

"Let us go over to the other side"

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm sure, unless you're a visitor here, you know very well what it's like to have to cross the sea to get somewhere. Living where we do, we have to cross the sea to get anywhere, really.

And while he was on earth, Jesus was familiar with us as well. He crossed the Sea of Galilee a number of times. And here in the portion we read, we have one of the times that he crossed the sea recorded for us.

It comes at the end of a very busy, intense day where Jesus has spent the day on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee teaching a huge crowd.

Now, Mark tells us in chapter 4 that this is when he used the parable of the sower. And Mark mentions three other parables that Jesus gave that day. But he also tells us in verse 33, with many such parables he spoke the word to them.

Mark hasn't told us every single thing that Jesus said to his congregation that day. He's just given us a selection. And not only has Jesus been teaching the crowd, he's also spent time with the disciples, explaining the meaning of all the parables to them in a special way.

[1 : 16] And this, I'm sure, would be quite a long lesson because Mark tells us he explained everything to his disciples. And when evening comes, 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.

And of course, whilst they're on the sea, that evening a storm blows up. The disciples are terrified. Jesus is asleep because of his exertions through the day. Disciples wake him up.

He calms the storm. He challenges their lack of faith. And the next morning he's in the land of the Gadarenes or the Gerasenes. Different versions of the Bible use a different version of the word.

And he meets Legion and he heals him from his demon possession. Now the chances are, friends, that that's a part of Christ's ministry with which you're very familiar.

We want to think about one pivotal statement and try to see its relevance to the Lord's work. Its relevance to the Lord's work when he was on earth 2,000 years ago.

[2 : 26] And its relevance to his ongoing work today. And it's a phrase in verse 35. Let us go over to the other side.

Let us go over to the other side. So here we have a journey. And it's a journey that's from the western shore of the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore.

And although it's a relatively short journey geographically, it's an epic journey culturally and spiritually. The Jews back then, and I believe they still do, refer to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee as the other side.

Because it's where the Gentiles live. One side, Jewish. The other side, Greek or Roman or whoever the power was at the time. And note as well in the last verse that we read, chapter 5 and verse 20, Legion goes into the Decapolis.

If you're using an AV, it just says he went into Decapolis. But it's not as clear. And Legion went there telling what Jesus has done for him. But Decapolis is a Greek word and it means ten cities.

[3 : 37] Deca for ten, polis for city. And refers to a group of ten cities on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. From Damascus in the north to Philadelphia in the south.

Most of them were in what is now the country of Jordan. So the Decapolis, these ten cities, they're on the other side in many ways. They're literally, geographically, on the other side of the Sea of Galilee from the Jews.

It's a place where the God of the Jews isn't recognised. It's a place that isn't under Roman oppression at this time. It's got different languages, different cultures, different political status, different religions.

It's a very different life to what they have on the western coast, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. So we'd like to try to look at Jesus' journey to the other side in three ways.

First of all, looking at it in the sense of its literal meaning here in the Gospel of Mark. And then in two metaphorical ways. So the first one we have is the journey from Galilee to Gadara.

[4 : 44] Why is it significant that Jesus goes to the other side? Why is it significant that Jesus goes from Galilee to Gadara? Well, at this time, the Jews were on one side, the Gentiles on the other.

The Jews saw it very much as a them and us situation. And they even believed that if they went into the Gentile lands on the other side of the sea, that it would make them ceremonially unclean.

So for Jesus to make this journey, that would have been seen as a scandal by the Pharisees. They would have asked, well, how can a rabbi, how can a teacher, how can somebody who claims he's come from God possibly go amongst the Gentiles in this way?

But friends, Jesus has work to do among the Gentiles. And surely here he's paving the way for the principle of the Gospel not being limited to the Jews.

Here's Christ establishing the principle that the Gospel is for everyone. And more than that, we see that Jesus has work to do once he gets to Gadara.

[5 : 49] 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 the sea, 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's also God and a man who is so much under the control of Satan that isn't just possessed by a demon, but by so many that even define his name.

How many? Well, a Roman region at the time would have had something in the region of 4,000 soldiers. So perhaps this man has something like that number of demons possessing him.

And these demons are destroying this man's life. He's an outcast. He's feared by his neighbours, by his family. He's living like an animal amongst the tombs.

Nothing can be done to control him. They can't even chain him. Or at least when they do, he's given the power to break the chains. And he must have been an awful sight. If you try to picture him, what would he look like?

