

While we'd like to think we learn just fine when everything is nice and easy, and comfortable it holds true for many that they learn a great deal from difficult situations. It's not that they want to, but the lessons strike home often accompanied by pain, difficulty and emotion. It makes sense that you get more strong and build more perseverance in the weight room lifting and exercising than on your couch sitting and eating a bag of chips. Jesus and his disciples were confronted by the obscene in the Gerasenes. We learn valuable lessons. We learn about demons, about sinful human nature, about Jesus and the power of his salvation, and about his plan for bringing people to know their Savior through people whose worlds he's changed.

Change the world. Tell what Jesus has done for you.

They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got

into the boat and left. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

The disciples had thought they were going to die on the Sea of Galilee as the storm raged around them and Jesus lay asleep in the boat. He quieted the wind and the waves. He chided his disciples for their lack of faith. They landed arriving in the region of the Gerasenes only to be met by, as Pastor Smith calls it, "The scary scene in the Gerasenes." A man possessed by a legion of demons confronted Jesus and fell at his feet naked and crying out. *"What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!"* The demon knew it deserved torment and torture in hell, but as Jesus commanded it to leave the man, it pleaded with Jesus for a lesser or at least temporary sentence. Hell would be its permanent home.

This naked man was driven by not just one, but a legion of demons. A legion is as many as 6,000 soldiers in the Roman army. How terribly this man was afflicted! What do you see about demons? Demons are not your friends. The world sees Ouija boards as just some simple fun, seances as a party theme, and some in grief or guilt or worried about the future seek to contact the deceased and seek out the help of the demonic whether they realize it or not. Some invite this demonic activity into their lives. Some are bystanders affected by it. But either way, demons have nothing good in mind for you. The man was naked, broke chains meant to help, and was driven into lonely, deserted places. This is not the solitude you or I might crave after a busy day, but the fearful isolation that does so much damage – driven from family and friends and society. *"For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs."* Demons are not your friends. Their purpose is to bring you down, cut you off, isolate you and bring shame on you. *"For a long time"* they afflicted the man. Jesus changes the man's world in an instant.

Demons are no match for Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus grants their request to inhabit a large herd of pigs on the hillside. Immediately they possessed them and ran down the steep hill to a watery grave. Can you picture the hogs piling up one upon another driving the others deeper into the mud and water until they all died? The caretakers ran to tell others. *"and the people went out to see what had happened."*

A massive swarm of dead hog carcasses bore witness. Did they float or look up from under the water's surface. Herdsmen heralds saw it all and gave the facts of this supernatural event. What did the hog co-op think of

this? What did the people think of this – the man they couldn't help finally wore clothes and was in his right mind?

The welcome party in the Gerasenes was obscene. And now the farewell party doesn't do much better. They are *overcome with fear*. They couldn't deny that what Jesus did happened. It seems they look past the miracle that happened to the man before them, and want to get back to normalcy, or maybe normalcy without Jesus interfering in their business, their life, their community. This still happens today with our sinful natures shooing Jesus further away.

Our own sinful natures seek to find ways to shoo God out of our lives even twisting blessings God gives. Is it my work? Have I overcommitted myself so that I skip time in God's Word or in God's house, with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And I just shoo Jesus away for a bit. But we'll pick it back up, won't we? We are more creatures of habit than we'd like to admit. Is it my activities for the mental and physical for myself or my children? Have I committed them to run or help them grow physically, mentally, running here, there, and everywhere, but I let time in God's house or in God's Word as a family become something "when we have time?" If you don't make it priority and make time, there will not be time for it. And if God's Word and God's House and growing spiritually is a "only if there is time left" proposition and not priority for you and your generation, often the next generation is quick to shoo Jesus completely to the side. Is it the prospect of time away, escaping to the north, a well-deserved break, and breaks too are a good thing – a blessing, but if we don't bring Jesus with or take time for him while away have we found true rest? Our sinful nature will try to turn even blessings to get in the way and shoo Jesus away, not to mention the downright sinful that we struggle against.

But what about the man? Learn a lesson from his difficulty. Jesus "cured" him. But make no mistake, Jesus "saved" him from the demons who would have had great pleasure to run him into the water amidst the hogs, and then into hell. Where do we find this saved man? *"They found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind."* There is no better place than to be at Jesus' feet. A while later Jesus will praise Mary to her sister Martha. "Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42)

When the people of town and of country pleaded with Jesus to leave, the man pleaded to go with Jesus. Jesus changed his world. Jesus changed his eternity. The man had his priorities straight. And what did Jesus say to him?

"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him." Jesus has changed your world, has he not? He saved you. And he accepts you, a sinner, as his forgiven child. He shed his blood on calvary's cross so that your sin is forgiven. He rose from the grave on the third day to prove his promise that because he lives you also shall live. You will be with him for all eternity in the glories of heaven.

Do not let your past keep you from the peace, the joy, and the work God sets before you today. Jesus says, *"Return home and tell how much God has done for you."* This is our priority as we go about our daily life – work, school, sports, free time, friends and family, witness to all that God's done for you.

This man had been the naked, crazy, demon-possessed, unchainable man who lived among the tombs. It didn't matter. He was saved now. He was safe with Jesus. What does your past look like? It is forgiven in Jesus Christ. He has saved you. You are safe with Jesus. Jesus changed this man's world, and sent him out to change the world. Jesus has changed your world. Share what Jesus has done for you – share it in the mirror first. And share it all over town. **Change the World. Share what Jesus has done for you.** Amen.