

Our Gracious Savior

We live in a very lost and very poor world, which desperately calls for our loving care, and yet only 5/10,000ths of our income as Americans, goes overseas to relieve the spiritual and physical sufferings of the world's most vulnerable people. Jesus had to teach His disciples, just as He must teach us, to go into these most needy human environments to serve. Let's read our text:

Mark 5:1-20

1 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. **2** And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. **3** He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, **4** for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. **5** Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. **6** And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. **7** And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." **8** For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" **9** And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." **10** And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. **11** Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, **12** and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." **13** So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

14 The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. **15** And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. **16** And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. **17** And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. **18** As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. **19** And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." **20** And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

After what Jesus had been through—His family thinking He was crazy, the religious teachers saying He was evil, and the winds and the waves terrifying His disciples—one might expect that Jesus would just chill out a bit, but He had some important lessons to teach His followers:

I. There is no place He will not go (v.1)

Notice that He took them "to the other side"—the land of the Gerasenes. Josephus, first century historian, reports that this was very hostile, Gentile territory for the Jews. They would systematically avoid going to places like that. Furthermore, this was obviously a pig farm! And we know what Jewish people would think about that. Jesus is teaching all of us to confront our reluctance to go to or to help certain places in our city or the world.

II. There is no person He will not help (vv. 2-5)

The disciples may have thought (since we know that there were 2,000 pigs on this farm) that Jesus was going first to the wealthy in reaching the citizens of the Decapolis, when, all of a sudden, out of the woods, comes a crazy man: naked, screaming at the top of his lungs, and dragging chains on his arms and legs. He's not only crazy, but fearfully powerful and violent. To the amazement of the disciples, this is Jesus' first customer! We need to remember that there is no person disqualified from Jesus' love.

But if we are sent to every place to help every kind of person, what possible prospects for success do we have in the face of such challenges? Jesus powerfully answers this question in His encounter with this demoniac.

III. There is no power He will not overcome (vv. 6-17)

Notice in verse 8 that Jesus initiated this encounter and that He completely controlled the details and the outcome: the 6,000 demons are consigned to the abyss (see Luke 8:31), where they begged not to go. Jesus cleansed the unclean Gentile land of its unclean spirits via the elimination of its unclean pigs. This is the work of Christ wherever He goes: "...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." (Titus 2:13b,14)

But notice that Jesus also had to face the opposition of the general citizenry. One would expect that they would publicly honor Jesus after He tamed their most dangerous criminal. Rather, they beg Him to leave! Jesus seems to acquiesce, but, by denying the request of His new convert (vv. 18,19), He teaches His disciples another vital truth:

IV. There is no person He will not use. (vv. 18-20)

On the very day of his conversion, Jesus instructs the former demoniac to evangelize his closest friends and family. The message he is to convey to them is very simple: just tell others how God has been merciful to you. We are all experts on that topic. No advanced training is necessary. Let's go do it!

Discussion Questions

1. Where are the places to which Christians today are least likely to go? What should each of us do about it?
2. Who are the people we are least likely to help? What should we do about that?
3. What are the powers that must be overcome in our own day in order for the gospel to flourish around the world?
4. Why does Jesus not allow the former demoniac to come along with him and the other disciples? What can we learn from this?
5. What most often inhibits us from serving Christ boldly from day to day? How does this text encourage us to overcome those inhibitions?
6. What lessons do you think the disciples gleaned from this experience?