

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: The Stunning Priorities of Jesus' Kingdom
(*Studies in the Gospel of Luke*)

Miracles that Lead to Discipleship

(Luke 4:14-30)

Study #4

Introduction: Great expectations...

Our current study of the life of Jesus brings us to passages today that include two of Jesus' miracles. And miracles are great. Who doesn't love to hear about God's powerful miracles?

No, miracles don't appear on every page of the Bible. Far from it. But they are definitely there.

In the Old Testament we read of Red Sea crossings and manna in the wilderness, supernatural victories over enemies in battle and healings. These stories tell us that God is powerful. He intervenes.

Then we come to the New Testament and learn about the life of Jesus, which was one big intervention, from conception forward. After Jesus died and rose again, God worked miracles through the apostles, and we love reading about and learning about all these miracles.

Both of the miracles we'll see today are truly amazing, and we will take time to see them clearly and in all their glorious detail.

But if you are expecting that these two miracles will be the prime focus for today's message, I can tell you now, they won't be.

Both miracles set the stage for the main point of the message. They both did happen. But the miracles were props for the main event.

The miracles we'll see today set the stage for Jesus to lead His followers into radical discipleship. As they take those steps, Jesus invites us all to take our own next steps with Him, today, too.

There is no timestamp for either of these episodes in Jesus' life. Luke only tells us that the first one happened on "***one of those days.***"

Power Over Nature - Jesus Calms a Stormy Sea (8:22-25)

One of "Those" Days (v. 22)

[22] Now on one of those days, Jesus and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." So they launched out.

The line of travel Jesus told them to take took them from the region of Galilee, a Jewish area, to a land known as the Decapolis, a place largely inhabited by non-Jews (Gentiles).

This wouldn't have been a long trip. It was three to five miles across the lake and was a trip that the fishermen among the disciples had been taking all their lives.

This day quickly became "***one of those days***" when a storm blew up while they were crossing over.

Trouble on the High Seas (v. 23)

[23] But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger.

It is not unusual for severe storms to suddenly descend on the Sea of Galilee. The storms can sweep down from any of the hills that surround the lake and turn it into a tempest - and this storm was quite a tempest.

While the storm raged, Jesus slept. That's a picture of either total peace of mind or of total exhaustion, maybe both.¹

But the disciples were definitely NOT asleep. They had been battling sea-storms for years, but this one was more than they could handle.

A Cry for Help! (v. 24)

[24a] They came up to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"

Now, remember. These men were sea-hardened fishermen who had worked this body of water all their lives. They woke up a carpenter from Nazareth to tell Him about their troubles.

Note that we aren't told why they woke Jesus up.

Clearly, they wanted Him to know that they were in trouble, and they probably were looking to Him for help of some kind.

It is possible (and given what follow, I think it is likely) that they were looking for Him to get up from His nap and help with paddling or with a bailing bucket.

Jesus gave another kind of help, altogether.

[24b] And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm.

As soon as the sea heard the voice of her Master (that is, after all, what the disciples called Him) she calmed down.

This telling of the storm on the Sea of Galilee ends with a question from Jesus and another question from the disciples.

¹ Note the contrast between this and another journey in a boat...See the prophet Jonah, asleep in a boat, running away from God, with a dead conscience. Then, Jesus, asleep in a boat, carrying out the will of God, with a clear conscience.

A Challenging Question from Jesus (v. 25)

Jesus' question of the disciples (v. 25a)

[25a] And He said to them, "Where is your faith?"

I don't know that I would have seen faithlessness in what the disciples had done to this point. Jesus saw faithlessness.

How so? How did what they did display faithlessness?

Again, if I had been evaluating their actions in the boat, I think I would have commended them. After all, they turned to Jesus for help (of whatever kind He might give) and they called Him "**Master.**"

But Jesus asked, "**Where is your faith?**"

Jesus saw from the beginning that they were lacking in faith. You and I might not have seen it at first, but we do see it at the end.

The disciples' question about Jesus (v. 25b)

After the miracle, ***[25b]...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?"***²

Whatever they had expected from Jesus when they woke Him up, it certainly was not this.

They were hoping that He could do something to help them out. But either the quickness of the miracle, or the ease with which He performed it, or the fact of the miracle itself, exploded their categories about who Jesus was.

Their response after the calming of the sea should have been worship and gratitude. Instead, it was fear and amazement.

² Alfred Edersheim a Jewish Christian scholar (1800's), writes that Jesus wondered at their lack of comprehension of who He was and of what He was capable.

