

THE TERROR OF GADARA

Mark 5 is so relevant and real for us today. It wasn't very long ago that Clyde Thompson, the son of a minister, committed his terrible crimes and as a result was incarcerated on death row in Huntsville, Texas.

Clyde never went to church with the rest of his family. He would get up early on Sunday morning and stay out hunting all day. He would come back late at night so he would not have to face his mother and father. The church and the community tried to make excuses for Clyde Thompson, but really, they could not excuse his actions.

Clyde not only refused to go the church, he was developing a very rotten attitude. He was becoming a mean person.

One day, while hunting on a Sunday afternoon, he met some men in the woods. We don't know all that happened, but Clyde killed two of those men before he left. Then he started to run from the law until finally he was arrested and placed on death row in Huntsville, Texas.

Death row inmates were separated from the regular population. They ate and had recreation together but could not come into contact with the rest of the inmate population. While on death row he killed two more men, making a total of four people he had killed. He developed such a terrible reputation inside death row that at last the guards took him off death row and put him in the morgue, which was a small building containing six slabs, where they laid the bodies after execution.

They took the slabs out and placed a steel door on the morgue. It contained a four-inch square where the light could enter and the guards could look through. Because this morgue sat between two very tall buildings inside the prison, daylight could only enter for six hours each day.

They stripped him of all his clothes. He wore nothing but his undershorts, walking and ranting around inside this morgue like some wild animal. When the guards would come too close he would try to spit at them through the small window, and yet he was not insane; he was very sane. He was just a terrible person!

As the years passed, Clyde Thompson was tagged by his own prison mates on death row as the meanest man in the State of Texas. Oh friend, do you know how mean he must have been? What an attitude he must have had toward God and toward man until the day that Jesus set foot on his coast.

But God has His people everywhere. One of the prison guards said, "Clyde, you don't have anything to read in there. I would bring you a Bible if you promise not to tear it up."

Clyde said, "You are right. I have nothing to read. I would take a Bible."

During the six hours of daylight, Clyde would read the passages of Scripture and when it got dark, he would try to remember what he had read. He did not realize it then, but he was actually memorizing and meditating on the Word of God. No great television personality came and gave his testimony to Clyde Thompson. No preacher preached a sermon. There was nothing but the Word of God which the Scriptures state is the power of God unto salvation. Friends, you cannot memorize and meditate on the Word of god without something taking place in your life. Either you are going to change your lifestyle or you are going to throw the Bible back through the cell bars.

A change began to come over Clyde Thompson. The guards noticed it. Finally he was released from the

morgue to return to death row. There, on death row, he baptized by immersion eight other prisoners. He made such an impression on prison administration that they finally released him from death row and let him go among the general population. He became the chaplain's right-hand man, what is known inside the walls as the chaplain's assistant. Eventually the State of Texas gave him a life-time parole, which meant he would be limited in his activities like any other parolee and be required to check in each week to his parole officer. As long as he did not break the law he could live on the outside.

Where did Clyde Thompson go? Straight to the Lubbock County Jail, one of the largest county jails in Texas. He began a chaplaincy program there and died in July of 1979. It was Clyde Thompson who will go down in God's record book as one of the greatest soul winners this present generation has ever known. It was Clyde Thompson, the meanest man in the State of Texas, who literally led hundreds of men, women, boys and girls out of the streets of alcoholism, out of the streets of drugs, and to the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. It was this man, Clyde Thompson, the meanest man in the State of Texas, who was transformed the day he allowed Jesus to set foot on his coast.

You see, Mark 5 should not be filed in history as something that happened once and can never happen again. The man in Mark 5 lived in a graveyard. Clyde Thompson lived in a morgue. The man in Mark 5 wore no clothing. Clyde Thompson was only allowed to have his undershorts. This man in Gadara went ranting and raging and spitting and spewing upon the people of the community - so did Clyde Thompson. The man in Gadara was completely transformed, and praise the Lord, so can you be completely transformed!

THE ONLY EVIDENCE OF GOD'S LOVE FOR A SICK AND DYING WORLD SUPERIOR TO THIS LESSON IS THE CROSS ITSELF

Three of the four Gospels (Mark 5, Luke 8, and Matthew 8) tell this thrilling story of the healing of the terror of Gadara. And oh, what a terror he was.

Gadara is a beautiful seacoast community nestled against the Sea of Galilee. In the evening they could watch the fishermen who would be out late on the sea fishing. During the day the farmers would be plowing their fields and the children would leave for school. Yet in all its beauty and splendor there was a cloud that hung over Gadara, because people in Gadara never knew when this wild man was coming to town. He walked around with his arms lacerated, his legs bleeding, and all the while refusing to wear clothes. At night the people of Gadara would hear his blood-curdling scream, the cry of a wild man possessed. Their funeral processions in the graveyard would have to be hurried. Lookouts would be posted to watch for this man lest he come running out from the tombs and embarrass everybody at the funeral.

