



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Face to Face with Jesus

Mark 5.1-20

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"Who Is This. . . ?"

Mark 4.35-41 tells about Jesus and the disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a fierce storm. Panicking as the waves swamped the boat, the disciples awakened Jesus who was asleep in the stern. "Peace! Be still!" he said. "And the wind ceased" (Mk. 4.39). With a different fear, the disciples then asked, "'Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?'" (4.41).

J. B. Phillips critiqued one answer to that question, citing a rhyme taught to many children: "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, / Look upon a little child."

Why "*mild*"? Of all the epithets that could be applied to Christ this seems one of the least appropriate. For what does "*mild*," as applied to a person conjure up in our minds? Surely a picture of someone who wouldn't say "boo" to the proverbial goose; someone who would let sleeping dogs lie and avoid trouble wherever possible; someone of a placid temperament who is almost a stranger to the passions of red-blooded humanity; someone who is a bit of a nonentity, both uninspired and uninspiring.¹

Phillips then elaborates three additional observations.

1. It is little wonder that many "children feel . . . that they have outgrown the 'tender Shepherd' and find their heroes elsewhere."
2. Because of this view, the idea that the Father and Son are "mild and soft and sentimental still exists in many adult minds."
3. An "intelligent reading of the Gospels" will put this view where it belongs, in our intellectual "file thirteen" (Phillips, 28).

How we see Jesus matters, greatly. Misunderstand him, and you misunderstand what it means to follow him, and then the meaning of life (cf. John 10.10). So, answering "who is this?" relative to Jesus should be our passion. Mark's immediate answer to the question of v. 41 in 5.1-20 informs and guides us.

What Power!

Jesus' power over the demons is obvious in this text.

1. In the ancient world, it was understood that saying one's name gave you power over that person. So the demons tried to control Jesus, using a divine title (Mark 5.7). But Jesus had power over them in a way unavailable to anyone else (vv. 9-10).

2. His power was ultimately displayed here in sending the demons into the pigs (vv. 12-13). "Legion" points us to the enormous power with which he was confronted; the term typically referred to a Roman army group numbering 6,000 men.² Their power was again seen in the amazing sight of 2,000 pigs rushing headlong into the sea.³
3. Understand the significance of this: Jesus had power over their power; their evil, as strong as it was, was no match for his good (vv. 3-5, 15).
4. Furthermore, Jesus had power over humanity's futile attempts to conquer evil (vv. 3-4, 8, 13). Where they treated symptoms, he defeated evil's root cause.

Reflect on the significance of Jesus' power.

1. It lasts, prevailing over what we fear most (Rom 1.4; 1 Cor. 15.55-58).
2. It is available to us as God's children (John 1.12; Rom 8.16-17).
3. It can change even the most hardened and sinful (1 Cor 6.9-11; 2 Cor 5.17).
4. It can lead us to great things beyond all we ask or think (Eph 3.16-21).

But only if we choose to welcome it and submit to Jesus.

A Challenge and a Choice

The person we see in our text was not "mild." He challenged everyone who encountered him, putting them in a situation where they had to choose for or against him.

1. The demons wanted to remain in the man and tried to forestall Jesus. While they chose their ultimate destination—and he allowed it—it was not their first choice (Mark 5.7-12).
2. The area's residents made a choice. Luke tells us that they feared him (Luke 8.37). Mark's account shows an interesting contrast: they saw that the formerly possessed man was well and sane, but it had cost their neighbors 2,000 pigs (Mark 5.14-17). All these things obstructed their view of how wonderful Jesus was; they chose to ask him to leave.
3. The man who had been possessed "begged him that he might be with him" (5.18), something of a technical phrase in Mark for close disciples.⁴ Jesus gave him a different mission, which he subsequently carried out (5.19-20).⁵

From these examples, we are reminded that:

1. A choice is necessary: to reject him or submit to him as Lord; he allows our freedom, but if we choose him, he expects us to commit completely to being with and serving him.
2. Once committed, we may complete his mission in different ways, depending on our abilities and role in the body (cf. Rom 12.3-8; 1 Cor 3.5-9; 12.14-31; Eph 4.11-16; 1 Pet 4.10-11).
3. We should be open to him continuing to change us, a process that we may not always find comfortable, but one that is necessary as we leave behind what enslaves us for the liberation that comes with discipleship.

What Will We Do?

The connection between the close of Mark 4 and first episode in Mark 5 shows that to answer the question "who is this?" in faith is also to accept the challenge of being changed by and serving Jesus. The Gerasenes illustrate the choice we continue to have: to send Jesus away or to welcome and serve him. What will we do?

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Notes

¹ J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1961), 27.

² Larry Hurtado wrote, "The term Legion also makes the scene like a battle between the powers of evil and Jesus, who comes in the name of the kingdom of God. This imagery is likely intentional, for already Jesus has described his exorcisms as assaults upon Satan's strongholds (see 3:23-27)" (Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983, 1989], 85).

³ The destruction of the pigs creates an ethical problem for many today. Keep in mind that, from the Jewish viewpoint, pigs were unclean. Therefore, in their eyes, the destruction of the pigs was acceptable. See the comments in Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 144.

⁴ See Hooker, 144; compare Mark 1.36; 3.14; 5.37, 40; 14.33.

⁵ "After being set free from the evil spirits, the former demoniac is told to go tell **how much the Lord has done for you** (5:19). This contrasts with Jesus' characteristic command to silence encountered elsewhere in Mark (e. g., 1:43-44; 5:43; 7:36). These commands to silence, however, are all to Jews. This man, a Gentile in a gentile area, is allowed to spread the word about Jesus, and Mark no doubt saw in this a foretaste of the mission of the church to the nations, proclaiming the gospel" (Hurtado, 83).