Their experience as fishermen told them that it was impossible that such a storm should cease in an instant. And they had not yet had the thought that their Master was Master over the forces of nature.

Jesus knew that they should have had that thought. He wasn't satisfied with the degree to which they trusted Him.

He expected more.

Given what they had already seen from Him, He expected them to approach Him with a full recognition of who He was: God. He had raised the bar of expectation high. He had great expectations that they would have responded to His miracle with gratitude and worship.

So, what are we to do with this post-miracle rebuke? You and I are to take it to heart and hear the same challenge from Jesus to us.

Today, Jesus is calling us to a full confidence in who He is and what He is able to do, so that the only *unknown* for us is what this all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving Jesus deems best for us in any situation.

We are to see that Jesus was more than a man of God, more than a prophet, and more than a good, moral teacher. He calms storms on a raging sea. He is sovereign over nature. He is God in the flesh.

We can only imagine that this experience on the Sea of Galilee was a game changer for the disciples. They would now know that they should expect great things from Jesus.

So, no, we don't make demands of Jesus that He calms every storm in our lives. But let's join the disciples in expecting great things from Jesus.

- Engage friends about Jesus with confidence that He can open their hearts.
- Pray for great provision for desperate needs.
- Ask Him for great changes in the lives of people you love.
- Ask Him to heal broken bodies, hurting souls, damaged lives.
- Expect Him to use you powerfully in the lives of others.

Jesus wants us to live with great expectations for what He can and might do because of who He is.

Now, with calmed waters outside and jittery disciples inside, the boat landed on the southeast shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus and the disciples got out of their boat, having landed in the country of the Gerasenes. One of the citizens of the region is at the center of the action that follows.

Power Over Demonic Forces - Jesus Calms a Stormy Soul (8:26-39)

Into Enemy Territory (vv. 26-27)

[26] Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. [27] And when He stepped out onto the land, a man from the city met Him who was possessed with demons; and he had not put on any clothing for a long time,³ and was not living in a house, but among the tombs.

It is not unusual for the Bible to include the stories of people who are tormented by demons. And throughout His ministry, Jesus dealt with people who were possessed by demons, or *demonized*.⁴

And then, from beginning to end, the Bible assumes the existence of a real, personal devil and real, personal demons as much as it assumes the existence of God, angels, and life after death.

Of course, the Bible doesn't attribute all illnesses and all mental problems to demons. Sometimes it does and sometimes it does not.

³ Luke is the only gospel writer who comments on the man's nakedness, which is significant. Wearing clothes or not was a matter of personal preference. His nakedness was a manifestation of the influence of the devil.

⁴ See these passages in Mark's gospel where Jesus cast a demon out of a man in a synagogue (1:23-28), healed many who were demon-possessed on the same night He healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Mark 1:32), and gave His disciples authority to cast out demons (Mark 3:15).

But in this case, there is no question. The pitiful man who approached Jesus was oppressed by demons. And he had been oppressed for a very long time.

He lived in a way he would never have chosen and was ruled by forces other than his own will.

How he came to be this way is anybody's guess.

Was he involved in some sin that opened the way for demonic activity?
Was he deeply involved in occult practices?
Was he simply the hapless victim of evil spirits?

We are not told.

Nor does Jesus seem interested in finding out. As we work our way through the narrative, Jesus doesn't ask about the man's personal habits, his past lifestyle choices, or his family of origin.

Jesus simply saw a stark created-in-the-image-of-God tragedy. He was naked. There was an animal wildness about him. Everything about him reeked of uncleanness.

The man approached Jesus and the demon within him spoke.

A Power Encounter (vv. 28-33)

The demons' fear and malevolence (vv. 28-29)

[28] And seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell down before Him, and said with a loud voice, "What business do You have with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?⁵ I beg You, do not torment me!"⁶

⁵ This is a title for God frequently used by heathen: Melchizedek (Gen. 14); Balaam (Numbers 24); Isaiah, quoting the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14); Daniel, in chapters 3, 5, and 7; the Philippian slave-girl with the spirit of divination. (Acts 16)

⁶ The demon had been tormenting this man for years and begs Jesus to not be tormented.

We often think of demonized people as evil, and that is a true way to think of them. But that is not all they are. They are also pitiful. They live under the influence of demons who want their destruction.

The demon who was speaking here wanted to keep its home inside this miserable man. It wanted to keep tormenting him. It didn't want to leave, as Jesus had been commanding it to do.

[29] For He had already commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard; and yet he would break the restraints and be driven by the demon into the desert.

