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CHRIST'S TRANSFORMING POWER

Luke 8:26-39

By

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Luke Lesson 37

Christ's Transforming Power
Luke 8:26-39

Years ago a farmer from the interior of China had come to a mission compound where a doctor had removed the cataracts from his eyes. A few days after the farmer left, the doctor looked out his window and noticed the same man holding the end of a long rope. In single file behind him, holding to the rope, were several dozen blind Chinese whom the farmer had rounded up and led for miles to the doctor who had worked "miracles" on his eyes. Because his sight had been restored, he wanted others to experience the same thing! That story illustrates the message of the dramatic encounter between Jesus and Legion, the demoniac:

Those who have experienced Christ's transforming power should proclaim it to others.

It's a story with some strange twists in it. You would think that Jesus would deny the requests of demons and unbelievers, and grant the request of an eager follower, but He didn't. Jesus granted the request of the demons, He agreed to the appeals of a group of unbelievers, and then He denied the entreaties of a man whose life He had transformed who wanted to follow Him! That seems backwards, doesn't it? Why did Jesus act this way?

I believe that Jesus granted the request of the demons that He not send them out of the region and into the abyss because the final judgment of Satan and his forces is yet future. The time is coming when they will be cast into the Lake of Fire, but for now we are engaged in spiritual conflict against these forces of evil (Eph. 6:12). We don't know for certain what happened to the demons after the pigs drowned, but I think they were free then to go trouble someone else. The water did not harm the demons.

I believe that Jesus granted the request of the local people to leave their region because His main mission at that time was to the Jews (these people were mostly Gentile) and because He will not

force Himself upon those who harden their hearts against Him, especially after they have seen evidence of His mighty power.

And I believe that Jesus denied the request of the former demoniac to accompany Him because even though His primary mission at that time was to the Jews and even though these Gentiles' hearts were opposed to Him, He knew that some of His elect among them would hear and respond. And so He told the man, "Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you" (8:39). Thus the maniac became the missionary!

Thus the lesson for us from this miracle is that all of us who have experienced Christ's transforming power should proclaim it. But that raises two difficult questions that we must ask ourselves:

To what extent am I experiencing the transforming power of Christ? What is there in my life that is explainable only by the spiritual power of Jesus Christ? It may not be as instantaneous and dramatic as the changes in Legion. But even so, there ought to be some obvious changes due to my experience with Jesus Christ.

To what extent am I proclaiming the transforming power of Christ? Do I have "holy huddle disease"? That's a disease that especially affects us pastors, where you surround yourself with the saints, holding hands and sharing precious verses, but you never venture out among the pagans. I believe that Jesus went out of His way to cross the Sea of Galilee in the storm for the purpose of saving Legion and of teaching the disciples about His transforming power. No sinner is beyond the saving grace of God in Christ! Our text plainly shows that...

1. Christ has spiritual power to transform lives.

It is interesting to compare this miracle with the one that immediately precedes it, the stilling of the storm. In that miracle, we see Christ's power over nature; here, we see His power over the supernatural. In that one, we see Christ's ability to tame the wild sea; here, we see His ability to tame a wild man. In that one, we see Christ giving peace in a storm; here, He gives peace in a soul.

Picture the scene: It was either at night or very early in the morning when Jesus and the disciples arrived on the other side of the lake after the storm. As they are stepping out on the beach, they hear a terrifying shriek. They look up to see this naked wild

man running toward them. (Actually, there were two men according to Matthew. Apparently, one was more notorious and the other was a silent follower, but we don't know for sure. Mark and Luke only report one, but they do not say that there was *only* one.) The man's naked body was covered with scars and caked on blood, with fresh bloody wounds in some places (Mark 5:5). His uncut hair and untrimmed beard were matted and tangled. He had a wild, demented look in his eyes. He reeked of body odor. Luke does not record what the disciples did, but I can picture them scrambling back into the boat or looking for rocks and sticks to defend themselves. But Jesus stepped forward, spoke the word to the demons, and Legion was a different man. We need to understand two things about the transformation that took place:

A. Christ's power is necessary for transformation.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Jesus didn't use some clever method to convince Legion to make a decision to accept Him. Legion didn't decide to turn over a new leaf and try harder this time. He didn't sign up for a 12 Step group to overcome his addiction to demons. The gospel is nothing less than the mighty power of God imparting new life to a previously dead sinner. If God does not change the heart, there is no lasting change.

