

Today's Quick Word Mark 5:6-8

By Bruce Christian

MARK 5:6-8 *When [the man with an evil spirit] saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"*

When Satan tempted Adam & Eve to rebel against their Creator and disobey his rules for a blessed life in his Garden, a factor was introduced into his perfect world that changed everything. Man was no longer in perfect harmony with his Creator, but came under the complete domination and control of Satan, to whom Jesus therefore would later give the title 'the Prince of this world' (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

Whether we realise this or not, as Adam's descendants we have ALL inherited this condition, and it manifests itself in different ways in every one of us. For most of us, this manifestation is fairly subtle, and expresses itself in quiet, non-spectacular ways, like simply ignoring God's rightful rule and living out our lives on the assumption that we can set our own rules and agenda for living, determining our own definitions of what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' without any reference to God's revealed Truth in his inspired, infallible Word, the Bible.

In our own present society, this attitude has become less 'subtle', and what God says about marriage, sexuality, Creation, the value

of the life of an unborn child, etc, is not just ignored, but is under organised attack. Sadly, however, for the man who confronted Jesus in the 'region of the Gerasenes' (1), the manifestation of Satan's rule was much less subtle!

Given that the very purpose of Jesus' coming to earth was to conquer Satan's power over us (cf Genesis 3:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26), it is not surprising that this man was 'driven' to run up to Jesus and yell abuse at him. It is clear that Satan knew his days were numbered, but he was not going to surrender without a fight - but a fight that ended in his comprehensive defeat, through the cross and the empty tomb!

I like the way Timothy Dudley-Smith explains all this: "The Lord made Man, the Scriptures tell, to bear his image and his sign; yet we, by nature, bear as well the ancient mark of Adam's line. In Adam's fall falls every man, with every gift the Father gave; the crown of all Creation's Plan becomes a rebel and a slave. Herein all woes are brought to birth, all aching hearts and sunless skies; brightness is gone from all the Earth, the innocence of Nature dies. Yet Adam's children, born to pain, by self enslaved, by sin enticed, still may, by grace, be born again - children of God, beloved in Christ! In Christ is Adam's ransom met, Earth, by his cross, is holy ground; Eden indeed is with us yet; in Christ are life and freedom found!" (Tune: Alstone)

Today's Quick Word Judges 7:19-20

By Bruce Christian

JUDGES 7:19-20 *Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, 'A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!'*

The interesting aspect of this chapter for me is the delicate balance between the error of trying to do things in our own strength, and the opposite error of assuming that the sovereign power of God absolves us from any responsibility in the work of his Kingdom.

At the beginning of the chapter, Gideon has the resource of 32,000 men to fight 250,000 Midianites and, although they would still be outnumbered nearly 8 to 1, the LORD declared: "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, ..."! So God wanted them to know that they weren't defeating their powerful enemy in their own strength. On the other hand, he was going to carry out his divine purposes by making use of their efforts! Hence, their 'war-cry'

was to be: "A sword for the LORD AND FOR GIDEON!"

This is pretty much the balance that the Apostle Paul recognises: "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING, for it is GOD who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Philippians 2:12-13).

There is a warning here against two extreme theological positions concerning our salvation: 1. The belief that we initiate our salvation, and that our faith in Jesus is actually a 'work' that we do and offer to God (Arminianism); and 2. The belief that we have no part to play in the demanding task of evangelism because God does it all himself (Hypercalvinism). (I like the story of the Hypercalvinist who got up in the middle of the night to go to the toilet and, not wanting to disturb the family, he didn't turn the lights on. Sadly, his irresponsible teenage son had left his skateboard at the top of the staircase. Having stumbled on it in the dark, our Hypercalvinist picked his badly bruised body up from the foot of the stairs and was heard to mutter, "I'm glad that's over.")

"A sword for the LORD AND for Gideon!"

Today's Quick Word Jeremiah 24:1

By Bruce Christian

JEREMIAH 24:1 *When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!"*

What an important lesson for us is contained in this short chapter of Jeremiah! We all struggle with God's strange providence in these very testing days, and faithful, lone-voice Jeremiah has a significant word for us in such circumstances.

God's people were at the crossroads. God's loving, caring 'providence', which he was communicating through this Prophet, was far from popular. It was part of his sovereign Plan for his chosen people that they should be defeated by Babylon, should go into captivity there for 70 years, and should witness wicked, ruthless Nebuchadnezzar destroying their blessed City of 'Zion' and their beautiful, sacred Temple - the LORD's 'dwelling place'! That was the message entrusted to Jeremiah.

Human 'wisdom', on the other hand, was to refuse to submit in humility and contrition to God's providence, and to fight against the Babylonian invasion in their own strength, and/or to flee back to Egypt for refuge. This 'wisdom' was what was being communicated to them by all the other self-proclaimed 'official' prophets!

In the vision of the baskets, Jeremiah saw one basket full of delicious figs and the other full of rotten, inedible figs. The LORD would explain through his Prophet that the good figs represented those who, with a humble and contrite heart would accept his providence and go to Babylon, as illogical as this might seem to human 'wisdom'.

The LORD would, in fact, shortly give them another group of back-up instructions and promises: "... seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. ... Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them. ... When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:7-11).

Are we prepared to let God be God as we struggle with his 'illogical' providence in our own lives and in the lives of our families, our nation and our world - and to trust his promises in the midst of the present 'darkness'? Let us remember, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and CERTAIN of WHAT WE DO NOT SEE." (Hebrews 11:1).