

Jesus restores a demon possessed man

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[0 : 00] It's great to be with you guys again tonight. Thank you to Chris for leading and to Willie! I'm just going to read again from the start of the passage just because it's so short.

So it's Mark 4, verses 35 to 52. He said to him, When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees, in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, Send us among the pigs. Allow us to go into them. He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about 2,000 in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and the countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there dressed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man, and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

[3 : 08] As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.

So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and all the people were amazed. Amen. So I'm wondering how you guys feel about authority.

Are you someone who responds well to authority? Perhaps you see it as a threat. I think quite a lot these days people see it as non-existent.

No one really has any authority over another person apart from the systems that have been made up. This passage tonight is about the real, ultimate, tangible authority of Jesus Christ, and it's also about fear.

You might notice it crop up three times in this passage. If you look at verse 41, it says, The disciples were terrified and asked each other, Who is this?

[4 : 21] Even the wind and the waves obey him. The disciples were terrified by Jesus' authority over the wind and the waves. In 5 verse 7, it talks about the man possessed of demons.

He shouted at the top of his voice, What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the most high God? In God's name, don't torture me. The demons inside the poor man were panic-stricken and begged Jesus not to hurt them because they recognized that he is the son of the most high God.

And thirdly, in 5 verse 15, After the man was healed, the town folks came to see, and when they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there, dressed and in his right mind, and they were what?

They were afraid. So the big question that this passage gives us tonight is, what authority does Jesus really have? And what does it mean for us?

So firstly tonight, the first point is that Jesus has authority over nature. Let me read the first few verses again, 35 to 38. That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, Let us go over to the other side.

[5 : 44] Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along just as he was in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped.

Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. At this point in the book of Mark, in Jesus' ministry, he's preaching the gospel through parables to Jewish people in the area of Galilee.

But in this chapter, he intends to bring the gospel to some Gentiles on the other side of the lake in the region of the Gerasenes. You can tell that they're Gentiles because of the detail in chapter 5

that says that they kept pigs.

That would be an unclean animal for Jews. And this story has striking resemblance to another story in the Old Testament.

You might know about the prophet Jonah who left his home country to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in Nineveh. Unlike Jesus, he was unwilling to go, and he tried to run away.

[6 : 49] But in the course of him running away, he falls asleep on a ship that undergoes a big storm. The sailors woke him up, and they called out to their idols.

But Jonah knows that it's not the idols that have authority over this storm, but the Lord God himself. They asked him to call out to his Lord, the God of Israel, and right enough, the storm calmed.

So Jonah and the sailors ended up recognizing that nature belongs to the Lord, as he created all of it, and it answers to him. So that makes it striking, then, in verses 39 to 41, when we see that the person who commands the storm and the wind is Jesus himself.

Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. So what this passage is saying is that Jesus is not simply a prophet or a preacher, not only a man, but he is God in the flesh.

That's why he has authority over the nature. That's why it answers to him, because he created it. He was there in the beginning. He has such a level of authority that even inanimate objects in nature obey him.

[8 : 19] You see this kind of authority elsewhere in Genesis 1, right at the beginning, when God says, Let there be light, and light obeyed, and there was. Jesus has the kind of authority where he simply has to speak, and it happens.

So the disciples question, Then is this, that the wind and sea obey him? Well, the answer, he's God in the flesh. The same Lord who calmed the sea for Jonah hundreds of years before, and the same God who in the beginning said, Let there be light.

If you're someone who believes in Jesus tonight, this is great news for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it means that nothing will get in the way of Jesus' mission. Remember that what Jesus was doing here was part of his evangelistic mission.

He was going to these people to preach the gospel to them. He was crossing the Sea of Galilee to bring the knowledge of God to Gentiles. And that is a mission which he continues today through his church.

The church exists to hold out and hold up the truth of Jesus Christ to the world. To teach his words, to live according to his commands, and to eagerly await his return.

[9 : 40] And so it's great news that Jesus has all the authority in the world because it means that his mission won't fail. The storm and all of nature couldn't stop him getting to the other side of the lake.

He simply commanded it to stop. The same way nothing will stop Jesus achieving his mission in the world through his church. I think many of us maybe feel a little anxious or disappointed in a sort of post-Christian culture that we live.

Where the church seems to be declining. You might have seen the recent news that that encouraging report on the quiet revival was based on dodgy data. But what this passage shows is that you shouldn't pin your hopes on headlines, but pin your hopes on Jesus Christ himself.

We can be optimistic and hopeful for the gospel in this country and every other country. Because it's backed by Jesus. Who has the authority to make it happen. Secondly, this shows that Jesus cares for his people through the worst circumstances.

He doesn't only care for the corporate mission of the church, but he cares for us as individual believers. Look at what the disciples were asking in verse 38.

[11 : 02] Teacher, don't you care that we're perishing? Or in the NIV, it's don't you care if we drown? The disciples in this passage must have felt they were about to die.

They must have felt like it was the end. A furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped. There was water in the boat. There's no life jackets or coast guard or swimming lessons in 30 AD.

If the boat sinks, that's it. A storm was not a trivial situation. So they wake up their sleeping teacher and say, don't you care that we're about to drown?

So Jesus stops the storm and he answers them saying, why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Jesus recognizes that the disciples are so afraid because it hasn't sunk into them that God

was in the boat with them.

They hadn't come to the settled realization that Jesus is God himself and that he cares for his people. I certainly find this relatable at times and I'm sure you do too.

[12:14] We all have moments of extremity, moments of panic, fear, anxiety, or deep sadness. Moments where our faith is put to the test.

