

Lessons from the Graveyard Part I

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Mark 5:1-7

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. 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." Mark 5:1-7

Brothers and sisters, "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever" Isaiah 40:8.

I don't know about you, but when I read a story like this I am sometimes left wondering why the Holy Spirit chose to include a record of such events in the gospel narratives. This story appears in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39). We know that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16), so there must be great value in this text for us this morning. I am persuaded that this text is intended to leave us awestruck as we are brought face to face with the deity, majesty, power, and authority of Jesus Christ.

The text before us this morning displays Jesus' sovereign power over chaos. Last week we saw Him demonstrate His power to calm a violent storm at sea (cf. Mark 4:25-41). This morning, we'll see Him demonstrate His power to calm an equally violent storm that is raging inside of a demonized Gerasene man. Satan is hell-bent on destruction. Jesus tells us, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Jesus Christ is our great victor; He triumphs over every evil. He is our savior and redeemer. Our text this morning brings us face to face with the evil forces of darkness, but closes with Jesus triumphing over darkness and sending a once demon possessed man to tell his family and friends "how much the Lord has done for him..." (v.19).

A WORD OF CAUTION CONCERNING EXTREMES

There are two extremes that give Satan great delight. First, there are those who disbelieve all things demonic not giving credence to the powers of darkness. Secondly, there are those who swing to the other side of the pendulum and take up an unhealthy, inordinate fascination and interest in Satan and his demons. C.S. Lewis, in His book *Screwtape Letters*, rightly observed:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail the materialist and magician with the same delight.¹

I briefly mentioned last week that the language Jesus used to rebuke the wind and waves in chapter 4 verse 39 is most interesting. As the terrified disciples woke Jesus, who was sleeping in the stern of the wind-tossed boat, and charged Him with not being concerned for their lives, Mark writes, “He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” The word “rebuked” is the same word that Jesus used in (1:25) when He rebuked the man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue in Capernaum. Likewise, the Greek word translated “Peace” (literally hush) refers to an involuntary inability to speak and the word “Be still” literally means to “Be muzzled”. The way the original language is used, it’s as though Jesus were addressing a person and not just the natural elements of wind and waves. Jesus’ response is more appropriate for demonic forces than of inanimate nature. We’ll see in our text this morning that just as the natural elements submit to Jesus’ authority, so do Satan and the demons.²

Do you remember the great promise of Genesis 3:15? Immediately following Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden, God pronounces the curse. But it’s interesting to note that the effects of the curse are first directed to the serpent (Satan) and then to Adam and Eve. What did God say to the serpent in verse 15? He said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” So there is both a devastating curse and a glorious promise revealed in Genesis 3. The curse is death. But the promise is that the coming Messiah would crush the head of Satan, redeem those under the curse by dying as a substitutionary sacrifice in their place, and thus them new life. John, in the first of his three letters, tells us, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” 1 John 3:8. What we see in our text this morning is a validation of Jesus’ Messiahship and a foretaste of our Redeemer’s ultimate victory over Satan (sin and death). With that context, let’s look at the text.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942), 29.

² James R. Edwards, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 150.

I. THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF SATAN (v.1-7)

Look again at the first five verses. Mark writes, “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.”

Jesus and His disciples have just arrived on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. No sooner than they get their boat situated they are confronted with a most interesting individual. A man who had come out from the tombs with an unclean spirit immediately meets them. Matthew’s account of this story tells us that there are actually two men (Matthew 8:28), but Mark only writes about one of them. This is likely because the one of the men is the key figure of the story and Mark zeros in, or focuses in, on him.

Look at how Mark describes this man. He says that he dwelt among the tombs – cut off from any human contact. He was either exiled by the townspeople or in his madness he voluntarily resigned himself to the tombs (the dead). It’s interesting to note that all society can do for a problem person is to isolate them. For all of our wonderful scientific and medical achievements, we still can’t manage the problems caused by Satan and sin. Fearful of this madman as you can imagine, people had tried to bind him up with shackles and chains, but the text says that was a futile endeavor. He was able to wrench the chains apart and break the shackles into pieces. Under the influence of the demons, this man had super-human strength – strength that was beyond that of a normal person. Mark says that he was unable to be subdued, a description more fitting of a ferocious animal than a human being.

The Greek word *damazo* translated “subdue” is probably better translated “tame”. Elsewhere it was used to describe the taming of a wild animal or a vicious beast. James uses the same word *damazo* when he says, “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison” James 3:7–8.

Look at this man’s actions. Mark says, “Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones” Mark 5:5. He is so restless that he relentlessly wanders about. You could probably hear him from time to time yelling and screaming. He was always crying out. That verb literally means to croak with inarticulate shrieks. And not only does he wander aimlessly and indiscernibly cry out, but he cuts himself with stones. This poor, naked man was a mass of bleeding lacerations, scabs, infections, and scar tissue living in a

delirium of pain and masochistic pleasure.³ Make no mistake about it, this is a picture of Hell. This man inhabited by demonic power and presence, lives among the dead, has no rest, no escape, only unceasing torment. The only relief he can think of is to cut himself with stones to try and take his own life. This demonized man is wild, crazed, and “untamable”. But thanks be to God that here is One who has the ability to arrest a human heart. Jesus Christ can tame our sin and our madness!

