**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MARK-021**. **THE LORD OF DEMONS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1.* *And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. 2. And when He was come out of the ship, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, 3. Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: 4. Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. 5. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones. 6. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped Him, 7. And 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. 8. For He said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. 9. And He asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. 10. And he besought Him much that He would not send them away out of the country. 11. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. 12. And all the devils besought Him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. 13. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea. 14. And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. 15. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. 16. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. 17. And they began to pray Him to depart out of their coasts. 18. And when He was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed Him that he might be with Him. 19. 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. 20. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel."*

*Mark 5:1-20*

The awful picture of this demoniac is either painted from life, or it is one of the most wonderful feats of the poetic imagination. Nothing more terrible, vivid, penetrating, and real was ever conceived by the greatest creative genius. If it is not simply a portrait, Aeschylus or Dante might own the artist for a brother. We see the quiet landing on the eastern shore, and almost hear the yells that broke the silence as the fierce, demon-ridden man hurried to meet them, perhaps with hostile purpose. The dreadful characteristics of his state are sharply and profoundly signalised. He lives up in the rock-hewn tombs which overhang the beach; for all that belongs to corruption and death is congenial to the subjects of that dark kingdom of evil. He has superhuman strength, and has known no gentle efforts to reclaim, but only savage attempts to tameby force, as if he were a beast. Fetters and manacles have been snapped like rushes by him. Restless, sleepless, hating men, he has made the night hideous with his wild shrieks, and fled, swift as the wind, from place to place among the lonely hills. Insensible to pain, and deriving some dreadful satisfaction from his own wounds, he has gashed himself with splinters of rock, and howled, in a delirium of pain and pleasure, at the sight of his own blood. His sharpened eyesight sees Jesus from afar, and, with the disordered haste and preternatural agility which marked all his movements, he runs towards Him. Such is the introduction to the narrative of the cure. It paints for us not merely a maniac, but a demoniac. He is not a man at war with himself, but a man at war with other beings, who have forced themselves into his house of life. At least, so says Mark, and so said Jesus; and if the story before us is true, its subsequent incidents compel the acceptance of that explanation. What went into the herd of swine? The narrative of the restoration of the sufferer has a remarkable feature, which may help to mark off its stages. The word besoughtoccurs four times in it, and we may group the details round each instance.

**I. The demons beseeching Jesus through the man's voice.**

He was, in the exact sense of the word, distracted--drawn two ways. For it would seem to have been the self in him that ran to Jesus and fell at His feet, as if in some dim hope of rescue; but it is the demons in him that speak, though the voice be his. They force him to utter their wishes, their terrors, their loathing of Christ, though he says Iand meas if these were his own. That horrible condition of a double, or, as in this case, a manifold personality, speaking through human organs, and overwhelming the proper self, mysterious as it is, is the very essence of the awful misery of the demoniacs. Unless we are resolved to force meanings of our own on Scripture, I do not see how we can avoid recognising this. What black thoughts, seething with all rebellious agitation, the reluctant lips have to utter! The self-drawn picture of the demoniac nature is as vivid as, and more repellent than, the Evangelist's terrible portrait of the outward man. Whatever dumb yearning after Jesus may have been in the oppressed human consciousness, his words are a shriek of terror and recoil. The mere presence of Christ lashes the demons into paroxysms: but before the man spoke, Christ had spoken His stern command to come forth. He is answered by this howl of fear and hate. Clear recognition of Christ's person is in it, and not difficult to explain, if we believe that others than the sufferer looked through his wild eyes, and spoke in his loud cry. They know Him who had conquered their prince long ago; if the existence of fallen spirits be admitted, their knowledge is no difficulty.

The next element in the words is hatred, as fixed as the knowledge is clear. God's supremacy and loftiness, and Christ's nature, are recognised, but only the more abhorred. The name of God can be used as a spell to sway Jesus, but it has no power to touch this fierce hatred into submission. The devils also believe and tremble. This, then, is a dark possibility, which has become actual for real living beings, that they should know God, and hate as heartily as they know clearly. That is the terminus towards which human spirits may be travelling. Christ's power, too, is recognised, and His mere presence makes the flock of obscene creatures nested in the man uneasy, like bats in a cave, who flutter against a light. They shrink from Him, and shudderingly renounce all connection with Him, as if their cries would alter facts, or make Him relax His grip. The very words of the question prove its folly. What is there to me and thee?implies that there were two parties to the answer; and the writhings of one of them could not break the bond. To all this is to be added that the tormentdeprecated was the expulsion from the man, as if there were some grim satisfaction and dreadful alleviation in being there, rather than in the abyss--as Luke gives it--which appears to be the alternative. If we put all these things together, we get an awful glimpse into the secrets of that dark realm, which it is better to ponder with awe than flippantly to deny or mock.

How striking is Christ's unmoved calm in the face of all this fury! He is always laconic in dealing with demoniacs; and, no doubt, His tranquil presence helped to calm the man, however it excited the demon. The distinct intention of the question, What is thy name?is to rouse the man's self-consciousness, and make him feel his separate existence, apart from the alien tyranny which had just been using his voice and usurping his personality. He had said Iand me. Christ meets him with, Who is the I? and the very effort to answer would facilitate the deliverance. But for the moment the foreign influence is still too strong, and the answer, than which there is nothing more weird and awful in the whole range of literature, comes: My name is Legion; for we are many. Note the momentary gleam of the true self in the first word or two, fading away into the old confusion. He begins with my, but he drops back to we. Note the pathetic force of the name. This poor wretch had seen the solid mass of the Roman legion, the instrument by which foreign tyrants crushed the nations. He felt himself oppressed and conquered by their multitudinous array. The voice of the legionhas a kind of cruel ring of triumph, as if spoken as much to terrify the victim as to answer the question.

