

Victory Over Spiritual Evil

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Date: 08 January 2023

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[0 : 00] As we come to God's Word, let me pray for us. Father, as we prayed earlier in our service, so now we pray again.

Come, Holy Spirit. Would you come as we read the Word that you have inspired and preserved through many ages about our living Lord Jesus, would you come and help us to see you more clearly and to understand your deep grace for us through your Word?

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. All right, Mark chapter 5, verses 1 through 20. Let me read for us. They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.

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.

[1 : 18] And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and 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? And 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 2,000, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and 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.

[2 : 24] 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. 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. So if you were here in the fall when we began our series in Mark's Gospel, you'll remember that Mark wrote his account of the life of Jesus to answer a few key questions. Who is Jesus? Why did he come? What does it mean to follow him? And where we left off the story in November was with Jesus demonstrating his unparalleled power over the material creation. At the end of chapter 4, we saw that with just a word, he calmed a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee. But here in chapter 5, Jesus and his disciples step out of the boat to find a different sort of storm.

[3 : 40] This storm isn't outside, it's inside. They meet a man with a violent storm of chaos and destruction inside of him. And what we learn from this encounter is that Jesus has unparalleled power, not just over the material world, but over the spiritual world as well.

Mark shows us that Jesus is the Lord of all things seen and unseen. Now, Mark 5 verses 1 through 20 is perhaps the most detailed account in the Gospels of Jesus healing a person afflicted by demon possession.

So it's a text that brings us face to face with personal spiritual evil and Jesus' encounter with it. So as we consider this text together, let's consider first the reality of spiritual evil, and then we'll look at the gravity of it, and then finally Jesus' powerful victory over it.

So first, the reality of spiritual evil. Look at verses 1 and 2. They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. That is the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, which was predominantly a Gentile region.

And when Jesus stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit. So according to the Bible, there is such a thing as personal spiritual beings.

[5 : 02] When God created the world, he didn't just choose to display his glory through the manifold beauties of a material created order, but of a spiritual created order as well.

Think of a great composer, right? Great composers are masters of melody, of course, but not just melody. They're masters of harmony as well. If you think of a piece of music, a great composer can make the notes sound interesting and beautiful, not just going this way, right?

But they can make the notes sound beautiful and interesting this way, too, on a sheet of music. So when God wanted to display his glory through the act of creation, like a great composer, he wasn't just restrained to melody or restrained just to harmony.

His glory overflowed in a material and spiritual order. He's the maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen, as the Nicene Creed says.

So according to the Bible, there is such a thing as personal spiritual beings, angels created by God for his glory. But among these personal spiritual beings, some rebelled.

[6 : 11] And rather than worshiping and serving God, they stand opposed to God and God's kingdom. The Bible has various names for these fallen angels, unclean spirits, demons, principalities and powers.

And at the head of their rebellion, one called Satan or the devil. And rather than play the harmony of God's good creation, they seek to disharmonize and destroy.

So according to Scripture, according to Jesus himself, personal spiritual evil is a very real thing. And for most times and places, this hasn't been a very controversial point. But you know, maybe for you and me today, it's not so easy to believe something like that.

Maybe you have a hard time accepting this reality of spiritual good and evil. Well, if that's true, let me offer a few things to consider, things that have helped me wrap my mind around this reality.

First, we can sometimes think that belief in demons is sort of simplistic or naive.

But actually, you know, the biblical picture isn't simplistic at all. It's actually quite robust. You know, you read the Gospels and you'll see, you'll see there an analysis of the human condition that takes into account the physical and the emotional and the social and the structural.

[7 : 32] None of these things eliminated or ruled out. They all are considered and given gravity and weight and importance. But the Bible acknowledges that there is also a spiritual dimension to reality.

We sometimes think that if we admit the reality of spiritual beings, we'll have to put on blinders to every other aspect of reality. But that's not true. In fact, just the opposite. The mindset that says everything must have a material cause, that's actually the oversimplification.

Indeed, the Bible gives us a more robust, a more sophisticated analysis of reality. It refuses to oversimplify. Second, we can sometimes think that belief in personal spiritual evil is somehow primitive or narrow.

But, you know, if you were to travel to many, if not most places in the world today, Africa, Asia, Latin America, you'd find there that the reality of spiritual evil is readily acknowledged. And surely we wouldn't want to say that all of those cultures or places are primitive or narrow, would we?

