

From Ruin to Redemption

Mark 5:1-20

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It is a privilege to be here again this morning, to open God's Word with you. If you have your Bibles if you'd turn to the Gospel of God according to Mark, to chapter 5.

The Context of Mark's Gospel

Someone has called Mark, "the gospel for guys," which I happen to like - action-packed, rapid fire snapshots of Jesus and His divinity, His message, His mission; one vivid picture after another coming together to draw a larger picture of who the Lord is. I think of the picture that, if you go to the Wendy's fast-food restaurant sometimes you'll see there at the entrance a picture of a smiling Wendy's worker, but if you get closer to it you realize that this picture is actually made up of literally hundreds of smaller pictures that are tiny pixels in the picture and as you back away from it you get a grander picture, a larger picture. And that's what Mark is doing; he's showing us snippets, little points here and there, drawing together to show us a greater picture of our Savior, of who He is.

Now this particular passage we're looking at this morning follows the most memorable account of the disciples who, having left a busy schedule with the Lord Jesus, crossing the Sea of Galilee, thinking they're going on some sort of break to get away from the crowds only to find themselves in a squall, a storm, in the middle of the night, and the terror that follows that when they literally think they're going to drown and the Lord is awakened and He rescues them. And if that's not enough of a shock to get over, they arrive the next morning on the other side of the Sea of Galilee at this area called the Gerasenes where no sooner do they set foot on shore than a screaming, demon-possessed man rushes at them, lunges at them. Never a dull moment for the disciples, is it? Let's pick up the story; let's unpack both the message and the implications for us. Mark chapter 5 beginning at verse 1. Follow with me if you will:

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately

there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, 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. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. 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.' For he was saying to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' And Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion, for we are many.' And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, 'Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.' 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 were drowned in the sea.

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

Our wonderful Lord, we opened our Bibles but You alone can open our hearts. And we pray that You would do that even now, that You would instruct us by Your Word, that You would work in our hearts knowing us as we truly are before You, that we would be more like Your Son, our Savior. And in this Lord, we commit ourselves again to You. In Your name we pray, Lord Jesus, amen.

Now I want to divide this section of Scripture into three parts. If you're taking notes, the first part is to look at the depths of Satan's control; the depths of Satan's control, verses 1 through 7. The second will be to look at the deliverance brought by the Lord Jesus, verses 8 through 13. And last we'll look at the difference in the man's conduct, verses 14 through 20. So we have the depths of Satan's control, the deliverance by the Lord Jesus, and the difference in the man's conduct. This sermon, like "Sesame Street," is brought to you by the letter "D" this morning.

I. The Depths of Satan's Control

So first we'll look at the depths of Satan's control. Before we get started we need to ask a very basic question, and the question is, "Is this a story of a man truly overwhelmed, possessed by demons, or is this really a case about mental illness that predates some sort of modern diagnosis? Which is it?" We read several encounters by the Lord Jesus with those who are possessed by evil spirits. Chapter 1, if you're familiar with this particular section of Scripture, talks about Jesus cleansing a man who was demon-possessed in Capernaum when he was in the synagogue. An exorcism in church, no less. There are many today who believe that the latter is true; that it's just undiagnosed mental illnesses. A book written by Dr. Michael Cuneo, *The American Exorcism*, takes that position. There are others who aren't as sure about that. We could mention a number of different ones. A number of years ago, Barbara Walters did a piece on the first ever televised exorcism on the "20/20" program, not exactly the most pristinely scientific piece of work but definitely interesting. You have Scott Peck who wrote his famous book, *The Road Less Traveled*, a psychiatrist, who subsequently wrote another book called, *The People of the Lie*, in which he takes a chapter and he devotes it to demonism. There are a lot of missionaries, I think particularly of our friend, Dr. Paul Long Sr., missionary to the old Congo in Africa and then having been run out of that he and his family went and ministered at the Amazon Basin, and the effects there that he saw and the anecdotal stories and his observation, convinced that there still is the influence of Satanic beings on those people that they were dealing with.

