

Last week we saw how the Lord displayed His power over the natural elements contained in the wind and in the storm on the sea of Galilee. How that this great storm was quieted and the great calm that the Lord can bring into our own lives by means of his Word when we place it at the centre of our life. Today, we come to one of the most vivid stories in the Gospels, that of the healing of a man who has said to have within him a legion of demons.

What I'd like you to do as we read this story is to focus your attention on the powerful emotions and graphic imagery that this story contains. And I'd also like to remind you that what is contained here is a description of our own inner state. The state of the natural will. We see a progression, of learning and application. This is the general path that all those who walk the spiritual life must follow. We saw the Lord working at the level of the understanding in teaching the crowd and his disciples by means of parable. This is us learning from his Word where the focus is on understanding the core principles of spiritual life. But these principles are given for a purpose and that purpose is to provide us with the ability to see what exists in our natural will that we might, by means of the Lord's strength, remove what hinders us from being more loving and understanding people.

We shall see today that our natural will is filled with unclean lusts. We shall see that this is a legion and it is THE Legion spoken about in this story. And that the principles that we have learnt or are learning are the boat that carries the Lord to the other side. Here, we hear nothing of the disciples but only of the Lord in his dealings with the possessed man. For those principles represented by the disciples and by extension this boat, are found in the Lord Himself. For it is the Word, we shall see, that steps out from the boat in Its power due to the heavenly principles that we have had worked into our lives. This is the only means by which the things in our natural will, as we shall see, can be subdued.

READINGS

From the Book of Psalms 68: 1-3

*Let God arise,
Let His enemies be scattered;
Let those also who hate Him flee before Him.*

*As smoke is driven away,
So drive them away;*

*As wax melts before the fire,
So let the wicked perish at the presence of God.*

*But let the righteous be glad;
Let them rejoice before God;
Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly.*

From the Gospel of Mark 5:1-20

*Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes.
And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the
tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs;
and no one could bind him, not even with chains,*

*because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had
been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could
anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in
the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.*

When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him.

*And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus,
Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me."*

For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!"

*Then He asked him, "What is your name?" And he answered, saying, "My name
is Legion; for we are many."*

Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.

Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains.

*So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may
enter them." And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits
went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd
ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea. So
those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And
they went out to see what it was that had happened.*

*Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and
had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were
afraid. And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been*

demon-possessed, and about the swine. Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you."

And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marvelled.

From the Heavenly Doctrines: True Christian Religion 533

There are two loves which from long time past have become deeply rooted in the human race, the love of controlling everyone, and the love of possessing everyone's goods. The first of these, if given its head, actually plunges headlong into an ambition to be the God of heaven; the other, if given its head, plunges headlong into an ambition to be the God of the world. All the other evil loves - and they are legion - are subordinate to these two. But it is extremely difficult to examine these two loves, because they lodge so deep within and hide themselves away. They are like vipers lurking in holes in a rock and holding in their poison; and when anyone lies on that rock they inflict a fatal wound before retreating again. ...

[3] The reason why what the will intends has to be examined is that the will is the seat of love, for the will is a receiver of love, as was shown before. From the will the pleasures emanating from every love spread into the perceptions and thoughts of the understanding, for they are incapable of doing anything of their own accord, but are activated by the will. For they take the will's part, agreeing with and supporting everything to do with its love. So the will is the house in which a person lives, and the understanding is the fore-court through which he goes in and out. That is why it was stated that the intentions of the will must be examined. When they have been examined and banished, a person is lifted up from his natural will, which is beset by evils, inherited and of his own doing, and brought into possession of a spiritual will; and by means of this the Lord reforms and regenerates the natural will, and by means of this the sensory and voluntary parts of the body, and so the whole person.

"My name is Legion, for we are many". To recap, we remember that the Lord was teaching the crowd by means of parables from a boat on the edge of the

Sea of Galilee. Having dismissed the crowd, He then told the disciples to make for the other side. This crossing involved a major crisis with a mighty storm arising that led to a display of the Lord's power over the elements of nature. That nature, of course, is our own being. The activity of the natural man that rises up to destroy all that is genuinely good and true within us. But the Word of the Lord has power over all selfish desires and evils rooted in the loves of self and the world. They may rage at times in our lives but they only do so when the Lord in us is asleep in the boat.

When we give more attention to natural concerns and desires we lose our spiritual focus and as a result, we become vulnerable to malicious forces that seek to destroy even the smallest potential for our spiritual growth and development. These forces are the operation of the spirits of hell within us. For all our thoughts and affections either flow in from heaven or from hell, being communicated to us through the spiritual associations we cultivate in our inner life. If we choose to entertain thoughts and affections that seek another's good, then we enjoy the peace and the calm of the heavenly life. But should we entertain thoughts and affections rooted in selfishness, we invite the fury of the hell upon us. However, there is also that aspect which we saw last week of the transition from being rooted in those elements that seek to destroy us and moving toward those things that seek to save us.

