

Authority over Nature-Mark 5:1-20

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 5:1-20...

Our culture takes two extreme positions regarding the supernatural demonic world. We can label one extreme materialism. Since the "Age of Reason" or "Enlightenment," many have been fooled into disbelieving the existence of demons or any spiritual beings. The spirit of this position contends that we are only what we can observe with our five senses. Satan would happily leave a generation ignorantly believing that he and his legion of fallen angels don't exist. That way, their schemes, and plans can't be identified, and there's no need for a great God-man savior to, once and for all, banish the enemy and restore all things.

We can label the other extreme new ageism or postmodern mysticism. This group is enamored with angels, demons, and anything spiritual that's beyond this world. Just take a look at Hollywood. Beginning in 1969 with *Rosemary's Baby* and in 1973 with *The Exorcist*, Americans have been fascinated with the occult and demonic. If you survey Hollywood since the release of these two films, you'll pick up on this pattern of more and more movies devoted to exploring the demonic. Even less serious shows like *Charmed* prove the same point.

In his book *Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis writes about an older and wiser demon named Screwtape mentoring the younger Wormwood. C.S. Lewis writes in the book's preface, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or magician with the same delight."

I think Lewis hit the nail on the head. As we approach this text, you may be tempted to fall on one of these two extremes this morning. However, engaging in this issue requires a good dose of biblical balance. And Mark 5 provides us with a good starting point. Demons are indeed real, as we find them in this text. But the primary message is that

Jesus is greater than the Satan and all his legion of demons. And he will destroy the power and purpose of Satan once and for all, and we get a glimpse of that final judgment in this passage. Here are our four points for this morning.

- I. Demons power over the man (vv. 1-5)
- II. Jesus' power over the demons (vv. 6-13)
- III. The crowd responds to Jesus' power (vv. 14-17)
- IV. The man responds to Jesus' power (vv. 18-20)

Let's reread verses 1-2. So Jesus and his disciples arrived in the country of the Gerasenes, which would have had a high population of both Jews and Gentiles. They step out of the boat where he tamed the wild sea, and now we're about to see him tame a wild man. Let's read verses 3-5.

This has to be one of the saddest pictures in this gospel. Here we see depicted the depths in which demons, and by extension Satan, have brought a man made in the image of God. Compare and contrast this with Genesis 2. Adam and Eve existed in a world with no pain or sorrow. No physical ailment. There was no isolation or seclusion because they had one another and a relationship with Yahweh. They had perfect dominion over animal life. They perfectly enjoyed each other and God's creation. And yet Jesus tells us that the thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. And that's precisely what happened when he slithered into the garden. And now, consider the tragic state of this demonized man. It's truly heart-wrenching. This man was demonized, meaning he was under the influence of evil and unclean spirits. Demonization can vary in degree of influence, but we find the extreme in this text.

Instead of expressing his dominion over the animal life like Adam, he howls like a wild and untamed animal. Instead of enjoying God's creation, he repeatedly cut himself against the jagged rocks of the land. Instead of flourishing with others, for it is not good that man should be alone, we find him isolated, living among the tombs. Instead of climbing the mountains to receive revelation from God, he goes up on a mountain to try to end his life. His nakedness is not due to an innocence provided by the Lord, but rather his nakedness is due to the shame of the unclean spirits within him. Perhaps this man has a family, and instead of his wife embracing him with a warm hug, she cries herself to sleep at night, asking herself, "What happened to my husband?" Maybe he had children terrified at the thought of their father never returning. And perhaps the people of the town wanted nothing to do with him, so they drove him away, or perhaps the demons drove him to isolation. His supernatural strength proves that demons controlled him, as with the seven sons of Sceva in the book of Acts. In this passage, it's hard not to recognize that the demons seek to remove all that makes humanity distinctly human or image-bearers. That's Satan's design. The demonic function is to distort and

destroy the image of God in humanity. As Werner Foerster notes, "...in most of the stories of possession, what is at issue is not merely sickness but a destruction and distortion of the divine likeness of man according to creation. The center of personality, the volitional and active ego, is inspired by alien powers which seek to ruin man."

We need not think this is the only way demons seek to gain control over individuals. First, as the saying goes, we can do bad all by ourselves. Second, we see images not too far off from this text as we view those strung out on drugs. Consider the epidemic that's taking place in San Francisco and so many other cities in our country. It is heartbreaking, especially if you know the Genesis 1-2 story. Often news anchors compare these individuals with zombies. Typically, those under the sway of demons descend to filthy living, both physically and morally. I don't think it's incidental that the rise of occultism and Satanism these last few years has been accompanied by increasing drug abuse, pornography, and obscenity. The devil wants to kill, steal, and destroy. He wants the man who was made in the image of God to love one woman and provide for his children to spend all his days secluded in front of a computer screen. He wants his demons to influence people to cut, hang, and shoot themselves. He wants them convinced that they have nothing to live for. He hates them because they're made in the image of the one that he truly hates.

Instead of protecting the most vulnerable in our society, a Satanic Temple in New Mexico opens a clinic to provide "free religious medication abortion." The Psalmist accused the Israelites of offering the children as sacrifices unto demons. And in many ways, we see the exact same in our culture today. I can recall working as a juvenile supervision officer in a detention center, and I believe I can confidently say that I've seen these types of demons at work within adolescents, and it truly is sad. And then, he ran into the Lord Jesus. This takes us to our second point this morning. Let's reread 6-13.

