

Mark 5:1-20

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. We're looking tonight at Mark chapter 5. So if you want to turn there in a Bible, it's page 840, if you're looking in one of the Bibles in the pews.

Mark chapter 5, we're looking at verses 1 through 20. So let me read this for us tonight.

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? 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 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 : 27] 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. Several years ago, I was leading two Bible study groups going through the Gospel of Mark.

And when we came to this passage, the two groups had nearly opposite reactions. The first group was a group of Yale undergraduate students. And for the most part, most of the Yalies were turned off by this story.

They said, This story is really weird. I can't relate to it. I mean, demons? Do you really have to believe that evil spirits exist and possess people?

[3 : 38] And what about the pigs? I mean, the slaughter of innocent animals. And it's for no apparent reason. Why does Jesus allow that?

But they were turned off by this story. Now, the second group, the second Bible study group, was a group of mostly recovering drug addicts and alcoholics.

And their reaction was the total opposite. They were immediately drawn to the Jesus described in this story. They said, I can totally relate to that man's experience being a slave to a self-destructive pattern that spirals totally out of control.

And you know you're destroying yourself, but you just can't stop. And nobody else, no matter how hard they try, can stop you either. And they were drawn in to this Jesus who is powerful to rescue even the most tormented soul.

So I wonder, what's your initial reaction to this story? Are you turned off or are you drawn in? Now, interestingly, we see these two reactions at the end of the story itself.

[4 : 48] We see the townspeople who are turned off by Jesus. They beg him to depart and leave their region.

Now, it says they were afraid of him. Well, they're afraid of Jesus because he's stronger than this man whom no one could contain. Whom no one could ever chain down and control.

And Jesus is even stronger than him. But they're also afraid because they've lost 2,000 pigs all in one day. Their local economy is shot. And they're afraid what might come next.

And so they ask Jesus to leave. And he goes. But we also see the man who had been healed. And he's totally drawn to Jesus. He begs that he might be with Jesus and go with him.

And Jesus says, no. He says, go home. Tell your friends how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you. And then verse 20 says he went around not just to his friends, not just to his family, but to the Decapolis.

[5 : 58] That word means 10 cities. It was the whole region of 10 cities and the surrounding countryside. And he becomes the first missionary preacher sent out by Jesus to the Gentiles.

Commissioned directly by Jesus himself. A man who had spent probably years of his life cutting himself and living in a graveyard as a tormented soul.

Now the point of this story is that Jesus is the Lord who can rescue and redeem and restore even the most tormented soul. And the man totally gets it.

See, Jesus says, go tell what the Lord has done for you. And then it says he began to tell what Jesus had done for him. He gets the point. Jesus is the Lord who has authority over all the forces of evil.

That's the point of the story. Now if you were here last week, we saw the disciples in the boat crossing the lake. Facing a raging storm at sea. Like nothing they had ever seen.

[7 : 07] Totally out of their control. Threatening to capsize the boat and drown them all. And Jesus with a word calms the storm. And tonight, we see this man with a raging storm inside his soul.

Totally out of control. Tearing him apart. And threatening to utterly destroy him. And Jesus by his word brings peace to this man.

He's the Lord over the storm. He's the Lord over whether it's the storm on the lake or the storm in the man's soul. Jesus has authority over all the forces of chaos and evil.

Now Jesus' authority is both attractive and scary. So tonight I want to look at these two themes. First, why is Jesus' authority scary?

And the answer is, Jesus' authority has no boundaries. Now notice this. First, Jesus goes to a place where his disciples would never choose to go.

[8 : 10] And he brings them along. Verse 1 says, they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. Now this was a region that every good Jewish person would avoid. Because it was full of Gentiles and foreigners.

It was, in other words, it was the wrong side of the tracks. It was the bad neighborhood that you don't go through. And you certainly don't cross the lake to spend time there. Because they raised pigs.

Thousands of pigs. Now pigs were unclean. They were disgusting and offensive in the eyes of the Jewish people. Pigs represented the Roman occupying army.

That's probably why they were raising so many pigs. To feed the army of the Romans. Romans who were occupying their land. And oppressing them. And when Jesus steps off the boat, he's greeted by this man who's lived in the tombs.

Who has an unclean spirit. Now the tombs were also off limits for faithful Jews. Because touching a dead body. Or touching someone, coming in contact with someone who had touched dead bodies.

