jewish leaders start by telling Jesus that “he loves our nation.”

He seems to have been a member of the group of people called “god fearers.” They believed in and prayed to the God of Israel. They studied the Scripture and went to synagogue, where they sat in the back. Many God-fearers lived and acted like Jews but refrained from officially converting because the central act of conversion to Judaism was circumcision. This centurion was probably in that category. He loved Israel and served Israel’s God. He used his position and wealth not to better his own life, but to build a synagogue for a conquered people whose faith he had adopted.

He had a generous faith. He saw what he had simply as a means of service to other people. Now he demonstrates his generosity again by cashing in whatever chips he has and using whatever favor he has earned with the Jewish people not for himself, but for his slave, someone the culture would have told him to undervalue.

A CONSIDERATE FAITH (V6)

This centurion is someone who is focused on others and not himself. He sees others. He serves others. He uses what he has to help others. Next, he shows how he is considerate of others as well. Verse 6 says, “Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, ‘Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof.’”

Though he loved and served the God of Israel, and though he had built the local synagogue, he didn’t think it should give him any favors. In fact, perhaps he understood far too well what it means for some Jews to come to the house of a Gentile. He knows that some Jews would consider themselves defiled by being in contact with him. He doesn’t become indignant. He doesn’t remind them of the things he has done for them. He actually is accommodating and considerate in his understanding of issues that might cause problems for others.

This is a very Christlike attitude. As Paul says in Philippians 2:3-4, “3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

What that means is not always insisting on your rights or on your privileges. It means being considerate of other’s weaknesses and even their preferences. It is what Paul really meant when he says in 1 Corinthians 9:20, 22:

20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law... 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

He doesn't want to cause offense. So, he allows Jesus, should he wish, to stay out of a Gentile's home. He has a considerate faith.

A SERVANT FAITH (V7-8)

The final attribute of the centurion's faith is found in his final words to Jesus. In Verses 7-8, he says,

⁷ for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it.

The centurion tells Jesus, through friends, that he knows Jesus doesn't have to be physically present to heal his slave. The reason he knows this is because of his military experience. He has spent his career giving orders. Notice, though, the centurion doesn't say, "I know what it means to have authority." Instead, He says, "I am a man placed under authority." The centurion knows he has authority, but he also knows that there is someone greater than him with more authority. In the same way that he gives orders and people do what he says. He realizes Jesus has a greater authority and has the right to command him, his slave, and even the sickness, and they will all obey Him.

The centurion doesn't see himself as being a boss, using whatever power he has to get whatever he wants. Rather, he see himself as a servant and wishes to use whatever power has been placed on him to serve those he has been entrusted with. He is living out what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:22, "For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise, he who was called while free, is Christ's slave." Though he has power, he sees himself as a servant of all. And asks Jesus to give the order.

CONCLUSION

As we look closely at the centurion's faith, may we be eager to demonstrate similar faith. May our eyes always be looking with compassion on others, and may we be eager to bring them to the one who can heal. May our faith cause us to be generous with what we have. May we be considerate of other people's weaknesses, and may we use whatever we have been entrusted with to serve other people. Most of all, may we see Jesus, like the centurion did, as having authority over everything in this world, including ourselves, and may we seek to obey him in all things.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does compassion mean? How does the centurion demonstrate it? What is the opposite of compassion? How can we be more compassionate?
2. How does the centurion demonstrate his generosity? What is the opposite of generosity? Why are we frequently afraid to be generous?
3. How would coming to a Gentile's house be a potential problem for a Jew? How is the centurion considerate of them? What issues like this exist in our day?
4. What does it mean when Paul says He becomes all things to all people? How can we be considerate of others? What is the opposite of being considerate?
5. How do most people use the power they have? How does the centurion use his power? How can we be more like him?

LESSON 10 | POWER OVER DEATH

JESUS RAISES A WIDOW'S SON LUKE 7:11-17

Lines make me anxious. Grocery stores, restaurants, concession stands, traffic jams. Wherever you have to wait in line, or worse, choose a line, you can bet that if I am there, I am standing there worried. My wife asked me one time why I was so anxious. It got me thinking. There are a couple of reasons. First, I am worried I chose the wrong line. I am that guy who constantly switches lanes because the other lane looks like it is moving faster, then I switch back when it isn't, then I switch again when I start doubting myself. I am also worried about being cut in line.

