

Lesson 7

The Gerasene Demoniac is Healed

Introduction

The story of demon possessed man in Mark 5.1-20⁵⁴ is an incredible picture of forgiveness and the power of transformation. When we truly begin to grasp what has been done on our behalf, there will not be any part of our life that goes unaffected. The story in this lesson is unique in and of itself. It takes place outside of Jewish land, on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Gerasenes.

Why was this story placed inside the Biblical record? What did it mean to be possessed by demons? How did this meeting with Jesus impact his life? And finally, what was the man's condition after he encountered Jesus?

How the Gospel Writers Describe this Man

As soon as Jesus and the disciples step off the boat they see two men running toward them. At least one of them is naked. That sight alone is enough to get your attention, but these men are demon possessed. Mark tells us that one of them had a *legion* of demons, 5.9.⁵⁵ Take a moment and just envision total human wretchedness. The man is a terror to himself and to others. And, he is totally helpless against the evil forces that have filled his body. For the Jew, the situation is amplified when considering how ritual uncleanness permeates everything in the story. Two men living in tombs, in Gentile land, surrounded by pig farmers. It couldn't get much worse.

Mark's description of the man is raw and brutal. Verses 4 and 5 describe him as *bound with shackles and chains*. He *tore the chains apart*. He *smashed the shackles*. He *cut himself with stones*. No one would have been able to secure him. He would have been smelly, unsightly, and scary. The Biblical writers go out of their way to describe him in real, physical, and violent terms. Naked. Self-destructive. Wild. The man is a personal manifestation of the devastation of sin.

The Encounter with Jesus

Mark 5.7 captures the first words out of the man's mouth as he falls on his knees and speaks to Jesus: *what have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? I beg you before God, don't torment me!* His falling to his knees before Jesus is important to note because it indicates the action of prostrating oneself before a person to whom worship or reverence is due. *When demoniac meets divine, it is a no-contest event.*⁵⁶ By referring to Jesus as the Most High God, we see the demon's recognition of Jesus position and the totality of His power.

⁵⁴ See also Matthew 8.28-9.1; Luke 8.26-40.

⁵⁵ One Roman Legion had 5600 men and was the largest troop-unit in the Roman army. See Balz, Horst Robert, and Gerhard Schneider. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990– Vol. 2, p. 34.

⁵⁶ Edwards, p. 156.

Jesus simply speaks and the spirit has no choice but to obey. There is no elaborate process or formula to be recited. As they come out they beg to be sent into a herd of pigs. Jesus gives them permission. The demons promptly drive the herd into the sea where they drown. All of the herdsman see what happened and ran away. They tell everyone around what happened.

Afterward, the Man is Completely Changed

Notice how Mark describes him in the final verses of the story:

- 5.15 – he is sitting down, clothed and in his right mind.
- 5.18 – he is desirous of going with Jesus. He wants to make a difference.

What we have here is the perfect picture of restoration, salvation, and discipleship. Formerly out of control, violent, and destructive, now the man is quiet, submissive, and sitting at the feet of Jesus ready for service.

Taking this story in conjunction with the story just before, at the end of Mark 4 when Jesus calms the storm on the sea, we find how Jesus can speak . . . and dissipate the greatest of outer *and inner* storms. *Jesus brings creation out of chaos.*⁵⁷

In verses 18-20 we read of the man's desire to go with Jesus. Instead, the man is directed to *Go home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you*, 5.19. The man responds accordingly, v. 20, so we see a man, who is probably a Gentile, going into Gentile lands testifying about the Messiah.

Jesus Provides Life Changing Power

He is a source of help for those who are in trouble

Think back to your life before you knew Jesus. Ephesians 2.1-3, 11-13 teaches how you were lost and without hope in this world. Romans 6.16 declares that you were controlled by Satan's influences. *The one we obey is our master*. 2 Corinthians 4.3-4 emphasizes that your heart was blind. When Jesus stepped off the boat and encountered the man with a legion of demons, his life was forever changed. The message here is that Jesus has the power to help you overcome *every* sin you deal with.

This is possible because of who Jesus is. He has all authority and power. One of the reasons for the prevalence of demon possession during the days of Jesus was so that His power and authority could be demonstrated for all. Jesus not only has power over everything in this world . . . but also in the spirit world too. Satan would be no match for him, John 12.31-32. Paul aptly illustrates this in Colossians 2.13-15 by using the language of victory. Jesus is in control and overcomes Satan at every turn. As God's sons and daughters, we now live inside this reality. In fact, Romans 16.20 declares that Satan is *under* our feet. We need to live with an understanding that Satan's power only consists of what we choose to give him.

Jesus brings complete and decisive change

⁵⁷ Edwards, p. 159.

Again, we note the complete and total change of before and after. Before he met Jesus, the man. Was naked, self-destructive, and wild. At the end of the story, he is calm, clothed, and in his right mind. The shame has been removed. The reproach destroyed. He is freely and confidently interacting with other people. He has embraced the new life he's been given. You can see how it impacts the way he sees himself and the way he relates to others. There is no bringing up the past. There's no attitude of self-deprecation. For this man, who had been so ravaged by demons, now there is only the future ahead. His past has been destroyed, never to return, and here, *in the present*, he embraces his future.

Now, let's make the application. Peter writes:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

– 1 Peter 2.9-10

Embrace what God has done for you. Seize it. Clothe yourself in humility. Fill yourself with thankfulness. Live in confidence, because through Him every day is another day of opportunity and promise.

Because of the LORD's faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness!

– Lamentations 3.22-23

Conclusion

When you truly begin to comprehend what it means to be forgiven, what will be the natural result? *You can't help but share what has been done for you!* This is exactly what the man did, 5.20. Every day, you can proclaim the good news of the new life that God offers. Let the world know that it doesn't matter where you've been or what you've been in to, you can always come to the cross.

For Thought and Reflection

1. What do Jesus and the disciples encounter as they step off the boat on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee?
2. Take a few moments to read Matthew, Mark, and Luke's accounts together. How do the gospel writers describe the man?
3. Why do you think the description is so graphic? Is there a message behind it? If so, what is it?

4. In what ways does the demon acknowledge Jesus' authority and power?

5. What does the demon request?

6. How much effort does Jesus expend in getting the demon(s) to come out of the man? What happens to the herd of pigs after Jesus gives them permission to go into them?

7. What happened to the herdsman when the pigs ran into the sea? What did they do? What was the reaction of the local villagers?

8. How is this story illustrative of the devastating effects of sin? How does Scripture describe your life before Christ?

9. How is this story illustrative of the total power of Jesus to save any person ... no matter how awful their situation is?

10. How do we see the principle of discipleship in this story?

11. What should become our mission after we are changed by Jesus? What are some things you can do to become more engaged in that mission?