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Presentation Transcription
Our Calling
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There's an account of an encounter that Jesus had in Mark 5, verse 1. It says:

Mk. 5:1 – *Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice, and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me." For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" Then He asked him, "What is your name?" And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many." Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains. So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them." And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea. So those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened. Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed in his right mind. And they were afraid. And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon possessed, and about the swine. Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region. And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you".*

Let me ask you this question. What great things has God done for you? How has He had compassion on you? What does it mean to have a calling from God? And how important is

that calling? How much do we value God's part in our life – our calling that He's called us to. How should we respond to a calling from God?

I want to tell you how I came to talk on this subject. Two events brought me to it actually. One of those events was something my friend, Guy Swenson, told me some years ago. He knows the man who's in charge of evangelism in North America for the Seventh Day Adventist Church. And he went to visit this man quite a few years ago now to learn how they did evangelism. And Guy was explaining to this man that we did not believe that God is calling everyone now – that there is a resurrection to physical life later for those who are not called at this time. And the man said to him, "How can you be motivated to do evangelism with a belief like *that*?" See, they believe if you're not called now, then you lose salvation. And so it's *very* important to be able to reach as many people as possible so that they won't lose their eternal life. That belief propels them to try to reach as many people as they possibly can. And he could not understand how we would ever be motivated to reach out to people if we knew that God would work with them later. That's the first event that started me thinking. The second one was a sermon tape I heard given at the Feast by Ron Dart over a decade ago. He was talking about the same general topic. I think he was talking on the Last Great Day – about that resurrection. And he said in the sermon that our attitude had been, "Well, hey, if we don't get them now, then we'll get them later. No big deal." He said that he didn't think we had that quite right – that we were missing something – that our outlook is somewhat skewed from what it ought to be.

Well I've thought about those two things for quite some time now. Let's go to Matthew 13 and verse 10. Let's notice something that we all know, but let's bring it to our mind.

Mt. 13:10 – *And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."* So there are some people that are being called and it's given to them to understand. And there's other people that it's not. Jesus knew that, didn't He? *"For whoever has, to him will more be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."* So some of the time Jesus gave parables to make things clear. Other times He gave them so that the people who weren't being called couldn't get it. It's kind of like code talking. People in the audience that were being called could get it, and the ones that weren't didn't. So some are being called now and some aren't. That's not the way the gentleman from the Adventist Church thinks about things. Jesus knew that most people are not called now and there would be a resurrection later for most people. Okay? So He thinks like we do – or we think like He does.

Luke 19. Let's look at verse 9 – Luke 19. This is the tail end of the story about that man named Zacchaeus, who climbed up in the tree because he was short – he was a tax collector and hated by everybody – and wanted to see Christ. And Jesus said, "I'm going to spend the night at your house," to this man. And Jesus said to him in verse 9:

Lk.19:9 – *Today salvation has come to this house, because he also was a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.* So the fact that there was a resurrection later for most people didn't seem to diminish Jesus' zeal to call people now. He was out trying to seek and save those who were lost.

Let's go to Romans 9, verse 1.

Rom. 9:1 – *I tell you the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers, and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.* Did we hear it? Paul said...now he believes the same thing Jesus does, doesn't he? He talks about that other resurrection, too. He talked about the resurrection to life as the *better* resurrection. "The first one is the better one," he says. And so here he is saying that if it would help, he'd give up his eternal life to help people get in the first resurrection, even though there's another one that they could be in if they don't make it in the first one. And this man suffered beatings, stonings, shipwreck, imprisonment – all to spread the Word to people who could come up in another resurrection if he didn't preach to them. So what are we missing that Paul gets? "No big deal. If we don't get them now, they can come up in the resurrection later." Paul didn't seem to think that way, did He? Neither did Jesus. Why?

I'm not going to turn to the scripture, because we've turned to it so many times – Acts 8 – where the New Testament church was being persecuted by Paul, when he was Saul, and other people – so much so that they had to run for their lives from Jerusalem. And while their lives were in danger, it says, "They spread the Word everywhere they went." Usually when you're running for your life, you try to change your name and your driver's license, and you try to go incognito and just lay low – low key the whole thing and hide out. And here they are, blabbing off everywhere they went about the thing they were being persecuted about. Why would they do that? I mean, there *is* another resurrection for all those people.