It is incredibly frustrating when you are waiting in line behind a slow cashier, someone with a complicated request, or a person who seemingly has never encountered technology (or money) before, then the store opens up another register and someone behind you gets to go first. My sense of justice feels violated. I want to scream "Hey, I was here first!"

Or in traffic, when someone cuts through the median or on the shoulder or does some other sketchy traffic move to get ahead of you. People also don't know how to zipper merge anymore. Either they were never taught or simply don't care. But when two roads merge, we are supposed to alternate one car, then the other. There is always someone who won't let you in, or who tries to get ahead of you.

Why does this happen? People are in a hurry. And when we are in a hurry, we tend to focus on ourselves. I heard somebody say that you should never tell people you are stuck in traffic.... you are traffic. We tend to see ourselves as having real concerns, real issues, and real schedules that we have to keep. Though we might not say it out loud, we treat other people as less important than us, and their problems as less real than ours. But to somebody else, you are the traffic they are telling their friends they are stuck in.

We are all worried that no one sees us, that we don't matter. Some express it in anxiety over being bypassed on the road. Others complain about everything. I heard someone say that the reason people complain is because they are worried about being overlooked. Still others fall into depression thinking no one sees them or cares about them.

The good news is that though the world frequently treats us like we are anonymous faces in a sea of humanity, God does not. The Bible is full of promises that God sees us

individually, takes great interest in us, knows us deeply, and loves us very much. One place this concern is on display is in the miracle we are going to look at today. Perhaps as we study this miracle, we will come to understand more deeply God's individual concern for each of us.

JESUS SEES (V11-13a)

The story begins with Jesus continuing his teaching tour through Galilee and the surrounding region. He is preaching, teaching, and gathering a following. Luke 7:11 says, "Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd." This is the only place that Nain is mentioned in the Bible. Most people think it is the same place as modern day Nein, which is about 6 miles southeast of Nazareth. It's a small town being visited by a famous and important teacher, and a crowd is following him.

As Jesus and his crowd is entering the city, another procession is leaving a city: a funeral. Verse 12 says, "Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her."

The start of verse 13 contained an important phrase, "when the Lord saw her..." This is the first time that Luke calls Jesus "Lord." Perhaps he does it here because he recounted the event of Jesus declaring himself Lord a few verses earlier. But it also is an interesting juxtaposition. The Lord is also a title which carries with it notions of importance, attention, and deference. If you knew that a Lord was coming to town, you had better take notice. Any other Lord might have pushed his way through the crowd determined to assert his importance by making sure people gave way to him. But not this Lord. Jesus sees her.

This is a powerful reminder that Jesus concerns himself with us. He isn't a self-absorbed distant dictator. He is a loving Lord who sees you and knows you. As Jesus will say later in Luke 12:6-7, "6 Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows."

JESUS CARES (V13b)

Jesus did more than see her. Verse 13 goes on to say, "When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her." Remember, compassion is from a Greek word which literally means "to suffer (passion) alongside (con)." Jesus suffers alongside us. He understood her situation and felt compassion for her. Luke says that the woman was already a widow and now she was burying her only son. The description of the woman as widowed and childless is important. She was an orphaned parent, with no family and no one to look after her. The description of the child she is burying is also important. The Greek word that

gets translated as “only” is the same word used in John 3:16 to refer to Jesus and His relationship to God. It literally means “only begotten.” when Jesus saw her weeping over her dead son, I wonder if he saw in it the agony the Father would feel when He would go to the cross.

Sometimes we think because God knows that one day He will make everything right that He doesn't fully appreciate what we are going through. We wonder if God is telling us to stop crying because it's no big deal. This is not the case. Jesus is proof that God sees our situation and has compassion on us.

JESUS TOUCHES (V14)

It might seem like an insignificant detail, but verse 14 says, “And He came up and touched the coffin.” In Jewish culture, the word which is translated as coffin means something more like an open wooden cart on which a shrouded body would be placed. Jesus, by touching it, made himself unclean according to Jewish ceremonial purity laws. But that's the point: He isn't afraid to get his hands dirty. He doesn't heal at a distance. He is a God who comes close and enters into our situation.

This is an important reminder. Life is messy. Sin is messier. God doesn't like our sin. But He isn't afraid of it either. He isn't some germaphobe holding a cloth over his face, keeping us at a distance with a ten-foot pole, and shouting for us to take whatever we want just don't get close to him. Jesus is proof that he loves us and bridges the gap that separates us. He comes near to us in our sin. He makes a way for us to be free.

