

## Supreme Power

Mark 5:1-20

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There is a spiritual battle taking place in our country and around the world. It is between those who acknowledge sin and the supernatural and those who feel all evil is explained with natural rather than supernatural causes. This is the crux of most of the problems we repeatedly read about. We will see this tension in this account that on first read makes us scratch our heads. However, if we pay attention, we will find it has some important and perhaps even life-changing things to say to us.

Last week we read about Jesus and the disciples traveling across the Sea of Galilee in a storm on their way to the Decapolis. The Decapolis was on the eastern side of the Jordan River and the sea of Galilee. It was not a formally united group of 10 cities. The Decapolis was like us talking about the “Tri-States” of Illinois, Iowa and Missouri. It was an area with a large Gentile population with many Hellenized (under the Greek influence) Jews.

The passage is written as if it was a firsthand account. This tells us Mark was likely using Peter as a source. As we compare this account with the one in Matthew 8 we see a difference (not a discrepancy). Matthew refers to two men and Mark talks about one. I don’t know the reason Mark speaks in the singular but it does not change the message at all.

Mark tells us,

<sup>3</sup> This man lived in the burial caves and could no longer be restrained, even with a chain.

<sup>4</sup> Whenever he was put into chains and shackles—as he often was—he snapped the chains from his wrists and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. <sup>5</sup> Day and night he wandered among the burial caves and in the hills, howling and cutting himself with sharp stones. (Mark 5:3-5)

### Tormented Men

Stop with me for a minute and imagine being one of these men. You were possessed by an army of demons, people are afraid of you, no one comes near you or touches you, and you spend your time cutting yourself (because of the agony of life). A real man was in these bodies that were overtaken by the servants of Satan! How terrifying it must have been. Anyone who has had a stroke-like effect knows how scary it is to be in a body that you have no control over. I was talking with my college roommate who said he woke up from brain surgery and had no idea how to tie his shoes! He said it was terrifying.

These men were not freaks. Their individuality, their personhood had been subdued and held for what seems like a ransom. Where others avoided such people, it seems like Jesus made the trip across the sea just to meet them (because this account ends with the people asking Jesus to leave the area). There is a good lesson here for us to follow His example. Bringing people to faith is worth whatever the cost.

## Submissive Demons

Our text continues,

<sup>6</sup> When Jesus was still some distance away, the man saw him, ran to meet him, and bowed low before him. <sup>7</sup> With a shriek, he screamed, “Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In the name of God, I beg you, don’t torture me!” <sup>8</sup> For Jesus had already said to the spirit, “Come out of the man, you evil spirit.”

<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus demanded, “What is your name?”

And he replied, “My name is Legion, because there are many of us inside this man.”

The men ran to Jesus. Did they run to Jesus knowing He was the only hope for deliverance? Or was it the demons inside the man who hoped to gain an advantage over Jesus? It appears that when Jesus saw the men He must have commanded “Come out of the man you evil Spirit.” To which the demons (the name Legion denotes as many as 5000 . . . it seems to be at least 2000 based on the pigs) pleaded for their life.

There are many who will dismiss this account because they believe this is obviously superstition. They will tell you that these are primitive people who didn’t understand the nature of mental illness and attributed everything to demons. The world around us is uncomfortable with the notion of evil. Tim Keller wrote,

the intelligent people in the West have said all evil, whether we’re talking about selfishness or violence on an individual level, or if we’re talking about war or crime or poverty or racism on a corporate level, can be reduced, analyzed, understood, and dealt with because it has human roots. If you get rid of the transcendent, if you get rid of God and the Devil, then you say, “Why do we do these things to each other?”

Some people would take more of a psychological approach. They would say the reason there’s violence and selfishness in people is that we have psychological problems. We weren’t loved properly, we had inadequate family background, and so forth. We deal with evil through counseling. Some people like more of a sociological view. They say racism and poverty, for example, are the result of an unjust social system. Therefore, it can be dealt with through education and social policy and programs.

