

Beggars before Jesus

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Date: 28 February 2016

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[0 : 00] that light must be bothering you people at the back there it's flash even I'm here at the front but there you go we'll just have to put up with it for the moment it's one of these things one of the the issues that the council has to deal with periodically here in Aberdeen occasionally see it be mentioned in the paper it's what to do with beggars probably in Aberdeen it's not a huge issue I lived in Edinburgh for a few years and it seemed to be a much bigger problem if that's what we we call it there and you hear the different arguments that are are made what to do some argue for a zero tolerance approach others seem to have a somewhat more laid-back approach to the problem and I don't pretend to know much about it but I think it is it certainly can be a very complex matter you sometimes hear that there are criminal elements and those who you see begging all of them of course are maybe connected in some way victims perhaps of criminal elements it's a complex matter

I wonder what Jesus thinks of beggars and I don't have in mind on this occasion though it's something we could certainly give thought to and we I'm sure we could find answers in the Bible too or certainly principles in the Bible but I don't have in mind the beggars on Union Street or elsewhere in our city center though I'm sure Jesus does have an opinion on their plight and I'm sure that opinion whatever it is is grounded in compassion but I'm thinking rather this evening of the beggars that we meet in the passage that we've read in this passage in Mark chapter 5 on three occasions Jesus is faced with we're calling them beggars and I'll explain in a moment why I use that word but on three occasions we're faced with beggars or groups of beggars and on each occasion Jesus responds to a request that they bring to him they're begging him for something and he responds to that plea it probably isn't altogether accurate to describe those concerned and presented to us in the passage as beggars but they do beg and hence the liberty that I'm taking in calling them beggars let's just identify the occasions where we find people or individuals or a group of people approaching Jesus and begging of him the first time that we find the word is in verse 10 and when we read there that he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area and it seems clear that though the voices of the man and the one possessed the one speaking or those speaking because there were many of them are the demons who have taken possession of this man so the demons beg the same verb is found and translated as beg in verse 12 the demons beg Jesus they're very explicitly send us among the pigs and it goes on so that's the first occasion where we find in this case a group of evil spirits who are within the man who've taken possession of this man they're begging of Jesus but then verse 17 we find the same word being used in the version that we have it's translated with a different word the word in Greek is one that can be translated in a number of ways and it's perfectly legitimate to translate it in in different ways but it's the same word in verse 17 then the people began to plead with Jesus or they began to beg with Jesus to leave their region this is the second occasion where Jesus is faced with in this case a group of people a large group of people that the community they're begging him to leave their region and then the third occasion is in the following verse in verse 18 as Jesus was getting into the boat the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him and they're translated with that same word and it is the same word that is used so three occasions an individual a group of people or a group a legion of demons begging of Jesus we want to think about this passage using these three instances of begging as our framework it's a passage that is replete with possibilities but we need to tackle it from a particular angle and this seems to provide us a framework three occasions through the passage where people or an individual beg of Jesus and Jesus responds to them now before we we look at each in turn

I think it's necessary for us just to introduce ourselves to the man who is next to Jesus the central character in the account the man described there in the passage as a man with an evil spirit there in verse two and we're familiar with the passage and we've we've read the passage but just to stress how wretched his circumstances were I think it would be difficult to conceive of a man in more desperate or more wretched circumstances one commentator speaking about this man and his circumstances says the following that what we have here is one of the most lamentable stories of human wretchedness in the Bible and it's difficult to argue with that description when we see the plight of this poor man if we look at it from a Jewish perspective and the passage is very much written from that perspective he were here was a man with an unclean spirit indeed a multiplicity of of unclean spirits he was living amongst unclean tombs there could have been no more unclean place for him to be than among the tombs he was living in an unclean region and they'd gone across the lake to a gentile territory and he was surrounded by a community that would appear to have occupied themselves in what was from a Jewish perspective an unclean profession in the care and raising of the pigs you really couldn't get someone more unclean than this man but even if we leave aside that that Jewish perspective we simply consider the man at the level of of human misery his plight is a wretched one possessed deranged marginalized isolated out of control self-harming we could probably go on if it is ever right to describe a man as virtually subhuman and I don't think it is ever right to do that but if it were possible then this would be that man indeed the very language that is used at the beginning of the chapter in verse 5 when it speaks of attempts that had been made to to bind him they've been unsuccessful attempts but even the language that is used there that speaks of him being bound is really language that would ordinarily be used of wild animals it's not language that you would expect to be used in relation to a human being wild animals would be bound well this is a man who was treated and considered as a wild animal perhaps worse than a wild animal his situation was by any reasonable measure hopeless but of course and thanks be to God

