

Mark 5:1-20
July 9, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Why do you think most Christians rarely talk about the realities of the spiritual realm? Is it ignorance? Is it just uncomfortable? What do you think? [Let people engage]

Transition: For Jews, tombs were an unclean place. They were not allowed to touch bodies. Demons drove these people (Matthew 8:28 mentions two of them) to live in this horrific place. Demons seem to take delight in causing misery and torment to their hosts. Satan has always appeared as an angel of light. He often makes big promises about the fun and pleasure people can have if they give in to his temptations, but such people are always disappointed and find themselves trapped and enslaved instead. Jesus is met by a demon-possessed man who runs to Him as soon as he sees Him. Let's see how Jesus deals with evil spirits driving this man named Legion. Let's begin.

BOOK:

The Healing of a Demon-possessed Man

⁵ They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. ² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil (unclean) spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. ⁷ He shouted 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!" ⁸ For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

⁹ Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." ¹⁰ And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

¹¹ A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. ¹² The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." ¹³ He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

¹⁴ Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. ¹⁵ When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. ¹⁷ Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. ¹⁹ Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the

Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”²⁰ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis (the ten cities) how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We cannot hope to win the spiritual warfare against Satan and his demons by our own power. He is stronger than we are and smarter than we are. If we rely on ourselves, we will lose. We have to rely on the Lord who is stronger than He is. How can we do this? We must be alert to temptations and always turn to the Lord through prayer and the Word. Follow the principles in God's Word and pray for His help.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 125-126). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.*

Victory over Demons (Mark 5:1–20)

When Jesus and the disciples landed on the other side, they encountered two demoniacs, one of whom was especially vocal (see Matt. 8:28). This entire scene seems very unreal to us who live in so-called “modern civilization,” but it would not be unreal on many mission fields. In fact, some Bible teachers believe that demon possession is becoming even more prevalent in today’s “modern society.”

We see in this scene three different forces at work: Satan, society, and the Savior. These same three forces are still at work in our world, trying to control the lives of people.

First, we see what *Satan* can do to people. Satan is a thief whose ultimate purpose is to destroy (John 10:10; and see Rev. 9:11). We are not told how the demons entered these men and took control, but possibly it was the result of their yielding to sin. Demons are “unclean spirits” and can easily get a foothold in the lives of people who cultivate sinful practices.

Because they yielded to Satan, the thief, these two men lost everything! They lost their homes and the fellowship of their families and friends. They lost their decency as they ran around in the tombs naked. They lost their self-control and lived like wild animals, screaming, cutting themselves, and frightening the citizens. They lost their peace and their purpose for living, and they would have remained in that plight had Jesus not come through a storm to rescue them.

Never underestimate the destructive power of Satan. He is our enemy and would destroy all of us if he could. Like a roaring lion, he seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8–9). It is Satan who is at work in the lives of unbelievers, making them “children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:1–3). The two men in the Gerasene graveyard were no doubt extreme examples of what Satan can do to people, but what they reveal is enough to make us want to resist Satan and have nothing to do with him.

The second force at work on these men was *society*, but society was not able to accomplish very much. About all that society can do for problem people is to isolate them, put them under guard and, if necessary, bind them (Luke 8:29). Often these men had been chained, but the demons had given them strength to break the chains. Even the attempts to tame these men had failed. With all of its wonderful scientific achievements, society still cannot cope with the problems caused by Satan and sin. While we thank God that society does offer a limited amount of restraint and protection, we must confess that society cannot permanently solve these problems and deliver Satan’s terrorized victims.

This brings us to the third force, that of *the Savior*. What did Jesus Christ do for these men? To begin with, He graciously came to them in love, and even went through a storm to do it. Some think that the storm itself may have been satanic in origin, since Jesus used the same words to calm the sea as He did to cast out demons (compare Mark 1:25 and 4:39). Perhaps Satan was trying to destroy Jesus, or at least prevent Him from coming to the men who needed Him. But nothing could stop the Lord from coming to that graveyard and bringing deliverance to those men.

