

The mad Gadarene

Mark 5 vv.1-5.

Luke 8 vv.26 and 27.

Right opposite Capernaum, on the other side of the Lake of Gennesaret, lay the city of Gadara. The area surrounding this city had lately become unsafe. Become unsafe? ... For what reason? ... Were there robbers in the district? ...

No, it's not that. But in the region of that city there dwelt a devil-possessed man.

In the gospel of Matthew it says that there were two possessed with devils; Mark and Luke only refer to one. Very certainly then, one was the principal. And since Mark and Luke speak only of one man, we will do the same.

The Gadarenes know this poor unfortunate well, for Luke says that he was a man out of the city. For quite some time now, however, this man had not lived in his own home, for he was possessed of the devil. He now dwelt by the tombs. ^{Ch 5 v. 5}
 x No, that is not correct. Just read in Mark. He lived not "by the tombs", but "in the tombs". How could that be? Surely he could not live in the graves?

If we think about the tombs in our cemeteries, no, then that could not be. But in Israel the tombs were different. In the land of Canaan there were many mountains, in which were many holes and caves. Only think about the cave of Machpela, where Abraham buried Sarah. David too, fled from Saul into the Cave Adullam.

Frequently such caves were used as sepulchres. The kings of Judah lay, all except one, in the royal vault. The Lord Jesus also lay for three days and three nights in such a cave. You will hear more about that later on.

Well then, in the country of the Gadarenes there were also mountains which contained many of these caves. In some of these caves they buried their dead.

Now this possessed man lived in these caves or sepulchres. What a terrible place to live wasn't it? He lived there with the dead.

Whoever came near those graves could hear him from afar shouting and screaming. Each one who heard those terrible, threatening screams, shuddered involuntarily. Those who came there early in the morning, heard him call. But not only mornings, no, whenever it was that people came by there - afternoons, evenings, yes even in the middle of the night that terrible cry could be heard. In the Bible it says that he was always, night and day, in the mountains and in the tombs.

Poor man. The devil gave him not a moment's rest.

Furthermore he ill-treated himself too. He cut himself with stones. He had pulled his clothes to pieces in his frenzy, so that he walked about naked. And on that naked body he smote and battered with stones, perhaps until the blood flowed. How cruel the devil is, is he not?

He not only ill-treated himself, however, no, passers-by were also set upon and beaten. He was very cruel.

So it is no wonder that none dared to pass that way any more. Those who had to go in that direction preferred to make a detour.

But this was a nuisance, so the Gadarenes decided to put a stop to it. Things could not be left to go on like this... this devil-possessed man made the whole neighbourhood unsafe.

Some of the men of Gadara resolve to bind him. Together they set out to capture him. When he spied them he stormed upon them in a frenzy. But they all grasp him firmly, and whether he will or no, he is strongly bound. So there, now they had him, now he could do them no more harm. But no sooner had they left him than he broke the bonds asunder and freed himself once more. Without having succeeded they return to Gadara. That attempt had failed.

They will not give up so quickly, however. They decide to try again. At the second attempt they take not ropes, but chains. Probably they were copper chains. He would not be able to break those, they think.

Once more the men of Gadara look out for him. Once again they ^{overpower} ~~overpower~~ him and we may be sure that was not easy. His eyes stared wildly from his head, his teeth gnashed angrily. By summoning up all their strength they at length succeeded in binding the possessed man. When at last they were ready and the poor wretch was apparently powerless, they wiped the sweat from their foreheads. But ... they had got him, and that was their objective.

But, just look ... those copper chains too are burst asunder by him, though it tears the skins from his arms. Again - failure.

Oh, they tried it yet again, and again, but nothing succeeded. Whether they bound him with thick cords or copper chains, all their attempts came to nothing. The demoniac had such gigantic strength that everything was burst asunder. At last they gave up trying. In God's Word we read that no man could tame him.

Poor, poor man. The devil gave him that unbelievable strength. The devil-possessed has been victorious and there in those ~~mountain~~^{gloomy} surroundings he carried on, undisturbed, his terrible ~~life~~^{would ever} life. Who ~~could~~^{able} be ~~in a position~~^{to} to help this poor wretch? ... Was there no-one who could put an end to his misery?

It seemed not, for the men of the city had tried often enough, but always without result.

So, there was no possibility of saving this unfortunate sufferer? ...

Matthew 8 vv.28-31.

Mark 5 vv.6-12.

Luke 8 vv.28-31.

It is a lovely calm morning. The sun throws her first rays over the mountain tops and upon the mirror-like surface of the Lake of Gennesaret.

Yet only that night there had been a terrible storm and the mighty wind had swept up the water into raging, seething billows.

Now, there is no sight or sign of the storm, the water is so calm that not a ripple can be traced.

In that early morning hour a boat steadily approaches the rocky shore. In some parts the mountains rise sheer out of the water.

The men ^{aboard} ~~aboard~~ the ship are looking for a reasonably low lying place at which to land. At last the ship scrapes the shelving bottom of the lake and beaches. The voyagers step ashore. They are a group of strangers. Who are these men? ...

Oh, you know already, don't you? It is not difficult to answer that question. Now, tell me then. It is ... the Lord Jesus with His disciples. They have been through a tiring, worrying night. When, a few hours ago the storm raged along the tops of the mountains and the water was a boiling, foaming mass, they had been in deadly peril. They had not been far short of finding a watery grave. At least, that is what the disciples had thought. Yet at one word from the Lord Jesus the roaring of the hurricane had ceased at once and the impetuous waves had been stilled. In a miraculous manner they had escaped from the jaws of certain death.

Now they have come to land ... and, look there, another danger threatens them. Another danger? ... What is that? ... Just look over there.

There runs towards them a frenzied man. It is the demoniac. He has noticed the group of travellers from his mountain retreat. With loud cries he runs down with furious speed and in great leaps and bounds.

Oh! ... The eyes of the disciples betray fear. Perhaps some of them made a move to hurry back on board, for this madman will murder them. He is capable of such a thing. They can see that from his wild look; from the gleam in his eyes; they can hear it from his frightful screams. This bodes evil. They grow pale with fright.

One, however, does not grow pale. He is not frightened. One stands calm and still and waits quietly for the possessed man. That One is ... the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. Shall He, the King of kings fear the prince of darkness? ... No!

Closer and closer to Him comes the frenzied man. Only a hundred paces ... only fifty ... only ten ... and then? ...

Oh, just look! Just as the disciples fear that he will cast himself in furious, blind frenzy upon the Lord Jesus, the demoniac falls suddenly upon his knees before their Master and ... worships Him!

Listen! He cries something, he shouts something with a hoarse^{se} voice. What does he say then? ... Just read what Luke writes; "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech Thee, torment me not."

What? Does the man know the Lord Jesus then? ... He had cried, surely "Jesus, thou Son of God?"

Oh, children, it is not the man who speaks, but the devil who speaks through him. And the devil indeed knows the Lord Jesus! Yes, Satan trembles before the King of kings. "I beseech thee, torment me not."

These words too were spoken by the prince of darkness. The devil knows ~~xx~~ that one day he shall suffer eternal torment. He knows it, he believes it, and he trembles for that coming punishment.

Do you believe that too? ... Yes? And can you still go on through life and serve sin? ...

Calmly the Lord Jesus asks: "What is thy name?"

Immediately the evil one replies through the means of the poor man: "My name is Legion: for we are many."

This man was possessed then, not of one devil, but he was ruled by many devils. Those devils tormented that man, but they themselves were not willing to be tormented.

Jesus commands them to leave the man! They are bound to release their prey. They dare not disobey the Divine command. Refuse? ... No, that they cannot do. Jesus brooks ~~no~~ no refusal from those cruel enemies.

Yet before they depart, they ask something of the Lord Jesus and ... the Son of God accedes to their request. What do they ask of Him then? ...

Matthew 8 vv.32-34.

Mark 5 vv.13-20.

Luke 8 vv.32-39.

On the hills, not far from the place where Jesus and His disciples had put ashore there was a large herd of swine feeding; we would call them pigs. These swine belonged to the Gadarenes. Now, it could well be that there were some heathens living in Gadara, but if they were in fact Jews, then they were not permitted to keep swine. They would be transgressing the laws of the Lord, for swine were unclean beasts. The Israelites were absolutely forbidden to eat swine flesh, yes, they were not even to come into contact with those animals.

This enormous herd of swine, there were about two thousand of them, was looked after by a few keepers. The animals lay peacefully on the ground or walked calmly through the grass. The keepers kept an eye to make sure they did not wander too far.

But then, all of a sudden a kind of shock goes through those beasts. Their great heads sway wilding and in a flash all those beasts rush off in one direction, doubtless squealing loudly.

Just at that spot the shore of Lake Gennesaret was extremely steep. The rocks there rose sheer from the water.

As though gripped by panic, the frightened beasts run towards the steep place and ... the whole herd charges from the cliff into the depths and ^{is} drowned [^] in the water, which for a moment becomes turbulent with their struggles.

The keepers have sprung to their feet. They know not what is happening. To their great fright and consternation they watch the last animals disappear in the depths. Nothing have they been able to save - not one. They could only stand there powerless. It all happened so unexpectedly and suddenly.

The keepers have also seen what has happened to the devil-possessed man. They had watched him run down the mountain. Oh, their hearts went to their mouths in fear for the lives of the little company. But what they had expected did not take place. ~~Ex~~ To their great amazement they saw that the untamable madman fell down in worship before One of those strangers. And then ... they saw that he arose and stood calmly by. Then suddenly their swine had run off screaming wildly and had plunged into the depths of the sea. They cannot understand it at all.

Look, there they go. They are fleeing into the city. They are running as hard as their legs will carry them. They must relate there what has happened to their swine.

Very soon they disappear from sight.

Perhaps some of you are asking with surprise: "What was it really that took place? Why do those two thousand swine act so strangely? Why do they run so suddenly and plunge into the sea to drown?"

Just listen! Be very attentive, because this is rather difficult, but I will try to make it clear.

I told you a short while ago that the devils who were in that poor man had asked something of Jesus, didn't I? Do you know what they had asked? ...

"Suffer us to go away into the herd of swine" they besought Him. Now, why should they want to do that? Well, they were bound to release the man. Jesus had commanded them to do so. Henceforth that man would no more render the district unsafe. Nobody would be troubled by him any more. Oh, what a defeat for those devils. Now they ask if they may depart into the swine. Why? What was their intention in so doing? If all those swine were to become mad and devil possessed what fearful desolation they would produce. Just suppose that two thousand maddened swine were to be charging around there, what a fearful danger they would constitute. Even worse than the previous danger. So you see, that was the evil plan of these cruel, hellish spirits.

And ...? Jesus immediately consents.

So do the devils get their own way? ... No, indeed, for just see what happens. The whole herd is smothered in the sea. Now they can do no harm at all.

Yet that was not what those evil spirits had intended. No, their cruel plan had been to cause destruction and to kill people, but they had failed.

Oh, ^{how} the Lord Jesus here shows His power over the devils. They can do nothing without His permission. He reigns over the devils also.

But why did the Lord Jesus permit this? ... He had a higher motive. Firstly for the demoniac. He could not only feel that he was freed from his tormentors, but he could see it too. The devils had left him for good.

Secondly, it was a lesson for the Gadarenes. They should not have had swine, for, as I told you, they were unclean beasts.

We too can learn from this. The devils are defeated by the Lord Jesus. Those evil spirits can perform nothing, nothing at all without God's permission. The Lord Jesus can deliver you too from the ^{We are all by nature slaves of Satan.} might of Satan. No-one can save us from his power. The angels cannot; no human power can do it either. Only the Saviour, the Lord Jesus is powerful enough to do that. How essential it is then that you come to know Him as your Saviour and Redeemer. If that does not take place here on earth, then we remain under Satan's power, and when we die we shall go to hell with those condemned spirits. How terrible that will be. Do you believe it?

Great concern reigns in the City of Gadara. Just look, the streets are full of people. Others come running from their houses with alarmed faces and ask what can have happened.

Look, there are a few grouped together. In their midst stands a man who relates excitedly what he has seen. It is one of the keepers who had been watching over the herd, and who has ~~skunked~~ fled to the city in haste. Over there stands another, and further on yet another. Soon it is known throughout the whole city.

How do the Gadarenes take the news? ... Are they happy that the poor man is at last relieved from his great misery? ... Oh no, alas, no. They are more anxious about the swine than about their fellow-citizen. Their swine have gone for good. They are all drowned. What a terrible loss. Can there be nothing left of their valuable possessions? ...

Look, crowds of them are hurrying to the shore of the lake. Soon afterwards they come to where Jesus is. And what do they see there? ...

There sits that dreaded madman of whom they had been so ~~far~~ afraid, calmly next to Jesus. The wild expression of his face has disappeared, the frenzied staring eyes are now filled with tears, tears of gratitude. There he sits, no longer naked, but clothed and in his right mind.

Oh, they should really congratulate the man, their fellow citizen upon his miraculous recovery. They should fall down in worship before this great, this mighty Prophet. And do they do so? ...

No! Their eyes wander towards the place where their valuable possessions have disappeared. At a glance they realise that nothing can now be saved. The water has closed in upon those hundreds of beasts.

And then resentment and anger arises in their hearts. Anger?? ... Had Jesus then not done them a great favour? ... Henceforth the whole district around their city is no longer unsafe. Henceforth they could walk calmly by the tombs with nothing to fear from the madman. They should be thankful.

Thankful? ... But they are angry. The swine were worth more to them ^{than} that unfortunate man. If only he were still devil possessed, at least they would still have their swine.

"We beseech thee, depart out of our coasts" they say to Jesus.

Yes, so it is with mankind, boys and girls. And are you the same? ... To sacrifice another before ourselves. How cruel, how godless man has become. That is the answer that the Gadarenes give to this mighty wonder. That is the thanks which Jesus receives for His kindness.

And then? ... Jesus departs! He steps at once with His disciples into the little fishing vessel again. They are about to push off from the shore.

"May I come too?" asks the man who has been healed, timidly.

Oh, what has gone on in the heart of that man, no pen can write. He wants to go also. He will be with Jesus. Is that to be wondered at? ...

"No", says the friendly voice of the Lord Jesus. "Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee."

The man steps back obediently. He is not saddened or angry, he does not persist in requesting to go, no, he watches the departing boat, but peace remains in his heart. His eyes sparkle with joy previously unknown.

Then he returns. No, not now to the tombs, but to his home. And then he

declares throughout the whole district what great things God has done for him.

What an unthankful request the Gadarenes made to Jesus. Certainly the Lord Jesus did depart, but ... there still remained a preacher in the land of the Gadarenes. A preacher who showed unto them Jesus. They had not deserved that.

God is great, and we cannot comprehend Him. God was good to this mad Gadarene for He loosed him from the ~~hand~~ bands of the devil. God was good to the ungrateful, selfish Gadarenes, for He left them with a preacher. God is also good to such wicked people as we are, for He still grants us life and everything we need. We receive a thousand mercies from His hand.

What answer do we give for all these undeserved blessings? ...