Jesus doesn't know the meaning of the word hopeless well he knows the meaning of the word but he doesn't recognize the concept well having introduced ourselves or reminded ourselves of just how desperate the situation of this man is let's let's move on and think of these three occasions where Jesus is approached and there are those who would beg of him and we begin with the demons the demons beg we've already noticed how in verse 10 and in verse 12 this word is found what can we say of these beggars the demons I want to notice two things about them we have to be selective in what we what we pick out this evening but two things I want you to notice about these beggars and they're connected one is that these beggars the demons are intent on destruction but also they're conscious of their own destruction what do I mean by that well when I say that they're they were intent on destruction I'm talking about what they were doing to this poor man their intention their objective in in in regard to this man was to destroy this man they've taken possession of him to do him harm and the more harm the better and of course in this in a very stark way we're confronted and we see the evil one in his true colors the devil and all his hosts their primary their sole objective and desire is to enslave and to destroy and that was true 2000 years ago and it remains true today now the devil is clever he doesn't always present himself in such a stark way such a repugnant way that we would we would we would flee from him but his intention remains the same to destroy how many around us maybe we're oblivious to some of the the demonic forces that lie behind their their spiral to destruction this is the work of the evil one his intention is to destroy and he wants to destroy you we think of the words of first or the words that we find in first Peter in chapter 5 concerning the devil your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour that is what he is about and he continues to prowl looking for those he might devour and so the words that precede that are be alert be on your guard those are words directed to believers so they're intent in destruction that's one thing we can say about these beggars these demons who beg but the second thing is that they're conscious of their own destruction and in order to draw out what is meant by that or what I'm trying to say with that is we really need to turn to the parallel account of what happened here in Matthew's gospel in Matthew chapter 8 and in verse 29 we have recorded words of the demons directed to Jesus as they're begging of him that we don't have recorded in Mark the words that are recorded are largely similar but in Matthew there are some words we find that we don't find in Mark and we'll find that in chapter 8 of Matthew and in verse 29 notice what it said there it's the demons who have possessed this man they're begging of Jesus and what do they say what do you want with us son of God they shouted and then notice what they say have you come here to torture us that's familiar we have that in Mark but then they say before the appointed time what do they mean by that have you come to torture us before the appointed time what time are they referring to the word that they

use is a very significant word I'm sure it's one that's been highlighted to you in the past it's the word *kairos* and *kairos* is translated the appointed time it's just one word but it's translated the appointed time because it does refer to not just any time but to a very particular time and the demons are saying our time has not yet come what are they referring to well they're referring to their own destruction they know that the one before them is the one who at the appointed time will cast them into the abyss to use the language that Luke actually uses in speaking of this passage they know that time is coming but they're saying it's not yet that time hasn't come yet and so there's in a sense as they see it room for negotiation yes the time will come we are destined for destruction but not yet Jesus and so they plead with him to deal with them in another way not to cast them into the abyss that is for another day but for this day they look for an alternative but they are conscious of their own inevitable destruction and defeat the fact that they do recognize in Jesus the one who will in due course at the appointed time cast them into the pit it also reinforces what is clear from other things that they say that they recognize him to be who he is they speak of him very explicitly as the son of the most high

[14 : 00] God and then it's clear that they recognize him but then that recognition reinforced by this acknowledgement that he is the one who has power over them and will exercise that power at the appointed time hence you have this begging plea to be allowed to be sent to the pigs rather than the pit so they're the ones who are begging but what are the response of Jesus how does Jesus respond and what can we draw from that well the simple thing to say is that he grants their requests this is what they asked for to be sent into the pigs and that is what happens he does what they ask of him why does he do that let me suggest a couple of reasons in each of the occasions we're going to see these two reasons for the response of Jesus first of all his love and here we're thinking of course very especially of his love for this poor wretched man that's why Jesus is willing to send these demons into two thousand pigs that they would then go to their destruction some in considering this passage of rather foolishly sought to stand in judgment over

Jesus or in any case wondered whether this really could have happened because well would Jesus do something like this would he so wantonly be a participant in the destruction of these poor pigs two thousand of them surely they have rights also and then what are the livelihood of the people this is what they lived on and this could have brought economic chaos to their homes and their families and their ability to provide for themselves how could Jesus do such a thing well the reason he does such a thing and what it reveals is the great love that he has had to choose between the livelihood of all of these people of the whole community and this wretched man well it would be no contest well this man doesn't matter if they had to choose between two thousand pigs and this man well it's no contest the two thousand pigs are worth way more than this miserable man but not in the opinion of

Jesus Jesus sees this man in all his wretchedness so much volume that Jesus grants the request of these demons that he might be freed and liberated from their oppressive power of course this is God's perspective on human life on every human life it is that biblical perspective on the value and the sanctity of human life that has undergirded or at least informed our own society view on the value and sanctity of human life but as we lose our grip on God's perspective will we see the consequences of it and human life no longer granted the value that God grants to it I was struck just this past week some of you maybe saw this on the news or on social media of what happened to a baby dolphin in