At times, neighbors had tied him up with chains. Every time, supernatural strength would course through his body, and he would break the chains.⁷

Now, the human host (who remains nameless) has become too wild. No one approaches him anymore, and he is left alone to roam among the tombs and out in the deserted areas like a wild beast.

Jesus demanded an answer from the demon to a question He never did ask of the man.

The demons are cast out with a word (vv. 30-33)

The demons identified (v. 30)

[30] And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

The spokes-demon responded with "**Legion**" because there were actually many, many demons afflicting this man.⁸

⁷ Immense physical strength is a phenomenon that is mentioned frequently in the literature that addresses demon possession.

⁸ A Roman legion varied in size from 3,000-6,000 soldiers. But the focus is less on the number of demons and more on the cruel, destructive, and strong group of demons that was tormenting this man.

These demons have met their match in Jesus, and they know it.

The demons beg (v. 31)

[31] And they were begging Him not to command them to go away into the abyss.

The demon speaking to Jesus was terrified. It knew who it was dealing with. It knew Jesus to be the Son of God.⁹ It begged for mercy.

Jesus granted this request, which freed the man from his long years of bondage.

Jesus set the man free (vv. 32-33)

[32] Now there was a herd of many pigs¹⁰ feeding there on the mountain; and the demons begged Him to permit them to enter the pigs. And He gave them permission. [33] And the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

The pigs' actions told the herdsman what had happened. They ran to spread the news to all the citizens of the region. (v. 34)

A Call for Jesus to Leave (vv. 35-37)

Good News! (v. 35)

So, what would have greeted the eyes of the citizens of the region when they arrived on the scene?

They would have first looked out at the south end of the Sea of Galilee and seen a couple of thousand pigs floating on the water.

Then, they would have looked away from the sea to where Jesus was and would have been greeted by another sight entirely.

[35] And the people came out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind...

Not only was it obvious that the demons had entered the pigs. It was clear that the demons had left the man.

Now, instead of restless, he is seated calmly; instead of naked, he is fully clothed; instead of raging, he is in his right mind; instead of shunning human company, he is seated at the feet of Jesus.¹¹

You and I would agree that what has happened is great stuff. A wonderful miracle has occurred.

But some didn't see it that way. Some saw the good news of this man's deliverance as bad news. And those who had come from the surrounding region to see for themselves **[35]...became frightened.**

Bad News? (vv. 36-37)

[37] And all the people of the territory of the Gerasenes and the surrounding region asked Him to leave them; because they were overwhelmed with great fear...

What did they fear?

They had seen this demoniac break chains. Now, somehow, Jesus has tamed him. Maybe they feared Jesus, who had such power.

They had been successful pig farmers. Now, a whole herd is gone, no doubt due, somehow, to Jesus. Did they fear further loss?¹²

⁹ It is interesting that the disciples on the boat wondered, "Who is this Guy?" while the demon immediately knew Who it was dealing with.

¹⁰ The fact that the swine were present clues us into the fact that they were in a Gentile land. The pigs were "unclean" from the perspective of a Jew. Moses' Law listed pigs among the animals that the Jews were not allowed to eat.

¹¹ He has taken the posture of a discipline, listening to what Jesus has to say.

¹² At least one commentator suggests that their fear stemmed from their financial loss, wondering what else Jesus might do to jeopardize their material possessions if He were allowed to stay.

It's possible that they simply feared the supernatural. What is certain, though, is that they all wanted Jesus to leave.¹³

Jesus knew that His ministry would sometimes lead to rejection. So, He accepted their rejection, got into the boat, and prepared to return.

But we keep reading and learn that there was one Gerasene who desperately didn't want to be separated from Jesus.

A Call for One Man to Stay (vv. 38-39)

[38a] But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him...

The former demoniac longed to accompany Jesus (v. 38)

This is one incredibly moving scene. Here is this man, shamelessly begging Jesus for the privilege of sailing away with Him.

And there are all kinds of reasons why he might have wanted to be with Jesus.

He might have been afraid that in Jesus' absence, the demons would return. Or maybe he was afraid that the people of this region would give him a hard time.

Or maybe it was love that prompted him to want to leave with Jesus. After all, Jesus was the One who had given him his life back.

None of us think it was wrong for this former demoniac to want to be with Jesus. He had met Jesus as a wreck and was now whole.

And you know, everything would point to the wisdom of allowing him to accompany Jesus and the twelve in the boat.

Make him the thirteenth apostle. Let him come along. After all, he WANTED to drop everything and follow Jesus. How many disciples want to do that?

