

Ian Macrae: Mark 4:35 - The Other Side

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] Well friends, as we depend on God to help us, we would like to turn back to the portion that we read together in the Gospel of Mark. I consider part of what you read, but as a focus we would like to take Mark chapter 4 and verse 35. Mark chapter 4 verse 35. On that day when evening had come he said to them, let us go across to the other side. Let us go across to the other side. Now we all know living on an island what it's like to have to cross the sea to get somewhere, don't we? And while he was on earth, Jesus was also familiar with this. He crossed the Sea of Galilee on a number of occasions. And here we have one of the times that he crossed the Sea of Galilee recorded for us. And it comes at the end of a busy, intense day. Jesus has spent the day teaching a huge crowd on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us in chapter 4 that this is when he used the parable of the sower for example and Mark mentions three other parables in the chapter. But Mark also says in verse 33 with many such parables he spoke the word to them.

See Mark hasn't told us everything that Jesus said and that sermon that day. He's just given us a brief selection. And not only has Jesus been teaching the crowd, afterwards he's also spent time teaching the disciples on their own, explaining what the parables mean to them in a special individual way. And I'm sure this would have been a long lesson given how much Christ would have said in his sermon. And again Mark tells us that he explained everything to his disciples. So evening comes and Jesus tells the disciples to get into a boat and that they're going to cross the Sea of Galilee and go to the other side. Now of course whilst they're on the sea the storm blows up, the disciples are terrified, Jesus is asleep as a result of his exertions during the day and of course as we all know, he's woken up by the disciples. He calms the storm and he challenges the disciples for their lack of faith. And here we are the next day in chapter 5 and he's in the land of the Gerasenes or the Gergesenes and he meets Legion and he heals them from his demon possession.

This is a part of Christ's ministry which I'm sure most of us are quite familiar with. But we want to think about this statement at the end of verse 35 as a pivotal statement in what is taking place. We want to see how it's relevant to the Lord Jesus' work, how it was relevant to the work, his work on earth 2000 odd years ago and how it's still relevant to his work today. Let us go across to the other side. So here we have a journey. On the face of it it's a simple journey, it's from the western shore of the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore. It's a short journey geographically but it's an epic journey in terms of culture and in a spiritual sense. The Jews referred to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and I think they still do actually as the other side. And the reason they do that is because it's where the Gentiles live. One side of the sea is Jewish, the other is Gentile, it was under Greek or Roman rule depending on what exactly was going on at the time in history. And notice in verse 20 of chapter 5, the last verse that we read,

Legion goes into the Decapolis. If you're using an avi it just says Decapolis which isn't quite as clear. And Legion goes into the Decapolis telling people what Jesus has done for him. Now Decapolis is a Greek word meaning 10 cities. Deca like we would have in Decade or De Cathlon meaning 10 and Paulus for a city. And it refers to a group of 10 cities on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee from Damascus in the north down to Philadelphia and the south. And most of these ancient cities were in what's now the country of Jordan.

So the Decapolis, these 10 cities, they are on the other side in many ways. They're literally on the other side of the Sea of Galilee from the Jews. They're in a place where the God of the Jews isn't recognised. They're not being oppressed by the Romans like the Jews are. They have different languages and cultures and politics and religions. It is very different to life on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee. Friends let's try just for a short time to look at Jesus' journey to the other side in three ways. Firstly in its literal sense given to us here in Mark 4 and 5 and then in two metaphorical ways. So first of all we've got the journey from Galilee to Gadara. Galilee on one side and Gadara on the other. Why is it significant that Jesus goes to the other side from Galilee to Gadara?

[5 : 53] Well at this time we say the Jews are on one shore, the Gentiles are on the other. And the Jews see it as an us and them situation. And they even believe that if they go into Gentile lands that they would become unclean. So Jesus making this journey will have been a scandalous thing to the Jews and especially to the Pharisees as you can almost imagine them gossiping to themselves. This man's supposed to be a rabbi, supposed to be a teacher. How in the world can he go amongst the Gentiles in this way if he's a rabbi? But friends Jesus has work to do among the Gentiles. And surely here in this journey he's paving the way for the principle of the Gospel not being limited to the Jews. Yes as Paul wrote later on the Gospel was to the Jew first but it was also to the Greek, to the Gentile, to the foreigner.