- Man's efforts at transformation fall short.

The human attempt to deal with this man had been to bind him with chains (8:29). But it didn't work. Human solutions to problems that are spiritual in nature ultimately will fail.

Margaret Sangster, the social worker, told about seeing a small boy in an urban ghetto sitting on the stairs of a tenement. The youngster had been hit by a car several months before, but his parents, fresh from Appalachia, neglected to get him proper medical attention. Although not part of her case load, she took the boy to an orthopedist and learned that through an involved series of operations the child's body could be made normal again. She cut through the bureaucratic red tape, raised the funds, and set the process of cure in motion.

Two years later the boy came to her office. To her astonishment, he walked in without crutches, and to show the completeness of his recovery, he turned a cartwheel for her. The two em-

braced and when the boy left, Margaret Sangster reported that a warm glow mantled the entire office. She said to herself, "If I never accomplish anything else in my life, at least here is one young man to whom I can point where I have made a real difference!"

At that point she paused in her presentation and asked, "This was all several years ago now. Where do you think that boy is today?" Caught in the emotion of that moment, several made suggestions—a school teacher, a physician, perhaps a social worker?

There was a longer pause, and with even deeper emotion Sangster said, "No, he is in the penitentiary for one of the foulest crimes a human being can commit." Then she said, "I was instrumental in teaching him how to walk again, but there was no one to teach him where to walk." Man's efforts fall short because...

- All who need transformation are in Satan's domain.

This narrative reveals that there are two types of people in Satan's domain, who need the transforming power of Christ. There are those who are conspicuously in Satan's domain, such as Legion. These people make you shudder and draw back from them by their very appearance. They look evil.

But there is a second type of people in this story who are just as much in Satan's domain and who need the same transforming power of Christ. But we might be inclined to overlook them. These are not conspicuous, but camouflaged. I am referring to the people of that area who flocked out to see what had happened to Legion. Outwardly, they were decent, respectable citizens. There are three clues that these people were in Satan's domain just as much as Legion was.

First, the demons were at home in their region. They didn't want to be sent out of the country (Mark 5:10). Second, these people were more concerned about the loss of their swine than they were about the healing of this man (or these two men). Sure, Legion had been a nuisance to them. He was so violent that no one could go near where he was (Matt. 8:28). But if his healing meant the loss of their swine, forget it. Third, they begged Jesus to leave (Luke 8:37). What a horrible request! They had feared Legion. But they were more frightened about Jesus (8:37). He threatened them and they didn't want Him to get too close.

These people are like the man Harry Ironside talked to one night after he had preached. He asked the man if he was saved and the man said no, but he would like to be. Ironside asked him, "Do you realize that you are a sinner?" "Yes," the man quickly replied, "but you know, I'm not what you would call a bad sinner. In fact, I'd have to say I'm a rather good one."

There are many people like that man. They are in Satan's domain of darkness, but they're decent folks. They've never committed a felony. They love their mates and their children. They may even go to church and believe in God. But they don't want Him getting too close for comfort! If a preacher brings up sins like pride, greed, lust, envy, racial prejudice, and the like that step on their toes, they get real nervous and put up their defense. They're just as much in Satan's domain as the conspicuous sinner, but outwardly they look more respectable.

All people, apart from Christ, are in one category or the other. Paul says, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14). The "us" included the religious Paul as well as the formerly pagan Gentiles. Every person without Christ is in Satan's domain and needs Christ's mighty power to deliver him.

