

Jason Upchurch - Mark 5:1-20 - The Good News that No One is Too Lost for Jesus

This morning we return to the gospel of Mark and I have to tell you that I am all the more encouraged to continue through this gospel. Having been to Israel and seen the sites it is positively amazing.

Oddly, the place we are talking about today we did not actually visit. But we did see it from across the lake and it's easy to get an idea about how the pigs were killed because the steep cliffs are visible from every area.

One of the biggest takeaways of our time in Israel is just how small the whole region is. It's about the size of the Idaho panhandle. And it's small size is helpful for understanding the context of so many stories. This might sound silly, but I'm going to do my level best to no longer call it the Sea of Galilee. It's not a sea by any definition. It's not a sea by size or by salt content. The Lake of Galilee - and the Greek word used here can mean both lake and sea - but the lake of Galilee is very small. It's only 50% larger than Priest Lake. And because of its shape you can easily see the whole lake from any small hill anywhere on the lake.

If a shepherd had been watching on the hills of the western shore of the lake they would have easily seen the pigs run down the side of the mountain and drown. The cliffs are massive and the terrain treacherous and this would have been obvious from anyone who happened to look across and see a massive pile of dead floating pigs in the lake.

Now, as I mentioned several weeks ago, here in Mark's gospel the miracles of Jesus are continually reaching new levels of amazement. Mark is painting a picture for us that the further into his ministry he goes, the more powerful Jesus is revealing himself to be. We saw that with the calming of the water, we see that again with this demoniac.

Now, although Matthew records there were 2 demon possessed men, Mark homes in on just this one guy. Likely because he had the demon called Legion. There's no contradiction between Matthew and Mark, Mark just doesn't mention the other guy in the story; he focuses on the one guy with the thousands of demons.

And this guy is in what is called the Decapolis, this is the red area of the map. It's a region that looks like an odd misshapen cross mostly on the eastern shore of the lake, The thing that makes this area significant is that it is very Gentile, very Roman. Jewish presence in the Decapolis at the time of Jesus is very small. Decapolis means 10 cities, but the actual number of the cities within the Decapolis region varied quite a bit over the years.

This event takes place at the very top of the Decapolis area on the eastern side - right side - of the lake. And I think what Jesus is doing is beginning to invade the Gentile world. He's done miracles in Galilee in mostly Jewish regions and now he is beginning to display his messianic power to the Gentiles in force as well.

Jesus is not just the Messiah for Israel, he is the Messiah for the whole world and this is a taste of that. Gentiles are going to be included in the people of God in a major way. Only after the cross and after Cornelius in the book of Acts do we begin to understand how significant Gentiles will be in the Kingdom of God. But we get little tidbits all throughout the gospels.

Now, the big takeaway this morning is that there is no one too spiritually far gone for Jesus to save.

There is no one who is too oppressed, too steeped in sin, too caught up in the world or their own selfish pride for Jesus. Or here, too demonic for Jesus.

Many times we think people are too far gone, they'll never come to Christ, they'll never turn to Jesus. Their problems are too big, their skepticism is too great, their spiritual darkness too black. We know in our mind that Jesus could do anything he wants in their life but we fail to believe he will do something or cares to do something.

But how this whole thing goes down is that Jesus just had a long day of preaching in parables and then personal teaching afterward. Then he purposefully got in the boat to head to this one place. There was a storm

on the way. He calmed that, disciples are amazed. But he gets to the other side, meets this one guy - well, 2 from Matthew's account - he casts out the demons and heads back to the other side.

That's the whole of his ministry here. That was what was driving him that evening when he headed out on the lake in the boat into a hurricane. There was a chosen child of God on the other side of the lake and neither hell nor literal high water was going to keep Jesus from bringing him in to the fold of God.

He goes over, casts the demons out, creates a worshipper of the true and living God, gets back in the boat the same day and moves on to the next town and next miracle. This man wasn't looking for Jesus, wasn't wondering what must he do to be saved, wasn't contemplating when the Messiah might arrive. He was utterly oppressed until Jesus showed up on the shore.

Jesus didn't leave any of those whom the Father gave him stranded. And because of that the man who was filled with Legion is our brother in heaven to this day.

No one is too spiritually far gone for Jesus and he will see to it they will enter the Kingdom. That's the big picture.

And I want to make 6 observations of this to sketch that out.

1) The demonic world is alive and well.