We spoke last week of this journey representing an in-between state, the journey across that sea, and we can see this as the Lord on one side is actively preaching, teaching and healing and his activity has been drawing a number of reactions. Things are being stirred up. The crowd are enthralled. His disciples are amazed and at times perplexed. And the religious leaders we have seen, who see their power base slipping, are indignant as murderous thoughts begin to arise and justify themselves.

So too within us, in our spiritual journey, with different states arising we are at times enthralled with what is going on within our lives - of the power of the Lord's Word. And then there are those times when we feel it is all too much and we feel like giving the spiritual life away or at least we wonder what on earth is going on. You see we have attachments to states within our lives that are heavenly and we have attachments that are hellish or selfish in their quality. This mixture is the basis for temptations or storms in our life which are the only way things can be put into order and so, the life of heaven become progressively more a part of our daily living. We need to keep foremost in our mind that if our desire is to follow the Lord and we are in effect in that effort to do that, then He is governing the process. Storms have to come because

there is no other way which our attachments to what is detrimental to our spiritual wellbeing can be broken and replaced with new attachments of heavenly affections. The Lord doesn't push us into a storm. He doesn't enjoy seeing us suffer the stress and the trauma it involves. The storms arise because we are attached to what is resistant to the development of the heavenly life within us.

As these two lives, the lower and the higher, come into contact with each other so what is lower reacts and we experience it as a series of various levels of inner discomfort, anxieties, fears, those sorts of things. And this can certainly be seen in the experience of the storm on the sea but it is driven home in the torment of this man possessed by a legion of demons. In this tormented soul, we have a picture of the true state of our own natural minds or will, when we don't allow the Lord to govern our lives. We can have difficulty seeing ourselves in this man but be sure he is us all. This story exists in the Word because it describes something of our own inner states. In his external behaviour we see the operation of the lower mind and while we don't run naked through local graveyards, if we choose to reflect on the nature of our thoughts and affections, we will quickly see that in our natural will we are little better than this sorry soul. That's a description and we will look at it in more detail in a moment. It's not given in order to discourage us; it's given that we might see for ourselves what this level of mind is truly like when separated from the Lord.

This is a powerful story about our deliverance and salvation. For it is only through seeing what we are that we can see our desperate need and so will seek the Lord's assistance and strength so that we can fulfil the promise of our spiritual potential. Let's have a look at what is said about this man for perhaps then we'll be able to see its activity within our lives.

We are told first of all that he has his dwelling among the tombs and that he roamed the mountains in the area in the Gadarenes. We see that there were many attempts to bind him with fetters and chains but this had been a waste of effort for he broke them in pieces. We are told that he is continually crying out and that he is cutting himself with stones.

How then is this like our natural will? Well, *Gadarene* or *Gadara* means walled or fortified. The ideas here are those of being closed, defensive and combative. All those ideas are captured here and this is of course the state of the natural mind in relation to what is spiritual. The lusts of the natural mind continually war against higher spiritual loves resisting their advances for fear of the loss of

its own life or dominance within a person. The love of self, the Heavenly Doctrines tell us, is the love of dominion. This love should serve what is spiritual but we are told that it loves nothing more than to have authority over all others, even God and heaven if it were possible. For this lust of dominating, if given its head, we were told, knows no bounds.

So, we see that the man is said to be in the mountain. And we have looked at the spiritual idea of a mountain when we looked at Jesus calling the disciples or His making of the twelve. A mountain is that which is elevated and corresponds to love either in a positive sense or in a negative sense. Here the correspondence is clearly negative so that that love described by this mountain is the love of self elevated to prominence within the natural will. When our self-centredness is such that it causes us to forget that we need to operate from heavenly loves or heavenly principles of loving the Lord and loving our neighbour, so it very quickly can become a mountain in our thought, crowding out the things related to those higher heavenly loves.

Now, things become interesting with regard to this man when we look at the Greek word translated *tomb*. This is the word *mnēmeion* which literally means *memorial* or *memory vault*. The demonic dwelling in the tombs strongly suggests a state of dwelling in memories, which contain nothing living. To dwell on something is to place our focus there. Here to dwell in the tomb speaks of living our lives in and amongst dead memories.

Friends, this is the abode of the hells within us. They love nothing more than keeping us focused on events from our past, particularly on events where we feel we have been wronged or over which we have regrets or those on which we carry guilt. All these things thrown into the mix of our natural memories, they are kept alive there by insidious spirits that delight in the decay of a mind unable to extract itself from these mental or psychological tombs.

We also have memories which we have forgotten yet they remain within us unconsciously exerting their influence producing general states of thought and feeling. So many people we hear of suffer from low self-esteem, which often seeps into consciousness as forms of depression, anger, frustration, anxiety or fear. From these general states thoughts arise as forms of negative self talk. Voices within that tell us we are no good or useless or that we're incapable of getting anything right. These are false ideas that continually cut at our vitality or spiritual life. Or in the imagery of the story we are focusing on today, this sort of activity is captured in the stones with which the demonic cuts himself with.