But friend, in my many years working with prisoners and their families, I believe I can see something else that took place each evening in Gadara. I can see a wife as she kneels beside her bed at night and prays, "Lord, send someone to my husband. The whole community thinks he is crazy...but I love him. I know him. I believe You, Lord, can make the difference. Please send someone to my husband." Even as wives today are praying for their husbands who are presently filled with the powers of evil.

I can see little children in Gadara kneel beside their beds and pray, "Oh, Lord, please send somebody to talk to my daddy." Even as tonight, all across this nation, we will have tens of thousands of children praying that same prayer.

He was useless to his family, to his community, and to humanity until that day he met Jesus.

At first this story appears remote from our life; we seem to have no part in it, but as we think about it we

find it is describing something of our own stresses and strains. The story touches our life simply because the man is a type of one who has lost control of himself; he is the prey of morbid passions and delusions, he is miserably unhappy and restless, and an offense to all his neighbors. The records of modern medical psychology would produce many cases, milder perhaps than the story of the madman of Gadara, yet to a certain extent, parallel, in which a personality is torn and distracted between the warring elements in its own being.

WHO CAN PLACE A VALUE ON THE HUMAN SOUL?

When Jesus set foot on the coast of Gadara, this wild man did not walk; rather, the Scriptures state, he came running to meet Jesus. You know, sometimes it's not good for people to meet each other. It was certainly not good for Anthony to meet Cleopatra. It was not good for Samson to meet Delilah. But on this occasion it was good for the terror of Gadara to meet Jesus Christ. And it would certainly be good for you to meet Him too. That is my prayer for you.

Soot was meeting snow. Darkness was meeting light. Sewage was meeting sanctity. Ruin was meeting righteousness. And as he came running he also came crying out, "What do I have to do with you, Jesus?"

There are two pathways to avoid. The first is that of denying the existence of evil spirits and Satan and taking an unrealistic view of the world and man in it. The second is to attribute all spiritual experience to God, including forbidden territory.

This was all part of the purpose for Christ's coming. Jesus himself declared, "He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives. To set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18). So he fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. A new day had dawned. "To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death," as Zechariah described it (Luke 1:79). But when His light shown into the darkness, there were often sharp reactions. "Do not torment me," shouted the demoniac at Jesus (Mark 5:17). For a being who habitually lives in darkness, the coming of light can be torture - not blessing.

This is what the coming of Jesus to this earth meant. It was the unavoidable collision of the unhindered power of the Holy Spirit manifested through a sinless life with the opposing power of Satan. It was impossible for the Son of God to be in the vicinity of evil power and not expose it and challenge it. Shadows of twilight and the curtain of night only temporarily hide what the brilliance of the noonday Son reveals.

As we draw nearer to Christ's return, there is no indication of a lessening of this power. The idea that evil spirits only operate in "uncivilized" parts of the world is entirely illusory. It may be true that at some points in history the power of a church which believed in both the existence of evil powers and the authority it possessed in Christ's name to overcome them, had been underground and so neutralized its effectiveness. But such a situation does not exist today, for the church has largely abdicated its authority and blandly disbelieves in such things.

In some cases missionaries are being sent abroad into strongly held enemy territory unarmed, unprotected, and largely untrained for spiritual warfare. No wonder there is such a high casualty rate, with so many returning disheartened, depressed, or ill.

The situation at home is similar. Many Christian leaders and workers who began their ministry full of hope and zeal are now a shadow of the people they once were. They have been gradually worn down by hard and often fruitless work, not fully understanding the real nature of the battle nor how to win against what often appears impossible odds. A modern general would be instantly dismissed if he dared to send such unprepared soldiers into battle against such a skillful and merciless enemy.

The evil spirits that were within this man came out of him and entered into a herd of swine. The man was cleansed. He was purified. He was set apart and sanctified.

When Jesus does a job, He does a complete job. This man was not partially cleansed...he was completely cleansed. When we come to Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins, Jesus does not forgive just a few of our sins, Jesus forgives all our sins...justified "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned.

It is interesting to hear the requests these demons made as they were coming out of this man. They said, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them." What does that tell you? It should tell you that the devil is just as comfortable inside a herd of pigs as he is living in your life and in your heart. Satan's second choice for a dwelling place is a bunch of filthy, sloppy hogs. If he can, he wants to dwell in your life; but if you, through the power of our risen Lord will cast him out of your life, Satan would be just as content to dwell in a herd of pigs.