JESUS RESTORES (V13b-15)

Jesus speaks first to the widow telling her not to cry. At first this might sound like he is offering her half-hearted and pointless condolences. It's like he's saying, “cheer up, he is in a better place, or his suffering is over.” Both potentially true statements, but which rarely do any good for people in the midst of grief. I wonder if the woman looked and shrugged and nodded like she had the countless other times that day someone had said something similar to her. I wonder how her countenance changed when she saw him lay his hand on the dead body and stop the procession. I wonder if she was about to get offended about him intruding on her mourning when she heard him speak to her dead son. I wonder if she had spoken to her son at all since he had died. People sometimes speak to the deceased at funerals, but they don't expect a reply. Jesus did what seemed useless and pointless. He spoke to a dead person. He simply said, “get up.” And the man rose. Verse 15 says, “The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother.” He sat up and started talking. I wonder what he said. We aren't told what he said. We do see that Jesus gives him back to his mother then goes on about his business.

Jesus restores the man to life and restores the man to his mother.

CONCLUSION

It is easy to read this miracle and wonder why Jesus raised this woman's son but doesn't do it to other people in similar circumstances. The same question can be asked about healings. Why does this person get a miracle and someone similarly deserving does not? It's a good question. And a hard one. First, God does still raise people from the dead. It is rare, like all miracles, but it does happen. Second, in the instances where Jesus does raise someone from the dead, they are brought back to life, not raised to new life like Jesus was when he was raised and like we will be in the resurrection. They all died again eventually. CS Lewis wrote a poem that imagined Stephen, the first martyr from the book of Acts, talking to Lazarus, calling him the real first martyr. Stephen died for his faith. Lazarus came back to life for his faith, only to have to die a second time.

Like all the other miracles, the point is not how we can get our own miracle and avoid some unpleasant aspect of life. The point is to see who Jesus is revealing himself to be. This miracle demonstrates that Jesus has power over death. It is supposed to illustrate for us what Jesus says to Mary and Martha before He raises Lazarus. John 11:26 says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die."

John had a similar experience on the Island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation. In Revelation 1:17-18, he recounts meeting the risen Jesus: "17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

We don't need to fear death. Jesus has the keys of death and Hades. Jesus sees our suffering. Jesus has compassion on us. Jesus comes close to us. Jesus is in the process of restoring all things and making all things new.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever felt overlooked, like you didn't matter, like no one cared? How did you respond to feeling this way?
2. What does it mean that Jesus sees what we are going through?
3. What does the word compassion literally mean? What does it mean that Jesus has compassion on us?
4. What is the significance of Jesus touching the coffin? What does it show us about Jesus? How does that apply to our lives?
5. Whom does Jesus restore in this story? What does this miracle demonstrate to us about who Jesus is and what power Jesus has?

LESSON 11 | POWER OVER NATURE

JESUS CALMS A STORM **LUKE 8:22-25**

When I was in the fifth grade, I was selected to be a part of the school crossing guards. I thought it was the coolest thing ever. I got a badge, an orange belt, a stop sign on the end of a long stick, and a whistle to blow to get students attention and tell them to stop running. My job was to keep students from crossing the street until it was safe to do so. The head crossing guard, a teacher, would give the signal and we would all switch from blocking students to blocking traffic. The job also came with special bright yellow rain gear to help us do our job in poor weather.

One day, as I prepared for the afternoon shift, the teacher in charge told us to don our rain gear because it looked like there was going to be rain. So, I got ready and went to my side of the intersection. That day all the students were running as fast as they could. No matter how much I whistled or tried to impede their progress with my sign, they just ran past me into the intersection and down the street. Exasperated, I turned to make eye contact with the head crossing guard to see if he saw what I saw. As I turned my head, that was when I saw it: a massive thunderstorm. The kind that turns the whole sky black, except for the streaks of lightning that jumped from cloud to cloud. Suddenly I understood the panic and started to feel it myself. I wanted to go home.... now.

