

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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God's Servant in Mark's Gospel: Mark 5

Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah King and records His genealogy back to Abraham (Matthew 1:1). Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man and records His genealogy back to Adam (Luke 3:38). John presents Jesus as the Son of God and records His eternal character (John 1:1) the One through Whom all things were made. But Mark presents the Lord Jesus as the Servant of God. His Gospel provides a great insight into the Son of God at work. No genealogy is given. A servant's genealogy is not important. Jesus Christ is described as the Son of God in the very first verse of the Gospel. But by verse 9 He is baptised and immediately undertaking the service of God. The Gospel of Mark is full of action. One of the characteristic words of the Gospel is "immediately". The Gospel of Mark has a great sense of urgency and intensity no more so than in this morning's chapter.

The events we shall look at are part of a sequence which begins in 4:35. Jesus was taken by the disciples into one of their boats. It records that they took Jesus "just as He was". The implication being that the Lord Jesus, exhausted from His ministry, was helped by the disciples into the boat where He soon falls fast asleep. It is remarkable to think that in the Old Testament God is described as the One who neither slumbered nor slept. Yet as Son of God on earth He experiences the limitations of humanity. Jesus sleeps to recover from the labour of the day. It is a vivid picture of "Immanuel", God truly with us. It is Mark who describes such lowliness as the introduction to an explosion of incredible power in the events which follow. These events show Lord's authority over **disaster, the devil, disease and even death**. Chapter 4 ends with the first of four miracles. Jesus rises from His sleep to calm the storm. His disciples ask the question, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Legion - the power of the Devil.

This morning we start with the second of these miracles, the healing of Legion. Some commentators have suggested that it was Satan who caused the storm on the sea to prevent Jesus reaching Legion to free him of the demons that possessed him. They cite Satan's power to send a great wind in Job 1:19 as evidence of his influence in nature. Whatever the cause, Christ's greater power cannot be resisted. In our passage, Jesus steps out of the boat to be met by the frightening sight of Legion. Mark describes the hopeless condition of Legion. "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," (verses 1-5).

The dreadful condition that Legion was in can be seen as an illustration of some of the extremities of the human condition. Legion lived among the dead and had no normal relationships. Satan's work from the very beginning of creation was to destroy the relationship man had with God and then destroy man's relationship with one another. Paul uses the phrase, "without natural affection". Legion was also out of control. One aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is self control (see Galatians 5:22-23). In today's world there are many examples of people who are unable to control their behaviour. Legion was violent. The most frightening aspect of Legion was his violence. One of the most frightening aspects of the world we live in is the terrible acts of violence to which we have become accustomed. Legion was in despair. His behaviour arose from the despair that was in his heart. He hated himself and harmed himself. When we hate ourselves we are prone to harm ourselves and those around us.

What is remarkable is that Legion runs to Jesus. "When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped Him." Mark describes the unusual circumstance of Legion running to Jesus but at the same time the demons expressing fear of Christ's power over them. "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!" (verses 6-8). James explains "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" (James 2:19). The use of the expression "the Most High God" is one used repeatedly in the Bible by the Gentiles and indicates that Legion was probably not a Jew. Certainly the Jews would not be found keeping swine which they considered unclean animals.

It is interesting that Jesus asks Legion his name. "Then He asked him, 'What is your name?' And he answered, saying, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.'" (verse 9) Legion was a Latin word used to describe a Roman army regiment of 6,000 soldiers and also used to describe a large number. Here it describes Legion's condition: an individual possessed by many demons. We come to Christ as individuals as the old Gospel hymn puts it - "Just as I am." Legion came to Jesus just as he was in all his despair and hopelessness. What follows is the most remarkable exorcism. Jesus casts out the demons into the 2,000 swine feeding nearby causing them to rush down the steep hill into the sea where they drowned.

One might ask why Jesus inflicted the demons on the swine. What it demonstrates is that the condition of legion was not a psychological problem. He was not simply mentally disturbed. He had been possessed and the demons which had possessed him then possessed the swine causing their destruction. It brings home the reality of satanic power but the greater power of Christ.