JESUS DID NOT CAUSE THE SWINE TO DIE - SATAN DID

The Bible records the herd rushed down the steep bank, about 2,000 pigs in all, and drowned in the waters below. Of course, the herdkeepers ran into the city to tell them what had happened. And oh, how the tongues did begin to wag. How the mouths began to talk. The more they talked the less they spoke of Jesus. They, instead, spoke about their financial loss of 2,000 hogs, until at last, the community came rushing out to meet Jesus Christ.

A very unusual scene was waiting for them upon their arrival. The wild man was sitting at the feet of Jesus. I suppose most of them had never seen him sitting before. He had always been up and running, ranting, and raging. Also, he was quiet, and in his right mind. Always before he had been crying out profanities and blasphemies. Now he was fully clothed. Jesus Christ made the difference...didn't He?

This is not a case for Christ's power. It instead has always been Christ's great problem. To still the wind is easy. To heal the sick is not hard. But power, however great, cannot be forced into the moral realm. Force does not exist for the soul. God will never force His love down your throat. This man desired to be healed.

The people put it all in the balances. Their financial loss of 2,000 pigs against the healing of one man. "And they began to entreat Him to depart from their region." They said, "We want the sausages of hogs, not the Son of God". "You're ruining the pig market." "We cannot afford much more of this." "We are not concerned about goodness, we are concerned about our hogs."

I used to pick up some children on my way to church, whose parents always refused to bring them. One evening I had an elderly lady of the church riding with me as we stopped to get the kids. She and I approached the house and knocked on the door, but no one answered. We then heard voices coming from the back yard, so upon going around the house we found the father, mother, son and daughter cleaning out the barn.

The dear elderly lady said, "Children, you must hurry and get dressed. We're going to be late for church."

The father put down his pitch fork and said, "Well, the children aren't going to church tonight. You see, we have got to get this barn cleaned out."

As long as I live I'll never forget what that lady said back to him. She said, "Sir, you think more of that pile of manure than you think of Jesus Christ."

And here in Gadara they thought more of these hogs than they thought of the Son of God.

I talked with a young man who said, "Well, you know I just can't give up drinking my beer. I know you can't be a good Christian and a beer drinker at the same time, so I'm going to settle for my beer." What he was really saying is that he would rather have a cold can of beer than the wonderful salvation offered by the Son of God!

What is it on the balances of your life? I cannot find even one occasion where the Bible states that Jesus returned again to Gadara. Not once do the Scriptures record that He ever came back. This is an important lesson for us today. Be careful when you send Jesus away. Be very careful when you tell Jesus to leave your habits and lifestyle alone. He just may do that!

Before Christ left, the previously possessed man asked a question. He asked, "Lord, can I go with you?"

HOW MATCHLESS OF GOD THAT HE WOULD EXPECT US TO SEE IT FOR OURSELVES

Jesus said, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you." Just look at the wisdom of Jesus in this. If this man would have gone with Christ they would have traveled to communities where people did not know him. Someone would ask, "Who is that man following Jesus?" And someone else would reply, "I don't know. I hear at one time he had a demon, but I really couldn't prove it. I didn't know his past life."

Instead, Jesus sent him right back into Decapolis. Do you think anyone knew him there? You know they knew him! "And he went off and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marveled." He did not have a Master's degree, except one that he had received at the feet of the Master. That is the only Master's degree that really matters.

One reason surely must have been the great need of this people for an evangelist. But the real reason was in the man himself. It was for his own sake that he was sent back, and the Lord's refusal to take him with Him was the gift of something better, the making of the man. He needed to help heal those whom he had once hurt.

Go down into the slums of our great cities and tell me who is toiling there. Moral philosophers? I rarely meet them. Doctrinaires? They are at home discussing social problems. I meet Christian men and Christian women.

When the drunkard is made himself again, when the poor woman of the street is rescued, when little homes that once were pigsties become models of neatness and of cleanness, I bear my witness after a long ministry, that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, at the back of everything is your coming to Jesus.

This maniac, who was healed and delivered of demons, set out on a journey to visit the ten towns of Decapolis in the name of Jesus, to become Christ's witness, to share with everybody what Jesus had done for Him.

I can see him as he took off on his mission. How wonderful he must have felt! Can't you see him that day as he was standing there with Jesus? He wanted to go with Jesus, but heard, "No. I have a plan for you. I have a job for you to do."

He must have said, "Me? Master, Me? What good am I? I've been a maniac. I've been running all over the country, nude, cutting my body with stones. Me? You have a job for me?"

