

## “Legion”

Mark 5:1-20

*<sup>1</sup>They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup>And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. <sup>3</sup>He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. (ESV)*

A few weeks ago we learned why Jesus taught in parables, and then last week we began another section in the Gospel of Mark in which Mark is showing us different episodes in the life of Jesus that show us His authority over different things. Last week we looked at Jesus’ authority over nature as He calmed the wind and the waves. He was sort of like the Dog Whisperer. Everything was out of control, and he just went “Fssst,” and it was done. This week we’re going to look at Jesus’ authority in the spiritual realm, and then in the future we’ll look at Jesus’ authority over disease and even His authority over death.

Today we look at this encounter that Jesus has with a man who is commonly known as “The Garasene Demoniac.” It’s one of my favorite stories in the whole Bible. It’s recorded in all of the Gospels, but Mark gives it more detail. Mark is really into the demon thing, or at least Jesus conquering the demons. So, we have much more detail here in this story. As I was thinking about it this week I thought, “It would probably be good to talk for a second about what is demon possession in the first place.” Most of us probably don’t think that much about it unless you’re working with toddlers every now and then! They’re sweet children nonetheless. In reality, in the New Testament (and this is going to shock some of you) there is actually no such thing as “demon possession.” It says it in my Bible, but that’s the best they could do as far as their translation of it. If you look in the footnotes of the ESV, it will have a footnote about demon possession and it shows the Greek word, “daimonizomai” which is basically our equivalent of “demonized.” Doesn’t that sort of mean possessed? It means something more like an alien occupation. It will not possess someone else’s soul; they just take up extra space inside that person and seek to do them harm. The other question you have to ask yourself is, “Why do demons possess, or why do demons demonize?” As I was thinking about that, it reminded me of my training time when I was with Eli Lilly. I worked at Lilly selling a drug called “Zyprexa” which is the best drug in the world (it was at the time, I’m not sure now) for schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is a very misunderstood disease for most people. It’s not split personalities. It’s when you hear, among other things, audible voices in your head and you see hallucinations. But the thing that’s different from what you see in the movies and what you see in reality is amazing. First you do two weeks of training where they basically send you a bunch of encyclopedias that you have to memorize. If you get the quiz right you get to go to Indianapolis and then it’s more give and take in discussion. At one point in the class someone asked the instructors (there were about 30 of us in the class), “Is there a spiritual aspect to schizophrenia?” For some reason, all the heads turned and looked at me. The instructor said, “Tommy, what do you think?” I said, “You know, I’m not sure, but let me ask you a question. Why do the voices always, 100% of the time, seek to do the person harm? Why 100% of the time are they negative?” If you’ve seen the movie, “A Beautiful Mind,” that movie is bogus. People never hear a chummy English chap telling them how good they are and helping them out. Never. One hundred percent of the time people with schizophrenia either hear voices or

have visual hallucinations that tell them how bad they are. They tell them that they're worthless. I've never seen, in thousands of schizophrenia patients that I've met, one person who said, "You know, I hear these voices that tell me how loved and accepted I am. I hear voices that tell me how good I am and how I'm made in God's image and because of that nothing can separate me from his love." Never. I said, "The point is I can't tell you for sure if there is a link between the spiritual world and schizophrenia, but what I do know is the goal of the demonic realm and goal of schizophrenia seem to be the same, and that is to demolish and crush and deface the image of God in any particular human being." If you think about it, if you're a demon or demons and you wanted to hurt God, what would you go after? If it was me, I would go after not His creation, but the creature that was made in His own image. It would be like hurting one of His children. Wouldn't that be the thing that would hurt you the most, if someone went after one of your kids? So, of course, in the demonic realm if they're going to hurt something, if they want to get back at God, they would attack His image in us. That's what's going on here.

That's not the biggest problem, by the way. We're going to look at three things this morning. We're going to look at the extent of the problem, we're going to look at the fairness of the fight that goes on between Jesus and the demon, and also we're going to look at a missions mandate, of all things.

What's the extent of the problem here as Jesus gets off of the boat and meets Legion (that's what I am going to call him throughout my talking this morning)? First of all just as a side note, I had to laugh when I read this. Here's Jesus Who's gone through the wringer with people accusing Him on the west side of the lake. He's crossing the lake, trying to get a little shuteye, and of course the disciples wake Him up and say, "Don't you care that we are perishing?" He "Fssst" and calms the whole thing. He probably went back to sleep. As soon as He gets up and His foot touches the ground, there's this demon that wants some action. It never ends. He never gets to rest and yet it doesn't seem to faze Him. Only when you see the extent of the problem, can you see the extent of grace. Let me read to you the extent, because Mark takes a side note and tells us about Legion.

