

Jesus Heals a Demon-Possessed Man

Mark 5:1-20

Key Verse: 5:9

“Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘My name is Legion,’ he replied, ‘for we are many.’”

Mark’s gospel reveals that Jesus was in a continual struggle with Satan (1:13,25,34,39; 3:11). Jesus trained his disciples to participate in this spiritual warfare (3:15). Today’s passage is the most detailed account in the gospels of Jesus driving out demons and healing a demon possessed man. We learn three things: 1) Satan, evil spirits, and demons are real; 2) Jesus has absolute authority over them; 3) Jesus is a compassionate Savior and friend for those suffering from demons.

I. A man with an evil spirit came to meet Jesus (1-5).

After Jesus had calmed a furious squall with one word of command, Jesus and his disciples reached the other side, the region of the Gerasenes. They were on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee in an area known as the Decapolis, the ten cities. It was largely a Gentile area, influenced by Greek and Roman culture more than the law of God.

Look at verse 2. “When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him.” Many people do not acknowledge the existence of evil spirits. Some modern movies and books treat the realm of evil spirits as mere entertainment, or a joke. However, we must know that evil spirits are real, and they are really evil. Evil spirits are also called “unclean” spirits. They debase human beings. The underworlds of drugs, pornography, and gang activity are full of evil spirits. One victim in the Virginia Tech shooting, Garrett Evans, who was badly wounded, later testified about the killer, “Man, the devil entered him. I know he did.” In John 8:44, Jesus says about Satan, “He was a murderer from the beginning...he is a liar and the father of lies.” Evil spirits deceive people in order to murder them and others.

How did the evil spirit affect this man? Verse 3 says, “This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain.” Who lives in the tombs? Spiritually healthy people live in houses with their families. But this man lived among the tombs in dark isolation. How had this happened? Perhaps as a boy he was very active in school. Since he would not sit still in class, his teacher diagnosed him with ADD. Then the school psychologist prescribed drugs for treatment. He became too lethargic to study well or play sports. Gradually he was isolated. Then he began to feel sorry for himself, saying, “I am the most unfortunate person in the world.” The demons did not miss the chance. They came and agreed with him. One by one, demons channeled into him. One day they showed him the power of demons. Then he decided to use it to get revenge on everyone who had bothered him. He began to abuse and mistreat his classmates and neighbors. As a young man he had a long criminal record. He could not live in society anymore. He began to live among the tombs. He felt wretched Verse 5 says, “Night and day

among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.” Malice, hatred, and rage constantly churned in his heart. In self-contempt, he tortured his body by cutting himself.

A lifestyle of lawlessness and disobedience, whatever the cause, invites the work of evil spirits into one’s heart. Ephesians 2:1-2 says, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” We must obey God. Then God protects us from evil spirits. The Bible tells us to put on the armor of God (Eph 6:11). Jesus taught us to pray every day, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Mt 6:13). We must know that evil spirits are real and we must ask God’s deliverance every day.

II. Jesus’ spiritual authority and divine compassion (6-9).

When Jesus saw this man, he knew that his one and only problem was demon possession. Jesus said, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit!” Jesus did not blame the man. Jesus rebuked the evil spirit. Jesus’ words were a command from God. The evil spirit could not ignore it. The man ran to Jesus and fell on his knees in front of him. Though no one else was strong enough to subdue him, Jesus subdued him with a word. Jesus is the stronger man (Mk 3:27). 1 John 4:4 says, “...the one who is in you (Jesus) is greater than the one who is in the world (Satan).” Soon Jesus will throw Satan into hell to stay there forever (Rev 20:10).