[9 : 19] Would make you unclean for seven days. And then you had to go through a whole ritual. To be restored to a place where you could enter the temple. And have fellowship with God. And be in community with other people.

So if you were one of the disciples. Traveling with Jesus in the boat. You would be asking the question. Why in the world is Jesus taking us here? It's like if you were the personal assistant.

To the head of the United Nations. And accompanying him on his visit to New Haven. And he said tonight we're going to sleep outdoors. In the rain. On a bench.

In the middle of the worst housing project in New Haven. Where someone was shot last week. And that's where I'm going to give my speech about world peace. You think.

What in the world is this guy doing? No. You should speak at Yale. That's where visiting dignitaries go and speak. You should stay at the Omni Hotel. Or the study.

[10 : 18] Take your pick. You don't go there. But Jesus doesn't conform to his disciples' expectations. And Jesus doesn't conform to the tormented man's expectations either.

Jesus' arrival is unexpected and threatening to him. Now initially he seems attracted to Jesus. He runs to Jesus and falls down before him. It's almost like he's worshiping him. But then he's resistant.

And he's hostile. Because Jesus is coming on his turf. And claiming authority. So he cries out. He says. What have you to do with me? In other words. Why are you messing with me?

He says. I adjure you by God. That's. As if he's saying. I bind you under oath. Don't torment me. He's sort of using all the persuasive. And manipulative power.

That he can grab onto. To try to resist. Jesus' advances. And he's frightened. Because no one else has ever approached him.

[11 : 20] In this kind of way. And he realizes he can't hide from Jesus. He's in the most desolate. And forsaken place in the world. And Jesus. Comes.

And finds him there. The least. The place you would least expect. To meet God. And Jesus shows up. You see.

Jesus doesn't stay. Within anyone's expected boundaries. Not within the disciples. Expected boundaries. Not within this man's expected boundaries. He goes where no one expects him to go. He does what no one expects him to do.

And then. He permits the demons. To destroy 2,000 pigs. By drowning them in the lake. Now I know. Usually pigs can swim. This is the whole point.

Demons make. Them do things that are unnatural. And self-destructive. Just like this man. Right. No one. But no one expected. The pigs to be destroyed either.

[12 : 19] So you might ask. Okay. Well. What's. Why the pigs? Why destroy all these pigs? Okay. Let me give you two reasons. First. To show the magnitude. Of what Jesus has delivered this man from.

Now think about it. Who would have believed. That this man was really. Taken over. By a whole army. A whole legion. 2,000 demons.

If 2,000 pigs hadn't run off the. Edge of the lake. And drowned in the water. Right. People could have said. Well. Okay. Maybe he was possessed by one or two demons.

Well. I guess we couldn't deal with it. But. You know. There's people. There's other exorcists out there. I mean. You can watch movies about. And even maybe documentaries. About exorcisms that have happened.

And. Other people have done that too. Or maybe the guy was just crazy. And not really demon possessed. But. If you saw all the pigs. Drowned in the sea.

[13 : 19] You couldn't say those things. You'd realize. How. The great magnitude. Of the deliverance. That Jesus had. Had. Had done.

No one could debate it. No one debates that in the story. Now some of you. Some of you might be wondering. Well what about demons? What. I mean. It's not what I usually think about. Or talk about.

Like. Sounds. This still sounds a little weird to me. So let me give a brief answer to that. So according to the Bible. There are a whole range of afflictions. That human beings experience.

Physical. Emotional. Social. Political. Mental. Spiritual. Now many times these are combined. But it's wrong.

According to the Bible. It is wrong to assume. That for example. A mental or emotional disturbance. Or a strong temptation. Is always caused by demons.

[14 : 16] The Bible does not teach that. The Bible makes a distinction. On the other hand. I would say. It's also naive to believe. That. There's no way demons can exist at all.

Simply because. I've never. Visibly. Seen evidence of them. There's a lot more things in the world. Than. You and I have experienced. In our individual experience. Now the Bible acknowledges.

That there are forces in the world. That seek to oppress. And dehumanize people. And some of those forces. Are political. Some are economic. Or social. But the Bible also says.

There are spiritual forces. Intent on destroying. And distorting. The image of God. In human beings. That God created us. To bear. And that's sort of the broader world view.

Behind. This story. But let me encourage you. Don't get hung up. On this question. Of demons. And evil spirits. That's. The point of the story. Is not. To teach us.

