

“Who was the first missionary Jesus ever sent? Someone well-trained right? Someone with an intimate relationship with Christ. A devoted follower. A close disciple. One with a thorough knowledge of Scripture and sacrifice, wouldn't you think? Let me give you a hint. To find him don't turn to the names of the apostles. How about the 72 disciples sent out by Christ? Sorry, wrong again. The letters? No ...Long before Paul picked up a pen, this missionary was already at work. Where did Jesus go to find this first missionary? You won't believe this. A cemetery. Who was the first ambassador he commissioned? You're not going to buy this either. A lunatic. The man Jesus sent out was a madman turned missionary. His story is found in Mark chapter 5."When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones."

He's the man your mom told you to avoid. He's the fellow the police routinely lock up. He's the deranged man who stalks neighborhoods and murders families. This is the face that fills the screen during the evening news. And this is the first evangelist of the church. Palestine didn't know what to do with him. They restrained him, but he broke the chains. He ripped off his clothes. He lived in caves. He cut himself with rocks. He was a rabid coyote on the loose, a menace to society. Of absolutely no good to anyone. No one had a place for him-except Jesus.

Even today the best that modern medicine could offer such a man is medication and extensive treatment. Maybe, with much time, expense, and professional help, such destructive behavior could be curtailed. But it would take years. With Jesus it takes seconds. Jesus says, "You evil spirit, come out of the man!" Jesus wants the man back. He doesn't want to see this man lost to an eternity in hell. The evil angels muster no challenge. They've heard this voice before. When Jesus demands, the demons have one response. They plead. They begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of that area.

Jesus' mere appearance humbles the demons. Though they had dominated this man, they cower before Jesus. Through they had laced the region with fear, they beg for mercy from Jesus. His Words reduce them to sniveling, groveling, weaklings. Feeling safer in a herd of pigs than in the presence of God, the demons ask to be sent into some pigs". Can't destroy a human being creation of God, might as well destroy something from the animal world. Jesus consents and 2000 pigs hurl themselves into the sea. Those Jewish herdsmen shouldn't have been raising pigs to begin with. That was against the ceremonial laws of the O.T. So Jesus taught them a lesson in the loss of their pigs. But all the while this was going on, the disciples do nothing. While Jesus fights, the followers stare. Can you relate? Are you watching a world out of control and don't know what to do? You have friends, neighbors, co-workers at work who are not active in any church. They may not have evil angels living inside them, but they are servants of Satan nevertheless. If you and I don't do anything, their end is destruction. What is an average person to do? Follow the example of the madman turned missionary. Go home to your family and friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.

Great things worth telling. How about changing the theme to go and tell the horrible things that are happening. Daily car bombings in Iraq. Nuclear Dirty bombs being produced in North Korea. Kidnappings and killings of young coed girls. 2000 pigs may not be jumping off cliffs today to their destruction and evil angels may not be taking up residence in humans, but the loss of life and the evilness of mankind are just as rampant as in the days of Jesus. What is wrong with our world?

The world's problem can be summed up in one three letter word, sin. It afflicts us all. Sin is a fatal disease. Sin has sentenced us to a slow, painful death. Sin does to a life what shears do to a flower. A cut at the stem separates a flower from the source of life. Initially the flower is attractive, still colorful and strong. But watch that flower over a period of time, and the leaves will wilt and the petals will drop. No matter what you do, the flower will never live again. Surround it with water. Stick the stem in the soil. Baptize it with fertilizer. Glue the flower back on the stem. Do what you wish. The flower is dead The Bible reminds us of this truth about ourselves. The wages of our sin is death, eternal death in hell with the evil angels. The same ones who afflicted our missionary. It looks like we have the same problem as the lunatic in our text. But wait, Jesus has entered our life. He comes to our rescue just like He did for the madman. Jesus came into the world to rescue us from the forces of darkness. And how did He do this?

