

A STORY OF US ALL

Mark 5:1-20

One of my favorite things is hearing someone's testimony about coming to faith in Christ. I love to hear the great things Jesus has done in peoples' lives. In fact, that's one of the things I look forward to the most when we get to heaven – listening to everyone's stories of grace! We all have a testimony story. And every story is unique in its details, but at the same time, there is a sense in which every story is also similar in that when we meet the real and living Jesus Christ of the Bible, He saves us, sets us free, transforms us, and creates in us a desire to tell others about all the great things He's done for us. I hope that's one of the main reasons we're singing praises this morning! And in the account we're going to read this morning about Jesus setting a demoniac free, this man's story is certainly unique to say the least. But I think we'll find that to a degree, this is all of our stories – the story of us all who are in Christ. This is one of those passages that doesn't need an attention-grabbing introduction.

Mark 5:1-20

“They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones. Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and shouting with a loud voice, he said, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” For He had been saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” And He was asking him, “What is your name?” And he said to Him, “My name is Legion; for we are many.”

“And he [the man] began to implore Him [Jesus] earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain. The demons implored Him, saying, “Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.” Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them.”

“As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him. And He did not let him, But He said to him, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” And he went away and began proclaiming in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.”

So after crossing over the Sea of Galilee from the Capernaum area on the northwest shore, to the Gerasenes/Decapolis area on the eastern shore, it appears that Jesus and His disciples hardly step out of the boat before they meet this man in serious spiritual bondage.

I. **A MAN IN SPIRITUAL BONDAGE MEETS JESUS. (VV. 1-9)**

The man is in spiritual bondage to way more than just one demon. There is actually so many that they call themselves **Legion, which means a vast host or great number**. And a legion of Roman soldiers would have been around 3,000–6,000 soldiers. I'm not saying that that's exactly how many there was – the exact number doesn't matter but we do know that there is apparently enough to run 2,000 pigs off the hillside into the water. This seems a little odd at first to have many demons

in one man but remember that we're talking about the spiritual realm, not just physical. In this our physical realm, we are limited to being shoulder-to-shoulder, like stadium seats. In the spirit realm, one should can pass through another. We know that much, but we'll leave it at that much too.

Something else to keep in mind is that the book of Matthew records the same account but mentions **two demon possessed men**. Mark and Luke only mention the one man probably because one of them was the highlight of the two. He made the most interaction with Jesus or maybe was clearly in a far worse condition. But a very valuable lesson can be gleaned from that in that when one gospel writer shares details that another doesn't, it does not mean that there is a contradiction between the accounts and the Bible is in error. It means that not every gospel writer felt the need to write down the exact same details. One writer wrote about the one man with the Legion and another writer wrote about both men, providing **greater context and further details**. The passages are complimentary and not contradictory.

➤ **Interpretation Principle: Complementary, not Contradictory.**

We could say the same thing about the area they are in: Mark and Luke describe it as the country of the Gerasenes. Matthew calls it the country of the Gadarenes. Well which is it? Gerasenes or Gadarenes? It's both. Gerasa is a city in the region of Gedara, and Gedara was also a name of a city in the Decapolis area. Neither author is wrong, they're just giving the general location by noting different reference points in the vicinity.

But as we come back to the condition of the man, one unforgettable observation is that he has unnatural, superhuman strength – a key sign of demon possession in some cases (I'm sure many of you've heard stories like this). And no doubt the strength is due in part to the fact that he had many demons (not saying that's always the case though). But it says no one can subdue this guy. He just tears chains apart like wax and shatters the shackles like glass. In fact, the man is so violent that people were afraid to travel this particular corridor anymore where these men lived among the tombs, so the people should at least be thankful that this area is traversable again (Matt. 8:28)! And even though this man has great strength, or at least the demons do through him do, notice **he himself is totally helpless as a man to free himself from the spiritual bondage he is in**. He can break and shatter the man's attempts to bind him, but he is helpless to free himself from the spiritual bondage of Satan.

And when it comes to our stories, one of the realities we learn about through the Bible usually after we are supernaturally born-again by Spirit of God through faith in Christ, is just how much every single one of us was in spiritual bondage to Satan and actually doing Satan's will when we didn't even know it. **We might not have been demon-possessed, but we were still in bondage to a certain degree**. I want to look at a couple passages for this. Ephesians 2:1 first, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them, we too all formerly lived in the lusts of the flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." So before Christ, we were spiritually dead in our sins. We were dead and we walked like it!