[15 : 14] How demons behave. Or don't behave. The point is. That Jesus has authority. Over all forms of evil. The pigs are simply. One piece of evidence. Of that. So that's the first reason.

The pigs matter. To show the magnitude. Of the deliverance. The second reason. Is that they force. The townspeople. To clarify. Their priorities. In other words. What matters more to you? Two thousand pigs.

Or one. Tormented man. Who's now healed. And restored. And what's their answer? This is probably the saddest part.

Of the story. Their answer is. It's the pigs. That's really why they asked Jesus. To leave. Right. Verse 16. Those who had seen it. Described what had happened.

To the demon possessed man. And. To the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus. To leave. Their actions.

[16:10] They don't say it directly. But their actions show. They cared more about the pigs. Than about the man. So we see that Jesus authority. Knows no boundaries. And that's why it scares them. And I think honestly.

If we really. Grapple with. The nature of Jesus authority. We might be scared too. Because it means that Jesus. Leads his disciples. Into intimidating situations.

Into messy places. Into bad neighborhoods. Into spiritual and physical prisons. And graveyards. Places that we would never choose to go otherwise. All for the sake.

Of redeeming. And restoring. Lost. People. Verse 21 says. After Jesus. Healed this one man. He went.

Right back across the lake. He led his disciples. All the way across the lake. Through a raging storm at sea. All for the sake of this one. Man. A man who nobody else.

[17:08] Cared for. And everybody else. Had totally given up on. Jesus cares more. About the restoration. Of one. Tormented soul.

Than he does about. The economy. Of downtown New Haven. And all the great restaurants. That many of us enjoy. And appreciate.

In fact. He cares more about. The restoration of one soul. Than the balance. In my bank account. Or your bank account. And Jesus is willing. To empty out. My bank account.

Or yours. For the sake. Of redeeming. And restoring. One lost soul. Without asking. My permission. Or yours. That's scary.

If we take this seriously. That Jesus authority. Knows no bounds. But at the very same time. This story shows us. That Jesus authority.

[18:10] Is. Irresistibly attractive. Now imagine for a moment. That you are this man. Who's living in the tombs. Once.

You had a family. And a home. Now. You're alienated. And homeless. You find shelter in caves. Full of dead people's bones.

Once you had friends. To eat. And drink. And share meals with. Now you've broken all your relationships. And no one wants.

To share your company. Once you interacted freely. With people in society. Now they just try to lock you up. In shackles and chains.

And you. Break the chains. And scare them off. Once you could lie down. And sleep at night. Now you can never rest.

[19:06] For night. And day. You cry out. In anguish. And rage. And fear. And hatred. And you take it out on yourself. By cutting yourself.

With stones. Until you bleed. Once you felt like. A human being. Now you live like. A wild animal. Once you wanted to live.

And now you just want to die. Nobody cares. And even if somebody did care. They couldn't help you. Until one day. Jesus.

Shows up. Now of course. When Jesus shows up. You have mixed feelings. You're drawn to him. But you also resist him. And there's a struggle.

That plays itself out. Between you. And Jesus. Now notice. Jesus doesn't just command the demons to leave. And they go right away. Verse 7 through 10. There's a struggle.

[20 : 00] That goes on. A back and forth. It's even hard to figure. Between the demon possessed man. And Jesus. It's even hard to figure out. If the man is speaking. Or if the demons are speaking.

It goes back and forth. Between he and they. And I and we. The point is. The man resists. Jesus advances. But Jesus graciously.

Persists. And in the end. Jesus is stronger than the man. And he's stronger than all the demons inside him. And he overcomes the resistance. And so at the end of the day.

That. Which began. With crying out in rage. And cutting. Himself in anguish. This man is sitting peacefully. For the first time.

In years. Sitting. At the feet of Jesus. Clothed. Decently. Thinking. Clearly. His humanity.

[20 : 56] His human. Dignity. Which had been almost totally. Obliterated. And torn apart. By the legion. Of evil spirits. Is beautifully.

Restored. Isn't that a beautiful picture. Of what Jesus has come to do. This man was destroying himself. Out of control. Tormented himself.

And tormenting others. And Jesus speaks peace. To his soul. Just as he stilled the storm at sea. With his word. Of course this man.