The Biblical Doctrine of Fallen Angels

But really more important than anything else we have to understand that the Bible makes it clear that there are fallen angels, those who were with Satan in his rebellion against God, who are determined even to this day to oppose, to dilute, if it were possible to even destroy the work of God in redemption. And Jesus deals with many who are under this influence and oppression, necessitating genuine exorcism, extracting these destructive demons. And as uncomfortable as this may make us proper Presbyterians, we really have to accept Scripture that it speaks to the realities of the world, the universe that is, that we can't pick up on with our senses in and of ourselves, and to press on to study, to understand, and apply spiritual truths to our lives. There are two extremes that we could take and C.S. Lewis is very helpful in this. With reference to satanic activities, C.S. Lewis wrote, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence and the other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them." Well stated. There's a ditch on either side of the road and Satan doesn't care which ditch he gets you in. The one side is to ignore altogether the realities that God tells us in His Word and the other is to become obsessed with the possessed, if you want to put it that way, in an unhealthy focus. But as we come to this particular passage in

Scripture none is more graphic or horrifying in a sense than this account in Mark chapter 5 of demonic possession in people. And that's what we're going to unpack this morning.

Into Hostile Territory

Begin again with me in verse 1. "They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes." Now this is an area on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. The western side is beautiful, rolling plains, slides gracefully into the sea, grassy areas, but on the eastern side it's quite different. There are craggy cliffs, very steep; drops immediately down into the sea. It's an area that was predominantly Gentile, not Jewish in the population. That's why there's a pig herd. The Jews were forbidden to keep pigs and to eat pigs. Leviticus chapter 11 - hosts to all kinds of parasites; part of God's protection for His people. But in short, for the disciples particularly as they go to this area, this is very hostile, alien, strange to them. It's uncomfortable. This is not a pastoral scene. This is not heaven on earth for them.

The Demon-Possessed Man

And they come and they step ashore in verse 2 and "Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit." Now I don't know about you, but in my sanctified imagination I just wish that I could have a picture of the disciples' faces as this man came running at them, screaming, just what he would have looked like and what they would have looked like in response to him. We see this man who's not a hermit by choice. This is not some sort of pre-utopian Walden Pond. He's likely been driven out of a polite society because of his affliction. He's forced to live among the tombs, and serving there, these tombs would have been shelter for him. This was his home. This is where he had to live. Now listen again, carefully, to the description of this one. Verse 3, "He lived among the tombs. No one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, 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." Sounds like shades of Samson all over, doesn't it? "Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones." This is a picture of a pathetic human being. This is a picture of a man continually in mental, emotional, spiritual torment. He's in agony, far worse than the man in chapter 1. At least that man was allowed on the periphery of society. He was in church when Jesus encounters him. And so now here are these disciples with the Lord Jesus in this spiritually polluted region of the Gentiles facing a genuine, card-carrying, certified demon-possessed man rushing at them looking more like an animal than a human being. Just think about this. If he has any clothes on it's not much, ragged perhaps, scarred from the chains from bruising himself as we're told, self-inflicted wounds all over his body, unwashed, filthy, dare I say it, ripe-smelling, shrieking as he rushes at the Lord Jesus. Definitely not the sort of person you and I would

want to be around, much less encounter and talk with.

We get this sense from the passage that this man is almost a guard; he's almost a century, almost a demonic junkyard dog as if strategically placed there by Satan to keep Jesus from entering this area. In fact, the word used that we translate from the Greek in the word "met" literally means "to face off; to challenge." It was a military term. This was no society welcome. This was no polite welcome wagon sort of reception. And we're not told why he was this way. Was it because he had dabbled with the occult like King Saul had done earlier? We don't get the sense that he was born that way like the man born blind that Jesus will heal. We aren't told why but we are told that he was totally overwhelmed. He was enslaved by evil spirits and in bondage to the sin consuming, dominating his life. He was literally a living horror, tormented day and night, and unable to help himself and unable to do anything about his situation. The depths of Satan's control.

