

Jesus Crossed Over

Have you ever thought about how seriously Jesus takes saving every single lost soul? Of course, he gave his life to accomplish this, so obviously it is a very big deal to him. He told a couple of parables that deal with this subject in Luke 15. The parable of the lost sheep is about a man who left ninety-nine sheep in order to pursue the one that was lost. The parable of the lost coin is about the diligence with which one ought to pursue even one soul that is lost. Every single lost soul is important to Jesus.

Mark records a series of events that helps me to appreciate just how much each individual soul means to Jesus. First, let's recognize that these events are all framed by Jesus and his disciple's crossing over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Mark 4:35 says, "On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'" Then, Mark 5:21 says, "And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea." My interest, for the moment, is what happened on the other side of the Sea. Jesus went to the other side, and then he came back. Why did he go there, and what did he do while he was there?

Before we talk about what Jesus actually did on the other side of the Sea, we should probably think about what it took to get there: "And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling...And they [the Apostles] woke him [Jesus] and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'" Ben Witherington says, "One must remember that these men, at least the fishermen among the Twelve, had sailed this lake for some time, so one must surmise that, for these veteran sailors to react as they did, this must have been an extraordinarily severe storm."¹ Whatever was on the other side of the Sea must have been pretty important to Jesus because the disciples who were with him were afraid for their lives on this journey.

Beginning in Mark 5:1 we are told what was on the other side, "¹ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. ³ He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, ⁴ for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. ⁶ And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him."

Again, Witherington says, "There can be little doubt that most of the population was non-Jews, and our story makes plain that Jesus is in Gentile territory by mentioning the herd of pigs. No practicing Jew would have had such a herd, nor for that matter would they have been found residing in a graveyard."² Do you mean to say, then, that Jesus risked his follower's lives in a monumental storm in order to travel by boat to Gentile territory, and to heal a man who was possessed by a demon who lived in a graveyard and who terrorized the country by screaming out day and night and cutting himself!" That is about the sum of it; and after he was finished in Mk. 5:21 they crossed back over to the other side.

¹ Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 175.

² *Ibid.* p. 178.

It did not matter to Jesus what the risks were to get to the man. It did not matter to Jesus that the man lived in a part of the country that Jesus and his disciples would have been ridiculed for being in had others known about it. It did not matter to Jesus that the man was, by all accounts, lost beyond all reckoning. What mattered to Jesus was that there was a human being who needed help on the other side of the Sea. Jesus knew that if he did not go to help that man, nobody would or could.

There are at least two lessons we need to take away from a story like this. First, we ought to ask ourselves if individual souls—every single individual soul—mean as much to us as they did to our Lord. Are we willing to cross over to the other side, no matter the risks, and no matter where the other side may be, in order to help those whom nobody but Jesus can help? If not, then we need a recalibration in our thinking. Second, there is no such thing as a person so far gone that God’s grace cannot or will not reach them. Jesus went to great lengths then, and he still does today to save all who would come to him. Will you?

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