

March 26, 2023

“Jesus Overpowers Legion”  
Lesson 4

Mark 5:1-13, 18-20

**Intro**

Mark’s gospel is the shortest, but presents Jesus as an active doer. He is presented as a miracle worker frequently, and especially so in this week’s study passage. But the miracles were done to support and confirm his preaching and teaching; they are of secondary importance to these two elements. In Mark 1:38-39, we read, “But He said to them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.’ And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.” So we see that the preaching was most important, with the miracles in the role of supporting that preaching.

Today’s lesson is the fourth about people “Called From the Margins of Society”. These people are all outcasts in some way in the societies they live in. But Jesus goes to them, reaches out to them, to let them know that God cares about them deeply, even if the people in their own worlds have cast them out or ignored them.

**Read Mark 5:1-13**

1. vs. 1: Jesus and His disciples cross the Sea of Galilee (the lake) to the eastern side
  - This area is known as Decapolis, or the “10 cities”
  - Two of the leading cities in this area are Gadara and Gerasa
  - Matthew’s gospel says the Gadarenes, Luke’s the Gerasenes
  - Gadara seems more likely, as it’s nearer to the coastline than Gerasa
  
2. vs. 2-3a: Jesus gets out of the boat and a man comes toward him “immediately”
  - This is typical of Mark’s gospel, where there is a lot of action
  - The man is described as having an “impure spirit” and coming “from the tombs”
  - He is also described as living in the tombs
  - The tombs are obviously where dead bodies are placed
  - To be near the dead makes a Jew unclean according to Jewish law
  - To go to a person who is unclean for this reason makes the 2<sup>nd</sup> person unclean
  - Nowhere does Jesus show concern about ritual uncleanness here
  - To have an “unclean spirit” indicated the man was possessed supernaturally by evil
  
3. vs. 3b-4: This passage indicates steps taken by the community in the past
  - He had been bound with chains at times, but tore the chains apart
  - This strength is due to the evil spirit possessing him
  - After the happened many times (“often”), no one tried it again
  - It says “No one was strong enough to subdue him”
  - The impression is of a dangerous and uncontrollable person, a beast
  - The community is afraid of him, and seems to hope he’ll just stay away from them

4. vs. 5: The man seems very beast-like here  
He cries out, more like a hurt animal than a human expressing sadness  
He cuts himself with rocks/stones  
A healthy person does things that promote well-being  
The evil spirit causes him to hurt himself  
The spirit makes him act beastly to both himself and others
5. vs. 6-7a: The demon possessing the man is the one doing all the action and talking here  
He comes and falls at Jesus' feet  
This isn't worship, but an acknowledgement of Jesus' power and authority  
He calls Jesus "the Son of the Most High God"  
Even the disciples haven't come to this conclusion yet  
The demon knows who Jesus is and where He has come from
6. vs. 7b-8: Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man  
Other scriptures show evil spirits coming out immediately  
Jesus allows this spirit to plead with Him  
Perhaps this is for our benefit to find out more about spirits like this one
7. vs. 9: The demon replies "Legion" when asked by Jesus what his name was  
A legion usually refers to a Roman military unit of 6000 soldiers  
Calling something a legion implies a great number with great power and strength  
However many demons were inside the man, they were many and strong  
Ancient peoples (and maybe some today) think saying the name of the spiritual being gives that person power over the spiritual being  
Jesus is about to show the disciples an important truth about Himself  
Though the powers of darkness appear many and strong, Jesus is always in charge
8. vs. 10: The demons beg not to be sent out of that area  
Luke's account notes Jesus could send them into the Abyss, a place of punishment  
This appears to be why they want to stay where they are
9. vs. 11: The presence of pigs indicates this is a Gentile community  
Pigs were unclean for Jews to eat according to the Law  
Pigs were important as herds, just like sheep or goats were to the Jews  
They were also an acceptable sacrificial animal in pagan ceremonies
10. vs. 12-13a: The demons beg to be allowed to go into the pigs, and Jesus allows it  
This shows that Jesus was in control of the demons; they had to ask permission  
The demons also knew they could no longer inhabit the man  
It's also possible that they were hoping to re-enter the man (or another person) after Jesus left, so this is a way to stay around
11. vs. 13b: If the demons thought this was going to be a good solution for them, they were disappointed  
The thousands of demons entered the pigs, who immediately drowned themselves  
The demons were deprived of a human body and an animal body to inhabit  
This is a foretaste of the ultimate defeat Satan and his demons will suffer at judgment

The herdsman of these pigs didn't see things from God's perspective here.  
They were afraid of Jesus, and asked Him to leave the area (Mark 5:14-17)

### **Read Mark 5:18-20**

12. vs. 18: The healed man begs Jesus to be allowed to follow Him

The verse says, "who **had** been demon-possessed"

This man knows the miracle that has been performed on him

He wants to stay with the One who healed him

He is different from his countrymen

They want Jesus to go away and leave them alone

This man wants to stay with Jesus

13. vs. 19: Jesus denies his request, but tells him to go tell his people what God had done for him

We frequently see Jesus tell others to keep quiet when He has done a miracle for them

Here he tells the man to tell others what happened—why the difference?

One strong possibility is who is going to be told

Most of the ones told to stay quiet are Jews living in Jewish areas

They have the OT and the rabbis; Jesus' ministry can grow in its own time

This man and this area are Gentile

They did not have the OT or the history of God dealing with them

This eyewitness account prepares the way for faith in these people

14. vs. 20: The man obeys Jesus and tells the Decapolis cities what Jesus did for him

These cities are in modern-day Jordan and Syria

One of these cities is Damascus, where Paul regained his sight and became a Christian

Another city is Philadelphia, one of the seven cities getting letters in Revelation 2-3

Scripture doesn't say, but who knows how much this man may have prepared these cities?

Application: We have a lot in common with the man in this account. We too have been delivered by Jesus from a life that was painful and ugly. We too are called to share what Jesus has done for us, to prepare our community to meet Jesus and gain a new life. And whatever the legions, the forces of the enemy, which are set against us, Jesus is more powerful than all of them together—He is in control, not them.

Prayer: Father God, help us to always remember the complete undeniable power of Jesus to deliver and to heal. Help us to show our gratitude for what has been done for us by telling others the good things you have done for each of us. In Jesus' name, Amen.