

JESUS HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE US!
LUKE 8:26-39
SERMON

Most of us handle certain kinds of changes without any problems. If we need to buy gas for our car and the gas station we normally go to has run out of gas or has closed for the evening, we simply drive to another gas station and don't think anything of it. Or, if someone's using our favorite treadmill at the gym we simply get on another treadmill for our workout. Almost every Sunday we deal with some kind of unexpected change in worship or Sunday school. I remind our staff that if Jesus had a ninth beatitude it would be "blessed are the flexible."

But some changes in our lives can cause a huge uproar: losing our job, losing our house, a school district closing our kid's school, a good friend moving away, our spouse leaving us, the church changing worship, or someone sitting in our seat for worship! Many years ago when I first arrived to serve as pastor of this church, one of the elderly men who attended our church regularly had the gall to ask a visitor to move out of his seat in the historical sanctuary! We can become very territorial can't we?

How does Jesus want us to respond to change? It all depends on the change! If the change involves becoming more like Jesus, more effectively serving or worshipping Jesus, living a more Christ-centered life, then Jesus would say, "Bring it on!" Jesus didn't fear change! Jesus didn't fear anything!

The Bible's clear that the Lord does not want our lives characterized by fear, including fear of change. Remember what the apostle Paul wrote Timothy in **2 Timothy 1:7** "**For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline**". If we believe God's truly sovereign, that he reigns over everything, that he controls everything, then we don't have to fear anything, including change!

Imagine all the changes Jesus brought when he came to this earth: introducing the kingdom of God, the first and only man to be born of a virgin, the first and only man to live a perfect, sinless life, the first and only man to back up his claims of deity with actual demonstrations of divine power, forgiving the sins of humanity with his sacrificial death on the cross, beginning the church, the list goes on and on. In enacting all these myriad changes, Jesus demonstrated that he has power to change people! **Jesus has power to change people!**

Let's look at our text in Luke

Vs.26-Scholars believe this region was located on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee.
Vs.27-28 Immediately upon exiting the boat a naked, demon-possessed man confronted Jesus. According to vs.29 Jesus must have taken the initiative and commanded the demon to come out when he first saw the man. The grammar indicates he repeated the command several times. The demon possessed man responded to this command by shouting at Jesus. "What do you want with me, Jesus Son of the Most High God?" I find it interesting that the demon knew Jesus' true identity! Note the next plea that recognizes Jesus' power over the demon.

Vs.29 Luke, with his medical background, explains to the reader the devastating effect the demon had on the man: it "seized" him, meaning, "to seize violently". The ancient world knew only one solution for this problem: restraint. Thus, the man had been

chained. Both his hands and feet were chained. Misunderstood and rejected by his community, he lived a solitary existence.

Vs.30-31 Why did Jesus ask the man his name? Jesus already knew he had power over the demon so it wasn't an attempt to overpower the demon. Instead of telling him his name, the man replies "Legion". A legion consisted of 6,000 men in the Roman army. In replying this way he indicates many demons afflict him. Luke provides the explanatory note, "because many demons had gone into him". The demons beg Jesus to keep them from the Abyss. The "Abyss" indicates a place of imprisonment for demonic powers.

Vs.32 Luke comments on a near-by herd of pigs. Remember, the Jews considered pigs as unclean animals. This herd of pigs probably belonged to a Gentile farmer. The demons asked Jesus to send them into the pigs and he complied with their request.

Vs.33 Jesus exorcised the demons and they went into the pigs. The pigs responded by rushing down the hillside, falling into the lake and drowning. Years ago when I preached on this passage of scripture I entitled the sermon, "Oh, Hogwash!"

Following this exorcism the man changed completely! I will discuss this change in a few moments. Clearly, Jesus exercised his divine power to change this man and change him forever. **Jesus has the power to change people!**

Luis Palau told the story many years ago of a woman that Jesus changed radically. Rosario had been a terrorist in Peru, a woman who breathed violence, an expert in martial arts. She had reputedly killed twelve policemen. When Luis Palau conducted a crusade in Lima, she heard about it and went to the stadium with the intention of killing him. However, once inside the stadium, she began to listen to the message that Luis preached on hell. The Holy Spirit moved in her heart, convicted her of her sins and she embraced Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord. Ten years later Luis Palau met this woman. In that ten-year period Rosario had assisted in planting five churches and had started an orphanage that houses over 1,000 children! **Jesus has power to change people!!**

How does Jesus need to change you? The story of Rosario reveals dramatic changes in this woman's life. Most of us haven't lived our lives like Rosario but we still need Jesus to change us. We learn some lessons from the text about Jesus' power to change:

1. When Jesus changes people, we don't need to be afraid.

Vs.34-35 The people tending the pigs were surprised to see what happened. Luke reports that they ran back into town and told the townspeople what happened. The townspeople returned to the site of the incident and were amazed to find the demon-possessed man dressed instead of naked, calmly sitting at the feet of Jesus. Note Luke's comment on their reaction "they were afraid". The complete, total transformation of this man made the people fearful! Change often precipitates or causes fear.

Clearly, the radical transformation of the demon-possessed man stimulated fear in the lives of the people who knew him. Why were they afraid? Luke doesn't provide any explanation for their fear. Perhaps they feared the supernatural or they feared loss of their livestock or they were simply afraid of change.

Are you afraid of change? Consultant John Maxwell says that people change at these three times: when they *hurt enough* that they *have* to change; when they *learn enough* that they *want* to change; and when they *receive enough* that they are *able* to change.