We left our posts early. It was raining by the time we got back into the school. I changed quickly and got ready to run the couple blocks home. As I started home, the rain got harder. By the time I made it to my front door it had started hailing. The combination of the flashing lighting, booming thunder, driving rain, and pounding hail was too much for me and I ran inside the house and hid under the covers on my bed. Fortunately, my grandparents were visiting and home when I got there. My grandma came to check on me to see what the matter was. I asked where my grandpa was. She told me he was in the garage. What I saw when I got to the garage surprised me. My grandpa had the garage door partly open, and he was sitting in the garage watching the storm. The flashes of lightning, the booms of thunder, the hail bouncing off the driveway - none of it phased him. He seems to be almost enjoying it, like he was watching a documentary on TV. It slowly began to dawn on me that if he wasn't scared, I didn't need to be either.

Something similar is going on in the miracle we are looking at today. Jesus demonstrates His power over nature by calming the storm. In the process he astonishes the disciples

and calls them to a greater level of trust than they had before. Perhaps as we study this miracle, we will grow in our ability to trust Jesus as well.

JESUS SAILS (V22)

The story starts with Jesus getting into a boat with his disciples. Verse 22 says, “He said to them, ‘Let us go over to the other side of the lake.’” This is an important detail to keep in mind. This whole thing was His idea. The lake that is referred to is what we call the Sea of Galilee. It is really a freshwater lake and not a big one at that. Because there were cities all around the shore, taking boats was a common and convenient mode of transportation. The disciples, who were fishermen, were probably also used to shuttling people from place to place as well. So, when Jesus says they want to go to the other side of the lake, they don’t think anything if it.

JESUS SLEEPS (V23)

Once the boat sets sail, Jesus finds a comfortable spot and lies down. In Mark’s version of the story, we get a little more detail. Mark 4:38 says, “Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.”

While He was sleeping, a storm rises up on the Sea of Galilee. Verse 23 says, “a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake.” The Greek literally says, “a whirlwind of wind.” The Sea of Galilee is below sea-level. It is surrounded on all sides by steep hills. It has the look and feel of standing at the bottom of a bowl. On the northwest side of the lake, there is mountain pass connecting the region around Galilee with Nazareth and the Judean countryside. Wind from the Mediterranean gets funneled into the mountain pass and down into the lake.

These storms were not infrequent on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples piloting the boat were probably used to dealing with them. But this one turns out to be stronger than they were expecting. Verse 23 ends by saying “they began to be swamped and to be in danger.” Mark 4:37 adds, “the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.”

JESUS STILLS (V24)

When people who are used to being on the water start getting afraid, you know something is wrong. The disciples start to panic. That’s when they notice that Jesus is still asleep. Verse 24 says, “They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’” Mark makes their cry more emphatic. Mark 4:38 says, the disciples frantically “woke him up, shouting, ‘Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?’” They not only are worried about the storm, but they are also worried about what seems like their master’s lack of concern for their plight.

The rest of verse 24 says, “And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm.” This scene is an interesting juxtaposition of both the humanity and divinity of Jesus. One minute he is an exhausted teacher grabbing a quick nap before he has to speak again. The next minute he rebukes a storm, and it stops.

I wonder what He said. It doesn't say. It just says he rebuked the wind and waves. I sometimes imagine the scene unfolding like a tired, hardworking dad being disturbed from Sunday afternoon nap by noisy kids. Jesus sits up, then stands up, then drowsily walks to the front of the boat, and while rubbing sleep out of his eyes with one hand, exhales very loudly, “SSSHHHHHHHH!!!”

JESUS SCOLDS (V25a)

In my reconstruction of how this miracle took place, Jesus then walks back to the back of the boat and as he lays back down, preparing to go back to sleep, he wearily says to his disciples, “Come on guys, where is your faith?”

Faith is a fancy word that we use a lot and unintentionally have a bad definition for. We think it means trying hard to believe what you know isn't true. The truth is that faith is interchangeable with the word trust. “Where is your faith?” is the same as Jesus asking, “Don't you trust me?”

Faith is hard in moments like this, but the truth is that faith is for moments like this. It's easy to believe when times are easy. It's not costing anything of you to believe, it's not requiring anything of you. When everything you know isn't working anymore, and you feel trapped and afraid, what do you choose to believe? The disciples gave in to fear. They trusted their feelings and began to doubt the care and concern of God. They thought they had found an area of life that was beyond Jesus's limits. They were wrong. And Jesus lovingly scolds them for it. He reminds them that in hard times it is important to tell yourself that your fear is lying to you. You have to choose to listen to something else more. You have to choose to believe Jesus, to trust Jesus, to have faith in Jesus in spite of how you feel.