[6 : 57] Full of cuts from his self-harming. Looking wild from years of living this way. Living like an animal almost. But here this morning, just a few hours after Jesus has told his disciples to launch their boat and go to the other side, Legion comes face to face with Jesus.

Now, people often picture Jesus as being soft and timid, don't they?

And when you look at religious art, that's almost always the way he's portrayed. Somebody you'd almost look at and feel sorry for. But friends, I don't think that's anywhere close to being right.

Because he certainly wasn't timid when he chased the traders out of the temple. And he wasn't soft when he was being scourged and beaten by the Roman soldiers, was he? And he's not to be pitied when he's standing here face to face with this demon-possessed man.

This man who terrifies the people in his town. The people who have known him all his life. Jesus stands on the shore of the sea, face to face with this man.

[8 : 11] But more than that, he stands on the shore of the sea, face to face with a whole legion of demons who hate him. And who want to destroy him. And what happens, friends?

He defeats every single one of them. The demons are thrown out of this man. And he's returned to his senses. And then the strangest thing happens.

The people of Gadara, they hear what's happened with the pigs. They hear what's happened to Legion. They come and see him. And what do they do? Do they say, Hey, this is incredible.

Who are you? How do you have the power to do this? If you can fix Legion, you can fix whatever's wrong in my life. Stay with us. Explain this to us.

No. They say, Jesus, go away. Go back to where you came from. We don't want anything to do with you.

[9 : 15] Doesn't matter what you've done in this man's life. We don't want you in our life. Friends, isn't that absolutely shocking?

Isn't that absolutely tragic? Here's the saviour of the world. The great miracle worker. Visiting Gadara from his native Galilee.

Against all logic. Against all Jewish protocol. And they can't wait to get rid of him. Can you believe it? Can you believe it? But the greater tragedy is this.

That if you're here this morning. And you're not a Christian. You're seeing the exact same thing. You're telling him he's not welcome in your life.

You're telling him. To go and do his work somewhere else. You're telling him you don't want his power in your life. And friends.

[10:22] You don't have the excuse that they had. They were afraid. They were terrified. Here's a man who has healed Legion. By doing nothing but speaking. They can't control him.

By tying him in chains. They don't understand how Jesus. How anyone has power. To overcome the demons. And they're even more afraid.

To see Legion sane. Than they were to see Legion demon possessed. Because they were familiar with him demon possessed. They understood a bit of that.

They don't understand what's happened to him here. But you know all about this Jesus. Don't you? You know what he does. You know how he heals people.

Especially from their sins. And still you're telling him to go back. To where he came from. Well you might not have a Legion of demons controlling your life.

[11:21] But soon controls your life. And here's the only one who can free you from it. Surely you're not going to reject him. Like these ignorant and terrified gatherings did.

Surely you'll welcome him. Like pure demon possessed Legion. But despite their rejection of him. Jesus doesn't reject the gatherings. What does he do? Legion asks for permission to follow Jesus back to Galilee. But the Lord has agreed a calling for him. 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 that Christ's journey across the Sea of Galilee.

Was establishing the principle of reaching the Gentiles with the gospel. And here he is immediately building on that foundation. By sending Legion as a missionary amongst his own people.

[12:18] He's to spread the word. Of the great things that Jesus has done for him. Of the mercy that he's shown him. And we can be sure that his work was blessed by God.

And it led to sinners in these ten Gentile cities being saved. The very last words we read. All the people were amazed. Doesn't this principle still apply to God's people?

Shouldn't you, shouldn't I be telling our friends, our family. About everything that God has done for us. Everything that he can do for them. We should be talking about it.

And our lives should show that we're different as a result of what he's done. Has he done great things in your life, friend? Has he shown you mercy? But he has.

Don't keep it to yourself. Share it with whoever you possibly can. And the last thing we'll mention about Jesus' journey here is that nothing's going to stop him from getting to the other side.

[13:20] Do you think it's a coincidence that this violent storm rises up on the Sea of Galilee whilst Jesus is making his way from the Jews to the Gentiles?

Of course not. And although Jesus is in control right throughout the storm, surely this represents the opposition that those who seek to take the gospel to people will face in their work.

Satan would have been delighted if Jesus and the disciples had had to turn back. But Jesus is determined to do it. He's determined to bring his good news of salvation to Gadara and beyond.

And shouldn't we praise the Lord for that? This is a real journey that Jesus takes. And I think it represents two other journeys as well.

