

## **My Name Is Riot**

**Luke 8:26-39**

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**LISTEN:** <http://fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/392633-my-name-is-riot>

I don't know how many sermons you remember, but when I was about 14, I heard a student from Southwest Baptist University bring a message from this text. It was vivid and unsettling. Let's face it. This story is odd, scary, awkward and doesn't fit neatly into our 20th or 21st century categories. And maybe, just maybe, that's what makes it stick--makes it more memorable and clear.

First of all, let's look at this broken man described by Luke. What do we know about him? And more importantly, does he resemble us in any way? He is possessed with violent forces and on a course of self-destruction. He is naked, his self-respect gone. He is homeless. He is unclean socially and religiously because he is living in the tombs. Myron Madden once suggested that perhaps the man is dealing with unresolved grief over the death of someone dear to him. What else? Verse 29 says he is strong and violent and that this condition was chronic ("many times"). He is enslaved, tied up with chains and cuffs.

I don't know what kind of demons you are wrestling with this morning, but I bet you can relate to this man. What are your chains? Fighting to overcome sexual abuse in your past. You may be battling addiction to drugs, to pornography, to a violent temper, to wealth, to your own ego and appetites. And here's the real heartbreak. It's never just one thing. It's a whole batch. In fact, in v. 30, Jesus asks the man his name (literally from the Greek, "what name fits you?"). He replies, "My name is legion" meaning Roman military group of between five and six thousand. My name is Mob. My name is Rebellion. My name is Warfare. My name is Riot. All this poison bubbling around in our souls!

You see, that question is the key to the text. Jesus' first words spoken in this dialogue are words of identity. He is saying to the man, "You aren't just a statistic, a victim. You are a person of worth and dignity. You're somebody!" This is why God sent Jesus--not to shame us into good works, or get us to create personal worth and value, but to show us we have value, simply because we are. And we are loved.

I'm intrigued by the part of this story which shows the forces within the man rejecting Jesus. But Jesus keeps coming toward him in love and liberation. Jesus became flesh to rescue us. A woman once said to her pastor, "I can't hold on any longer." Her pastor replied, "Don't forget: God is always holding on and won't let you go" [Marva Dawn, *Being Well When We're Ill*, p. 217]. Jesus longed for a relationship with this man. And God wants a relationship with you more than you want one with him.

Look at the healed man in v. 35. He's healed, restored, clothed, in his right mind. He is "sitting at the feet of Jesus." Isn't that the posture of a disciple? Isn't that the phrase we use to describe a learner/follower?

Luke does a great job of contrasting the healed man and the crowd. The healed man wanted begged to be with Jesus (v. 38) while the crowd begged Jesus to go away. The crowd didn't know what to do with the demoniac when he was ill and now they don't know what to make of him when he is well. Without Jesus, we're always afraid of people we don't understand. Without Jesus, we're always afraid of God's work in the world.

But notice what Jesus tells the healed man. Go and report what God has done (v. 39). But then he goes and tells what Jesus has done. No, the healed man is not a theologian. But he cannot talk about God without talking about Jesus and his rescuing work. Did you know your testimony is powerful? No one has a story exactly like yours. And no one can refute it. It's your story. Tell it! Share it!

Philip Yancey tells the story of a Russian woman. When the Soviet system disappeared and religious freedom was restored, she began to examine all the world's religions because her soul was hungry, and she had been in economic and political chains. She read the gospels, became a believer and now directs a small Christian publishing company. Has Jesus liberated you? Has he rescued you? Has Jesus quieted the riot in your soul? Tell it. Share him.