Argentina I don't know some of you saw folks that were at the beach and somebody had as I understand the story taken out this baby dolphin and people were taking selfies with the baby dolphin and quite rightly there was a sense of outrage at the cruelty to this poor dolphin and let me be very clear I think it was outrageous what was done and it it's shocking that this poor dolphin suffered so much but at the same time I was struck by and I was exploring a little bit just the volume of response that there was to this thousands and thousands of people indignant horrified distraught at the death of this baby dolphin and yet we think little of countless children suffering and dying in Syria and all over the world there's not even a shrug at the death of the unborn in our own country and you think well what's what's going on something isn't right well here in this passage we see the value that

Jesus places on one human life even such you might say especially such a wretched miserable specimen of humanity as is presented to us here it is love that explains why Jesus grants the request the begging request of the demons but also we can look at it from the perspective of his plan and this really is picking up on what we've already seen about what the demons said the demons acknowledged and were conscious that their time had not yet come and so the reason why he grants the request for them to be sent into the pigs rather than to be sent into the abyss however we understand that is because it had to go and he had to work and he had to do all that he did in accordance with the plan Jesus did everything that he did in accordance with the plan he was sent into this world in accordance to the divine plan and everything he did was in fulfillment of the divine plan and so here too he is operating in that framework so the demons beg but let's move on to the second occasion where we find people begging

[19 : 48] Jesus and it's the members of this community who had been affected by the death of the 2,000 pigs in verse 17 we find them begging we read there then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region what can we say about these beggars these people who were begging what we're told that they were afraid and we find that in the passage that this is the emotion that had gripped them they were afraid there in verse 15 when they came to Jesus they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there dressed in his right mind and they were afraid now what were they afraid of I wonder if there's maybe a couple of things that are kind of intertwined in answer to that question what were they afraid of there's no doubt that they were afraid of Jesus I was saying just before we we read this passage that there are many parallels between this miracle and the one that is recorded immediately before at the coming of the storm and here we have a very clear parallel you remember the disciples they were afraid of the storm but they were terrified of Jesus when he calmed the storm there was this step jump from fear to dread in the in the presence of of one who could do such a thing well there's something of that here you know the members of this community they were afraid of this man this man who had this strength that he was incapable of being bound they were afraid of him but they were more afraid of the one who restored him to sanity and to wholeness there was this dread in the presence of one who was altogether other they dread the one who has performed this miracle so they're afraid of Jesus

I wonder if there's not something in addition to that that is hinted at in the passage they're afraid of the Lord but I think they're also afraid of loss that is financial loss well in many ways the loss had already happened maybe they feared that this could go from bad to worse in verse 16 it's telling what we're told about the report that is given of what had happened we read those who had seen it told the people some had witnessed what had happened and of course others had not witnessed it in the community so those who had witnessed it told the people what had happened to the demon possessed man and told about the pigs as well let's not forget the pigs let's not forget these 2,000 pigs who have been lost and start working out what their value is and so they want to be rid of Jesus be rid of Jesus because they're afraid of him they're afraid of one who can do such a thing there's this dread in his presence but afraid also of the consequences of his presence amongst them even to their financial well-being

I wonder you know fast forwarding a couple of thousand years if that is sometimes true of us we don't want to get Jesus too close as he becomes more demanding and begins to demand of us in a way that we consider to be unhelpful or to our loss in one way or another foolishly but nonetheless but what of the response of Jesus well we find that for a second occasion in the passage he grants their request they ask him to leave and he leaves and he does so immediately verse 17 then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region and then immediately we read as Jesus was getting into the boat they ask him to go and he goes he grants their request why well I think again we can understand his willingness to grant their request on the basis of these two elements that we've already seen previously first of all his love

I think again we can speak of or identify his love for this man who has been redeemed and you might ask well how do we find evidence of Jesus' love for this man in his granting this particular request I think we can find it in this fairly simple way that the reason Jesus can leave the reason Jesus is prepared and willing to leave is because his job is done the reason he had crossed the lake to the region of the Gerasenes the reason he had gone through the storm to get to the other side of the lake was for this man that's why he had crossed the lake that was his purpose in crossing that lake it was to rescue it was to redeem it was to liberate this poor man and his job was done the man was liberated he was free to go and so love explains even this granting of the request to the community who are begging of him to leave them all that he had done for this man and some might wonder was it worth it all that time all that trouble the sea the storm the time the rejection the banishment all for one man was it worth it well of course it was worth it and this is so like Jesus we know that in time he would pay a far greater price to save sinners no price too high to rescue miserable wretched sinners enslaved by the evil one so his love explains his response but also his plan his plan as he came into this world to draw to himself men and women as his disciples his plan and his method was to call not to coerce and so if these people don't want