This very dramatic event and brought the whole of the community to Jesus. "Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and 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," (verses 15-16). This is a very powerful part of Legion's story. Everyone witnessed the transformation of this man they all knew. They saw a man sitting peacefully. He had been possessed, now he was free. He had been wild, now he sat quietly. He had been naked, now he was clothed. He had been out of his mind, now his mind was at peace. It is a beautiful illustration of new life in Christ.

What is surprising is the inability of the community to value this transformation. The one who had terrorised them was now their friend and neighbour. But they could not cope with this. Instead they pleaded for Jesus to leave, "Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region," (verse 17). Why are people so disturbed when faith in Christ brings about so much good where before there had been nothing but misery?

Jesus does leave. He does stay where He is not welcomed. But Legion wanted to go with Him. "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." And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marvelled," (verses 18-20). What a marvellous command Jesus gave Legion! "Go home to your friends." His home had been the tombs. He had no friends. But now restored, he can go back home and find his old friends and tell them what amazing things the Lord had done. Notice it is amazing "things". It was not just that he had been set free from the possession he endured, but there were so many new aspects to his life. This was not a man in need of rest and recuperation following a long bitter battle with evil. This is a man who is immediately ready to live out the new life he had in Christ. He was ready to share with others the compassion he had experienced and this made a great impression on those who heard his story. It is an encouragement to us to share what Christ has done in our lives.

Jairus' daughter - death.

Next we find Jesus returning across the sea to be met by a large crowd. "Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea. And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live." So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him," (verses 21-24).

What a difference! Jesus is not approached by a wild man but by an intelligent, sophisticated family man – Jairus. I suspect Jairus would not normally have sought out Jesus. Jesus did not fit into the Jewish view of the Messiah and ultimately He was rejected by the Jewish religious establishment. But Jairus had something in common with Legion – he was in despair. His daughter was about to die and Jesus was the only One who could help. And so a journey began. The Saviour walks side by side with Jairus amidst a bustling crowd of people including His own disciples. One can imagine how Jairus wanted to complete that journey as quickly as possible. What happened next was the last thing he needed.

The unnamed woman - disease.

"Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well." Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction," (verses 25-29).

Another person comes on to the scene. This woman was like Legion and like Jairus. She was in despair. And like Legion and Jairus she came to Jesus. But she was different. She was neither wild nor confident in her approach. She was hesitant and timid. But she had a remarkable faith. She believed by simply touching Jesus she would be healed - and she was right! By simply stretching out the hand of faith she was healed of a disease that had lasted for twelve years. This was a disease doctors had tried to cure but without success. Christ was the only answer.

But the woman was not expecting what followed. "And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?" But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" (verses 30-31).

We have all had the experience of walking in a crowd. It could be at a football match or whilst we are Christmas shopping; people unintentionally brushing past or bumping into each other. In such circumstances the disciples' reaction seemed sensible. But they still did not understand the power of Christ. Their question earlier was, "Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey Him." When they saw Jesus still the storm, it had staggered them. But the healing of the woman was unseen. Only she and the Lord Jesus knew it had taken place. The work Christ does stilling the storms of life in the hearts of ordinary people is as wonderful as His ability to control the storms of nature. He had come to heal the broken hearted and He placed the highest priority on this ministry.

We all come to Christ in different ways. Some of us, like Legion, have a dark and distressing background from which Christ frees us. Some, like Jairus, have lived in normal circumstances until a crisis awakes their spiritual need and they find Christ. And some of us, like this timid lady, quietly endure suffering until we stretch out the hand of faith and discover the transforming power of the grace of God.

Jesus stands still. "And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction,'" (verses 32-24). To Legion Jesus had said, "Go tell your friends." To this woman He says "Go in peace." Salvation is something to be communicated. Legion went and told his friends and he did it with great confidence. The woman came forward trembling to tell others what Christ had done for her. However bold or timid we might be, Christ can bless our testimony.

In the story of Legion we see the power of Christ over the devil and in the story of the woman we see Christ's power over disease. Now we see Christ's power over death itself. "While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house who said, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?'" (verse 35).

Finally, Jairus.