The demons here react similarly to the unclean spirit in the synagogue that we found in chapter one. They start by declaring the full identity of the Lord Jesus. The demons have an accurate understanding of Jesus. Their knowledge of him supersedes the Apostles at this point, proving that knowing good theology doesn't save you. What do they mean when they request that he not torture them? Well, it appears they're asking not to be sent to eternal damnation before it's time. I make this conclusion based on the Matthean parallel passage.

²⁹ And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" -Matthew 8:29

In other words, they know their time is short. They're not under the impression that they have to wait it takes to overthrow or overpower God. In so many of these horrific school shootings, it's clear that the shooter knows their time is short. They're not under the impression that once the tactical units arrive, they'll be able to shoot their way out and survive another day. Unfortunately, they plan to take as many people out with them as possible before they go themselves. Well, they get that from their father, the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning.

¹² Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" -Revelation 12:12

So these demons are aware that they will one day face the eternal wrath of God in hell. That's who hell was prepared for, according to Matthew 25.

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. -Matthew 25:41

So this idea that Jesus and the devil are arm wrestling is not the biblical depiction of what's taking place. The demons know they lost; therefore, they beg for more time. When asked his name, he says my name is Legion, for we are many. The technical term for legion consists of a contingency of about 6,000 Roman soldiers. So, without the Lord Jesus, this man is completely lost. We find the demons begging to enter into a herd of pigs, and the Lord Jesus grants their request. I'm going to reframe from speculating here, as we don't have the answers as to why he grants their request, why the pigs drown afterward, or what happens to the demons after the pigs drown.

I did find William Lane's commentary both interesting and plausible. "First, Jesus recognized the time of the ultimate vanquishment of the demons had not yet come; his encounter and triumph over the demonic does not yet put an end to Satan's power. It is the pledge and the symbol of the definitive triumph, but the time when the triumph will be fully realized is yet deferred. It must await the appointment of God. Therefore, Jesus allows the demons to continue their destructive work, but not upon a man. The second element is related to this: Jesus allowed the demons to enter the swine to indicate beyond question that their real purpose was the total destruction of their host." [1]

So we find Jesus casting the demons out of this man. This is merely a microcosm and preview of the fate of Satan and his demons, as we've already seen. Remember what we read in Mark 3:27?

²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. -Mark 3:27

Spoiler alert. Our God wins! And the cross and resurrection is a down payment of his victory!

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. -Revelation 20:7-10

Now compare and contrast this demonized man's state, which in a sense represents this fallen age, with what Jesus has in store for his people.[2] This is why the gospel is so beautiful. The kingdom of darkness is real and shouldn't be trifled with; however, our God is greater, and he has already won the victory on our behalf. Let's consider the people's response in our third point this morning. Let's reread verses 14-17.

Again, we find a juxtaposition. The insane demonized man we read about at the beginning of this chapter is now clothed and in his right mind. He's now sitting at the feet of Jesus. Ladies and gentlemen, this is the power of Jesus! This is the power of the gospel! It has the power to take one full of thousands of demons, clean them up, and have them learn at the feet of Jesus. Do you believe Jesus and the gospel still have this power today? John Ramirez was introduced to the occult by his father's family when he was 8. He became a high-ranking priest in this Satanic cult for 20 years. He encountered the gospel of the Lord Jesus and is now an evangelist for the Lord. Not much, unlike our friend in this passage. Perhaps you have a family member caught up in a false religion or worldview. A coworker, maybe. I know how it is to feel like a loved one is too far gone for the Lord's gospel to save, but he's still in the life-changing business. If he can do it for him, he can do it for the ones we know and love.

But not everyone was so impressed. Verse 15 says the people were afraid. Reminiscent of the disciples saying they were afraid after the display of Christ's power to tame the sea. The disciples displayed a reverential fear that led to faith. These people's fear led them to reject Jesus and request for him to leave. Perhaps they blamed Jesus for the

commercial loss of their pigs. And they clearly appraise property and finances as more worthy of worship than Jesus. One has even penned what a hymn may sound like by this crowd.

Rabbi, begone! Thy powers
Bring lost to us and ours.
Our ways are not as Thine.
Thou lovest men, we-wine.
Oh, get you hence, Omnipotence,
And take this fool of Thine!
His soul? What care we for his soul?
What good to us that Thou hast made him whole,
Since we have lost our swine?

The people revealed what they valued the most. This contrasts sharply with the man's response, as we'll consider in our final point. Let's reread verses 18-20.

It should come as no surprise that this man became a follower of the Lord Jesus, so much so that he begged to join Jesus in his itinerant ministry. If you're a follower of the Lord Jesus, then your testimony is not too different from this man's.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body^[a] and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.^[b] ⁴ But^[c] God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— Ephesians 2:1-5

The Lord Jesus doesn't permit him to follow him, but he does encourage him to tell others! And verse 20 tells us that he does this with joy. I'm willing to bet his understanding of the depth of his depravity became the extra push for him to share the message with others enthusiastically. The same is true today. You may not go into full-time vocational ministry; however, the Lord calls his people to announce the good news in their Decapolis. By God's grace, as we share the message with others, we, too, will witness the miracle of conversion in the life of others.

Let's pray.

[1] NT Scholar William L. Lane, not Apologist William Lane Craig

[2] Revelation 21:1-4, 22-27, 22:3-5.