So here is Christ establishing the principle that the Gospel is for everyone. But more than that we see that Jesus has work to do specifically not just amongst the Gentiles in general but here in Gadara, the region of Gadara. And it's work that shows him for who he really is. As soon as he steps off the boat on the eastern shore of Galilee he's met by this man Legion. And this is no ordinary meeting between two ordinary men. This is a meeting between a man who is also God and a man who is so much under the control of Satan that he isn't just possessed by a demon but by so many that they even define his name.

A Roman Legion had about 4,000 soldiers. So it's possible that this man had something like that number of demons within him. What a horrifying thought. And these demons are destroying this man's life. He's an outcast. He's feared by his neighbours. He's living like an animal amongst the tombs. Nothing can be done to control him even when they grab a hold of him and they chain him up. He's given so much strength that he's able to just shatter the chains. And he must have been in an awful sight full of cuts and bruises from his self harming. He must have looked wild from years living in this way. But this morning, just a few hours after Jesus has set off in a boat to go to the other side with his disciples, this man Legion comes face to face with Jesus. You know we often picture Jesus as being a soft, timid man. Almost somebody you would look at and feel sorry for. And I think it's one of the great problems with religious art that we see. One of the reasons we shouldn't make images of Christ was we have no idea what he was like as a man. But the images that are created always give this idea. But friends I don't believe for a second that he was anything like that. Because he certainly wasn't timid when he chased the traders out of the temple and stopped them making their money. He certainly wasn't soft when he was being beaten and scourged by the Romans. And there's nothing pityable about him here as he stands face to face with this demon possessed man. This man who is terrifying the people of his own town, of the villages round about. People who have known him all his life. Here they are standing face to face on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

But more than that, here is Jesus standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And he's not just face to face with this man. He's face to face with a legion of demons. A legion of demons who hate him. A legion of demons who want to destroy him. And in the ensuing battle, if you can call it that, he destroys everyone. The demons are thrown out of this man. He's returned to his senses. And then the strangest thing in the story happens.

The gatherings here, what has happened, they come to Jesus. And what do they say? Well this is amazing Jesus. Tell us how you have the power to do this. No. Well Jesus if you can control this man, you can help me with my problems. No. Jesus take time with us.

[11 : 00] Explain to us what's going on so that we can understand it. No. They ask him to get out. They tell him they're not interested in him. They want him to leave their country.

Friends, isn't that shocking? Isn't that tragic? Here is the saviour of the world, the great miracle worker. He's here in Gadara against all logic, against all Jewish tradition. And they can't wait to get rid of him. Can you believe that? But you know the greater tragedy is that if you're not a Christian, you're doing exactly that as well. You're telling him that he's not welcome in your life. Friends, you live in a community where God's power has been seen over the generations. Times of revival, churches active in the community, religions all around. And you're still saying it's not for me. I don't really care what you've got to say. I have no interest. You know, these gatherings had an excuse that you don't have. Because they were afraid. They were absolutely terrified of what they were seeing. They were more afraid to see Legion with its senses than Legion possessed.