The Greek word for *cut* literally means to *cut down* or *down cut*. It also means to *lament* and to *mourn*. Words which capture, quite graphically, states of depression, anxiety, self pity. States which evil spirits continually strive to keep alive within us because they find their delight in those things. Stones represent false ideas. So spiritually we can see that the natural mind when dominated by selfish states is filled with thoughts which rise up to cut us down. Evil spirits present with a person will draw on every memory that suits their own manipulative ends. If you have ever tried to stop thinking negatively about a situation or another person or to snap out of a state of depression, anxiety, or frustration you will know how powerful the forces that exist in our lower minds are. It's no sooner than we realise that we are in such a negative state and seek to apply some form of affirmation or principle to extract ourselves, we find once again our thoughts returning to lower things.

You see the message here is that no amount of human willpower can bring about the changes we seek. It is true that we can keep things suppressed for a time, perhaps in the company of others or in situations where our reputation may be damaged if say our temper got away with us. There are many external bindings that keep these evils in check but they're only temporary. They hold for a time or in certain situations but they don't deal with the underlying thing itself. So we all know if we are engaged in the practice of a life of repentance, that we have evils that seem to lie just below the surface ready to burst these superficial bindings, these chain and fetter us the first chance they get.

Thus, the natural will is a wild man possessed, unable to be tamed by anyone. Anyone that is, but the Lord. But this truth takes time to learn. Part of the illusion the natural mind offers is that we can control it and as long as we think that this is the case we actually exist in a state of denial of our need for the Lord, which of course suits these hellish influences.

The illusion is partly created because we tend to focus on externals. We keep our behaviour in check and think we are okay. Not seeing that the problem actually lies with our inner world, the world of our thoughts and affections. These are the things that run wild within us, the things over which we have little control and these are the things that the Word is designed to deal with. These thoughts and affections are Legion rising within us continually as we go about our lives.

The power of this story is that if we pursue the spiritual path with a view to becoming more loving and understanding in our attitude towards others and in our responses to life in general, then the Lord will bring about our deliverance.

However we need to be aware that we will have to weather a few storms before this point can be reached. This deliverance from these lower lusts that dominate our lives only comes after the establishment of the principles of loving the Lord and loving the neighbour, represented by the disciples, have become established within our thinking. Then and only then do we make that crossing. And then and only then is the Lord able to be confronted or to confront this demonic.

The sea separates one side from the other. In this case it served as a natural boundary between the Jewish community and the largely Gentile communities in the region at that time. If we view both sides as two sides within our own minds then we can see the journey across is the journey of knowledge about the Lord and heavenly things becoming something with real power to affect our external lives. The intervening storm is the disruption that this new teaching brings. It brings it about because these new thoughts enter in on the domain of old established patterns of thinking and disrupts them. That is what the storm is all about, it's an internal disruption of the way we think. The experience however of the storm brings about powerful new insights into the power of the Lord or what is the same, the power of his Word's operation in our lives. This experience strengthened the disciples growing conviction that Jesus is something infinitely more than just an ordinary man.

We too have to come to a place where we see that the spiritual principles or teaching, that these things in and of themselves can do nothing with regard to our deliverance and salvation. There is in our culture a strong tendency to take spiritual principles from many religious traditions and reinterpret them leaving the Lord out and placing self at the centre. Those who take hold of the Heavenly Doctrines and become fascinated by the ideas contained in them but who refuse to see that they, on every page, direct their readers to the Word himself, have a boat in which the Lord is asleep.

The boat that the Lord taught from is our understanding of his teaching which is limited and will always be so. Yet He is within it. The understanding we have acquired of the principles found in the Word and the Heaven Doctrines of the New Church carry the Lord within them. And it is through the storms of life that we come to see more clearly the connection between the two, between doctrine and the Word. The stronger this connection is with us, we will find less prominent doctrine or truth in our spiritual journey and more prominent love. This has seen that upon arriving on the other side it is not the boat that causes the deliverance of a demonic but it is what is in the boat. It is the Divine Love and Wisdom in human form. The Word says that

“when he came out of the boat immediately they met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.

If the boat is a person's understanding of spiritual things then we see that when this understanding is obedient to the Lord's desire to travel to the other side it is able to convey the living Word itself into the Gadarenes, into those strong resistant aspects of our will that hold the Lord's love out and exist in our lower minds. Of course the Lord's desire for our spiritual wellbeing will always direct us toward those things that need dealing with within. Here on the other side it is not teaching from the boat that brings the desired effect but the embodiment of that teaching in the Lord.

The Lord stepping out of our boat occurs when we are prepared to acknowledge Him as our God by placing His Word at the centre of our life. This is not a mere mental ascent. It is a heart committed to living life and obedience to the Lord's commandments. This is what is able to bring our deliverance from the hellish influence that populate our lower minds.

Amen