Jesus then he'll leave them if these people want him to go then he will go he won't twist their arm he won't oblige them he won't coerce them to worship him if they want him to go then he'll go and that in itself is a very solemn reality if you tell Jesus don't come into my life I have no place for you I have no time for you I want you to go and he'll go but then you will have to suffer in due course the eternal consequences of your rejection of him but then finally we have a third occasion when Jesus is presented with one begging of him and it's the man who has been liberated in verse 18 we read as Jesus was getting into the boat the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him here we have a restored man the one who is doing the begging a restored man possessed of a worthy desire the picture that is painted of him restored is simple yet striking you read there in verse let's see what verse is it where we find him described there in verse 15 when they came to

[27 : 33] Jesus they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there dressed and in his right mind again there's this contrast between the chaos and the calm the chaos of the storm and the storm calmed the chaos of this man's life altogether chaotic and now described sitting dressed and in his right mind a picture of peace and sanity it's a restored man who comes and begs of Jesus and what he begs reflects a very worthy desire he wants to be with Jesus this is at the very heart of discipleship as we're discovering in this gospel to be a disciple is to be with Jesus and this man wants to be with Jesus it's a good thing that he wants and what is the response of Jesus well in a twist that is nothing if not ironic of the three occasions when he's faced with those begging of him this one occasion when what they ask or what is asked is a good thing

Jesus denies the request he doesn't grant to the man that which he is asking for why is that well again I think it's to be understood on the basis of his love and of his plan how can we see love in Jesus denying the man his plea what we might call this tough love that sends the man to live as a disciple amongst his own people it's not a blanket no with nothing else added it's a no but I have something for you to do go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and Jesus goes on it is love that would have Jesus send this man to serve him amongst his own people to develop and grow as a disciple in this way not the way he wanted but in the way that was best for him and of course love always underpins the response of

Jesus to our requests when we come to him begging pleading with him the response may be to grant our request it may be to deny our request but whether it's to grant or to deny it is grounded in his love for us and in his seeking the best for us there's also his plan we've really touched on it already and the plan that Jesus has for this man and through this man the fact that the people of the community were casting him out of their community would not mean that that community would be left without gospel witness Jesus would go across the lake he would be gone but there would be a witness to Jesus in that place and it would be this man go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you in Mark's gospel this is the first occasion of

Jesus sending out a missionary preacher a Gentile to the Gentiles and the sermon that he is to preach intriguingly maybe twisting things somewhat has three points he has to preach he has to tell who Jesus is why do I say that because in the way this passage ends we discover that this is what this man does maybe not even consciously and what really am I drawing attention to I'm drawing attention to the distinction between what is said by Jesus and then what is said describing what the man did Jesus says go and tell how much the Lord has done for you God has done for you go and tell how much Yahweh has done for you the living and true God and then we're told by Mark that he went away and told how much Jesus had done for him and so Jesus is being presented here as being the Lord of course we know that he is the

Lord but here we have it this man has been told to tell what God has done for him and he tells what Jesus has done for him and so in his sermon he identifies Jesus for who he is not only does he tell of what Jesus or who Jesus is but of course he tells of what Jesus has done go and tell how much the Lord has done for you but he also in his sermon is to tell of why Jesus has done this for him how he has had mercy on you that he has been the object of why is it that Jesus did this for him because of his great mercy who Jesus is what Jesus has done and why Jesus has done it what a great sermon for this man to go to his family and to preach well as we draw things to a close maybe we can draw it to close there as an immediate challenge to us the sermon that that man had to preach as a sermon that you can preach he wasn't one trained in preaching his knowledge was very limited and yet he was sent to preach to tell people who

[33 : 09] Jesus is to tell people what Jesus has done and to tell people why Jesus does such things and that's something that you can go and do go into the week go home to your family to your work to your friends to your colleagues tell them who Jesus is tell them what Jesus has done for you and tell them of his great mercy that underpins his saving work in your life and that will underpin his saving work in their lives as they respond to him well let us pray heavenly father we do thank you for your word we thank you for the way in which we are reminded again of the great love that you have for wretched sinners such as we are we thank you for the great value that is given to this man of whom we read and we can be sure that when you look at us in all our own brokenness and insignificance as we may see ourselves and as maybe many others see us yet we can be sure that you look at us as those of great value we thank you for the great price that was paid as a demonstration of how much you love and value those you have come to save heavenly father we thank you that as we enjoy and experience of your saving work in our lives so we too are challenged and commissioned to go and tell to go and tell others about

Jesus about who he is about what he has done and his great love and mercy and for all who come to him help us so to go and so to declare and we pray in Jesus name amen