**FACE TO FACE WITH JESUS**

by

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Scripture - Mark 5:1-20

The famous preacher A.W. Tozer once said this about a real Christian:

A real Christian is an odd number.

They feel supreme love for one whom they have never seen.

They talk familiarly every day to someone they cannot see.

They expect to go to heaven on the virtue of another.

They empty themselves in order to be full.

They admit they are wrong so they can be declared right.

They go down in order to get up.

They are strongest when they are the weakest.

They are richest when they are the poorest.

They are the happiest when they feel the worst.

They die so that they can live.

They forsake in order to have.

They give away so they can keep.

They see the invisible.

They hear the inaudible and

They know that which passes knowledge.

So true. All those characteristics of a real Christian are true and can be found in the Scriptures. If people were asked to describe you and me, I would hope that all those characteristics would be used to describe us. But in order for those characteristics to shine out of us to others, one important thing must happen. That is, we must have met Jesus Face to Face. We must have come to know Jesus not only as our redeemer but also as our friend.

Today I want us to look at the demoniac described in our Scripture lesson in Mark 5. I want us to look closely at what happened to him when he met Jesus 'Face to Face'. I believe we can learn some important lessons from him.

The scene of our story, as described in verse 1, is 'on the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerascenes.' Where is that you might ask? Most scholars believe it is the town of Gergesa on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The Scriptures say Jesus came there by boat after He had stilled the storm. It is there, on the shore that we meet the demoniac.

The Scriptures starting in verse 3 tells us that the demoniac 'lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him anymore, even with a chain; for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke to pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him."

A fetter is the shackle that was attached to the feet of prisoners so they could not run away. Frequently a chain was also attached between the fetters to further hinder escape. Considering this demoniac's excessive strength, he was probably shackled with fetters and chains on both his feet and hands to restrain him. Yet he was so strong he was even able to remove them. What we read describes very vividly a man out of control. Here was a man who was controlled by the power within him and therefore was a not only a danger to himself, but also to all those around him.

You see, this demoniac is no different than you and I. That’s right. Without a Face-to-Face encounter with Jesus, we are a people out of control. For we are controlled by our emotions, our fears, our desires of the flesh, and our desires for gratification. We are just like this demoniac, bound by the shackles of our sinful selves. We are also, like the demoniac's association with the tombs and death, for we are living a life of eternal death, forever doomed.

Verse 5 says: "Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones." Again, we are no different. Without Jesus being an active part of our lives, we are ‘night and day among the tombs', walking among the dead, living a life of death, constantly bruising ourselves with the stones of the flesh - idolatry, selfishness, pride, greed, lust. Without the Face-to-Face encounter with Jesus on a daily basis, we are living just like the demoniac.

Like the demoniac we may also ask - is there no hope? How can I ever stop this life of torment and bruising of myself? The answer is one of great hope. Listen again to verse 6: "And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him." That's the hope. That's the answer. We must run to Jesus and worship Him. We, like the demoniac, must meet Jesus Face-to-Face. We like the demoniac, must, as he did in verse 7, "cry out with a loud voice".

Jesus promises us that if we come to Him with our pains and hurts, He will remove them from us. Like He did with the demons in the demoniac, He will send them away, drown them and make them no more. But the key is we must come to Him Face-to-Face.

You know that is not an easy thing to do. Our human nature, our flesh, feels uncomfortable with that especially after we have sinned. We are then unable to approach God. But since Jesus died and took our sins upon Himself, we are made clean through His shed blood. God then looks upon us as we cry out with a loud voice, repent of our sins and meet Jesus Face-to-Face. But there will always be those who will not come to Jesus. There will always be those who will always just look upon themselves.

When Jesus sent the demons into the swine and they hurled themselves into the sea, we read in verse 17 these word: "and they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood." Why, you say, did the people ask Jesus to leave? It’s simple. They were protesting because He had removed their hope of financial gain by destroying the swine. Money. Financial gain. Self. No concern or gratitude for the change in the demoniac's life.

What did Jesus do? Did He rebuke them? The Scriptures say no. Verse 18 says: "and he was getting into the boat." He left. Jesus never stays where He is not wanted. If we act like the people and are only concerned about money, financial gain and self, we are telling Jesus we have no use for Him and when we do that, He will not stay. He will leave us to our desires.

The other important lesson from this story is what happened to the demoniac. The Scripture says he wanted to go with Jesus and the disciples. But Jesus said no. Verse 19 says what Jesus told him: It reads: "go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And verse 20 says that's exactly what he did. He went back to Decapolis and proclaimed what God had done for him and all men marveled.

That’s also what an encounter with God does. Elijah, when he heard the still small voice of God in I Kings 19, he forgot his fears and immediately got up and did God’s bidding because he was filled with awe and strength, making himself a living testimony of God.

That's what a Face-to-Face encounter with Jesus does. It not only redeems us. It not only cleanses us. It not only changes us. It also makes us a living testimony of God's love for mankind. Our life can no longer contain its joy for God. Everything we do will reflect God's redeeming love in Jesus. People will see it and want to know about it. They will ask about it and want to have what we have! We all identify with the demoniac before he met Jesus Face-to-Face. But do we identify with him after he met Jesus Face-to-Face?

We need to ask ourselves -

Is our life full of joy for God to the point people notice and ask about it?

Is our life a living testimony of how God changed our lives when we met Jesus?

Do people ask us about our faith?

Do people ask us where we go to church?

Do people say to us - I want what you have, referring to the peace we have in Jesus?

We need to ask ourselves these questions. We need to evaluate where we are in our walk with Jesus. If we are not where we should be, we need to take the necessary actions to get there.

Because tomorrow may never come. Today is the time.

In Jesus Name. Amen.