

From the Grip of the Destroyer to the Grace of the Deliverer

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Mark 5:1-20

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea. The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. Mark 5:1–20

I don't know about you, but when I read a story like this I am sometimes left wondering why the Holy Spirit chose to include a record of such events in the gospel narratives. This story appears in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39). We know that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16), so there must be great value in this text for us this morning. I am persuaded that this text is intended to leave us awestruck as we are brought face to face with the deity, majesty, power, and authority of Jesus Christ.

These verses display Jesus' power over chaos. Jesus has just demonstrated His power to calm an incredibly violent storm at sea in Mark 4:25-41 and now we will see that He has the power to calm an equally violent storm that is raging inside of a demonized Gerasene man. Satan is Hell bent on destruction. John tells us concerning Satan, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly." Jesus Christ is our great victor; He triumphs over every evil. He is our savior and redeemer. Our text this morning will close with Jesus sending out a once demon possessed man to tell his family and friends "how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has shown mercy on you (Mark 5:19).

A WORD OF CAUTION CONCERNING EXTREMES

There are two extremes that give Satan great delight. There are those who disbelieve all things demonic not giving credence to the powers of darkness. At the same time there are those who swing to the other side of the pendulum and take up an unhealthy, inordinate fascination and interest in Satan and his demons. C.S. Lewis, in His book *Screwtape Letters*, rightly observed:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail the materialist and magician with the same delight.¹

I briefly mentioned last week that the language Jesus as used to rebuke the wind and waves in chapter 4 verse 39 is most interesting. As the terrified disciples woke Jesus, who was sleeping in the stern of the wind-tossed boat, and charged Him with not being concerned for their lives, Mark writes, "He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." The word "rebuked" is the same word that Jesus used in (1:25) when He rebuked the man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue in Capernaum. Likewise, the Greek word translated "Peace" (literally hush) refers to an involuntary inability to speak and the word "Be still" literally means to "Be muzzled". This is a bit technical, but both of those verbs occur in the second person singular, as though Jesus were addressing a person and not just the natural elements of wind and waves. Jesus' language here is more appropriate of demonic forces than of inanimate nature. While verse 39 undoubtedly reveals Jesus' authority over the natural order, more than that it reveals Jesus as the Strong Man who vanquishes Satan. Satan would love to sink the ship carrying God's people and the captain of their salvation – but just as the natural elements submit to Jesus' authority, so do Satan and the demons.²

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942), 29.

² James R. Edwards, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 150.

Do you remember the great promise of Genesis 3:15? Immediately following Adam and Eve's sin in the garden, God pronounces the curse. But it's interesting to note that the effects of the curse are first directed to the serpent (Satan) and then to Adam and Eve. What did God say to the serpent in verse 15? He said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." So there is both a devastating curse and a glorious promise revealed in Genesis 3. The curse is death. But the promise is that the coming Messiah would crush the head of Satan, redeem those under the curse by dying as a substitutionary sacrifice in their place, thus giving them new life. John, in the first of his three letters, tells us, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" 1 John 3:8. What we see in our text this morning is a validation of Jesus' Messianism and a foretaste of our Redeemer's ultimate victory over Satan (sin and death). With that context, let's look at the text.

IN THE GRIP OF THE DESTROYER

Look again at the first five verses. Mark writes, "They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones."

Jesus and His disciples have just arrived on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. And no sooner do they get their boat situated then they are confronted with a most interesting individual. A man who had come out from the tombs with an unclean spirit immediately meets them. Matthew's account of this story tells us that there are actually two men (Matthew 8:28), but Mark only writes about one of them. This is likely because the one of the men is the key figure of the story and Mark zeros in or focuses in on him.

Look at how Mark describes this man. He says that he dwelt among the tombs – cut off from any human contact. He was either exiled by the townspeople or in his madness he voluntarily resigned himself to the tombs (the dead). It's interesting to note that all society can do for a problem person is to isolate them. For all of our wonderful scientific and medical achievements, we still can't manage the problems caused by Satan and sin. Fearful of this madman as you can imagine, people had tried to bind him up with shackles and chains, but the text says that that was a futile endeavor. He was able to wrench the chains apart and break the shackles into pieces. Under the influence of the demons, this man had super-human strength – strength that was beyond that of a normal person. Mark says that he was unable to be subdued, a description more fitting of a ferocious animal than a human being.

