

## Luke 8:26-39

### Jesus' Mission Trip

**Prayer:** Father, we know that you are a God on mission. You desire to make your name known among us, and we know that you desire to save us from our sin against you and its effects and from our spiritual enemies. You do that by sending your Son on a mission to rescue us and by sending your church on a mission, empowered by the Holy Spirit to send the good news of that rescue. But Father, I pray today that by seeing Jesus leave his homeland and the people he grew up with, we also learn something about how we are to go on mission ourselves, whether in our city or abroad. It is in Jesus name that I pray, Amen.

**Intro:** At Redeemer, our vision is Christ, Community, and Culture, and by that, I mean we want to make Christ's name known, together as a community, in our culture for its good. We believe that we, as Christians, are a sent people who have been given a mission, to tell people about Jesus and what he has done by coming, dying, rising again from the grave, and ascending into heaven, one day to return and make all things new again. We want to invite them to be a part of God's family because we are convinced that is actually good for people in the short term and in eternity.

When we talk about the idea of mission here at Redeemer, that's the heart of the matter. That's what we're trying to do when we go to Mexico to build a house for a family or to Taiwan to spend time with college students. That's the goal of endeavors like Refugee Language Project that understands the nations are at our doorstep and we have an opportunity to minister to a felt need, build relationships, and then disciple people toward Jesus. We also want to be missionaries in the parts of our lives that we are going to be in naturally, like toward our

kids, discipling them and baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and to be missionaries in our workplaces or neighborhoods or campuses. For each of these mission fields, we might expect a different focus or methods, and it can be easy to get lost in the methodology – I’m a nerd, that’s what I like to talk about, read about, learn about – but we also have to keep a clear sight on the target of making Jesus’ name known, as a community, in our culture, for its good.

My favorite movie as a kid was Apollo 13. And my favorite scene is the movie where the astronauts, Jim Lovell, Fred Haise, and Jack Swigert realize along with the NASA guys back home that as they try to get the home, they have to use the Lunar Module to do a controlled burn, accelerating to adjust their pitch in gimble. They are off course. But the Lunar Module wasn’t designed to do this. It didn’t have the computers to make this happen, so they have to by hand aim the spacecraft toward Earth and try to hold the Earth in their targeting reticule while strapped to rocket.

This passage from Luke gives us the perfect opportunity to line up our missional targeting reticule with the paradigm of missional work – Jesus. This is perhaps other than his transit time in Samaria, Jesus only mission trip outside of his native Jewish culture. He crosses the Sea of Galilee; if you were with us last week, we saw Jesus calm a storm along the way, but now that we are Gerasenes, we can watch Jesus as this story unfold, and from how he operates, we can see five big ideas that are true of Jesus’ missional work that are also universally true of our missional work, no matter what environment we are in.

Verse 26: **Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had**

**demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.**

### **Jesus' Mission Involves Spiritual Warfare**

And so, one of the very first things we notice is that Jesus engages in Spiritual Warfare. He shows up, and the enemy makes himself known. Demons are unclean spirits that work to keep people from worshiping God. They seem to follow Satan, whose name literally means the accuser, and they go about their work in a couple of different ways. They might harass a person like we see here. These demons will cause this man to hurt himself and others. They attempt to rule over this man and his community through fear. They abuse the man, drive him to live in a land of death filled with tombs, and according to Mark's gospel, cut himself with stones. Now, I hesitate to say that anyone who is self-injurious is demon possessed, but I do not doubt for a second that Satan or his forces would hesitate to attack an already vulnerable person, perhaps suffering from a biologically caused psychological disorder or from the pain of deep trauma, and to urge such a person to injure themselves. But its not just physical injury. Some of you constantly listen to the lies of the Enemy about who you are. You beat yourself up with your words, condemning yourself or accusing yourself. And if Satan's name means accuser, we ought to be very careful about how we unintentionally ally with him. We can be self-aware and acknowledge our short-comings, but if we perseverate on what is wrong with us instead of turning to Jesus to see what is right with him, we are providing aid and comfort to the enemy.

Sometimes, in the Old Testament, we would see demons set themselves up as pagan deities, objects of worship for the false religions in the nations that surrounded Israel,<sup>1</sup> false religions that sought provision of things like, rain or crops or trade or success in military conflict. And sometimes, out of grace God would actually provide the crops or protect the people were looking for, even if they were looking in the wrong place. But the effect was that the people would actually be lulled into a sense of complacency. And if I had to guess, in a place like the United States that has a great deal of material wealth, complacency would be a very effective tactic. We can forget that we need God or that he is sovereign. Now, whether our Spiritual Enemies use complacency or a more direct route of attack on us to make us forget God, we have to acknowledge that our war, as Paul says, is not against flesh and blood, but powers and principalities, against rulers of darkness in the spiritual high places. Every one of our missionary endeavors has a spiritual component, and we should not be surprised when we encounter spiritual opposition. Satan does not want to give up ground.