II. The Deliverance by the Lord Jesus

But now let's look at the deliverance wrought by Christ. I want you to notice again what the man does when Jesus arrives. Verse 6, "When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran, he fell down before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High?'" You notice something interesting - at one in the same time he's running to Jesus with his feet but he's running from Jesus with his mouth. If you see this, notice something that he's doing here. He recognizes without an introduction who Jesus is in His person, in His position, in His power. To the amazement, I'm sure, of the disciples, this man runs, he falls at the Lord's feet, and in verse 7 the second part he says, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God." That's His person and that's his position. And then he says, "I adjure you by God, do not torment me," or as another translation puts it, "Swear to God that you won't torture me." He recognizes the power that Jesus has. Now the Lord is not rattled by all of this. I think the disciples were probably very rattled by all of this.

But in verse 9 Jesus asks him, "What is your name?" And he replies, "My name is Legion, for we are many." Now for those of you who may be trivia buffs, this may be an interesting point for you to pull on your friends. This is the only time that Jesus asks a demon to identify itself by name. And perhaps the reference has to do with the military terms. The Romans - we know what a centurion was - over a hundred soldiers. Do you know what a legion would have been? If that's true to the reference being made, a Roman legion was a company of 6,826 Roman soldiers. Perhaps this is the reference to the influence of the different spiritual beings that are binding and controlling him, representing a host of demonic influences, and they're clearly afraid of the Lord Jesus. In verses 10 through 13, we're familiar with this story since childhood, they make an unusual request asking that Jesus not banish them from the area but that He allow them

to leave this man and enter into this herd of pigs that are over on the side feeding themselves as if to say, "This is really our territory. We'll leave him if we can stay here by going to them." This is home turf for them; this is occupied territory. And the Lord Jesus gives them permission. And we're told that they leave the man, they go into this very large herd of pigs that immediately run over the cliff and they are drowned in the Sea of Galilee. Someone said that the Sea of Galilee at that point turned into the original Bay of Pigs. I thought that was kind of an interesting thing! I had a friend in college, as we studied this together, he said, "I'll bet that's the first ever recorded swine dive in history!"

The Motive for this Ministry?

So why did Jesus do that? Could I suggest a couple of things? Perhaps, perhaps it was to show the value of one person more than 2,000 animals. The atheist philosopher, Bertrand Russell, in his famous essay, "Why I'm Not a Christian," sites this account in the Bible as one of the reasons why he couldn't believe in Jesus because, he said, "It's just a waste of animals and I can't believe." Perhaps it was to show the value of one person more than 2,000. Perhaps, perhaps it was to show that the real and ultimate goal of the demons possessing the man was his destruction because they immediately were destroyed; the animals. Perhaps it was to show that their ultimate goal was to destroy all that they inhabited. Perhaps it was to show the power of Jesus over evil spirits that never would there ever be so many satanic influences that could tip the scale against the Lord Jesus. In very few hours since leaving the shore on the other side of the Sea of Galilee the day before, the Lord's disciples had just witnessed not only the Lord that night before in His power over the elements, they now see the Lord Jesus' power over evil.

III. The Difference in the Man's Conduct

The depths, the deliverance, now let's talk about what happens - the difference. Verses 14 through 16 - "The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had legion, sitting there and clothed in his right mind" - I like that phrase. I wish my children sometimes I could have said things like that. But "clothed and in their right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs." There's obviously a radical change in this man. It's obvious, "This is not the person that we have known." And for the first time in perhaps years this man is there and he's calm and he's self-controlled, he's amazingly able to interact with the townspeople. He's presentable, acting rational. This is a 180 turn around; an amazing thing has just happened.

