

FOLLOW THE SAVIOR, ...DESPITE THE PERILS

4 ³⁵On that day when evening came, he said to them, Let us go over to the other side [of the lake]. ³⁶So leaving the crowd, they took him with them, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

³⁷A fierce gale of wind came up [on the lake], and the waves began to break over the boat so much that the boat was now filling [with water]. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They roused him and said, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? ³⁹He awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace, be still. The wind ceased and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰Then he said to them, Why are you afraid? Do you not yet have faith? ⁴¹Then they became exceedingly afraid and said to one another, Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

5 They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. ²When he stepped out of the boat, there immediately met him from out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, ³who lived in the tombs. No one could any longer bind him, not even with a chain. ⁴He had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he ripped the chains apart and broke the shackles into pieces. No one had the strength to tame him. ⁵He was always in the tombs and in the mountains, crying out night and day, and cutting himself with stones. ⁶When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and worshiped him, ⁷crying out in a loud voice, What do I have to do with you, Jesus, you who are the Son of the Most High God? I beg you by God, not to torment me. ⁸[The demon was saying this] because [Jesus] said to him, Come out, you unclean spirit, [come] out of the man. ⁹Then [Jesus] asked him, What is your name? And he replied, My name is Legion; because we are many. ¹⁰He requested that [Jesus] would not send them out of the country. ¹¹Now there was a large herd of swine feeding on the hillside. ¹²They made the request, Send us into the swine, so that we may enter into them. ¹³And he gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits came out [of the man] and entered into the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank and into the sea. [The herd numbered] more two thousand; and they were [all] drowned in the sea. ¹⁴Those who had been tending the swine fled, and reported this in the town and in the countryside. Then people came out to see what had happened. ¹⁵When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed with demons sitting there, dressed and in his right mind—the [very man who] had the legion [of demons]—and they were afraid. ¹⁶Then those who had witnessed it told what happened to him who had been possessed by demons, and [they also reported what happened to] the swine. ¹⁷Then the people began to request [Jesus] to leave their region. ¹⁸As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons requested to be with him. ¹⁹But he would not permit him [to do so]; rather, he said to him, Go to your home and to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and [how] he has had mercy on you. ²⁰So he went his way and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed. (Mk. 4:35-5:20)

See attached Appendix for the parallel passage of Matthew 8:18-34

Introduction

The men who signed the Declaration of Independence knew that they were doing a dangerous thing—they were getting themselves into big trouble. Benjamin Franklin stated it in a humorous way, but he was dead serious: We either hang together in our commitment to one another and our cause, or we will all hang separately on a British gallows. These leaders of the American Revolution were doing a very dangerous thing; they were risking their wealth, their homes, their very lives—they were setting themselves against the might of the British Empire.

The men who signed their names to the Declaration of Independence were very much aware of the fact that they were embarking upon a very dangerous venture. We should be aware that the same holds true for each one who would place his faith in Christ the Savior and become identified with His name. We, being enlightened by the Spirit of God, must confess with Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and must follow the Savior, despite the perils.

I. Follow Christ the Savior, Even though He Calls You to Deny Yourself (Matt. 8:18-23)

When Jesus saw great multitudes gathering around Him, He gave the order to board the fishing boat and depart for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Why did He do so? He did so in order to discourage the gathering crowds from accepting Him as merely a healer, or miracle-working entertainer, or potential political leader who could overthrow the Romans by force. Furthermore, He did so to teach His disciples what they—and we—can expect as we bear the name of Christ and identify ourselves with Him.

As they board the little fishing boat, a scribe approaches Jesus and declares, *“Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”* The text reads literally, *“one scribe;”* one exception to the large number of scribes and Pharisees who opposed Jesus and sought to discredit Him. Note that here is one scribe who acknowledges Jesus as a *“teacher”* (not Lord) from whom he can learn more about God. Jesus responds, *“The foxes have dens, the birds have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head”* (Matt. 8:20.) Notice that Jesus identifies Himself not as a teacher, but as the Son of man, alluding to the divine person spoken of in Daniel 7:13-14,

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13-14)

But notice too that Jesus declares that the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head; as the Apostle John testifies of Him: *"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him"* (Jn. 1:10-11.) John reports that on one occasion, *"each went to his own home. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives"* (Jn. 7:53-8:1.) Here is Jesus' message to this scribe who would become a disciple: "You must recognize that I am much more than a teacher, I am the divine Son of man to whom you must render absolute allegiance; and then, when you identify yourself with Me, you should expect to be rejected by the world."