Other people would say no, a lot of the problems we have are only physiological. They’re the results of evolutionary biology and natural selection. They’re survival of the fittest, and we have to deal with it, really, through chemicals. It’s chemistry that makes us aggressive. It’s chemistry that does this sort of thing. We deal with it through drugs.

We’ve been working at the counseling. We’ve been working at social progress. We’ve been working at these things. Things are not getting better. <sup>1</sup>

The secular explanation for the presence of evil in the world is not an explanation. There are certainly psychological, physiological and societal issues that can be addressed but the larger

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

problem is we live in a fallen world. Satan is working to destroy us and there are days it sure seems like he is winning.

### **Those Poor Pigs!**

The next part of the account is where many people focus.

<sup>10</sup> Then the evil spirits begged him again and again not to send them to some distant place.

<sup>11</sup> There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby. <sup>12</sup> "Send us into those pigs," the spirits begged. "Let us enter them."

<sup>13</sup> So Jesus gave them permission. The evil spirits came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the entire herd of about 2,000 pigs plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water.

There is more angst in our day over the 2000 pigs that drowned in the water than the two men who were possessed by demons and were made well! The question we all want to ask is: Why did Jesus allow the demons to go into the pigs?

Let's clarify something first: Jesus gave permission for the demons to enter the pigs. It was the demons that drove the pigs into the sea! It is a fair question: "Didn't Jesus know what the demons were going to do?" He probably did. But he allowed it anyway. Why?

First, the pigs all running over the cliff was powerful evidence that demons had actually been cast out of the man. Pigs don't act this way! Second, it was powerful evidence to the demon-possessed man that the demons were gone. What a feeling of relief he must have felt. And maybe the message being sent was: Lost people are more important than animals.

Since the demons did not want to be destroyed, why would they lead the pigs to commit suicide? I believe the number one reason they did it was to create a problem for Jesus. They knew what would happen if all those pigs died . . . the people would revolt!

### **The Angry Businessmen**

<sup>14</sup> The herdsmen fled to the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, spreading the news as they ran. People rushed out to see what had happened. <sup>15</sup> A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons. He was sitting there fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid.

<sup>16</sup> Then those who had seen what happened told the others about the demon-possessed man and the pigs. <sup>17</sup> And the crowd began pleading with Jesus to go away and leave them alone.

The same community that had been terrorized by the demon-possessed man does not celebrate the deliverance and healing of the men. They asked Jesus to leave because they considered Jesus to be bad for business. It is a completely secular response to the Son of God!

Sadly, I think many have dismissed the message of Christ not because they believe it is false; they reject it because to embrace it would cramp their style. Or if you will, it is bad for the “business as usual mentality of our day.” People reject the church because:

- The Christian faith is “oppressive” because of their “narrow-mindedness.” They reject the Biblical notion of two genders and the idea that sex is for marriage and is about far more than mere pleasure.
- The church talks about sacrifice and generosity in a world that believes the “person with the most toys wins!”
- The church holds to the Bible as the standard of non-negotiable truth which they view as archaic and naive.
- The church preaches forgiveness for those who have wronged us and they say it is just a way to let the oppressors off the hook.
- The world around us believes we should practice our faith “in private” lest we offend others with our “narrow view of truth.” (Translated: if you make your faith public people will be less likely to embrace the consumer-oriented indulgence that is the secular religion being peddled everywhere) Jesus tells us to tell the world!
- They reject the church because they say the Christian faith will limit their freedom to do whatever they want to do. While the Bible says following Christ is the only avenue to real freedom.

If we recognize the absurdity of these townspeople rejecting Jesus, we are condemning our own society and maybe even ourselves in the times we push Him aside to get what we want for ourselves.

### **A Grateful Man**

There is one final scene,

<sup>18</sup> As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. <sup>19</sup> 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.” <sup>20</sup> And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

It is no wonder this man wanted to go with Jesus. Jesus had restored him to life. He had seen him as a real person, something that hadn’t happened for a long time. Having met the people of this region, we can’t blame the guy for wanting to get out of town with the man who saved him, saw him, and loved him. We have no way of knowing what the townspeople had said to this man in his time of possession. I wonder if those words burned in his soul much the same way words might stick with us that were spoken in a time of great need or a spew of anger.

