

PM Mark 5:1-20 & John 19:1-16 Questions Jesus was asked - 2 Three times when Jesus did not answer

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[0 : 0 0] Chapter 5, verses 1 to 20, first of all. Mark chapter 5, verses 1 to 20. They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerizines.

And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, 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. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran, and he fell down before him, 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. For he was saying to him, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit. And Jesus asked him, What is your name?

[1 : 1 6] He replied, My name is Legion, for we are many. And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, Send us to the pigs, let us enter them.

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.

The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. 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.

And they were afraid. And those who had seen it, described to them, what had happened to the demon-possessed man, and to the pigs.

And they began to beg Jesus, to depart from their region. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons, begged him, that he might be with him.

[2 : 3 3] And he did not permit him, but said to him, go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.

And he went away, and began to proclaim in the Decapolis, how much Jesus had done for him. And everyone marveled. Our second reading, isn't listed in the order of service, but it is in John chapter 8, the first 11 verses.

John chapter 8, at the beginning. They each went to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Early in the morning, he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery.

And placing her in the midst, they said to him, Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women.

[3 : 49] So what do you say? This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.

But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones. And Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

Jesus stood up and said to her, Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, No one, Lord.

And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, sin no more. And our third reading is in John chapter 19, the first 16 verses.

[5 : 07] John chapter 19. Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. Pilate went out again and said to them, See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.

So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, Behold the man.

When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, Crucify him! Crucify him! Pilate said to them, Take him yourselves and crucify him for I find no guilt in him.

The Jews answered him, We have a law and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the son of God. When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.

He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, Where are you from? But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, You will not speak to me?

[6 : 44] Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you? Jesus answered him, You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.

Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin. From then on, Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, If you release this man you are not Caesar's friend.

Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar. So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called the Stone Pavement and an Aramaic Gabbatha.

Now it was the day of preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, Behold your king.

They cried out, Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him! Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

[7 : 57] So, he delivered him over to them to be crucified. May God add his blessing to these readings of his word.

This morning we thought a little about how Jesus answered some questions asked of him in John chapter 9.

The difficult question regarding the source of suffering and illness. the thrilling question of Jesus' own identity as the Son of Man and the Son of God.

And then there was the vexed question as to the salvation of those who think that they have 20-20 spiritual vision but are in fact blinded by the God of this world.

And the first question received a short eye-opening and mind-opening response that if we view everything that happens to us correctly we see that it is so that the works of God might be displayed in our lives for his glory.

[9 : 13] The second question prompted that simple but simply profound engagement of a sinner with his saviour. And the third question are we blind too asked by the Pharisees that prompted one of the most beautiful expositions of the relationship between the good shepherd and his sheep.

I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep John 10 14 and 15.

But the Pharisees were not of those sheep who belonged to the good shepherd. But our Lord does not always answer questions that he has asked.

And I'd like to consider briefly three such unanswered questions tonight. One is in Mark 5 verse 7 where the question is asked by a possessed man using his human voice but speaking for a demon.

The second question in John 8 is asked by the Pharisees who were evil in their own right. And the third question is asked by Pilate the coward governor who condemned the innocent son of God to death by crucifixion.

[10 : 40] First then the question asked by the demon possessed man from the country of the Gerizines. Now Gergesa is an area to the east of the Jordan as it runs from the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea.

And in Roman times it was part of a region called the Decapolis or Ten Cities. Ten rather unusual anomalous cities. They were satellites of Greek and Roman Empire and they were steeped in Roman and Greek culture with each city an autonomous city state which was dependent on Rome militarily.

I suppose they were a wee bit like Andorra or Liechtenstein or Monaco or San Marino are nowadays in Europe. But these first century cities were melting pots of Roman Greek Jewish and Aramean cultures.

And the presence of large herds of pigs for Roman and Greek cultic sacrifices as well as food is explained by this predominantly non-Jewish or in the Jews' eyes heathen culture.