When the first man and woman, Adam and Eve chose not to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and instead chose to disobey God by eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they died in 3 ways. First, they opened the door to **spiritual death**. There was a removal of this intimate relationship between man's spirit and God's Spirit. The

intimate fellowship was removed and in its place came a death, or separation in the relationship that had to be bridged. Secondly, whereas they were created eternal, they would **die physically** now and if we aren't born again spiritually, there is a **third eternal death** where the resurrected body and soul would be cast into the **lake of fire for eternity**. But the state that we're all born in as descendants of Adam and Eve is we're already dead before we die, and need to be born again so that we don't experience the third death.

But since we're dead and without the divine nature to start out with, we walk like the verse says, according to that sinful nature. It's all we know. It's the course of this world and it's in agreement with Satan's desires. It says he is **the prince of the power of the air**. Satan and his **spirit** are at work in this world all around us and you see it more clearly now than ever in our country. But we should expect it. This world is Satan's playground. When God asked Satan in Job where he'd been, he said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." Satan's having a hay day right now and all he wants to do is steal, kill and destroy.

But how are we to respond to those who are still in bondage? 2 Timothy 2:25-26 sheds the light on it: "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive to do his will." This verse tells us that people without God, whether they realize it or not, are actually opposed to Him and on Satan's side – even those who try to remain neutral. They're described as without truth and without their senses and without freedom. And being a jerk isn't going to win them because it didn't win us, did it? What won us to Christ? Gentleness. Kindness. **Romans 2:4 says it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance – especially His kindness in Christ while we were still sinners.**

➤ **If you want to help and not hinder people being set free, be kind. Speak truth in love.**

But this story about a demon possessed man, is actually closer to our stories than we realize. We might not have been possessed like this man but every one of us without Christ started out in a similar condition of spiritual bondage, and it took the work of God by the Spirit of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ to free us from that (Titus 3:1-7). And that's what we see next.

II. JESUS FREES THIS MAN FROM THE BONDAGE. (VV. 10-13)

"And he [the man] began to implore Him [Jesus] earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain. The demons implored Him, saying, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them." Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them." This is one of those passages that we look at and just have to wonder. What happened to these demons? Did they come back out of the pigs once they drowned? Well, we're only left to speculate the details about a spiritual realm that we don't totally understand yet.

But we can know something about it by taking note of some of the **desires of these demons**. One of the sad desires is that **they desire to stay in the country** or the area they were in. They liked where they were at and were comfortable there. And that's what demons do. They like to set up shop somewhere specific and occupy territories from which to work. I have no doubt they are in key positions and have key influences on peoples all over the world to keep people deceived. One

thing we don't want is for them to feel comfortable *where we are* – especially at church or in our homes – so we stay close to the Lord in His Word and in prayer.

Another desire they have is that Jesus not torment them. Even though the demons many and Jesus is one, they are subject to Him and fear Him because He is God and has the power and authority to do what He wants. Their question in Matthew's gospel, "Have You come here to torment us before the time?" reveals that they know torment is coming. What torment? The Lake of Fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels (25:41). But Luke also adds that they begged Jesus not to send them into the abyss (Luke 8:31). The abyss is a place for demons until that time. It is described as a bottomless pit (unfathomable) and is the place where Satan will be locked up for 1,000 years during the Millennial Kingdom.

One of the sad realities about demons is that even though they bow down before Jesus, they don't have a heart for Him. They'll never obey Him out of love – they have to be forced to obey Him. **They're orthodox in their beliefs, but He doesn't have their heart.** They know about God, but they don't know God in the sense that they have an obedient love relationship with Him. We've got to be careful that isn't us – knowing of God, without really knowing Him personally.

Then the last demonic desire is sad as well. These angels who were created to glorify God in Heaven, now **desire to go indwell a herd of pigs.** Jesus didn't suggest the pigs, they did. From God's throne, to a herd of pigs. This is how low your desires can become without Jesus. It reminds us of the prodigal son and what life became for him without God – he ended up among the swine (Luke 8:11-32). And by His allowing them to go into the swine, He allowing them to admit they are as unclean as swine according to the Law and not fit for service in the kingdom of God.