You know, all the apostles, except for John, we think, were martyred for preaching to people that could come up in another resurrection. Why, if they were in danger of losing their lives – if anonymity would save them – why did they still preach to people who could be saved in another resurrection? What is it that we don't get?

All right. I'm asking that question rhetorically, but if you don't have an answer for me right now, then you don't know the answer, do you? So we're missing something, aren't we? There's something we don't get!

I think that what we're missing is that we don't get the story of that Gadarenian demoniac. I think we don't understand what it means to be called and to value our calling. Let's go back and put the microscope on that.

Mk. 5:1 – *They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him.* Do you know what it would do to your hands to get a hold of a piece of chain and try to tear it apart with your bare hands? It would rip you to the bone is what it would do. And this had happened many times. So here's this poor man. Luke tells us that when he encountered Jesus he was naked. So he was probably suffering from exposure. He was doing this day and night. He was sleep deprived. The demons probably wouldn't let him eat anything, so he was probably starving. He was humiliated. He was alienated from every other human being. They ran away from him, or they would try to put him in a cage and couldn't.

V-5 – It says in verse 5, *And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.* So he had cut himself with stones. The demons were using *him* to torture his own body. So he was being abused by a terrifying force that he could not see and was powerless to fight.

V-6 – *When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I do to with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me." For He had said to him – Jesus had said to him – "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" Then he asked him, "What is your name?" And he – that is the demon said – saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many."* Two thousand pigs ran down into the sea, right? So literally thousands of evil influences within this man's mind – can you imagine what that would be like? Perhaps the most horrifying thing about this man's plight was his *utter helplessness*.

Have you ever seen the movie *The Exorcist*? I said I would never see that movie, but it was on TV one time and I saw the end of it. It wasn't as scary as I had built it up in my mind, but it was bad enough. To talk to people who don't have control of themselves, and can't do anything about it... And here is this man in the grip of an *evil*, merciless, cruel power and there wasn't a single thing that he could do to help himself. He had *no* control. All he could do was suffer. All he could do was be tortured.

So the demons begged Him, and said, "Send us into the swine." And they did. And they ran down... Then the townspeople came – they heard about it and they came out.

V-15 – *Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon possessed and the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.* Because they knew that nobody had been able to do anything for that guy. He was just out there screaming and yelling all through the night. *And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon possessed and about the swine. Then they began to plead with Him – Jesus – to depart from their region.* The people who came to see what had happened were more upset about the pigs than they were about this poor man who was now free from Satan's grasp. They just wanted Jesus to go.

V-18 – *And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon possessed begged Him the he might be with Him.* They just wanted Christ to go. It meant nothing to them that this man was saved. And by contrast we are told that this man *begged* Jesus to let him stay with him. He *loved* Him because Jesus saved him from a terrible, terrible fate. And he wanted to be with Him because he loved Him. That’s what people who love each other want to do.

V-19 – *However* – it says in verse 19 – *Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.”* So, if you think about it in a different way that just reading it literally, this is a picture of what Jesus has done for *us*. He has redeemed us from Satan’s grasp. He has saved us from thousands of distracting influences in this world and our lives. He has saved us from our sins. He’s clothed us with His Word. He fills our mind with His sound-minded spirit so that spiritually we can be in a *right* mind now, instead of in darkness. He’s restored us to a life with God that was lost in the Garden of Eden to most people. That’s ours now, if we’ll take it.

And I think some of us are like children, who have been given a gift, and not realizing the effort and love that went into it, because they can’t – it’s just because they’re children – they don’t express appreciation or even value the love of the giver. I think a lot of us are like that. I think if we say, “Ho hum, who needs to evangelize? If we don’t get them now, they’ll come up in the resurrection” I just think that’s another way to say, “I don’t really value what God has done for me *now* and I don’t care if other people don’t get that. I don’t value what God has done for me and the compassion He has shown me. I don’t realize how helpless I was – how pitiful, how lost, how dead. I don’t realize what Christ had to do to *free* me from my sins. I don’t realize that to know God is the rarest of gifts. I don’t realize that in calling me, God is showing that He loves me and wants to be *with* me, and for me to be with Him.”

