

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on January 31, 2016 at Victory of the Lamb on Luke 8:26-39

Series: All Things New
Today's Focus: New Purpose

“A Fresh Perspective From Jesus... Can Provide a Whole New Purpose”

1. **This is something that only Jesus can truly do for you**
2. **This is something that truly transforms all that you do**

In the name of Jesus Christ who says, “Behold, I am making everything new!” (Rev. 21:5)

Maybe it's just January, but this time of year can seem really bleak, can't it? Actually this week I saw a cautionary tale being shared online that hit me as one of the saddest stories I'd ever read. I'm sure it's partly because I could so easily put myself in the dad's shoes. There was a young family in New Jersey this past week whose little Mazda car (that you can see here in the pic) was surrounded by a massive pile of snow as a result of the blizzard that pounded the East Coast.



A young mom, her one year old son, and her three year old daughter got in the car. She started the engine to stay warm as dad went to work shoveling the snow and trying to dig the car out. But there was a serious problem. The heavy snow had clogged the tailpipe. As the mother and her children huddled for warmth inside the running car, the dad stood just outside shoveling and shoveling. He kept on shoveling for about 20 minutes. When he checked in on them, to his horror he found that they were all unconscious inside. The mother whose name was Sasha and their one year old son, named Messiah, were found dead.

Carbon monoxide (CO) had killed them. CO is a colorless, odorless gas that can hit quickly and without warning. In other words one cannot see it. One cannot smell it. But it is still very real and it can prove fatal to humans because God designed our bodies to run on oxygen. Carbon monoxide by contrast is a poison.

It's tragic what happened to that family, isn't it? They were trapped inside the car unaware of the danger they were in. Just as sad is how that poor father must be feeling now knowing how close he was to help but unaware as his family sat there dying right next to him.

Well in a spiritual sense, we're going to talk about how the same thing can happen to people in our lives. The same thing can happen to people like us too if we are unaware of our purpose in life which can happen if we lose sight of the perspective of what Jesus has done for us. We can become trapped, or stuck, or surrounded by the piles of temptation unaware of what's happening, consuming harmful content and believing lies which can only harm us. We ourselves can be dying spiritually and perhaps not even knowing it. On the other hand, we're going to see today that **a fresh perspective from Jesus...can provide a whole new purpose in life!**

Today in our Bible story we'll see this in a man who sorely needed both a fresh perspective and a whole new purpose which, happily, he found that Jesus could provide. Here's the story as recorded in Luke 8:26-39...

²⁶ *They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.* ²⁷ *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.²⁸ 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!"²⁹ 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.

³⁰ *Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"*

"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him.³¹ And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

³² *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.³³ 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.*

³⁴ *When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside,³⁵ 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.³⁶ Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.³⁷ 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.*

³⁸ *The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying,³⁹ "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.*

If ever there was a man who needed whole new purpose in life, it was this guy, right? They make scary movies about violent guys like this. But here's the thing. Just as I mentioned earlier about how carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas yet it is very real and deadly...something similar can be said about Satan and his demons. Though we do not see them, they are real. They seek only to harm. Demons are evil spirits who wage war against our hearts and minds and bodies and souls to hurt and harm us. We are told in our story today that this man was bodily possessed by a legion of demons so that he was trapped in a life that had no good purpose. And so it first appears to us that his was a seemingly useless life. It was a wholly self-centered life because this man helped no one but rather hindered many and sought their harm. The man lived in a lonely place outside of town among the tombs. His was a tortured existence. And it seemed to everyone as if there was nothing that could be done. He was a lost cause. A useless case. A dead man walking.

You ever felt this way about anyone? Beyond hope? You ever feel this way about yourself? Do you ever feel trapped? Useless? Adrift? Alone? Tormented even? Do you ever feel stuck in a spiritual rut that seems to have no bottom? Do you ever feel like some temptations are inescapable? Do you feel like no matter how hard you try you cannot break free, find some sense of purpose in your daily life, or ever feel good about who you are?

Then it's time for a fresh perspective. And the good news is that this fresh perspective isn't something you can just produce on your own. Rather it's something that only Jesus can provide. That was certainly true for the man in our story today, wasn't it? ²⁸ *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?"* It's kind of amazing he recognizes Jesus, isn't it? This region of the Gerasenes just East of the Sea of Galilee was not a place Jesus had ever frequented before. And it was not a place he would ever go back to. But the demon-possessed man knew Jesus. In fact he stated some nice sounding theological truths about Jesus—the Son of the Most High God!

But something was wrong here. You hear it in the question, *What do you want with me, Jesus?* I imagine a similar tone of voice like when I was a boy and I was busy playing video games up in my room and my mom was calling me downstairs to do something. "What do you want with me now, Mom?" I think of this now and feel ashamed because I recognize the completely selfish attitude behind it. What do you want with me? It's a question that's all about me. And as wrong as it is for a little boy to maintain that attitude towards his mother, think of what happens when a person holds that attitude against God? "What do you want with me, God? What are you trying to get from me, Jesus? Are you trying to ruin my life? Take the fun out of new experiences and encounters? Why would I give up any of my hard earned money and give it to the church? Why would I choose to take people's words and actions in the kindest possible way? Why would I turn the other cheek? Why would I deny myself, take up my cross, and follow you? Lose my life to save it? Forget it, Jesus."

