

PREACHING HISTORICAL TEXTS: EPILOGUE

Note that the sermon respects the Christocentric character of the text. The focus is not upon the "miraculous exorcism of demons," but upon "the gospel proclaimed by Christ" as this is confirmed through the miraculous exorcism of demons. That is no small difference! The focus of action is not first of all upon who was healed and how, though this is significant, but upon him who came to "the other side" and upon his purpose. A superficial reading of the text turns the incident into a story about the power of Jesus over against the despair and weakness of human endeavor--for we read that the demoniac "had often been bound with shackles and chains." But no one could "tame him" (v. 4). Or even worse, one might note the *isolation* of this demon-possessed man, and conclude therefrom that Jesus liberates us from the demonic power of loneliness. Clearly, such approaches demolish the uniqueness and powerful thrust of the text. Although Christ *acts* within exemplaristic sermons, though he might even be the primary *Actor*, nonetheless the Christocentric, i.e., redemptive-historical thrust of the passage is lost. As a result, we are left with an interesting story detached from the whole scope of the history of salvation.

But this is precisely what our sample sermon avoids. The events recorded in Mark 5:1-20 are not independent stories coming together to comprise a bigger independent story. Mark 5:1-20 is salvation history. It is part of a larger whole and constitutes a unity with the whole. The *land* in which all these events occur is important. Significant too is the history of the past events within that land. Also important are the beasts that graze the land--pigs, and the (Old) Covenant dietary laws that govern the inhabitants of the land. For the land is *Promised Land!* And one other vitally important element of the text is found in the last verse: "And he departed

and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled." The name of the region is hellenistic--Decapolis. Paganism in God's land! Thus in order to really understand Mark 5:1-20 in its height and depth one must see it within the unity of redemptive-history at large; and one must see too the progress or advancement or flow of that history. Our sample sermon satisfies on all counts.

All of which is to appreciate what Holwerda calls synthetic exegesis. Because the sample sermon is synthetic rather than atomistic in approach, the applicatory thrust of the passage is immediate, natural, and specifically unique. Nothing extraneous is needed in order to establish a link between the text and the reader. The application is plainly *scriptural* in its truest sense, coming from the text of Scripture. And note too it is fully *ethical* in implication without moralizing.

The redemptive-historical method holds great promise for the pulpit today because it allows the historical materials of the Bible to speak in their unique, God-intended role. That's just to say: it allows *God to speak* to his church today.