

“Tell Them How Much the Lord Has Done for You”

The Fifteenth in a Series on the Gospel of Mark

Texts: Mark 5:1-20; Isaiah 65:1-7

The water was calm when Jesus and his disciples set out in a fishing boat, heading across the Sea of Galilee so that Jesus could preach in a new area. Although it was dark, this was the time when the winds normally died down, so the two-hour crossing was expected to be uneventful. Jesus—who was worn out from the day of preaching and healing the sick—was sound asleep in the back of the boat. Suddenly, a huge and unexpected storm blew up, terrifying the disciples, who were experienced fishermen and who knew the Sea of Galilee like the back of their hands. That such experienced sailors would be so terrified indicates just how large this storm was. When their boat began to swamp and started to sink, the disciples rebuked Jesus, “don’t you care if we drown?” Jesus awakened and rebuked the storm and commanded the winds to cease and the waves to be still. Immediately, the Sea of Galilee became calm. Jesus then asked his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” Relieved that the storm was gone and yet terrified at being in the presence of a man who could give commands to the weather, the disciples asked themselves, “who is this man?” Even the wind and waves obey him?”

We are continuing with our series on the gospel of Mark. We now move into Mark chapter 5, which deals with the latter part of Jesus’ Galilean ministry. Recall that in the previous chapter, Mark grouped together three of Jesus’ parables which illustrate the nature and character of the kingdom of God. Following these three parables, Mark now groups together the accounts of three of Jesus’ miracles, through which our Lord began to reveal to his disciples just who, exactly, he was and to give them new information about the nature and character of his mission. These miracles include a demonstration of Jesus’ Lordship over creation (the calming of the sea), a miracle which demonstrates his dominion over Satan and the demonic (the miracle we will be covering this morning), and then Mark records a miracle which will demonstrate Jesus’ Lordship over death, when Jesus raises a young girl from the dead. Slowly but surely, Jesus is lifting the veil as to his true identity.

That Jesus is preaching in parables and performing miracles is indicative of the sad fact that Jesus is already being rejected by the religious leaders of Israel. They have accused him of being demon-possessed and are already looking for ways to have him killed. Therefore Jesus will speak in parables as a form of covenant judgment. But even the multitudes who have been flocking to Jesus and even his own family, don’t understand who Jesus is or what he is doing. And so by speaking in parables, Jesus is forcing all those who hear him to ask for spiritual eyes and ears so that they can truly hear and understand what it is that Jesus is saying. For those who do not believe nor seek spiritual understanding, Jesus is hiding the truth about who he is and the nature of his mission right out in the open.

The fact that Jesus accompanied these parables with miracles over nature, the demonic, and death, should have proved that Jesus was who he claimed to be, and serve as proof that the kingdom of God had indeed dawned because he had come. But the sad fact is that these miracles did not create faith nor convince the skeptics. The first of these miracles—the calming of the sea—only served to demonstrate that the disciples still were not getting it. Jesus must ask them why they had no faith after they rebuked him for sleeping during the storm and supposedly, not caring whether or not they drowned. Furthermore, Jesus’ action in stilling the storm left the disciples terrified. They ask themselves, “who is this man who can calm the wind and the waves?”

With the next miracle, in which Jesus demonstrates his absolute authority over the kingdom of Satan, Jesus is about to lift the veil a bit further not only to demonstrate the tragic effects of human sin and the efforts of Satan to destroy humanity, but to demonstrate the true purpose of his mission, which is to usher in the kingdom of God so as to deal with root cause of all human suffering and the occasion for demonic oppression, our sin and fallen human nature.

And so with this bit of background in mind, we turn to our text this morning, Mark 5:1-20 and the account of Jesus encountering a demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes.

Just as is the case with the account of Jesus calming the sea, the account of this second miracle resounds with eyewitness detail, and so we can be very sure that Peter witnessed this event and recounted it in great detail to Mark. This particular event followed close upon the heels of our Lord's calming of the sea—the next morning in fact. We simply read in verse 1 of Mark 5, "*they went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.*" Under normal circumstances, the trip by boat across the Sea of Galilee would take a couple of hours. But given the night the disciples have just had, it may have taken them most of the night to cross, and it is not unlikely that they arrived the next morning still reeling from what they had just witnessed. According to Mark's account, Jesus and his disciples make shore somewhere in the district of the Gerasenes, which would be near the modern cities of Kersa or Kursi. On a map, these small cities would be almost directly across the Sea of Galilee from the small village of Capernaum on the opposite shore. While the beach there is relatively flat, about one mile south of the city of Kersa, there is a region with steep slopes coming up to the shore and where a number of caverns and tombs have been discovered.¹ This location would certainly fit with the details in Mark's account.

