

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Christ and us as seen in the Gospel of Mark: Changed lives

Good morning. By way of introduction let me outline the radio talks in this new series. Today we will look at “Changed Lives” and consider from Mark 5:1-34 the demon possessed man from Gadara and the woman who had a long term bleeding problem for twelve years. During the following three weeks the talks will cover;

- “Perceptions of Jesus”; the Syrophenician woman and the Transfiguration;
- “Which way?”, the rich young Ruler and Bartimaeus; and finally,
- “Opportunities”, the woman who anoints Jesus, the soldier who confesses and the actions of Joseph of Arimathea.

The demon possessed man

Let us now look at the demon possessed man from Gadara in Mark 5. At the end of Mark 4 the Lord Jesus has just completed the crossing of the sea of Galilee and calmed a storm (Mark 4:35-41). The storm appeared so violent that the disciples thought that the boat was in danger of sinking (Mark 4:37-38). However, the Lord was there to deal with the danger (Mark 4:39-41).

Let us now see the Lord’s compassion as we read Mark 5:1-6, *“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.”*

As the Lord Jesus and His disciples step ashore, He is met by the demon possessed man. It appears from these verses that the man lived in a cemetery, not the best of homes! Because of his condition, he could not control himself, be controlled or restrained. The man was distressed, self-harming and a threat to the wider community. But when he sees Jesus, he immediately runs towards him and amazingly he worships. Is the worship real from the man or are the demons pretending to worship? Mark 5:8 seems to clarify the situation because it states, *“For He [Jesus] said to him, ‘Come out of the man, unclean spirit!’”*

We have the situation where the man needs to be liberated before true worship can take place. We have a similar situation in Acts 16 in the city of Philippi. Let us read Acts 16:16-18, *“Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour.”*

Paul would not have witnessing coming from an agent of Satan, so eventually uses the power of the name of Jesus Christ to both liberate the slave girl and stop the witnessing coming from an evil spirit.

So it is the same with the Lord Jesus Himself, but He acts immediately upon meeting the man. It must be said at this point that when there is a face to face contact with the Saviour, nothing is ever the same again for those He meets. It is also true today. Through the preaching of the Gospel message things change, either acceptance or rejection of Jesus as Saviour. Therefore, how important for every Christian to take opportunities to preach the Lord Jesus as the Saviour of sinners.

Let us come back to the man at the sea shore. In Mark 5:7-9 we read, *“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.’”*

We see from Mark 5:7 that the worship offered is the acknowledgement to One who is superior by one who is worthless. The demons are taking their proper place when confronted by the Lord Jesus, "*Son of the Most High God.*" The next phrase, "*Do not torment me*" shows that they are afraid of Jesus. The Lord Jesus has identified the nature of the demons, "*unclean spirit.*" Satan and his demon followers spoil and debase any person that they come into contact with, whether on a temporary or permanent basis. Unclean can be applied to spiritual, moral and physical situations and sometimes all three as in this man. Spiritually he is indwelt by these demons, morally he self-harms and is violent, and physically he is naked and lives in a cemetery. The Lord Jesus asks the name of the demon and the reply is "*Legion; for we are many*" (Mark 5:9). This is a huge force to be reckoned with.

At the time that this event was taking place, historians consider a legion in the Roman army to be almost 7,000 strong, mainly foot soldiers and a few cavalry. From this we see the serious state that this man was in, totally under the control of this satanic army. No wonder he was uncontrollable as far as the local population was concerned and yet these demons, legion, are afraid of the Lord Jesus.

Legion's conversation with the Lord Jesus is found in Mark 5:10-13, "*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."

From this conversation we see that the demons did not want to be banished from the locality. But if we look at the same account in Luke 8:26-39, we find a far more serious banishment, that of the abyss or bottomless pit. Luke 8:31 states, "*And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss.*" This is the same place that is referred to in Revelation 20:1-3 where Satan is to be confined for a thousand years during Christ's glorious millennium reign. These demons were desperate to keep their freedom and they looked for an alternative host in which to dwell - the pigs! The Lord giving them leave to do so results in the destruction of the pigs who were unable to cope with the demons. The temporary respite for these demons did not last long. Although Scripture is silent as to what happened to them after this I can only believe that they would end up in the abyss as I believe the grace of the Lord Jesus would not allow them to devastatingly affect another person.

In the meantime, the effect of all this results in the farm workers, who were looking after the pigs, running away to the surrounding area with the news of the dramatic events. As a result, people started coming to see for themselves what had taken place. Let us read Mark 5:14-17, "*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 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. Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.*"

The first result of this face to face encounter with the Lord Jesus is that the man is completely changed. The man is sitting whereas before he was agitated and a menace to himself and others. Next we see that he is clothed, no longer naked. He looks decent. Nakedness was the first impact of sin. When Adam and Eve sinned (see Genesis 3:1-7), we are told that their eyes were opened and they realised that they were naked (Genesis 3:7). The covering of innocence had been removed through their disobedience. Finally, the people realise that the man was now in his right mind. We cannot see into people's minds but we can see the results in their behaviour as to the state of mind. What a complete change for the man but the population cannot cope with the dramatic change and their reaction is to plead for Jesus to leave.

