

Legion – An Exposé

Last Sunday I referenced the words of Jesus, **“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** We see a clear illustration of this in Mark 5 in the story of a demon possessed man we call Legion. When we talk about demonic possession in the bible, we are talking about demonic forces that usually have some kind of physical control over a person. I know some would say, “it’s 2021, do you really expect me to believe in the devil or in literal demons? My response is to look at the world we live in. It ought to convince you there is real evil and malevolent forces at work in this world. The bible teaches there is a real devil and real demons, evil spirits that torment and bring terror and chaos into the world. Can Christians be demon possessed? No. You can’t be possessed by the Holy Spirit and possessed by a demon at the same time. Can Christians be oppressed or tormented by the devil? Yes. Paul mentions a messenger of Satan was sent to torment him, but remember it was then the Lord reminded Paul that His grace was sufficient for him and that in his weakness, God’s strength would be manifested. The devil is real, he has come to steal, kill and destroy, but Jesus has come to give us life. We don’t have to fear the devil for we are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ and the victory he provides us!

How did this man in Mark 5 become possessed by demons? We don’t know. Somehow at sometime he must have opened his heart and life to demonic powers and demonic influence. I don’t think it happens by accident. You can’t accidentally become possessed by the devil. The biblical view of demonic spirits is a balanced view. We aren’t seeing demons behind every bush or in every human flaw or characteristic. What some people blame as demonic is simply human vices, surrendering to the cravings and desires of sinful flesh. But...what we know for sure is this man in Mark 5 was demon possessed, physically controlled by demonic forces that left him bound and broken, enslaved to the devil, harmful to himself and to others. Let’s read this account and then I want to point out some things that are exposed by this encounter with Jesus! Read Mark 5:1-20 (We are going to call the man Legion, to distinguish from the demons.)

First, can we find ourselves anywhere in Legion’s story? I’m not suggesting anyone here or online is demon possessed, but can we find ourselves in the desperation of this man and his condition? Consider this.

He was more dead than alive, 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.

To the Jews he would be considered unclean because he was living among the dead, in a cemetery. Also he was living among swine which were unclean animals. He was treated like an animal. The townspeople no doubt had done it for their own safety, but they had chained him hand and foot and had often tried to subdue him. The passage literally reads “no one was able to tame him.” He was living and acting like a wild animal. Perhaps they had not only chained him, but had whipped and beaten him, all in an effort to break him, to beat the devil out of him.

He had been physically bound, chained, restrained, but more significantly, he was spiritually bound by the devil, a slave to demonic spirits, voices, thoughts and actions. He was a threat to himself and to others, isolated, an outcast from family, society, alone, 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 he and his family experienced.

He was being pulled apart by an inward spiritual battle. While we can't identify with demon's 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 perhaps you can identify with some of what this man we know as Legion was experiencing. You feel more dead than alive, or you wish you were dead. You feel unclean because of the way you are living, how you are living your life. You feel mistreated, misunderstood, abused by others, bound, trapped, isolated, cut off, outcast, unwanted, estranged from family members and friends, 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 any hope for Legion. The whole town gave up on him. His family and friends had to finally give up on him and write him off, but then Jesus shows up and look what happens. Don't give up. There is hope after all.

Jesus exposed the lies of the enemy. The first thing that happens when Jesus encounters Legion: **“When he saw Jesus from a distance he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice. ‘What do you want with me Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!’” Mark 5:6-7**

The demons were convinced, and perhaps Legion himself was convinced, that Jesus wanted to torture him, to inflict pain, to mistreat him like everyone else. It's the lie the devil has

been telling from the beginning in the Garden. “God is trying to cheat you. He’ll harm you. He will steal from you.” It was all a lie. The devil came to steal, kill and destroy, Jesus came to give life. Jesus came to seek and save. Demons torment and enslave, Jesus comforts and liberates. Demons deceive, Satan is the father of lies, but Jesus is the truth! Demons blind, Jesus gives sight to the blind. The demons and Legion were about to learn the truth as the lies of the enemy are exposed by this encounter with Jesus.

If the devil has deceived you and convinced you Jesus is out to harm you, or torment you, let me set the record straight. Jesus has come to give you life. He has come to set you free. He has come to show you the way. Don’t be deceived. Jesus brings hope. Surrender your life to Jesus and discover what it means to be a soul set free! What a difference Jesus makes. Look at the contrast between verses 3-5 and verse 15. From demon possession to deliverance!