So I think this whole thing about “Ho hum, if we can’t get them now, we’ll get them in the resurrection,” and “What’s the big deal?” and “Let’s just think about our salvation and qualifying for eternal life and preparing to be the bride of Christ.” I think we have a grace problem. Now why would I say that? Well, you know, we have this spiritual heritage. We talk about preparing to be the bride of Christ. And it’s true! We are. That’s clearly in the scriptures. And it’s true that we are to *prepare* to be the bride of Christ. And we talk a lot about growing and overcoming and building godly character. And we certainly must! We talk about enduring to the end. And we better do that! That’s what we focus on. We talk about that being our part in all that. But I think in focusing on all these things, many of us believe, in fact, that we are not *really* saved by grace through faith, but by our own works – by qualifying, by preparing, by whatever.

Now, we are either saved by grace – not of works, lest any man should boast – or we are saved by our works. Which is it? Well, of course, we *are* just like that Gadarene demoniac. There is *nothing* we can do to save ourselves from our sins! We just can’t do it. We’re helpless. We’re as helpless as that guy with two thousand demons in his brain. We’re as good as dead. We were in the clutches of Satan and cut off from God. That’s how we were. And no amount of character, no number of successfully observed Sabbath days, no course of preparation, no catalog of good works can *ever* save us! No qualifying for the Kingdom of

God. And I think people whose focus is on qualifying for the Kingdom of God don't really realize what has been done for them, because they think, at some level, they're doing it for themselves. They don't realize that the Holy Spirit is the down payment of eternal life – that it's already in them – that God has made a commitment to them when they were baptized.

Look at Romans 8, verse 1 with me.

Rom. 8:1 – *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. No condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus! No condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus – saved from all our sins.* Now somebody will say, “You think that you're saved from your future sins.” A future sin does not exist. You can't be saved from a future sin, because it hasn't been done yet. So, I think that people that have this approach – that this is the more important thing: that we've got to qualify and we've got to build character and all that – which we do. We do! But I think that's like the kid who doesn't appreciate the gift given. They can't value their calling because they don't understand its value. Just focusing on themselves and what they're doing and what they want. That's what kids do and that's what some of us do, too.

Let me ask you this question? The fear is, when you hear people like me talking like this, is that, “Oh, we're going to throw all the character building out the window, and pretty soon it's going to be cheap grace. And that's all that matters and you can go and do whatever you want and it'll be forgiven, and so what's the big deal? Why even bother building character and all that, because your sins are already forgiven? So no problem. Do whatever you want.” When I was in high school – no, I was in college by then – I had a summer job working in a laboratory, and there were a bunch of these child geniuses there – kids that had graduated from college when they were sixteen – real smart – worked on their slide rules. One of them was Catholic. And he would tell us how he would go out and do all these outrageous things on Saturday night, and then go confess it Sunday morning and be ready to go again the next weekend. That's cheap grace. I'm *not* talking about that.

So what place, then, does preparing to be the bride of Christ play? What place does building character play? Where does enduring trials fit in? Where does obeying the law fit in? If a person really understands what's been done *for* them, then those things are the grateful response to what has been done to us. That's the thank you. That's the thank you that we give for the great gift that we've been given. We were once slaves of the devil. We were possessed of him, figuratively, and now we're happily the slaves of God, whose not a control freak. We have gladly traded places. We've been given a relationship with Him.

Why have we gladly traded places? Why have we so happily, once freed from Satan, come to God? Well, because we love God for what He has done for us, and we want to draw close to Him. Just like that poor man, who after Jesus saved him, wanted to go with Him in the boat. He loved Him. He didn't want to be apart from Him. He *begged* Him to take him with Him.

Let's turn to John 12 and verse 30, if you would. This is a very instructive scripture – at least it is to me.