### **Jesus' Mission Relies On His Authority**

But, we shouldn't let that discourage us. Watch what happens in verse 28:

**When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of him.**

The fight is not one of equals. There is a terrible painting out there of Satan arm-wrestling Jesus and they are locked in a duel of equals. But that's not a good analogy. The fight isn't even close.

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<sup>1</sup> Pagan worship is also related to demon activity in the Old Testament (Lev. 17:7; Ps. 106:37). Demons delight in making heathen idols the focus of their activities. Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., [\*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

Jesus has no equal. We forget that Jesus has now equal, but the demons don't. They know that Jesus, as God, is unbound in power and has absolute authority over them. They can only go where he allows and have to leave when he commands them. The demons in this story also realize their fate. Satan and his allies know that Jesus is one day going to remove them from the earth and put them in the abyss. The book of Revelation paints a picture of a great war when Jesus returns, and his army smashes the enemy. It's not a contest.

Sometimes the mission of making Jesus known looks like slow-going, and there at times, we can be discouraged by what is going on near to us. We can be mocked; we can be tortured, we can even be killed. But even death doesn't have the final word over us if we are Jesus' people. We look forward to a resurrection from the dead because Jesus has already defeated death and risen from the dead. We look forward to a time when all the evil is driven out from the world because Jesus does the driving out.

So when we try to live as missionaries in our world, and we encounter opposition, there is no need to give up or to surrender to our culture. Jesus is going to have the final world. No matter what happens between now and the final day, Jesus will be the victor, and we will be with him. Satan is not going to win out. And in fact, in Matthew 28:18-19, Jesus tells us that all authority has been given to him *and* he will be with us until the end of the age – in other words, he is not abandoning us.

And yet, as Christians we act like he is a lot of the time. We start off very excited to share Jesus with people, but when we realize that there is opposition, we slowly stop talking about Jesus. When we realize that our views are popular, we start to talk less about those parts of the Bible. Eventually, we concede that if Jesus is going to grow his church, he needs his

church to look like the world around us in its behavior, rather than believing that Jesus doesn't need a PR campaign. He is the Son of the Most High God and that's enough to create fear in the hearts of Satan and his demons, enough that they would beg to be sent into some pigs, rather than that go to the Abyss just yet, where they will receive justice for the harm they've caused and the lies they've told. And even that has irony. I wonder if the demons realized they ran the pigs into the Sea of Galilee, the very same sea that Jesus had just calmed down in Luke 8:24.

Jesus' authority means we do not have to be ashamed of the gospel, the story of redemption that is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, as Paul says in Romans 1 because it is the power to save. Jesus' uses his authority to transform lives.

### **Jesus' Mission Results in Transformed Lives**

In Luke 8, Jesus uses his authority to transform this man's life. He was living in a graveyard, cutting himself with rocks, breaking chains and escaping, living his life naked and tormented by demons. This is not a life one would want to live. But Jesus by the words of his mouth force the demons to leave this man alone. Verse 35 tells us that when the townspeople got to the scene, they find the man, clothed, in his right mind and sitting at the feet of Jesus, the way a pupil might sit to learn from his teacher, like a disciple before his master.<sup>2</sup> This man is also able to live among other human beings without posing a threat to them or himself. No longer does Legion command this man to self-inflicted pain and misery, but Jesus now guides this man toward a knowledge of Jesus. One of my friends, a fellow seminary student, pointed out to me as we were talking about this text that this man's humanity has been restored to

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<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, [\*The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text\*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 340.

him. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

Think about your own life apart from a saving knowledge of Jesus. What behaviors that enslaved you that Jesus has freed you from? You may still have to fight with temptation, but I’d be willing to bet that at least you do not desire the things you once did. Even if you’ve loved Jesus as long as you can remember – which is what many of us who are parents pray for our children – if you thought it about it, and were honest with yourself, you could probably get a good sense of what your life might look like without Jesus. Take the temptations you struggle with, and think about what a life indulging in that particular sin would be like. Think about the pain and heartache you would get if you gave in to every whim that entered your heart. I know if I think about that, the results are scary, at least to me. But I can trust in Jesus’ work in my life, even if my own heart would want to buck God’s authority and do whatever it wanted. We haven’t achieved perfection, but by giving us, as Ezekiel 36 puts it, hearts of flesh in place of hearts of stone, and by sending us his Holy Spirit to dwell within us, Jesus is changing the trajectory of our lives.