So, what will Jesus do?

If Hollywood was writing this script, the scene would conclude with Jesus welcoming the man with open arms, saying, *"You bet, big fella. Hop on in. There's room for you in My boat. Come, follow Me."*

But that is not what Jesus says. Jesus said, **"No."**

That's right. The Lord refused his request. *"No, you may not come with Me."*

And, in this mostly heathen region of Decapolis, Jesus gave this man an assignment.

Jesus had a different assignment for him (v. 39)

[38b]...but Jesus sent him away, saying, [39a] "Return to your home and describe what great things God has done for you."

Jesus has just appointed the recently redeemed former demoniac the Apostle to the Decapolis.

And by doing that Jesus gave him the most challenging assignment of all: the home assignment.

Home would have been the hardest place of all for him to go.

The people of this region knew all about him. They had watched him run through the tombs like a wild man for years. They had chained him up and seen him rip up the chains.

He had a well-earned reputation for filth and violence and evil.

But Jesus told him to go - and go he did.

¹³ How ironic. The demons wanted permission to stay in The Decapolis. It's a nice place for demons, evidently. But the citizens of this region want Jesus gone!

As the Lord sailed away across the Sea of Galilee with His disciples, having been in the Decapolis for just a few hours, watch the former demoniac.

[39b] So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city what great things Jesus had done for him.

The only credibility this man had was the clothing he now wore. His changed life opened the door to powerful witness. And there is the power and the beauty of the miracle.

But the biggest takeaway from the story comes at the end, after the miracle, when Jesus denied the man's request to travel with Him.

The point of the story was that this man - one day old in Jesus - will become Jesus' messenger who will spread the Good News to the Decapolis.

Conclusion:

This story is one of my favorite stories from the Gospels - and it just may have become one of yours.

The story of the Gerasene demoniac tells us that following Jesus will lead us into challenging, messy situations.

It also tells us that Jesus has high expectations that we will rise to the occasion when we face those situations. He expects that we will be His messenger in those situations.

As you reflect on this story, remember that people who are in a mess need help, and that the Jesus you follow changes lives.

People who are in a mess need help - and your Jesus changes lives.

Before saying anything else about this, each of us freely admit that none of us has arrived, none of us are perfect, and all of us have far to go as we take our next steps with Jesus. We're all messes, too.

But, given that, any of us who are taking next steps with Jesus may meet someone who is in a mess.

They may have made a mess of their own life, may have gotten messed up by someone else, or may have been messed up by circumstances beyond their control.

Watch Jesus deal with this demoniac. He helps him. Period.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost messes we all are. He didn't make this man's rescue an inquisition into his past. He simply rescued him.

We say this all the time, but a story like this one brings it all home: Jesus Christ changes lives. The changes He makes are real and deep, profound and powerful.

One day He will transform a man trapped in a demon-possessed state of insanity into a picture of calm. The next He will change a hoarder into a giver.

He will change a narcissist into someone who loves sacrificially, and He'll change someone addicted to lust into a model of purity.

Jesus has been changing lives for two thousand years. He still changes lives. He has and will continue to change yours

He will change the lives of those you love. Ask Him to do that. Ask Him to make you His messenger to people in messes.

Remember, too, that serving Jesus might lead to rejection. *Serving Jesus may well lead to rejection.*

Jesus' miracle of casting the demons out of the man into the pigs was a heroic, kind, and wonderful work. Note that when He performed that miracle, the citizens of that region promptly asked Him to hit the road.

We shouldn't expect that serving Jesus today will necessarily result in popularity. It may lead to rejection. That may well be what comes your way when you follow Jesus.

But, know for certain that nothing compares to the joy of being God's touch in another person's life.

And remember one more thing from this story.

You have been saved to live the life Jesus chooses.

The main character wanted nothing more than to stay with Jesus. Given a choice, he would have chosen that life above any other.

And on the very first day of his life as a believer, he learned that he had been saved to live the life Jesus chose for him.

Jesus refused his request to jump into the boat with Him and the rest of the disciples. He commanded the man to go home.

For him, following Jesus meant doing something very hard and not doing the very thing he wanted to do.

For us, following Jesus means that we learn from this Gerasene. Obey God. Submit to Jesus. Say "Yes" to His commands.

And here is Jesus' promise to you.

In the obeying, you will find joy. In the submission, you will find purpose and meaning. As you say "Yes" to the commands of the New Testament, you can anticipate hearing "Well done!" from your heavenly Father.