

## 547 Five Requests

In Mark 5.1 we read of Jesus and His disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee and arriving “into the country of the Gadarenes”. The name of this area, lying on the south-east shore of the lake, originated with the Israelite tribe of Gad though now its inhabitants were mainly Gentiles – hence for example their herds of swine.

On the lake shore Jesus was immediately confronted by a very alarming figure “with an unclean spirit”, who lived among the mountains and tombs, who was unchainable and untameable, and who was “always, night and day ... crying, and cutting himself with stones” (from Mark 5.2-5, KJV). The passage in Luke adds that he “had devils long time, and ware no clothes ...” (from Luke 8.27). Here was a wild, anguished, naked, demon-dominated soul shunned by everyone apart from those indwelling devils.

The passage then unfolds with five significant requests made to the Lord Jesus. “But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him” (5.6, the thrust of the Greek word, (‘horkidzo’) translated here as “worshipped” meaning “to do homage so as to make supplication”). Clearly the devils immediately recognised the Person and authority of Jesus, and knew they were in trouble.

Here is the first request of the passage – “I adjure thee (that is, “I solemnly implore thee”) by God, that thou torment me not” (v.7b): we see from the singular “I” and “me” that it is the man speaking, but he is only the mouthpiece for the unclean spirit and associated devils within him. This request to be spared from “torment” was in response to the words Jesus had already uttered – “Come out of the man, [thou] unclean spirit” (v.8).

Then comes Jesus’ extraordinary, gracious question– “What [is] thy name?” (v.9a). For the first time presumably for years and years, Someone was treating this poor troubled soul as one who mattered, who was made in the image of God, and who had a name! – even though “Legion” was the last name he would have wanted.

The second request then came from Legion to Jesus, “he besought him much not to send them away out of the country” – the “he” and “him” and “them” again demonstrating Legion’s chaotic inner confusion. The Greek translated here (‘parakalei’) as “besought” basically means “begged” or “pleaded”: before Jesus that evil spirit and those devils were powerless.

Then is the third request, “the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them”, and Jesus “gave them leave” – with shocking results (from vv.12-13). Unsurprisingly the swine herders “legged it”! – they spread the news and the crowds soon gathered. What they saw astonished them: there was Jesus, and there was Ex-Legion, “sitting, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid” (v.15).

So we come to the fourth and fifth requests: “And they began to pray him (another ‘parakalei’) to depart out of their coasts” (v.17), and Jesus duly obliged by entering on to his ship (v.18a).

The fifth and final request, ‘parakalei’ again, comes from Ex-Legion himself, who “prayed him (Jesus) that he might be with him” (v.18b). “Howbeit, Jesus suffered him not” (v.19a). Jesus’ reply here is remarkable! – “Go home to thy friends ...”. What? Ex-Legion had a home to go home to? And friends?? He was to tell them of the Lord’s deeds and compassion, which he duly did, and as a result, “all [men] did marvel” (from vv.19-20).

So, five requests to Jesus: three from Legion and his devilish controllers, for them to be not tormented; one from the Gadarene people, for Jesus to leave, and quickly; and one from the Jesus-recued man, for him to remain with Jesus. In each case Jesus acted appropriately, first with awesome spiritual power, then with quiet withdrawal, and finally with a kindly No yet spoken for God-glorifying reasons.

In our response we note that Satan and evil spirits still exist, even though they are frequently denied or ignored in these supposedly enlightened days. They still make their mischief when given opportunity (eg., I Peter 5.8), but thankfully they remain powerless when confronted by the Lord Jesus Christ (egs., Matthew 28.18b / I John 3.8b). We are not ignorant of Satan’s devices (II Corinthians 2.11b); we don the whole armour of God (Ephesians 6.10-18); and we resist the devil “stedfast in the faith” (I Peter 5.9a).

We note also that some people still tell Jesus to depart from their lives (eg., Luke 19.14 / John 19.15). In so doing they are refusing God’s gifts of grace freely given in Christ, and remain in a bad place (eg., John 3.36b).

Finally, as with Ex-Legion, all those “in Christ” long to be with Jesus visibly, as will happen in God the Father’s good time (eg., Acts 1.7). Until then, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (II Corinthians 5.7), faithfully making

known the goodness of the Lord - and humbly lifting our own requests to Him whenever there is need.

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