Let me draw this out for you. Imagine the word us on one side and God on the other. Back in the Garden of Eden we could talk to God, we had all our needs met, we would never die. But then we ate from a tree we weren't supposed to eat from, and something called sin entered the world. Sin created a wall between us and God. Oh, we tried different ways to get back to God. We try to work hard at our jobs. Take care of our families. But all of these ways fall short of God's expectations, which is perfection. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The result is that we deserve death. The wages of our sins is death. But 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ came into this world and he rebuilt the bridge from us back to God. That bridge was build by the cross of Calvary. Jesus lived a perfect life for us, and died on the cross for all of our sins. And how does this bridge which unites us and God become our own. Simply through faith. Believe. Believe that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life and died for all of your sins. As it says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

And now Jesus says to us, "Go home to your family and friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." Tell people personally about what Jesus has done for you and what He means to you.

But there are barriers out there that keep us from going home to our friends and family to tell them how much the Lord has done for us or supporting mission work like Project Share. The first barrier out there is the failure to appreciate the treasure of salvation. When you have been given the same thing over and over again, its easy to take it for granted. You know how that works. A child receives a new toy. At first the toy is special. He wants to share it with his friends. But after a while the toy is thrown into the toy chest, hardly to be used again. And so it is that if I don't appreciate what I have, I am not going to give it to someone else. Do we really appreciate the treasure of salvation we have been given by Jesus Christ? Do we know what it means to be called out of darkness

into God's wonderful light? Its time for us to recognize again just what we have been given by Jesus.

Another barrier to sharing the promise is our failure to really accept the lostness of the lost. When I do evangelism visits in the community it ceases to amaze me that everyone out there thinks they are going to heaven. But they haven't the foggiest idea of how it will really happen. There is a dangerous universalism which has crept into our society. But my friend, the Bible is clear, "He that believeth not shall be damned. I don't care how nice a person your unchurched friend might be, if he doesn't believe in Jesus as his Savior, he will be lost to an eternity in hell. Yes, its vitally important that we accept the lostness of the lost. For it is only then that we will want to build relationships with the unchurched so that we can have the opportunity to share Christ with them.

Sometimes we hear people say, "I don't feel at ease talking to strangers about religion. I might mess up, thus its better that I do and say nothing. But my friend, how could you make it worse for an unbeliever who is already on the path to hell? Listen to the comfort the prophet Isaiah gives us. He tells us that no matter how bumbling we might be, The Word we share will have an effect on our hearer. Isaiah 55:11 says, "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." So in God's eyes you never really mess up if you share the simple testimony of the Word. Sometimes people say, I can't witness because I wouldn't know what to say. Jesus' disciples felt the same way. They were just uneducated fishermen. How could they speak about Christ in a court setting. Jesus tells them in Matthew 10:19,20, "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Imagine, the Holy Spirit will guide our words when we share the promise to others.

And you know, sharing the promise brings joy. In fact, it brings a triple joy. First, there is joy in heaven. In Luke 15:10 it says, "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Yes, the angels in heaven are clapping when you share the promise. Secondly, there is joy on the part of the hearer of the good news. Think of the story in Scripture of the jailer of Philippi. What did he feel like after Paul and Silas told him about Jesus. WE are told that he went home rejoicing and told his family of what he had seen and heard. And finally, there is joy on the part of the witness. No drug can give you a greater high than sharing the promise of Jesus Christ with someone, and then seeing that Word take root in their lives.

A madman turned missionary. One minute insane, the next in Christ. No training. No teaching. All he knew was that Jesus could scare the hell out of hell and apparently that was enough. But even more surprising than the man who was sent is the fact that anyone was sent. I wouldn't send a missionary to some people who had just given me the boot, would you? A plague perhaps, but not a missionary. But Christ did. And Christ does. He still sends the message to the unworthy. And he still uses the unworthy as messengers. Use me then, Jesus, this vessel of clay, to share the great things you have done for me. Amen..