

TRUTH FOR TODAY

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FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE #2

Last month, we began a study of a miracle performed by Christ - the record of which is Mark chapter 5. This would be an encounter between Jesus and two men demon possessed. We began our study with a brief discussion of what little we know about demon possession.

Many wonder if there are cases of demon possession today. The way some people act, it makes you wonder!¹ Some religions still believe in demon possession, utilizing the rite of exorcism, performed by the priest.² However, it is our understanding that when the age of the miraculous ended, demonic possession ended as well.³ Zechariah predicted the time would come when the “*unclean spirit [would] pass out of the land*” (*Zechariah 13:2*). God simply allowed demon possession to occur for a limited time to reveal His Son’s power over Satan.

Our text under consideration is not fiction or make-believe, but concerns an actual case of demon possession, and the subsequent miracle performed by Christ to expel such. Parallel accounts (*Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-40*) give the complete picture, not conflicting views as some maintain. Let’s look at the account of one who was literally a prisoner of Satan!

AN EXPOSITION OF THE TEXT

The Setting (Mark 5:1-5).

“And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes [Gergesenes (Matthew 8:28)] [which is over against Galilee (Luke 8:26)]” (Mark 5:1).

Jesus and His men had had a busy day, and sailed from the heavily populated western side of the Sea of Galilee to the sparsely populated eastern side for the purpose of getting rest. “*Gadarenes*” was the general area southeast of the lake; it surrounded the important city of

Gadara, hence the name.⁴

“And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit [two possessed with devils (Matthew 8:28)] [had devils long time (Luke 8:27)]” (Mark 5:2).

A “*demon-possessed man*” meets Jesus. Matthew’s account says there were “*two*,” while Mark and Luke refer to only one. How do we harmonize these accounts? How do we answer those critics who allege fraud, discrepancy, and contradiction? “The natural explanation is that one was more prominent, more violent and fierce, more notable than the other. Since he acted as the spokesman, the other falls into the background.”⁵ Fereday offers an additional possibility:

...because one case was more desperate than the other, Mark and Luke concentrate attention on one, but Matthew, who always wrote with Jewish leaders before his mind and who knew the weight two witnesses would have with such (*Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15*) was careful to record the fact that two men were blessed, even though he omits a crowd of other details.⁶

Matthew Henry’s quaint explanation may actually be the best of all: “If there were two, there was one.”⁷ Since our primary text is from Mark, we shall follow his use of the singular in discussing the demonic, his cure, and the forthcoming results.

Notice some of the characteristics of this poor fellow; his condition and actions would make the Exorcist movie look like a cartoon! He was “[*exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way (Matthew 8:28)*] Who had his dwelling among the tombs [*and ware no clothes (Luke 8:27)*]; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains” (*Mark 5:3*).

The demonic “*lived among the tombs.*”⁸ Then, tombs were cut out of rock in limestone hills where the living could enter as a vault.⁹ Most of us do not care to walk in cemeteries at night -- much less make them our home! Yet this demented individual actually lived there!

Notice also his superhuman strength: “*no man could bind him, no, not with chains.*” Further, “*he had been often bound with fetters [shackles, NJKV] and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him*” (Mark 5:4).

Obviously, this was not a case of insanity. One can control an insane person with a straitjacket without resorting to chains! Thus, extreme measures had been attempted to control this individual - all to no avail. But, why would they want to bind him? One reason was for their own safety, as this man was a danger to society. For good reason they were afraid of him! Matthew’s account adds that he was “*exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way*” (Matthew 8:28). Some sections of town and some neighborhoods people try to avoid, and his was one of them!

They also wanted to bind him for his own safety: “*And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones*” (Mark 5:5).

Luke’s account adds that he was “*from the city,*” that is, he used to live in town. He also had had demons “*a long time,*” and he “*wore no clothes.*” We have to agree with McGarvey’s assessment of this poor man: “*It would be hard to imagine a more horrible state.*”¹⁰

Thus, on the one hand, you pity this poor man and want to help him, but, on the other hand, you’re afraid of him and can’t -- he can’t be caught and held! It will take a supernatural event to heal this man.

The Encounter (Mark 5:6-12).

“But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him [fell down before him (Luke 8:28)]” (Mark 5:6).

Why would a demon worship Christ? Is this the real man’s reaction and not the demon’s? Was he at times able to conquer the demon? Or was the demon simply recognizing One clearly superior?

“And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not [art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (Matthew 8:29)] (Mark 5:7).

Note that these demons had faith¹¹ -- something many do not have; confessed their faith -- something many do not do; and they believed in the reality of judgment and torment -- something many will not accept. They had more of a correct theology than most people!

“For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many [because many devils were entered into him” (Luke 8:30)] (Mark 5:8-9).

“What is thy name?” Was this question directed toward the man or the demon? Though Trench believes Jesus queried the man,¹² others maintain that Jesus addressed the demon.¹³ Either way, the demon answered, *“My name is Legion: for we are many.”* The Roman army was divided into units called *“centuries”* containing one hundred men. Thus, a *“centurion”* was a man in charge of a century; it took sixty centuries to make one legion, as a legion consisted of about six thousand men.¹⁴ Were there a literal six thousand demons in this man, or is this a figurative use of the number to indicate a very large amount?¹⁵ Literally or

figuratively, the case is made that this poor man was afflicted by “*many*” demons!

[continued next month]

ENDNOTES

1. Lockyer writes: “One wonders when he reads of the horrible, sadistic crimes of today whether those who commit them are not demon-inspired and possessed...The horrible nightmares experienced by drunkards when in the D.T’s may be a form of possession by evil spirits (Lockyer, p. 188). Indeed, crimes, drunkenness, and the like are the result of Satan’s work, but should not be equated with demon possession

2. Rossell Hope Robbins has a comprehensive volume of alleged accounts of demonism, exorcism, and the like. Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology (New York: Bonanza Books, 1981).

3. We agree with McMillon who states, “Demon obsession prevails in our world today rather than demon possession.” Lynn A. McMillon, Doctrines of Demons (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1975), p. 101.

4. J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, The Fourfold Gospel (Cogdill Foundation Publications), p. 344.

5. Lockyer, p. 186.

6. Ibid.

7. Matthew Henry, A Commentary on the Whole Bible, Volume 5 (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell), p. 476.

8. Places unclean because of the dead men’s bones that were there (*Numbers*

19:11,16).

9. McGarvey, p. 344.

10. McGarvey, p. 345.

11. “They would have been saved if ‘faith only’ saves, but faith only does not -- will not -- save (James 2:17-24).” W. Gaddys Roy, Sermon Outlines on the Miracles of Jesus (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1971), p. 88.

12. Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 181.

13. It was not that the Lord was asking for information, but to reveal to those standing by of the greatness of the miracle about to be performed.

14. Lockyer, p. 189.

15. Hendricksen leans toward the figurative position. William Hendricksen, The Gospel of Mark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975), p. 192.

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GOSPEL MEETING

June 28 - 30, 2019

Mel Futrell, speaker

VERONA CHURCH OF CHRIST
