

The Greater Fear - Part 2

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[0 : 00] G'day everyone. My name is Jeff. I'm one of the slightly organised pastors here at Holy Trinity. Please keep your Bibles open to the passage that Victor just read and there's an outline which you probably got on the way in.

I'm going to refer to that and help us follow along. Some of you may know this. I have a great fear of spiders.

Not a funny fear of spiders. Not a fear which we'll all laugh about when you throw a joke spider at me or a real one and then we'll all laugh.

It's not funny. Spiders have real power over me and I don't really know why. When I see one, particularly a huntsman, even more than a funnel web or a redback, I go all jelly and lose my nerve. The only thing worse than a huntsman in the house is a huntsman in the car. I used to be so worried about having a spider in the car that whenever I got in, I would punch the underside of the visors to kill what might have been there.

[1 : 14] I was driving home from work very late one night in my very small, very old Corolla. Like many old cars, this thing was a bit of a spider magnet.

It was about midnight and there were no cars on the road, which was a good thing. The car was really small. I'm a big guy and it's a small, small car and the visor was here and the window was here.

It was dark and I saw something move just in the corner of my eye and I prayed, please God, not a spider.

It was. I prayed again, please God, not on the inside. It was. It was big, a huntsman, hand size. It moved from the window towards my head and I prayed again, please God, make it go in between the visor and the roof. It didn't.

[2 : 23] It sat right in front of me on the side of the visor and I was driving like this. Seriously.

Because of this fear, spiders have a kind of power over me and not that they know it, I hope. And there really isn't much I can do to change it.

I see a spider, I freak out and killing it is the biggest deal in the world. In the passage tonight, we're going to see a great power. Power over us that we cannot control.

In this short series, we've seen Jesus revealing the truth about himself in the kingdom of God. We saw that understanding who Jesus is comes from seeking and listening to him.

We saw that our faith in Jesus is revealed by how and what we fear. Sorry, what we fear and how. In today's passage, Jesus continues to reveal who and what he is.

[3 : 33] And like last week, he does it with a demonstration of power. Today's passage follows on right after last week. Mark tells us that they came to a region called the Gerasenes.

It was likely a Gentile region. The disciples are probably still a little bit jittery because of what they've just seen. You might remember how the last passage ended.

And to increase stress levels, they're met by a man who is possessed. Possessed with an impure or evil spirit.

In the opening verses of the passage, Mark begins to tell the story as it unfolds. But in verses three to five, he pauses to give some extra info for the reader to help feel the weight of the moment.

Mark wants us to properly understand who this man was that was coming to meet them. Have a look. Verse three. This man lived in the tombs and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.

[4 : 40] For he had often been bound, sorry, 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.

The man Mark describes is an absolute terror. Can you imagine the boat pulling in and meeting this man?

It was probably at night. I'm not sure I'd want to hang around. Just listen to what we learn about him. Not only did he live among tombs, but he couldn't be controlled by any person.

He had what sounds like superhuman strength. It says this guy had been chained hand and foot and still he couldn't be held.

What kind of person can break out of chains and iron bonds? Well, I thought it would be good to help us get a bit of a feel for what that might be like.

[5 : 42] So I've pre-arranged a volunteer to come and help me. Thanks, Vince. Let's make him feel welcome. Now, Vince, you're a pretty strong guy.

I wonder if you might be able to give us a bit of an idea about how powerful this guy was. David has brought some genuine handcuffs from his work as a police officer.

Come on, come on, Dave. And he's going to put Vincent in handcuffs. His handcuffs did not come from the \$2 shop. They came from, I don't know where, the law.

Okay. In the passage, we heard about the guy. When he was bound hand and foot, he tore the chains apart. Vince, will you please tear the chains apart for us?

Okay, now stop playing. Now do it for real. Now pull hard. It doesn't look like he's trying, does it?

[7 : 00] Yeah, okay. All right. Let's give a round of applause. Why don't you go back and... David told me beforehand that if he did bang them on things and push with his feet, the handcuffs just get tighter.

Isn't that great? The deemed possessed man was often chained hand and foot. But it says he tore the chains apart.

He tore them apart. It even says that he broke the irons on his feet. Can you imagine having power like that? Have you ever wished to have power like that?

A power to control any restraints, to do whatever you want? There is something a bit tempting about that kind of power. But while it's enticing, this power is actually enslaving.

While it may seem that this man has great power, the truth is that he has no power. Rather, he is completely possessed and overpowered by evil.

[8 : 10] He sort of reminds me a bit of Venom. I've got a picture on the slide from that really bad Spider-Man a few years ago. If you aren't familiar, Venom gives Spider-Man a bit of a power boost, which allows him to do things that he hasn't done before, but it comes at a bit of a cost.