*<sup>3</sup> He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. (ESV)*

Just as a side note, from a Jewish perspective, (if we didn't have the information that he had an unclean spirit), they probably just thought he was insane. Believe it or not, in the Ancient Near East they didn't attribute everything to demons or gods or superstition. The rabbis had a formula to see if someone was just crazy. That included: they run around naked at night (pretty crazy, I would imagine). They live in the tombs. They tear their clothes and cut themselves, and they destroy other people's property. Legion fits that description. He may be crazy. Also, they would bind people like that in order to protect not the person, but themselves. They figure if they can tie him up and just get rid of him, they would be safe. They would start with ropes and if he was able to break the ropes, they'd move on to heavier things. This guy was so bad off that he could even break shackles and apparently he was banished to live in the tombs. That's where we begin to see more of the extent of the problem here, at least from a religious perspective. From a religious perspective this is unbelievable because we see here's a man who has an unclean spirit. The word "unclean" keeps coming up. So he's unclean. He has an unclean spirit. But bigger than that, he lives in an unclean place. The Book of Leviticus says, "If you touch a tomb, if you

go in a graveyard, you are unclean.” So here is a man who has an unclean spirit who lives in an unclean place in this graveyard, and worse than that, the graveyard is in an unclean area. On the east side of the Sea of Galilee it was Gentile territory, the Decapolis. The Romans had occupied it and given it over to the Gentiles and Jews would have seen that whole area as unclean. In other words it was the other side of the tracks. Then on top of all of that, not only is he a man with an unclean spirit who lives in an unclean place in an unclean area, but did you notice (you’re going to find out later on) what kind of animals happened to be swarming around the place? Pigs (swine), thousands of them. So you have an unclean spirit living in an unclean place in an unclean area surrounded by unclean animals, completely nasty from a Jewish perspective. And that’s not his biggest problem. Do you know what his biggest problem is? His biggest problem is that on top of everything else in the world, he’s a sinner. And that’s the problem that he shares with you and with me. You can deal with pigs, you can deal with even maybe a demon, you can deal with all of these other things, but the only thing you can’t deal with is sin. What’s interesting here is what Jesus did. If most of us were in Jesus’ shoes, would we even have gotten off the boat on the other side of the tracks? Would we have made it a point to go there? And if we got there what would we do? The beauty of the Gospel that you see in this particular passage is that Jesus is not afraid of the demoniac. Jesus is not afraid of uncleanness, and bigger than that, he’s not afraid of your sin. In fact the only place you ever see Jesus even evidencing what seems to be fear is when He cries out to His father and says, “Father, if there’s any way that I don’t have to drink from this cup, let it be.” But the only reason He was afraid is because He’d be bearing the wrath for our sin. The question you have to ask yourself is, “If Jesus isn’t afraid to go to the other side of the tracks, why are you and I so afraid to go to the other side of the tracks?” Isn’t He Who is in you greater than he who is in the world? Why are we so afraid? Most Christians I know are afraid of people who are different from them.

It was beautiful here yesterday. If you weren’t here, you missed one of the most beautiful sights I’ve seen since I’ve been at this church. There were 540 Harley-Davidson motorcycles filing past the front of the narthex. Every person looked different than everyone here looks today. Some guys even looked a little scary, especially the guy whose jacket I touched. I learned I wasn’t supposed to do that. But they’re afraid of religious people, too. That’s why people who are different than Christians often don’t go to church. Isn’t that a joke? They don’t come to church because they’re afraid of you, and you don’t invite them because you’re afraid of them. Do you know what the problem is? Neither you nor I believe the Gospel. The Gospel says that Jesus is not afraid of any of us. If the Gospel is true nothing can harm us. Maybe you’re thinking, “Gosh, my neighbors are pretty creepy.” Jesus doesn’t think that. Jesus isn’t afraid. If Jesus isn’t afraid, then you don’t need to be afraid. If you’re here for some reason thinking, “Man, if Jesus only knew who I was, He’d be afraid.” Look at Legion. You don’t get much worse than Legion, and we’ll see in a minute it’s worse than even I’m explaining now. The extent of the problem is that you and I are utterly sinful. If that’s the case, it levels the playing field whether you wear a suit to work or whether you wear coveralls to work. Is Jesus big enough to take care of that sin? The answer is, “Yes.” When it comes to a fight between Jesus and sin, Jesus and the demonic world, it’s not even a fair fight. In fact that’s what’s pretty interesting about this passage. Let’s look next at the fairness of the fight.

<sup>6</sup> And when he (that’s Legion) saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. <sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> For he was saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” (ESV)

The interaction between Jesus and Legion here is pretty amazing because Legion, who is possessed by demons, is simultaneously drawn to Jesus and repelled by him. He simultaneously has to submit to Him and he simultaneously wants to dominate Him. What's interesting is that the man comes running out at Jesus. Any person in the world would be creeped out. But instead of falling upon Jesus and harming Him, he falls down in front of Jesus and says, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God. What do you have to do with me?" The title he uses there, (the only place I think it's used in the New Testament or at least in Mark's Gospel), is the title that pagans in the Old Testament used for Israel's God. What's even more amazing is that he calls Jesus the "Son of the Most High God" and then in the very next sentence he basically swears by that same God to ask Jesus to keep from tormenting him. See how conflicted he is? On one hand he's saying, "You're the Son of the Most High God" and then on the other hand he calls upon the name of that same God to sort of help him. The demon is trying to stop Jesus by using the name of God. He says, "I adjure you in the name of God not to torment us." He cannot help but submit. Did you notice what Jesus has done here so far? He hasn't done anything. He just showed up. There's not a battle. In the Ancient Near East there were a lot of exorcisms apparently going on, and people had very complex formulas and incantations and magic potions and spells. Do you know how Jesus gets rid of demons? He just shows up. He's there. I said this morning, and I'll probably get a letter for this. Jesus I'm sure didn't smoke, but I just have this vision of him reminding me when I was in the army, just sort of lighting up and saying, "Whenever you're done. I've got all day." A lot of people think he tried to use Jesus' name to control Him like in the Old Testament when Jacob asked the angel, "What is your name?" It didn't work, so now he says, "Don't torment us." Then things take a little bit more of a creepy step. Notice what he says next.

<sup>8</sup> For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" <sup>9</sup> And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many."

In other words, the demon tried to intimidate him. "What's your name?" "Legion, for we are many." Jesus doesn't flinch. But it's important to know what the demon was doing here because it shows us the extent of the problem even more. The Romans had occupied this area beside the eastern part of the Sea of Galilee. A Roman legion was about 6,000 men. It was huge and oppressive, and it meant battle. When a Roman legion came into your area, you pretty much knew that the gig was up and you were going to lose. This demon says, "My name is Legion, for we are many." What does Jesus say to him? Nothing. It's interesting to see. Jesus does not cast out 6,000 demons. Here's how powerful Jesus is. They beg Him to let them go. Notice what He says.

<sup>11</sup> Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, <sup>12</sup> and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." <sup>13</sup> 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. (ESV)

This is one of those places where Jesus does not cast out these demons. He is so powerful. Just being in His presence they beg Him, "Give us permission to go into those pigs over there." And Jesus gives them permission. He doesn't cast them out. They simply scam. When He gives them permission, they flee as quickly as they can. They enter into a herd of pigs and go off the edge of the cliff and all the pigs die. A lot of people have written dissertations about these pigs. There's a moral question posed here. "Didn't Jesus care about the pigs? Didn't he care about people's livelihoods and this and that?" Mark never really worries about answering that question. You

could speculate a little bit. Mark's readers were under occupation of Rome themselves and were being oppressed by Rome. Those pigs were undoubtedly being raised in order to feed the Roman soldiers that were oppressing people of Jesus' day. I'm guessing here, but you can almost guess there's a wink in Mark's eye when he writes, "Jesus killed all their pigs." He stuck it to the Romans. What's more important about this story is the result of it. The result of it is that people ran and began telling other people about it. That's where we're going to find a missions mandate in here, not from the people who ratted Jesus out about the pigs, but about Legion.

You find at the end of this passage a huge contrast between the people that accept Jesus and the people who don't accept Jesus, namely one person who has accepted him. Let's read that.

*<sup>14</sup> The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. <sup>15</sup> 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 . . . (ESV)*

Everyone knew Legion. Everyone knew this guy. Maybe they participated in his binding and putting him in the cemetery and leaving him there and hearing him scream out at night and watching him cut himself. Everyone was afraid of this guy. They had come to see what had happened to the pigs, but they find something even more frightening: Legion sitting there clothed and in his right mind. What was the response to Legion's complete healing? It says that they rejoiced and were overjoyed with great joy. Not. They see that Jesus has completely changed and transformed this person, and they are afraid. It should sound familiar. Remember when Jesus calmed the storm? The disciples were more afraid after the storm was calmed than before. At that point you have to say, "Who then is this man? If he can heal Legion, who then is He? What does that mean for me?" I got into quite a bit of trouble growing up. And when I became a Christian, it was a pretty radical transformation. People were freaking out. They didn't know what to do. My own godmother swooned. I told her, "I became a Christian." She swooned and fell back and said, "Oh, my God! He's become a holy roller." If I can be changed by Jesus, that meant one of two things. Either they had to deal with Jesus, or they had to diminish what had happened to me, but they couldn't just be neutral. So, what did these people do? It says the people begged Jesus to leave. Now, is that as backwards as anything you've ever heard? Someone who is powerful enough to fix Legion certainly has to be powerful enough to heal you. Someone powerful enough to cast out 6,000 demons from one person certainly is powerful enough to minister to you. So, what do you do? Say, "Get out of here." They beg Him to leave. If it was me I'd be begging Him to stay. Do you know why? It's because I'm more like Legion than I am like the shepherds. And that's exactly what Legion does there. Notice what he says.

*<sup>17</sup> And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. <sup>18</sup> As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. (ESV)*

In other words, the man who had been made clean wanted to become a disciple. When Jesus called the disciples, He called them that they might "be with Him." Legion was saying, "Let me be with You. Let me be one of Your disciples, one of your gang. I'm going to be with you the whole time." What Jesus says had to be shocking to Legion. He says, "No." Then He says something that had to be shocking to the disciples. Every time up to this point when Jesus had cast out a demon he tells people, "Don't tell anyone. Keep this to yourself. Go and tell the priest, but don't tell anyone else what you have seen and heard today. Just keep it to yourself." What does he tell

Legion? He tells him the exact opposite thing. He gives him a mandate. He says, “Go home and tell your friends. Tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how He has had mercy on you.” Why does He tell Legion to go and He tells other people not to go? The answer is probably pretty simple. Remember Legion is no doubt a Gentile in a Gentile region. There was no worry that if he started spreading the news of Jesus that the Gentiles would gather to make Jesus the king of Israel before His time had come. Every time Jesus tells people not to say anything, He’s in Jewish territory and He doesn’t want His secret to get out until He can be in control of it and go to the cross on God’s timing, not people’s timing. The other reason, I’m guessing, is because Legion was particularly effective. Did you notice what Legion did when Jesus told him, “Go home and tell everyone what the Lord has done for you”? Two things you need to notice. The first thing he does,

<sup>20</sup> *And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. (ESV)*

So the first thing he did is he went away, and Jesus said, “Go to your home and tell people how much the Lord has done for you.” We guess he went home, but verse 20 says he went to the Decapolis. The Decapolis was ten cities. He proclaimed, and that’s the same word as “preaching.” He proclaimed what Jesus had done for him. He didn’t just go to his own household; he went everywhere and told what Jesus had done. Remember Jesus said, “Go tell people what the Lord has done for you.” And Legion went and told people what Jesus had done for him because in his mind apparently they’re the same thing. The last thing I want to point out to you here is what you’ve just seen Legion do is the only thing you need to know about being an effective evangelist. It’s the only thing you need to know about reaching people for Jesus. I can’t tell you how many churches I’ve been in and people say, “You know, we need to have classes on evangelism in this church.” If classes on evangelism worked, how come people aren’t more effective? How come more people aren’t coming in? It’s because most of the time we use classes and education as a way to avoid evangelism rather than to pursue it. All you need to do evangelism and see people come to know Jesus is know Jesus yourself and simply tell them what marvelous things the Lord has done for you. Can you do that?

When Judy and I were having children (I mean, Judy had them, I was just sort of there). We took classes for the first one, took classes for the second one, and took classes for the third one. And you think, “Gosh, without these classes we would not be able to birth this child. And without the classes and without a midwife or without a doctor, what in the world is going to happen?” Judy and I found out. You’ve heard the story, right? On our third baby the midwife, who was the most smug person I’ve ever met in my life, said, “Aw, I’ve never missed the baby, don’t worry about me.” I said, “You don’t know my wife.” She missed the birth of our baby, but at the end of the day from my perspective, all you had to do was catch. That’s it. I didn’t need a class for that. I just had to be there and I had to be able to catch the baby. It’s the same with evangelism. God’s the one who does all the hard work. Just like Judy did all the hard work with our children. My job was just to be a midwife, and all it takes to be a midwife. When it comes to the Gospel, it’s telling people your story. Can you do that? You can only do it if you have a story. That’s what I ask you to leave here with. Ask yourself, “Has Jesus changed my life? Has he changed my heart? Has he forgiven my sins?” Think about that.