

March 1, 2015    “The Word Is Amazed!”    Mark 5:1-20

The word is amazed. They were all amazed. Why? Because these people in the area of the Sea of Galilee, below what we currently call the Golan Heights had never seen the man who had been demon possessed, who was usually out of his mind and violent,...they had never seen him just sitting there...at peace....dressed in clothes like a normal person...and in his right mind. They were amazed.

I was amazed! I wrote from Israel about the archeological discovery of this place. Of all things the nation of Israel was building a highway. The highway would eventually make a turn and take us up into and onto the Golan Heights. But down here, below, in the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 miles of construction they discovered a 6<sup>th</sup> century monastery. Because the government of Israel includes a Department of Antiquities, construction came to a halt. Archeologists were sent in. The highway was rerouted and the archeologists began very carefully, to dig. Below the level of the Byzantine monastery, they found the ruin of a church. What all of that signifies is that something important happened here involving the Christian movement. They resumed their dig, inch by inch. Twenty two feet down they found a grave yard. Tombs. And eventually as they unearthed the tombs they found a stone etched with a name and a single word.. “Legion saved.” That stone can be viewed in the National Museum of Israel in the city of Jerusalem. I was amazed.

Since my return from Israel I have done a little research of my own. I have been re reading Lee Strobel's book, “The Case For Christ.” Strobel's training was in Harvard Law, and journalism. He set about investigating whether or not there was a case to be made for Jesus, because his wife very suddenly became a Christian. He

2.

and his wife were agnostics leaning toward atheism when they were married. He knew his wife was wise, reasonable, and had a good mind. He was really asking the question, what did I miss? What's more he observed this was not just a matter of philosophical shift on her part. He writes that she began to change...changes in character, a new depth of integrity. She became more confident. He was surprised to discover at the same time, a sense of personal inadequacy. He began to investigate Jesus.

He wrote these words. “I wouldn't have been surprised to discover that archeologists who were Christians, interpreted the evidence as confirming Biblical accounts....that's why I was fascinated by the story of Sir William Ramsay of Oxford University in England. He was an atheist. He spent 25 years doing archeological digs trying to disprove the book of Acts which was written by Luke, writer of the gospel bearing that name. Instead of discrediting Luke's account, Ramsay's discoveries kept supporting it. Finally, he concluded that Luke was one of the most accurate historians to have ever written. Influenced by the archeological evidence Ramsay became a Christian.

Let me show you one example. In Acts 17:6 Luke tells us, “Some Jews who were jealous, rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out before the crowd. But when they did not find them they dragged Jason and some other brothers (Christians) before the city officials shouting: these men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house.” Now when you go into the Greek from which our New Testament documents have been translated, the term “city officials” is actually a title...politarchs. For some time New Testament scholars were even convinced Luke had

3.

made a mistake. Nowhere in Roman documents could they find the title “polytarchs”. Then archeologists found a first century arch (literally chunks of stone) bearing this inscription: “in the time of the politarchs.” And since then 35 chunks of stone have been found bearing references to the politarchs, making the point that Luke was extremely careful in his writing. And by the way that arch is on display in the British Museum in London England. I am amazed. Why? Because in all of the work I did in Seminary and then in my doctorate, I never once read about the contributions made by archeology that supports the accuracy of the Biblical documents in general, the New Testament documents in particular.

Back to the story of Legion, the man dwelling among the tombs, the man possessed of evil spirits, the man Jesus cleansed, meaning he cast out demons. This is a story about a tormented and twisted man. He was so violent the only way his own people could prevent his doing significant

harm to himself and his neighbours was to bind him with chains...and he tended to break free of chains. One encounter with Jesus, up the slopes of the hillsides that rise from the shores of the Sea of Galilee...and he becomes a man who sits calmly. Who dresses normally. Whose behaviour is so changed....he is clearly in his right mind. Normal.

And when Jesus starts to leave this formerly tormented man makes a request....please, please, please Jesus, let me go with you. Jesus says to the man, no, you cannot do that but here is your assignment. “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has shown you mercy.” And so the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. The Decapolis is an area of 10 small towns or cities...some of them were in Jordan, some of them were in Syria,

4.

some of them were in Israel.

I would sure like to know who spent the time scratching, etching the message into that piece of stone found among the tombs. “Legion saved.” I am just like the people who gazed on the wild man transformed into quiet normalcy. The word is amazed. How much the Lord did for him. How much the Lord has done for us!

Let us pray