We've talked about this before but I think we need to hear it over and over because it's just so easy to put it out of our mind. The same demonic world that existed in the time of Jesus still exists today.

There are still people walking around today who have demonic activity happening in their lives. Maybe that makes us uncomfortable to say or even think. Maybe that sounds offensive or unkind. But it is the truth and the Bible never shies away from that reality. The Bible makes it clear that there is all manner of spiritual activity all around us all the time and that it won't stop until the judgment.

Eph. 6:12: For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

You know why many people are so messed up? Spiritual forces.
You know why politics is so messed up? Authorities in the heavenly places.
You know why science is anti-God? Cosmic powers that hate God.

Working in people and through people to lie and maim and kill. This is what the spiritual forces do. God is the one who gives life, makes life, wants life to flourish.

John 8:44: Satan was what from the beginning? A murderer and the father of lies.

Every time you see evil spirits in the Bible they're either murdering, maiming or injuring or they're lying.

Demons made a young boy epileptic and threw him into fire and water. Demons made prophets lie to entice Israel's army into battle. Demons made a woman bent over with back problems for 18 years. A demons makes Saul try to kill David.

The evil spiritual forces in the world are always trying to maim and hurt and kill. That's Satan's grand plan and demons fall in the same line.

And today it manifests itself in the same way. I think many of the psychological diagnoses we hear about are probably spiritual in nature. There may well be many physical diagnoses that are spiritual in nature. How many times do we hear doctors saying "I don't know what's wrong or how to fix it?" There might very well be a spiritual component.

And I think on a larger scale we see this as well: whether it's the abortion movement or euthanasia or using dead babies to make medicine or the KKK or genocide or holocaust or maiming perfectly healthy people in the name of gender affirmation or self mutilation - it has its source in demonic activity.

Demonic activity is alive and well.

This man seems to have been especially targeted by the forces of evil. He has been banished even from gentile cities. He's living in the wilderness in tombs. All around the eastern shore of the lake there are steep cliffs. And in those steep cliffs are caves. There are caves in cliffs all over the region, but especially in the steep areas of Israel. They're dark and often very hard to get to but you could theoretically use them as shelters or even a family tomb.

This man was so afflicted by demons he was banished from society to live in tombs. With dead people. He was already unclean because he was a gentile. And he apparently lived around pigs - so doubly unclean. But he was even more so because he lived among dead bodies - making him ritually unclean - on top of the fact that he was filled to the max with unclean spirits. He was 4 times unclean.

And I suspect there was a fifth way in which he was unclean. I believe there's a place in the Law where if someone has open wounds they are considered unclean but I wasn't able to track down a verse.

But nonetheless he is completely unclean. He would have been far beyond any redeemable condition in the mind of the disciples and the average Jew. And yet Jesus has his sights set directly on saving him.

The physical manifestation of this demonic possession is something else. No one could bind him with metal chains. Shackles are for feet, chains are for hands - whatever was happening to him from the Legion was like super-human. It was Avengers level strength, Superman strength.

The Bible records other times when people have had multiple demons - Mary Magdalene had 7 demons according to **Luke 8:2**.

In **Matt. 12:45** Jesus gives a situation of a demon being cast out and if there is no repentance, no true spiritual transformation in a person after that then 7 spirits might come back. It seems that just because someone is rid of their evil spirits does not make them for sure a believer.

But we've never seen anything like this - and Jesus is on a mission. And the demonic world that existed then is alive and well today.

2) We should have pity on this man. Read 6-10

Now, I want you to think about this situation. This is guy is certified demonic. We wouldn't go near him. We wouldn't send our kids out to play anywhere in his region. We'd hear him screaming in the distance, even from boats on the lake. He would have been covered in scars and blood from the cutting.

But Jesus has come to save him. He is a child of God who is in need of rescue. The moment he sees Jesus he comes running and Jesus goes to work on casting out the Legion. Mark says he had been saying - continually. It seems that for whatever reason the Legion wasn't leaving right away. This is a serious situation.

And we're not told that this man did anything for this to happen to him. In fact, most of the time in the Bible when there's a demon attacking someone it's framed in such a way that we are to have pity on them. It is beyond their control.

With the exception of king Saul or those who pursue demonic influence, we don't see this as a punishment for sin. But what we see throughout the gospels is Jesus having pity on people who are oppressed by demons.

When we look on people who are spiritually being attacked our first instinct shouldn't be disgust or hatred. It should be pity.