Again the man's voice speaks, beseeching the direct opposite of what he really would have desired. He was not so much in love with his dreadful tenants as to pray against their expulsion, but their fell power coerces his lips, and he asks for what would be his ruin. That prayer, clean contrary to the man's only hope, is surely the climax of the horror. In a less degree, we also too often deprecate the stroke which delivers, and would fain keep the legion of evils which riot within.

**II. The demons beseeching Jesus without disguise.**

There seems to be intended a distinction between he besought, in verse 10, and they besought, in verse 12. Whether we are to suppose that, in the latter case, the man's voice was used or no, the second request was more plainly not his, but theirs. It looks as if, somehow, the command was already beginning to take effect, and heand theywere less closely intertwined. It is easy to ridicule this part of the incident, and as easy to say that it is incredible; but it is wiser to remember the narrow bounds of our knowledge of the unseen world of being, and to be cautious in asserting that there is nothing beyond the horizon but vacuity. If there be unclean spirits, we know too little about them to say what is possible. Only this is plain--that the difficulty of supposing them to inhabit swine is less, if there be any difference, than of supposing them to inhabit men, since the animal nature, especially of such an animal, would correspond to their impurity, and be open to their driving. The house and the tenant are well matched. But why should the expelled demons seek such an abode? It would appear that anywhere was better than the abyss, and that unless they could find some creature to enter, thither they must go. It would seem, too, that there was no other land open to them--for the prayer on the man's lips had been not to send them out of the country, as if that was the only country on earth open to them. That makes for the opinion that demoniacal possession was the dark shadow which attended, for reasons not discoverable by us, the light of Christ's coming, and was limited in time and space by His earthly manifestation. But on such matters there is not ground enough for certainty.

Another difficulty has been raised as to Christ's right to destroy property. It was very questionable property, if the owners were Jews. Jesus owns all things, and has the right and the power to use them as He will; and if the purposes served by the destruction of animal life or property are beneficent and lofty, it leaves no blot on His goodness. He used His miraculous power twice for destruction--once on a fig-tree, once on a herd of swine. In both cases, the good sought was worth the loss. Whether was it better that the herd should live and fatten, or that a man should be delivered, and that he and they who saw should be assured of his deliverance and of Christ's power? Is not a man much better than a sheep, and much more than a pig? They are born to be killed, and nobody cries out cruelty. Why should not Christ have sanctioned this slaughter, if it helped to steady the poor man's nerves, or to establish the reality of possession and of his deliverance? Notice that the drowning of the herd does not appear to have entered into the calculations of the unclean spirits. They desired houses to live in after their expulsion, and for them to plunge the swine into the lake would have defeated their purpose. The stampede was an unexpected effect of the commingling of the demonic with the animal nature, and outwitted the demons. The devil is an ass. There is a lower depth than the animal nature; and even swine feel uncomfortable when the demon is in them, and in their panic rush anywhere to get rid of the incubus, and, before they know, find themselves struggling in the lake. Which things are an allegory.

**III. The terrified Gerasenes beseeching Jesus to leave them.**

They had rather have their swine than their Saviour, and so, though they saw the demoniac sitting, clothed, and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus, they in turn beseech that He should take Himself away. Fear and selfishness prompted the prayer. The communities on the eastern side of the lake were largely Gentile; and, no doubt, these people knew that they did many worse things than swine-keeping, and may have been afraid that some more of their wealth would have to go the same road as the herd. They did not want instruction, nor feel that they needed a healer. Were their prayers so very unlike the wishes of many of us? Is there nobody nowadays unwilling to let the thought of Christ into his life, because he feels an uneasy suspicion that, if Christ comes, a good deal will have to go? How many trades and schemes of life really beseech Jesus to go away and leave them in peace! And He goes away. The tragedy of life is that we have the awful power of severing ourselves from His influence. Christ commands unclean spirits, but He can only plead with hearts. And if we bid Him depart, He is fain to leave us for the time to the indulgence of our foolish and wicked schemes. If any man open, He comes in--oh, how gladly I but if any man slam the door in His face, He can but tarry without and knock. Sometimes His withdrawing does more than His loudest knocking; and sometimes they who repelled Him as He stood on the beach call Him back, as He moves away to the boat. It is in the hope that they may, that He goes.

**IV. The restored man's beseeching to abide with Christ.**

No wonder that the spirit of this man, all tremulous with the conflict, and scarcely able yet to realise his deliverance, clung to Christ, and besought Him to let him continue by His side. Conscious weakness, dread of some recurrence of the inward hell, and grateful love, prompted the prayer. The prayer itself was partly right and partly wrong. Right, in clinging to Jesus as the only refuge from the past misery; wrong, in clinging to His visible presence as the only way of keeping near Him. Therefore, He who had permitted the wish of the demons, and complied with the entreaties of the terrified mob, did not yield to the prayer, throbbing with love and conscious weakness. Strange that Jesus should put aside a hand that sought to grasp His in order to be safe; but His refusal was, as always, the gift of something better, and He ever disappoints the wish in order more truly to satisfy the need. The best defence against the return of the evil spirits was in occupation. It is the emptyhouse which invites them back. Nothing was so likely to confirm and steady the convalescent mind as to dwell on the fact of his deliverance. Therefore he is sent to proclaim it to friends who had known his dreadful state, and amidst old associations which would help him to knit his new life to his old, and to treat his misery as a parenthesis. Jesus commanded silence or speech according to the need of the subjects of His miracles. For some, silence was best, to deepen the impression of blessing received; for others, speech was best, to engage and so to fortify the mind against relapse.