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

**MARK-022**. **A REFUSED REQUEST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"18.* *He that had been possessed with the devil prayed Jesus 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."*

*Mark 5:18-19*

There are three requests, singularly contrasted with each other, made to Christ in the course of this miracle of healing the Gadarene demoniac. The evil spirits ask to be permitted to go into the swine; the men of the country, caring more for their swine than their Saviour, beg Him to take Himself away, and relieve them of His unwelcome presence; the demoniac beseeches Him to be allowed to stop beside Him. Two of the requests are granted; one is refused. The one that was refused is the one that we might have expected to be granted.

Christ forces Himself upon no man, and so, when they besought Him to go, He went, and took salvation with Him in the boat. Christ withdraws Himself from no man who desires Him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, and said, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee.

Now, do you not think that if we put these three petitions and their diverse answers together, and look especially at this last one, where the natural wish was refused, we ought to be able to learn some lessons? The first thing I would notice is, the clinging of the healed man to his Healer.

Think of him half an hour before, a raging maniac; now all at once conscious of a strange new sanity and calmness; instead of lashing himself about, and cutting himself with stones, and rending his chains and fetters, sitting clothed, and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus. No wonder that he feared that when the Healer went the demons would come back--no wonder that he besought Him that he might still keep within that quiet sacred circle of light which streamed from His presence, across the border of which no evil thing could pass. Love bound him to his Benefactor; dread made him shudder at the thought of losing his sole Protector, and being again left, in that partly heathen land, solitary, to battle with the strong foes that had so long rioted in his house of life. And so he begged that he might be with Him.

That poor heathen man--for you must remember that this miracle was not wrought on the sacred soil of Palestine--that poor heathen man, just having caught a glimpse of how calm and blessed life might be, is the type of us all. And there is something wrong with us if our love does not, like his, desire above all things the presence of Jesus Christ; and if our consciousness of impotence does not, in like manner, drive us to long that our sole Deliverer shall not be far away from us. Merchant-ships in time of war, like a flock of timid birds, keep as near as they can to the armed convoy, for the only safety from the guns of the enemy's cruisers is in keeping close to their strong protector. The traveller upon some rough, unknown road, in the dark, holds on by his guide's skirts or hand, and feels that if he loses touch he loses the possibility of safety. A child clings to his parent when dangers are round him. The convalescent patient does not like to part with his doctor. And if we rightly learned who it is that has cured us, and what is the condition of our continuing whole and sound, like this man we shall pray that He may suffer us to be with Him. Fill the heart with Christ, and there is no room for the many evil spirits that make up the legion that torments it The empty heart invites the devils, and they come back, Even if it is swept and garnished, and brought into respectability, propriety, and morality, they come back, There is only one way to keep them out; when the ark is in the Temple, Dagon will be lying, like the brute form that he is, a stump upon the threshold. The condition of our security is close contact with Jesus Christ. If we know the facts of life, the temptations that ring us round, the weakness of these wayward wills of ours, and the strength of this intrusive and masterful flesh and sense that we have to rule, we shall know and feel that our only safety is our Master's presence.

Further, note the strange refusal.

Jesus Christ went through the world, or at least the little corner of it which His earthly career occupied, seeking for men that desired to have Him, and it is impossible that He should have put away any soul that desired to be present with Him. Yet, though His one aim was to draw men to Him, and the prospect that He should be able to exercise a stronger attraction over a wider area reconciled Him to the prospect of the Cross, so that He said in triumph, I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me, he meets this heathen man, feeble in his crude and recent sanity, with a flat refusal. He suffered him not. Most probably the reason for the strange and apparently anomalous dealing with such a desire was to be found in the man's temperament. Most likely it was the best thing for him that he should stop quietly in his own house, and have no continuance of the excitement and perpetual change which would have necessarily been his lot if he had been allowed to go with Jesus Christ. We may be quite sure that when the Lord with one hand seemed to put him away, He was really, with a stronger attraction, drawing him to Himself; and that the peculiarity of the method of treatment was determined with exclusive reference to the real necessities of the person who was subject to it.

But yet, underlying the special case, and capable of being stated in the most general terms, lies this thought, that Jesus Christ's presence, the substance of the demoniac's desire, may be as completely, and, in some cases, will be more completely, realised amongst the secularities of ordinary life than amidst the sanctities of outward communion and companionship with Him. Jesus was beginning here to wean the man from his sensuous dependence upon His localised and material presence. It was good for him, and it is good for us all, to feel our feet, so to speak. Responsibility laid, and felt to be laid, upon us is a steadying and ennobling influence. And it was better that the demoniac should learn to stand calmly, when apparently alone, than that he should childishly be relying on the mere external presence of his Deliverer.

Be sure of this, that when the Lord went away across the lake, He left His heart and His thoughts, and His care and His power over there, on the heathen side of the sea; and that when the people thronged Himon the other side, and the poor woman pressed through the crowd, that virtue might come to her by her touch, virtue was at the same time raying out across the water to the solitary newly healed demoniac, to sustain him too.

