

What Mercy Did For Me
Luke 8:26-56
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Read Luke 8:26-56

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
(Hebrews 4:12)

Introduction

I hope that you’re enjoying learning that new song, “What Mercy Did For Me,” as much as I am. I want to read the words (even though we just sang it) because they really capture the theme of the three stories that we are studying today; it’s even the title of the sermon:

*“I was hopeless, I knew I was lost / death and darkness were my only songs /
I needed someone to come rescue me / then mercy heard my plea /
Lord, You found me, You healed me / You called me from the grave /
You gave me a real love, You washed my sins away / And now I’m living like I’m forgiven /
You came and set me free / and that’s what Your mercy did for me /
You gave me beauty for my guilty stains / And now I’m living day to day by His grace /
So excuse me if I can’t contain my praise / ‘Cause I know I’ve been saved /
Every morning mercy will restore me / and even if the world may fall before me / I will proclaim.”*

Do those words ring true for you? Do you remember that you were spiritually dead in your sins, that you were lost with no way to save yourself before Jesus found you? Do you acknowledge the huge change that He made in your life - healing you, loving you, setting you free? Do you live your life singing His praises because of the mercy and forgiveness that He showered on you? Maybe some days we remember those things better than others. Some days we live in thankfulness and joy. Other days, not so much. We forget or we get distracted, so we need to be reminded. Today we’re going to meet a series of people who were radically transformed by Jesus. I’ll be using phrases from the song as we work our way through the text.

My last sermon was about Jesus calming the storm that whipped up on the Sea of Galilee as He was sleeping; we pick up when they step off the boat into Gentile territory. The first encounter is straight from a horror movie set, a story that culminates in Jesus’ power over demonic activity. We meet a man who could say:

I. “You Came and Set Me Free, Now I Can’t Contain My Praise” (vv. 26-39)

²⁶ Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ 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. 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.” ²⁹ For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. ³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³² Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. ³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the

city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. 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. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "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.

You may have heard the famous C.S. Lewis quote about demons, from his preface to the amazing book, *The Screwtape Letters*: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."¹ I wholeheartedly agree. We should not be attributing every illness or problem in life to demonic activity as some charismatic groups have done, but we should also not be so arrogant as to believe there are no such things as demons and they don't have a presence in this world just because we haven't encountered them.

We learn some fascinating things about demons from this passage:

- 1) The main thing that demons seem to do is drive humans to animalistic, degrading, and self-destructive behavior. This man was living outside, naked. Mark's Gospel says that he was cutting himself with stones. He was given great strength to break any chains.
- 2) Many demons can reside in one person. Luke 8:2 says that Mary Magdalene had been delivered from 7 demons. This man told Jesus his name was "Legion" because many demons had entered him; a Roman legion was 6,000 soldiers! I'm not saying that's how many demons were inside of him, Mark says there were 2,000 pigs, so maybe that was the number.
- 3) As we've seen before, demons know exactly who Jesus is, the Son of the Most High God. The crowd may be confused, the disciples may still be figuring out His exact identity, but the demons are crystal clear. James 2:19 – "*Even the demons believe (in God) – and shudder!*"
- 4) They feared Jesus because He could do whatever He wanted to them; they begged Him three times – don't torment us, don't send us to the abyss, send us to the pigs instead.
- 5) They know their ultimate end. They were scared of being sent into the abyss, which is where they would be destroyed.

Good news, in case you've ever wondered: demons cannot possess a Christian. Evil spirits may tempt and provoke, but in Matthew 12, Jesus explains that a house divided against itself cannot; you will not have the Spirit of God and the spirit of Satan inside you at the same time. And Romans reminds us that new creations in Christ are not slaves of sin anymore.

One thing I am not clear on is what made the pigs jump off the cliff. Either the demons forced the pigs to drown, or the pigs ran hard and jumped off the cliff to rid themselves of the demons, or Jesus made it all happen to end their existence. Regardless of which one it is, this is a picture of the future judgment of all that belongs to Satan – they'll all be thrown into a lake. In Revelation 20:10, 14: "*the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever... Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*" Demonic spirits may roam the earth and cause evil for a time, but the day is coming when God will put an end to them.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), p. IX.