Not only did Jesus come to them, but He spoke to them and permitted them to speak to Him. The citizens of that area avoided the two demoniacs, but Jesus treated them with love and respect. He came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

It is interesting to note that, as the demons spoke through the man, they confessed what they really believed. Demons have faith and even tremble because of what they believe (James 2:19); but neither their faith nor their fear can save them. Demons believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He has authority over them. They believe in the reality of judgment and that one day they will be cast into hell (see Matt. 8:29). This is more than many religious people believe today!

Nowhere does the Bible explain either the psychology or the physiology of demon possession. The man who spoke to Jesus was under the control of *a legion* of demons, and a Roman legion could consist of as many as 6,000 men! It is frightening to think of the horrors this man experienced day and night as thousands of unclean spirits tormented him. No doubt the other demonized man experienced his share of agony too.

Satan tried to destroy these men, but Jesus came to deliver them. By the power of His Word, He cast out the demons and set the men free. Demons even believe in prayer, for they begged Jesus not to send them into the abyss, the place of torment (Mark 5:7; Luke 8:31). It is encouraging to note that the demons did not know what Jesus planned to do. This suggests that Satan can know God's plans only if God reveals them. In fact, there is no evidence in Scripture that Satan can read the mind of a believer, let alone the mind of God.

Mark 5 tells of three requests: the demons requested that Jesus send them into the pigs (Mark 5:12); the citizens requested that Jesus leave the area (Mark 5:17); and one of the former demoniacs requested that Jesus allow him to follow Him (Mark 5:18). Our Lord granted the first two requests but not the third one.

Did Jesus have the right to destroy 2,000 pigs and possibly put their owners out of business? If these men were Jews, then they had no right to be raising and selling unclean pigs anyway. However, this was Gentile territory, so the owners were probably Gentiles.

Certainly, Jesus was free to send the demons wherever He desired—into the abyss, into the swine, or to any other place that He chose. Then why send them into the swine? For one thing, by doing it that way, Jesus gave proof to all the spectators that a miracle of deliverance had really taken place. The destruction of the pigs also gave assurance to the two men that the unclean spirits were actually gone. But more than anything else, the drowning of the 2,000 swine was a vivid object lesson to this Christ-rejecting crowd that, to Satan, a pig is as good as a man! In fact, Satan will make a man into a pig! The Lord was warning the citizens against the powers of sin and Satan. It was a dramatic sermon before their very eyes: "The wages of sin is death!"

The swineherds did not want to be blamed for the loss of the pigs, so they immediately ran to tell the owners what had happened. When the owners arrived at the scene, they were afraid as they beheld the dramatic changes that had taken place in the two men. Instead of running around naked, the men were clothed, seated, and in their right minds. They were new creatures! (2 Cor. 5:17)

Why would the owners ask Jesus to leave? Why not ask Him to stay and perform similar cures for others who were also in need? The owners had one main interest—business—and they were afraid that if Jesus remained any longer, He would do even more "damage" to the local economy! Our Lord does not stay where He is not wanted, so He left. What an opportunity these people missed!

Why did Jesus not permit the healed demoniac to follow Him? The man's request was certainly motivated by love for the Lord Jesus, and what a testimony he had! But Jesus knew that the man's place was in his own home, with his loved ones, where he could bear witness to the savior. After all, effective Christian living must begin at home where people know us the best. If

we honor God there, then we can consider offering ourselves for service elsewhere. This man became one of the earliest missionaries to the Gentiles. Jesus had to leave, but the man remained and bore faithful witness to the grace and power of Jesus Christ. We trust that many of those Gentiles believed on the Savior through his witness.

Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 122-124) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

2. THE CURE OF THE GERASENE DEMONIAK (5:1–20) (Matt. 8:28–34; Luke 8:26–39)

a. *A description of the demoniac (5:1–5)*

5:1. Jesus and His disciples **went** to the east side of **the lake** (Sea of Galilee) into **the region of the Gerasenes**. Greek manuscripts are divided on the precise location involved, citing three names: Gadarenes (Matt. 8:28), Gergesenes (from Origen), and Gerasenes. (See comments on Luke 8:26). Reliable evidence favors the name Gerasenes which probably referred to the small town Gersa (modern Khersa) located on the lake's eastern shore. Most of its inhabitants were Gentiles (cf. Mark 5:11, 19).