Because they were used to seeing Legion under the possession of the demons, under the influence of the demons. They kind of understood what was going on with that because they were used to it. They'd probably grown up with it, many of them. But they don't understand how Jesus can just speak and he's overcome the demons. How Jesus can just speak and Legion is in his right mind. They can't understand what's going on and they're scared. But you know all about him. You know what he does. You know how he heals people. You know how he forgives sins. And friend, are you still telling him to go back where he came from? Well, you might not have a Legion of demons controlling your life. But for everyone before they come to Christ, sin controls their lives. And this is the only one who can free you from that control. Well, don't reject him like these ignorant gatherings did. But welcome him like poor Legion does. You know better than them. But despite their rejection of him, Jesus doesn't reject them. What does he do? Well, Legion asks for permission to follow Jesus back to Galilee. But the Lord has a greater calling for him. He says, go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you. We mentioned a couple of minutes ago that Jesus' journey across the sea of Galilee was establishing this principle of reaching the Gentiles with the gospel. Well, here he is immediately building on that foundation by sending Legion out as a missionary to his own people. He's told to spread the word of the great things that Jesus has done for him to tell a bit of the mercy that Jesus has shown him. And we can be sure that his work was blessed by God and that it led to sinners in the Decapolis and these 10 Gentile cities being saved. And doesn't this principle still apply to you and I as God's people, friends? Shouldn't we be telling your friends and their family about everything that God has done for us? Shouldn't we be talking about it? Shouldn't our lives be showing it? If he's done great things in your life, if he's shown you great mercy, should you keep it to yourself? Of course not. But it's interesting that Jesus tells Legion to spread the word. But later in chapter 5, the part where he didn't read, he heals Jesus' daughter and he tells Jesus' family not to say anything about what he's done. Why the difference? And you'll remember I'm sure that this happens a few times in the gospel. He performs a miracle and then he tells people, don't say anything about it. Why the inconsistency? Well, I'm not completely sure about this and you might have your own thoughts on this. But it looks like what he says in this regard depends on where the miracle takes place. If it takes place in Galilee or Judea, amongst the Jews, it looks like he doesn't want the word spread. But if it takes place in a Gentile area like

Gadara or Samaria, he seems to encourage them to be sort of missionaries going out and spreading this word. Now, commentators have different opinions on why this is the case. Before myself, the most sensible suggestion is this, that if news of our great miracle worker had spread in Judea, the Jews would have been thinking that this was a great political leader who was going to lead an uprising against the Romans, which of course they wanted. That Jesus wants to be known more as a saviour than as a miracle worker. I'm not sure if that's right or not.

Maybe you can think about that for yourselves. One last thing to mention about Jesus' journey, from one side to the other, and that's that nothing is going to stop him from getting to the other side. Do you think, friends, it's a coincidence that there's a storm blows up in the Sea of Galilee in the midst of his journey from the Jews to the Gentiles? Of course not.

[17 : 22] And although Jesus is in control right throughout the storm, surely this storm represents the opposition that those who spread the gospel face in their work. Satan, of course, would have been delighted if the storm had made them turn back, if he had never reached Gadara, if he'd never reached the Gentiles with the gospel. But Jesus is determined to do it.

He's determined to bring his good news to Gadara and beyond, and praise the Lord for that. This is a real journey that Jesus took from Galilee to Gadara. So let's think about it now in terms of two metaphorical journeys. And secondly, we have the journey from glory to Golgotha. The journey from glory to Golgotha. It's sometimes hard for us to think of God as being eternal. In a sense, it's easy, or easier, to think of God as never having an end. But it's so difficult for us to think of God as never having a beginning. Because you and I have a beginning, and everyone we know and everything we see around us had a beginning. We can't get our heads round something not having a beginning. But that's not the case with God. God is eternal. And in a way, the greatest journey that was ever undertaken was the journey that the Son of God took, which began in heaven and ended in at Golgotha. Well, it didn't really end, of course, but you'll understand what I mean.

And it's the strangest of journeys, but the most important of journeys. And friends, it's the ultimate example of the words of this text crossing to the other side. How? Well, Christ's journey from glory to Golgotha meant that he left the riches of heaven that have always been hoosed by right for the poverty of a sinful world. Imagine just now a king or a queen who has lived all their lives in palaces and castles and choosing to go to live in a slum in one of the great cities of the world. We're all familiar with these pictures, aren't we, of cities like Delhi or Mumbai or Rio, where there are huge areas of slums, people living in shacks, no electricity, no running water, no sanitation, constant threat of danger, constant threat of disease. And it would be a huge understatement to say that it was a culture shock for that king or queen who was used to living in luxury all their lives to then go and live in this slum. It's one extreme to the other, isn't it? But the extremes which Jesus experienced were even further apart than that. Because he's always existed, he's always reigned as the king of heaven, he's always had complete power and authority as the creator of everything. But when he came to earth he gave all that up. The one who was eternal, no beginning, no end, he took a body that would die. The omnipotent God who could do everything, who had the power to do everything, became a helpless baby dependent on others to care for him. The one who is perfect in and of himself, the one who experienced perfect bliss and enjoyment in heaven suffered and died on earth. Can you think of greater extremes and circumstance? My friend, I don't think they exist. But you know this is a journey from glory to Golgotha that didn't have to take place. Do you think the Son of God had to come into the world? Do you think God felt he owed it to humanity to give them a second chance after Adam sinned? Did God have to provide a way of salvation to increase his own happiness? Well the answer to all these questions is no. God wasn't obliged to provide a way for us to be saved. He's always been totally satisfied, he's always been totally pleased and totally glorified in and of himself.