Well, here yet again we see an example of how our Lord is the Lord and Saviour of not just the Jews but the Gentiles too.

[12 : 12] He didn't make it easy for himself here because his focus on this trip into Gentile territory was not a Jew but a non-Jew a severely mentally ill non-Jew in fact an unpredictably violent one and one who was possessed by a demon into the bargain.

Now let's get one or two things straight here. Mental illness is real. Demon possession is real. There may be overlap from time to time between demon possession expressed in mental illness but and it is a big but that does not mean that people with mental illness are necessarily demon possessed.

Anything but they have generally speaking a biochemical imbalance of transmitter substances in their brains in certain areas there and they are no more demon possessed as a result than people with diabetes or high blood pressure or Parkinson's disease are demon possessed.

There's a real danger of false demonisation of poor mental health in certain uninformed and bigoted circles sadly sometimes Christian ones.

Now during my medical career I've come across a fair bit of mental illness and some people suffering from some forms of this can be quite unpredictable.

[13 : 54] Sometimes they can be a bit hyperactive in their behaviour. I learned early on in my medical career that you could not always rationalise the irrational as I began to describe it.

I remember one disturbed patient whom I was trying to persuade to take some oral sedative medication in a syrup form rather than being forcibly injected with the same and I equally well recall being baptised with the self-same medication as part of his refusal.

That's something which has left me with a leaning towards sprinkling rather than full immersion. That's a wee Baptist Presbyterian medical joke there. I imagine the disciples looking on here would have been flabbergasted.

Why were they here in the first place? Because this was alien Gentile territory. There were pigs, unclean animals everywhere and this man was clearly unhinged and he was violent.

He couldn't even be restrained by chains and he was scarred from previous episodes of self-harm and he was either nearly or completely undressed. This was raw, naked violence and he was demon possessed too.

[15 : 25] Now the Lord Jesus was as full of compassion for this poor man created in God's image as indeed all men and women are so created however fallen or diseased they may have become and he was as full of compassion as the disciples were full of fear and misgiving.

Now I'm not unsympathetic towards the disciples position here since we're told that when the man saw Jesus and presumably the disciples too from a distance he ran to him.

But his humanity didn't then attack Jesus instead he fell on his knees at Jesus' feet. Verse 6 And in that regard he was more sane and balanced than all the other people of the region who eventually pled with Jesus to leave their territory in verses 15 to 17.

And Jesus responds to the approach of this wild man was one of compassion and authority as he ordered come out of this man you impure spirit.

In a way we've got recorded for us here a conversation between the Lord of glory and a demon or group of demons for they were legion.

[16 : 49] And of course such a name would carry connotations of Roman Empire and authority as well as the false gods and demon worship which they practiced. And that would have been very much evident to the mixed bag of inhabitants of the Decapolis who saw this and heard this drama playing out.

And the question asked of Jesus is not whispered. But it's shouted at the top of legion's voice. and it's not a question about healing or clothing or chains or injuries of current affairs or the weather or politics or sport.

It's a question which takes it as read, as already understood and accepted without demur that the person in front of legion at whose feet he is kneeling is divine.

He is Jesus, son of the Most High God. Now not even the disciples had got that far in their thinking or had articulated this truth so clearly if they had got there.

The question verbalized was one of naked self-interest on the part of the demons. demons who knew that eternal punishment was their lot and justly so.

[18 : 25] They didn't want to be tortured. Torture for a demon was to be in the presence of absolute goodness. The son of the Most High God who showed up their own evil in the light of his goodness and the question was one born of terror.

Leave me alone. Don't punish me. What do you want with me? Jesus does not give a direct answer to that question. He had already issued a command before the question in the event actions speak louder than words and after a strange three way audible conversation between Christ Jesus, the man and the demons.

The demons are given permission to leave the area. well they were quite at home there in a region thorough to devil worship but to enter a nearby herd of pigs whom they then stampede off the nearby hillside and drown in the lake.

