



THE DAY THE DEMONS BEGGED
MARK 5:1-20

Turn to Mark 5.

Intro: Stranger Things. Constant awareness of another world—in their case an evil world—that exists right alongside the one they're living in. And we're going to look at something very similar today in Mark 5. In the Bible there's also another world called the spiritual world—the unseen realm—specifically in this text the demonic realm. And Mark 5 offers us the longest and most detailed account of demonic possession and exorcism in the Bible. If you're new, we're in a series called, "He Reigns" looking at God's sovereignty (not taboo stuff—this is in the text). And there's so much for us to learn, but before we jump in, I want us to offer three reminders that are going to be helpful as we have this discussion.

Reminder #1: There exists, alongside of us, an invisible spiritual world. Notice I said alongside us, not just "up there" or "down there" but right here. And this invisible realm includes both good righteous spiritual beings consisting of angels, cherubim, seraphim and it includes evil spiritual beings called demons or unclean spirits. The Bible doesn't give a ton of details about their origin, the general consensus among scholars is that demons are either fallen angels—that is angels who rebelled with God along with Satan—and were cast out of heaven. The specifics of how their demonic careers began is not particularly important for us today, what is important is that you know that demons are created beings, they are intelligent, they are very powerful, and they are active in this world to deceive and oppress humanity. Which leads us to reminder #2

Reminder #2: When it comes to demonic activity, we cannot afford to be naïve or overly curious. "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." (C. S. Lewis) When it comes to demons, some of us have a tendency to be overly interested—almost like they're cool. We have people who want to "make contact" and experience paranormal activity. But the fact is that you came in direct contact with a demon, it would be the most terrifying experience of pure evil you could ever imagine. Paranormal activity is not a hobby.

On the other hand, when it comes to demonic activity, we cannot afford to be naïve. We can make the opposite error of believing that God and angels are real, but that demonic influence is just in the movies or perhaps just over a few select people that are really bad like Adolf Hitler and Judas. But, "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." (1 John 5:19). There is evil in this world that is the result of more than just people making bad decisions. There are demonic forces at work all over the world to destroy God's creation and thwart his mission of redemption. And if you don't at least have a category for demonic activity, not only will you be naïve but you will be unable to account for some of the evil you witness in the world and perhaps experience yourself. Which leads to reminder #3

Reminder #3: God exercises absolute sovereignty over both angels and demons. When we say there are good and evil spiritual beings, this is not some Star Wars fight where it's the light side vs. the dark side in an eternal battle for the galaxy. In real life, God dominates the dark side from beginning to end and the dominion the demons exercise doesn't extend any further than the chain God has them on. And it's the sovereignty that we see here on display in this text. And if these demons know anything about Jesus in this account—they know that he reigns. **Pray.**

This story comes immediately after Jesus calms the wind and waves which we saw him do last week and he does this en route to the other side of the Sea of Galilee about a two hour journey south...

¹They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. (Pic) This is the southeast corner of the sea of Galilee and was for the most part Gentile territory, which will be important later on. So, Jesus extending his ministry to the Gentiles here... ²And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. That is a demon. Vs. 6 tell us this guy is running toward him. So just picture this, you get out of the boat, and a demonically possessed man, comes charging out of the graveyard directly toward you. I like to think the disciples were lined behind him looking hard giving back up—I got you bro—but the text only mentions Jesus getting out of the boat. The disciples are likely in the boat paralyzed with fear. And as this guy comes charging toward Jesus, he doesn't flinch. Meets him face to face. And vs. 3-5, specifically describe this guy...

Rescue Needed

³He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, ⁴for 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. ⁵Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. This guy is truly a terror. Lived among the tombs—in this case most likely caves or caverns where people buried their dead. He wasn't just crazy. Those folks would be bound with chains. The demonic strength possessed him at a physical level where he had supernatural strength and could snap metal. Truly something you see in a movie. He was undoubtedly the main character in some of the horror stories told around camp fire—"If you're quiet enough you can hear him scream." **Going to Old Brice.** The kids at Gerasene High School probably dared each other to walk through the graveyard. From the public's perspective he's absolutely terrifying.

From his perspective, it's absolutely tragic. No one signs up for this. No one signs up to be a living host for a demonic enclave. We have no reason to believe that this unnamed man was any better or worse than the rest of the folks. He was targeted and attacked by demons. Whether or not he cuts himself to end his misery or because the demons are trying to kill him, it's safe to say that as someone who lives among tombs, he is experiencing a living death. And we need to be careful not to put too much distance between ourselves and this man. It's easy to just say he's a freak. But the truth is we have much more in common with this man than we care to admit.

