



Those who care for pigs

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 evil 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 him 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 them, 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. Luke 8: 26-33 NIV

Many times having read this passage I have said to myself, "This is a miracle like none other in the New Testament." It is a miracle of sheer power demonstrated by Jesus by just one word. He did for this man what nobody else ever could do, which was set him free. When we read this passage we tend to

think of it as a miracle as opposed to something that could be applied to ones life. Seeing how most do not have a legion of demons, we tend to think in terms of testimony as opposed to application. However, I would like to take a view point of application of this scripture and look at it as an examination rather than something we might shrug off and say, "It doesn't apply to me", because it can apply to us all. As a matter of fact we see clues in this passage that reveal why demonic activity abounds. We see that this man was imprisoned by demons for a very long time. These demons had destroyed this man's identity, they stole everything he ever had. It should be noted that he didn't get that way overnight rather one open door at a time they came in. As the man didn't keep his guard up he became a nesting place for demonic activity. I believe that there are symptoms in this story that can shed light on avoiding situations that will lead us to attacks of the enemy.

First of all we see that this man lived in the area of the "Gerasenes", this word means "walls" in the Greek, meaning he lived in the "city of walls". Most of the time walls are for keeping things or people out and we see by the way the people of this town told Jesus to leave after the dramatic miracle, that they were accustomed to not allowing change to make its abode in their town. Their walls kept them from receiving any more miracles and the power of God being

manifest in their town. When we have walls we tend to keep Jesus out and that is when we stop seeing the power manifest in our lives. An interesting note is that this place was opposite Galilee, in Spanish it says, "Opuesto", which means, "Contrary". Galilee at this time was seeing a great light, the light of the Gospel was transforming that place. Jesus, wanting to preach all over visits this area of walls. The minute He sets foot on land He is confronted with a full blown naked demoniac. As I said, this man's identity was destroyed by demonic activity so much so that he went about naked, homeless, dirty and lived in a cemetery. What could be more extreme? When one is naked in scripture they are with shame or exposed. When Adam and Eve sinned the first thing they did was to look for leaves to cover their shame. In Mark 14:51-52, we see an interesting verse that I could never understand why it was in the Bible. "A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind." Here we see a young man that while he was following Jesus he was covered, but when he was ashamed of Jesus his garment was cast off and he then went about naked. When we are ashamed of Jesus it's going about naked and uncovered, our identity is bruised and shattered. Therefore

this demonic was full of shame. The devil had riddled his life with shame, robbed him of his identity and had exposed him for all to see. Not only that, he had no shelter, no protection, rather lived among the dead. So even the life he had was death. What could better illustrate us before being saved? We also see that when he saw Jesus he shouted in a loud voice, "What do you want with me Jesus", then went on to say, "Don't torture me." This shows a clue as to part of his problem, he recognized Jesus as Lord but didn't know Him or His character. He had misconceptions of Jesus that he thought that Jesus must only want to snuff him out. That God was out to torture him, even the statement "before our time" indicates a "nothing good ever happens to me", "the worst is yet to come" attitude. This attitude is predominant in the church today. Many confess Jesus but are ignorant of his love and character. They think, "Jesus would never want to bless me," or, "I don't deserve to be blessed, I don't deserve His love or blessing". Their misconceptions are missing the mark like the demons who were accusing Jesus of wanting to torture them. As a matter of fact when we say such things we are sounding more like the demons that inhabited this man than like sons and daughters of God we truly are. We must break down the wall of misconceptions of the character and love of God or we will be hindered, or like this man, chained and in bondage. When the children of Israel were in bondage God sent word to them through the prophet Jeremiah to let them know His heart when He said, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." Jer. 29:11 The plans haven't changed. They still are to give us a hope and a

future and to prosper. We need to stop accusing God of being evil and recognize Him for what He is, a good God.