5:2–5. The vivid details of this whole account reflect both an eyewitness report and the report of townspeople who had long been familiar with this demoniac. As soon as (*euthys*; cf. 1:10) **Jesus got out of the boat**, He encountered **a man with an evil spirit** (cf. 5:8, 13 with 1:23) **from** (*ek*, “out of”) **the tombs**. These were probably cavelike rooms cut into the rocks of nearby hills which served as tombs and sometimes as haunts for demented people. Matthew mentioned demoniacs, whereas Mark and Luke focused attention on one, probably the worst case.

Mark 5:3–5 elaborately describes his pathetic condition. He **lived in the tombs** (an outcast); he was uncontrollable for **no one could ... subdue** (from *damazō*, “to tame a wild animal”) **him**, not even with fetters for his feet or **a chain** for his hands. He went about **night and day** shrieking wildly and cutting **himself with sharp stones**, perhaps in a demonic form of worship.

Such behavior shows that demon possession is not mere sickness or insanity but a desperate satanic attempt to distort and destroy God's image in man (cf. TDNT, “*daimōn*,” 2:18–19).

b. *The command to the demon (5:6–10)*

5:6–7. The brief statement of Jesus' encounter with the demoniac (v. 2) is now related in more detail. Three things indicate that the demon possessing the man was fully aware of Jesus' divine origin and superior power: he knelt before **Him** (in homage, not worship); he used Jesus' divine name in an attempt to gain control over Him (cf. 1:24); and he brazenly appealed to **Jesus** not to punish him. The words, **Most High God**, were used in the Old Testament, often by Gentiles, to refer to the superiority of the true God of Israel over all man-made gods (cf. Gen. 14:18–24; Num. 24:16; Isa. 14:14; Dan. 3:26; 4:2; cf. comments on Mark 1:23–24).

The plea, **Swear to God**, was used in exorcisms and should be rendered, “I implore you by (I appeal to) God.” The demon did not want Jesus to **torture** him by sending him to his final punishment then (cf. 1:24; Matt. 8:29; Luke 8:31).

5:8. This verse is a brief explanatory (*gar*, **for**) comment by Mark (cf. 6:52). **Jesus was** commanding **him**, the demon, to leave the **man**. Throughout this section there is fluctuation between the personality of the man and the demon who possessed him.

5:9–10. These verses resume the conversation of verse 7. The demon said through the man, **My name is Legion for we are many**. Many evil powers controlled this man and subjected him to intense oppression. They tormented him as one combined force under the leadership of one demon, their spokesman. This accounts for the alternating singular (“my”) and plural (“we”) pronouns. Repeatedly the leading demon **begged Jesus** earnestly **not to send them out of the area** (lit., “region”; cf. v. 1) into a lonely exile where they could not torment people.

The Latin word “Legion,” commonly known in Palestine, denoted a Roman army regiment of about 6,000 soldiers, though it probably also meant a very large number (cf. v. 15). To people under Roman domination the word no doubt suggested great strength and oppression.

c. The loss of the herd of pigs (5:11–13)

5:11. The Jews considered **pigs** “unclean” animals (cf. Lev. 11:7). But the farmers on the east side of the Sea of Galilee with its predominantly Gentile population raised pigs for the meat markets in the Decapolis, “the 10 cities” of that region (cf. Mark 5:20).

5:12–13. **The demons** (cf. v. 9) specifically **begged Jesus** to **send them among** (*eis* here suggests movement toward) **the pigs** so that they might **go into them** as their new hosts. They knew they were subject to Jesus’ command, and in a desperate attempt to avoid being consigned to a disembodied state until final judgment, they made this appeal.

Jesus **gave them permission** to do so. When the demons left the man and entered **the pigs, the whole herd, about 2,000 in number, stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned** (lit., “one after another they drowned themselves”). The “sea” perhaps symbolized the satanic realm.

d. The plea of the townspeople (5:14–17)

5:14–15. The herdsmen **tending the pigs** fled in fear **and reported this** startling event **in the town** (probably Gersa; cf. v. 1) **and the surrounding countryside**. The report was so unbelievable that many **people went** to investigate the incident for themselves. **They saw the** former demoniac **sitting there, dressed** (cf. Luke 8:27) **and in his right mind**, rational and self-controlled (contrast Mark 5:3–5). So complete was the transformation that the townspeople **were afraid** (awed; cf. 4:41).