Now 1 John 4:4, tells us that "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." So I believe it's impossible for a believer to be possessed by a demon—oppressed yes—possessed no. But it's possible for us to be possessed by the cares of the this world that choke out our spiritual life. The Christian life is a constant fight to establish my heart against being possessed by anything by the glory of God. Possessed by a need for romance. Appearance. Approval—it controls you. Successful—achieve and build and expand. You don't lay in bed awake at night worried whether or not people will remember God's name. You lay in bed at night wondering if you'll accomplish enough for people to remember yours. You say, "I have dreams." Ok. But have you ever thought that maybe your dreams have you? We're more like him than we care to admit—all constantly fighting being possessed by something.

And also like this man, all of us are unable to rescue ourselves from our predicament. This man free himself from this slavery. Neither can anyone else. No pill, or group, or technique, or essential oil that can meet his biggest need and it's the same for us. We can't emancipate ourselves from sin's grip on us. This goes against our culture which champions the power of "I can."

The Gospel is about the power of “He can.” We don’t come together to collectively celebrate our ability to overcome. We come together to celebrate the fact that he overcame, and that he brings the rescue we can’t bring ourselves. Which is what he does here for this man. So in vs. 3-5 we see rescue needed, and in 6-10 we see rescue accomplished...

Rescue Accomplished

Now verse 6 says, ⁶ And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. ⁷ 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.” ⁸ For he was saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” ⁹ And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” ¹⁰ And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. This is where we learn that there are a multitude of demons in this guy. At the time a Legion was around 6,000 soldiers. This doesn’t mean 6,000 demons but at the very least it means a sizeable army of demons one of which is doing the talking for the legion. Now this is interesting. Last week, we looked at Jesus calming the wind and the waves and the disciples are left asking the question, “Who then is this, that the wind and the waves obey him?” They’re still not sure who this guy is—but the demons are not at all confused! The answer to the disciples’ question comes from the lips of a demon who, bowing before Jesus, correctly identifies as him the Son of the Most High God.

Now imagine if you’re a disciple watching and you hear that, “We *knew* something was different about him!” They saw him reign over the visible world and they are about to see that he reigns over the invisible world as well. Meanwhile, legion asked Jesus not to send them out of the country. Lk. 8 clarifies what that means for us and says they were begging him not to send them to the abyss. What is that? Most likely, it’s the spirit prison for the fallen angels of Genesis 6, it’s where they’re held until final judgment and these demons are essentially saying, “We know we’re going to be judged, but it’s not time yet—don’t lock us up just yet instead send us into these pigs... vs. 11 says

¹¹ Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside this is how we know it’s Gentile country ¹² and they begged him, saying, “Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.” ¹³ 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. PETA would not appreciate Jesus allowing these demons to kill these pigs. Even you and I might say, “Poor piggies”—but they were being raised to be slaughtered, so Jesus did it for them. The point of course is not the pigs but the absolute sovereignty of God over this demonic army. The demons who have been dominating this man, come bowing and begging in front of the God man. He determines that they’ll leave, how they’ll leave, and when they’ll leave—when he gives his permission. Are demons active in the world, yes but with his permission. On a leash and on borrowed time.

And it gets better. Keller points out that in every exorcism even in different cultures, the exorcist tries to control the demonic presence by invoking a higher power, “I command you in the name of _____.” Second half vs. 7, “I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” The demons are trying to manipulate Jesus by invoking God’s name. Notice all Jesus said in vs. 8 was “Come out of the man.” Unlike exorcists before him and even the demons here, he doesn’t appeal to a higher power. He doesn’t appeal to a higher power because he *is* the higher power!¹

¹ This is Keller’s observation from his sermon on Mk. 5:1–20 entitled, “The Defeat of Evil.”

When he speaks it happens. When he tells Lazarus to come forth, he comes forth. When he says your sins are forgiven, they are forgiven. And when he tells an army of demons to leave he doesn't ask twice, he doesn't try hard, and he doesn't say please. He speaks the word and they bow, beg, and obey. And after such an astonishing display of sovereignty, you'd think folks around him would be worshipping him, but they're not. We've seen Rescue Needed, Rescue Accomplished, and in vss 14–17, we see rescue resented.