As they are about to shove off from the shore, another disciple makes his appeal: *"Lord, allow me to first go and bury my father."* This man is identified as *"a disciple"* and he acknowledges Jesus as *"Lord;"* furthermore, he asks Jesus' permission to first bury his father, he does not just do as he sees fit. He seems to have been requesting permission to remain at home with his elderly or terminally ill father, and at a later date take up "full time" discipleship. Jesus responds: *"Follow Me; and leave the dead to bury their own dead"* (Matt. 8:22.) As a disciple of Christ you have been resurrected to a new relationship with God in Christ; note carefully Jesus' words, *"Let the dead bury their own dead."* This is in keeping with what the Lord declares on another occasion: *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life"* (Jn. 5:24.) This new relationship to God must take priority over every other relationship: *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"* (Matt. 10:37.) This new relationship with God will affect our lives in radical ways and may at times cause us to make hard decisions. For example, there may be a time when a disciple of Christ must say to his earthly father, "Dad, I can't take over the family business, Christ is calling me into full time ministry." Or a disciple may have to say to his son, "Son, in faithfulness to Christ, I can't condone your choice of an unbelieving marriage partner."

Let us follow Christ the Savior, even though He calls us to deny ourselves: *"anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me"* (Matt. 10:38.)

II. Follow Christ the Savior, Even though You will Encounter Demonic Challenges (Mk. 4:35-5:13)

Matthew 8:23 records the fact that when Jesus entered into the boat, *"his disciples followed him."* A true disciple cannot bear to be separated from Christ; his love for Christ transcends all other loves, ambitions, relationships, and interests; and the Spirit of God compels him to heed Christ's call to follow Him.

Thus Christ's disciples enter into the boat with their beloved Lord and Master; but as soon as they are out on the lake, *"there came up ... a violent wind storm."* No sooner had they launched out into the deep than a violent wind came

sweeping down upon them, lifting the waters into crashing breakers that pour themselves into the little boat and threaten to sink it to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee. Mark records the fact that it was evening when they set off on their journey across the sea (4:35;) consequently, it is dark, the wind is howling furiously, the boat is filling with water, and the disciples recognize that their lives are in peril. Thus it is that these disciples have faithfully heeded Jesus' call ("*Follow me!*"), and as a result of their commitment they now find themselves in a life-threatening situation.

Where is Jesus while all this is happening? He is in the stern of the boat, fast asleep on a cushion. He is still present with His disciples, but He is not doing anything to prevent the storm. In panic and desperation, the disciples arouse Jesus and make known their plight: "*Save us, Lord, we are perishing!*" (Matt. 8:25.) Since they are utterly amazed when He stills the storm (Matt. 8:27), it is not at all clear what they expected Him to do. However, they know that they have launched out into the deep at His command, so they rightfully recognize that He is responsible for their well-being. Furthermore, they have no other recourse but to call on Him for help—they have nowhere else to turn. In Mark's account there are the added words, "*Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*" (Mk. 4:38.) Even as His disciples, there are times when we lose sight of the fullness of who Christ is and underestimate His divine ability and we question His concern for us.

In response to their earnest pleas, Jesus sternly rebukes the wind and stills the raging sea. Having done so, He then mildly rebukes His disciples with the question, "*Why are you so afraid? Do you not yet have faith?*" By means of His question, the Lord Jesus is setting fear and faith in opposition to one another; note, here, the testimony of the Psalmist: "*When I am afraid, I will trust in you. ⁴In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid*" (Psl. 56:3-4a.)

The next morning they arrive safely on the far side of the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus now gets out of the boat, immediately He is confronted with a violent demoniac (Mk. 5:2.) This man—actually there were two of them as Matthew reports—lived in the tombs, and a legion of demons lived in him. The powers of darkness are so strong in this poor wretch that no human power can control him; we are told, "*no man had the strength to tame him*"—he was like a wild animal. Now Jesus—and His faithful disciples—is confronted with a wild demoniac screaming in His face. But by the divine authority of the Lord Jesus Christ the whole legion of demons comes out of the man. With Christ's consent they enter into a herd of swine, and the whole herd runs headlong down the steep embankment and are drowned in the sea.