The demon-possessed man which Jesus now encounters on the other side of the Galilee is simultaneously a frightening and pathetic individual. No doubt, people from the area knew of this man and his circumstances quite well and they obviously considered him insane and a threat to the people living in that area. We read of this poor man's circumstances in verses 2-5, "*When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 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. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.*" The very fact that people tried to restrain him with chains, and yet he was still able to free himself, explains why he was driven out of populated areas and forced to live away from the two small cities in the caverns where many generations of the ancestors of the local townspeople were buried.

The fact that this man was forced to sleep among the dead is troubling by itself. But Mark adds the fact that this man would wander around the area at night, yelling and crying out as he cut himself with stones. He must have terrorized the whole area. But in reality, this man was not insane—he was demon-possessed. And in his completely self-destructive behavior, we can see that the demonic forces which have possessed him delight in distorting the divine image and dignity in which this man was created. This poor man's life has not only been reduced to savagery and self-mutilation, but he is now an object of fear and scorn on the part of all those who lived in area.² Every community, it seems, has some misunderstood or creepy neighbor, who scares all kids and gives the community an endless source of

¹ Lane, [The Gospel According to Mark](#), 181.

² Lane, [The Gospel According to Mark](#), 181-182.

gossip and speculation. This man is much more than that—he’s a genuine threat. And so even though he was chained up for his own protection, the chains were also intended to protect the people in the community around him. Sad as this is, we can just imagine the way in which the people in the area viewed this man, with scorn and disdain.

In what amounts to another touch of irony, this poor demon possessed man actually reveals Jesus’ true identity, when the night before the disciples were wondering out loud, “who is this man?” As Mark’s account resumes in verse 6 several things have already happened. “*When [the demon possessed man] saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 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!’ For Jesus had said to him, ‘Come out of this man, you evil spirit!’*” While Jesus was fully human (and as we know from Isaiah 53, he had no beauty and there was nothing about his appearance that would attract us to him, or identify him as the Son of God), the demon immediately recognized him, even from a distance, because Jesus was indwelt by the blessed Holy Spirit, whose very presence would have provoked the demon possessing this poor man to wrath. The fact that the man yelled at the top of his voice and fell down before Jesus is a clear indication that unseen spiritual combat is already taking place. The demon knows that it is defenseless against Jesus and can do nothing to resist, except to cry out and ask not to be cast into the fires of hell.

And so the demon challenges Jesus with a question, “*what do you want with me?*” The demon reacts as though Jesus had come to bring about the final judgment. Whether the purpose in Jesus’ landing at this spot is to encounter this man is never stated. Another question raised by this encounter is “how is it that the demon knew Jesus’ given name?”—we will take up the importance of this momentarily. Although people throughout the region had certainly heard of Jesus because of the miracles and exorcisms he was performing on the other side of the Sea, it is especially remarkable that the demon not only knew Jesus’ name, but identifies himself as the “Son of the Most High God.” Remember at this point in Mark’s gospel, the only ones who actually know who Jesus is are the demons, who scream out in defiance when Jesus approaches. When the demon speaks of Jesus as Son of the Most High he is not using a messianic title, but he is speaking of Jesus’ divine origin and dignity.³

As we have seen before in Mark 1:24, when speaking forth Jesus’ name the demon is attempted to gain control over Jesus through the use of an incantation.⁴ It is utterly amazing that the demon would even attempt to use Jesus’ name so as to bind Jesus to swear to his father (“swear to God”) that he (the demon) would not be destroyed. And so when the demon causes this poor man to bow before Jesus, when the demon causes the man to yell out, when the demon invokes the name of Jesus so as to gain control over him, it is clear that the demon is absolutely helpless in the presence of Jesus. In fact, the power that Jesus exercises over the demon is so great, the demon knows that he must obey Jesus’ command and leave the man whom he has possessed.

Exercising his authority over this unclean spirit, we read in verse 9, “*Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ We now learn that this poor man was not subject to the control of a single demon, but that a multitude of these unclean spirits have taken over the man’s personality. ‘My name is Legion,’ [the demon] replied, ‘for we are many.’*” The term “legion” is a military term, which refers to a Roman

³ Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 182-183.

