

*Where we start . . .*

You can usually tell what matters to someone by watching what they get “worked up” about. If someone were to hang around you for a few days or a week, what would they conclude about what matters to you? Why? What do you think they might observe?

*What we read . . .*

As we read accounts of Jesus’ life in ministry as recorded by Mark, it is important to pay attention to all that Mark tells us. Sometimes, what he is driving at might not be the thing we immediately fix our attention on. Keep that in mind as you read Mark 5:1-20.

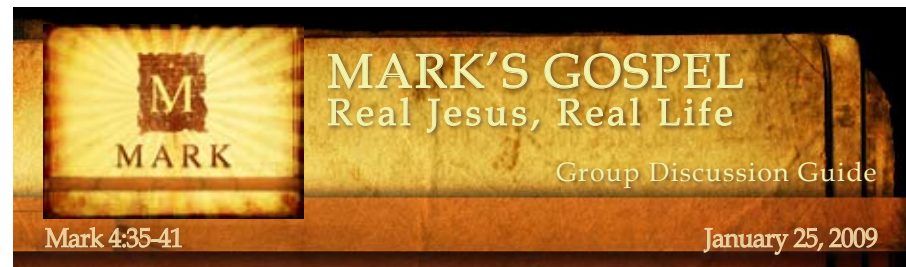
If you have headings in your Bible, what does the heading tell you this passage is about? What does your attention first go to when you read this account?

If all Mark was doing was underscoring the point that Jesus could (and did) deliver a severely “demonized” man, why bother to give us all the details he did? What does Mark’s attention to seemingly distracting details tell you about what Mark wants us to pay attention to?

Apparently, the herdsmen had grown to tolerate the demonized man living in the tombs; after all, they tended their pigs nearby. Apparently the people of the town were well acquainted with the demonized man; they must have been involved in the attempts to subdue him and came to see when they heard the report. Why then, knowing what they did, do the people of the area insist that Jesus leave after the demonized man has been made well?

*Why this matters . . .*

This account actually raises at least one troubling question: When might you be tempted to ask Jesus to stop what He is doing to or for those around you? Why?



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*Diving in . . .*

Demons and things demonic pretty much make most people at least a bit uncomfortable. And, as we read in Mark this week, we don't just have your "run of the mill" demonized guy. This account is startling in its detail and impact; a man is under the influence of a huge number of demons and when they are driven from the man, two thousand pigs end up dying! But that may not be the most troubling thing in the account. What might be even more disturbing is to listen as those who saw what Jesus did ask Jesus to leave. Why would anyone not want such a wonderful deliverer to continue ministering to those afflicted? That is what we want to wrestle a bit with this week.

*Discussing . . .*

The opening question really simply brings into focus the idea that we can see what matters to people by watching what they "make a big deal" about. That should be pretty much intuitively obvious to most; but articulating it will help us bring that idea into play as we read the text. What we will come to see is that we can tell what matters to the people who knew the (formerly) demonized man by what they make a big deal about.

Heading in your Bible notwithstanding, although the account in Mark 5:1-20 *does* deal with a demonized man, the passage is about so much more than "Jesus Heals a Demonized Man!" If that is simply what Mark wanted to tell us, he would likely not have given us so much extraneous detail. The details he reports clearly have something to do with what he wants us to understand. So reading the account with an eye on those details will be of great help.

What are some of those (initially seemingly) extraneous details? The location, to start with. Jesus arrives on the "other side" (see 4:35); the region is referred to as the "Gerasenes" (5:1) and is in the region of the "Decapolis" (5:20). All this tells us that we are dealing with a Gentile region. This is underscored by the pig-herders in the area; that is not a husbandry project that any Jew would have readily embraced.

We are also given information that lets us know that the people in the area must have known this man. They had repeatedly sought to bind him (5:3-4). The local herders apparently had something of a peaceful tolerance for him seeing as they tend their pigs only a short distance from his home among the tombs. And, when the herdsman did go into the town to report

what they had seen happen to the demonized man, the people in the town apparently were familiar enough with the situation that it warranted investigating.

It is true that this seems to be a demonic problem of great magnitude that we have not yet encountered in Mark. Many demons afflicting just one man. Enough demonic power and presence to drive a herd of two thousand pigs into the sea. (One interesting side note. What is similar between what happened to the pigs and what happened to the man before he was delivered? They were both living self-destructive lives; only the pigs did not have the power of will, the power of soul, to resist the self-destructive drive stirred by the demonic while the man apparently could resist to a point.)

Although the magnitude of the demonic problem does come into view, apparently that is not all we need to note in Mark's account. He gives some attention (and, thus, so should we) to the herdsman and the people of the town. They know the former condition of the man from the tombs. They know what has happened to him because of this man Jesus. And (amazingly enough) they decide that they don't want Jesus to hang around any more!

What could possibly drive these seemingly normal people to such insanity to insist that the One who had done so much good for someone so afflicted must leave? What prompts them to tell Jesus to go?

As much good as Jesus has done, He has upset their world. Although He didn't insist that the demons kill the pigs, He did permit them to go into the pigs when He drove them out of the man. And the people preferred the pigs over having the man in his right mind. Jesus did demonstrate amazing and fearful power. And the people preferred the power of the demonized man that they had grown accustomed to dealing with over the power of Jesus that shocked them and was seemingly beyond their control.

Because of the details Mark bothers to tell us, this must be part of his point (and at the heart of what Jesus was doing!). The focus comes down on, not only the demonized man, but on those who knew him and their resistance to have Jesus stay among them.

Jesus has a way of doing this. He steps into a situation. Maybe a situation that we would all agree on as being bad or twisted or broken. And Jesus brings healing and wholeness. The only problem for us is that we had made adjustments to living in the presence of the "badness." For Jesus to do away with that . . . well, that forces us to adopt a new way of doing things. Apparently, the people of the town preferred how things had been over how things were now going to be after Jesus came on the scene. And, sometimes, we can get that way, too.

That's a tough thing to think through; a challenge to talk about. But we need to address it. If Jesus were to start changing lives around you, how would you react? Would you always rejoice with those delivered? Or would you find some grounds to be bothered by how your life might now have to change, seeing as Jesus changed those who were part of your life?