Are you willing to make that sweeping cultural judgment? Perhaps it's our own culture that's made us narrow-sided. Perhaps we need to be willing to learn from others.

[8 : 50] But third, if we aren't willing to believe in the reality of spiritual evil, we simply aren't equipped to deal with the depth of what's wrong in the world. I think a lot of times we're afraid that believing the Bible on this point will make us superstitious, that is kind of overly believing.

We fear that we'll end up with an overbelief, an overbelief that everything is the fault of the devil or spiritual forces and that we'll not take stock of the very real social or psychological or material causes of brokenness in the world.

But what if there's an equal but opposite danger, not of being superstitious, of being overbelieving, but of being substititious, of being underbelieving?

You see, if we only think that the human problem is material or social or psychological, if we don't see that there's also a very real spiritual dimension and spiritual battle at work, then we'll never get to the depth of what's wrong.

And if we never get to the depth of what's wrong, we'll never get to the sort of freedom that we're longing for. And as we see in our passage, that's what Jesus has come to bring, real freedom and wholeness.

[10:01] So we see first in our text the reality of spiritual evil. Next, we see the gravity of it. Let's pick up again in verse 2 and read through verse 5. 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 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. Now, many commentators have pointed out that what the demons are working toward in this man is the utter defacing of God's image.

Notice, he's among the tombs, and he's crying out like an animal. His humanity is being undone. So we see here that Satan's goal is to dehumanize and to denigrate, above all, the one thing in creation that displays God's glory the best, the men and women made in God's image.

He truly is the enemy of our souls. And of course, part of what makes this event so memorable to the disciples and part of why Mark includes it in his account of Jesus' life is because of how grave and desperate this man's situation really was.

[11:16] This was no minor spiritual attack. This was a full onslaught of spiritual darkness. In fact, as we learn in verse 9, a whole host of demons had been afflicting this man. Legion, after all, was the name of a Roman military unit that numbered upwards sometimes of 6,000 troops.

So just as the Roman legions had conquered and oppressed the whole of Palestine during this time, so this demonic legion had conquered and oppressed this man. But you know, when we read of how grave and desperate this man's condition was, we need to be careful.

We need to be careful not to think that this extreme case has no relevance for us. Perhaps you've never encountered demonic activity in such a blatant form.

If not, be thankful you haven't. But that doesn't mean you and I are immune from very real spiritual battle. In 1 Peter 5, 8, the apostle Peter reminds the whole church to be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. In Ephesians 6, 11, the apostle Paul tells every Christian to put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

[12:30] In fact, when we look at this man's condition in Mark 5, we see there, yes, an aggravated and extreme form, but we see there two strategies that Satan uses against every person.

Notice first how the man seems to have supernatural strength. Chains and shackles can't hold him. No one has the strength to subdue him. But what's become seemingly true of this man through demonic activity is also a picture of how Satan tempts us to think in everyday temptation.

Think about what's going on when you experience temptation. Isn't it as if, isn't it as if your internal talk is saying something like this, I can do this.

I'm strong enough to handle this. It won't hurt me. After all, I deserve this. Satan wants us to think that we're strong, that we have the power in ourselves to do what we choose and want to do.

And he wants to hide from us the holiness and authority of God. Will we end up breaking chains and shackles? Probably not. But Satan wants us to act as if we are the authority that we have the strength and power to do as we wish.

[13:54] But as we see here, temptation and sin always leads to loneliness and to death. This man lived among the tombs. Satan promised him power, but what was the return?

The return was like a living death. But notice the second thing in verse 5. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

On the one hand, Satan is a tempter, trying to get us to believe the lie that we're strong, autonomous, self-reliant. But on the other hand, Satan is an accuser. That's literally what the word Satan means, the accuser. He accuses us of all our guilt and failure, and we end up miserable, torn

up inside, hating ourselves.

This man was always crying out, cutting himself with stones. Satan tries to hide our view of the mercy and love of God so that we end up racked with self-loathing and despair, crushed by our own failures.

Do you see either of these dynamics in your own life, in your own heart? On the one hand, do you hear the talk that says, do what you need to do. You deserve it.

[15:06] Nothing can stop you. On the other hand, do you hear the voice that says, you're worthless. After all you've done, anyone could have done that better than you.

And if we're honest, we've heard both of those voices. We've all been in the grip of spiritual war. And we all know just how powerful the temptation and the accusation can be.