Jesus told the man he could not go with them. His job was to testify to others in his own region what had happened to Him. Jesus made him a missionary to his friends, relatives, and townspeople.

Often when we comes to faith in Christ we feel we have to find some great ministry where we can speak to hundreds or thousands of people. We think we have to come up with some slick presentation like the guys we see on TV. Jesus told this man to simply share his story with all the people he knows. And he tells us the very same thing.

Billy Graham had a brother Melvin, who was a farmer. Melvin was a committed Christian just like his famous brother. Now suppose Billy Graham held 5 major crusades for 32 years. Each crusade would average about 10,000 conversions. In those 32 years more than a million and a half people would come to Christ.

But suppose Melvin was used by God to lead just one person to Christ. The next year he helped this person grow and then each of them would win one person to Christ. The next year those 4 would win four more. If that continued to double every year, in 32 years that number would reach more than 4 BILLION people! The power of one faithful man is powerful!

We can draw many lessons from this account. First, **Sin is real**. Anyone who suggests that there is no power of evil has not considered first, the depth of evil that is around us. How do you account for the Holocaust, school shootings, the horrible persecution going on in other parts of the world, and the general aggression and sense of entitlement around us? Billions of dollars have been spent to improve education, there are endless programs to wipe out racism, parental responsibility is being replaced by the government to “ensure a better education for our kids,” and there are pharmaceuticals prescribed for almost any problem, but nothing has changed positively. We can blame bad homes, faulty education or even the church but the fact remains the only real explanation is evil forces at work.

Second: **Satan is actively working to derail or diminish our faith**. It is a serious mistake to underestimate our enemy. Do not sell Satan short. He and his followers may not be able to POSSESS a true believer, but they can exploit weaknesses and places where we have let their guard down. There are some activities we are involved in that seem to invite the Devil to bring his binding influence into our lives. Just because He cannot POSSESS us does not mean He cannot OPPRESS us and make our lives miserable or destroy our Christian testimony. Let me give you some examples of ways we may invite his influence into our lives,

- Ungodly friendships. If we spend our time only with non-Christian (or weak Christian) friends, we are opening a door to the influence of Satan.
- Watching pornography or shows that glorify immorality will open a door for the demons to oppress us.
- Becoming involved in movements or behaviors the Bible condemns. Trying to pick and choose what you are going to embrace is a recipe for Satanic influence.
- Indulgent spending at the expense of generosity created a materialism Satan can easily exploit.

- Engaging in gossip and the rumor mill will tarnish our witness and lead us to overlook our responsibility to encourage one another.
- Distancing yourself from the church (even when you feel you have a very spiritual reason for doing so).

I hope you get the idea. Anyplace we let our guard down opens the door to the influence of the Devil in our lives. Becky Pippert has a great insight in her book *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World*.

“The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. But there’s one thing that is certain. No one controls themselves. We are controlled by the lord of our lives.” You have made a pact with somebody. You think you’re in charge. You are *not* in charge.

Satan will influence us or water down our testimony anytime we give our allegiance to someone or something other than the Lord.

**Third, Evil is defeated by a superior power. It is defeated in our lives when we connect to that power.** This account is a perfect picture of that reality. These demon-possessed men could not be controlled. They broke their chains, they were stronger than those who tried to subdue them but the mere presence of Jesus was enough to get the demons to tremble. He alone had the power to cast out the demons.

We will not defeat the enemy in our own strength. We need the power of our Lord and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We must learn to trust and rely on that power. We should turn to Him before life-altering decisions. We should seek His strength when we are facing temptation. We should call out to Him when we have been ensnared by sinful behaviors.

He is the one who has supreme power

- Over supernatural forces
- Over political clout
- Over public opinion
- Over disease
- Over vindictive people
- Over the hurts of the past
- Over the pain of loss
- Over your deepest fear
- Over your addictions
- Over whatever frustrates you

Jesus traveled across the lake in a storm just to reach and deliver these men. He wants to do the same for you. He wants to set you free from whatever has bound you in this life. He only asks that you trust and follow Him. It is best to start today.