Wow! What he must have thought when Jesus said, "Yes I have a job for you."

You see, that's what God does to all of us.

When the Lord comes into our lives, first He LIFTS us, then He GIFTS us. And our GIFT is meant to LIFT other people. It will do that when Jesus lives in us and radiates through us to other people. It is LIFTING POWER.

"So the man started off to visit the ten towns of that region and began to tell everyone about the great things Jesus had done for him; and they were awestruck by his story."

That impresses me. Ten towns were lined up, waiting for the man to come and tell what Jesus had done for him.

You know, before God saves you, He has already lined up people and organizations and places and circumstances and areas, waiting for you to come and witness to them and bless them with what God has done for you.

IT'S EXCITING, ISN'T IT?

It might be ten marketplaces. It might be ten neighborhoods. It might be ten houses, ten supermarkets. It might be ten cities, ten states, or ten nations.

But the idea is that Jesus sent this man away to visit ten areas (or Decapolis), and tell them what the Lord had done for him.

I don't know what kind of speaker this Gaderene demoniac may have been. Opportunities were presented for him to tell people what things Christ had done for him. You can well imagine this man walking down the street one day when somebody stops him to ask, "Legion, how come you don't sleep out in the graveyard anymore, among the tombstones like you used to? How come you're all dressed up?" He would reply, "I used to go naked, but I have met the Lord, and I just don't do that anymore."

Others will ask, "Hey Legion, how come you used to wear chains and the sheriff doesn't have to go out and lock you up anymore?" He would reply, "There was a time when they had to tie me up with chains, but I've met the Lord, and they don't do that anymore."

Again, somebody would ask, "Hey Legion, how come you used to cut yourself with rocks? You were always bleeding and you had sores all over your body and now you're clean and you're well and you don't cut yourself anymore?" He would reply, "Well, I used to like to do that, but now I've met the Lord and I simply take better care of myself now."

Oh, my precious friend, I believe that as you and I will be looking around the New Jerusalem someday we will see, standing over to one side of that magnificent throng of people, a man...no, perhaps he won't be standing at all, instead, he will be down on his knees with tears streaming down his cheeks. He will be crying out his praises to Hosanna.

You and I will lift him up by the elbows and say, "Tell us, Mister, what is your name? How did you get here? Surely you're not Moses, the very one who led the children out of bondage, the one who was allowed to see the Promised Land without actually entering in. Is that why you're rejoicing so much, because you are at last in the Promised Land?" Oh, through those tears streaming down his cheeks he will cry back, "No, no, no! I was never privileged to be a prophet of God."

"Surely then, you must be Paul, James, or John, or one of those who walked and talked daily with Jesus; who ate and slept with Him, and witnessed daily His healing and teaching?"

He will cry back, "No, no! In fact, Jesus told me not to follow Him. I was never privileged to walk day by day with Jesus."

"Well, tell us man, what is your name? How did you get here?"

We will hear him say, "Oh, my name doesn't matter. But I once was filled with the powers of Satan. I had so many demons raging within me that they were literally driving me insane. I was driven away from my wife, away from my children, away from all those I loved. I would go running out into the desert on many occasions screaming and crying. I don't know what made me do it, but I would cut myself with stones. I was literally 'the Terror of Gadara'. I was known as 'The Wild Man'...until that day Jesus set foot on my coast. On that day that Jesus set foot on my coast I went running to meet Him...and all things were made new. The pain was taken away, the tears were wiped away. My sins were forgiven. I was cleansed, I was purified...Oh, praise the Lord...Now I'm here in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem."

Yes, you and I will be able to talk with the "Terror of Gadara" someday. All because of this event recorded in Mark 5. That wonderful, that beautiful day, when Jesus Christ set foot on the shores of Gadara.

Just prior to that day Jesus had stilled a terrible storm at sea. I believe it is easier for God to calm the storms of nature than it is to calm the storms that rage and rant within people's lives. In Mark 5 Jesus demonstrated to His disciples and to us today that He has the power over nature and the victory over sin and Satan.

Do you have an untamed spirit today? An untamed heart? An untamed life? An untamed mind? If so, come running to meet Jesus, knowing that He will answer your every need, that He will forgive your every sin, that He can wipe away your every tear and that He can heal your broken heart.

For "When Jesus comes the tempter's snare is broken. When Jesus comes all tears and sins are wiped away. He takes your gloom and fills your life with glory. For all is changed when Jesus comes to stay."

Christ desires to set foot on your coast right now.

Joe R. Garman, President,



If you need help in making a decision for Christ, or if you want someone to assist you in Christian baptism, please contact:

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