And nothing can add to his happiness or his glory. But God is righteous or just and his justice has to be satisfied. His justice has standards which must always be met. My friends, that means that if every man, woman and child sins and is sentenced to an eternity in hell as a result of their sin, God's justice would be satisfied because that's the penalty for sinning against him. We often hear there's nothing God cannot do. But that's not true.

And one of the things that God cannot do is pardon sin in a vacuum. And what I mean by that is he can't simply decide, well I think I'm going to pardon such and such just because I feel like it. Because if he did that his justice wouldn't be satisfied. The principles of his justice would be violated and he would stop being God. So what's the solution? If he can't just pardon sin because his justice gets in the way as it were, how can anyone be saved? Well the answer finds us that although God is just, he's also merciful. His justice demands punishment, it demands satisfaction and it absolutely must have it. But God chose to show mercy. Not because he had to, but because he wanted to, because it pleased him to show mercy. And the way in which he showed mercy was by sending his own son into the world to suffer and die instead of sinners. And in doing that his justice was satisfied, the standards and requirements of his justice were met and it allows him to show mercy. Someone put it like this or something like this at least, I don't know if I have the words exactly right. God is righteous and he is a savior. But these things are mutually exclusive. God's justice will not allow him to save without something happening. We have to see Calvary between God's justice on one side and God as a savior on the other. John Piper, the

[25 : 04] American author says this, God the Father makes an agreement with God the Son that the Son will demonstrate to all the world the infinite worth of the Father's glory by taking the punishment and suffering that our sin deserved. What does that punishment and suffering involve? Well, of course, ultimately it involves the cross and everything immediately leading up to the cross. But it involved more than that. It involved laying aside his divine attributes whilst he was on earth. It involved being hated by the religious and the political leaders in Israel. It involved even being forsaken by his father for a time. He left behind everything that he knew, everything that was hosed by right, everything that he enjoyed in heaven, the side he had always been on, to come to our side. It's incredible to think of God coming here as a man. For our sake's not his own. Yet, friends, that's what happened. And just as Jesus crossed the sea of Galilee, he crossed the great gulf that's between God and us, the impassable chasm caused by sin, so that we can have a relationship with him. And although it was for our benefit that he made that journey, we're not the only ones satisfied as a result. Isaiah tells us those well-known words, it pleased the Lord to bruise him. And he tells us that Christ shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, they look at this journey from glory to Golgotha and they're pleased. Piper tells this story.

Once he says there was a land ruled by a wicked prince. He'd come from a foreign country and he enslaved all the people of the land and made them miserable with hard labour in his mines across the deep canyon. He had built a massive trestle for the trains that carried the slaves across the canyon to the mines each morning and it was heavily guarded. Two men were still free in the kingdom, one old and one young. They lived on a cliff above the trestle and they hated the trestle. At last they resolved to blow it up and to destroy the slave labour of the enemy prince. They planned and they prayed. The night came when the deed would be done. Their hearts were pounding with joy. It was a hard plan but it would be possible to time the trek of the trestle guard so that the explosive could be carried quickly to the vulnerable spot on the trestle. But there would be no time for the carrier of the explosives to return. It was certain that he would be seen and the plan foiled if he tried to return. To make sure the trestle blew up, the two men agreed that the young man would decorate it by hand on the trestle and he would blow up with it.