JESUS SHOCKS (V25b)

The final comment on this miracle comes from the disciples. The end of verse 25 says, “They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, ‘Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?’” They had been with Jesus a while now. They had seen him do some amazing things. They had left everything to follow Him. They believed He was the Messiah. But even they were not prepared for what He showed them. They thought they knew who he was, then he did something that showed them that he was more than even they had realized.

APPLICATION

This miracle is supposed to expand our view of Jesus as it did the disciples. It is supposed to make us ask what Jesus asked the disciples. Where is our faith? Do we trust Jesus? This miracle gives us some ways to trust Jesus.

1. **Trust that Jesus Knows:** The disciples weren't on the lake during a storm on accident. Jesus sent them there and knew where they were. Sometimes, when hard times comes, we tend to think that everything is our fault or an accident. We use our prayers to remind God of facts that we aren't sure he fully appreciates. This miracle is a reminder that we can trust that God knows where we are and where we are isn't an accident.

2. **Trust that Jesus Cares:** Sometimes we can interpret the apparent absence of divine guidance as apathy. We can cry to God like the disciples, "don't you care that we are perishing?" The Psalms are full of examples of people asking God how long it is going to be before He does something, or when is He going to wake up or take notice of what is going on. Jesus never promised us that life would be easy. In fact, He promised the exact opposite. In John 16:33, Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world." Jesus offers us peace not by fixing our problems, but by offering His presence in the midst of the problems.

3. **Trust that Jesus Can:** The last way we are invited to trust Jesus is to remember that nothing is beyond his power. Sometimes that is a harder truth to wrestle with. If God can fix things, why doesn't he? The reason he calms the storm is so that the disciples can see Jesus is more powerful than the storm. He didn't calm every storm. He showed that he could, so that next time they won't need him to calm the storm. They will be able to trust Him in the midst of it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why were the disciples on the lake in the first place? What hope can we draw from that?
2. How do the disciples interpret Jesus sleeping? What else could it mean?
3. What does Jesus calming the storm show us about His power? How does this apply to our lives today?
4. How does Jesus scold the disciples? Why does he do it? What can we learn from it?
5. Why are the disciples shocked by Jesus? Have you ever thought you knew Jesus then were shocked by what he did?

LESSON 12 | POWER AND HOPE

JESUS HEALS THE GADARENE DEMONIAIC LUKE 8:26-39

Have you ever started something and realized a little way into it that you had messed up and the only thing to do was to start all over again? When I was a kid, I used to do this all the time while playing video games. This was before “save points,” which allow you to get to a hard part and save right before it starts so that if things go wrong you don’t have to go to the beginning; you can just go a little way back. Before that, if you messed up, you might have a few extra “lives,” but sometimes it was just too hard to keep going because you lost all your special tools or weapons or whatever you had accumulated. There would be times my sisters and I would be taking turns playing games. When it was my turn, I would start a game, but if I didn’t do the first part of the game right, I would claim that turn didn’t count and start the game over again. I wanted a fresh start from the beginning to get it right.

Sometimes we wish we could do that with life as well. We look back on the choices we made that didn’t work out and the choices we wish we had made that might have worked out better. This causes some people to live in the past. This causes others to live in regret. This causes some to believe that they are failures and are forced to accept a lower level of happiness.

Like the famous quote spoken by Marlon Brando’s character in the 1950’s movie *On the Waterfront*. He is lamenting all the shortcuts he took and bad decisions he made. He complains to his brother, “You don’t understand. I could’ve had class. I could’ve been a contender. I could’ve been somebody. Instead of a bum, which is what I am.”

The problem is that there are no do-overs in life. You can’t hit the reset button and try again from the beginning. The good news thought is that when we hit those low points, we are finally in a position to hear the gospel. The good news is that Jesus came exactly for people in that situation. We all, because of sin - both ours and other peoples’ - end up wrecking our lives. Jesus comes to show us, like Paul says in Romans 8:28, that through him “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.” What that means is that our lives might not turn out the way we were expecting, but if we will trust God and heed his call, God will work all things out for our good and his glory.

Nowhere is this more on display than when Jesus comes to a Gentile area across the Sea

of Galilee and heals a man who is possessed by a legion of demons. Through this miracle, Jesus shows us that no one is so far gone that they cease to be valuable to God or able to be redeemed and find a place in his kingdom.

