

NEIGHBOR PEOPLE OF THE DECAPOLIS

Mark 7:31-37

Key Verse: 7:34

"He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!' (which means, 'Be opened!')."

Today's passage is a story about the neighbor people of the Decapolis. The neighbor people of the Decapolis brought a man who was deaf and mute. They begged Jesus' mercy to place his hand on the man to be healed. In this story we learn how a changed man in Jesus is influential and makes the world a paradise. In this passage we also learn the concept of our neighbor. May God give you peace when you study this passage.

First, a changed man's good influence (31-32). The story of the Decapolis people appears in Mark 5:1-20. This story is somewhat eerie and grotesque. But in that chapter we can learn Jesus' great shepherd heart. In order to rescue a man who had been possessed by 6,000 demons, Jesus ruined the pig industry of Gerasa. The story starts with a man who had been possessed by 6,000 demons and who lived among the tombs. In the past, he damaged and terrified others. When he lived in the tombs he was damaging himself by cutting his flesh with sharp stones. As soon as the man who was possessed by the demons saw Jesus and his twelve disciples, he cried out at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" (Mk 5:7). The man's personality was split into two. His inner man cried out, "Son of the Most High God" (5:7). And at the same time demons in him made him say, "Swear to God that you won't torture me" (Mk 5:7). The demons in him sensed they could not keep him. They wanted 2,000 pigs as a ransom price. Jesus gave them permission. Then the demons went into the pigs grazing nearby. As soon as the pigs were possessed by demons, they jumped into the lake and committed mass suicide.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus they found that several very unhappy things had happened. The man who had been a source of anguish to the townspeople

and the region of the Decapolis was sitting there with Jesus and his disciples like a most beloved prince. He was dressed in a three-piece suit and wore a necktie and he was in his right mind. They had hoped he would die in the tombs. But he was sitting by Jesus. Moreover, he looked like somebody with divine sagacity. The man became a new man in Jesus (2Co 5:17). They were very upset because the man looked proud, and because Jesus ruined their pig industry in order to save that man who had been demon possessed.

When Jesus went there first, the people of Gerasa in the Decapolis were business oriented. They valued 2,000 pigs more than a man who needed God's mercy. But this time, when Jesus and his twelve disciples arrived there, they were quite different. They had been changed. In the past, they regarded an unproductive person, like the man who had been possessed by 6,000 demons, as useless. But this time, when Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis, some people brought to him a man who was deaf and dumb, and they begged him to place his hand on the man (31,32). What a great change! Such business-oriented men--jungle men--to whom money was god, were changed until they were mindful of a deaf and dumb man and begged the Messiah's mercy would extend to him. What did the deaf and dumb man look like? When we carefully read the passage, he could not talk, but barely made some sound like an oinking pig.

Why have the people of the Decapolis changed? Obviously, when Jesus was forced by the people of Gerasa in the Decapolis to leave, the man who had been healed from demon possession wanted to follow Jesus. But Jesus told him, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (5:19). Obviously, the man accepted the mission of evangelizing the Decapolis, ten cities. Obviously, he worked hard. Wherever he went, he said, "You know, I was a demon-possessed man. I was beside myself. But by the grace of Jesus I was freed from the torment of the devil. Now I have the peace of God in my heart. Moreover, I have a mission from God. Jesus appointed me as the director of Decapolis UBF. I can only sing, 'Jesus is all the world to me: my life, my joy, my all'" (#367). Probably the people of the

Decapolis underestimated his testimony. But the man shared what God had done for him again and again and they were greatly influenced by the grace of God he had received. They wanted to know his secret of joy. This passage proves that because of his testimony the people of the Decapolis were gradually changed from business-oriented people to very kind neighbor people. It is amazing that one person's change is so influential. Jungle people turned out to be neighbor people.

There was a woman called Missionary Sarah Barry. Her change was remarkable. She was a college journalist and president of the student association at a woman's college. And she was the only daughter of parents in Benoit, MS. She repented of her human ambition. She decided to give her life to God. Soon she went to Korea when there was a war caused by pro-communism and pro-Americanism. At that time, Korean people were in many ways as miserable as present Russians. In order to teach the Bible to Korean young people she had to give up her marriage. She suffered together with her Korean sheep. God has used her change and influence very preciously. Because of her good influence many people gave up their good careers and achievements and spread to 78 countries as missionaries. Let me tell you another story. A woman Ph.D. was cleaning the podium and entrance to the Christmas worship service auditorium. It was 1992. The manager of the auditorium came to know that she was not a cleaning woman but a Ph.D. The manager was amazed by her humble servanthship and said, "Wow, that doctor is very beautiful." There is a woman medical doctor. She has a husband and two sons. She takes care of her family. She works at the hospital as a medical doctor. But she has never lost her peace of mind or missed regular Bible study for the last 10 years.

