



THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Study Guide Full
Mark 5:1-20
October 6, 2019

The journey of Jesus and the disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee continues, as we encounter the man living with the legion of spirits.

At the heart of this Mark 5 passage, as with the previous passage upon the water, is the divine action of Jesus to calm a storm; however, rather than the actual tempest of Mark 4, here we have the storm of a demon-possessed man consigned to the outskirts of society—to the realm of the forgotten. As we study this healing, we would do well to consider not only Jesus' preeminence over other powers, but also his perspective on the price of human life. As Pastor Bob preached: *Jesus values every individual.*

5 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2 And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. 3 He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, 4 for 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. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. 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. 11 Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, 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.

14 The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. 15 And 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. 16 And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. 17 And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 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." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

Mark 5:1-20

Notes:

Commentary Notes:

v 1-2. As noted in our study last week, "the other side" refers to the eastern side of the sea of Galilee. This was the region of the Decapolis ("ten cities"), a geographical term for the various cities east of the Jordan River. Gergasa lay in this region, and there was a steep cliff near the ancient city.

Discussion Questions:

Reflect: When have you met someone from the "other side" of the tracks? In what way was that experience eye-opening for you?

It is here, among the tombs, that the man with the unclean Spirit meets Jesus.

vv. 3-5. Mark describes at length the lamentable condition of the demoniac. The man's condition is clear: tormented by an unclean spirit, he lives among unclean tombs, in unclean Gentile territory.

What's clear in English is further highlighted in Greek: the diction and syntax of verse 4 is especially complicated—chiastically emphasizing “bounded” and “crushed”—as if Mark were metaphorically portraying the man's bondage through his literary style.

vv. 6-10. The contrast between the narrative build-up of the demoniac and his actual interaction with Jesus could not be starker: a demon-possessed man, powerful enough to hurl off chains, hurls himself at the feet of Jesus. For the man with the unclean spirit recognizes Jesus' true identity—“Son of the Most High God”, an expression emphasizing the superiority and transcendence of Israel's God over any rival powers. As knowledge of a demon's name gives one power over it, Jesus then asks for his name; “Legion”

Study: Review Mark 1:21-28, where Jesus met the unclean spirit. What did those verses reveal about Jesus? What does the reader expect here?

Study: Read Numbers 19:11-14. What were the expectations of the Israelites around tombs?

Reflect: How have you felt the unfortunate but all too common pain of social shunning at some point in your past? Share, if you feel comfortable.

Discern: It is deeply ironic that the town hopes that this man will be forgotten by casting him out to find a home among the tombs—for in Greek “tomb”, *μνημα* (*mnema*), clearly expresses a place where memory is *preserved*. In this vein, consider: To where does modern society cast those considered better forgotten than remembered?

Discuss: Does the demoniac's worshipful reaction Jesus surprise you? Why or why not?

Sing: Have you ever heard the worship song “Most High” as performed by, for instance, Uche Agu? If not, listen to it meditatively (on YouTube); the lyrics are easy, so also consider singing along!

Discern: Who are those “living shackled in the tombs” in our context of Vancouver? Do we have eyes to see them? Of this community, how are you asking the simple, intimate question, “What's your name?”

Discuss: Why do you think the Legion spirits want to stay in the Gentile area?

refers to the largest troop unit in the Roman army, some 5,600 soldiers—such is the full effect of the demonic forces.

vv. 11-13. The demons and the swine are destroyed in the sea, the same body of water over which Jesus just demonstrated his power in Mark 4. The running of the swine demonstrates that the exorcism did take place, and such evidence was a normal part of ancient exorcism narratives.

vv. 14-17. As in 4:41, where the disciples were filled with a great fear on account of Jesus calming the storm at a word, so is fear, after curiosity, the primary emotion here in response to the divine power of Jesus. That the man is healed and now in his right mind—that Jesus has brought new life out of past chaos—seemingly matters little.

vv. 18-20. Of these verses 5th-century Gregory the Great writes in *Epistle 5*: A legion of demons has been cast out of me. I would prefer merely to forget all of this that I have known and simply to rest at the feet of the Savior. But lo it is said to me, so strongly as to compel me against my will, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

Meditate: How does the reaction of the demonic before Jesus inspire you to run this week to Jesus, to name and identify with your true, flawed self?

Discuss: How would you respond to those who critique this passage by bringing up the moral question of destroying 2,000 pigs, and the human livelihoods represented by that herd?

Pray: Though recognizing a distinction between the ancient and modern worlds, pray for eyes to see true spiritual forces and realities (Eph 6).

Discuss: What do you think is at the root of the fear stirred up by this miraculous healing of Christ? Why is fear often a response to the work of Jesus and the revealing of his kingdom?

Discern: Beyond exorcisms, how can we pursue “being of sound mind” in Jesus? What does it look to seek good mental health as Christians? Along this path, for whom might you care?

Confess: Is part of your heart, in response to the demonstrated power of Christ—and all that this power demands on your life—asking Jesus to “Please go away”? If comfortable, share with one another, and pray together over your uncertainties and hesitations.

Pray: Pray that we might find the language, spirit, and courage (see Gregory the Great’s comment) to demonstrate how much Jesus has done for us. Pray that the effect would be a gospel wonder.