Jesus exposed the true nature of the enemy. It’s always been an interesting part of the story to me that the demons begged Jesus not to send them out of the area. They asked to enter the pigs, wanting to stay in the area, needing a host to inhabit, 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 couldn’t help themselves. The demons couldn’t help but destroy and kill, even if it meant their own destruction or losing the bodies they wanted to inhabit, because that is their nature. Why did Jesus allow them to go into the pigs? I think it was to expose the true nature of the enemy. If there was any doubt by the people about whether the man was really delivered or whether he was still dangerous, Jesus showed them. “Look, the demons are gone from the man and gone into the pigs and look what happened. It wasn’t the man that was destructive or dangerous, it was the demons. By their very nature they are destructive.” I think by sending the demons into the pigs and the people seeing the pigs go crazy and drown, they saw the devil can’t be trusted. It’s a lesson for us as well. It’s the nature of demons to destroy, to kill, to their own detriment. They can’t help it. You can’t bargain with the devil or demons because they can’t be trusted. They will always kill, deceive and destroy. You can’t negotiate with the devil. He will always destroy. You aren’t getting away with anything!

Jesus exposed the values of the townspeople. Those caring for the pigs ran to report what happened. The people from town didn’t come running because they heard the demoniac had been delivered; they weren’t coming to see the miracle of this wild man who had been set free; they came because the pigs had drowned, their livelihood and income had been affected.

Dealing with Legion had been no small thing for the people, I'm sure, but it appears rather than trying to help him, the townspeople had only tried to restrain him. No one tried to save him, and after Jesus set him free and they found him clothed instead of naked, not cutting himself or running among the tombs but sitting with Jesus, in his right mind, restored, healed, whole, the response of the people was not rejoicing but fear. They heard the whole story about Legion and the demons and the pigs and then they asked Jesus to leave their region. They were afraid of the Man who had power to cast out demons and deliver people. It seems they would rather have their pigs than to have the demoniac delivered. They chose money and things over Legion; a healthy economy over Jesus and miracles. They preferred pigs over people, pigs over Jesus. If Jesus physically, bodily walked into our home or into our church this morning and started teaching and working miracles, I wonder what might be exposed in us, in our preferences, our priorities and values? I wonder if we might be more like the townspeople than we care to admit? What does this story expose in you today?

Jesus exposed His nature. Stop and think about Jesus' love for one man. Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee for one man, to liberate and set him free. This was a Gentile region and Legion may have been a Gentile, but Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, to set the captive free and that included Legion and us. He came to the outcast, the broken and isolated, the unclean, those who were more dead than alive, the mistreated and misunderstood, the bound, those pulled apart by inward battles, the grieving and desperate, the unloved and the unlovely. While the devil came to steal, kill and destroy because that is his nature, Jesus came to liberate, to rescue, to forgive, to save, restore, to heal, because that is his nature. Compassionate, gracious, full of lovingkindness, abounding in love and mercy to a thousand generations. That's his nature. That's why he didn't leave when Legion screamed at the top of his lungs "What do you want with me?" Instead, he set him free.

Jesus often said "Come and follow me" but to this man who begged to be allowed to go with him, Jesus said, **"Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.' So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed."** Mark 5:19-20

Go home and tell. That can be the toughest assignment, the hardest call of discipleship. Go home and influence your family and friends, those who know you best. Go tell them and

show them how the Lord has had mercy on you. Legion had burned every bridge, spoiled every relationship, and yet Jesus says, 'Go home and tell them what the Lord has done.' God's mercy can not only set captives free, it can heal and repair relationships and give the broken a brand new start.

Legion – an expose`. Through Legion and his circumstances, Satan's lies and his true nature are exposed, the spiritual values of the townspeople are exposed, the loving, merciful nature of Jesus is exposed and now, Legion gets to go tell his story to the people living in the ten cities of the Decapolis. Talk about an expose`. Have I got a story for you!

If you are bound, feeling hopeless, I'm guessing your situation isn't as bad, or at least it isn't any worse than Legion's. But I've got good news – there is hope for you! Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. He still delivers and sets captives free. He has mercy and healing and wholeness for you. He hasn't come to torment or torture you. That's what the devil does. He has come to liberate you. Are you ready to come to him and ask for and receive his help?

Someone here this morning, someone listening today, the devil has lied to you, deceived you, tricked you and broken you. You believed his lies and now it feels like he has taken you so far from where you know you are supposed to be, you don't see how you can possibly get back home. That must have been the way Legion felt that day when he encountered Jesus. It may be how he felt when Jesus told him afterward to "go home." You can get there from here, but first you need to come to Jesus and have an encounter with him. He will change you, he will liberate you, deliver you, set you free and give you a new life.