And perhaps we think, how am I going to get through this? Or what am I going to go through next? This passage encourages us that Jesus has the authority to protect you through the adversity of life.

And also the care and the willingness to do so. There's a good question in the Heidelberg Catechism. Just to help teach people the Bible.

And I try and make these words my own and I hope you can too. The question, what do you believe when you say, I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

And the answer, that the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ his Son.

[13:25] I trust him so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul. And he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world.

He is able to do this because he is almighty God. He desires to do this because he is a faithful Father. We don't have a promise that we won't go through adversity or difficulty, but we have a promise that God will bring you through it.

Disciples, years later, must have looked back on this day and thought, we were afraid we're about to die. But God was with us and he brought us through.

So it is with us. So Jesus has authority, the top authority in the sphere of nature, and therefore we don't need to be afraid when the church goes through adversity, and we don't need to be afraid when we go through adversity.

For believers, Jesus' authority in the world is good news. Now the sphere of Jesus' authority extends beyond nature and into supernature, into the spiritual world.

[14:41] That's what the second part is about. Jesus has authority over spiritual darkness. God's people aren't only opposed by adverse and natural circumstances, but also the devil seeks to destroy people.

Look at verses 1-2. They went across the lake to the region of the garrisons. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him.

When it says he had an impure spirit, it's not that he's got a dirty mind or a critical personality. It means that he's been taken in by real spiritual evil.

The Bible affirms that the devil and demons are real. And they seek to keep people trapped in sin and opposition. Verses 3-5 read, This man is an example of the destruction and the devastation that the devil seeks to do in people's lives.

He was essentially separate from living society. He lived among tombs, which in those days were chambers hollowed out in stone.

[16:18] In ancient family tombs, there'd be a mixture of bones and decomposing bodies. And the man spent his days in those dark rooms with dead bodies and bones surrounding him.

Because he was more at home with the dead than the living. You might have noticed his strength. No one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he'd often been chained hand and foot. But he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. I think we see super strength in films as a bit of a superpower.

But this is not a superpower or talent for this man. It's a curse. No one's able to help him because he's too strong. He doesn't have control of himself and the devil has isolated him from anyone who wanted to help.

Spiritual evil that gripped him even resulted in himself trying to destroy his own flesh. It's worth registering that this sort of spiritual evil is still real.

[17:28] University of Edinburgh has an occult society where you can learn tarot cards and divination. I was at the Meadows yesterday and there was a group of people celebrating Beltane, a pagan festival about some pagan gods.

In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul says that worshipping pagan gods is worshipping demons. It's not an innocent, quirky, quaint tradition.

People who go to mediums or seances or do Ouija boards are drawing near to something terrible. They may go to these things with innocent intentions, but they're unknowingly experimenting with evil.

You wouldn't stick your hand in a hornet's nest because you'll get stung. And so it is with anything occult related. The devil wants to destroy people. However, Jesus came to destroy the devil.

So let's read verses 6 to 8. When the demon-possessed man saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God?

[18:43] In God's name, don't torture me. For Jesus has said to him, Come out of this man, you impure spirit. Jesus has the authority in the spiritual realm to destroy spiritual darkness.

And this passage makes it clear that he's not got authority because he's on their side, but precisely the opposite. Jesus has authority over demons in the same way that a judge has authority over a criminal, or a king has authority even over the rebels in his land.

Jesus came to judge and destroy the devil and his demons. The disciples were afraid because they didn't really know who Jesus was, but the demons here were afraid because they know precisely who he is.

Jesus was the son of the Most High God. You see him exerting his spiritual authority in verses 9 to 13.

Jesus asked him, What is your name? My name is Legion, he replied, for we are many. And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of that area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside.

[19:56] The demons begged Jesus, Send us among the pigs, allow us to go into them. He gave them permission and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about 2,000 in the number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

The man was afflicted with a legion of demons. And if that's an accurate number, that could mean up to about 5,000. I think this shows Jesus' different level of authority because there's a story in the book of Acts where two men tried to cast out a single demon from a person and fail.

And the demon beats them up. But Jesus is able to destroy a whole legion of demons with a word. And this is to show his authority.

You might remember that in Ephesians 6, Paul talks about demons. And he says, We wrestle not with flesh, but with authorities and the spiritual powers of darkness.

The word for demon comes from the word authority. And so that's another way of referring to them. In the chapter before in Mark 3, Jesus sends out his disciples, not with the power to cast out demons, but with the authority to cast out demons.

[21:18] In other words, what saves this poor man from the authority of wickedness and evil powers in his life is the authority of someone greater.

That means it doesn't matter how tightly the devil may grip a person or how terrible a person's spiritual state is. Jesus can still save them because he has the authority of the Most High God. Some people we know, or perhaps even among us, may have had experiences with the occult and spiritual darkness like that. But be assured that Jesus has the top authority.

He absolutely has the power to take people away from that. But thinking more widely, if we're not believers in Jesus, we're really in the same chains as that poor man.

It might not be visible, but the Bible says that before you're saved by Jesus, you're spiritually dead. It says you're slaves of sin, following the devil before we're saved.

[22:27] But Jesus has the power to destroy the work of the devil, and he does that through his gospel. By believing in Jesus, we're no longer slaves to sin, but we're set free.

Look at how the man changed in verses 14 to 15. Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and the countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened.

When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there, dressed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. Jesus reversed and undid the damage done to him.

He was sat down and clothed rather than naked. He was in his right mind. The Bible says that the devil blinds the minds of unbelievers.

It says that under the power of sin, the mind is warped and twisted to oppose God and to reject his truth. I wonder how it must have been for the poor man to have thousands of demons in his head.