You see in everything the demons asked, it was all about them—their comfort, their wishes, what they wanted. Then even after Jesus drove the demons out of the man and those crazy pigs went running off the cliff and perished...when all the people from the town came out and saw the previously demon-possessed man sitting clothed and in his right mind...instead of praising God and thanking Jesus for the sheer mercy and grace he had displayed even just blessing them with his presence, they were so focused on themselves, their economic loss, their earthly lives...that they asked Jesus to leave. So the very embodiment of mercy and grace, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, had to come to visit their town. He had displayed his power over Satan in what had seemed like a hopeless situation...and they were more concerned about their swine. I read this in a commentary this week: "When swine become dearer to men than Christ, it is high time that they lose their swine."

In a way that is very definition of sin. Augustine of Hippo hundreds of years ago coined a Latin phrase "Incurvatus in se". Literally this means "Curved inward on oneself." It's a theological phrase describing a life lived "inward" for self rather than "outward" for God and others. *What do you want with me, Jesus?* ... So what is a person to do if you realize so much of your life has been lived for yourself, for your own comfort, rather than outwardly for God and others?

Let Jesus give you a fresh new perspective! ³⁸ *The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "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 man was trapped by sin, but Jesus set him free! Jesus demonstrated that he alone has the power over the devil. He does what no one else can do when no one else could do it. This is why Jesus came into this world as one of us to die on cross as a ransom payment for the guilt of our sins. Isaiah 59:15-16 says, *The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was*

no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. What we could never do on our own, Jesus Christ came for us and did. He came to break the chains of Satan's power so that he could no longer accuse us, no longer condemn us, no longer to control us or get us to think that they path to happiness begins and ends exclusively with ourselves.

A fresh perspective from Jesus...can provide a whole new purpose. *"Return home and tell how much God has done for you."* After Jesus drove out the demons and gave this man a fresh perspective on Jesus as his Savior, Jesus then gave the man a whole new purpose. *"I don't want you to come with you. Go home and talk to the people you know! Tell others!"* Jesus told him. Friends, what characterizes your regular conversations with other people? What will you talk about out in the lobby after church today? What will you talk about on the way home today in the car? What will you post about on Facebook this week? What is it that you will be sharing with others when you open your mouth to use words or sit at your computer to type?

What if we started with what Jesus has done for us all? Imagine how each day could be different if that was our focus. How Jesus has given you a secure identity as a child of God in baptism where he washed away your sins and clothed you with the robe of his righteousness when you were filthy and unclean and unable to do a thing about it. How Jesus has fed you through the sacred meal that is Holy Communion, giving you his very body and blood as proof of divine forgiveness. How this time of blessed fellowship that we share is just a little foretaste of the perfect unity and love we will know together at the marriage Feast of the Lamb in heaven where God's very dwelling is with us. How the Holy Spirit has comforted and encouraged you with his word and promises so that everything now has meaning and purpose—absolutely everything you do no matter how mundane, it matters to God. You can live and work out of gratitude for God's grace instead of grumbling. Even our smallest acts of service are seen by our Heavenly Father even if they go overlooked or underappreciated by others. This is what our Builders For Christ friends taught us, right?

You may have seen this plaque given by our Builder friends out in the lobby. On it there's a verse: *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving"* (Colossians 3:23-24).



A fresh perspective from Jesus...can provide a whole new purpose. Here's one way to think of it and how to get it. This was from a devotion I had with my children the other night from a little book called "Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing." It was entitled "Cars". It said: *"What if you put porridge in a car's tank? No! Bad idea! How about tomato soup then? Stop it! The car won't run properly—actually, it won't run AT ALL! The Bible says if we put anything in the center of our lives except God, we won't work properly either. We are built for love and joy—not for sin and tears. The Bible says only God understands the human heart and how it works best—after all, he made it. And the one who made your heart can also mend it."*

Friends, I would simply add that the One who mends your heart also gives meaning to everything now in your life. **A fresh perspective from Jesus...can provide a whole new purpose.** Amen.

My Next Steps

A Thought to Ponder: The One who made our hearts is the only One who can truly mend them. What fresh perspective has God given you today about your purpose in life?

A Treasure to Share: *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving”* (Colossians 3:23-24).

A Challenge for the Week: *“Return home and tell how much God has done for you”* (Luke 8:39). This challenge implies two things: 1) Describe in your own words what Jesus has done for you. 2) Actively share your story with others where you live, where you work, or where you go to school so that they can learn what Jesus has done for them too.

Consider: The restored man from Luke 8:26-39 may have had a limited theological education, but what he lacked in theological knowledge was replaced by the personal experience of his contact with Jesus.