5:16–17. The herdsmen (and perhaps the disciples) rehearsed **what had happened to the ... man—and to the pigs**, a detail Mark emphasized to show that this economic loss (not the man) was the people’s major concern. As a result the townspeople **began urging Jesus to leave**. Apparently they feared further losses if He stayed. There is no record that He ever returned to that area.

e. The request of the restored man (5:18–20)

5:18–20. In contrast with the local inhabitants (cf. v. 17), **the man who had been demon-possessed** was begging (*parekalei*, the same word used by the demon, v. 10) **to go with Jesus**. Jesus’ miracles repelled some (vv. 15–17) and attracted others (vv. 18–20).

The words, “to go with Him” (lit., “in order that he might be with Him”), recall a similar clause in 3:14 that describes one of the purposes for which Jesus called the Twelve. It is in this sense that Jesus refused the man’s request.

Jesus told him to go to his **home** (immediate family) and **family** (lit., “to yours,” your own people) from whom he had been estranged **and report to them** all that **the Lord**, the Most High God (cf. 5:7; Luke 8:39) had **done for him and how He** had shown **mercy on him**. **The man**

obeyed **and began to** proclaim (cf. Mark 1:4, 14) **in the Decapolis** (a league of 10 Gr. cities all but one east of the Jordan) the wonderful things **Jesus** (cf. “Lord,” 5:19) **had done for him**. Those who heard him **were amazed** (*ethaumazon*, cf. “astonished”; 6:6a; 12:17; 15:5, 44).

Since this man was a Gentile and his preaching activity was confined to a Gentile area where Jesus was not welcome, Jesus did not give His usual injunction to silence (cf. 1:44; 5:43; 7:36).

Church, C.L. (1998). Mark In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 433). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

LIFE OUT OF CONTROL (5:1–20)

The Gerasene demoniac pictures the horror of a life out of control: isolation, violence, painful cries, self-destructive behavior, and powerlessness of neighbors to intervene or heal. Only Jesus could confront the oppressive forces and leave him “sitting ... dressed and in his right mind.” A Roman legion consisted of between four thousand and six thousand men. Again, the crowd’s fear comes at the end (see 4:40–41). They feared the power at work in Jesus more than the demonic forces that had worked in their neighbor. They valued swine more than another human being.

Though Jesus denied the man’s request to be with Him (see 3:14), Jesus commissioned the Gerasene to fulfill another disciple task: to tell how much the Lord had done for him.

Leavell, L.P. (1972). Mark. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (p. 622). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The passage—Turning from teaching by parable, Jesus began to teach by miracle. In 4:35–41 Jesus established himself as Lord over nature. In withdrawing from the multitude, he and the disciples put out onto the Sea of Galilee. This ordinarily placid body of water was subject to violent storms. The minute details in 4:38 and following undoubtedly came from an eyewitness. Jesus commanded the storm to “be muzzled,” using a verb form that implied immediate action, proclaiming the miraculous element of his word. This was not a gradual diminution of the wind and waves, but immediate calm. The disciples were originally frightened by the storm, but 4:41 points out their fear in the presence of One who has power over the storm.

In 5:1–20 Jesus showed himself to be Lord over demons. In this incident it is apparent that demon possession is marked by attempted suicide, insanity, and self-destruction. The text pictures Jesus as a believer in the presence and power of demons. To hold otherwise is to question the integrity of the Gospel writer and place the entire Gospel account in question.

Whatever one may choose to believe about demons, the text is quite clear that Jesus had authority over them. Whoever or whatever they might be, this was a malady that kept men from being whole and Jesus could restore possessed men to wholeness. Among the problems this miracle raises is that of the destruction of property. This may well be an underscoring of the supreme value of human personality. Humans are more important than institutions like the sabbath and they are of vastly greater worth than material possessions.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 5:1-20. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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