Jn. 12:30 – Jesus was talking to some folks, and He said, *This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.* He’s talking about Satan. And He said, *And I, if I am lifted up from the earth – and that’s a reference to Him being lifted up on the stake in crucifixion - will draw all peoples to Myself.* See, character building is very important. Good works are important. Obeying the Law is important. That’s the light that shines. It shows us how to stay out of the mud. But those things do not earn us salvation. They are the way that we draw close to the God who has saved us, and that we love so much, because of all He has done for us. That’s how we get in the boat with Him and go on with Him. Because He went after us and found us when we were *utterly* lost and completely helpless, and saved us from a cruel fate, and restored us to a relationship with Him. That’s what character building is for. That’s what obedience to the Law is for.

We know that the Law is a law of love, don’t we? And we know that God is love. So, when we try to obey God’s Law, that’s our way of drawing close to God – of loving God and loving His other children.

Of course, I always seem to relate this to working with teenagers. A number of years ago I worked in a large church and I was being transferred. So we decided to make the last youth group activity in that church a really bang-up activity. We took this church group to Jackson, Wyoming – up to the Grand Tetons. One day we had a day in town. And the kids are running all over the place in packs. If you’ve ever been to Jackson, it’s sort of a tourist Mecca – great art museums. Of course, no kids went into any of those. They went in the T-shirt stores and the jewelry places and like that. So they’re just running all over town. And I was strolling down the street by myself, after having been with that group for five consecutive days already, enjoying the solitude. And all of a sudden, four fourteen-year-olds from our group ran up to me all excited. And they said, “Mr. J, we have something for you!” And they pulled this T-shirt out of a sack. It was the neatest T-shirt I’ve ever seen. It had big hiking boots on the back, and said, “Just hike it.” And on the front it had the Tetons and all that. I still have it. It’s kind of thread bare by now, but I refuse to throw it away. I think of each of them every time I see it. And I said, “You girls shouldn’t be spending your money on me.” And they all hugged me, and told me they loved me, and thanked me for taking them on this trip, and for being their friend. And then they said, “Come with us. We want to show you something.” So we took off down the street. And the girl who was walking beside me took me by the hand in the most innocent and loving way. Tears came to my eyes when that happened. Of course, being a guy, I sucked them right back in and wouldn’t show them how it made me feel. But I was thinking a lot about it later and how good it felt to have that kind of relationship and that kind of impact on those children.

So what does that have to do with this? Maybe that’s just a little bit how God feels when we attend to Him with our obedience and we want to spend time with Him, learning His lessons and overcoming and praying and drawing closer to Him and spending time with Him. Do you think that’s far-fetched? I don’t. I think that’s exactly how God feels. It says that when we obey God we *glorify* Him. And I know I felt pretty glorified after that experience. Surely that way of thinking about the Law has to be more spiritual than thinking of it as a qualifying code.

Matthew 1, verse 21. We read this not too long ago.

Mt. 1:21 – *And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.* So, that's what a calling means. That's what it means to be called. It means to be lost in the worst kind of trouble that you can imagine – to be totally helpless and tortured – and then to have God reach down and find us and to *save* us from a terrible fate that we caused by our own sins. It means to be loved and cherished by God our Father, who says it makes His heart swell with pride when we try to mimic Him and obey Him. It means to be back in harmony again – something that hasn't happened since the Garden of Eden. Are those good things? How much are they worth? Wouldn't we also want those things for other people now – to be found, to be saved, to be restored? I believe that *is* the reason why we are to make disciples now, and why, in the New Testament, it's so much a first priority. Because we value our calling, because we love God, because we're so excited about it, we just can't not talk about it to people.

What was it that Jesus told that man after he was free? “Go home to your friends and tell them what *great* things the Lord has done for you and how He has had compassion on you.” Somehow, I just don't think that man went back to town and put his feet up. I think he was so fired up and so happy and so excited that he just couldn't keep his mouth shut. I think he had to tell everybody what had happened to him. And I think – and this is just me – I think that we will all be better Christians and better evangelists when we understand what has been done for us, when we understand the depth of the gift we have been given, when we understand that our salvation comes by grace through faith and *not* by our own works and that God has *many* other people that He was to find and save *now*. And he wants to use *us* to do that.