But they believed in heaven and they loved the people of the land and so the honour of this sacrifice made their hearts leap with joy. The hour came, they folded up the map of their strategy, they stood from the table and they embraced each other. When the young man got to the door he turned with the explosive strapped to his back. He looked at the old man and said I love you father. And the old man took a deep breath with joy and said I love you son. The journey from glory to Golgotha was a long hard journey to the other side.

But it was a journey that was made with love and joy on the part of the father and the son and a journey that was made for your sake friend and for mine. The journey from Galilee to Galera. The journey from glory to Golgotha and then lastly the journey from Galilee to Kyarnon. We see that Jesus goes into the land of the gatherings. He sends Legion into the cities of his own land with the gospel. And it's a rare trip into Gentile territory. Throughout the Old Testament and the early part of the New it's very rare to find a believer who isn't an Uthralite, who isn't a Jew. They were of course God's chosen people. They were particularly blessed by God, cared for by God and they were given a special insight about the coming Messiah. They knew or they should have known and understood through the sacrifices and the temple worship that a Savior was coming and that He was coming to them.

But although the good news about Christ, the good news that was in the sacrifices in the Old Testament, was generally restricted to the Jews. That wasn't always to be the case.

[30 : 23] There's another crossing to the other side to come and that's Jesus in the gospel going out to the entire world. Jesus tells Legion to spread the good news of the gospel of the Decapolis. He tells Jeres' family and others to say nothing about what he's done in Galilee and Judea. But friends we should praise the Lord. That his final message to the disciples while he was on earth is much more like what he said to Legion than what he said to Jeres.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. God in his mercy devised a way of salvation which he didn't have to do. Christ in his mercy came from heaven to earth as a man, something he didn't have to do. Whilst he was here he crossed the sea of Galilee, he went to Gadra, he healed a demon possessed man, he sent him out as a missionary to his hometown, things he didn't have to do, but things that came about as a result of his mercy. And over the past 2000 odd years he's been doing what he didn't have to do. He's been sending the good news of the gospel out right across the world. While the disciples took on that work of spreading the gospel and the apostles took on the work after them. And through the centuries different people have been used in different ways and events such as the Reformation have been used to spread the gospel. And God even saw fit to bring the gospel to our island, to our tiny speck of rock in the ocean, to our communities and our homes. What a privilege. But we've left out the most important part of Christ's final instructions to the disciples. Because it's not just that he tells them to preach the gospel in every nation, but he promises

I am with you always, to the end of the age, to the end of time. And he isn't just promising to be with the 11 disciples who heard him, he's promising to be with whoever preaches, whoever publishes the gospel, wherever they are and however they do it, whether it's standing behind a lectern on a Sunday or whether it's living your life and your family and your community. He's promised to be with whoever does that. And perhaps even more than that he's promising to be with the gospel wherever it's preached because of course he is the gospel. He is the good news. To Christ out of the gospel and even the gospel is worthless. Well the journey that began in Galilee has seen the Lord Jesus arrive in this community. He's here in the gospel not because he has to be, but because he wants to be. Why does he want to be here in the gospel? Friends, he wants to be here in the gospel so that you and I can believe in him. So that you and I can have our sins forgiven.

And so that we can enjoy an endless eternity with him in heaven. We're all on a journey.

It's a cliché that life is a journey, but it is. And there's only two possible destinations. And there's one final leg of that journey to make at the very end of life. When you and I have to cross over to the other side of death. And none of us knows when we'll be called to take on that part of the journey. But I want to ask you just as we finish. If you had to face that journey today. If you were brought to the shore of death today. What's on the other side for you? Is it hell? Is it the place that was prepared for the devil and his demons, including those who possessed Legion and who were thrown out? Or is it heaven?

[35 : 20] Is it that glorious place that Jesus voluntarily left behind for a while to come to earth and suffer and die so that you could join him there forever? Friend, make sure that when it comes to your time to take that last leg of your journey that Jesus is on the other side to make you. Because the alternative. The alternative is worse than anybody could ever imagine in their worst nightmares. You have the opportunity. You have the gospel here in your community and in your homes. Don't tell Jesus to go back where he came from for your own eternal life. It's pretty.