The evil spirit was exposed and subdued. However, it did not come out immediately. Rather, it shouted through the man’s voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won’t torture me!” (7) The demons knew exactly who Jesus was. They knew they could not overpower Jesus. So they tried clever means to escape. They claimed demon’s rights, saying, “Leave us alone! Mind your own business!” They tried to get Jesus to make a binding oath not to torture them. They tormented the man with fear, as though he was a hostage in negotiation. Jesus did not deviate. Jesus spoke to the man. Look at verse 9a. “Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’” Jesus’ voice, so commanding toward the evil spirit, became tender and compassionate toward the man. Jesus spoke like a gentle doctor to his fearful patient. Jesus asked, “What is your name?” Why did he ask this?

First, Jesus wanted to make a personal relationship with this man. So Jesus asked his name. In doing so, Jesus revealed his respect for this man as a human being. Jesus did not see him as a weird animal man, as others did. Of course, the man looked nasty, like the creature Gollum in “Lord of the Rings.” Yet Jesus believed that he would be okay if only he accepted Jesus’ love. Jesus saw that he could be a good man. Jesus saw the image of God in him. So Jesus wanted to drive out the evil spirits and fill this man with the Holy Spirit. To establish this relationship, Jesus wanted to win his trust. Jesus does not force himself on people. Jesus comes into the heart that invites him willingly. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the

door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” Jesus was knocking. The love of God began to shine into the man’s heart. It was the dawning of a new day. Jesus began a personal relationship with this man. Praise Jesus!

Second, Jesus wanted to restore the true identity and personality of this man. In the Bible a name is not just a label, but the representation of one’s being, his identity and personality (Gen 17:5; Mk 3:16,17). Thus, when Jesus asked, “What is your name?” he is asking the man’s true identity. This man must have had a name such as “Alan” or “Tom.” However, his answer was, “Legion, for we are many.” This shows that his own identity had been lost. The demons had taken over his being with their own evil persona. By asking, “What is your name?” Jesus was calling him back to his God-given identity and personality. This was the key to his spiritual healing and to a wonderful new life in God.

There is a young lady who is pretty and intelligent and kind. She was named “Georgina” after the rock star Boy George. However, with that name she could not find her identity; she is not a rock star type. So she was very unhappy. She could not study well. She envied rich classmates. She preferred her middle name, “Arby.” But “Arby” sounds like a fast food chain. When she began to study the Bible she learned that Jesus loves her and has a great purpose for her life. She began to seek his will and purpose. Then she took a new name, “Mary,” to grow as a woman of obedience to God and a mother of prayer. Since that time she has made tremendous progress in personal relationships, school study, and all things. She does not envy the empty way of life of corrupted teens. Instead, she has become a good influence spiritually and morally. When we have our identity in God and build up our personality in God we can be healthy and truly happy.

Third, Jesus wanted the man to acknowledge the misery of life without God. The man could not but answer, “Legion, for we are many.” It meant that an army of demons was inside of him. It was a well organized destructive force. It used the man’s members to carry out all manner of evil. This man hated what he had become. But it was the cumulation of his own disobedience that allowed demons to channel into him one by one. Jesus wanted him to renounce his former way of life so that he could live a new life of holy obedience. When Jesus asked, “What is your name?” it was the best love. Jesus wanted to lead him to salvation. Jesus is a true friend to those suffering from demons.

III. Jesus drives out the demons at great cost (10-13).

Look at verse 10. “And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.” This is indeed strange. These demons had done terrible evil in this man. They had brought nothing but pain and destruction. Yet he pleaded with Jesus to let them stay in the area. He seems to think of the demons as his friends. Those under the influence of evil spirits cannot discern between good and evil; between what heals and what harms. However, the demons knew they had no choice but to obey Jesus. They were desperate to salvage a dwelling place in the flesh of a living thing.

So they asked to be sent into the pigs. Jesus gave them permission. They came out of the man and went into the pigs. Then the pigs rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

Some people think Jesus compromised with the demons by letting them go into the pigs. But this is not true. Jesus had his own very good reason to do this. Jesus taught the value of one man in the sight of God. In modern terms, the pigs were worth over one million dollars. To Jesus, one person is worth more than a million dollars, even more than all the world (Mk 8:36). Jesus lived by this truth. In fact, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jesus' disciples needed to learn this. Doing God's work is not just a matter of exercising authority, but also involves great sacrifice. Jesus challenged the selfishness and materialism of fallen man. As we will see, Gerasene people valued animals or money more than this man. They were like many modern people. This is the influence of selfishness and materialism. It is not the mind of Christ. We must love people more than animals or money.

