

“Who’s the Hero? Part Two”

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Texts: Mark 5:1-20; Romans 1:28-32

Romans 1:28 And just as they did not see fit [a]to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, (that is, are sinful) 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips; 30 slanderers, [b]haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them¹. (When we repent we turn from all of this, and back to God.)

Matthew 3:7-9 “ **But when he** (John) **saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.**

Matthew 12:33-37 Words Reveal Character

33 “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak [a]what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man brings out of *his* good treasure [b]what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure [c]what is evil. 36 But I tell you that every [d]careless word that people [e]speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 For [f]by your words you will be justified, and [g]by your words you will be condemned².”

The time is fulfilled (This is very significant. The people do not know what time it is! Not on the timeline of salvation history—they even struggle to read the signs of the

¹Footnotes

a. Romans 1:28 Lit *to have God in knowledge*

b. Romans 1:30 Or *hateful to God*

²Footnotes

a. Matthew 12:34 Lit *good things*

b. Matthew 12:35 Lit *good things*

c. Matthew 12:35 Lit *evil things*

d. Matthew 12:36 Or *useless*

e. Matthew 12:36 Lit *will speak*

f. Matthew 12:37 Or *in accordance with*

g. Matthew 12:37 Or *in accordance with*

times which gives them heavy clues!), **and the kingdom of God is at hand!** (That's what time it is. Therefore. . .) **Repent and believe in the gospel—Jesus came preaching “the gospel of the kingdom of God.”** (Mark 1:14c)

First, when there's a call to repentance, the self-defensive response (sometimes insolent, sometimes proud and defiant) is something like, “Of what? What have I done that I should repent of?” There is a striking thread in the New Testament between this **brood of vipers** and **children of the devil, Satan**, who is called the **Serpent(!)** And his seed is at enmity with the seed of woman.

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but [a]He sent Me. **43** Why do you not understand [b]what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. **44** You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks [c]a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of [d]lies. **45** *But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.* **46** Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? **47** He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God³.”

In a manner of speaking, the kiss of death lies in the viper's sting, or poison/venom (remember the **fiery serpent** episode of Numbers 21:4-9(!)) When God's people grew impatient and discouraged. **And the people spoke against God and Moses: “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? (v. 5)**

Romans 1:28-32 adequately answers that question: of what shall we repent?. Many sins—excluding politics and party affiliation(!)—many are listed there and, frankly, many of us find we are indicted on multiple charges which are listed here, *not just one*. Honestly now. The disposition of vipers is in view, not just a singular character flaw, to behavioral trait/sin. Our infractions are multiple, not singular.

Second, O, the word (of God): **Repent and believe the gospel!** The mustard seed is a figure of speech representing the word of God customized to us, **our ability to hear it!** The technical word for this is divine accommodation, or condescension. It is the Son of God speaking in terms we can conceptualize *about something we cannot conceptualize!* **And the gospel is that there is forgiveness of sin through faith in the finished work of Christ! After being forgiven, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and we are sanctified—made holy:**

³Footnotes

- a. John 8:42 Lit *that One*
- b. John 8:43 Or *My way of speaking*
- c. John 8:44 Lit *the lie*
- d. John 8:44 Lit *it*

pure/clean/blameless and righteous with the righteousness of Christ. We enter the kingdom of God, we attain eternal life through Christ⁵ who lives in us.

This gospel of the **kingdom of God is like a mustard seed sown on the ground**. Can't get more down to earth than that! It is **like a seed**, but more than a seed. It is **sown on the ground**—it is broadcast, not planted; it is a seed and not a transplanted seedling. Sown, the soil is not turned, not dug out for it to be planted. **But when it is sown**, by Jesus the Sower(!), **it grows up**. The seed is good and it does its own thing. *The seed sown and beloved produces saints out of forgiven sinners!* The seed being generative, generates things: saints, a kingdom, a rule of God on earth in time and history. We are told nothing here about *soil condition*, and very little about cultivation, (only **that it is sown**) **and that is what the kingdom of God is like. Jesus came, broadcast the kingdom, like mustard seed, and something radically transforming began to take place!** There are two active agents here: Jesus, the Son of God, and, the seed/gospel/word of God!