Rescue Resented

¹⁴The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵And 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. ¹⁶And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. ¹⁷And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. They see this formerly crazy violent, naked guy now clothed, calm, and rational, delivered from an army by one man—and they ask him to leave the *region*, not even their town. This is strange enough, but it gets even more strange when you contrast their response with the demons. The demons come to Jesus and beg for mercy. The people come to Jesus and beg him to leave!!! How? Why would they do that? Some people have suggested it was because of the economic loss represented by the pigs. This is unlikely, because the folks certainly went and retrieved them and saved that bacon. It would be a real drag to lose 10 years worth of bacon. “More likely, Jesus is seen as a dangerous disruption to their peaceful lives. The inbreaking of the kingdom of God does not bring a comfortable life and the status quo, but rather a radical transformation of individual and societies.” (Mark Strauss)

That's exactly what happened here. These people see the activity and power of God, they see Jesus do for this man what no one else could do, and they say, “It might be nice to have a mighty deliverer in our lives, but it's not worth the disruption that might come with it. Get back in your boat.” In short they want their idols. They want a calm, predictable low-risk life without Jesus that a life that's shaken up with him. I think it's dangerously easy for us to do the same thing. I can't follow a Jesus that would threaten my dreams. I'm going places, I'm achieving, and I need a Jesus that isn't going to be a liability to my ten year plan, certainly not my reputation or financial portfolio. Who wouldn't call me to make a huge sacrifice, take me to a dark place, or slow me down. I want a Jesus that's comfortable, who functions as more of a resource when I need help. A Jesus who shows up on the shore periodically, does a miracle, gets back in the boat, and then leaves me to it. And I'm telling you, if that's the Jesus you want, the Jesus of the Bible isn't for you. The real Jesus is disruptive. He's not reckless. But he is disruptive—and he may very well wreck your dreams for his glory. You and I need to learn to from these folks and rather than pass on Jesus because of the threat he represents to our idols of comfort, calm, and career. We need to be like this man and cling to him no matter the cost...we've seen rescue needed, rescue, accomplished, rescue resented, and not in vss. 18–20, rescue proclaimed.

Rescue Proclaimed

¹⁸As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. ¹⁹And he did not permit him. Maybe bc room in the boat? His circle of 12 was established? Because it wasn't time for Gentiles to enter into the messianic community? Instead, he gives him an assignment 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.” So Jesus steps off the boat delivers this guy, commission him, and rides off. We don't get the impression that Jesus decided to cancel his ministry tour through the Decapolis. No, Jesus had an appointment with this man. He crossed the Sea of Galilee, through a storm to make a monster into a missionary. Delivered this guy and gave him the same assignment that he's given to you and me. **Our church mission statement** We have to tell the story, and while the details are different the shape of our story is the same as this guy's. I was dead inside, a prisoner held captive unable to rescue

myself, but Jesus came to me, by the word of his power he set me free—and he did it by sheer mercy—and gave me the task of proclaiming how much he has done for me.

That's what we're doing in our jobs, and in our networks, Jesus has come to us and empowered us to go to them. And we'll see all three of these responses. When you hear the Gospel...

You can be like the demons and acknowledge Jesus without repenting of your sin. You say, "I believe that Jesus is the son of God" Demons believed and even obeyed! Recognition isn't repentance. I've done bad things. Would Jesus even want me? Would he ever go after a demon possessed man? Who better? If anyone didn't have a chance, it was this guy.

You can be like the townspeople and reject Jesus because he's disruptive. He might call me to do hard things, forsake my favorite idols, deconstruct and reconstruct my identity, completely repurpose my life. I

You can be like this man who followed after Jesus. Notice the doesn't just say thanks and return to his life. Vs. 19 says, "he begged that he might be with him." He's not trying to cherry pick his blessings, he doesn't ask for any guarantees, more than anything in the world, this man just wants to be with Jesus. And instead of putting him on the boat, Jesus redirects that passion places him on the proclamation team—the first person in Scripture that Jesus officially sends out to tell of his works...

²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. Decapolis means "Ten Cities". It was a loose confederation of cities that cooperated together for their common good. That word "proclaim" here is *kerusso*. It means preach, and it's the same word used to describe what John the Baptist does for the Jews to prepare the way for Jesus. And it would seem that in a similar way this man is going before and preparing the way for Jesus by preaching to the Gentiles. And his faithfulness to tell the story, hasn't been without effect. You hang a right in hour Bible and look at Mark 7 and you see in vs. 31...

Mark 7:31, "31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 And they brought to him da man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him." Why? It's not hard to believe that many of them know of Christ' power to heal because this man was faithful in the mission Jesus gave to him and went around the Decapolis telling about the one who set him free. The formerly half-dead host of a demonic army declaring to the world that He Reigns.