

"AN AMAZING TRANSFORMATION"

Mark 5:1-20

Our Lord was teaching by the seaside, but the people pressed on Him in such numbers that He got into a boat and moved out from the shore a little and there taught many things. That evening He said to those who were in the boat with Him, "Let us pass over unto the other side." While they were crossing the sea a terrible storm arose. He caused the wind to cease and the sea to get calm.

From the record it would appear that Christ crossed the sea for the specific purpose of bringing relief to a demon-possessed man.

I. The Case.

As soon as the boat had grounded on the beach in Gadara and Christ and His disciples 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.

Likely this man had formerly lived in one of the villages in that area. One day he began to act strangely. He said strange things and acted very strangely. The neighbors began to talk about his statements and his conduct, and, noting the wild maniacal look on his face, they wondered what had happened to him. The fact is that demons had taken possession of him and caused him to be mentally deranged. Local remedies and traditional cures were tried on him, but to no avail. Instead of getting better, the man grew worse. At length when he became violent and dangerous, the authorities laid hands on him and bound him with heavy iron fetters, but in the fury and strength of his madness he broke the chains as easily as Samson broke the ropes with which Delilah had bound him. Unable to cure him or to control him, apparently the men of the village banded together and drove him out of the village into the country. There he took up his abode in the tombs and caves which had been dug out of the limestone cliffs and are still a feature of that area. Much of the time the 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, avoided and feared, 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. Their mastery ruined him.

II. The Contrast.

Many of the citizens of Gadara were rich. Much wretchedness frequently exists at the same time and in the same place with material prosperity, and amid the beauties of natural scenery. This world often affords a strange mixture of plenty and poverty, sunshine and shower, beautiful and terrible, mercy and wrath, joy and sorrow. So it was in Gadara. Along with the well-to-do inhabitants was this wretched creature. While others were respectably clad, or even gorgeously attired, this miserable man refused the decency of raiment. 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 with stones he sought to transfer at least a part of his suffering from his mind to his body.

Being at war with himself, the demoniac was naturally wretched. Anybody who wars against

himself is always a stranger to real happiness. Regardless of his circumstances, he will continue to be miserable until his conflict is hushed in peace.

Moreover, 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 a liability instead of an asset, a hindrance rather than a help. Instead of making the burdens of others lighter, he made them heavier.

III. The Cry.

At considerable distance the demoniac perceived the party 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 would have pushed out to sea again. But Christ Jesus was not afraid of him. He saw in him great possibilities. When he 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). Thus the demoniac 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 basis in fact.

IV. The Command.

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. He dropped from his hands the sharp and bloody stones. 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.

V. The Change.

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. Not only had he been healed, but he was clothed and in his right mind as he sat at the feet of Christ. What an amazing transformation had taken place in him! He had passed from the companionship of demons into fellowship with the Son of God. Surely nobody could be in his right mind if he preferred the companionship of Satan to that of Christ.

VI. The Conversation.

While Satan was only one being, he operated through many demons which inhabited human bodies. These demons hated Christ whom they recognized as the Son of God. Nevertheless, they requested Christ to permit them to enter the two thousand swine which the herders were watching while they were feeding on the hillside nearby. In response to their request our Lord gave His consent. When the demons entered the swine, the hogs became so miserable that all of them rushed over the cliff and drowned themselves in the sea.

As soon as the astonished herders had seen the drowning of the swine, they ran into the village and reported what had taken place. Just as people now rush to any disaster, so the Gadarenes rushed out of their homes and down to the sea, where they discovered some of the drowned animals floating on the surface of the water. They also observed the man of whom they had been afraid, and whom Christ had healed, sitting at the feet of the Lord in splendid condition. What a wonderful thing the Lord Jesus had done for him! Not only had He conferred a great blessing upon him, but also upon the entire community when He healed him. But the crowd was not concerned about that. Their 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. In compliance with their wishes He left promptly.

When our Lord stepped into the boat in order to cross the sea, the man whom He had healed and saved humbly clung to Him and begged Him to let him accompany Him. He loved His Saviour and Lord and wanted to prove his love for Him by going with Him. Out of gratitude to his Deliverer and Saviour he said, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest; I will be thy constant companion and thy servant; permit me so to be."

VII. The Commission.

"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). In this commission we note two things.

1. A desire denied.

"Howbeit Jesus suffered him not." What a strange denial! When the demons asked Christ to let them go into the hogs, He gave His permission. When the citizens asked Him to get out of their country, He granted their request. But when a poor fellow who had been healed and saved asked Christ to let him go with Him, He refused to grant his request.

2. A duty demanded.

In substance Christ said, "No! I esteem your motive; it is one of gratitude to me; but if you would show your gratitude, go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." The saved man loved Christ and thought he could show his love for Him by going with Him. He believed that he could show his gratitude to him by being His attendant. He was exceedingly anxious to do something for Him Who had cast out the demons, so he thought he would be the happiest man on earth if he could only wait on Christ. He wanted to be with Him and taught by Him. In addition to being His disciple, he wanted to be with Him as a comrade. What is better than being with Christ? It is better to be working for Him.

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. He assigned him a quiet and unostentatious work. He could be far more useful telling of Christ in his own home and to tell his loved ones and his friends what the Lord had done for him than he could by traveling about with Christ. So, the Lord told him where to go and what to do. His work was to begin at home. All true work for God commences there. His work was to be found among old acquaintances. Some of them had scorned him. Others had hated him, and perhaps ill-treated him. But all resentment in him was to be conquered by God's grace, and to those who had known him at his worst he was now to speak for Christ. Such witness-bearing is the most difficult, but the most effective. John the Baptist told the penitents around him to go back to their old spheres, and to prove their repentance by their changed lives and spirit amid their old temptations. So, when this man was saved, he was sent first to his own house and friends. So, let all grace from Christ begin to tell at home. If it cannot win its way there, it certainly lacks vital force.

Note that it was a story of personal experience that was demanded. You are to go home and tell, not what you have believed, but what great things the Lord hath done for you. It is not, "Tell thy friends how great things thou hast done for thyself, but how great things the Lord hath done for thee." It must be a story told by a poor sinner who feels himself not to have deserved what he has received—"how He hath had compassion on thee." Do not tell John Bunyan's experience, but tell your own. If Christ has done great things for thee, be ever ready to speak of it. Tell it humbly

and earnestly. Let others see that you mean it. There must be the witness of the life, of course; but there must also be the witness of the lips as well. "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). "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee." It is good to read, to pray, to go to church, but that is not all-- "Go and Tell." They must hear if they are to be saved. The Lord commands us to go. Something in us as deep as life says we must go. Many expect us to come.

A man who had been saved in one of Spurgeon's services came to him after the meeting and expressed the desire to go out and do Christian work. Spurgeon looked at him and said, "What are you?" The man answered, "I am an engine driver." "Is the stoker a Christian?" said Spurgeon. "No," the man answered. "Then there, in your engine, with the stoker working at your side, is your field of duty and opportunity."

It was better for the healed and saved man that Christ denied his request. It was better for the man's friends. It was better for the land in which he lived. If Christ had permitted him to follow Him, the whole region of Decapolis would have remained in darkness.