But a main point should be made that **only God could be casting out a legion of strong fallen angels like this.** Only God could make these demons who were so rebellious and strongminded and violent one minute ago, start begging not to be tormented. The tormentors of this man are now begging not to be tormented. It's a powerful picture of Christ's authority.

- **Only Jesus, who is God, can free you from the powers of sin, Satan and society (the corrupt world system).**

Only He can set you free from spiritual bondage of any degree! And like John 8:36 says, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

After meeting Jesus and being freed, we see the man was then transformed.

III. THE MAN WAS RESTORED TO HIS SENSES. (VV. 14-15)

"Their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. And the people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the "legion"; and they became frightened. Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. And they began to implore Him to leave their region." Look at the man's new body language. This man is no longer restless and reckless and running around the tombs screaming, but is sitting down, quietly, and wearing proper clothing. The man's dignity is restored. He has self-control. He has a sound mind and sound lifestyle (Lk. 8:36). And that's the way it is when you come to Christ – the Spirit of God through His Word will produce sound minds and lives. Those of us who now know Jesus Christ after being under the

bondage of Satan's lies for a great portion of our lives, knows what it's like to have our dignity (the image of God) and senses restored to us.

When the people see this man sitting there in his right mind and **the pigs floating there as unforgettable evidence that he has been freed and something great has taken place**, we get the impression that it's been a long time since this man was in this kind of condition. For the longest time he's been unsociable and distant and unrelatable. People avoided this man in this area. But now, everything has changed. He's made new. And the point needs to be made this morning:

➤ **If Jesus can restore this man's life, He can restore anyone's life – including yours.**

Like this man, you may have made some bad decisions that got you into a mess in the first place. But now you're stuck and you feel helpless to get out of it on your own. That's the sort of business Jesus is in. **Jesus is in the business of setting people free and restoring their lives to something that's stable and sensible and sound – and a life like that is going to stand out in this world.**

After being transformed, the man is then commissioned.

IV. THE MAN IS COMMISSIONED TO SHARE WITH OTHERS THE GREAT THINGS JESUS DID FOR HIM. (VV. 16-20)

As Jesus is getting ready to get back into the boat to leave the area now, the man begs Jesus to let him come with Him (v. 18) but He denies the man because in this particular instance, not following Jesus physically, is to follow Jesus. By not actually traveling with Jesus and all the other disciples, he is actually following Jesus more by telling others about the great things He had done for him!

Jesus essentially said, I have enough disciples following me but I don't have a whole lot of witness in the area of Decapolis so "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and the mercy He had on you." And you know what? He did! This man listened. He let the Lord Jesus command him. If Jesus is your Lord, that's what you do. How can we call Him Lord if we don't do what He says.

? Are we letting the Lord command us, even when it goes against our desires?

Think about it: he wanted to do one thing and Jesus told him to do another. And when He listened, God blessed it – God used him! People in this area wanted Jesus to leave but through the testimony of this man about Jesus, and the swine to prove it, this man had an impactful ministry. There was a favorable response. It says, "...he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed." There were 10 cities in Decapolis that we know of. So he was prolific!

So here's another question:

? Have you gone home to your people and reported to them what great things the Lord has done for you?

Because your testimony is powerful! Especially to those who know something about you and can see the "before & after Jesus" in your life. And if you think about the greater context of Mark 7:31, I think we could say that it was because of this man that the region was actually prepared to receive Jesus the second time He comes back to the region. Soon, Jesus will be drawing large crowds again in this area too, no doubt in part because of this man's testimony. And you know, through our transformation and testimony, we also prepare people to receive Jesus at His 2nd Coming.

To close, I want to just encourage you with this interesting point again: Jesus Himself was rejected by the people until the transformed man shared his testimony. **They couldn't deny the change in**

this man's life. That tells us a lot about how powerful a testimony is. And this command for this man to go tell people about Jesus at home is a biblical principle. Starting at home with family and friends is the logical and natural pattern. It's the pattern Jesus gave to the apostles in Acts 1:8, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth." And if you go and read the rest of the book of Acts, that's exactly how it played out. They started in Jerusalem, their home town. Then Judea, their country or province. Then Samaria, the neighboring province. And then the remotest parts of the world – they just kept telling people about Jesus.

➤ **Evangelism Principle: Tell the world your powerful testimony of Christ, starting at home!**

Let the Lord who met you, freed you, and transformed you, command you and commission you.