- None are too difficult for Christ to transform, but camouflaged sinners are often more difficult than the conspicuous.

We look at a story like this and say, "Wow! If Legion can be transformed, then there is hope for anybody!" Yes, there's even hope for the respectable sinners! It takes the same saving power of Christ to transform them as it does to transform the demoniac. But they're often the more difficult cases because they don't see their great need. But Christianity is not a matter of dressing up a pig in the tuxedo of good works. It is a matter of God changing the nature of the pig! But in addition to Christ's saving power, transformation also requires His teaching.

B. Christ's teaching is necessary for transformation.

This is an inference on my part. The text does not directly state that Christ taught this man. But I believe that He did. Verse

35 reports that the man was sitting at Jesus' feet when the local folks found him (see 10:39). It took a fair amount of time, perhaps a whole day, for the herdsmen to run off into the surrounding area and report what had happened and for the people to arrive back at the spot. I believe that Jesus was giving this man a cram course in spiritual things. I think that He taught him who God is and who He was as God's Messiah, and what it means to live a godly life. The point is, salvation must be followed by sound doctrine so that the new convert can be transformed through the renewing of his mind. Legion, quite naturally, wanted to accompany Jesus (8:38). Who wouldn't want to? His life dramatically had been transformed by Jesus' power and through Jesus' teaching. But Jesus said "No" to the man's request. That leads to our second main lesson.

2. Christ commands those whose lives He has transformed to proclaim it.

If you've experienced His transforming power, then you've got to express it. It's at this point that many of us fail. How do we communicate the changes Christ has made (and is making) in our lives? Most of us lack the personality or gift to go out knocking on the doors of strangers to tell them about Christ. I would never take a job selling stuff door-to-door. And, apart from the erroneous theology, I would never want to be a Jehovah's Witness! Yet, clearly, the Lord has called us all to be His witnesses. So how can we do it? There are two very normal parts to proclaiming the message that every one of us can do:

- A. Exhibit a transformed life.

People knew this guy as a naked, wild, violent maniac. But when they went out to see him, he was sitting down, clothed, and in his right mind (8:35). There was obvious change.

Maybe you're thinking, "But I wasn't a naked, wild, violent maniac before I came to Christ. I was raised in the church. I trusted Him as a child. How can I show people that Christ has made a difference in my life?"

There are many ways. Our *attitudes* should show people that we are Christians. Do you have a cheerful, thankful heart, even in difficult times? Or, do you grumble and complain? Paul says that if we do all things without grumbling or disputing we show our-

selves as lights in this crooked and perverse world (Phil. 2:15). What about your *words*? Do you encourage and build others up, or do you tear them down? Do you use foul language or is your speech pure? And, what about your *behavior*? Are you self-centered or are you always thinking about others and how you can serve them? Do you live for the same values and goals the world lives for? Do you blend in with the world or do you stand out as distinct? If you walk in reality with Jesus as your Lord every day, your life will be a witness.

B. Return home and describe what great things God has done for you.

There are three things to note here:

- How do you go? You go with obedience and zeal.

It takes *obedience*. This man didn't want to go home. He wanted to go with Jesus. Maybe he was a bit disappointed at first. But he obeyed. He had exchanged masters. Before, he served a destructive tyrant. Now he served a loving Lord. But sometimes our new Master asks us to do things we may not feel like doing. We must obey, if we want to be His disciple.

It takes *zeal*. Jesus said return to your house, and Legion went throughout the whole city! Mark says that he went to Decapolis, which was a region consisting of 10 towns! He was zealous to tell others about what Jesus had done for him! Sometimes those of us who have been Christians for a long while need to stop and think about how much the Lord did in saving us and to remember how desperately those who are without Christ need Him. Legion was going to witness to normal people. They had never lived naked among the tombs. But they were just as alienated from God as he had been. So he eagerly told them of their need for the Savior. We need the same obedient zeal that Legion had.