There are disturbing truths to understand here. Demons exist. They find being near Christ or his followers torture.

They can be rooted out. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. When evil asks you a question do not answer except to resist and direct the evil as far away from you as quickly as you can.

[20 : 02] Do demons exist today and do they possess people? You can rest assured that they do. And since our civilization has become more sophisticated at least in its own eyes all that has changed is that we are all less adept at recognizing evil and evil possessing lives for what it is.

But you know whatever else we recognize let's take on board that no matter how awful how violent how outrageous how possessed by evil how unutterably sinful a man or woman may be here she can be restored to spiritual soundness by the blood of the Lord Jesus and in fact may become such a bright light shining for the Lord that they are not invited to follow the band of disciples but instead they are considered by Christ as ready to spread the good news of the kingdom as in Legion's case the first Christian home missionary 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 and is that not so often the way it is an ex addict preaching to addicts or an ex prisoner preaching in prison an ex

Muslim preaching to Muslims well from what has the Lord particularly freed us and have we gone back to witness about that liberation to others similarly afflicted but the question asked here of Jesus by Legion in verse 6 what do you want with me Jesus son of the most high God does not have a spoken answer Jesus does not want demons he does not want their company but the glorious gospel truth here is that Christ Jesus wanted the demon possessed man and the friend of publicans and sinners must have his way with this poor man's soul and what a demonstration of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus in Legion for whom Jesus was soon to go to the cross and give his very own life for this hitherto untamable violent outrageous and outrageous and deeply disturbed wreck of a man the second unanswered question is recorded in that beautiful account at the start of

John chapter 8 where the teachers of the law and the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus in answering a question so that they might have a basis for accusing him because you see try as they might they had no grounds for bringing any just accusation against the perfect sinless son of God now in John chapter 8 the first 11 verses there are all sorts of shenanigans going on there there was a section of the book of Leviticus where Mosaic law declared that the punishment for being caught committing adultery was death by stoning for both the man and the woman involved now the Jewish attitude to women at this time was appalling treating womankind in general as a thing a chattel and over the centuries the Mosaic dictate had been corrupted in these circumstances of adultery to stoning only the women and latterly it wasn't really actively pursued at all we may think that adultery is predominantly a phenomenon of the last hundred years and attitudes to this sin have become particularly lax but if we think that we're ignoring history even history as recorded in scripture but the point here was that any one of a score of points of

Mosaic law could have been brought up to challenge Jesus' reaction and personal beliefs all the Pharisees wanted was a solid reason to discredit and accuse our Lord little did they realise that this was the one who magnified the law and made it honourable who would not let a jot or a tittle of the law fail but who looked at the heart behind the law as well but here we have the standoff we've got Jesus having this adulterous woman as it were pushed towards him what are you going to do about this then Moses said stoner what do you say what Jesus said was nothing at least for some time it says he bent down and he started to write on the ground with his finger what did he write it doesn't say but can you sense

[26 : 00] Sinai Mount Sinai here Moses coming down from the mount with tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God with the rules that Israel had to but from that point onwards failed to keep was Jesus writing the tablets of the law in the dust of the ground was he writing to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself by the way how and when did this carpenter this builder son learn to read and write do we actually have recorded in the gospels any other time when he wrote but in the first instance here while they may have written on the ground Jesus did not answer the Pharisees and when they saw they were getting nowhere they came back at him again repeating their questions and at this point

Jesus straightened up he still didn't answer their question but he invited whichever of them was without sin to cast the first stone and then he bent down and he continued to write on the ground he didn't actually answer their question at all directly now it may have been their own unpunished involvement in adultery on other occasions it may have been other sins which came powerfully to their minds but there must have been some shuffling of feet and peeling away from the edges of the group because they all knew each other didn't they they all knew each other to be sinners presumably and which of them would have the gall to pronounce himself sinless after a while it's just