The Greek word *damazo* translated “subdue” is probably better translated “tame”. Elsewhere it was used to describe the taming of a wild animal or a vicious beast. James uses the same word *damazo* when he says, “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison” James 3:7–8.

Look at this man’s actions. Mark says, “Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones” Mark 5:5. He is so restless that he relentlessly wanders about. You could probably hear him from time to time yelling and screaming. He was always crying out. That verb literally means to mean to croak with inarticulate shrieks. And not only does he wander aimlessly and indiscernibly cry out, but he cuts himself with stones. This poor, naked man was a mass of bleeding lacerations, scabs, infections, and scar tissue living in a delirium of pain and masochistic pleasure.³ Make no mistake about it, this is a picture of hell. This man inhabited by demonic power and presence, lives among the dead, has no rest, no escape, only unceasing torment. The only relief he can think of is to cut himself with stones to try and take his own life. This demonized man is wild, crazed, and “untamable”. But thanks be to God that here is One who has the ability to arrest a human heart. Jesus Christ can tame our sin and madness!

THIS IS THE EXCEPTION NOT THE RULE

What we are reading here in the text is very real, it happened often in Jesus day and the New Testament assigns no reason that it can’t and doesn’t happen today. Human nature hasn’t changed, and Satan, though he and the rest of his host of darkness will be, are not bound yet. Having said that, I think instances like what we see in our text are more the exception and not the rule when it comes to demonic influence in our day. Demon possession as we see it in this man is not always so blatantly overt. Yes our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8), but more often than not, Satan and his demons are content to work much more subtly. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

He is just as content to operate covertly, masquerading in “Christian” circles and lead people away from the truth, as he is to manifest what power he has in overt demonstrations of demonic possession. John MacArthur says, “He likes to go to church in a grey suit, likes to sit in a pew, likes to stand behind a pulpit, like to teach in a seminary.” He is the father of lies (John 8:44). He is the manipulator of truth. He is more content to sit in church next to the respectable religious person as he is to exercise such undisguised, blatant displays of demonic power.

³ Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior – Mark Vol. 1* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 119.

HOW DO DEMONS ADDRESS THE SON OF GOD

Look at verses 6-7. Mark writes, "And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." Who is speaking here – the man or the demons? Mark's account makes it sound like it was the man who was speaking but in Matthew's account the man's words seem to be attributed to the demons. Matthew writes, "And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time" Matthew 8:29? I think we are hearing the voice of the demons. Previous to this we are just told that the man cry's out in unintelligible shrieks - he can't even speak on his own accord. Furthermore, this man would have had no idea who Jesus was. He was a Gentile and Jesus' ministry to this point has been confined to a Jewish audience. But the demons on the other hand, they know exactly who Jesus is and they know that they are subservient to His authority.

The first thing I want you to notice is that the man bows down. When the demonized man sees Jesus (presumably the demons who were terrorizing the man see Jesus), he, under their influence runs out from the tombs and falls down before Him. They *proskuneo* Jesus – fall down prostrate in reverent submission. In the presence of King Jesus even the demons bow down and recognize His authority. In Colossians 1:16 Paul reminds us that Jesus is the creator of all things in heaven and on earth. He is the Lord over all that is visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. When the demons meet Jesus, it's a no-contest event.

Bowing down in submission the demons first ask, "What have you to do with me," or "What business do you have with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" It's interesting to note that the demons refer to Jesus by the title Son of the Most High God. To the Jews, God was *El Elyon* the Most High God who was transcendent and exalted over all pagan gods and rival powers. (Cf. Gen. 14:18, Num. 24:16, Is. 14:14, Dan. 3:26, Lk. 1:32, 35, Acts 7:48, 16:17, Heb. 7:1).

The psalmist writes, "I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High. For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth. For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods" Psalm 7:17, 47:2, 97:9. This is the very position that Satan sought to overtake. Remember what Satan said in Isaiah 14:14, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But this wasn't his title... This was the title that the angel Gabriel gave to Jesus when he announced to Mary that she would give birth to Jesus. He said, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David" Luke 1:32. Satan and his host of demons recognize that Jesus is *El Elyon* – The Lord Most High!