I said earlier that when there is a face to face contact with the Saviour nothing is ever the same again for those He meets. This we see is true for the man, a complete change, he is truly transformed. For the population it is also the same but with the opposite result; they want Jesus to go away. When we are confronted through the Gospel, what is our reaction to the Lord Jesus and His wonderful message of salvation?

Finally, this man has something to understand. His deliverance from the power of Satan opens up for him a job opportunity. He wanted to go with Jesus and we can easily see how this would be a natural thing to desire. Mark 5:18 states, "*And when He [Jesus] got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him.*" We do not always receive what we might think is best or the next logical step in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord wants people here in this world to witness for Himself. The Lord Jesus has a work for him to do as He has work for every Christian. So in Mark 5:19-20 we have the Lord's commission for 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." The change in our lives must start first in our homes and then among our friends and neighbours. The man is to speak about the Lord's compassion. The Lord's blessing is that He transforms lives

because He transforms people from the inside to the outside. This is unlike social reform that only attempts to change the outside and possibly the environment in which we live - that largely has limited success.

The Lord Jesus, in His transforming work, empowers believers to cause changes in the lives of others and in their own environment because we want to make an impact in every part of our lives. The message of the Gospel starts with salvation and has the potential for almost unlimited social reform! So with this man he went and witnessed. The central message was what *"Jesus had done for him."* The man had a bad reputation. He was living proof of what Jesus had done in his complete conversion. It was the before and after picture! His witness had an impact, *"all marvelled."* How many came to trust in the Lord Jesus we are not told but they heard the good news.

The woman with a long term illness

The next person in changed lives is very different from the man of Gadara. This is a woman with a long term illness. Let us read Mark 5:25-34, *"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. 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?'" 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.'"*

This event is imbedded in another story, that of Jairus and his very ill daughter (Mark 5:35-43). This is also an amazing story and the whole of Mark 5 is worth reading after this broadcast. But, we are concerned with the woman. We are not told what kind of haemorrhage that this woman had but we are told that her suffering had been going on for twelve years. Any illness is wearisome especially that which is long term and possibly some this morning can identify with such a situation. Even a two week cold can be testing, let alone an illness of twelve years. In Mark's detailed account we find that the doctors were of no help and had only added to the woman's suffering because she grew worse. There was no NHS to gain free treatment because we find that the woman *"had spent all that she had and was no better"* (Mark 5:26). This, too, would add to her suffering, as she was brought to poverty.

In this story the message of hope comes with the statement, *"When she heard about Jesus..."* (Mark 5:27). We may well ask, "What had she heard?" or "When had she heard?" Had the news about the man of Gadara come back with the Lord when He sailed back across the sea of Galilee? We are not told specifically but whatever the woman had heard it compelled her to seek out the Saviour; she needed to get close to Him. *"If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well"* (Mark 5:27). You cannot get much nearer than to the point of reaching out to touch the Saviour's garments. This is what she did.

We should step back and just highlight how serious this haemorrhage was for the woman. Without going into detail here but a look at Leviticus 15 details the seriousness that is attached to such a condition. The illness would drastically impact the whole of family, social and religious life. The fact that the woman ventures out and moves through the crowd towards Jesus was serious in itself, but to think that she contemplated touching Jesus was beyond comprehension. Why did she do it? Whatever the woman had heard, she knew her only hope was to touch the Saviour.

When we trust the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, we are in consequence 'touching Him'. We need the vital link of personally knowing the Saviour. The amazing thing in this story is that the woman thought she could touch the Saviour unnoticed! What is so blessed is that the Lord Jesus knows whenever a person comes to Him, no matter how quietly. The woman's faith was so strong that she knew she would be made well, no doubt as to the result. So we read *"Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction"* (Mark 5:29). True to her faith, the healing was immediate. But what was not expected was that Jesus stopped. *"And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, 'Who touched My clothes?'"*

The Lord Jesus is giving opportunity for the woman to come forward because He knew who it was. However, the disciples are not tuned into this event of faith as they said to Him, *"You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'"* But the Lord Jesus was already turning, *"And He looked around to see her who had done this thing."* Now we have the woman who, realising that nothing is hid from the Lord because He is God, *"came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth."*

When we come to the Lord Jesus to repent and accept Him as our Saviour, He wants us to tell Him the whole truth. The woman in John 4 had a message of good news when she said to the people of Sychar, *“Come, see a man who told me all things that I ever did...”* (see John 4:29)

My repentance includes owning that there is nothing good in me at all and that I need a complete change from the inside out. It is when we get to this point in our lives that the Lord can respond, as He does to this woman, *“And He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction’”* (Mark 5:34). There are four things in this statement of the Lord Jesus:

- *“Daughter”*, implies relationship;
- *“Your faith”*, which was centred upon Himself;
- *“Peace”*, because she had come to know the *“Prince of Peace”* (see Isaiah 9:6);
- *“Healed of her affliction”*, a present blessing for the woman.

Healing is not necessarily a result of faithful prayers. A greater witness to the Saviour is how through many trials, including illness, believers are able to witness for their Saviour. But there is one illness that every person has which can be healed every time; it is sin. As sinners, we can know the blessed reality of sins forgiven when we truly trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. Heaven is the place where there is no sin, no illness; earth is the place where we need sins forgiven.

Two changed lives. Has your life been changed?

May the Lord bless and encourage you all this day. Thank you for listening.

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