And who is it that is instigating/imparting this? It is Jesus. Jesus sows, the kingdom grows. Well, that really makes sense, in a mysterious way—sowing the kingdom on the ground is precisely what Jesus came to do. He came to announce, proclaim and declare things into being: Phase One: come preach repentance, faith and the gospel—yes, and so *He brought the kingdom of God from heaven to earth*. It was also a rescue mission—the parable is a picture, or a figure of speech, for the coming of the kingdom *through the heroic intervention of our Savior, Jesus*. **Behold, I am doing a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.** (Isaiah 43:19)

By faith in the Son forgiveness comes: we are liberated, freed and transformed by Jesus AND the Word—that word was creative and sanctifying. If we believe, testified to by hearing and trusting, we are saved. There it is pure and unadulterated.

Third, here's a startling thing to consider, with regard to salvation: ***faith is not optional***. Jesus doesn't suggest that we believe in Him. No, what He does is command it. **The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel of God.** The seed is sown! The kingdom is now and its power is present at this moment. There is something imperative about **The Kingdom is at hand; something real and incontrovertible**. The seed is sown. The sower, Jesus, has come and done that. Jesus doesn't suggest we believe in Him, in the Kingdom enterprise; He demands it. Jesus doesn't recommend that we believe in Him! No, He commands it.

Now my topic is not free will—that's not in question here. We choose. The problem is not that we exercise free will; rather the problem is that we exercise it badly. And we do that badly over and over, creating habits and captivity—inhibiting our freedom and impairing our better judgment. By free will we harm ourselves and

do harm to others because 1. We act corruptly; and 2. We choose to do evil. Our free choices compound the mess we find ourselves in and we have no one to blame but ourselves; we damage our own integrity, we compromise our character—repentance changes our disposition not just our choices, behaviors and lifestyle! Not all trauma is self-induced; but some surely is. When we follow our evil hearts and perpetrate evil actions, we are volunteers in Satan’s army. *We need to change sides and allegiance. We need to choose wisely and redemption allows that.*

When the seed is on the ground (**sown**), we have moved beyond deliberation and persuasion. The demoniac had it right. Whatever part of him that was able to, pressed him to **immediately meet Him . . . as He came out of the boat(!) . . . but when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him** (Mark 5:6). He ran to Jesus for healing and deliverance, despite being disabled, deranged, damaged and wounded. That’s encouraging! He didn’t wait to be fixed before he came to Jesus—he came to Jesus to be fixed. So must we all.

Here’s what’s truly remarkable! He ran, he met, he worshipped Him . . . and then, the demons spoke: **What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore you by God that you do not torment me!** (v. 7) Torment is the future for demons so many expositors render this “**Are you come to torment us ahead of time?**” The demon is pleading for more time to kill, steal, murder and destroy. Jesus casts the demon out and permits them (**for we are Legion, “many” to enter the swine**). And with that, the capital investment of several swineherds went down the drain—to their dismay (which reveals their callous indifference to the main event—the release from captivity of the soul of one man by the heroic love of Jesus! Oh, this was a sowing of the mustard seed! The swine were collateral damage, and the illicit trade in pigs was disrupted for, as it has been suggested, these swineherds **may have been** proxies for Jewish investors who were making a profit off their swine! And, if that is a feasible explanation, we might inquire, “Who would dare complain publicly among the Jews—that would incriminate them?” Is this divine judgment in the marketplace?! I trust it is and welcome that intervention.