And what we see in this poor, afflicted man in Mark 5 is ultimately where this road would lead for all of us if left to run its course. It's the road to death.

But in the face of the reality and the gravity of spiritual evil, what Mark wants us to see above all else is Jesus and his victory over spiritual evil.

Let's pick up in verse 6. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and 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?

[16:13] I adjure you by God. Do not torment me. For Jesus was saying to him, come out of the man, you unclean spirit. And Jesus asked him, what is your name? He replied, my name is Legion, for we're 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 Jesus gave them permission, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs.

And the herd, numbering about 2,000, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea. Note the contrast between these verses and the end of verse 4.

Before Jesus arrived, no one had the strength to subdue him. They tried chains, they tried shackles, perhaps to prevent the man from hurting others, perhaps to prevent the man from hurting himself, and none of it worked.

But then Jesus arrives. Others had tried to tie him down externally, but Jesus liberates him internally. And at last, this man knows real and true freedom.

[17:18] And notice, in this encounter between Jesus and the unclean spirits, there's no contest. Jesus commands a whole host of demons to take flight as easily as a child running into a flock of pigeons.

Poof, they're gone. In fact, this legion of demons can do nothing but beg. Did you notice how many times the text says that? The demons beg Jesus not to torment them.

They beg Jesus to let them enter the herd of pigs. There are a whole army of spiritual evil, but before Jesus they can do nothing but get down on their knees and beg. And when we compare this account to other ancient exorcism accounts outside of the Bible, we see something pretty interesting.

You know, in other ancient accounts the people trying to cast out evil spirits always sort of call on a higher power. The exorcist always evokes the name of a greater deity so that they can overcome the power, the lesser power of the evil spirit.

But is this how Jesus works? No. Jesus doesn't call on a higher power. Never. In fact, for Jesus it doesn't matter whether it's one demon or a whole legion of demons with his own word.

[18:29] He puts them in submission and drives them out. But of course there's a curious detail here, isn't there? Jesus' victory over spiritual evil and this man's spiritual freedom comes with a strange cost.

because Jesus doesn't just send the demons fleeing he permits them to enter a herd of pigs and the demons subsequently destroy the whole herd.

Now this is a strange detail to be sure and most readers of Mark's gospel today sort of scratch their heads and a lot of us think oh man those poor pigs what did they ever do wrong?

Right? But consider what consider what this what this would have meant. consider first what it tells us about the demons.

On the one hand the destruction of so large a number of pigs shows us just how many demons there were in this man. Legion indeed not quite 6,000 but a frightening host nonetheless.

[19 : 34] On the other hand the destruction of the pigs shows us the destructive nature of demonic power. The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy as Jesus says in John 10. And here is yet another proof of Satan's evil intent to ruin God's good creation not something to play with.

But consider what the destruction of the herd of pigs would have meant for the man himself. You see the destruction of the herd was evidence that these destructive forces had been removed from him once and for all.

I mean who knows how long this man had suffered? Who knows how long his fellow townspeople had lived in fear of him? But now lest any doubted there was proof that something radical had cleansed him and set him free.

As tangible and as evidenced as the missing herd of pigs on the hillside. But consider what this would have meant for Jesus. On the surface the magnitude of the miracle that Jesus had just performed.

The magnitude of what Jesus had just done. Driving out a whole legion of demons. That is made visible by permitting the destruction of the herd. You know it's one thing to see one man put in his right mind as we see later in this passage.

[20 : 52] It's another thing to have seen 2,000 animals crash into the sea. So this allows us to see the magnitude of what Jesus has just done. But consider a little deeper what the destruction of this herd might have meant for Jesus.

In the first century a herd of pigs meant a lot of money. The people made their living from agriculture after all. And a whole herd of pigs was very valuable.

When the pigs went charging over the cliff the townspeople were not thinking oh no the cute pigs. Right? They were thinking oh no we just lost a ton of money. Someone just drained our bank account.

So what Jesus is demonstrating is that all the wealth in the world doesn't compare to the worth of one human soul.

Better to lose the pigs and gain the man. But look even deeper. In permitting the destruction of the herd Jesus asks the townspeople to bear a bit of a cost for this man's restoration.

[22 : 06] But don't you see the even bigger story that's being played out here? Conquering evil vanquishing the destructive powers of darkness silencing the accusations of the evil one none of this would come without an even greater cost.