Now, only one person has a correct response to what Jesus has done: the man who had been freed of the demons. They put clothes on him, he had calmed right down, he was even begging to follow Jesus. J.C. Ryle comments that, "Never is a man in his right mind till he is converted, or in his right place till he sits at the feet of Jesus, or rightly clothed till he has put on the Lord Jesus Christ."² How do the townspeople react? They're frightened! Back when the man was thrashing about, breaking his chains, running around naked in the tombs and the desert, cutting himself – apparently, they were used to that and weren't afraid of that anymore. Now they were afraid that he'd been set free and healed of all of that. They were so freaked out by Jesus, seized with great fear, they asked Jesus to leave. It's similar to our last story where Jesus calmed the storm that had the disciples panicked, and their response is to be afraid of Him.

But the man who was set free was truly grateful for his deliverance. Instead of granting the man his wish to travel with Him, Jesus sent the man back to his hometown. What an amazing witness he must have been as he obeyed and told everyone about what Jesus had done for him: saved from Satan, saved from isolation and loneliness, from naked indecency, from insanity, and from the power of death. This young man could sing our new song: "*I can't contain my praise 'cause I know I've been saved.*"

We move from this picture of deliverance to a very different kind of deliverance; a woman who could say:

II. "You Healed Me, You Gave Me Beauty for My Guilty Stains" (vv. 40-48)

⁴⁰ Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. ⁴¹ And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, ⁴² for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying. As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. ⁴³ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. ⁴⁵ And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me." ⁴⁷ And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

Imagine this huge crowd of people pressing in on Jesus. In the midst of the crowd, this very important man fell at Jesus' feet and begged Him to keep His daughter from dying. Luke tells us that he was a ruler of the synagogue, not usually Jesus' best friends, right? Unlike the Roman centurion from the last chapter, Jairus did not send others to lobby his case to Jesus; he came himself. This must have surprised the people who knew him: it wasn't a very dignified thing to fall on his knees at someone's feet. But the heart of this father would do anything for his daughter. I can identify with that; I'd go to any lengths to help one of my children, any good parent would. Particularly as things get desperate and you're running out of options. The most natural thing in the world is to fall on your knees to beg God to save your child.

But Jairus had to wait because the walk to his house was interrupted. Put yourself in this woman's shoes. Her life had been, literally, a bloody mess for a dozen years. She had been in and out of doctor's offices spending all her money, trying all kinds of crazy things to get this blood flow, this

² J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Luke* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1976), p. 270.

hemorrhaging, solved, but nothing had worked. And it's not just the pain or the despair of not being able to fix her body, this woman was ceremonially unclean according to Levitical law. She could not participate in worship, or even social gatherings. Anyone who touched her would have been unclean too. She must have been so alone, miserable and broke. As she watched Jesus agree to accompany Jairus to heal his daughter, I wonder if she pondered whether trying to get Jesus' healing power for herself was too selfish. This man was keeping his daughter from dying, how can I justify interrupting with my health issues? But she must have heard of how powerful Jesus was and she thought, "Maybe I don't have to interrupt Him. Maybe if I just touch His cloak, that will work."

And sure enough, it did! It's interesting that lots of people were touching Him, according to Peter, but it seems that His healing power only went to the person who touched Him for that reason, with the hope of being healed. We see this same kind of power in the book of Acts: Acts 5 indicates that Peter's shadow was able to heal the sick and Acts 19 says that cloths that Paul touched were able to heal the sick and drive out demons. So it was not just Jesus who had this power, but I would argue that with the apostles, this was a power that came to them only in extraordinary times, whereas with Jesus, it was part of who He was and He could always heal people like that since He was God.

Now Jesus seemed angry that someone had touched Him, had taken some of His power. But I don't think it was anger; it was an invitation to the person to come forward for a conversation. The woman was reluctant to admit touching Him – what if Jesus was going to chew her out? What if He was going to take away her healing? But she fell at His feet and confessed. And rather than rebuke, He encouraged her, commending her faith and sending her on her way in peace! He called her daughter in a gentle, loving way. This is the only woman that Jesus called daughter.

Perhaps we have a great reminder that our personal issues are worth bringing to God in prayer. Sometimes we can get a mindset that, "I have problems, I have things I worry about or that I need, but they're so insignificant in the grand scale of things. Right? There's people starving, people dying of COVID, homeless people, refugees evicted from their homes, all kinds of terrible things. I'll just power through my issues, no sense troubling God with them. I don't want to be selfish." As if God doesn't already know everything about you, every health issue, every relationship problem, every need you have before you ask it. I'm not saying you should become totally self-centered and only worry about yourself. Actually the opposite: cast your cares on the Lord and that takes the burden off of you to shoulder it all yourself. Throw yourself at the feet of Jesus, and humble yourself to receive the Lord's love and attention. I promise our all-powerful God can handle your issues on top of all of the other problems in the world!