The Impact Locally

So what is the impact that it has on those who live in the area? Well we're told that the herders of the pigs had gone to town, they had told everybody, people turned out in mass to see this thing that had happened. "What's going on?" And they find the local village idiot, the crazy man, no longer crazy. And what's their response? They ask the Lord to go away. They begged Him to leave, to depart. "We can't handle this. We don't know what's going on but please just leave! Don't talk to us!" You know I find it interesting that just then, as today, somehow we get the idea that, you know, when Jesus would perform miracles and He would preach and these wonders and things would happen that it would automatically draw people in; they'd be fascinated with it. They'd want to know more. And the reality is that it polarizes people. Some people are drawn, some people do want to know more, and others are repulsed. "Go away! Go away! I don't want to hear it!" Nothing has changed. It was true then; it's true now.

What do we learn from this? Jesus is getting back into the boat. He's not arguing with them. He's not trying to say, "Listen guys, you don't really understand. Let Me explain." He doesn't do that. He's getting ready to go back. He's leaving. Verse 18 - Jesus is getting into the boat, but "the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him." Isn't that interesting? The man who had experienced a life that was changed wants to be with Him but the people whose livelihoods had been changed want Him to go away. In verse 19, Jesus, it says, "did not permit him to go with him." Isn't that interesting? Why? Perhaps it's because the man's not Jewish. This is early on in the ministry of our Lord and we know that the Gospel was first to go to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. The time will come when the Gentiles will be enfolded into the family of God but not yet. But He doesn't ignore him. Look what He does. Instead, Jesus commissions this man to be the first home missions missionary. Verses 19 and 20 - "And he did not permit him but said, 'Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he's had mercy on you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled."

The Impact of a Changed Life

You see, the point is that the greatest impact of a changed life, someone who's come to know the Lord Jesus, who begins to see what God does in his life because of that, the greatest impact they can have is to go back where they came from to those who have known them and to share what the Lord Jesus has done. The greatest impact is at home not necessarily to gather together as Christian groups and isolate and to be off to the side. You know we used to call them in college, "SMOTS - Secret Meeting of the Saints." You know we'd sort of just be in this "holy huddle," love to be with those who thought like we thought, like to do what we like to do, singing Kumbaya, all that sort of good stuff. Nothing wrong with it but that wasn't the call. The charge was to go back. And that's

exactly what he did - to the very people who had put him in shackles, to the people who had treated him like he was dead. They didn't want anything to do with him but that's where Jesus sent him - back to those who knew him. That's how God works, so often, like the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman - the impact of her testimony among those who knew what she was really like. What has happened? And here the Lord sends back this man who knows he's unworthy to share the good news of the Gospel, he recognizes his own unworthiness, he's going back to those who are also unworthy, but they don't yet know they are unworthy.

We're not really told what impact he had, what was the influence; we don't know exactly the story. That will be one of the wonderful things when we get to heaven. I just want to go track this man down and sit down with him and talk. We do know that the Gospel flourished in this region of the Decapolis. *Deca* - ten; *polis* - cities = the ten cities. We see all kinds of things in the book of Acts, most notably, Damascus. There's a large Christian church there. In fact, the apostle Paul, before he's Paul he's Saul and he's going there, in his thinking he's going to help get rid of this heresy; he's going to stomp it out. And that's where he has his conversion, on that road to Damascus. And he continues and he goes and he finds this large body of believers there and he's brought in and he's disciplined by Barnabas. Jesus is a great Savior and the Gospel was and is a declaration of the good news of changed life. "If any man is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come."

But most of us don't have this kind of experience. There are not many of us who come to Christ from demonic backgrounds. There weren't that many then and there aren't today but we all know what it's like to be tormented. We all understand what it's like to have self-destructive thoughts. In a real sense, the demonic man from the Gerasenes experienced in the extreme what we experience to a lesser or varying degrees. Some of us, by God's grace, have been spared the ravages of a life apart from Christ unbridled. But it doesn't matter where we come from, our story is our story of what He's done and we shouldn't be embarrassed, we shouldn't be afraid to share it with other people. We are, in a sense, "Exhibit A" in the courtroom of life. We are testimony to truth, to the power of God to change lives. I saw a plaque not too long ago that I really liked. It said, "Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future." There's no better place to do it than at home, with your family, with your relatives, those that you work with, those that you play with, those that you go to the ballgames with. The reality of what God does.