And so we may all learn that we may have, and it depends upon ourselves whether we do or do not have, all protection all companionship, and all the sweetness of Christ's companionship and the security of Christ's protection just as completely when we are at home amongst our friends--that is to say, when we are about our daily work, and in the secularities of our calling or profession--as when we are in the secret place of the Most Highand holding fellowship with a present Christ. Oh, to carry Him with us into every duty, to realise Him in all circumstances, to see the light of His face shine amidst the darkness of calamity, and the pointing of His directing finger showing us our road amidst all perplexities of life! Brethren, that is possible. When Jesus Christ suffered him not to go with Him, Jesus Christ stayed behind with the man.

Lastly, we have here the duty enjoined.

Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee. The man went home and translated the injunction into word and deed. As I said, the reason for the peculiarity of his treatment, in his request being refused, was probably his peculiar temperament. So again I would say the reason for the commandment laid upon him, which is also anomalous, was probably the peculiarity of his disposition. Usually our Lord was careful to enjoin silence upon those whom He benefited by His miraculous cures. That injunction of silence was largely owing to His desire not to create or fan the flame of popular excitement. But that risk was chiefly to be guarded against in the land of Israel, and here, where we have a miracle upon Gentile soil, there was not the same occasion for avoiding talk and notoriety.

But probably the main reason for the exceptional commandment to go and publish abroad what the Lord had done was to be found in the simple fact that this man's malady and his disposition were such that external work of some sort was the best thing to prevent him from relapsing into his former condition. His declaration to everybody of his cure would help to confirm his cure; and whilst he was speaking about being healed, he would more and more realise to himself that he was healed. Having work to do would take him out of himself, which no doubt was a great security against the recurrence of the evil from which he had been delivered. But however that may be, look at the plain lesson that lies here. Every healed man should be a witness to his Healer; and there is no better way of witnessing than by our lives, by the elevation manifested in our aims, by our aversion from all low, earthly, gross things, by the conspicuous--not made conspicuous by us, conspicuous because it cannot be hid--concentration and devotion, and unselfishness and Christlikeness of our daily lives to show that we are really healed. If we manifest these things in our conduct, then, when we say it was Jesus Christ that healed me, people will be apt to believe us. But if this man had gone away into the mountains and amongst the tombs as he used to do, and had continued all the former characteristics of his devil-ridden life, who would have believed him when he talked about being healed? And who ought to believe you when you say, Christ is my Saviour, if your lives are, to all outward seeming, exactly what they were before? The sphere in which the healed man's witness was to be borne tested the reality of his healing. Go home to thy friends, and tell them. I wonder how many Christian professors there are who would be least easily believed by those who live in the same house with them, if they said that Jesus had cast their devils out of them. It is a great mistake to take recent converts, especially if they have been very profligate beforehand, and to hawk them about the country as trophies of God's converting power. Let them stop at home, and bethink themselves, and get sober and confirmed, and let their changed lives prove the reality of Christ's healing power. They can speak to some purpose after that.

Further, remember that there is no better way for keeping out devils than working for Jesus Christ. Many a man finds that the true cure--say, for instance, of doubts that buzz about him and disturb him, is to go away and talk to some one about his Saviour. Work for Jesus amongst people that do not know Him is a wonderful sieve for sifting out the fundamental articles of the Christian faith. And when we go to other people, and tell them of that Lord, and see how the message is sometimes received, and what it sometimes does, we come away with confirmed faith.

But, in any case, it is better to work for Him than to sit alone, thinking about Him. The two things have to go together; and I know very well that there is a great danger, in the present day, of exaggeration, and insisting too exclusively upon the duty of Christian work whilst neglecting to insist upon the duty of Christian meditation. But, on the other hand, it blows the cobwebs out of a man's brain; it puts vigour into him, it releases him from himself, and gives him something better to think about, when he listens to the Master's voice, Go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee.

Master! it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles. Stay here; let us enjoy ourselves up in the clouds, with Moses and Elias; and never mind about what goes on below. But there was a demoniac boy down there that needed to be healed; and the father was at his witsend, and the disciples were at theirs because they could not heal him. And so Jesus Christ turned His back upon the Mount of Transfiguration, and the company of the blessed two, and the Voice that said, This is My beloved Son, and hurried down where human woes called Him, and found that He was as near God, and so did Peter and James and John, as when up there amid the glory.

Go home to thy friends, and tell them; and you will find that to do that is the best way to realise the desire which seemed to be put aside, the desire for the presence of Christ. For be sure that wherever He may not be, He always is where a man, in obedience to Him, is doing His commandments. So when He said, Go home to thy friends, He was answering the request that He seamed to reject, and when the Gadarene obeyed, he would find, to his astonishment and his grateful wonder, that the Lord had not gone away in the boat, but was with him still. Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel. Lo! I am with you always.