And the second journey we can think of is a journey from glory to Golgotha. It's sometimes hard for us to think of God as being eternal.

[14:22] In a sense, I think that thinking of God never having an end is more straightforward. But we can't quite get our heads around God not having a beginning. Because we have a beginning and everything we know has a beginning, no matter how old it might be.

But it's not the case with God. And in a way, the greatest journey ever undertaken was the journey the Son of God took, which began in heaven and ended on Golgotha.

It didn't end, of course, but you know what I mean by using that language. It's the strangest of journeys, but the most important of journeys. And it's the ultimate example of going to the other side.

How? Well, Christ's journey from glory to Golgotha meant that he had to leave the riches of heaven that are housed by eternal right for the poverty of a sin-filled world.

Imagine just now a king or a queen leaving their palace and going to live in the slums of one of the world's grey cities.

[15:37] You've all seen them through your images. Some of you will have seen them for yourselves. These places where people live in shacks. There's no running water. There's no electricity. There's no sanitation.

There's a constant threat of disease and crime. And here's this king going to stay in the slum. Well, it would be an understatement to say there would be a culture shock for him, wouldn't it?

Going from one extreme to the other. But the extremes which Jesus experienced were even further apart than that. He's always existed.

He's always reigned on the throne 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. And the one who was eternal took a body that would die.

The omnipotent God became a helpless baby who had to depend on others to care for him. The one who was perfect in and of himself.

[16:38] And the one who experienced perfect bliss in heaven suffered and died on a cross. Can you think of greater extremes and circumstance? I'm sure they don't exist.

But you know this journey didn't have to happen. Do you think that the Son of God had to come into the world? Do you think that God felt he owed it to humanity to give him a second chance after Adam fell?

Did God have to provide a way of salvation to increase his own happiness? Well, no. No to all these questions. God wasn't obliged to provide a way for us to be saved.

He's always been totally satisfied, totally pleased, totally glorified in and of himself. And nothing, in a sense anyway, can add to his happiness or glory. God is righteous.

Or just, if you want to use that word. And his justice has to be satisfied. And 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 is satisfied because that's the penalty for sinning against God.

[17:52] Friends, we often hear that there's nothing God can't do. That's not true. God cannot pardon sinners in a vacuum.

That's to say, he can't just decide, I think I'll pardon that person just because I want to, with nothing else happening. Because if he did that, the principles of God's justice would be violated.

And he would cease to be God. So what's the solution? If God can't simply pardon sin because of his justice, his justice in the way, how can anyone be saved?

Well, the answer is that although God is righteous, he's also merciful. His justice demands punishment. It demands satisfaction.

It must have it. But God chose to show mercy. Not because he had to. But because he wanted to.

[18:55] And the way in which he showed mercy, of course, was by sending his own son into the world to suffer and die instead of sinners. And this satisfies God's justice and allows him to show mercy.

Allows him to save. Someone put it something like this. God is righteous and he's a saviour. 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 and God as a saviour. And John Piper 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 did that punishment and suffering involve? Well, of course, it ultimately involved the cross and everything immediately leading up to the cross. But it involved more than that.

[19:55] It involved laying aside his divine attributes whilst he was on earth. It involved being hated by the religious and the political leaders of the day. It involved being forsaken by his Father.

He left behind everything he knew. Everything that was hers by right. Everything that he enjoyed in heaven. On the side that he had always been on. To come to our side.

And friends, it's incredible to think of God coming here as a man for your sake. For mine, not for his own. Yet that's what happened. And just as Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, so he crossed the great gulf between God and us.

The impassable chasm caused by sin. So that we can have a relationship with him. And although it was for your benefit and mine that he made this journey.

We're not the only ones satisfied as a result. Isaiah tells us that it pleased the Lord to bruise him. And that Christ shall see of the travel of his soul. And shall be satisfied.

[21 : 05] For the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Look at this great journey from glory to Golgotha. And they're pleased. John Piper tells this story.

He says, once there was a land ruled by a wicked prince. He'd come from a foreign country and enslaved all the people of the land. And made them miserable with hard labour in his coal mines across the deep canyon.

He'd built a massive bridge for the trains that carried the slaves across the canyon to the mines each morning. And the bridge was heavily guarded. Two men were still three in the kingdom. One old. The other young.

They lived on an inaccessible cliff overlooking the bridge. They hated the bridge. At last they resolved together to blow it up. And destroy the slave labour of the enemy prince.