The demons then plead with Jesus at the end of verse 7 saying, “I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” Matthew 8:29 records the demons as saying, “Have you come here to torment us *before the time?*” What is meant by the phrase “before the time?” it means that Satan and his demons understand that God, in His plan of redemption, has appointed a day when Satan will be bound and all the forces of hell will be vanquished once and for all. In other words, the demons know that their days are numbered! When Jesus comes to draw history to a close, the demonic world will not be able to match His power. But that time has not come yet and the demons tormenting this man are fully aware of that. The demons words here are almost like a protest. They were reminding Jesus, who very well could have destroyed them right then and there, that it was not yet time for Him to send them to the pit.⁴

FROM THE GRIP OF THE DESTROYER TO THE GRACE OF THE DELIVERER

There is a marked transition in verse 8 from the power of the demons to the power of the Deliverer. Look at verses 8-9. Mark writes, “For he was saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” Jesus commands the demons as we will see here with divine authority – and they obey His voice.

Notice also the name of the demon. Verse 9 says, “Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘My name is Legion, for we are many.’” The man who was demon possessed was inhabited by not one, but by a whole host of demons. A Roman legion was a group of military men that consisted of as many as six thousand men. But the term legion was also used generically to represent a large host. To say that an army of demons tormented this man might give us a clearer picture of what was going on inside of him. We must not forget that Satan is king over an enormous host of subordinate spirits who do his will.

Look at verses 10-13. Mark writes, “And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, “Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.” So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.”

After begging Jesus not to send them out of the country, the demons ask Jesus to allow them to enter into a herd of pigs that were feeding on the hillside. Such is the devious nature of Satan and his minions that even after they were cast forth from the man whom they had so long inhabited, they still thirsted for mischief. Unable to continue injury to the man in whom they took up residence, they desired to injure the animals that were feeding nearby.

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Commentary on Mark*.

Why would Jesus allow the demons to inhabit the pigs just to have the pigs run off the face of a cliff? Jesus could have resigned the demons to the pit instantaneously, or just destroyed them on the spot for that matter. He is the sovereign Lord over creation and demons as powerful as they might be are not uncreated beings. So why did He do it? I think He allowed the demons to inhabit the pigs and run off the cliff provided undeniable proof to all the onlookers that the miracle of deliverance had actually taken place. This is very similar to what Jesus did back in Mark 2. After Jesus had forgiven the paralytic of his sin, He perceived in His spirit that the religious leaders were questioning His authority. He answered their doubtful speculation saying, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'?" "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home" Mark 2:9–11. The destruction of the pigs gave assurance that the demons or unclean spirits were actually gone. This served as a visual sermon that "The wages of sin is death" Romans 6:23.

While some have charged Jesus with wastefulness, we must remember that Jesus is free to whatever He wills with creation. Jesus' destroying the pigs wasn't a lack of compassion on the pigs or their owners. He was willing to sacrifice two thousand pigs, as valuable as they were, to rescue the demon possessed man. One commentator says, "There is a cheap sentimentalism which will languish in grief over the pain of an animal and never turn a hair at the wretched state of millions of [lost] people. God [cares] for every creature with His hand have made, but we must preserve a sense of proportion; and in Gods scale of proportions, there is nothing so important as a human soul."⁵

What did the herdsman do? Look at verse 14. Mark writes, "The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened." They ran back into town and spread the news far and wide. What was the result? People who were aware of the demon possessed man assembled to "see what had happened." Look at verse 15. "And they (those from the city and the country) came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid."

