

THE STRANGE COMMANDS OF JESUS
THE STRANGE COMMANDS OF JESUS (MARK 5:43; 7:36; 8:26)

Personal testimony has always been the spearhead of Christian influence. The church was established upon earth because men and women witnessed about the Savior. "Go home and tell" has been the duty of every Christian. It seems strange, therefore, to discover occasions when the Lord commanded His followers to remain silent. There must have been reasons why He instructed the disciples to refrain from spreading the good news of the Gospel.

Jairus, the Ruler of the Synagogue... How Considerate
(Mark 5:38-43)

"And Jesus charged them straitly that no man should know it." The ruler of the synagogue was confronted by two problems. (1) His daughter was dying, and only Jesus of Nazareth could prevent that tragedy. If the anxious father sought the help of the Savior, serious repercussions would follow. As a leader of the religious community, he had probably warned his people of the dangers of listening to Jesus, Who was believed to be a blasphemer. Jainis was a guardian of the faith, and any man who claimed equality with Jehovah was a menace to the doctrines of the fathers. (2) If he did not seek the assistance of Jesus, he would attend the funeral of his child. If he asked Christ to help, he would become the object of derision and scorn, and would be remembered as a hypocrite who did what he had previously condemned.

That anxious parent was aware of the watchful eyes of his neighbors, but the life of his daughter was at stake. Despair and pride fought within his soul. Should he permit his girl or his pride to die? That was the most momentous decision he would ever make, but the end was never in doubt. "And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him he fell at his feet. And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live." The Lord could have healed the child instantly, but

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instead He "went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him . . ." (Mark 5:24).

An unexpected delay along the street and the depressing news that the girl had died increased the desperation of the worried ruler. The Lord said: "Be not afraid: only believe." Slowly, they walked along the crowded street, but even before they arrived, the wailing of the professional mourners could be heard. Jesus asked: "Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn"

Their pseudo-grief was replaced by sneering laughter, the Teacher was mad! The Lord made them leave the room, and what followed beggared description. The child was restored to life, and a grateful ruler hardly knew how to thank his Benefactor.

The chamber of gloom became a place of gladness, but even the adoring Jairus was surprised when Jesus ". . . charged them straitly that no man should know it. The Amplified New Testament renders the text: "He strictly charged them. He commanded them." The Lord was very firm in His remarks. Under no circumstances were they to broadcast the news of the daughter's miraculous recovery. The Savior had reasons for issuing His command.

Was He surrounding Jairus with loving kindness? Angry Jews would criticize the action of their leader, and try to remove him from his position of authority within the community.

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Instead of the miracle bringing glory to God, it could become the center of a continuing controversy, in which even the daughter might be threatened. At a later time when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the anger of the Lord's enemies was unprecedented. John wrote: "Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus" (John 12:9-11).

The Deaf Man with an Impediment... How Challenging
(Mark 7:32-36)

"And they bring unto him one that was deaf and had an

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impediment in his speech; and they beseech him (Jesus) to put his hand upon him." This was the only miracle of its type mentioned in the scripture. Modern science has created techniques where, in special clinics, deaf people are taught to speak with amazing clarity. When Jesus was upon the earth such facilities were unknown. Deaf people had no way by which to recognize and reproduce sounds, and consequently their speech was indistinct and confusing. Sensitive persons were embarrassed by such an infirmity and probably had this man been left alone, he would never have met the Savior. That he was brought to Christ by his friends or neighbors suggests they cared for him. It was difficult to communicate with, or listen to, the afflicted man. He was deaf, and his speech was extremely difficult to understand.

Such people are not unknown in our generation. John Bunyan, in his book *The Pilgrim's Progress*, described a character whose name was Mr. Talkative. He was a great speaker but it was difficult to listen for the man was shallow and unreliable. He could converse on any subject suitable to the company he kept, and could be devout or blatantly irreligious, as the occasion demanded. The fellow could be equally at home in a bar or a church. It was difficult to correct his behavior, for the man was deaf to all entreaties and blind regarding his need for improvement. Such folk advertise their virtue, and at the same time, remain unacceptable to God. It is difficult to impress them with the importance of the Gospel for they resemble the self-righteous Pharisee.

Mark said Jesus "took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, ... Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain." It was significant that first the Lord gave hearing. Unless a man can hear the voice of God, his testimony will be useless. Understanding precedes confession in the soul-transforming work of the Almighty. Then the Lord "charged (commanded) them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; And were beyond measure

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astonished, saying, He hath done all things well; he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak" (Mark 7:36-37).

Their disobedience might be pardoned, for the excitement of the onlookers was intense. Nevertheless, the Lord had reasons for commanding them to refrain from speaking of what they had witnessed. This event happened between the beginning and the middle of Christ's ministry. Much work had still to be

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completed, and the Savior was trying to avoid unnecessary problems. Many people desired to make Him their king, but that would have been insurrection against the Romans. The royalist mob would have been overwhelmed by military power, and Palestine would have been a battlefield. The nation could have been divided by civil war, and the purpose of Christ's coming to earth would have been thwarted.

His attitude revealed He was not an agitator seeking to cause strife. His pathway in life led to a Cross, through which He would win an army of redeemed men and women whose endeavors would subjugate the world. Solomon wrote about "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Eccl. 3:7). Evidently the Savior was aware of the truth enunciated by the king of Israel.