The God of this world has blinded their eyes. That's not to remove responsibility. Every person is responsible for their sin. But we can't forget that there is often a spiritual component beyond their control.

3) Jesus is completely sovereign over the spiritual legions. **Read 7-13a**

Now, there is a lot happening here. First of all, this demon knows exactly who Jesus is the moment he gets off the boat. The demon is not confused about the identity of Jesus.

Demons never are confused about the identity of Jesus. Remember the last question the disciples asked in **4:41**? Who then is this man? The disciples are still trying to figure it all out but Legion knows exactly who the man is: he is the Son of the Most High God.

It's interesting that demons have perfect theology proper - they understand the nature of God probably better than we do. The only difference is that they don't worship God.

Jas 2:19: Demons believe that God is one...and they shudder.

They know exactly who God is - three in one. They know Jesus is fully divine and has the authority to cast them into hell. They know he will judge them and cast them into hell. They know he's in charge and they beg of him, not the other way around.

What's shocking to them is that he has shown up on a seemingly random day in the entire span of history. He's on a mission and it's aimed at them. They know it, he knows it.

But ironically, they plead with Jesus. Look at this. **Read 7**

Now this is kind of funny, actually. Did you notice they are adjuring Jesus by God the Father to not torment them? What is going on here? Here's what's happening: they know they will be judged by Jesus on the Last Day, the Day of Judgment. And that at the judgment they will spend an eternity in hell. When the angels fell they all knew instantly that their fate was sealed. They were not elect angels, they were Satan's minions and they would spend eternity in hell.

In fact, some demons were so bad that God put them in basically a holding chamber until the judgement so they couldn't do any more damage. **Jude 1:6** and **2 Pet. 2:4** talk about how there are demons in dark chains right now locked up until the judgment. They are so vile and filthy and wretched for what happened all the way back in **Gen. 6** that God has consigned them to darkness until the judgment. 6,000 years of darkness so far until they are cast into hell.

So angels know what's going to happen. What this angel seems to be doing is begging that Jesus not cast him into hell just yet. It seems like God has made it clear that the Lake of Fire won't happen until the judgment. The demon seems alarmed that his day has come all too early. Matthew's version says "Have you come to torment us before the time?" Are you fast tracking our eternal damnation?

Why are they asking that? Because from the moment Jesus stepped out on the boat he has been commanding the demon to come out. Jesus is saying over and over to come out of him. And then he says this, which is unusual. **Read 9**

Why does Jesus ask for the name? There are many in the charismatic spiritual warfare camp who think this is some kind of pattern we are to follow for casting out demons. If we see someone possessed by a demon we should ask their name to somehow get mastery over them. But that doesn't seem to make sense.

In no other instance where Jesus or the apostles cast out a demon do they ask for the name. This is not a formula we follow. Why then does Mark add the name? Because of what the name tells us about the demon. His name is Legion.

Jesus isn't doing battle with one or even 7 demons. He's doing battle with thousands of demons, speaking through this one demon. How many demons were actually in there? We don't know for sure but it's in the thousands. A Roman legion was usually 6,000 soldiers. The demons are cast into 2,000 pigs. Maybe it's 2,000, maybe it's 6,000, maybe it's somewhere in between.

But the point of giving the name is for us to realize just what Jesus is up against. And just how tormented this man is and just how powerful Jesus is to overcome this.

The descriptions up to this point have made it very clear than no mere man - or even group of men - can do anything to help him. People had tried to bind him. People had tried to subdue him. No luck.

But notice: Jesus is the one in total control. Immediately, Mark says, when Jesus gets off the boat this demon possessed man comes running and falls to the ground begging Jesus.

It is to Jesus they answer. It is Jesus they obey. They beg Jesus, Jesus commands them. Authority over demons always comes back to Jesus.

If you remember Paul cast out demons in the name of Jesus in **Acts 19**. We know that because 7 Jewish exorcists tried casting out demons in the name of Jesus but they were unbelievers and the demon knew it. They had no power because the Jewish exorcists didn't actually believe in Jesus and 1 demon possessed man whipped them so bad all 7 ran away naked.

Demons can be extremely powerful. But they are nothing to Jesus. The authority structure here is a one way street.