Jesus and the woman left and Jesus straightens up again and lo and behold he is the only person who without sin could have stoned this woman caught in adultery but his gentleness and love and respect for women was such and his knowledge that he was soon to die on the cross for this very woman was such that he said to her women where are they has no one condemned you neither do I condemn you go now and leave your life of sin now what have we to learn from Jesus silence here we can usually spot a fault in anyone else at a hundred yards can't we we can see the specks in other folks eyes but if we take the time to think it out we are in a sawmill full of planks and beams of our own sinfulness all we can do is cast ourselves on the mercy of Christ who went to the cross for our sins not for his own so let's not be hasty to jump down others throats when we perceive wrong in their lives but tenderly help them to understand that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and let us not delve deeply to find justification to condemn others and try our Lord's patience in the process remember that wonderful parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18 21 to 35 he was forgiven a huge debt but then got thrown into prison people who owed him minor amounts his own end was awful and let us not try to manipulate

God's own word for our own ends but let us treat the word with the awe and the solemnity and the love that is its due as the living oracles the living words of the living God Acts 7 35 and we come lastly in John 19 to the grave solemnity of the third question where Jesus gave no answer the questioner is Pilate craven cowardly self seeking morally bankrupt Pilate we have the record in John 19 Pilate has already interrogated our Lord in chapter 18 he's been presented with the bound

Jesus by the chief priests and their evil crew and he tries first to shift responsibility you try him yourselves he tells the Sanhedrin and when they retort that they don't have the authority to execute him Pilate questions Jesus are you the king of the Jews am I a Jew what is it you've done you're a king then what is truth but he concludes I find no basis for a charge against him and he offers to release Jesus but they want an insurgent a terrorist Barabbas released to them instead and in his cowardice finding no fault in Jesus Pilate then has him flogged the soldiers place a crown of vicious thorns on his head he's mocked he's dressed up in a purple robe and repeatedly violently assaulted and he then again tried to release

[32 : 31] Jesus to the Jews showing him to them mocked beaten and to his own eyes the king of the Jews radically diminished and he hopes he'll be diminished in their eyes and the whole problem will go away I find no basis for a charge against him he says but they were having none of it crucify crucify they chant and again the third time a familiar pattern perhaps in verse 6 Pilate declared he can find no fault in Jesus but the Jewish leaders are having none of it we have a law they insisted and according to that law he must die because he claimed to be the son of God Pilate was terrified when he heard that and he went back into the palace and accosted Jesus where do you come from but Jesus gave him no answer verse 9

Jesus had listened to Pilate declaring his belief in his innocence while at the same time scourging beating mocking abusing dressing him up humiliating him Jesus had already told him that his kingdom was not of this world the situation had gone beyond answering questions do you refuse to speak to me said Pilate don't you realize I've got power either to free you or to crucify you and at this Jesus reminds him he would have no authority unless it were given to him from above and that the one who handed Jesus over to him was guilty of a greater sin well Pilate again tried to release Jesus but then the Jews played their trump card if you release him you're no friend of Caesar's now there's a sub plot here one in which the gospel writers do not expand but one where we can learn a lot from the writings of

Josephus the Roman Jewish historian of the time and Philo the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher of the time you see the history goes something like this when Herod the great the Jewish vassal king died around the time of Jesus birth he willed his kingdom to his three sons Herod Antipas inherited Galilee and a part of the other side of the Jordan Philip the Tetrarch inherited the wilder northeast of Palestine and Archelaus who was only 18 inherited Judea and Samaria now Archelaus was such an extortioner and tyrant that the people complained to Caesar and he was deposed instead the territory came under imperial rule by a procurator and

Pilate who apparently had a gift for administration though certainly not any social skills was the fourth or fifth procurator installed and he ruled from 26 to 35 AD Pilate was just so arrogant and he paid so little regard for Jewish sensitivities that he blotted his copy book on three major occasions and was eventually recalled to Rome the first faux pas was to bring standards flags into Jerusalem with the graven image of Caesar on them offending the very sensitive Jews and a major confrontation was only diffused when he was forced to back down or massacre instead hundreds of unarmed Jews in cold blood so he backed down he lost face and he lost respect the second problem with Pilate was that he seized temple funds to pay for a new aqueduct into