Begs to be with Jesus. He's attracted to Jesus. Like a magnet. Because there's no one else. Like Jesus. There's no one else. Who's ever treated him like this. There's no one else.

Who's ever been able to do. What Jesus could do. There's no one else. Who had authority to dispel. The darkness. And the chaos. And the evil. That had engulfed his life.

[21 : 53] Jesus' authority. Is wonderfully attractive. And this is very good news. For us today. Because if Jesus could save.

And heal. And restore this man. Surely. He can save. And heal. And restore you. However disturbed.

However disturbed. Afflicted. Restless. Alienated. You may be. However full of anguish. And rage. And fear.

And hatred. Your heart may be. However deeply. You've been locked. Into self-destructive patterns. That you just can't seem to stop. And nobody else can make you stop either.

No matter how hard they try. However much you have hurt other people. And broken past relationships. As this man surely had.

[22 : 50] Jesus is stronger. Stronger than all the forces of evil inside this man. Stronger than all the forces of evil that afflict you and me. Stronger than all the resistance.

That we might hold inside us. And Jesus has come. To set his people free. Now this man is an extreme example. He's in an extreme situation.

But the whole story is simply a picture. Of what it means to become a Christian. To become a follower. And a believer in Jesus. To pass from death. To life.

From fragmentation. And alienation. To wholeness. From restlessness. To peace. From being all alone.

To being united with Jesus. Forever. So turn. To this Jesus tonight. Come. Sit at his feet.

- [23 : 48] Be clothed. By his mercy. And his grace. Let his words of promise bring peace. And clarity. To the troubles. In your mind.
- And in your soul. Now I know. The transformation doesn't always happen. As immediately as it seems to here. And even in this story. There's a struggle.
- Maybe you're. Struggling. With Jesus. You're drawn to him. You're drawn to him. You're drawn to him. But you're also resisting him. In some part of your life.
- Surrender. Give up fighting. Give up fighting. Against him. Jesus is the rightful Lord. Over all creation. Jesus has come to bring order. And fullness.
- Where there's only chaos. And emptiness. He's come to reclaim you. To restore in you. The very image of God. That God created you to bear.
- [24 : 45] His grace. His grace. Is greater. Than your sin. His redemption. Is greater. Than your past. His promise for your future.
- Is greater than your past. His love. Is even stronger. Than death. Brothers and sisters. I know that for some of you.
- It's hard to believe those truths. It's hard to live. As if you believe them. On a day-to-day basis. Because your sin. Seems greater than God's grace. Your past seems bigger.
- Than God's redeeming power. Your addiction. Seems to define you. More than your identity. In Jesus. But I pray that tonight. That you would see. Jesus. The persistent.
- And victorious. And merciful. Lord. And you'd be encouraged. To believe. And trust. This Jesus. With all your heart. And all your soul.
- [25 : 46] Now the story doesn't end. With the man simply. Believing and trusting. In Jesus. It ends with him being sent out. To proclaim the truth.
- And tell the story. Of what Jesus had done for him. Jesus went all the way. Across a lake. Through a raging storm. To a bad neighborhood. And a desolate graveyard.
- To rescue. This tormented man. But when Jesus departs. He tells the man. Stay behind. Stay behind. For the sake of your family. And your friends. And your neighborhood. And these ten cities. That nobody else cares about. And nobody else wants to go there.
- So that they too might know. The saving. And healing. And restoring. Power. Of Jesus. The merciful. Lord. So if you have experienced.
- [26 : 46] If you have even begun. To experience. Jesus healing. And transforming power. Go home tonight. To your family. And friends.
- To your neighborhood. To the desolate. Graveyards. Of this city. In this region. And tell. What the Lord Jesus has done.
- And how he has had mercy. On you. Let's pray. Lord Jesus.
- We praise you. For your. Authority. That knows no bounds. And we praise you. For your mercy. God knows no bounds either.
- Lord your mercy. And your authority. Are stronger. Than the power of the grave. Stronger than all. The forces of evil.
- [27 : 59] In the world. And in our hearts. Lord Jesus. We thank you. We thank you. For this picture. How you rescued this man.
- How you rescued him. And even. Sent him out. As a preacher. As a testimony. To you. Lord would you.
- Do your restoring work. Even tonight. In us here. Lord. Lord. And would you send us out. To proclaim. This. Message. With joy. And with peace. The peace. That only you can give.

Pray this in your name. Amen.