- To whom do you go? Go to your house.

In other words, go back to the people who knew you before, to your family and friends, to the relationships that you already have. The New Testament pattern for evangelism is that you go back into your own circle of influence—family, friends, neighbors,

job, school, common interest groups, and community contacts, and tell them what great things God has done for you.

“Yeah, but they all know me!” That’s the point! That’s why they have to see your transformed life. You go back “clothed and in your right mind”! Live Christ before them and when they ask why you’re so different, tell them!

- What do you say? Tell them your story and the gospel of God’s grace.

Tell your personal testimony: “What great things God has done for you” (8:39). Tell how you met Christ, and what He has done in your life. All witnessing should have this personal element.

Explain the gospel: Who God is, who Jesus is, how we have sinned against God, what Jesus came to do as the sin-bearer. A person needs to know the basic facts of the gospel before he can intelligently respond. Part of the gospel involves telling them who Jesus is. I don’t know whether Legion fully understood the deity of Jesus yet, but Luke wants his readers to make the connection. In verse 39, Luke places the words God and Jesus emphatically at the end of the sentence to link them. The great things *God* had done were one and the same with the great things *Jesus* had done!

Emphasize grace: Every false religion in the world and every fallen sinner by instinct tries to approach God through good works. If you try hard enough and do enough, maybe God will accept you. But Christianity is not a religion of works, it is a relationship of grace. Grace means that God freely gives His salvation to those who deserve His judgment, apart from any human merit.

“But, Legion, didn’t you put on some clothes before you went to Jesus?” “No! I ran to Him just as I was, stark naked.”

“But Legion, didn’t you clean up and hide your bloody wounds before you went to Jesus?” “No! I looked hideous.”

“But Legion, didn’t you try to get rid of your demons before you went to Jesus?” “No! The demons were shrieking through my voice when I ran up to Him. He saved me just as I was, totally by His grace, not at all through anything I did.” That’s grace!

Conclusion

John Wesley was once riding his horse, singing a favorite hymn, when a robber accosted him with the words, "Your money or your life." Wesley obediently emptied his pockets of the few coins he had and then invited the robber to go through his saddlebags, which were filled with books.

The disappointed robber was turning away when Wesley (who had much more presence of mind than I had when I was mugged!) called out, "Stop! I have something more to give you."

The robber turned back and Wesley said, "My friend, you may live to regret this sort of life you're living. If you ever do, remember this, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses from all sin.'" The robber hurried silently away and the man of God rode along, praying that the word spoken might be fixed in the robber's conscience.

Years later, at the close of a Sunday evening service, a man stepped forward and asked to speak with Mr. Wesley. Wesley was surprised to learn that this was the man who had robbed him years before. He was now a well-to-do businessman, but, better still, he was now a child of God. God had used the words spoken that night in his conversion. Taking Wesley's hand, he affectionately kissed it and said with deep emotion, "To you, dear sir, I owe it all." "Nay, nay, my friend," Wesley replied softly, "not to me, but to the precious blood of Christ which cleanses us from all sin."

Let me close by asking you the two questions again:

To what extent are you experiencing the transforming power of Christ?
Has He changed your life through His gracious gift of salvation? Is He continuing to change it as you walk with Him?

To what extent are you proclaiming the transforming power of Christ?
Are you looking for opportunities with those you know to tell them of the great things God has done for you and of the great things He will do for them if they will come to Jesus just as they are?

Discussion Questions

1. To whom is it easier to witness: a total stranger or a family member? Why?
2. How can a person from a Christian home prepare a testimony when the changes since salvation haven't been very dramatic?
3. How can we help a "good" sinner to see his need for Christ?
4. Is there a difference between making a decision to trust Christ and truly getting saved? If so, what's the difference and how does this affect our witnessing?

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