

The Healing of a Man Possessed with Many Demons

Mark 5:1-20

Mark 5:1-20 - *"Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. ² And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, ³ who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, ⁴ because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. ⁵ And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.*

⁶ When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. ⁷ And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me." ⁸ For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" ⁹ Then He asked him, "What is your name?" And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many." ¹⁰ Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.

¹¹ Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains. ¹² So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them." ¹³ And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.

¹⁴ So those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. ¹⁶ And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine. ¹⁷ Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

¹⁸ And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. ¹⁹ However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." ²⁰ And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled."

Background Notes

"The other side of the sea" (v1) would be the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. It was a less populated area than the western side of the Sea of Galilee. A number of Gentiles lived in this region because it was part of the Greco-Roman territory known as Decapolis.

It's likely that the herdsmen here were Jews who were raising swine for the Gentile markets of the Decapolis area. The Mosaic Law forbade Jews to be involved in this kind of business, because (according to the Law) swine were unclean animals. Did you ever wonder why the Lord permitted 2000 pigs to drown in the Sea of Galilee? This was probably one reason. These Jews were involved in an illegal business enterprise. It's interesting to see that the pigs' owners did not find fault with the Lord. Perhaps they realized their guilt in running an illegal business.

It's important to realize, by the way, that the **Lord** did not destroy the pigs. Although the Lord allowed it, it was the destructive power of **Satan** that led the pigs to be drowned.

The eastern side of the Sea of Galilee is quite mountainous, and there are a number of steep cliffs, so it is not surprising to read of the pigs stampeding and rushing headlong down into the Sea of Galilee. On one of our Holy Land tours, we were on a boat on the Sea of Galilee, and the captain told us that he had seen a cow that was grazing on the side of the hill and actually lose its footing, and tumble down and drown in the Sea of Galilee. There definitely are steep banks in that area, so it's not hard to see how this took place.

Verses 2-3 say that the demon-possessed man lived among the tombs. Now don't imagine that he had a house in the middle of a cemetery. No – in the 1st century, caves or cave-like rooms carved out of the rocky hillside were used as tombs. This man was alienated from his family and community, and was living in one of the cave-like tombs.

In verse 19 the Lord said to the man, *“Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you.”* On other occasions, we read that the Lord told somebody who was healed, “Don't tell anyone.” What's the difference here? Usually the Lord asked them not to tell anyone because He didn't want huge crowds following Him for the sole purpose of seeing Him do miracles. But this area was less populated, so there was little danger of His popularity hindering His ministry.

Doctrinal Points

1. Demons are more than “psychological problems.”

Some critics of the Bible say that “demon-possessed people” in the Gospel accounts were just people who had psychological problems. Critics maintain that the people of that time were ignorant, and didn't know any better, so they blamed all kinds of problems on demons. No! This is the *Word of God*, and it says the man was demon-possessed! Furthermore, it's completely illogical to think that a man's “psychological problems,” transferred to 2000 pigs, could cause them to stampede and drown in the Sea of Galilee!

The Bible teaches that demons are evil spirits. They can cause a person to become dysfunctional and can cause deep, psychological problems, but the demons are not a psychological problem! Demons are invisible spirit beings, part of the ranks of the evil angels, led by Satan and his schemes. But don't get the idea that demons are all-powerful, and that they can operate at will. No, this account clearly teaches that evil spirits know who Jesus Christ is, and they know that they are subject to Him.

We learn quite a bit about demons from this one account.

- Demons can differ in character. The demons here are called “unclean spirits” - they caused this man's talk and actions to be unusually vile and disgusting. Other demons in the New Testament are called “deaf or dumb

spirits,” causing hearing or speech disabilities. In Luke 13:11, a woman had a “spirit of infirmity” for eighteen years - she was permanently bent over. 1 Timothy 4:1 speaks of “deceitful spirits” and “doctrines of demons.” Many Old Testament references mention “familiar spirits” - evil spirits who are associated or familiar with particular people. So demons can differ in character.