The Blind Man at Bethsaida... Condemning (Mark 8:22-26)

"And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him... And he looked up and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he (Jesus) put his hands again upon his eyes: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. And Jesus sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town."

Bethsaida was one of the nine towns situated at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. It was a fishing community, but the influx of thousands of people who came to see Jesus brought to them unprecedented prosperity. Thousands of men and women desired to see and hear the new Teacher, and their money was a blessing to the local economy. Probably the citizens became more interested in their increasing profits than in the miracles performed by Jesus. Unlike the Gadarenes who asked the Lord

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to leave their shores, the people of Bethsaida earnestly desired Him to stay. His presence guaranteed increasing trade. They thought only of larger boats, bigger fishing nets, and luxuries of every form. They would not have appreciated the words of Jesus: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Man. 16:26).

The people of Bethsaida exploited the situation to increase their wealth, and as the situation deteriorated, the Savior issued one of His sternest warnings. woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matt. 11:21). The large crowds brought to the area the greatest business boom in the history of the community, but, unfortunately, love for increasing wealth prevented the people from obtaining treasures more to be desired than gold.

The exact location of Bethsaida has never been discovered, but apparently it was a small village close to Capernaum. Nearby Jesus fed the 5,000 (Luke 9:10-17). It was also the home of Philip (John 12:21). It seems incredible that citizens who had seen so much could be unresponsive to the Lord's message. Jesus commanded the man not to return to Bethsaida, and refrain from witnessing to its people. This was an indictment suggesting that men and women may be very near to the kingdom of God, and yet remain outside.

The Men from the Mountain ... How Constrained (Mark 9:9)

"And as they (the disciples) came down from the mountain, he (Jesus) charged them that they should tell no man what

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things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead." The disciples were probably confused when they received this command from their Master. They had witnessed amazing things on the Mount of Transfiguration; had seen and heard Moses and Elijah conversing with the Lord; and had listened to the voice of Jehovah endorsing the character and message of Jesus. They were thrilled and could hardly wait to describe their experience to the disciples who had remained in the valley.

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Perhaps the others would not believe. Moses and Elijah had returned to encourage Jesus (Luke 9:30-31). Probably Peter and John were already anticipating the joy of describing the scene in the mount; their next sermons would be sensational!

The Sadducees who did not believe in life beyond the grave would be confounded by the evidence to be supplied. The Savior read their thoughts, and forbade their revealing what had happened during the night. The men stared at their Master, hardly believing what He had said. How could they possibly remain silent when they had so much to tell?

Their emotions were clearly visible when Jesus said: "Do not tell them now, but wait until after I shall have risen from the dead. Then you can tell them everything you know." Why could they not give their testimony prior to His death and resurrection?

(1) To Protect unity. Only three disciples witnessed the transfiguration of Christ; the others remained in the valley overnight. Perhaps they had been entertained by people friendly to Christ, and the opportunity for comfort and food was too good to be refused. If those men heard how Moses and Elias appeared to speak with Jesus, and how the voice of God was heard saying: "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye him," they might have been upset because they had not seen the unique revelation. All kinds of reasons could have been found for blaming Christ and the three disciples who had not called their brethren. Strife could have divided the party, and jealousy would have ruined the fellowship essential to the success of their mission. David was correct when he said: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.... For there the LORD commanded the blessing" (Ps. 133:1-3).

(2) To Prevent Arguments. The Sadducees did not believe in life beyond the grave, and fiercely resisted any doctrine which suggested they were mistaken. The appearance of Moses and Elijah who spoke with the Lord concerning His death, would have contradicted everything taught by the leaders of that sect. Had Peter, James and John commenced explaining what had taken place in the mountain, their opponents would have denied

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the account, and accused the preachers of insanity. The whole episode could have created a religious civil war. There would have been arguments at every meeting where the disciples preached, and their influence for Christ and His kingdom would have been destroyed. Few, if any people, would have believed the report, and when nine of the disciples admitted they had no proof of what was being said, Peter, James and John would have appeared to be liars! It was significant that Jesus said they could witness after the Resurrection, when the focus of attention would be upon Himself, and not on the ancient saints. The Christians would be able to cite that event as evidence of Christ's death and resurrection, for Moses and Elijah had spoken about the Lord's "decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem"

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(Luke 9:30-31).

(3) To Protect Their Influence. Jesus knew that after His ascension to heaven, the Holy Spirit would anoint the disciples with power needed for the evangelizing of the world. Evidently, He did not wish their mission to be ruined before it commenced! News spreads quickly and if those men had been accused of lying, preconceived ideas would have warped the minds of the people destined to hear the Gospel. By maintaining silence until after the resurrection of the Lord, the Holy Spirit would be able to prepare them for the stupendous task of world evangelism.

Luke's account of the deliverance of the maniac of Gadara provides a striking contrast to other miracles. "Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about, besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear, and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away saying: Return so thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him" (Luke 8:37-39, italics mine). The people at Gadara were isolated from the rest of the nation, and it was unlikely their reactions would disturb the rest of the country. The fact that Christ commissioned the man to testify revealed God's mercy

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is boundless. Although the citizens had requested the Lord to leave their locality, God's love for them remained unchanged.

The disciples were told to refrain from telling their story until the Lord had triumphed over death. That restriction has long since been removed. It was replaced by the Savior's command: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20). Professing Christians who never speak about the Lord are disobedient, useless and miserable. They will never hear God saying: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

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