He becomes, spoilers, corrupted and evil. The man in this passage can't be subdued by any person, not even himself.

In verse 5, it says, It's a bit like me driving in a car with a spider.

This man is trapped. He is imprisoned by this evil spirit, trying to escape, even by ending his own life. Jesus steps onto the shore.

And this man comes to meet him. In verse 6, Mark returns to the story. And just for a second, put yourself in the shoes of the disciples.

[9 : 24] Jesus has stepped off in front of you and the first thing you see is one of the locals bleeding, naked and screaming and running directly at you.

And just as this confrontation is about to take place, something happens that no one would guess.

As he approaches Jesus, this evil, scary, demon-possessed man is suddenly possessed by fear.

Look at verse 6. 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, What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the most high God?

How is it that the man who everyone fears is suddenly so afraid? This is an odd turn of events, isn't it?

Just look what he does. He does a few things. He falls on his knees. He's described as someone who can't be controlled either by the locals or by the man in whom the spirit resides.

[10 : 32] But here he falls on his knees as though in some kind of reverence or submission to Jesus. Secondly, he calls him son of the most high God.

Remember in the last passage, the disciples who just saw Jesus exercise his authority over a storm like it was a naughty child. And they asked each other in great fear, who is this?

Here we have a Gentile lunatic who, as soon as he sees Jesus, falls down and calls him son of the most high God. This evil spirit knows something about Jesus just by seeing him that no human has realized yet.

And thirdly, in light of this recognition, the evil spirit begs Jesus for mercy. Did you see that? He's uncontrollable, untameable. No one can overpower the evil within him.

Yet in the presence of Jesus, he is literally on his knees begging. Three times at least he begs. In the name of God, don't torture me. Please don't send me out of the area.

[11:44] The other option being to a place of torment. And allow me. Please give me permission to go into the pigs. And in response to all this begging, Jesus allows the demon, who we now have heard are many.

They go into the pigs who rush down the hill into the water and all drown. This confrontation would be a sight to behold, especially if you knew about this man.

The evil that no one can control. Naked, crazy outcast on his knees in front of Jesus begging for mercy. In a way, it looks a bit like the classic action movie, doesn't it?

Where we see good versus evil. And throughout the story, they appear to be equally matched until finally the goodies get the upper hand. But this is more than just a happy story where good triumphs over evil.

It's a display of the great power and character of Jesus. The impact of this demon possession has been huge on the man and his community. It has cut him off from the living.

[13:00] And almost completely consumed him. This evil has great power. Yet here we have Jesus, who has hardly done more than step off the boat and speak a few words.

And the demon is kneeling down in reverent fear, begging for mercy. Yes, yes, this evil has great power. But Jesus has a far greater power, doesn't he?

This isn't a classic good versus evil. This is God versus evil. It's not unlike the demonstration of God's power through a faithful servant, David, in 1 Samuel 17, which Katie read.

The Israelites were completely overpowered. They were unable to help themselves, dismayed and terrified, it said. When David suggested he would help, he was mocked.

But trusting in the power of God, he easily defeated the enemy of Israel. This evil has great and destructive power. And the enemy of God's people always does.

[14:07] Whether it be Philistines, evil spirits, even sin. And we can see this destruction in what the demons did to this man and then eventually to the pigs, eventually bringing death.

And in this destructive evil, which stands against both God's people, as well as all those who bear God's image.

We get a glimpse of the evil, which seeks to enslave and destroy God's creation and over which we alone have no power.

Like a normal person trying to get out of handcuffs, helpless to change our situation.

But in this act of Jesus, we see more than just a miraculous sign of Jesus' power over evil.

[15:08] In this, we also get a glimpse. A glimpse of the final destruction of sin, Satan and evil at the hand of Jesus and the coming of his kingdom.

Isn't this great news? Well, not everyone thinks so. The passage goes on to say that the power of Jesus in cleansing evil polarizes people.

There are two groups of people who witness this event in the passage. The demon-possessed man and those tending the pigs, although the disciples probably saw it as well. Look at verse 14 in your Bibles. Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and 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 in his right mind, and they were afraid.

Those who had seen it told the people what 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.

[16:20] I think it's probably not surprising that this has caused fear among the locals. The power of Jesus is fearful to behold. We've seen that already with the disciples, haven't we?

But also they just saw 2,000 pigs suddenly drown themselves. That would be downright freaky, wouldn't it? Fear of the power of Jesus is not uncommon.

What's strange here is the lack of either celebration or praise. It wasn't simply the act of the man being miraculously cleansed that worried the people.

It was seeing him normal again. That's what it says. They saw him and they were afraid. So far in the Gospel, when people have seen what Jesus can do, they flock to him to receive the same, but not here.

