

419 In his right mind

In Mark Chapter 5 we read of Jesus crossing to “the country of the Gadarenes” on the south-east side of the Sea of Galilee (5.1, KJV). This was in the “Decapolis”, more of a Greek and Roman area than Jewish, as the presence of the herd of swine also indicates.

As soon as He was on the shore Jesus and His companions were confronted by a very scary figure! - “a man with an unclean spirit” living among the tombs, who was unbindable, untameable and perpetually crying out and gashing himself with stones (vv 2-5). Here was thus a sudden clash between the forces of the devil and the Son of God Himself with much depending on the outcome, just as had been the case during Jesus’ direct temptations at the start of His ministry (Mark 1.12-13 and parallels).

Significantly for us all, the unclean spirit, (involving a nasty mix of “devils”, hence “Legion” – they were “many”, vv.9,12,15), immediately recognised Jesus for He really is. Legion was driven to run to Jesus and “worship” Him (v.6, KJV: we gather that the Greek word translated here as “worship” is about falling down in recognition rather than in allegiance).

“The devils” recognised not only Jesus Himself, but also Jesus’ power over them, for as Legion approached, Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of him (vv.7,10 & 8). We note that these devils had to go somewhere – it was not just a matter of Jesus “blowing them to bits”. Hence they pleaded through Legion that Jesus should neither torment them nor “send them away out of the country” (vv.7b & 10 / or, as in Luke 8.31, “into the deep”, “the abyss”). They “besought him” to be sent into the swine, and “forthwith Jesus gave them leave” (vv.12-13a), with well-known, catastrophic results (v.13b).

This startling destruction of the herd could not have been a clearer visual aid: that the unclean spirits were truly gone out of Legion; that unclean spirits can cause immense, devil-empowered harm, be that in places, people and animals; that Jesus has total power over them; and that one man’s rescue from their foul grip was and is worth more than a vast herd of pigs.

What a difference the Lord Jesus had made to the now-freed man! (eg., Luke 4.17-21). The townsfolk found him “sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind” (v.15b). Seeing this calm, healed man before them, from

whom they must have fled for years, “they were afraid”, and “began to pray him (Jesus) to depart out of their coasts” (vv.15b & 17), for Jesus was clearly a Trouble-Maker!

By contrast No-Longer-Legion, described now as “he that had been possessed with the devil”, “prayed him (Jesus) that he might be with him” (v.18). The answer from Jesus, to this man, at this time, in this place, was a gracious No, probably because here in the Decapolis Jesus posed little threat to the various authorities and He was about to leave those parts anyway. Instead Jesus told him to go and “give his testimony” to all and sundry, speaking of all that the Lord had so very clearly done for him; and in gratitude and obedience he did just that, “and all [men] did marvel” (v.20).

Of the various lessons we can learn from this well-known incident for our own discipleship today, we are starkly confronted with the genuine existence and activities of Satan, the devil, and his underlings. One of the many follies of our own times is the lofty dismissal by psychiatrists and the like, and even by some “theologians”, of the reality of the devil and “unclean spirits”, who still bring mayhem and misery when given the opportunity.

Praise God, Jesus has smashed Satan’s grip and his fate is guaranteed (egs., John 19.30 / Romans 16.20 / I Corinthians 15.57 / Hebrews 2.14-15 / I John 3.8b / Revelation 12.9; 20.2,10).

But meanwhile Satan is still on the loose. We are to be neither obsessed with the devil, nor to ignore him (egs., Ephesians 4.27; 6.10-18 / II Timothy 2.25-26 / James 4.7 / I Peter 5.8-9). We never tackle Satan in our own strength. We stick together using our God-given protections - the Name of Jesus, the shed blood of Jesus, the whole armour of God, the whole Word of God (- “It is written ...”), prevailing prayer and solid Christian fellowship. We wield our Christ-granted authority with caution and discernment (eg., Mark 16.17-18 / Luke 10.17-20 / John 14.12-14). Where exorcism is needed, as with Legion, we call on those of our number who are gifted and experienced in this exposed, specialist ministry.

With this dear healed man as our example, we too can “go home to our friends and tell them how great things the Lord has done for us, and has had compassion on us” (based on Mark 5.19) – a compassion and salvation that the Lord will willingly grant to “whosoever shall call on His Name” (Acts 2.21).

And we too can join with Thomas in proclaiming before Jesus, “My Lord and my God” (John 20.28)!

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