Our final seven verses show us a third area of Jesus' saving power, a young girl who could say:

III. "I Needed Someone to Come Rescue Me, You Called Me From the Grave" (vv. 49-56)

⁴⁹ While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more." ⁵⁰ But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well." ⁵¹ And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. ⁵² And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." ⁵³ And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴ But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise."

⁵⁵ And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. ⁵⁶ And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

The assumption with Jairus' household is that now that the daughter had died, there was nothing to be done. Jesus couldn't help any more, death was beyond His abilities to fix. They must not have

heard about the recent time when Jesus had interrupted a funeral procession and told the dead man to arise. No, to them death was final, so no use bothering the Teacher. But Jesus wasn't ready to walk away. He asked Jairus to have faith, to believe that He could make her well. He told the crowd of mourners to stop weeping because despite the appearance of final death, this was actually just temporary sleep. Then He called for the girl to arise. And then, tenderly, "get her something to eat."

At that point, if Peter, James, and John, who were the only disciples allowed to witness this miracle, didn't completely believe that Jesus could handle absolutely anything, they just weren't paying attention. They had just watched Him calm a life-threatening storm with one command, send thousands of demons out of a man, unintentionally heal an afflicted woman, and now pull a young girl back from the grave. If they had any doubts, I'm not sure what else Jesus could have done to drive home how powerful He was. Maybe make food appear out of nowhere? (That's coming.)

Conclusion

In America we don't like to think of ourselves as helpless and hopeless. We feel like we can solve our own problems, pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, and find the resources when we need something. If we have the money or the connections we feel confident that we can overcome anything. But the reality is that we can't. We can't control our lives, control is an illusion. We may be able to handle a lot of situations, but life quickly and easily spirals out of control. One drunk driver coming towards you, one inoperable tumor growing inside you, one spark left unattended to start a fire in your house. We have no guarantees in life that we will stay safe and healthy. And spiritually, the Bible presents our situation as completely hopeless in our natural state. The phrases it uses are "dead in our sins" and "in bondage to sin." We cannot save ourselves, we cannot find our own ways to heaven, we can't do enough good things to outweigh our great debt of sin.

These stories are about Gentile outsiders and Jewish insiders. Men, women, and children. Poor, nameless people, social outcasts, as well as important leaders. All people - no matter their income level, their nationality, or their social status - find themselves helpless and in need of a Savior. They find themselves in circumstances that they can't solve on their own, that they can't control. When these people in Jesus' day found the one person who could help them, they were encountering God Himself. And it seems that Jesus went above and beyond expectations in each case. Not only did He cast the demons out of the man, but He restored his humanity, then gave him direction and purpose. Not only did His power heal the woman's body, but He blessed her faith and sent her off in peace. Jairus had hoped Jesus would keep his daughter from dying, but Jesus worked the greater miracle of resurrection in her. All three knelt at Jesus' feet, either in reverence, thanksgiving, or sheer desperation. That's the best place for a person who is helpless and hopeless to be.

Jesus may not cast out literal demons from inside of us, but Jesus heals us of our sin and evil. He may not heal every one of our physical afflictions and sicknesses, but *"by His wounds we are healed."* And Jesus may not physically bring us back from the dead, but He raises us to new life twice. The first time is when He gives us salvation, raising us from our spiritually dead state, and making us a new creation, born again. And secondly, after we die physically, the ones who are united to Jesus in his death and resurrection will be raised again to new life in heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16b - *"For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep... the dead in Christ will rise first."* Romans 6:5 - *"For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His."*

What has mercy done for you? Maybe you haven't experienced His mercy and love. We invite you to learn more, to share your doubts, to get your questions answered. We would love for you to

experience the saving miracle of Jesus in your life. For those who are believers, He has done great works in us spiritually, and He has worked miracles in our lives. Are you willing to share that with other people? Are you willing to do what Jesus asked the man healed of the demons to do: “*declare how much God has done for you*”? Come back next week for more about how we take the good news of Jesus to the world. For now, let us thank the One who can heal both body and soul. Let’s pray.

Benediction

Philippians 2:5-11 - *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*