



Recognizing Jesus

October 11, 2009

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:

MARK 5:1–20

PRINTED TEXT:

MARK 5:1–13, 18–20

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.”

—Mark 5:19

Opening Song

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting

Opening Prayer

MARK 5:1-13, 18-20 (NIV)

5¹They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. ²When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. ⁴For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. ⁶When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. ⁷He 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!" ⁸For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" ⁹Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." ¹⁰And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. ¹¹A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. ¹²The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." ¹³He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

¹⁸As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. ¹⁹Jesus did not let him, but 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." ²⁰So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

INTRODUCTION**A. BOUND BY CHAINS**

Kathy has been in a clinical depression since her mother died in a car accident over a year ago. Kathy has not been able to forgive herself for her mother's death, even though she was not to blame. "If only I had been there," she mutters. "Or if I had prayed for her safety more often, maybe things would have been different," she says as tears cascade down her face.

Kathy has tried antidepressants, but she cannot escape the pain. Her friends have abandoned her, for she has weighed them down with her worry and tears. We would not say this is a modern case of demon possession, but Kathy definitely has "a monkey on her back." Encouraging Kathy to seek medical help is important, but would we also encourage her to seek Jesus?

Then there is Tom. Tom grew up in the slums and has never been able to break the curse of poverty in his life. He never had enough to eat as a child and struggles even now to put food on the table for his own children. Tom works countless hours from dawn to dusk just to try to make ends meet. He doesn't get to spend much time with his family. Tom is not chained due to demon possession. Yet he is figuratively chained to his job and to his circumstances, which he believes will never change. In his struggle to deal with his situation, has Tom tried turning to Jesus, the one who helps people realize their blessings despite circumstances?

B. LESSON BACKGROUND

Today's text takes us well into Jesus' three-year ministry. Just before today's text, Jesus had calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee. While this may appear to be in no way connected to the account of the healing of the man possessed by a demon in today's lesson, it may surprise us to see a parallel. In Mark 4:35–41, a storm is raging, with crashing waves and strong winds; in Mark 5, we encounter a storm in the inward person of the man dominated by a demon. Like the surging storm on the sea that captured the attention of the disciples, the demoniac's torment was obvious and unmistakable to all. How Jesus handled that torment is the subject of today's lesson. (The parallel accounts are Matthew 8:28–34 and Luke 8:26–39.)

I. NEED FOR DELIVERANCE (MARK 5:1–5)**A. LOCATION (V. 1)****1. They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.**

The incident we are about to read takes place after Jesus and the disciples have crossed from the western to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The western side is populated mainly by Jews. Beyond the eastern side, *across the lake*, is the Decapolis (v. 20, below), which means "ten cities"; this is primarily a Gentile area.

The location given as *the region of the Gerasenes* is too broad for us to pinpoint exactly where the boat reaches shore. Some

ancient manuscripts give the name as "Gergesenes," and Matthew 8:28 calls it "the region of the Gadarenes." Gerasa (or Gergesa) is located some 35 miles from the southeast shore of the Sea of Galilee, but this city apparently owns territory that joins that body of water. In this area can be seen a fairly steep slope within 40 yards of the water's edge (that feature is important, as we shall see).

B. DESCRIPTION (VV. 2–5)

2–5. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him.

Now our main character, the *man with an evil spirit*, enters the scene. The fact that he

dwells among *the tombs* surely illustrates the depths of his despair. This is not the first time Jesus has confronted a person dominated by a demon (see Mark 1:23).

Look at what this demoniac does: he turns to Jesus in the midst of his despair. This indicates at least two things. First, the demon is not able to prevent the man from going to Jesus. Second, the man has hope that Jesus can do something for him.

Before we move along, we can note that the man does not suffer from mental illness. Rather, this is supernatural demonization. The people of the first century know the difference. Matthew 4:24 discusses demon possession alongside “normal” illnesses, thus distinguishing between the two.

3, 4. *This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.*

We can examine these two verses from the perspectives of both the demoniac and of those who have tried to deal with him. Those who have come in contact with the demoniac have tried to handle the situation by binding him with *chains*. Was that a cruel thing to do? Perhaps not. If the man is a danger to himself and others, then those who have tried to intervene may have taken the only action they knew for everyone’s safety. Since this is a Gentile area, prayer to the true God probably has not occurred.

From the demoniac’s perspective, the shackles only have added to the alienation and ostracism that he has felt, despite any good intentions. In any event, the efforts so far have been in vain, since the man has been able to break the restraints. It is probably the supernatural power of Satan that has enabled the man to do this.

The chains of disapproval and exclusion can be mental as well as physical. I recently

underwent a tragedy that resulted in financial and personal hardship. I found myself rejected by others as a result. Some in my own family chastised me for “not having enough faith” or “not wanting to be healed.” That was their rationale for why I was in such excruciating pain. According to them, I needed to repent (which reminds me of how Job’s friends responded). Others refused to pray for me. Still others would not offer me financial assistance. Some wouldn’t even speak to me, turning their backs in my hour of need.