Jesus: Friend and Savior of Sinners

One last thought. This is a harrowing story. We see it through such sanitized lenses we just don't really get the impact, unfortunately. But this is interesting. What's going on here? It's been an exhausting pace of ministry, the disciples have been with Jesus, He's been preaching, He's been healing, they've been

watching, they're exhausted, they've been going through all of this; they're looking forward to this get-away, this peaceful, they think, night sail to take the Lord Jesus away. And they experience this traumatic experience where they're nearly drowned and now this one man horror show where they touch the other beach and this is what happens. Why is Jesus doing this? What's the purpose of crossing the Sea of Galilee? Now in one sense I think the Lord knows that He's taking the disciples into the storm; He's teaching them who He is. He knows the encounter they're going to have, the divine appointment on the other side. He knows all of that and they're going to learn from it. But why does He do this? He could have done that on the other side. Was it to rustle up another crowd? Was it to gather a new Facebook group or another Twitter group or whatever the 2,000 year old equivalent was? I don't think so. Was it to plant a missionary church, you know, sort of a spiritual D-Day invasion to plant the flag in this alien territory? I don't think so. Although we do know that there will be a great spreading of the Gospel afterwards through this rather unattractive, pathetic preacher, but I don't think that's the reason. Jesus takes him, takes all these disciples, on this trip, He goes across the Sea of Galilee and in less than a few hours He turns right around and He goes back. So why does He do this?

Could I suggest that it was to save one pathetic, pathetic man? The word "to save" literally means "to heal, to make whole." Jesus would take His disciples all the way through all these things to rescue one miserable, tormented, lonely, wretched, pathetic human being. That's the Savior that I trust you know. That's the Savior that we know by His grace and mercy in relationship with Him that we learn from, that we love, that we serve. Jesus, the Lover of your soul, so much that He would go the distance, all that they went through, for one person. You know I think it's kind of interesting because I think the disciples on the other side, you know on the grassy amphitheater where the Lord was giving the Sermon on the Mount and He's talking about the Good Shepherd who takes leave of the ninety-nine to go find the one lost sheep. And I can see the disciples - I probably would have been among them - "Yes, Lord. That sounds good! Yes, the good shepherd leaves the ninety-nine and goes and finds that one." And I can see that they're just sitting there smiling and, "Check, I got it, I got it, I got it." But that was theory. This is real life. This is the Good Shepherd doing what He said He would do. And you notice what He goes after is not a cute, fluffy, groomed, 4-H type of lamb ready for the ribbons. It's pretty ratty, miserable sheep.

You know in this account I find an illustration of something that was told to me years ago by a mentor of mine. He said, "Guy, you need to know that if you had been the only person in the universe in need of salvation that Jesus Christ would have come down from heaven and He would have died on the cross for you." The only one in the universe who could have overcome the power of evil, temporally or eternally, came to save a wretch like this man, a living death from among the tombs of the Gerasenes. He would save the "chief of sinners," as Paul would call himself; He would save me, and you, if you know Him. If you don't, please let me know. Please come talk to us. In the words of the hymn

writer, Wilber Chapman, “Jesus, what a friend of sinners! Jesus, lover of my soul!”

Father, we thank You for such a great salvation. And in Your sweetness to save us, Lord, You know us better than we would ever know ourselves. We look to each other well-washed, well-fed, well-ensured but you know our hearts. Thank You for giving us life and life eternal in Your Son, our Savior, Jesus. We praise You, we thank You, and we worship You. In Your name we pray, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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