### **Jesus’ Mission Makes People Uncomfortable**

Now, that’s a good thing, to be given a new life, but it’s not always going to be received well. This guy is clean; he’s not breaking chains, he’s wearing clothes. You would think that the townspeople would be ecstatic. You would think that they would want to make Jesus a meal in his honor, let him stay a few days, help anyone else needing help, join his small group, go to Jesus’ church. But nope.

Verse 37: **Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.** Now, it could be that they are also a little peeved at having lost a herd of pigs, but it seems like they are really more scared of the demonstration of Jesus power in rescuing this guy. They had made peace with the situation, and they were comfortable with having a demon-possessed man running around the cemetery, every time they went out to visit Granny's tomb. And then Jesus comes to town and rocks the boat.

Maybe you're a Christian, and you run a chicken sandwich chain, hypothetically called something like, I dunno, Chick-fil-a, and some columnist says you are "creepy Christian infiltrators" when you open restaurants in their city.<sup>3</sup> Some of you have lost friends who preferred the old you before Jesus. Some of you have family members that don't like to be around you very much because Jesus has made a new you they are quite sure how to deal with. Some of you are trying to navigate the workplace when you don't want to indulge in the manipulation and backbiting that is present in your workplace. Some of you are in dating relationships, and Jesus is changing who you are, and the person you are with doesn't understand why want to submit your sexuality to Jesus and wait for marriage. Maybe you became a Christian after being married, and your spouse doesn't even begin to understand your attempt to treat marriage as an institution mean to honor God and proclaim the Gospel, rather than a contractual agreement by which two parties fight for what they feel they are owed.

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<sup>3</sup> Dan Piepenbring, "Chick-fil-A's Creepy Infiltration of New York City," The New Yorker, April 13, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-gastronomy/chick-fil-as-creepy-infiltration-of-new-york-city>(accessed April 14, 2018).

Jesus is disconcerting; his people are disconcerting to a lost and dying world. Our message that people need a Savior from their sin and to bring them into right relationship with God is folly to them. And so these people ask Jesus to leave. And guys, he responds by getting in the boat and returning. He doesn't engage in culture war; he doesn't call them names, he doesn't get on Facebook and passive-aggressively complain about "some people." He moves on and continues his mission elsewhere. He did what he came to do. He came to rescue two guys (Matthew's gospel says there's actually two, Luke just focuses in on one) and he did it and left. By the way, next time you wonder if you are worth saving, remember that Jesus, got in a boat sailed across the Sea of Galilee, and calmed the storm just for two dudes. All that, for two guys. And then he left. But there was one last thing to do before he left.

### **Jesus' Mission Involves Multiplication**

Jesus multiplied himself by defeating demons who oppressed this man, by showing his authority, changing this guy's life, despite local opposition, and then commissioned this man to tell everyone what he had done. Jesus actually doesn't let people talk a lot about what he has done for them in the gospels, mostly because he ministers among Jewish people who are going to use their own pre-existing categories for the Messiah to pigeon-hole Jesus. But here, among non-Jewish people, Gentiles, who don't have a lot of preconceptions about who Jesus is and what he had come to do, he doesn't let this man leave with Jesus, but tells, **"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.** Jesus came on mission, changed this man's life and turned him to a missionary. Every single one of us in this room who have encountered Jesus have been commissioned as a missionary to our home. We have been

given a job to let as many people know about Jesus as possible. We do that corporately as a church that cares for our city, seeking to preach Jesus to our culture for its good, but we also do that individually, even among those relationships that Jesus makes awkward, relating how Jesus has shown us grace and forgiveness from God and given us new lives. This man went proclaiming, not ashamedly, bashfully, apologetically talking about Jesus. He went proclaiming, like a herald boldly announcing good news to all who would listen to him.

We were not able to go with Jesus when he ascended to heaven and returned home, at least not yet, but Redeemer, because Jesus came on mission into our world, because he suffered beating and crucifixion, because he commands demons to flee, and because he has changed the life of every single person he calls to himself, we can be a people who are fervently on a mission, on an offensive against the evil spirits that try to harm and heart those still captive and oppressed, going with the authority of Jesus, despite opposition. We have heard like the man, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." May we obey that command and fervently as this man.

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## Discussion Starters

1. What has Jesus freed you from? Share your story with your group.
2. Have you experienced opposition because of Jesus? If “our battle is not against flesh and blood” and you have experienced Jesus’ grace, how should you think about the people who have not responded well?
3. The man was commissioned by Jesus to go home and tell people what Jesus had done for him. Who do you need to tell about Jesus? What do you need to tell them?