

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. "Here am I. Send me, send me." That is how Isaiah responded and what he wanted. When he was cleansed, he was able to go out and preach to the people. And yet here in Isaiah, it's not Isaiah saying, "Here am I. Send me." It's God saying, "Here am I. Pay attention to me. Listen to me. Here am I." He's going to a people who refused to listen to Him, who had been given all the good gifts from God, who had been in the presence of God and had the temple of the Lord and knew the sacrifices, knew the commandments, knew all that God had given them because it was written down for them, and yet they refused. They refused to pay attention to Him. They refused to obey Him. They were under the curse of the law so much so they ate pigs, the pig's flesh, they ate tainted food. They ignored the dietary laws. They ignored the moral laws. And they thought of themselves, keep away from me. I am too holy for you. I don't need you around. This is the people that Isaiah was preaching to. These are the people of God, and they're saying this.

And yet God does not destroy them completely. He saves a remnant. He says at the end of His passage here that there's this new vine, this new grape that is coming, and I will save it for my sake. And this is, again, an indication that God, even though we have rebelled against Him, even though His people rebelled against Him, He still desires to show mercy, to show love, to show care to one another.

He demonstrates that in the gospel lesson with His demon-possessed man. And this was not just one demon, this was legions. It always seems like it should be a deep, foreboding voice when you hear that word legions, like something ominous is there. And it was. This man, for all intents and purposes, was frightening. Think about it, running around naked the whole time. And when they did catch him, they chained him up and he broke the chains and then lived in the tombs and lived out in the wilderness. He could never live inside a home. This was a scary person because of his being possessed by so many demons.

And of course, this wasn't even in Jewish territory. The Gennesarets were next to Galilee, so they were like the Pagan side, the Gentile side of things. And so it's hear Jesus going to people that don't deserve to hear Him; a new branch of wine, a new grapevine that He is reaching out to, the Gentiles. And He's reaching out to the craziest of the crazies, the most lost of the lost. And He brings them in.

And even to the demons, He shows mercy and grace. God does not desire to punish. Even the demons He does not desire. He does because of the rebellion, but He doesn't want to. He wants to show mercy. And He even shows mercy to these demons. They beg Him not to torment them and send them into the abyss, but rather to the herd of pigs, which of course Jesus is fine to do because pigs are unclean, and who cares about that? He sends the demons into the pigs. And what do they do? They don't want to be tormented. They don't be tossed in the abyss.

But what do the demons do? They automatically go into the lake and they drown themselves. They drown the pigs. Their goal is destruction because they refuse to listen to the word of God. Now, we know that demons cannot praise God. They know who He is, but they can't praise and worship Him.

But it's interesting the word choice that is used here. "The demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned." That word drowned is the same word that is used in Jesus' parable of the sower and the seeds. You know the sower. He throws the seeds out. Some of it lands on the hard path, some of it on the rocky soil, some of it on the weedy soil, and some of it on the good soil. This word drowned is the same word that is used for the plants that grow up in the weedy soil. And they are choked. They're choked out because they are more focused upon the cares of this world. They're more focused upon other people's opinions. They're more focused upon their own comfort and their own self-righteousness rather than focused upon God's word, rather than focused upon humility and trust in God's word. And so they are choked, destroyed. In this case, drowned. It's the same word.

When we focus, when allow ourselves to be focused upon the cares of this world, it's as if we're being choked or drowned. That's the imagery we should have. And so how do we avoid that? It's very easy to get focused upon the things of this world. Something bad happens to you, and suddenly your life is all focused on that one bad thing. You can have 99 good things happen, but one bad thing happens and you focus upon the one bad thing. You've had 50, 60, 70, 80 years of relative health, and suddenly you get a bad diagnosis and that's all you can focus upon rather than focus upon the gift that God has given, the great gifts that you have received. The cares of this world choke us out. They destroy our joy. They destroy our confidence in Christ. They destroy our hope. But yet God says there is always hope even when you fail to live up to the standards, even when you don't walk in my ways. He still desires to show mercy.

Paul in the gospel or in the letter to the Galatians, he makes it very clear that the law has condemned us all. But God's desire, again, is not just to condemn, but to raise up, to bring out, to kill and choke out our sin so that He might raise to new life. Our new life in Christ being born again in our baptism, being adopted as children so that our eyes might be focused upon Christ and Him alone.

All of these passages are calling us to remember that our life has been purchased by Christ, that His word has saved us. Now, we might not have had multiple demons cast out of us, but the redemption for that man was the same as the redemption for us. And what are we called to do with it? The same thing he was called to do. Jesus left him with his people so that he might go forth and declare

how much God had done for him. And so he goes out and sells how much Jesus had done for him.

And I think that's important that Luke points that out. The man goes to declare, or is told to declare what God had done, and he declares what Jesus had done because Jesus, of course, is true man and true God. And it is because of Jesus, it is because of Jesus' death and resurrection that we have the hope that we are not choked out by the cares of this world, but we can be raised to new life through His word, and then we can share that word with one another.

We have been bought with a price. There is no more slave or free, Jew or Gentile, male or female, there is just children of God. And as such children, as children who are adopted as baptized, as children who are no longer slaves to the rule of the law, the law holds nothing over us. We are not bound to obey the law except that we understand that Christ has fulfilled the law for us. The law does not judge us anymore.

Think about that. We confess our sins every day, and on Sunday morning we get to confess together and hear the absolution of Jesus Christ. But because of the absolution of Jesus Christ, because of his death and resurrection, we are not bound by the law. We're not choked out by the law because we are freed by the word of God, by Christ Jesus Himself. And because of that, we then are called and can rejoice and live a life that is pleasing to God and to share with those around us what Jesus has done for us and for the world. Because let's face it, everybody in the entire world has fallen short of the glory of God. We've all abandoned His word. We all think we're better than we are, more righteous than we ought, everybody, including those of us sitting here. It's very easy to think that.

And by every right, God should and could punish us, torment us, and send us to the abyss because we've earned it. But His desire is always to show mercy, and for the sake of the new wine that is found in the cluster, the hope that He has, that He gives to each and every one of us, we know that the punishment of God is not the end of the story. We are all freed. Everybody else out there is freed. We don't know upon whom the word of God will rest and free them. It's not important for us to figure that out. We don't need to beat anybody else up with the law and tell them how bad they are. What we need to do, what we are called to do is what this man did, what he was called to do by Christ himself; go and declare what God has done.

And that is our task in this world. Until He comes again, that is our task. Go and declare what God has done. He has saved us. He has had mercy on us. He has forgiven us. He has redeemed us. He has given us a hope and a confidence so that the cares of this world, no matter what comes, cannot and will not choke us out because our eyes are focused upon Christ and because He has told us we are His children, adopted, saved, redeemed, protected. Nothing can harm us. We are free,

we are His, and we are called to bear witness of that to the world around us. We are called to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves so that others might know the mercy and love of our Father. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.