

Expository Thoughts on Mark - Mark 5:18-20

by J.C. Ryle

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's plan for our lives, rather than our own desires and inclinations, and the significance of being a witness for Christ in our homes.

Scripture: Mark 5:18

Topics: "God's Will", "Witnessing"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the importance of understanding God's will for our lives, as illustrated by the man healed from demonic possession in the Gadarenes. Although the man desired to follow Jesus, the Lord instructed him to return home and share his testimony, highlighting that our personal circumstances may not align with our desires but are often where God can use us most effectively. Ryle warns newly converted believers against hastily abandoning their secular roles for ministry, reminding them that God can be glorified in various professions. He stresses the significance of witnessing to those closest to us, particularly at home, where our faith should be most evident. Ultimately, Ryle encourages believers to share their experiences of grace and deliverance with others.

Transcript

The after-conduct of those whom our Lord Jesus Christ healed and cured when upon the earth, is a thing which is not often related in the Gospels. The story often describes the miraculous cure, and then leaves the after history of the person cured in obscurity, and passes on to other things.

But there are some deeply interesting cases, in which the after-conduct of persons cured is described; and the man from whom the devil was cast out in the country of the Gadarenes is one. The verses before us tell the story. Few as they are, they are full of precious instruction.

We learn from these verses, that the Lord Jesus knows better than His people, what is the right position for them to be in.

We are told that when our Lord was on the point of leaving the country of the Gadarenes, the man "that had been possessed with the devil, prayed Him that he might be with Him." We can well understand that request. He felt grateful for the blessed change that had taken place in himself. He felt full of love towards his Deliverer. He thought he could not do better than follow our Lord, and go with Him as His companion and disciple. He was ready to give up home and country, and go after Christ.

And yet, strange as it appears at the first sight, the request was refused. "Jesus suffered him not." Our Lord had other work for him to do. Our Lord saw better than he did in what way he could glorify God most. "Go home to thy friends," He says, "and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

There are lessons of profound wisdom in these words. The place that Christians wish to be in, is not always the place which is best for their souls. The position that they would choose, if they could have their own way, is not always that which Jesus would have them occupy.

There are none who need this lesson so much as believers newly converted to God. Such persons are often very poor judges of what is really for their good. Full of new views which they have been graciously taught, excited with the novelty of their present position, seeing everything around them in a new light, knowing little yet of the depths of Satan and the weakness of their own hearts,--knowing only that a little time ago they were blind, and now, through mercy, they see,--of all people they are in the greatest danger of making mistakes. With the best intentions, they are apt to fall into mistakes about their plans in life, their choices, their moves, their professions. They forget that what we like best is not always best for our souls, and that the seed of grace needs winter as well as summer, cold as well as heat, to ripen it for glory.

Let us pray that God would guide us in all our ways after conversion, and not allow us to err in our choices, or to make hasty decisions. That place and position is most healthful for us in which we are kept most humble,--most taught in our sinfulness,--drawn most to the Bible and prayer,--led most to live by faith and not by sight. It may not be quite what we like. But if Christ by His providence has placed us in it, let us not be in a hurry to leave it. Let us therein abide with God. The great thing is to have no will of our own, and to be where Jesus would have us to be.*

* I cannot help remarking, in connection with our Lord's words in this passage, that it admits of question, whether men do not sometimes act unadvisedly in giving up a secular calling in order to enter the ministry of the Gospel. In plain words, I doubt whether men, who have been suddenly converted to God in the army, the navy, the law, or the merchant's office, do not sometimes forsake their professions with undue precipitation, in order to become clergymen.

It seems to be forgotten that conversion alone is no proof that we are called and qualified to become teachers of others. God may be glorified as really and truly in the secular calling as in the pulpit. Converted men can be eminently useful as landlords, magistrates, soldiers, sailors, barristers or merchants. We want witnesses for Christ in all these professions. Colonel Gardiner and Capt. Vicars have probably done more for the cause of Christ, as military men, than they would ever have done if they had left the army and become clergymen.

In steering our course through life, we should carefully look for the call of providence as well as the call of inclination. The position that we choose for ourselves is often that which is the worst for our souls. When two conflicting paths of duty lie before a believer, the path which has least of the cross, and is most agreeable to his own taste, is seldom the right one.

I write all this with a due recollection of many eminent Christians who began in a secular profession, and left it for the office of the minister. John Newton and Edward Bickersteth are instances. But I apprehend such cases are the exceptions. I apprehend moreover that in every such case there would be found to have been a remarkable call of providence as well as an inward call of the Holy Spirit. As a general rule, I believe that the rule of St. Paul ought to be carefully observed: "Let every man, wherein he is called,

therein abide with God."

(1 Cor. 7:24).

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, that a believer's own home has the first claims on his attention.

We are taught that in the striking words which our Lord addresses to the man who had been possessed with the devil. "Go home," He says, "to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee." The friends of this man had probably not seen him for some years, excepting under the influence of Satan. Most likely he had been as one dead to them, or worse than dead, and a constant cause of trouble, anxiety, and sorrow. Here then was the path of duty. Here was the way by which he could most glorify God. Let him go home and tell his friends what Jesus had done for him. Let him be a living witness before their eyes of the compassion of Christ. Let him deny himself the pleasure of being in Christ's bodily presence, in order to do the higher work of being useful to others.

How much there is in these simple words of our Lord! What thoughts they ought to stir up in the hearts of all true Christians!--"Go home and tell thy friends."--Home is the place above all others where the child of God ought to make his first endeavours to do good. Home is the place where he is most continually seen, and where the reality of his grace ought most truly to appear. Home is the place where his best affections ought to be concentrated. Home is the place where he should strive daily to be a witness for Christ. Home is the place where he was daily doing harm by his example, so long as he served the world. Home is the place where he is specially bound to be a living epistle of Christ, so soon as he has been mercifully taught to serve God. May we all remember these things daily! May it never be said of us; that we are saints abroad but wicked by our own fireside,--talkers about religion abroad, but worldly and ungodly at home!

But after all, Have we anything to tell others? Can we testify to any work of grace in our hearts? Have we experienced any deliverance from the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil? Have we ever tasted the graciousness of Christ? These are indeed serious questions. If we have never yet been born again, and made new creatures, we can of course have nothing to "tell."

If we have anything to tell others about Christ, let us resolve to tell it. Let us not be silent, if we have found peace and rest in the Gospel. Let us speak to our relations, and friends, and families, and neighbours, according as we have opportunity, and tell them what the Lord has done for our souls. All are not called to be ministers. All are not intended to preach. But all can walk in the steps of the man of whom we have been reading, and in the steps of Andrew and Philip, and the Samaritan woman (John 1:41, 45 ; 4:29). Happy is he who is not ashamed to say to others, "Come and hear what the Lord hath done for my soul." (Psalm 66:16).

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