- Demons can cause a person to have supernatural strength (v4).
- Demons can cause bodily harm and injury, and cause suicidal tendencies (v5). They can cause a person to become dysfunctional and have deep psychological problems. That doesn't mean that a person who has psychological problems, or who injures himself or commits suicide is demon possessed. No - but demons certainly can cause these things.
- Many evil spirits can inhabit one person (v9). A Roman legion consisted of several thousand men, so many demons were possessing this one man.
- Demons can cause a personality change. Evil spirits can even use the voice of a person (v7-9). It's possible that a person with a “split personality,” or “multiple personalities,” could be demon possessed.
- Demons inhabit certain geographic areas, either by assignment or by desire (v10). The demons begged the Lord not to send them “out of the country.”
- Demons can possess animals. This doesn't mean that every sick or rabid animal is demon possessed. No way! But demons want to be embodied, and we learn here that if God allows, they can possess the bodies of animals.
- Demons recognize the Lord Jesus as God (v7).
- Demons are completely under God's authority (v12). Demonic power is limited and only temporary. Matthew 25:41 says that hell was prepared for Satan and his angels.

2. People are more important than animals.

The Bible teaches that people are *different* than animals – people are not just a “higher” or “more developed” form of animal. People are *different* – they are body, soul and spirit. The Bible teaches that people are *more important* than animals as well. In this account we learn that one dysfunctional, alienated, demon-possessed outcast of society was more important than 2000 pigs – or even the whole pig business.

Now this doesn't mean that people can mistreat animals, or that we don't need to protect and care for wildlife and their environment, and so forth. God created animals, and gave mankind dominion over animals, to properly care for them by protecting their habitats and the environment. But let's keep things in biblical perspective. *People* are more important than animals!

Practical Applications

1. You are never “too far gone” for God's saving power.

Occasionally a non-Christian will say, “Even God can't save me. I'm too far gone. I've committed too much sin; too much water has gone under the bridge.” Well, here's a good account to share with someone like that. Look at this man,

possessed by many unclean spirits. Can you imagine this man's vile and sinful thoughts, talk, and actions? But look at the man, after he knelt at the feet of Jesus! No longer was he running around, naked and wild – he was sitting, clothed and in his right mind. God can do that with anyone today as well. You're never too far gone for God's saving power!

2. The Lord will not stay where He is not wanted.

When a person (or a community, or a nation) doesn't want the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus will not force Himself into the situation. He won't stay if He is not wanted.

In this account, the people of the community asked the Lord Jesus to leave - even though the Lord had subdued a wild and dangerous man. The people couldn't control the man, even though they had tried shackles and chains - but the Lord Jesus did the job. However, the Lord had disrupted their desired way of life and their money source, and they didn't want to God to interfere.

In the same way today, the gospel can truly rehabilitate a person. Think of the wonderful results of Prison Fellowship! The gospel and God's saving power are able to completely change an otherwise uncontrollable person. Think of a person who is totally ensnared in substance abuse. God's saving power can release the chains of addiction.

But the world will not admit it. The world doesn't want to admit the power and authority of God, because they don't want God to interfere in the way they have chosen to live their lives. They refuse to admit and submit to the power of Christ - so they ask Him to leave. And guess what? The Lord leaves. Every day see and hear about the terrible results of the world's choice to exclude God. The Lord will not stay where He is not wanted.

3. Let's start reporting the great things the Lord has done for us!

"Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." The man wanted to travel with the Lord, but the Lord said, "No, I have other plans for your life. I want you to go home and tell everyone the great things that the Lord has done for you!

Notice that the Lord did *not* say, "I want you to go to seminary so you can learn how to be a preacher." No, the Lord just said, "Go home and start telling your friends what the Lord has done for you." The Lord says the same thing to us today. "Start where you live, and just share with other what the Lord has done for you."

Has the Lord done some great things for you this past week? How about this past year? Well, share this with others. To be a witness for Christ, you don't have to have special training, and you don't have to be a gifted preacher. All you have to do is simply tell others about what God has done in your life!

Let's start reporting the great things the Lord has done for us!