⁴ Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 183-184.

regiment composed of some 6000 soldiers. The point is not so much that Jesus is confronted by 6000 demons, but that Jesus is confronted by a large body of demons acting in concert, just as a military unit would act. As one scholar puts it, “Jesus is not confronted by one demon, but by an army of them.”⁵ Indeed, it may even be the case that the demon who had been speaking through the man was under the mistaken assumption that withholding his own name from Jesus would prevent Jesus from exercising his own authority over the demonic. The demon may even have thought that by using a deceptive term which indicated great power (legion) that Jesus would be more inclined to grant the demon’s request.⁶ Thus, we read in verse 10, “*And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.*”

The region across the Sea of Galilee was largely Gentile and therefore, pagan. So, it is not a surprise that there would be a herd of swine in the area, since Jews would obviously not be keeping pigs because of the dietary laws which declared swine unclean. As Mark points out in verses 11-13, “*A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, ‘Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.’ 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.*” This incident raises a number of troubling questions, not the least of which is, “why would give Jesus the demon permission to destroy someone’s property and livelihood?”

We do learn from this account that it is the express purpose of these demons to destroy the God’s created order. They had already done this when they possessed this poor man who then terrorized the entire area. They completed this purpose when they destroyed over 2000 hogs.⁷ We do know that while Jesus came preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand, the kingdom of God was not yet consummated. Jesus was indwelt by the Holy Spirit, which provoked the demons to wrath. They knew that Jesus had the ultimate authority over them and that he would destroy them. But the day of final judgment had not yet come. Thus Jesus prevents these demons from doing further harm to this poor man, but he allows them to continue their rage against the created order, in this case, the herd of swine. This would only further illustrate that the ultimate purpose of these agents of Satan was to kill and destroy and that their rebellion would continue on—although restrained by Christ and the gospel—until the last day when they all will be destroyed, just as they had feared. In any case, we see in the desire of the demons to enter the swine and destroy the herd, that their goal is destruction of life. How it is the demons could possess and control animals is not clear, although there would be a certain irony in the demons possessing pigs, which the Jews considered unclean and an appropriate host for such an evil being.⁸

Those responsible for tending to these pigs were not amused. As Mark tells us in verses 14-15, “*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 saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.*” It did not take long for word of what had happened to get back to those who owned the hogs. People came running from all over

⁵ France, The Gospel of Mark, 229.

⁶ Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 184-185; Cranfield, The Gospel According to Mark, 178.

⁷ Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 186.

⁸ France, The Gospel of Mark, 230.

to see for themselves what had happened. To their surprise, they saw Jesus with the man who had been demon possessed, and this man was now dressed and sitting, calm and composed. From his appearance and demeanor it was clear to all that he was now in his right mind. Whereas before even chains could not hold him, now he sits with Jesus, no longer a threat to anyone. When the people saw the immediate and dramatic transformation of this man they were terrified, just as the disciples had been the night before when Jesus calmed the storm. “Who is this man who can control the wind and waves?” “Who is this man who has authority even over a legion of demons?” “What kind of authority is this?” “How could Jesus command a legion of demons?” “How is it that this troubled man is now in his right mind?”

No doubt, there are loud echoes in Mark’s account drawn from Isaiah’s prophecy of the coming restoration of Israel, which was tied to the coming of the Messiah and the dawn of the Messianic age. Listen to these words of Isaiah 65, when Isaiah speaks of Israel’s Messiah bringing salvation to the Gentiles.⁹ *“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’ All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—a people who continually provoke me to my very face, offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on altars of brick; who sit among the graves and spend their nights keeping secret vigil; who eat the flesh of pigs, and whose pots hold broth of unclean meat; who say, ‘Keep away; don’t come near me, for I am too sacred for you!’ Such people are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that keeps burning all day. ‘See, it stands written before me: I will not keep silent but will pay back in full; I will pay it back into their laps—both your sins and the sins of your fathers,’ says the LORD. ‘Because they burned sacrifices on the mountains and defied me on the hills, I will measure into their laps the full payment for their former deeds.”* Israel’s Messiah has come to the Gentiles. This demon possessed man has been delivered, and yet, sadly, the people of the Gerasenes act just like unbelieving Israel. They are not interested in following Jesus, even though his authority over the demonic is now clear for all to see.

