

Last week we talked about Jesus and the woman that washed his feet with her tears, dried them with her hair and anointed him with costly ointment. At the end we discovered that she had already trusted Jesus and accepted his forgiveness and Jesus pronounced that she had peace with God. The scripture then said that Jesus went on a missionary journey with his disciples and some women that supported their ministry. Matthew tells us during this time Jesus taught “the Parables of the Kingdom.” Some commentators and scholars think that the disciples must have felt like postgraduate students in the School of Faith! They now understood mysteries that were hidden from the scribes and rabbis and even from the Old Testament prophets. What they did not realize (and we are so like them!) is that faith must be tested before it can be trusted. It is one thing to learn a new spiritual truth, but quite something else to practice that truth in the everyday experiences of life.

Satan does not care how much Bible truth we learn so long as we do not live it. Truth that is only in the head is purely academic and never will get into the heart until it is practiced by the will. “Doing the will of God from the heart” is what God wants from His children. Satan knows that academic truth is not dangerous, but active truth is. Fathers know this – our children can often say what is spiritually right, but don’t practice it.

Now Jesus takes his followers on a field trip. They probably thought they were going on vacation after their evangelism tour. But everything they experienced had a purpose to teach them who Jesus was, what authority God had given Jesus, and that nature, demons and illnesses had to obey Jesus’ commands. We also face challenges today and they can also be overcome by faith.

In our scripture Jesus and his followers cross the Lake of Galilee and enter into Gentile territory. According to Luke Jesus was met by a demon-possessed man.

Matthew said there were two men. So it seems that Luke wrote about only one of the two. The men's manner of life showed that they were totally under the demonic control. They did not take part in normal human amenities and they were often forced by the demons to go into solitary places like graveyards. Both were pitiful cases: naked, living in the tombs, violent, dangerous, menaces to society, and controlled by a legion of demons. The belief in demons was common in ancient cultures, but seldom mentioned in the Old Testament. However, demons are spoken of often in the New Testament, and the Gospels are filled with references to these evil spirits. It may be that Jesus' presence stimulated an unusual outburst of demonic activity, as Satan marshaled his forces to resist the Lord.¹ These men were cases of violent insanity. They were too dangerous to live amongst men and they lived amidst the tombs, which were believed to be the home and the haunt of demons. No amount of man-made authority or restraint could control or change these men because they were controlled by Satan. Their only hope is in Jesus. Their fellow-men were so terrified of them that they would never try to do anything for them; but Jesus faced them calmly and unafraid.

As with most "demonized" individuals in the Gospels, these men were shouting at the top of their voices. We know that the demons recognized Jesus because one man called Jesus, Son of the Most High God. Demons have faith, but it is not saving faith. They believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with authority to command them. They believe in a future judgment and in the existence of a place of torment to which Jesus could send them.

Jesus asked one of the men his name. In answer the demon said that his name was Legion, a Latin term denoting a group of about 6,000 Roman soldiers. The point of the name was that a large number of demons inhabited the man. Obviously

¹Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 659

this man had seen a Roman legion on the march, and his poor, afflicted mind felt that there was not one demon but a whole regiment inside him. It may be that he had seen atrocities carried out by a Roman legion when he was a child or young adult. It is even possible that it was the sight of such atrocities which left a scar on his mind and ultimately sent him into madness.

The demons asked that Jesus not torment them “before the appointed time” and asked that they not be sent into the abyss, which was thought of as a place of the dead. The abyss was also thought of as a “watery place.” These demons also believe in prayer, so at the request of the demons Jesus let them enter into a large herd of pigs nearby which immediately rushed over a cliff into the lake and were drowned. So their request not to be sent into the abyss was granted by Jesus, but they were sent to a watery place anyhow.

Did Jesus have the right to permit the legion of demons to destroy a herd of 2,000 swine and perhaps put the owners out of business? God owns everything and can dispose of it as He pleases. Furthermore, these two men were worth far more than many pigs. Most of us are animal-lover, but if there is a choice between a person and an animal, our choice must be the person!

The effect of the miracle on the people of the area was fear. This fear was enough to cause them to ask Jesus to leave. The community should have thanked Jesus for ridding their neighborhood of these two menaces, but instead, they begged Him to leave!

The people of that area hated having their routine of life disturbed. Life went peacefully on till there arrived this disturbing Jesus; and they feared him. More people hate Jesus because he disturbs them than for any other reason. If Jesus says to a person, “You must give up this habit, you must change your life”; if Jesus says to an employer, “You can’t be a Christian and make people work under conditions

like that”; if Jesus says to a landlord, “You can’t take money for slums like that”—one and all are liable to say to him, “Go away and let me be in peace.”

The people loved their swine more than they valued the soul of a man. One of life’s supreme dangers is to value things more than persons. That is what created slums and vicious working conditions. Nearer home, that is what makes us selfishly demand our ease and comfort even if it means that someone who is tired has to slave for us. Nothing in this world can ever be as important as a person. I don’t know how many of you have gone on a cruise, but that is the way Leroy and I relax sometimes. I was never as disappointed as when I saw a family refuse to pay the tip for having their room cleaned and having their meals served. They wanted all the luxuries of the experience, but did not want to pay for the people that provided those luxuries for them.

What a transformation in these two men! You would have expected the people who saw the miracle to ask Jesus to stay and heal others who were sick and afflicted. Apparently money was more important to them than mercy, and they asked Jesus to leave.

The former demoniacs kept pleading with Jesus to be allowed to travel with Him and help Him. What a noble desire from newly converted men! They had more spiritual discernment than all the other citizens put together. The men were not yet ready to become disciples, but they could serve Jesus as witnesses, starting at home among their Gentile relatives and friends. Jesus did not want Jews who had been healed to say too much about it, but it was safe for the Gentiles to tell others what Jesus had done for them, and that is what they did.²

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 8:22

So in contrast with those people the previously demon-possessed men were, on Jesus' command, spreading the news of what had happened to them. These were the first recorded witnesses of Jesus in a Gentile area.³

Christian witness, like Christian charity, begins at home. It would be so much easier to live and speak for Christ among people who do not know us. But it is our duty, where Christ has set us, there to witness for him. And if it should happen that we are the only Christian in the shop, the office, the school, the factory, the circle in which we live or work, that is not matter for whining and complaining. It is a challenge in which God says, "Go and tell the people you meet every day what I have done for you."⁴ Fathers (and mothers) it does not matter the age of your children, grand children, or great grand children, we have the responsibility of telling our relatives that Jesus has done for us. Go and tell of your healing and salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:226

⁴ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Luke*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 106