JESUS CONFRONTS A DEMON POSSESSED MAN (V26-31)

We forget that after Jesus calmed the storm, they kept sailing. Jesus was going somewhere. Verse 26 says “Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.”

There is some confusion about the exact location. In Matthew 8:28, Matthew calls the area the land of the Gadarenes. Some manuscripts of Luke refer to the land as the Gerasenes or the Gadarenes or the Gergesenes. Both probably convey accurate information. Gerasa was a bigger Roman city about thirty miles from the sea, but Gadara was a smaller town six miles away. Matthew probably refers to Gadara while Mark refers to Gerasa. One locates the incident by the nearest large city, while the other locates it near a closer small town. The exact location is not central to our understanding. Whatever the precise place was, it was in the region called the Decapolis, a collection of ten Gentile cities near the Sea of Galilee. Because it was Gentile, it was possible to raise pigs, a fact that will be important in a little bit.

As soon as Jesus gets out of the boat, trouble starts. Verse 27 says, “And when He came out onto the land, He was met by a man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs.”

We have already talked in lesson 3 of this series about demon-possession. It is a topic that makes us comfortable. But the New Testament is full of reminders that God has a spiritual foe in the world and as Ephesians 6:12 says, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but ... against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” That is on display here. But something more is happening. Jesus is showing us that the victims of demon-possession are not the enemy. He has come to deliver this person from the real enemy.

We also see that this man was severely oppressed by demons. The name the demon gives is Legion, which was a Roman military unit made up of about 6000 soldiers. This man was full of countless demons. He was uncontrollable and unhelpable. The local people couldn't bind him and couldn't clothe him. They had given up on him and just tried to avoid him as much as possible.

Jesus isn't afraid. Jesus comes to this man. Jesus confronts the demons. But Jesus does more than that. He cures the man.

JESUS CURES TO A DEMON-POSSESSED MAN (V32-34)

The miracle that Jesus performs for this man is odd. The demons beg not to be sent to the abyss. Verse 32 says, “Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and the demons implored Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission.”

Most people reading this have a response like, “What on earth happened?” It gets weirder. Once inside the pigs, the demons wreak havoc on them, too. Verse 33 says, “And the demons came out of the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.” Mark 5:13 says that in all about two thousand pigs drowned.

How are we supposed to understand this? Why did Jesus do this? First, we have to ask ourselves what our problem with the story is. Usually it is something like, “Why does Jesus allow the demons to destroy someone’s herd? Those pigs belonged to somebody.”

The short answer is that Jesus cares more about people than property. We live in a world where we value people more than things. We value a herd of livestock over the health of a soul. The priorities of the gospel are different. Our world tells us to love things and use people. Jesus calls us to love people and use things. Jesus calls us to adopt His priorities, to see all our time, talent, and treasure as instruments to be used to invite people into his Kingdom. He isn’t saying we should destroy other people’s property. He is saying we shouldn’t value our own possessions more highly than people. In the gospel economy, people always come first.

But why does He allow it? Here are a couple possibilities. First, the panic and death of the pigs provides a powerful visual representation of the destructive power of sin and Satan. Watching what happens to the pigs is supposed to make us wonder and say, “Wow, all that was happening inside one man?” Instead, all we see and say is “Dude, those pigs belonged to someone.” Second, it also allows us to see the full destructive power of sin. Sin entices us. Sin lies to us. Sin promises us good things. But sin’s goal is to drive us to our death. Seeing pigs driven into the sea is a living presentation of the that. Third, the destruction provided physical proof that the man had been delivered. Someone seeing this man sitting in his right mind might be initially suspect of whether the cure was real. They might ask, “so where did the demons go?” To which, the herdsman could reply, “we saw the demons go into the pigs and drive them to their death.”

JESUS COMMISSIONS A (FORMERLY) DEMON-POSSESSED (V35-39)

It would be easy to stop the story with the man sitting there in his right mind while dead pigs floated in the sea behind him. But that is not where the story ends. We get to see how the people respond to the miracle. When people heard what happened they all came out to see Jesus and the man who was now, as verse 35 says, “sitting down at the

feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.”