Is this something small growing legs, getting bigger . . . like sown mustard seed? Is this the Kingdom come with power? I would say so. Perhaps it is striking that Jesus did not ask the pigs for permission! The demons had territorial concerns: **please don’t send us out of the country** (Mark 5:10)—but Jesus did not honor that request, the demon infested swine perished in the sea! It was game over. The swineherds went to town and reported the incident **in the city and in the country** [We should note that this would take some time and if this followed the storm when it was near evening—it must be getting late in the day!]**—and they went out to see what it was that happened.** (v. 14) **The Kingdom had come in power . . . evidenced right before their eyes!** And there was the demoniac, sitting clothed and in his right mind (something for those who prefer to picture demonic possession as mental illness?) **And they were afraid.** (v.15) **Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.** How very like the demons they turned out to be! The demons had said “Don’t send us away” and now those who were comfortable with their captivity to the demonic want to send Jesus away. Don’t plant your

Kingdom here, we prefer things the way they were—it's what we are used to. Jesus' heroic intervention was not welcomed, not rewarded; BUT the Lord gained a most effective evangelist out of the whole business—thus: a mustard seed sower! I wonder how many seed sowers will come from this hearing of the Word? How many will say, "Jesus saves. Come to Jesus" to the confused, perplexed and compromised in whose midst we live?

We are living in turbulent times. Jesus heroically commanding the wind and the waves is surely the central figure in the storm incident! Think about it. In a way, the *whole church leadership* is in the boat and the boat is threatening to capsize from the surging waves. It is all on the line, but this is not the mindset of the disciples. If it were, they might have concluded: **as long as we are with Him, we are safe**. We will be protected and preserved *which of course they were*. They were imperiled because they **had no faith**. Faith as I said previously is not optional. Nowhere is the boundary of free will more clearly set forth. Jesus stilled the wind, Jesus calmed the sea, our free will has little to do with it. Jesus didn't save them because of their faith; He saved them because that is what He came to do. He came to sow, He came to save. And He came to command: wind be still, seas be calm and, as for you, O man, repent and believe the gospel. They were helpless to save themselves, so are we! We can trust and obey . . . or we can perish. When the ship is going down, our options are very limited.

Thank goodness that the Lord of all is in charge of all! Jesus commands the wind and wave! Jesus sows the Kingdom. Jesus came to save you from yourself. He wants to draw you out of the perfect storm that your free will has created! He will draw you out of the mess your choices have created, out of your self-directed life—indeed out of your very self! For that, and nothing less is the matter with us. We are willful sinners, we chase after autonomy, self-pleasing and self-determination. The problem with our free will is chiefly that we choose badly, repeatedly. We are absorbed with what we are doing, **and not with tying into what He is doing**. I respectfully suggest that this is an area where we are prone to slip up—sometimes because of spiritual blindness, sometimes due to traps and snares of the devil, and sometimes due to false gospels.

Let me be very plain **I began with the real, true gospel because** there are many, many *false gospels* in our world. For instance, paganism, occultism and, in house, there is the gospel of marital happiness. This moralistic gospel teaches that sex is blessed within marriage and nowhere else. And when gays "hear" this gospel, if they are thoughtful about it, they might conclude that the goal of the Christian life is heterosexuality, reproduction and family. (At least that is what I have on good testimony.) What do I say to this false gospel? I say that marriage is temporal, it is not a feature of our eternal bliss. In heaven there will only be the Lamb and the church. Some may find it difficult to assimilate—that something so important in this life, might only be preliminary for something better (a trial run? A discipline?) But holiness, a requirement for union with God, the end point of redemption, holiness and not happiness is the better gospel. Jesus came to save, to wash, to sanctify and present us blameless before the Father. And Jesus

returned to the Father to make all things ready for our arrival—***if it were not so, He would have told us.***

We know that holiness trumps both heterosexuality and homosexuality.

If we get that right, God will take care of everything else. He will make us *pleasing* to Himself whatever that takes. He wants us to be with Him, to know Him, to love and worship Him in holiness forever—He offers bliss for happiness, and entire satisfaction. He aims higher than we typically aspire. I have a friend who likes to play golf. He wants to talk about it, so I listen even though golf is not my thing. But here's what I do not do: I do not criticize him for failing to talk about what interests me when he is talking about golf. Jesus had a whole lot more to say about holiness than He did about our sexuality. I guess He believes that if we would focus on the main thing (HOLINESS), things that are more peripheral would fall in line. Thus I preach: **The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel and Jesus is Lord, Hero, Savior** and I leave the moral transformation up to him. He prefers that we be holy. *Let's get on board with that!*

Amen.