One of the tests to recognize if we are being harassed by the devil, or drifting away is this, the demons drove this man to arid, dry places. Demons push man to the dry and waterless places. We know that Jesus is a fountain of living water so if we are feeling dry or in dry places we need to see it as enemy activity. Many times we feel dry, dead, just existing, feeling the need for someone to come and lay their hands on us to revive us. All those are symptoms that we are in the dry arid places and need to get back to the well of living water. Any time we feel dry we can be sure that the enemy is behind it trying to drive us away from the fountain. Interestingly enough, Luke 11:24 amplified version says, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it roams through waterless places in search [of a place] of rest (release, refreshment, ease); and finding none it says, I will go back to my house from which I came. The words rest and refreshment implies diversion or fun. This is the type of atmosphere they are looking for dry, arid, people who want to have fun more than press in. We have all heard that: "We as Christians should show the world that we know how to have fun," Yet it is this type of attitude that demons enjoy, people who are more focused on fun than the truth of the gospel or the advancement of it. Don't get me wrong, I'm not against having fun but it is not my prime objective; it can't be our main focus. If we go to church for the fun activities and not to encounter God we are on dangerous ground. If we are going for reasons other than God we

need to refocus. Also we should note that the demons wanted to go into the pigs. Now I have lived in areas where pigs abound and they always are around the garbage, mud, slop and filth. They could be clean but it never lasts long. It seems that the worse the mud and filth the more they like it, they are truly disgusting creatures, even when little.

CULTIVATING PIGS

When those who cared for the pigs saw what had happened and that their pigs were dead they ran off to the walled city to report the miracle. I find this verse among the funniest but saddest in the Bible because those who cared for the pigs are the ones that made the stink, (no pun intended) about the salvation of the man. Israel was a people of destiny, a people of purpose who had a reason to live, and God had set up rules and regulations one of which was that they were not allowed to eat pork. Yet here we find in Israel those who not only raised pigs but they cared for them. They took care of the things of which God said, "Don't have any". So among the people of destiny and purpose was found the detestable things being cultivated and cared for, pigs. Not only were they being cared for, they were angry when they were lost at the cost of saving a man's life. How can we apply this today? As the bride of Christ we have a purpose and a destiny. We have been commanded by God not to cultivate and embrace certain things. Interestingly enough, when God tries to touch them we object. Take for example when there is an issue of unforgiveness. We are specifically instructed to not let the sun go down on our unforgiveness, yet how many times do we justify, and even defend our unforgiveness as, "I

didn't do anything wrong, they offended me". Thus we end up cultivating and caring for "pigs" the very thing God said was detestable and not to have any. How many other things do we do that God says, "Don't do this", "don't love the world" and we do the exact opposite and then defend and justify ourselves as, "God is a God of grace and will understand". I don't believe that Jesus felt remorse for the pigs that flew off the mountain side. But the people who lost their prized forbidden possessions did. So much so that they expelled Jesus from the region. Check this out, here is a man running around naked, screaming, breaking chains and no one can subject him. He gets saved, set free and in his right mind and then the people are afraid. They were not afraid when he was a scary naked crazy man, but when he was in his right mind at the feet of Jesus they were terrified. And rightly so, for the world and those who will not let go of their pigs should be afraid of the man at Jesus' feet. If we are calling Jesus Lord, then He wants the caring for the pigs to stop. He wants us to do as He says, not how we feel. He is Lord, not us. The pigs have got to go.

I remember a time when I was president of the alliance of pastors here in Zihuatanejo. I had to make a decision and made one which was what I thought the best for all interests, which however was not received well. One of the pastors who was in charge of many other churches in the alliance decided to quit and take his group with him. However, before he did he had some remarks for me which tended to lean in the direction that I was

acting a certain way because I was an American instead of a Christian. This offended me sorely, but I didn't say anything. I wrote him a letter trying to explain how I felt but he refused to reply. After a while I began to think badly about him and whenever his name came up I had an opinion. Until one day the Lord showed me that I was now offending God by my attitude. Even though I was the offended I was now offending God, I was cultivating a pig. I was justifying myself for my wrong thoughts and words and using his offensive words as my excuse. I thought of going to talk to him but my pride wouldn't let me. But God was relentless and one day I went to the man and said to him, I need to ask forgiveness from you because even though what you said offended me I am allowing it to cultivate into bitterness in my heart and I don't want to hinder the life of God in me because of this, so please forgive me". In my twenty some odd years of experience I have never seen genuine repentance go unprovoked and cause the other person to break and ask forgiveness as well, which is exactly what happened. This man asked forgiveness for saying the things he said and off in the distance we heard pigs squealing as they ran off the mountain side never to be heard from again. We embraced and prayed for each other and our relationship today is stronger then ever. The words I wanted to hear so badly had to come from me first. That day the presence of God was in that room in a most powerful way and it followed me as I went about my business. When I related this to the other pastors, urging them to do like wise, one said to me, "I am going to do the same thing". Revival would break out if we would stop cultivating the pigs and like Jesus told Peter, "take care of the lambs". John 21:16