Jerusalem and then when there was uproar at that he infiltrated the into the crowd plain clothes police so to speak of his own who then proceeded to kill many of the protesters the crowd as crowd control the final straw for the Jews was that he introduced into Jerusalem shields with graven images of the emperor this was after Jesus was crucified but this led to a formal complaint by the Jews and his enforced return to Rome so in John 19 Pilate was so to speak on a last warning as far as the Jews were concerned and he saw the possibility of his own tenuous grip on power being severed by carrying through by not carrying through the Jews requests and so what he does is he abdicates responsibility for truth and he abdicates responsibility for justice for the sake of political expediency and his own job he bows to Jewish blackmail and he condemns the sinless son of God to crucifixion now our lord had been silent before the high priest

[38 : 34] Matthew 26 63 Mark 14 61 he had been silent before Herod the tetra Luke 23 9 and he had been silent before the Jews charges Matthew 27 14 Mark 15 5 but the question our lord declined to answer before Pilate was as to his origin as a Roman Pilate was undoubtedly superstitious and he wasn't at all immune to the idea of the gods coming down in human form so Pilate was looking for some indication of royalty or deity in this battered bleeding humiliated but supernaturally dignified victim the answer was there Pilate had just to look with eyes that were not blinded by superstition sin and self interest but something greater and more wonderful was playing out here supremely prophecy was being fulfilled word by word down to the deepest dregs of suffering pain and humiliation salvation tonight's passage and the others in the synoptic gospels which I mentioned there where

Jesus remained silent were the fulfilment of prophecy of God's own words spoken through the prophet Isaiah so let's read together a wee bit of Isaiah 53 at least I would if I could find the Bible where have I put it here we go if we read the last three verses of Isaiah 52 and then into 53 behold verse 12 of 52 behold my servant shall act wisely he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted as many were astonished at you his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind so shall he sprinkle many nations kings shall shut their mouths because of him for that which has not been told them they see and that which they have not heard they understand who has believed what he has heard from us and to whom has the arm of the

Lord been revealed for he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground he had no form or majesty that we should look to him and no beauty that we should desire him he was despised and rejected by men a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief and as one from whom men either faces he was despised and we esteemed him not surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken smitten by God and afflicted but he was wounded for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed all we like sheep have gone astray we have turned every one to his own way and the

Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all he was oppressed and he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent so he opened not his mouth now we are not idle spectators here we are not those who pass by and pause for a minute or two to note the spectacle of the crucifixion but basically are overwhelmed with indifference to the torture of Jesus of Nazareth and any possible personal implications or relevance of this crucifixion of another for us we are not idle spectators because the son of

God was going through all this for us he was going through all this for legion he was going through all this for the women caught in the act of adultery he was going through this for the disciples he was going through this for our loved ones who have gone home to glory he was going through all this for you and he was going through all this for me I owe my eternal hope to his silence to his silent suffering the extent and the depths of which I cannot begin to comprehend and I shudder when I try I owe everything to his humbling to death even death on a cross so this evening we have three occasions when the

[45 : 10] Lord Jesus did not directly answer questions asked of him once by demons once by children of the devil Pharisees and once by an agent of Satan the cowardly Pilate we should ponder these things and learn much of the wisdom and the eternal purpose the gentleness and the grace of our Lord Lord it's a wonderful ending to Psalm 107 that tells us to do just this let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord but there's one thing in conclusion of which I can assure you tonight and it's this that if you come to Jesus with the question Lord Jesus I know you died for me will you please forgive me will you please come into my heart and live there if you come to him with this on your lips the authority of scripture seals this into our hearts that he that comes to me

I will in no wise cast out Christ Jesus is more ready to answer that plea with an almighty yes then we are to ask in the first place let's pray