I was dumbfounded at how I had been rejected. I did not suffer from demonization. But like the man in today’s text, in this furnace of affliction I sought the Lord concerning these circumstances. God in his mercy accepted me and put the pieces of my life back together. Along the way I realized that not all Christians reflect the character of the Creator. Jesus, however, always reflects the character of the Creator because he *is* the Creator.

5. *Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.*

The parallel of Matthew 8:28 tells us that the man’s behavior is such that “no one could pass that way.” Thus if the man has not been completely forgotten, he is at least completely avoided. Even if his crying carries far enough to be heard, anyone who lives within earshot likely has “tuned him out” by now. Being unable to associate with others in society, he thus is left *among the tombs and in the hills* in the company of another man in the same condition (again, Matthew 8:28). Some students associate the man’s custom of cutting *himself with stones* with demonic worship (compare 1 Kings 18:28).

II. ACTION OF DELIVERANCE (MARK 5:6–13)

A. OBEISANCE (V. 6)

6. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him.

The fact that the man is said to fall *on his knees* should not be taken to mean necessarily that he honors *Jesus* as the Son of God. The context essentially refers to the act of bowing. This idea is used of worshiping God or idols, of bowing in obeisance before a king, or even welcoming an honored guest.

B. SHOUT (v. 7)

7. 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!”

In reflecting on this verse, we must clarify that this is the unclean spirit who is doing the speaking here (through the man) as verses 8, 9 will show. The man himself sees in Jesus some hope. But the evil spirit has a mind of his own, crying out *at the top of his voice*. The demon knows that his judgment is coming, thus he asks not to be tormented.

We see some presumptuous posturing on the part of the demon. Claiming to know the identity of someone and then shouting the name is an attempt to gain control over an adversary. Interestingly, the question the disciples have just asked about Jesus’ identity in Mark 4:41 is correctly answered here by the demon! Although it is not true worship, the demon’s confession that Jesus is *Son of the Most High God* is the highest tribute.

The punishment of which this demon speaks is that of the eternal torment that stands waiting at the final judgment (compare Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 20:10). The spirit that torments the man now fears torment himself.

C. AUTHORITY (vv. 8–13)

8–13. For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit!”

The phrase *for Jesus had said* indicates that Jesus’ command *Come out of this man* occurs before the demon’s cry in verse 7.

Thus the cry of recognition and terror in verse 7 is a result of the command here in verse 8. Clearly, Jesus realizes the urgency of the situation. He doesn’t allow the man to be tormented further; relief quickly comes.

9. Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.”

A *legion* is a military unit composed of about 6,000 men! It is a term familiar to both Jew and Gentile. We should not see the asking of the demon’s *name* to be a critical, necessary step in the man’s deliverance. Jesus easily can cast out demons without requesting their names. Perhaps Jesus asks *What is your name?* in order for the truth to be recorded—that the man has suffered with many demonic spirits, not just one.

By revealing the name of the evil power, people will know how great a deliverance this truly is. This possibility makes sense in the light of the fact that Jesus will (in v. 19, below) ask the healed man to testify to others.

10. And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

By begging not to be sent *out of the area*, the demons show their fear of being sent “into the Abyss,” as Luke 8:31 clarifies. The word *Abyss* is also found in Revelation 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3. When we read those passages, the reason for the demons’ fear is crystal clear! By begging not to be sent away, the demons recognize that Jesus is the one who is capable of sending them anywhere he chooses.

11. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside.

This verse gives us a good reason to believe that we are in Gentile territory, since *pigs* are unclean animals according to Jewish dietary laws. For Jews, pigs are just as unclean as tombs and evil spirits (Leviticus 11:7, 8; Deuteronomy 14:8; Isaiah 65:4; 66:17).

12. *The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.”*

The *demons* do not want to be cast into “the Abyss,” so to be sent into *the pigs* is their proposed alternative. The demons cannot fool Jesus, of course, but as a bit of speculation perhaps the demons hope to create some antagonism against Jesus should he grant this request—something we see happen in verse 17. In any case, they have no alternative but to do what the Son of God orders.

13. *He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.*

The fact that the exorcism causes 2,000 pigs to stampede over a cliff is a clue about the amount of torment the man has been suffering. The stampede in and of itself is (or should be) a testimony to those residing in the surrounding area.

Notice also the direct result of the demonic possession of the pigs: death. One may presume that this had been the demons’ goal for the man himself. The demons had wanted to make the man miserable, but undoubtedly they also sought to destroy his life. He had cut himself in the process of being tormented by devilish powers. But Jesus came “to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

III. RESULT OF DELIVERANCE (MARK 5:18–20)

A. REQUEST DENIED (VV. 18, 19)

18. *As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.*

Mark 5:14–17 (not in today’s text) shows us the fear that is displayed by the people of the surrounding area. They ask Jesus to leave. They apparently value pigs over people.

