

THE CHRIST WE NEED

Luke 8:26-40

This passage presents three things which are certainly relevant to both our age and our lives.

I. A Disorder.

Things were not right in this community to which Christ came. The people in the community were uneasy. As soon as the boat, in which Christ and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee, had grounded on the beach in Gadara and they had disembarked, they heard wild cries on the cliff above them. Looking up they saw a dreadful wreck of humanity rushing down toward them. His hair was long, matted, and disheveled. His body was gashed and bleeding from the wounds which had been made by the stones with which he had cut himself. He was a ghastly figure who had been dwelling in the tombs and proving to be a terror to all who had been passing that way. Much of the time this poor outcast was roaming over the hills, crying and howling fearfully, cutting himself with sharp flints and torturing his body in a terrible fashion. He frightened the seamen who came to the shore and caused numerous travelers and merchants to turn back.

Abandoned, feared, and avoided, this poor demoniac pictured the devastation and loneliness of sin. He exhibited human life in its uttermost derangement. His mental, emotional, and volitional faculties were all dominated by the demons, and their mastery ruined him. Having lost all that could make life desirable, he had fallen back into the condition of savage life. Homeless, houseless, and hopeless, he led the life of a vagrant. His agony of mind was dreadful and fearful. By cutting gashes in his body he sought to transfer at least a part of his suffering from his mind to his body.

This man was enslaved to evil. His enslavement and helplessness constituted a threat to the whole community. This man was antisocial. Nobody could live with him. It is always difficult to live with anybody who is torn by inward strife. He was not only constantly hurting and damaging himself, but he was liable to hurt others. His life was dominated by forces that men seemed powerless to curb. He was a liability instead of an asset, a hindrance rather than a help. Instead of making the burdens of others lighter, he made them heavier.

This is surely one of the very patterns in our modern scene that causes many people to be uneasy. This man injured himself, was liable to hurt others, and threatened the entire community. We are now living in an age of wonder -- there is no question about that: wonder at the scientific achievements of men in this amazing space age. But, it is equally true that this age of wonder is also an age of worry. The obvious question that is continually arising is, What is the good of man conquering space, if he cannot conquer sin? And, I ask, Was there ever a time when evil was so blatant or so beastly as today? Has man a future? The young people of this generation have no guarantee whatsoever that they will be allowed to grow up. The so-called advance of man's scientific knowledge has created for the first time a situation where man's mere survival on the earth is now a debatable and doubtful question; that total annihilation of human society and of civilization as we know it is a menacing and murderous possibility.

But for many of us the sense of hopelessness, the sense of worry and anxiety, the threat that overshadows life, is more immediately of the most intimate character. We wonder what will happen to our children who are growing up in this age. What will happen to home life as we have known it? What will happen to the whole Christian pattern and standard of living? The threat of untameable and untrollable evil is a desperately urgent and ever-present one. Of the demoniac the Scriptures say: "No man could tame him."

Christ was concerned with this element of disorder in the life of the community to which He had come -- the sheer helplessness of this man's enslavement, the hurt he was to himself, and the threat that he was to the others in the community. There was also another area of Christ's concern. Not only was Christ concerned about the helplessness of this demon-possessed man and of the people to do anything about it, but He was also vitally concerned about man's wilfulness. Even though this region of Decapolis was one of mixed races and religions, the historian Josephus tells us that those involved in this incident with the herd of swine were Jews, and that being so they were deliberately and wilfully disobeying the law of their God.

For reasons which maybe we do not understand, the hog was an unclean beast, and no Jew was allowed to have anything to do with swine. Yet here were Jews openly and deliberately disobeying their God; not only doing it, but making money out of it. Was it their distance from Jerusalem that made them feel that they could get away with it? Or was it possibly that the pagan environment around them made them feel it would be all right? Others were doing it, why should not they? There was a moral and spiritual disorder running right through the lives of many. Likewise, we are living in a day when the distinction between the Christians and the pagans is becoming increasingly blurred. Present-day disobedience to the Lord and conformity to the world are having terrific results.

Christ is concerned not simply with our helplessness, but also with our wilfulness. Is this because of the distance between Christians and the Lord? The disorder through man's helplessness, which is so obvious now, and through man's wilfulness, which is less clearly discerned, are grieving our Lord tremendously.

II. A Disturbance.

At a considerable distance the demoniac perceived Christ and His disciples landing and he came bounding toward them. As soon as the disciples saw him and heard his cries as he came rushing toward them, they laid hold on the boat and started to rush out from the shore. But Christ was not afraid of the man or disturbed by him. He saw great possibilities in the man. When the demon-possessed man ran to our Lord he "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" (Mark 5:7). That shows that the man recognized the deity and the sovereignty of Christ. At the same time, he was fearful that Christ would use His power to injure him, but his fear was without any basis in fact.

When Christ came into this scene of disorder and disturbance, He changed the whole picture. In this particular situation He presented Himself in a dual capacity.

1. His adequacy was seen.

The enslavement of this demoniac to evil was broken. Nothing is surer than this, that the power of Christ is adequate to cope with all the forces of evil in the human heart. When the Gadarene folk came out to meet Christ, we read that they saw him who had been possessed with a demon "sitting clothed, and in his right mind."

The adequacy of Christ to deal with our helplessness is indisputable. He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him. This was the purpose of His coming: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The adequacy of Christ to deal with our helplessness is absolutely true. If He cannot save you from your besetting sin, what kind of a

Saviour do you have to offer the world? The message of the entire New Testament is that Christ is able to save. I hope that His adequacy to deal with man's helplessness is seen in your life and mine as certainly as it was in the case of this man in the Scriptures.