Consider our Biblical account in light of these observations. The demon-possessed man hurt deeply! He carried some painful scars. He had lived a solitary, and lonely existence. He longed for change and desperately wanted Jesus to transform him. Jesus had to power to change him and he did!

Consider the eyewitnesses and the crowds. They weren't hurting people. Further, they did not learn from the exorcism and apparently hadn't received enough information to consider changing their reaction from fear to acceptance of Jesus' power to heal. Thus, the people refused to change. They reacted fearfully to Jesus and their fear persisted.

I wonder: are you afraid of some changes Jesus might want to make in your life? We all have areas of our lives that need change! Perhaps you've never had a personal encounter with Jesus. You've always considered him a great, historical figure that had a lasting impact on human history but you've never surrendered your life to him and acknowledged him as your Lord and Savior. Or, maybe Jesus needs to change you in a different way: perhaps you need to get rid of anger and resentment against someone who has hurt you deeply. Perhaps you need to let go of trying to control everything and everyone in your life. Maybe you need to change the way you operate your business. Maybe you need to go and get some professional help for emotional scars you carry from childhood. God wants us to avoid the fear of change! Jesus has the power to change us and change can be very good!

Look at what happened in Peter's life. Prior to Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter cowardly denied Christ three times. But some weeks later in Acts 2 Peter stands before thousands of people and preaches powerfully about the truth of Jesus Christ. He preaches so powerfully that 3,000 people become Christians as a result of his message! Talk about change! Jesus changed Peter! As we consider Jesus' power to change,

2. We don't need to be afraid of Jesus.

Note the people's response to the exorcism of this demon-possessed man: **Vs.37** The people were afraid of Jesus! They told Jesus to leave the region, which he did. Why were the people afraid of Jesus? **First, He upset the status quo.** The people of the region were very comfortable with the role everyone played in their community. They didn't want their secure roles in society disturbed. Jesus disturbed their region by healing a man who had been considered a freak. He also caused some material loss for the pig farmer. **Second, they feared his supernatural power.** What would he do next? Jesus represented a threat to the people of the community and the way they lived their lives.

It's interesting that Jesus also represented a threat to the religious leaders of Israel. Jesus represented a threat to their selfish interests and important role in the community. Since Jesus symbolized a threat to them, the leaders wanted to get rid of Jesus. They wanted Jesus executed.

Isn't it true that when we fear something we want to get rid of it or escape from it? It's the old "fight or flight" syndrome. When confronted with something that threatens us or that frightens us, we choose to either fight it or flee from it.

Christopher de Vinck tells this story about himself: **"I finally had it. The children were loud, cranky, impossible. I was tired and fed up. I decided that I was going to run away from it all and have a day just for me.. I zoomed out of the house with \$50. There! I did it! I said to myself as I drove to the highway and headed north. Well, I drove to a mall and had a wild time at a bookstore and bought the**

collected poems of Walt Whitman. After that I drove to a McDonald's and ordered two hamburgers, my own large fries and my own large soda. I ate everything without being interrupted, without giving my pickle to anyone, without wiping someone's mouth, nose or lap. I was free. I drove to a movie theater and watched a movie without having someone sit on my lap or having to escort someone to the bathroom. I was a free man! I was living it up! And I was miserable! By the time I returned home, everyone was asleep. As I slipped into bed, my wife whispered, "We missed you". "Me, too" I answered. I never ran away from home again."

This man expressed his fear of never getting to enjoy life again and his loss of independence by fleeing from his difficult, family situation. But he discovered that he missed his family! He needed them!

Like this man, some people express their fear of Jesus by fleeing from him. But we don't need to fear Jesus! Jesus came to give us life, to make our lives worthwhile and purposeful. Jesus said, **"The thief comes only to steal and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full"** (John 10:10)

Our text teaches us that **Jesus has the power to change people!** Jesus changed this demon-possessed man. Jesus has the power to change us!

Do you need Jesus to change you today? The change in your life might involve acknowledging for the first time in your life that Jesus came to be your Savior and Lord. Maybe you sense God's presence in your heart, calling you to change. Or, perhaps you've wandered away from God and the change in your life might be coming back to God. You want to change direction and return to the faith you once professed. Or, your change might involve your business. You haven't been operating your business like Jesus would and you want to start doing this. Your change might be treating your husband or wife with more love and respect. Your change might be having a more positive attitude towards a certain person in your life. How do you need Jesus' power to change? As you think about the area or areas of your life in which you need Jesus' power to change, I want you to envision Jesus entering that area or areas of your life and effecting change! Remember, **Jesus has the power to change people.**

If God has been speaking to you this morning about changing something in your life, ask God to give you the power and the courage to change! God will hear your prayer and give you the power and courage to change! Don't be afraid to change. **"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity but of power, of love and of self-discipline"** (2 Tim 1:7)

For those of you who would like to change your life by acknowledging Jesus as your Savior and Lord I would like to issue an invitation to you this morning. There's a prayer printed on the bottom of your bulletin I'd like you to pray with me in just a moment. When God calls us to acknowledge him as our Savior and Lord he wants us to admit our sins. God wants us to believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and invite him into our lives as our Savior. Jesus also wants us to acknowledge him as Lord of our lives. This means Jesus wants to rule over our lives as our master and ruler. I want to encourage you strongly, that if you've never taken this step, do so! You could have grown up in the church but have never acknowledged Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Today, you have this opportunity! Take it! Please pray it with me, then stand and acknowledge your faith in a public way. Jesus always called people publicly. Let us pray.