By the way, this isn't the only Legion Jesus has authority over. **Turn to Matt. 26:52-56**. This is when Judas meets Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane at night. The hundreds of thugs are there to arrest him. You remember his famous words? **Read**

You remember back in the OT when the Lord sent an angel - one angel - to destroy 185,000 of the Assyrian troops in a night. Or when the destroying angel killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt.

Jesus says could instantly deploy 12 legions of angels. 12 times 6,000 is 72,000 angels - at his instant disposal and they would utterly obliterate this rabble.

Jesus is in sovereign control over all spiritual forces - good angels as well as demons. Jesus is not an equal with them. They were all made through him and for him according to **Col. 1:16**.

What the disciples are beginning to understand, and what we need to be reminded of always is that Jesus is not an equal with the demons. Jesus is sovereign over the demons.

Let's look back at **Mark 5**. So the demonic world is alive and well. We should have pity on this man. Jesus is sovereign over demons.

4) There's a lot we don't know about the spiritual world. What happens next here is very unusual. And although commentators speculate about the situation, we just have no idea what to make of some of this. **Read 10-13**

What just happened? Why do they ask to go into the pigs? Why did the pigs drown? What is this all about? I'll give you some possible explanations but understand we are not given a lot of information here.

First, why go into the pigs? Well, we don't know. We know spiritual beings can animate people and animals. What was the first animal to be animated by a spiritual being? A serpent in the Garden.

There are other places where animals seem to be affected by the spiritual world. But we don't know why pigs. It might be they need to be attached in some way to life and so the pigs are a natural option. And the amount of pigs gives us an idea as to the legitimate amount of demons inside this man.

Why do they go off the cliff? Again we don't know. Was it Jesus who caused the animals to plunge off the cliff or did the demons do that? Again, we don't know. Demons, like Satan, tend toward death and destruction. But Jesus is ultimately in control.

Some speculate that Jesus gave them their request only to have the pigs drown in the water and when the pigs died the demons were consigned to the dark abyss awaiting hell like **Jude** and **2 Peter** say. Is that in the passage? No. So we don't know for sure. That seems likely to me only because we never see this Legion again.

Also, why don't they want to leave the country? **Read 10**

There is some indication in the Bible that at least some spiritual beings are tied to a general area. Or they prefer an area. But we don't know much about that either.

I will say we need to be really careful about taking a hard line on some of these issues. **2 Peter** warns that false teachers blaspheme glorious ones - demons. They blaspheme and don't tremble at the power of demons. They make all kinds of wild claims. Even good angels don't do that. Good angels rebuke demons in the name of the Lord.

Just know there is a lot about the spiritual worlds we just simply don't know much about and need to be very careful not to speculate about. People can get into some really weird stuff with angels and demons. Sometimes it's okay to not know.

What we do seem to see clearly is that this man's situation was serious and legitimate and the pigs plunging to their death prove it.

5) Not everyone is impressed with Jesus's power over the spiritual world. **Read 14-17**

This is a sad reaction to an amazing show of power and grace. And this isn't the first time the reaction has been lame. Remember he has been accused of casting out Satan by the power of Satan. Here, the people want him to leave.

It seems they care more for the pigs than they do the demon-possessed man. And it seems like there's a little bit of irony here too. Everyone was afraid of this man when he was filled to the brim with demons. Notice their reaction now that he's in his right mind. **Read 15**

Fear. They're still afraid. Just like the disciples were afraid they were going to drown but then more afraid once Jesus calmed the storm. It seems they were afraid of the man and how they're really afraid now that he's fine.

6) Evangelism is simple. **Read 18-20**

There is some irony in this passage: there are 3 beggars. Legion begs for pigs, the people beg Jesus to leave, the man begs for Jesus to take him. Jesus answers the prayers of the demons and the people, but not his newly minted disciple.

The demon possessed man is now to be an evangelist. And Jesus tells our brother in the Lord the easiest evangelism technique ever: Just go tell people what I've done for you. **Read 19**

You know that all it really takes sometimes: just tell people what the Lord has done for us and how much mercy he has shown us? There's plenty of evangelism material out there and it's good and helpful but I think many times all we really need to do is just tell people what Jesus has done for us. And how he has shown mercy on us.

Look at the result. **Read 20**

Now, our brother here had a pretty amazing transformation and Jesus used it as a powerful means by which many Gentiles came to faith.

But I think many times we underestimate just how much the Lord can use our simple testimony in the same way. I think we're called to do the same thing: go home to our friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for us and how he has had mercy on us.

Pray