THIS IS THE EXCEPTION NOT THE RULE

What we are reading here in the text is very real, it happened often in Jesus’ day and the New Testament assigns no reason that it can’t and doesn’t happen today. Human nature hasn’t changed, and Satan, though he and the rest of his host of darkness will be, are not bound yet. Having said that, I think instances like what we see in our text are more the exception and not the rule when it comes to demonic influence in our day. Demon possession, as we see it in this man, is not always so blatantly overt. Yes, our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8), but more often than not, Satan and his demons are content to work much more subtly. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

He is just as content to operate covertly, masquerading in “Christian” circles and lead people away from the truth, as he is to manifest what power he has in overt demonstrations of demonic possession. John MacArthur says, “He likes to go to church in a grey suit, likes to sit in a pew, likes to stand behind a pulpit, and likes to teach in a seminary.” He is the father of lies (John 8:44). He is the manipulator of truth. He is more content to sit in church next to the respectable religious person than he is to exercise such undisguised, blatant displays of demonic power.

HOW DEMONS ADDRESS THE SON OF GOD

Look at verses 6-7. Mark writes, “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.’” Who is speaking here – the man or the demons? Mark’s account makes it sound like it was the man who was speaking but in Matthew’s account, the man’s words seem to be attributed to the demons. Matthew writes, “And behold, they cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?’” Matthew 8:29? I think we are hearing the voice of the demons. Previous to this we are just told that the man cries out in unintelligible shrieks - he can’t even speak on his own accord. Furthermore, this man would have had no idea who Jesus was. He was a Gentile and Jesus’ ministry to this point has been confined to a Jewish audience. But the demons on the other hand, they know exactly who Jesus is and they know that they are subservient to His authority.

³ Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior – Mark Vol. 1* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 119.

The first thing I want you to notice is that the man bows down. When the demonized man sees Jesus (presumably the demons who were terrorizing the man), under their influence, he runs out from the tombs and falls down before Him. They *proskuneo* Jesus – fall down prostrate in reverent submission. In the presence of King Jesus even the demons bow down and recognize His authority. In Colossians 1:16, Paul reminds us that Jesus is the creator of all things in Heaven and on Earth. He is Lord over all that is visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. When the demons meet Jesus, it's a no-contest event.

Bowing down in submission, the demons first ask, "What have you to do with me," or "What business do you have with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" It's interesting to note that the demons refer to Jesus by the title Son of the Most High God. To the Jews, God was *El Elyon* the Most High God who was transcendent and exalted over all pagan gods and rival powers. (Cf. Genesis 14:18, Numbers 24:16, Isaiah 14:14, Daniel 3:26, Luke 1:32, 35, Acts 7:48, 16:17, Hebrews 7:1).

The psalmist writes, "I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High. For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth. For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods" Psalm 7:17, 47:2, 97:9. This is the very position that Satan sought to overtake. Remember what Satan said in Isaiah 14:14, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But this wasn't his title... this was the title that the angel Gabriel gave to Jesus when he announced to Mary that she would give birth to Jesus. He said, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David" Luke 1:32. Satan and his host of demons recognize that Jesus is El Elyon – The Lord Most High!

The demons then plead with Jesus at the end of verse 7 saying, "I adjure you by God, do not torment me." Matthew 8:29 records the demons as saying, "Have you come here to torment us *before the time?*" What is meant by the phrase "before the time?" it means that Satan and his demons understand that God, in His plan of redemption, has appointed a day when Satan will be bound and all the forces of Hell will be vanquished once and for all. In other words, the demons know that their days are numbered! When Jesus comes to draw history to a close, the demonic world will not be able to match His power. But that time has not come yet and the demons tormenting this man are fully aware of that. The demon's words here are almost like a protest. They were reminding Jesus, who very well could have destroyed them right then and there, that it was not yet time for Him to send them to the pit.⁴

If the Lord will, we'll continue next week with verse 8.

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Commentary on Mark*.

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

Friends, we are the man of the tombs. Each one of us is born under the curse of sin and madness. Each one of us needs our out of control hearts to be changed, clothed, and calmed by the grace of Jesus Christ. Some of us here this morning have been saved from the same wretched tombs. Some of us still remain. If you're here this morning and you, like the man in our text, have been redeemed by the power of Christ; what are you telling others? Can you at least say, "I once was blind, but now I see?" Can you testify to His work of grace in your heart? Have you ever tasted the graciousness of Christ? If you haven't been born again, recreated, delivered from the power of sin and death, you have nothing to tell. But if on the other hand you have found peace with God through the gospel and have been made alive in Christ, then you ought to shine like a bright light in the midst of this dark, crooked, and twisted generation (Philippians 2:15). Resolve to be like the Psalmist who said, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul" Psalm 66:16. If you are here this morning and have never come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, friend I assure you that Jesus can forgive your load of sin and bring peace to your weary soul.

CLOSING BENEDICTION

Hear this benediction as we bring our corporate worship to a close this morning, "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever" 1 Timothy 1:17. And All God's people said, "Amen!" Go in peace.