One can sense the despair into which Jairus was plunged. The journey to his home had been interrupted by someone else in great need. Now whilst there joy in the heart of the woman now, there was grief in the heart of Jairus. What is remarkable about the journey Jesus took with Jairus is that it was not necessary to the healing of Jairus' daughter. The Lord Jesus had demonstrated in the case of the centurion's servant, for example, that He had no need to be present in order to heal. But this journey was necessary for other reasons.

"As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe." And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James," (verses 36-37). Jairus believed Jesus could heal his daughter but for Him to raise her from the dead was an entirely different matter. The messengers' words, although direct, appeared to sum up the situation, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" But the response of Jesus addresses Jairus' fear and faith. Fear is the common thread in each story. Legion was afraid. The woman trembled with fear. And Jairus was afraid. It is this fear the Lord confronts, "Do not be afraid." So often fear can paralyse us. It can rob us of the ability to trust God. Jesus' words are so important; "Only believe." The implication is that believing displaces fear with hope. Jesus could have said, "Go home; your daughter is fine." But instead Jesus continues with Jairus on this journey of faith. He was with Jairus as he feared the imminence of his daughter's death. He halted His journey to display His power to heal by the slightest touch. He then takes Jairus' faith on to another level. Jairus could have said "Master, it's too late," and walked away. Instead they finish the journey together. We should never underestimate the times when the Lord walks with us. As David writes in Psalm 23, "You are with Me." So often all we want is for the Lord to take away our difficulties. Yet the deepest and the most enriching experiences are those which take place when we experience the Lord's presence in the most testing times.

It is also interesting that Jesus takes only Peter, James, and John with Him for the rest of the journey to Jairus' home. These close disciples are there to witness His power. "Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. When He came in, He said to them, 'Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping.' And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He

took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying, (verses 38-40).

So often today we see the intrusive behaviour of the media in the sorrow and suffering of people. There is much evidence of unseemly interest in the pain of others and the exploitation of the people in distress. Suffering is a time for close not large circles of interest. It is a time for protection and the inner circle of genuine love and compassion. So when Jesus arrives, He deals with the superficial behaviour of those who first pretend grief and so quickly ridicule the Son of God. The Lord, renowned as the gentle lowly Nazarene, was also able with authority to deal with unruly behaviour.

The other beautiful aspect of this story is the Lord entering into the home of Jairus. Legion and the woman were both healed publicly in the open air. Here Jesus enters the home. The home is that private family place where love is expressed and protection given especially to the young. Jesus does not allow prying eyes or insincerity to invade that space.

"Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, 'Talitha, cumi,' which is translated, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.' Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement. But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat." (verses 41-43).

The Lord did not touch Legion when He healed him. The woman touched the Lord to be healed. Here the Lord Jesus takes the little girl by the hand. In these miracles we have some important lessons in regard to dealing spiritual needs. Legion was encouraged to go tell his friends. Jesus encouraged the woman to publicly confess her faith in Him. But with Jairus' daughter, He commands the matter is kept secret. The Lord did not consider it wise to thrust the young girl into the public eye. We are constantly being reminded of the cult of celebrity and the desire to be endlessly talked about, photographed and to be in the spotlight. As Christians, there are times when we need to absorb the deep experiences we have with God in quietness and safety. Jairus had the experience of walking with Christ at the most painful time in his life and he had the joy of having his daughter restored to him. His undoubted faith, borne out of his despair, had grown in strength.

The events we have traced began with the Lord falling asleep after a long arduous day. He awoke from that sleep to perform four miracles which demonstrated His power over disaster, the devil, disease and death. In this last miracle Jesus shows Himself to be the One who is "the resurrection and the life". But He follows this great revelation with a simple request, "Give her something to eat."

The work of salvation can only be performed by the Saviour. Once life has been given, it needs encouraging and feeding. This is the ministry of the Lord's people by the power of the Spirit of God. This is especially true of young believers. Peter was one of the disciples who was in the room and heard these words. Later, at the end of John's Gospel just before Jesus went back to heaven, He instructs Peter, to feed His lambs, shepherd and feed His sheep. As we have witnessed afresh the power of Christ to save people from the most desperate situations, let us not forget our responsibility to share our faith and play our part shepherding the flock of God.

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