2. His authority was sensed.

With the calm voice of unmistakable authority Christ uttered the command: "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit." Instantly there burst forth from the victim a most fearful shriek. At once the taut and tense muscles of the arms of the demoniac relaxed. The demons were cast out of the man in a moment, whereupon he became a rational being and the wild look faded from his face. When the demons were cast out of the man his reason was restored, his wild cries ceased, his self-inflicted wounds were healed, and his soul was granted that peace which passeth understanding. What an amazing transformation had taken place in the man who sat the feet of Christ, clothed and in his right mind! He had passed from being indwelt by demons into fellowship with the Son of God. Not only had Christ conferred a wonderful blessing upon the man by healing him, but also upon the entire community.

The demons, which were cast out of the Gadarene demoniac, entered the hogs, and they became so miserable that all of them rushed over the cliff and drowned themselves in the sea. As soon as the astonished herders had observed the drowning of the hogs, they ran into the village and reported what had taken place. What a disturbance that created! These men who heard the story of the deliverance of the maniac and the disappearance of the herd of swine instinctively linked the deliverance of the maniac with the loss of their income. If it had just been a matter of Christ removing the threat to their safety by healing the maniac, that would have been all right: He would have been welcome. But when Christ started interfering with their way of life and their means of livelihood, this would never do. When Christ started challenging them on the question of their total obedience to the Lord God, they didn't want that, and panic seized them.

You see, sin can be uncomfortable. When one is made uncomfortable by his sin, it is nice to be relieved of that. But sin isn't just something that is uncomfortable. Sin can be sociable and financially profitable for the time being. When one finds that Jesus Christ is not only concerned with delivering him from the power of sin -- the sins in his life that are distasteful, or even dishonoring to Christ -- when one finds that Christ is taking in the whole realm of his life, he begins to object to this.

Let us face it, there are certain sins from which you do not want to be saved. There are certain areas in your life with which you do not want Christ to interfere. It may be in the realm of your social life. It may be in the realm of your business. You may consider your sin pleasant and profitable. Sometimes you want the Lord to deal only with the sins that cause you inconvenience, the sins that make you uncomfortable, and the sins that make you ashamed; but, if Christ is going to so permeate your life and so exercise His authority that He is going to make you different from the people of the world, you are not willing to have that. How much difference is there between you and those who are not professing Christians in the way you live, in the places to which you go, in the ambitions you have, in the interests you have, in the language you use, and in what you do? Do you want to experience the saving power of Christ and His adequacy only in those areas of life that are disturbing and distressing to you?

This is the crux of the problem today -- people want to be saved from certain sins and eventually saved from hell, but they do not want Christ to be the Lord of their lives. So many are fighting the Lordship of Christ over the whole of life. There is one or more areas of life that they are not prepared to yield. On one occasion Simon Peter had a vision of a great sheet let down from heaven, and in it all kinds of beasts. A voice said: "Rise, and eat," and Peter said, "Not so, Lord." That is a contradiction in those three words, for you cannot say "Lord" and at the same time say "not so." You must strike out "not so" or "Lord." Is there any area in your life in which the Lordship of Jesus Christ is not wanted?

III. A Dismissal.

The crowd was not interested in the fact that Christ had cast out the demons and the afflicted man had been transformed. Their sole interest and conversation centered around the loss of the hogs. So resentful of this loss were they that they actually requested Christ to leave their country. The Bible says: "Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them" (Luke 8:37).

1. A tragedy that was inexcusable.

Let us grasp it in the sheer bluntness of it: they dismissed Christ Jesus and told Him to get out. That is exactly what they did. There are professing Christians today, who do not want Christ to interfere with their manner of life, who are saying to Him: "Get out! I don't mind thinking of Thee as the Saviour from the sins of which I am afraid, but I'm not going to have Thee running my life. Get out!" What a staggering and shameful fact that people don't want the Son of God and the Saviour of men, but it is true of most of them. In compliance with their expressed wishes Christ promptly left the country of the Gadarenes.

2. A testimony that was inescapable.

When our Lord stepped into the boat for the purpose of crossing the sea, the man whom He had healed and saved humbly cling to Him and begged Him to let him go with Him. He loved his Saviour and Lord, and wanted to prove his love for Him by going with Him. Out of gratitude to Christ he said in substance: "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest; I will be Thy constant companion and Thy servant; permit me so to be." And the Bible says: "Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee" (Mark 5:19). The saved man thought that he could show his gratitude to Christ by going with Him and being His attendant.

Christ put the man's duty above his desire, beautiful and commendable though that desire was. He commissioned him to go home and to tell his loved ones and his friends what the Lord had done for him and for others like him. His work for the Lord was to begin where he lived, which is the case with all others who come to know the Saviour. There must be the witness of both the lips and the life. Christ said: "Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus hath done unto him" (Luke 8:39). If Christ had permitted the man to accompany Him, the whole region of Decapolis would have been deprived of his invaluable testimony.

Maybe you are in grave danger of doing exactly what these people did. You don't mind Christ dealing with your helplessness. Perhaps you would like to be rid of the things that injure you and hurt others. No doubt you would like to be rid of the discomfort

of it all. But if Christ is going to interfere at all with the pattern of your life, which you do not want to change; if Christ is going to insist that you must be different from unsaved people; if you find that He is going to interfere in any way with the amount of money you make or how you make it; then, your attitude toward Christ is: Get out!

Remember Who it is that you are dismissing. You're telling Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of glory, to get out of your life. That is what you are doing. If that is your attitude toward Him, he will do as you wish and you request. He will get out. Do you really want Him to go? Or, do you want to welcome Him, and give Him His rightful place and way in every area of your life?

When you and I bring the whole of life and put it at the disposal of Christ Jesus, His availability to meet every situation and need of our lives will be experienced and appreciated. What a joy it is to tell you about the adequacy of Christ, the authority of Christ, and the availability of Christ!