Second, good neighbor people. Verses 31 and 32 say, "Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man." In the past, the people of the Decapolis didn't care about their neighbors. To them, pigs were very important. They made many sausages and sold them to the secular people and made a huge amount of money. From early morning to late night they said, "pig, pig,

pig." Probably the people bragged about how many pigs they had instead of bragging about how many sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters they had.

But this time, some people brought to Jesus a person who was deaf and dumb. They begged Jesus to place his hand on the man. Here we see that they were changed from business-oriented people to good neighbors. In the Bible, the concept of neighbor is very important. The Bible teaches us that the man who lives next door is not necessarily our neighbor. Our neighbor is the one who needs God's mercy. There is a historically famous parable about the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). In this parable, Jesus teaches the concept of a good neighbor. In this parable, three people appear. The first one was a priest who conducted ceremonial rituals, singing and humming, making gestures. On the way to Jericho, the priest saw a man who was badly wounded and abandoned. The priest pretended that he had not seen anything and passed by on the other side. Next, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side, covering his eyes and nose with his robes. But the Gentile Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was. He saw him. He took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He put the man on his own donkey and took him to the inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have." In the course of helping the wounded man, maybe the Samaritan lost the chance of making a contract with Jericho city hall. Here Jesus asked, "Who is his neighbor?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37).

There is also a beautiful story about neighborliness between boy David and Jonathan. King Saul was a king. But he became very jealous of boy David because women praised David more than the king himself (1Sa 18:7-8). After this event, King Saul decided to destroy boy David. But Jonathan, King Saul's son, loved David and made an oath that he would save his life from his father's hand. After making a vow, they kissed each other and wept together--but David wept the most (1Sa 20:41,42). When David was branded as a political criminal, Jonathan was a good neighbor to Da-

vid. At the news of Jonathan's death at war, David grieved for his brother Jonathan. 2 Samuel 1:26 says, "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women."

To be a good neighbor is not doing a favor. We must know that it is precisely the command of God. Leviticus 19:18 says, "but love your neighbor as yourself." James 2:8 says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Romans 13:9 says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." John 13:34 says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Here we must hear the voice of God, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Who are Americans' neighbors? In view of history, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ first came to Israel as God had promised and prophesied. Second, the gospel of Jesus Christ arrived in the Roman Empire, through which the gospel of Jesus Christ had spread all over the world. Third, the gospel of Jesus came across to America, mostly from England. Most people who came across to America did not like the severe persecution of the liturgical Anglican church. The Anglican church persecuted John Bunyan and put him in prison simply because he preached the gospel of Jesus freely. But his imprisonment was not in vain. In prison, John Bunyan wrote "Pilgrim's Progress," the best seller next to the Bible. The Anglican church compromised with the queen's power and authority and mercilessly persecuted so many pious Christians whose loyalty was in God. But the persecution was not in vain. Many English people came across to the new land with the simple desire to worship God freely. When they came first, 70% of them died because of hunger and diseases. Still many were pouring into America. Their master passion was to worship God. Through them, "In God we trust," was forged as a tacit national motto. "In God we trust" became the foundation of their faith and heritage. When we scrutinize American history, it is more than sure that God established this country as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world. Therefore, broadly speaking, America's neighbors are all peoples of all nations. In short, God called America as a shepherd nation for the whole world in this generation.

Who are our immediate neighbors? They are those who are in need

of God's mercy. They are those under the torment of the devil. We must make the lost souls our neighbors and give them the word of life through one-to-one Bible study.

God used America as a good neighbor. Until 1950 the U.S. government invited students who were leadership material from many countries. The U.S. government gave foreign students full scholarships plus family finances and tutors. In this way, the U.S. government enlightened leaders of so many countries. We must pray that the U.S. should not discontinue being a good neighbor nation to all other nations until the time our Lord Jesus comes again.

Third, Jesus was moved by the Gentile people of the Decapolis (33-37). Let's come back to the Bible passage. Once people of the Decapolis were very money oriented and they valued pigs more than men. But when they heard the testimony of the man about God's grace, they were changed. Their change was remarkable. They valued a crippled man more than a pig industry. Some of them brought the deaf and dumb man and begged Jesus, "Please, Jesus, merciful Jesus, Son of God Jesus, we kneel down like this and beg you, please heal this deaf and dumb man. Then we will give you whatever you want." One of them must have said, "I will give you even my youngest daughter." That might be a white lie. Anyway they were people who knew the meaning of being a good neighbor.

Jesus was greatly moved by their good neighborliness. Jesus took him aside, away from the crowd. Jesus put his fingers into this man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven with a deep sigh and said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

Today we studied about how one man's change in Jesus is greatly influential. One crazy man's change changed the region of the Decapolis from a pig factory to a paradise. We also learn who is our neighbor. Our neighbor is God's lost sheep. We must care for them through one-to-one Bible study. May God richly bless you and use you as a good neighbor.