It would take more than the cost of a herd of animals maybe a few months or years wages to really conquer the powers of darkness it would cost nothing less than the death of God's own son.

A cost that he was willing to pay in love for you and for me. You see by the end of Mark's gospel Jesus will take this man's place.

Jesus will be handed over to the Romans and their legions. Jesus will be shackled condemned and hung up to die on a cross amidst the cursed and the unclean. He will cry out his body torn by the stones of Roman whips and Satan will exhaust his destructive evil on Jesus and his body will be laid in a tomb.

Satan will do his worst against Jesus but he will not win because by dying Jesus paid the cost for every sin and every failure of everyone who will trust in him.

[23 : 31] And on the third day Jesus rose to prove that the payment was made in full that Satan was now powerless and that no accusation could ever be made against his beloved people ever again.

The victory at last had been won once and for all. And if you really take this victory seriously then things start to change.

Notice first how the townspeople respond to Jesus. It's surprising isn't it? In verse 17 they beg him to leave. But maybe it's not that surprising when you think about it.

After all Jesus' redemptive program had just been massively costly to them. Some folks just lost a lot of money so that one person could be restored to the community.

Now according to the world's economy that's not a decent exchange, right? That's not a profitable rate of return. But in Jesus' economy things are different.

[24 : 41] When Jesus Christ enters your life and when the gospel really starts to take root in a community the priorities will be changed. Jesus doesn't just let things remain the way they are.

The status quo gets upset. The old way of doing things gets upset by a new way of doing things. There's a new kingdom. There's a new economy. There's a new approach to wealth and who's

important and who's not important.

Just like he did with the garrison social and economic status quo if you welcome Jesus into your life he will completely rearrange your normal way of doing things. He will change our priorities and he will become our ultimate allegiance.

And as we cling tighter to him and as he takes more and more control of our life we start to become a lot more open handed with the other things. But that means some people will tell Jesus to leave. We'd rather control things our own way. Thank you very much. Sadly that's what happened on this day in Mark 5. But not for everyone.

[25 : 58] If you see that his power is not out to enslave you or oppress you but that it comes to liberate redeem and restore you when you see that his power was displayed ultimately on the cross because he loves you then your response will be totally different.

When you see that God loved us at infinite cost to himself then you'll want to make him your Lord. Who else could lay aside their infinite power and privilege and wealth who else would do that to rescue us when we had done nothing to deserve it?

And if you see his power displayed on the cross instead of telling him to leave you'll want to be with him forever and tell everyone you love about him just like this man. You'll want to give him control of your life so that his power will remake you and reorder your life into something beautiful.

And like this man Jesus will dignify you by sending you on his mission. The man after being healed says Jesus let me be with you.

Right? Which reminds us of an earlier passage in the gospel when Jesus calls the apostles and said I'm calling you to be with me. And the man says Jesus let me go and let me be with you but Jesus has a different plan for this man's life.

[27 : 12] The Gerasenes needed a gospel witness and this formerly notorious man would now be the equally unforgettable witness to the power of Christ.

And like this man all true Christians have a story to tell about what God has done in their life and this story is all about Jesus. Did you notice how the passage ends?

Jesus tells the man to tell everyone what God had done and the man obeys by telling everyone what Jesus had done. So how are you responding to the power of Jesus?

What's keeping you from giving yourself to this powerful and infinitely loving Lord? This passage tells us that no matter how fearful you are no matter how broken you are no matter how ashamed you feel Jesus by his power can save you and make you an instrument of redemption in his world. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus we pause and we praise you for winning the ultimate victory over spiritual darkness.

[28 : 27] God we look out at our world and we still see so much brokenness so much evil that yes can be explained by many material causes and yet we know that there's also a great spiritual battle raging.

But we thank you Lord that this victory has been won and that we need not fear and that even though we are called to put on the armor each day to fight this battle we know that ultimately in you Christ it will be a battle that is victorious.

Lord we pray for your help in the midst of temptation and accusation help us to remember the gospel that you have loved us with an undying love and that you have called us to live holy lives in service of you.

Lord help us to live in that freedom and help us to encourage one another on the way. Lord help us to run this race together as a church proclaiming your victory like this man that we see here in Mark 5.

Lord each of us has a story about the great mercy that you've shown to us. Help us to publish it and proclaim it and be glad. We ask this in your name Jesus.

[29 : 46] Amen.