

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **Great Things that the Lord has done - Mark 5:19-20**

The title, "Great Things the Lord has done", for today's talk comes from Mark 5:19. The first twenty verses of this chapter record one of the many dramatic stories involving the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to understand the "Great Things" we must first consider the background which leads up to this statement.

There are many great things that have happened in the world even in my life time. However, great things can also be personal events and one that comes to my mind is the arrival of electricity to my home as a young boy. I can still remember the days of gas light and the excitement when electricity was installed. There would no longer be the need to stand on a chair and reach up and light the gas mantle with a match. A quick flick of the switch on the wall instead! To me this has always been a great thing. The arrival of electricity opened up great possibilities.

Our story commences, not with the arrival of electricity, but with the arrival of Jesus on the shore of the country of the Gadarenes. The arrival of Jesus to this world of ours was an even greater event, the Son of God becoming a man! To the demon possessed man of our story, it was to become a significant day in his life.

Verse 2 tells us that the only person to come to meet Him on that occasion was this demon possessed man. "There met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit." What a welcome for the Son of God! It tells us something of the condition of the man. His dwelling place was a cemetery – the place of the dead. Is it not poignant that this person a sinner, dead in sins (Ephesians 2), lives in a cemetery? So we find that this man is a picture of every person who is away from God and without Christ as their Saviour. The unclean spirit is a reference to his condition as under the control of demons, as we will see a little later.

From verse 3 we are told that not only was his dwelling in the tombs but the man was a danger to others. The people of that country had tried to restrain him but to no effect. Chains and shackles were no hindrance to the man; he simply broke them. The man possessed a strength which was abnormal.

At the end of verse 4, we find the plain statement that no one could tame him. This is one of the problems in the world today. People who are out of control are a danger to themselves and others. Increasingly authorities are finding it more and more difficult to find adequate solutions. We see in verse 5 that this person was both in distress and a danger to himself. The man himself had no solution and neither had the people of the country in which he lived.

That is until the day that Jesus arrived and as soon as the man saw Jesus afar off he ran to Him and worshipped. Now this must have been an amazing sight. The man might have looked a fearful sight and probably naked as implied by verse 15. The sight is pitiful and is a dramatic picture of the state of man as a sinner. Now someone might say, "I'm not a Christian but I'm not like that." In God's sight, we are told that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags", Isaiah 64. We might look good to ourselves and others, but as God looks on the heart we are not able to hide from Him our true condition in His sight. Sin has devastated mankind and the whole of creation. The solution to the devastation was the coming of Jesus.

In verse 8 we read that Jesus had commanded the demons to leave the man. But the demons objected, although they are not ignorant of who had arrived. They call Jesus, "The Son of the Most High God". In other words, they acknowledge that He is God on the ground of equality of persons in the Godhead. The expression "Most High God" brings to our attention the greatness of God and that no other god is as great, not even Satan, the master of these demons. The last statement in verse 7 makes us realise that they were afraid of the mighty power that Jesus had when He commanded them to leave the man. The word "torment" is used in the context of restraining and frustrating their liberty. Controlling the man gave them great freedom and liberty although the man was their slave, distressed and driven to despair.

I noticed in a newspaper recently that some prisoners in America have been prevented by the authorities from worshipping Satan. The authorities consider it a threat to national security. It was Satan who wanted to bring Jesus into submission to himself when he tempted Jesus by saying he would give all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus if He would worship him.

The Lord's reply was, "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve", Matthew 4:10. What chaos would occur in the whole of creation if Jesus had chosen to do as Satan had requested! Jesus would not have been able then to help this man and there would have been no salvation for this world. I wonder if Satan worshippers realise what bondage they place themselves in.

How Satan has blinded people as it states in 2 Corinthians 4:4: "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

It is not until we get to verse 9 that we find the full extent of the dreadful condition of the man. Jesus asks the man his name and the reply is "Legion; for we are many". We might assume that there were 2,000 demons from verse 13 but no matter how many, they had banded together under the one name to control this person. I have difficulty in coming to terms with 2,000 demons possessing a person. No wonder he was deranged, distressed and destructive. But the Light of the world was at hand to bring liberty to this man. However the demons wanted to remain active and they wanted permission to leave the man but to go into a herd of pigs! Powerful though these demons were, they needed permission to move. In Luke 8:31 we find the demons were afraid of the abyss - the place where other demons are already confined, see the epistle of Jude. As mentioned before, they did not want their freedom taken away.

Once Jesus gave them leave to go into the pigs, then the pigs themselves become self destructive and run down a steep place into a lake and perished. It is quite possible in doing so the demons sealed their own fate and disappeared into the abyss to wait for the day of their judgement. The pig keepers ran away to get others from a nearby city who all came out to assess the situation.

The scene that now greets them is an amazing transformation as far as the demon possessed man is concerned. Verse 15 states that he was "sitting and clothed and in his right mind." Here was powerful evidence of the greatness of Jesus, his power and compassion on this poor man who just a little while earlier had ran to Him and worshipped. Had he seen in Jesus the only opportunity for his salvation, his release from his terrible bondage? How long had he been demon possessed? Now he was sitting. Remember the distressing state of the man as given in verses 2-5 and now what a contrast - sitting and resting beside Jesus. It was also Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus listening to His gracious words. Jesus said that she had chosen the good part, Luke 10. It is also good to listen to the teaching of the Lord Jesus. We must all spend some time during each day reading the Bible.

Also the man was clothed. Earlier I said that it might be implied that he was naked in the degraded condition of being demon possessed. In Isaiah 61 we read "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness." This is what Jesus does for every believer. He clothes us with acceptable garments suited to heaven. Here we have the man suitably dressed for the presence of Jesus.

Lastly, we find that the man is "In his right mind". What torment and anguish the man had been in but now it is altogether different! A mind liberated and set free, a mind no longer controlled by demons but guided by a loving Saviour. In 1 Corinthians 2 we are told, "We have the mind of Christ." What a difference it would make to this world if more became set free and lived their lives as directed by Jesus!

Did this cause rejoicing amongst the inhabitants of the land? No, it was just the opposite. The people did not want Jesus, they wanted Him to leave. So we find Jesus leaving where He is not wanted. What a missed opportunity! Were there no other ill people, no other needs to be met? However, the man wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus said no. Who would witness for Jesus among this people. Jesus gives him a commission. "Go home to your friends, and tell them what GREAT THINGS the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." It was a large area that the man travelled around. A region known as Decapolis, an area of ten cities became the area of witness. The man spoke of Jesus and what He had done for him. The man became a living witness to the delivering power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am reminded of a hymn by FJ Crosby:

*To God be the glory, great things He hath done;  
So loved He the world, that He gave us His Son,  
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,  
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.*

PRAISE THE LORD!

The great things done for this man may well be summarised as follows:

- The man has deliverance from the bondage of Satan.
- His mind freed from the power of the demons.
- He is no longer a self destructive person.
- He is no longer a danger to others and needing to be restrained.
- He has become socially acceptable, being clothed.

Can we relate this incident to ourselves? The well known verse in John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." This is the basis from which blessing flows. We have God's love in action. God sent His only Son into this world. Jesus was the only person who was able to complete the work of salvation. And above all else salvation became freely available to anyone who believed in Jesus. We see something of this when the demon possessed man ran to Jesus and worshipped.

In many people's minds, the fear of death is so very real. We read in Hebrews 2:14, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." We have a man who is no longer in the tombs and in distress but someone who calmly sits at the feet of Jesus. We, too, can take encouragement from such a verse. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ look at death as a gateway to everlasting life. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so we also will be raised.

We also remember the words of the Lord Jesus just prior to the cross while speaking of His going away He could say in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." The peace of heart and mind is a gift for life. As the Lord looked on to the end of His work and the peace that would then reign in His heart, He gives that settled peace to His own disciples.

Believers today have the same gift of peace, no matter the circumstances. Was the man worried about the demons coming back, the reaction of the pig herders or other people of the country? Not a bit! He had Jesus as his deliverer and so have Christians today. Even when the Lord told him to stay in his own country and witness, the peace of Jesus was still with him. A little later Jesus spoke these words to the disciples in John 16:33, "In Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." How relevant to us. Many believers live in countries that cause them suffering and yet the peace of Jesus is with them.

One of the sad situations in the world today is the number of people who are disturbed in mind and find no peace. Some are self destructive in seeking some form of attention. I do not say that they have problems with demons. But it is possible to overcome destructive behaviour. I remember a story about a man whom I knew who had been an alcoholic and an abuser of wife and family, who when he trusted the Lord Jesus as his saviour, spoke of the miracle of turning beer into bread.

When we come to the man as being clothed, I spoke earlier of the scripture in Isaiah 61. There we read "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness."

Here is the very wonderful and positive aspect of the work of salvation. A believer in the Lord Jesus becomes immediately fit for heaven and God's presence. The garments of salvation remind us of the great work of the Lord Jesus. His work alone makes a person fit for heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Good works alone or other ways do not bring a person to heaven. The salvation is not just seen from heaven by God but it displays itself in the life we live. Therefore Paul could say, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Let us live our Christian lives carefully.

The robe of righteousness also has a double aspect. Believers are made fit for the presence of a holy and righteous God. Our fitness ensures we are no longer afraid to stand in the presence of God or our Lord Jesus Christ on the judgement day. God the Father is now the One who waits to welcome us into His house. The other side of the robe of righteousness is the manner of our living. We live rightly in this world: lying, cheating, foul language, pornography, etc are not part of my life any more. We are reminded in Romans 6, "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." This new life is God honouring. We endeavour to live in such a way that Jesus is manifested in my life. Many children today purchase wrist bands which display the letters WWJD - What Would Jesus Do? We could have a similar wrist band – WWJS (What Would Jesus Say). A robe of righteousness governs all our conduct in this world.

At the commencement of this subject, I mentioned about the great thing of electricity being installed in our home when I was probably about 6 years of age. However, the GREATEST THING which outshines the arrival of electricity for me, was the day when as a teenager I trusted the Lord Jesus as MY SAVIOUR. You can keep the great inventions, achievements and whatever else has happened in this world - MY SAVIOUR outshines them all.

In closing I am reminded of a hymn from Sunday school days.

*“Jesus bids us shine with a clear pure light  
Like a little candle burning in the night.  
In this world of darkness so we must shine,  
You in your small corner and I in mine.”*

Let us pray. Lord, we who have experienced Your great compassion in a real and personal way can now rejoice in our sins forgiven. Help us to tell others of Yourself like this man did so long ago.

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