Let us follow Christ the Savior, even though we will encounter demonic challenges. As they followed Christ, the disciples gained a deeper appreciation of His awesome person and power: "*The men marveled [at this], saying, 'What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?'*" (Matt. 8:27.) As they

followed Christ, the disciples saw a preview of Christ's final victory over the devil. Compare the fate of the demon-infested swine (*"the herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned"*) with the final fate of the devil himself: *"And the devil ... was thrown into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever"* (Rev. 20:10.)

III. Follow Christ the Savior, Even though You will be Challenged by His Divine Presence (Mk. 5:14-20)

The Gerasenes recognize the danger of Christ's presence; it was a danger to the status quo. When they saw the demoniac clothed and in his right mind, *"they were afraid."* When they heard what had happened to the herd of swine, they *"began to plead with Jesus to leave."* They recognized that they were in the presence of awesome divine power, and if Christ stayed, nothing could remain the same.

Some people recognize that Christ's divine presence is a danger to the status quo, and they ask Him to leave. They prefer to remain as they are, even tolerating the presence of demons, rather than accept the holy transforming presence of the Son of God. They wish to have nothing to do with the religion of God when it involves such experiences as that described in 2 Corinthians 3:18, *"But we all ... beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory."* They wish to have nothing to do with the religion of God when it makes such demands as that set forth in Ephesians 4:22-24,

You were taught ... to put off the old man [i.e.; the old nature and lifestyle], which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires ... ²⁴and to put on the new man [i.e.; the new nature and lifestyle], created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22,24)

Other people recognize that Christ's divine presence is a danger to their self-righteousness, and in their anxiety have asked Him to leave. In the presence of the holy Son of God, Peter became acutely aware of his own sinfulness and his inability to stand before God on his own merits: *"Simon Peter ... fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man'"* (Lk. 5:8.) By the grace of God, Peter was made to recognize and embrace the truth he would later express in 1 Peter 3:18, *"Christ also died for sins once for all, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones, so that he might bring us to God."*

Let us follow Christ the Savior, even though we will be challenged by His divine presence. Let us entrust ourselves to His saving mercy and yield ourselves to His transforming grace.

Conclusion

Let us be aware that it is a dangerous thing to follow Christ. In one way or another, our lives will be challenged and threatened by the devil; and our lifestyle will be challenged and transformed by the Lord. It is a dangerous thing to follow Christ, but it is all worth it: *“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me”* (Jn. 12:26.)

Appendix: The Text of Matthew 8:18-34

8 ¹⁸Now when Jesus saw a large crowd around him, he gave the command [to his disciples for them] to depart for the other side [of the sea]. ¹⁹[As they were leaving,] a scribe came and said to him, Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. ²⁰But Jesus said to him, The foxes have dens, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head. ²¹And another one of the disciples said to him, Lord, allow me to first go and bury my father. ²²But Jesus said to him, Follow me; and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

²³When he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴Then there came up such a violent wind storm on the sea, that the waves swept over the boat. But he was asleep. ²⁵They came to him and awoke him, saying, Save us, Lord; we are perishing! ²⁶But he said to them, Why are you afraid, you who have such little faith? Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. ²⁷The men marveled [at this], saying, What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?

²⁸When he came to the other side [of the sea], into the country of the Gadarenes, there met him two men possessed by demons, coming out of the tombs. [They were] extremely fierce; no man could [safely] pass through that area. ²⁹They cried out, What do we have to do with you, you who are the Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time? ³⁰Now at a great distance from them there was a large herd of swine grazing. ³¹The demons requested him, If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine. ³²And he said to them, Go. Then they came out [of the men], and entered into the swine; and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. ³³Those who had been tending [the herd] fled. They went away into the city and reported all this, including what had happened to [the two men] who had been possessed by demons. ³⁴Then the whole city came out to meet Jesus. When they saw him, they requested him to depart from their region. (Matt. 8:18-34)