Jesus also taught the reality of the spiritual world to the Gerasene people. When this large herd of two thousand pigs jumped into the water all at once, it was clear evidence that something had come out of the man and gone into the pigs. The people of that region wanted to ignore spiritual reality. But Jesus helped them to confront it. Jesus helped them realize that they needed to fight a costly spiritual battle to have true freedom and peace in the Gerasenes.

IV. Jesus' mission for the man and vision for the region (14-20).

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported what had happened to people in the town and countryside (14). Many people came to see what was going on. They saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind (15). He was okay. He could sit down peacefully and do his homework, without jumping around. He was wearing decent clothes. His hair was cut and combed, his face clean-shaven, his teeth brushed. His wounds had all been healed. He knew who he was and what he was doing. He looked handsome and talented and promising. It was a tremendous miracle of healing. It was a spiritual blessing for that whole region.

However, when people saw this, they were afraid (15). They could not understand the vast power that Jesus had demonstrated. Mostly, they were sorry that they lost so many pigs. They began to worry about their chickens and cattle. So they pleaded with Jesus to leave their region. What a mistake! They failed to discern the time of God's spiritual blessing. This happens to materialistic people. Jesus does not stay where he is not welcomed. He got into the boat to leave. Then the man begged to go with him. This man knew that Jesus was his good shepherd. He wanted to stay with Jesus no matter what. His change shows us that people who love Jesus discern good and evil (Php 1:10).

What did Jesus do? Jesus did not let him. Instead, Jesus told him, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." Why did Jesus do this?

First, Jesus wanted to help this man learn obedience to his word. The man really wanted to go with Jesus. His feelings were very strong about going with Jesus. He had to deny his feelings to obey Jesus' word. In this way, he learned obedience. The disobedient become the prey of demons. The obedient can enjoy God's presence and God's blessings.

Second, Jesus wanted to help this man restore his relationships. Jesus had restored this man's identity and personality. He had peace. Now he could restore his relationships with others. So Jesus sent him back to his family members. No doubt, his parents had shed many tears over him. His siblings had been heartbroken. Jesus wanted to show them the work of God in him. Jesus wanted to heal their hearts and restore their family. To live in a family is important for mankind, especially a family or community that treasures Jesus' grace and promotes mutual love.

Third, Jesus wanted him to remember his mercy and serve his mission. This man had done nothing to deserve Jesus' help. But Jesus had mercy on him until he was completely well. In telling the story, this man would remember Jesus' mercy. Then he could be a spiritually healthy man who was thankful and joyful always. Sharing mercy was his mission; it was what he could do for the glory of God. Those who have no mission are vulnerable to the devil. But those who serve God's mission with all their hearts enjoy God's protection and can grow endlessly.

Fourth, Jesus wanted to spread the gospel through this man. Jesus was not angry at the Gerasene people. Jesus understood them. They had no cultural context in which to understand what had happened. They were shocked and needed time to think about everything and repent. Jesus believed they would accept the man's testimony and it would open their eyes to see God's love for them all. The man went away from Jesus and told in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Today we heard Jesus' words, "What is your name?" Some people have lost their own identity under the influence of postmodernism. Some have yielded to the expectation of others. Some have become the friend of demons. Jesus asks, "What is your name?" to form a love relationship with us. Jesus restores our true identity and personality.

God has called us to serve campus mission. Many young people are suffering from evil spirits. They engage in bizarre behavior. They may even seem dangerous. We must have faith in Jesus' power to drive out evil spirits. We must pray and teach the word of Jesus. Most of all, we must learn Jesus' compassion. May the Lord help us do so.