THE WAY BACK

Well if you are in the dry arid desert or off cultivating pigs or have a wrong concept of God there is a way back, and this man's life shows us. When the people saw the man he was clothed, sitting at Jesus feet, and in his right mind..." Notice this man was at Jesus feet. This is the place that the believer should be most acquainted with. This should not be a rare place we visit, rather the daily resting place for our lives. Many times I ask people, "Why do you want to be a Christian and not pray?, Why do you want to be a Christian and not go to church or read the scriptures? It doesn't make sense, yet many do it. This point can never be emphasized enough for this is the place from which the devil tries to drive us from, the secret place, our place of strength, to the arid place, the place of weakness. If he can get us out of that place he's got a downhill battle. This man was sitting at Jesus' feet and he got clothed, meaning his identity was being restored, who he now is was being imparted, and who he was in the past was being removed. The protection and covering of God was taking place as he was at Jesus' feet, what a glorious truth. His right mind was being restored as he sat and listened to the words of Jesus. As stated, that should scare anybody wanting to hold onto or cultivate pigs. But for Jesus, it was a day full of power and glory for the kingdom of God. We can actually see that this story mirrors our own salvation. It was also when this man was at Jesus' feet that He commissioned him to go and preach. Therefore coming anew to the feet of Jesus is the road out of the dry arid places that might have been driving us away from the Lord. Many times we don't need the man of God to lay his hands on us, we just need to come once again to the presence of God. Sit at his feet and al-

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low Him to impart into us as well as remove the old. You'd be surprised at the amount of ease which comes into a man's life for just spending time with the Lord.

Secondly, we must forgive and let go of any situations that might be holding us back. This includes the ones where we are the victims or where we are the offended. They need to be forgiven and let go of, or our growth will always be limited and stunted. Leviticus says, let no priest come before me who is stunted. Lev. 21:18-21 "Indeed, no one who has a physical defect may ever come near the altar. That means anyone who is blind or lame, who has a disfigured face, a deformity, or a crippled hand or foot, who is a hunchback or dwarf, who has defective sight, skin diseases, or crushed testicles. If a descendant of the priest Aaron has a physical defect, he must never bring sacrifices by fire to the Lord. He has a defect."

I know that this is Old Testament, but the point is, God is not

looking for people to minister on his behalf when they are deformed by wrong attitudes, hidden sins, resentment or with actions that haven't been dealt with. When we harbor these things we become deformed and disfigured spiritually and not able to minister correctly because we are justifying our sin. So we will either hold on to our sin which will make us keep quiet, or loose our sin. God says loose the sin.

It was also at Jesus' feet this man was commissioned to preach the gospel. It was also where Paul and Barnabus were when they got commissioned. This is also where I was when I got commissioned, and it is where Jesus looks to find those He commissions as well. If someone can take the time to sit and receive at Jesus' feet on a regular basis, then that is a good indicator, that if they continue such a practice that his life will be lead by the Spirit, and receive a clear commission. The other day my daughter asked what does it mean to be led by

the Spirit. Our answer was simple, you let the Spirit show you the direction you need to go, the things you need to do, and the things you need to loose that can cause interference in your walk with Him. You find those things by cultivating time alone with the Lord and becoming acquainted with him, like this man did. He went from a totally lost and uncontrollable person to someone who will receive great reward from the Lord because he, after receiving salvation from the Lord, began to publicize all that the Lord had done for Him. His testimony alone went all over the Decapolis, which was a region of ten cities. What an impact!

I can hear him now as he starts his story, "My testimony includes a large herd of swine, some angry people and a merciful Savior..."