When they saw the miracle that had transpired, they say something odd. They asked Jesus to leave. Verse 37 says, “And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear.” This isn’t them asking Jesus to depart from them because they feel sinful and unworthy. They want him to leave because they were afraid of what He might do next. How many more people is he going to heal? How many more pigs is it going to cost us? They would just rather him be gone. So, he leaves. The rest of verse 37 says, “He got in the boat and returned.”

Before Jesus left, though, He gave the man he healed a mission. Verse 38 says, “the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him.” The man wants to go with Jesus --both because he believes in Jesus, but also because he probably wants to leave the place where he had been tormented by demons and hated by the people. He was worried that he would always be “that demon-possessed guy” in everybody’s eyes. But Jesus doesn’t let him come along. Instead, in verse 39 tells him, “Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you.” So, he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.”

The people were not ready to accept Jesus. So, Jesus sent them a missionary. You might think that Paul was the first missionary to the Gentiles, but you are wrong. It is this guy: an unnamed guy whose life was ruined until Jesus confronted him, cured him, and commissioned him with a job to do.

Notice also what Jesus tells him to do versus what the man actually does. Jesus tells him, “Describe what great things God has done for you.” What does he do: he goes “proclaiming...what great things Jesus had done for him.” Luke is making the point that is easy to miss. This guy realized who Jesus really was.

As a side note, there is some proof that this guy did his job well. Mark 7:31 tells about the next time Jesus comes back to this region. When he gets there, people already know who he is and bring him people to be healed. How did they know who Jesus was and what He could do? Probably because of the testimony of this man. He did what Jesus told him to do. May we be willing to be similarly faithful and similarly anonymous in the service of Jesus.

APPLICATION

Looking over this story, it is easy to dismiss. I don’t remember the last time I needed to look a passage up for what to do when you are possessed by a demon. So, we sometimes treat stories like these as interesting, but not very applicable. There is some

important truth here that applies to all of us. In short, no one is ever so far gone in sin that they are beyond the reach of Jesus. Here are three ways this story shows us no one is too far gone.

No one is Beyond Seeking: It seems like the whole purpose of the trip was for Jesus to seek and save this man. He doesn't do anything else before He heads back home. Evidently, in Jesus's mind the trip was worth it. The people in the local town stayed away from him. But Jesus came from across the lake to find him. This is a real-life example of a shepherd leaving his 99 sheep to find the 1 lost sheep. Every one of us is someone that is valuable to God. God thinks we are worth seeking after. None of us are so far gone in sin that God doesn't want us back.

No one is Beyond Saving: Additionally, none of us have wrecked our life so bad that God can't repair it. I heard a preacher say that God has more mercy than you have mess. Here is a man with enough demons inside him to kill two thousand pigs. He was wanted by God. He was redeemed by God. And the next moment, he was sitting at the feet of Jesus and in his right mind. The first lie sin tells us is that no one will find out or care about our sin. Then when we stumble into sin, the second lie is that no one will love us or accept us if they found out. The truth is God hates sin, but his hatred of sin is motivated by his love for you. He wants to get you out of the pit you're stuck in. And no pit is too deep.

No one is Beyond Serving: This last point is equally important. God does more than pay off our sin debt or heal our disease - whichever analogy you prefer. He has a place for each of us to serve in his body. One minute this guy was naked and alone living among the tombs, the next minute he was a missionary called to speak about what God had done and to seek others the way Jesus had sought him. When God calls us, he calls us out of sin and into his kingdom to play the part He has for you in His body. Everyone has a part to play. No one is beyond serving.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever felt like you were hopelessly lost, and your life was irrevocably broken? Have you ever looked at someone else's life and thought that? What hope does this story offer?
2. What's the point of the drowned pigs? Do you have a problem with it? What purpose does it serve?
3. What does it mean that nobody is beyond seeking? How does this story show Jesus going beyond to seek someone who seemed lost beyond reach?
4. What does it mean that nobody is beyond saving? What lies does Satan tell us to entice us into sin and then to keep us in it? How does this story show Jesus saving someone who seemed beyond saving?
5. What does it mean that nobody is beyond serving? What does Jesus send this healed man to do? What is the sign that he was actually successful?

— ABOUT THE AUTHOR —

Dr. Steve Jones has been the Teaching & Training Pastor at Kingsland Baptist Church since June 2016. He teaches regularly through the church in a variety of formats and works with the Discipleship Pastor to equip and develop leaders at Kingsland who are empowered to use their gifting to teach the Bible in life-changing ways.

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