Those who had witnessed this event, now attempt to explain what they saw to the crowds which had gathered. According to Mark’s report in verses 16-17, *“those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.”* As is sadly the case in many situations like this, the crowd forgets all about the man who had terrorized them and who is now in his right mind, and they are far more worried about what happened to their pigs. And so, without a word being said about this poor demon possessed man, the Gerasene locals begin insisting that Jesus and his disciples leave the region. Jesus may have made them safe, but he is also someone of whom they were obviously afraid.

Like most backwater places, keeping things the same wins out over change. The very presence of Jesus means the presence of the kingdom of God. And this is disturbing to these people. When Jesus comes into the region, so too does the kingdom of God, which also means that the day of decision has come. People would rather not have to make a choice. They would rather put up with a crazed man living in the tombs, then repent of their sins and turn unto God. Sadly, Jesus is too much of a threat, and so they reason, it would be far better for everybody if he just left the area.

The man who had been demon possessed was grateful for all that Jesus had done. We read in verses 18-20, *“As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, ‘Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for*

⁹ Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, 157-159.

you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.” While the inhabitants of the Gerasene region were afraid and insisted that Jesus leave, the man whom Jesus delivered now wants to go with his new master. The Greek text implies that he has become a disciple of Jesus.¹⁰ The man is obviously grateful, and would much rather go with Jesus than stay where he had been such an object of scorn.

But instead of allowing the man to come with him, Jesus sends this man back home with a very pointed exhortation to tell his family what the Lord had done for him. And so, as Mark recounts these events, the man went back to the Decapolis area (ten cities) and began to tell everyone what Jesus had done, thereby preparing the way for Jesus’ own upcoming mission to the Gentiles. Thus the Gentiles would soon hear of what Israel’s God had done for one of their own. And they would all be amazed at the authority that Jesus exercised over the demonic. Israel’s God would indeed bring salvation to Gentile lands.

What application can we draw from this incident?

When Jesus takes on a legion of demons and casts them out of the demon-possessed man with a single command, we see the consequences of the kingdom of God drawing near—the forces of Satan erupt in indignation. While the religious leaders of Israel, the multitudes who have been following Jesus, Jesus’ own family and now the Gentiles who live in the Gerasenes, do not understand who Jesus is, nor the nature of his mission, the demons surely know who Jesus is. They immediately identify him as the Holy One sent from God. And throughout all of this, Jesus is slowly but surely revealing his true identity to his disciples. With each parable and with each miracle the veil is being lifted. Jesus is Lord over all creation. Jesus is Lord over Satan and all his demons.

We also see in this account that the clear intention of demonic powers is to kill and destroy. Once possessed by this legion of demons, the poor man depicted in this account was not only a threat to himself, but was a danger and a terror to an entire community. The very fact that the demons would desire to destroy a herd of swine is further proof of this. And so when Jesus approaches, the kingdom of God likewise approaches and the demons respond with defiance and indignation. They know that Jesus has the power to destroy them and they think that is the purpose of his messianic mission. They could not yet know that Jesus would defeat them by dying upon a cross bearing the sins of all his people, and then rising again from the dead three days later. Thus Jesus establishes the kingdom of God as a present reality, but that kingdom will not be consummated until the day of judgment, when Jesus returns to raise the dead, judge the world and make all things new. Thus the demons had it right. Jesus came to destroy them. But they were wrong about the time. Jesus must first die for our sins and then be raised for our justification, for this would ensure the defeat of Satan and all his host.

And then there is much to learn from the man whom Jesus delivered. He was now free from demonic oppression and finally in his right mind. His humanity and dignity have been restored to him. His response our Lord’s mercy is to thank Jesus and desire to follow him everywhere he went. But Jesus instructed him to go back and “tell his family how much the Lord had done for you.” Surely, we must do the same. We may not have been delivered from a legion of demons, but we have been delivered from the guilt and power of sin! And because our hearts should be filled with gratitude because of all that God has done for us in Christ, how can we not leave here this morning and go back and tell all those we know about what our blessed Savior has done for us?

¹⁰ Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 187.

Through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus, who is Lord over wind and rain, the forces of hell and Satan, and even over death itself, God has set us free and is restoring us in the image of God. And this should fill our heart with gratitude. Beloved, “tell them how much the Lord has done for you!”

Amen.