I wonder if there are two things at work in this negative reaction. Firstly, I wonder if there's a fear of the unknown. The disciples claimed to know Jesus, and even when they saw his supernatural power, they were afraid.

[17:27] These people have no reason to expect anything from this stranger who rocks up at their shore. But they see what seems to be an even greater power than the crazy man that no one can control.

That would be scary. Secondly, I wouldn't be surprised if they're scared, confused, and angry about the pigs. The passage mentions the retelling about the pigs twice, and as soon as they hear it the second time, they beg Jesus to leave.

Yes, there was a problem with this man, but maybe they weren't too bothered by it. Maybe we didn't really need anything to change. Once they realized the cost of Jesus' actions, they want him gone. Not an uncommon response to Jesus. The other response is the total opposite. Verse 18 says, This man understands just how much Jesus has done for him.

It's not surprising that he wants to be with Jesus. What is surprising is what Jesus says to him. Verse 19, Jesus did not let him, but said, Go to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you.

[19:09] And so he did. This man wanted to follow Jesus, but instead was sent, almost like an apostle, to proclaim the goodness and mercy of God.

He didn't get what he wanted at first, but he was devoted to Jesus because he understood how much he needed him. He understood just how much Jesus had done for him.

In these two reactions, I think we see an example of how the world responds to Jesus. Rejection and devotion.

No middle ground. On one hand, there are those who fear Jesus' power and refuse to accept the change he brings, especially if it's costly.

On the other hand, there are those who are devoted. They may not always get what they want, but they get what they need. That is, released from the power of evil and death.

[20:18] In this passage, we continue to see the truth of the kingdom of God in the power and the person of Jesus.

Here we see that Jesus is the only one who is able to free humanity from evil and death. Yes, evil has great power and we continually succumb to it.

But Jesus has a far greater power over evil than us. So, what is your response to it?

If Jesus and his power are unknown to you, please don't leave tonight without asking more about who he is, about what his power really does. Like the man in this passage, our world is possessed by evil.

An evil the Bible calls sin. And I think that we can see this possession by the way people constantly seek to escape, to change our situation.

[21:27] We use things, don't we, to change the situation we're in. We use money and comfort and Netflix and so much more, which are good and they have a purpose, but are powerless to change this situation.

It's bleak, but true. Sin and Satan have great power over this world. Paul puts it like this in Ephesians 2, which is on the slide, verse 1 to 3.

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 the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Sin makes us lifeless servants of evil.

It has great power over us. But Jesus has greater power. He has far greater power.

[22:39] Like all humans, Jesus died because of sin, not his but ours. And because of the great power of God, Jesus rose from the dead and is now Lord over life and death.

And he freely gives life without death to those who believe in him. This is the power of Jesus over evil, over sin and over death.

Whether you've already put your trust in Jesus and his power to save or not, there's a challenge for you in this passage. In the demon-possessed man, we see a perfect example of someone who knows they need help and responds appropriately.

This man knows that he is in desperate need of Jesus' help. Those who haven't put their trust in Jesus are in desperate need because nothing stands between them and God's judgment. Those who have put their trust in Jesus, including me, I think, tend to forget just how sinful we are and how desperately we need Jesus.

[23 : 56] So think for a moment now about your life. Does your life show that you have forgotten how desperately you need Jesus?

One way, one way you might show this is by carrying guilt for sin. Are you unable to let go of sin and its consequences?

Yes, sin is bad and it produces great evil and it's right to be remorseful, to reflect on it, to repent and grow. But are you holding on to guilt even after Jesus has forgiven you for it?

I can understand how this may be easy to do. It's hard to let go, isn't it? But our sorrow and our mournfulness doesn't make God's forgiveness or love any more likely, any more sure.

Jesus' death on the cross completely saves those who believe in him. Nothing else is needed and despite how it may seem, holding on to guilt can say, Jesus hasn't or can't fully deal with my sin.

[25 : 20] Another way you might show this is by showing contempt for the non-Christian world. It's important for us to remember that in the story of God versus evil, we are on the side of evil along with the rest of the world.

If we forget how much we need Jesus to cleanse us from sin, we may start looking down on those who are outsiders, forgetting that we deserved the same as them until God graciously saved us. We mustn't forget that sin has great power and it wants to destroy. We must remember that Jesus has a far greater power which we have seen in his resurrection and so he is able to completely save those who believe in him.

So knowing this power, remembering this power and our great need, run to Jesus every day. beg for his mercy every day, trust in his power and live a life of devotion.

Shall I pray that God will help us to do this? Our Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for Jesus' power, his great power to save even me to remove even my great sin.

[26 : 57] Father, remind me, remind us with your word in your spirit each day how desperately I need your forgiveness, we need your forgiveness.

Make us run to you and cling to you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen.