

## **The Story – Master Over Spirits**

Last Sunday we looked at Mark 4 where Jesus calmed the storm and the sea. Jesus had said to his disciples, “let’s go over to the other side of the sea” before they got on board the boat. As you remember, a sudden storm threatened to overwhelm the boat until Jesus commanded the wind and waves to calm down and they arrived safely on the eastern side of the Galilee. Turn to Mark 5 as we look at the rest of the story. Last Sunday in our story Jesus revealed himself as Master of the Storm. This morning Jesus reveals himself as Master over the spirit world. Let’s read this story in **Mark 5:1-20** and then make some observations.

I realize to our modern ear and sensibilities this sounds strange. Do we still believe in demons and demon possession? I think we would agree we believe in evil. Two weeks ago evil walked into an Orlando nightclub and killed 49 people. According to the bible and our story this morning, there is more than a malevolent force at work in the world. The bible indicates there are real demons, demonic forces and evil spirits that torment and bring terror and chaos in the world. There are supernatural evil beings at work. Satan, the devil, the enemy, whatever you want to call him and the evil spirits or demons that are associated with him, they are at work in this world and they were at work in this man we know as Legion.

Jesus called Satan “the thief” and said of him, **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” John 10:10.** In John 8 Jesus said of the devil, **“He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” John 8:44.** A murderer, a thief that has come only to steal, kill and destroy, a liar and the father of lies. The devil can only be about destruction, distortion, deception and death. That’s who he is. That’s his nature. But don’t be afraid. John says of Jesus, **“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” 1 John 3:8**

While I doubt there are any demon possessed people here this morning, I think there are likely some folks who have been demonized, terrorized by the devil – with fear, with thoughts you can’t seem to control, terrorized with worry and anxiety, depression or thoughts of suicide. There are plenty of us that know the feelings - not necessarily as a result of demonic activity - but the feeling of being out of control, of too much chaos in your life - of so much emotional and inner pain that you feel like you are losing your mind. You want to run and hide or scream and you find yourself making desperate choices, poor choices, wrong choices.

This man in our story knew these feelings, only magnified many times over. The devil had stolen or destroyed everything of importance in this man's life. His family, his freedom, his self-esteem, his health, his sanity. Legion had surrounded himself with death, living in the tombs, torturing and cutting himself. Everything about him suggested destruction and death.

It's interesting this man was cutting himself. There has been an increase in recent years of people, young girls in particular, cutting themselves. It inflicts physical pain as a release for the emotional pain and torment on the inside. I am not suggesting that cutting is a sign of being demon possessed. I am simply pointing out that we can see something of ourselves and our pain in this desperately tormented man in Mark 5. And if you are cutting yourself, young or old, female or male, I believe there is an answer to be found in Jesus for you, just as it was for this man in Mark 5. Jesus can deliver you from your pain, inwardly and outwardly.

Jesus got out of the boat and this man comes running toward him. Maybe that was his usual response when anyone approached and most people would likely have been frightened away. Verse 7 tells us he was screaming at the top of his lungs. If you've ever had a crazy person suddenly screaming at you, it is pretty intimidating I have to admit. I move away pretty quickly. But notice what he says: **“What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!” Mark 5:7**

One of the things the devil does is deceive and distort the truth. Remember he is a liar and the father of lies. Ask yourself, why would this man, or the demons controlling him, think Jesus would torture him? Jesus' reputation was as a healer. He went about doing good. Where did they get that idea? From the devil! The devil was and still is lying about Jesus, distorting the truth about Jesus and about his mission. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, to heal the hurting and broken, to set the captive free. He hasn't come to torment you or condemn you but to love you and redeem you from your slavery to sin and self.

Here is this broken man, Legion, screaming, tormented. Can we find ourselves in this man's story? Again, I'm not suggesting anyone here is demon possessed, but can we find ourselves in the desperation of this man and his condition? Look at his condition.

**He was more dead than alive.** He was living among the dead in the tombs. These were likely caves on the hillside. Everything about him identified more with the dead than the living.

**Unclean.** To the Jews he would be considered unclean because he was living among the dead. He was spiritually and physically unclean. He was every homeless person you see today.

**Mistreated.** The townspeople had done it for their own safety, but he had been chained and tied. The passage we read said no one was strong enough to subdue him. The word there is used for taming a wild animal. It more accurately reads, “no one was able to tame him.” Perhaps they bound him, chained him, whipped him, beat him, all in an effort to tame him, to break him, to beat the devil out of him. He was mistreated and misunderstood by everyone.

**Bound.** He had been physically bound, chained and restrained by the people, but more importantly he was spiritually bound by the devil. A slave to demonic spirits, voices, thoughts and actions.

**Isolated.** He was an outcast from family, from society, forced to live alone among the tombs. Think how long it had been since anyone had looked him in the eye, touched him in a kind fashion, even said a kind word to him.

**Estranged** from everyone that loved him and knew him. He had family as Jesus speaks of them in verse 19, but he couldn't be around them. Imagine the pain his family had experienced.

**Pulled apart by an inward spiritual battle.** While we can't identify with demons controlling us, perhaps we can identify with something Eugene Lowry wrote in paraphrasing the demoniac's response to Jesus. “I feel like 6,000 soldiers inside me...sometimes they all march left, sometimes right...sometimes in all different directions. I'm pulled one way, then another. There's an army inside me, and I think I'm losing the war.”

You aren't demon possessed, but you feel more dead than alive on the inside. You feel unclean because of the way you are living, how you are living your life. You've been mistreated, perhaps you've been abused by someone, misunderstood by others. You feel bound, trapped, isolated, cut off, outcast, unwanted. You are estranged from family, pulled apart inwardly by conflicting thoughts and desires. Your whole life is like an internal storm. You know something of how this man felt

Is there any hope for you? No one thought there was hope for this man. The whole town gave up on him. His family and friends had to finally give up on him and write him off. Then Jesus came to their shores and everything changed! Don't give up. There is hope. Let's look at the rest of the story. Look at the demons and their encounter with Jesus.

**Demons always recognize Jesus' authority.** They weren't trying to battle with Jesus. Hollywood make the forces of good and evil just about equal don't they, or evil often triumphs in

the movies nowadays. But notice the demons “begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.” They begged him to send them into the pigs. Don’t let anyone deceive you into believing the devil is any match for Jesus. He is the master over every spirit and principality and ruler and power. Paul said “Jesus is before all things and in him all things hold together.” Colossians 1:17. James 2:19 says the demons believe and tremble. It’s only humans that fail to recognize the authority of Jesus and who he really is. Jesus is Master and Lord over every spirit and the devil and the demons of hell all know it!

**Demons look for opportunity.** The bible says, **“Give no opportunity to the devil.” Ephesians 4:27** (NIV says “do not give the devil a foothold.” Don’t give place to the devil.). The devil is looking for an opportunity to gain control, to gain influence, in a person’s life, in a community, a nation, an institution. Once a door is opened, the devil will capitalize on the opportunity and look to expand his operation and his control. This is what happened in this man and apparently in this geographic region of the Gerasenes. The demons had established control. Notice in this man, the demon goes from singular to plural. “My name is Legion for we are many.” A Roman legion was 6,000 men plus 120 horsemen. This demon indicates there are many of them terrorizing this man’s life and body. While it sounds ominous, remember again the demons begged Jesus not to send them out of the area. A legion of demons is still no match for Jesus. He is the master over all, including evil spirits and the devil himself.

The demons didn’t want to be sent out of the area. The bible mentions demons wandering in dry places. Apparently demons don’t want to be without a host and notice this: they were claiming this territory as their own. This was a pagan, Gentile area where people were engaged in all kinds of sinful practices. The people opened the door to the enemy’s control. Now these demonic forces had influence and control and they didn’t want to leave, but Jesus had come and their influence was being broken. He was establishing his rulership and reign in the heart of this one man and just one believer can wreck the demonic reign of a legion of demons!

**Demons can’t help but sow chaos, destruction and death.** The demons begged Jesus to allow them to go into a herd of pigs feeding on a nearby hillside (v11-12). They wanted to stay in the area they said -- they wanted to be inside the pigs, but as soon as they entered the pigs, they stampeded them into the sea where they all drowned. The very thing they wanted to avoid happened. Why? Because they just can’t help themselves. They can’t help but destroy and kill, even if it means their own destruction.

You can't trust the devil. He is a liar and has come to kill, steal and to destroy. He can't help himself. He will deceive you and destroy you. You can't outsmart him or bargain with him or trick him. Stay away from him and stay close to Jesus. Notice, while the devil can't help destroying,

**Jesus can't help but bring life!** Satan came to kill and destroy but Jesus came to give us abundant life! Jesus set this man free, the demons are gone and when the townspeople came to see what had happened - mostly to see about their pigs - they found this man sitting at the feet of Jesus, clean, dressed, restored and in his right mind. Just like the storm on the Galilee Jesus calmed the storm in this man's heart and mind, spirit and body.

The townspeople were frightened and begged Jesus to leave. They didn't know what to do with such power. They cared more about their pigs and their profit than they did about Jesus or this man. What a sad thing. These people could have had the same miracles that Capernaum had been having. They could have brought their sick and possessed and Jesus would have healed them, but they were afraid of the cost. Would it mean giving up their herds? Giving up their way of life? Sacrificing something? They chose to ask Jesus to leave.

Look at verse 18. As Jesus is getting in the boat to leave the man, now delivered, begged Jesus to take him with him. I can imagine him saying, "I can't go home. I've burned every bridge I ever crossed. No one loves me anymore. I've caused everyone that ever knew me or loved me too much sorrow, too much embarrassment, grief and shame. Please let me go with you." And Jesus says, "Go home. Show them and tell them what the Lord has done. They'll understand when they see you. Go home."

And this man did more than just go home. He told his family and he told everyone in the Decapolis, the ten Roman cities, what Jesus had done for him. He told everyone that Jesus, the rabbi of Capernaum, had power over the devil, even over legions of devils.

Jesus is the master of the storm. He has power over natural forces like the wind and the waves, but that's not all. He has power over the supernatural forces of the enemy. He is master over the storm the devil has tried to release into your mind and your life and there is no devil, no demon, no power of hell that can stand against Jesus. The authority of hell is broken and the works of the devil have been defeated. Jesus has come to set you free. Run to him like Legion did. Run to him and trust him to deliver you and make you whole!