I think it's safe to say that this demon-possessed man was well known. He was probably the talk of the town. If you are the man who runs around naked like a fierce beast, unable to be tamed, you cut yourself and cry out in the night with unintelligible noises, people are going to know about you. What did these towns people see when they arrived on scene? They witnessed the fruit of the redemptive touch of Christ. They saw that Jesus did what no one else could. He had rescued this man from the ravages of Hell. The fact that the man was sitting clothed and in his right mind when the people of the city and country came to see what had happened is a picture of 2 Corinthians 5:17. Paul says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." This is a picture of discipleship and salvation – a restored man sitting at the

⁵ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1975), 120.

feet of Jesus. Jesus calms both the outer storm of the sea and the inner storm of this demonized man. Jesus brings order to chaos! J.C. Ryle once wrote:

The awful thought that we have a mighty spiritual enemy ever near is, subtle, powerful, and malicious as Satan is, might well disquiet us, and cast us down. But, thanks be to God, we have in Jesus an almighty friend, who is 'able to save us to the uttermost.' He has already triumphed over Satan on the cross. He will ever triumph over him in the hearts of all believers, and intercede for them that their faith fails not. And He will finally triumph over Satan completely, when He shall come forth at the Second Advent, and bind him in the bottomless pit.⁶

What was their response of those who had come to see? The text says they were afraid. This sounds strangely similar to the disciples' response as they witnessed Jesus calm the storm on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were fearful of the storm, but they were filled with a greater fear as they beheld the One whose words the wind and the waves obeyed. Just like the disciples, the crowds who had come to see what Jesus had done with the once demonized man and were fearful. Why? Because they realized to some degree that they were standing in the presence of the holy. When the Holy One is revealed in the presence of unholy people, the only appropriate response is that of fear (Cf. Isaiah 6).

What did they ask of Jesus in their fear? Look at verse 17. Mark writes, "And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region." Why would the people have asked Jesus to leave? If Jesus had just radically delivered this man who had previously been devastated by demons it seems like they would want Him to stay and help others in need. But that obviously wasn't their desire. The tense of the verb translated "depart" suggests that they wanted Jesus to leave without delay. Such is the sad reality... people refuse to believe in God apart from a "sign", but when given a sign, when they are brought face to face with the Biblical Jesus, they ask for Him to leave. Here is the point, miracles will never be sufficient to save a man's soul (1 Corinthians 1:22-25). As powerful as this miracle is, the power of depravity is stronger.

But what about the man whom Jesus had delivered from the grip of the destroyer? He had been changed! He didn't want to separate from the presence of Jesus. Not only did he not beg Jesus to leave, conversely, he begged Jesus to allow him follow Him. Look at the concluding three verses beginning in verse 18. Mark writes, "As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. "

⁶J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Mark* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 2012), 72-73.

While the crowds wanted Jesus gone immediately, we see a much different response from the man whom Jesus had delivered. Far from wanting Jesus to go, he wanted to follow Jesus. But Jesus didn't grant this request. It is interesting to note that there are three requests in our text. First, the demons request that Jesus send them into the pigs (v.12). Jesus granted that request. Secondly, the citizens of the area requested that Jesus leave the area (v.17). Jesus granted that request. But lastly, when the man who had been delivered from the unclean spirit requested to follow Jesus, Jesus refused his request. Why? In denying the man's request, Jesus provided him with a much greater privilege. Look at verse 19. Jesus told the man, ""Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." Jesus didn't instruct this man to be silent!

Jesus delivered this man, lit his heart on fire, and gave him a mission as a (keryx) preacher / proclaimer / herald. He was a living, walking, talking, vivid, unanswerable demonstration of what Christ can do in a man. Everyone knew him as the deranged maniac, but now he was changed. He had been transformed by the grace of Christ. What he once was he is no longer. Such is the transformative power of Christ in the life of every believer. One of the unanswerable proofs of Christianity is a recreated man. Though Jesus left, His presence remained in the gospel testimony of this transformed man! By the way, how much do you have to know to be a missionary? Think about that... This is the first missionary that Jesus ever sent out, and he'd never taken systematic theology.

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

What about you? Do you have anything to tell others about Christ? Can you at least say, "I once was blind, but now I see?" Can you testify to His work of grace in your heart? Have you ever tasted the graciousness of Christ? If you haven't been born again, recreated, delivered from the power of sin and death, you have nothing to tell. But if on the other hand you have found peace with God through the gospel and have been made alive in Christ, then you ought to shine like a bright light in the midst of this dark, crooked, and twisted generation (Philippians 2:15). Resolve to be like the Psalmist who said, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul" Psalm 66:16.