They planned and they prayed. And they reminded themselves of the reality of heaven. The night came when the deed would be done. Their hearts were pounding with joy. It was a hard plan.

[22 : 05] It would be possible to time the trek of the bridge guard. So that the explosive could be carried quickly to the vulnerable spot on the bridge. But there would be no time for the carrier of the explosives to return.

It was certain that he would be seen on the planned foil if he tried to return. To make sure the bridge blew up, the two men agreed that the young man would detonate it by hand on the bridge. 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 the sacrifice made their hearts leap with joy. The hour came. They folded up the map of their strategy. They stood from the table and embraced each other. When the young man got to the door, he turned with the explosive strapped on his back. And 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 too, Son. The journey from glory to Golgotha was a long, hard journey to the other side for Christ.

[23 : 17] But it was a journey that was made with love and joy on the part of the Father and of the Son. A journey that was made for your sake and mine. We have the journey from Galilee to Gadara.

The journey from glory to Golgotha. And then thirdly, the journey from Galilee to Govig. Just stay now to keep the G's. Any name in hand. The journey from Galilee to right here today.

We see that Jesus goes into the land of the Gadaraeans. And he sends legion into the cities of his own land with the gospel. And this is a rare trip into Gentile territory.

Throughout the Old Testament and the early part of the New, it's fairly rare to find a believer who isn't an Israelite or a Jew. They were God's chosen people, particularly blessed by God and cared for by God.

And they were given a unique insight about the coming Messiah. They knew, or at least they should have known, through the sacrifices and the temple worship, that a Saviour was coming and that he was coming to them.

[24 : 29] But although the good news was generally restricted to this small nation, that wasn't always to be the case. There's another going across to the other side. To come.

And that's Jesus in the gospel. Coming to the entire world. Jesus tells legion to spread the good news of the gospel in the Decapolis.

He tells Jesus' family in the part of chapter 5 we didn't read, and others as well, to say nothing about his miraculous work in Galilee and Judea. But friends, praise the Lord.

That his final message to the disciples is more like his instruction to Legion than his instruction to Jesus. 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, came up with 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.

[25 : 37] And while he was on earth, he crossed the Sea of Galilee. He went to gather and heal the demon-possessed man. And he sent him to his hometown as a missionary, all things he didn't have to do.

But things that came about as a result of his mercy and his love. And over the past 2,000 odd years, he's been doing what he didn't have to do.

He's been spreading the good news of the gospel right across the world. The disciples took on the work of spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. The apostles carried it on.

It's been carried on through the centuries in various ways. And God's used individual men and women to deliver the good news. And he's used events like the Reformation to further the cause. And he even saw footprints. To bring the gospel. To bring his good news. The news of salvation. To our tiny little speck of rock. And into our own homes.

[26 : 41] Things he didn't have to do. But we've left out the most important part of the Lord's final instruction to the disciples. Because it's not just that he tells them to preach the gospel in every nation.

He promises, I am with you always. To the end of the age. And he isn't just making that promise to the 11 disciples.

He's promising to be with whoever preaches, takes out the gospel. Whether it's in a pulpit. Whether it's in your daily life. Wherever they are. And perhaps even more than that.

He's promising to be with the gospel wherever he's preached. Because of course, he is the gospel. He is the good news.

Without Christ, even the gospel, even the word of the Bible, would be worthless. And that journey that began in Galilee has seen the Lord Jesus arrive in this community.

[27 : 45] He's here in the gospel. Not because he has to be. But because he chose to be. Why does he want to be here in the gospel? Well, it's so that you and I can believe on him.

Can have our sins forgiven. And can enjoy an endless eternity with him. In heaven. We're all on a journey.

And there are only two possible destinations. And there's one final leg of the journey which everyone has to make at the very end of life. One final crossing to the other side for you and I.

Crossing to the other side of death. What's on the other side for you?

If you had to picture yourself standing at that river bank just now knowing you had to cross to the other side of it today what's over there for you?

[28 : 56] Is it hell? Is it the place that was prepared for the devil and his demons? Including those that were thrown out of legion. The place of torment and horror?

Or is it heaven? Is it that glorious kingdom that Christ voluntarily left behind for a while to come to earth and suffer and die so that you could join him there forevermore?

Is it the place where all this began? And only you can answer that question honestly for yourself.

But friends if your honest answer to yourself is I'm looking at hell now is the time to do something about it.

React like legion did and accept him today while he's here in the gospel. Amen.

May God bless you. I was thinking about this reporting of his worth. Thank you.