We see the opposite reaction in the one who has *been demon-possessed*. *The man*

wants to stay with *Jesus*. Perhaps the man wants to ensure that his deliverance will be permanent. But the man’s deliverance does not depend on being physically present with Jesus. Whomever the Son sets free is free indeed (John 8:36). Jesus has other plans for the man. See the next verse.

19. *Jesus did not let him, but 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.”*

This verse raises a question: Why did Jesus forbid the man who was cured of leprosy in last week’s lesson to testify, but now instructs the man cured of demon possession to spread the news of his deliverance to others? Perhaps the answer lies in the different locations of the two accounts. The healing of the leper took place in Jewish territory, while the deliverance of the demoniac takes place in Gentile territory. Perhaps Jesus is not concerned that Gentiles will talk freely that he may be the Messiah, since Gentiles do not share the concept.

The fact that people have asked Jesus to leave (Mark 5:17) suggests that in this area there isn’t much danger of Jesus being mobbed by those who need healing (contrast Mark 1:45). After Jesus returns to Jewish territory, he will again give instructions not to talk about healing experiences (contrast Mark 5:19 with 5:43).

B. COMMAND FOLLOWED (V. 20)

20. *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.*

The man is completely obedient to Jesus’ command. There is no record that he questions what he is to do. This should cause us to do some self-examination: Do we ask skeptical questions when the Bible tells us to follow a certain path? Do we trust and obey, or do we try to “explain away” the Lord’s directives for our lives?

When we obey the Lord, we can trust that he will bring good out of our situation. The

results of the man's obedience speak volumes. The *people* of the *Decapolis* who hear the testimony are *amazed*. This incident may "soften up" the area for Jesus' return in Mark 7:31.

Interestingly, Jesus will command that people keep quiet as he conducts healings on

that return trip (Mark 7:36). Today we are not to keep quiet about Christ. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20) requires quite the opposite. But many will see the gospel first in the examples of what Jesus has done for us in our personal lives. Make sure they see Christ in your daily actions.

CONCLUSION

The story of the demoniac demonstrates the extent of God's mercy. It is freely available. It breaks traditional boundaries. It reaches to individuals on the fringes of society. As recipients of God's grace and mercy, our aim is to reach those whom the world has forgotten, those who have encountered the trials of this life and have been marginalized. Embracing a call to compassion is to love the unlovable, to reach the unreachable, to touch the untouchable.

Consider the problems of the poor. Proverbs 19:7 tells us, "A poor man is shunned by all his relatives—how much more do his friends avoid him! Though he pursues them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found." How many people shut their eyes to the poor? But the poor are the very people who need a touch of God's grace the most. And keep in mind that "the poor" does not refer only to those who have little money. There are also those who are "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3).

The Lord has done great things for you. Don't keep quiet! While those around us may not be in physical chains, they can be chained in other ways (such as by life circumstances). When we see others in chains, we can be the love of God to them in their hour of greatest need.

HOW MUCH THEY MUST HURT

What the psychiatric profession calls "delicate self-cutting syndrome" affects a significant number of young people. The numbers are difficult to verify, but perhaps 3 million people between the ages of 12 and 30 are affected. Females are said to account for 70 percent of "cutters." Hear what one (recovering) self-cutter says:

I used it as my outlet for anger... I caused myself pain, in believing that I deserved it... I even enjoyed having the marks on myself and that I had my own little secret, but I have come to hate the scars and to realize that things don't stay a secret forever. My friends are concerned about me and so is my mother, so not only am I hurting myself but I was hurting them ... so in the end, it isn't worth it.

We wonder how much the "cutters" must hurt and why. Anxiety about relationships, poor self-image, divorce of parents, and dysfunctional family situations are all cited as causative factors of this cry for help.

One of the more poignant reasons given by a cutter is "to feel pain on the outside instead of the inside." This may get at the heart of why the demoniac acted as he did. Perhaps the hurt from his self-inflicted wounds served to distract him from the pain of the slashes to his heart inflicted by a fearful society and Satan that isolated him and bound him in chains. Who are the people whom we isolate and bind in chains—figuratively, if not literally? Why do we do it?

SAVED FROM A LIFE UNIMAGINABLE

Lakshmi Tatma was born in India in 2005. Many people in her small village thought she was the reincarnation of the Hindu deity after whom she was named. The “goddess” Lakshmi is depicted as having four arms; baby Lakshmi, by comparison, had four arms and four legs.

Her condition, which occurs in less than two percent of conjoined twins, happens when one twin’s embryo stops developing and becomes a “parasitic twin” on the other. Lakshmi was joined at the pelvis with her parasitic twin. Her extra limbs grew from that juncture. She had one head and one set of vital organs but an additional set of arms and legs from her twin.

When Lakshmi was 2 years old, a team of about 30 medical personnel spent more than 24 hours removing the extra limbs, transplanting a kidney from the twin and reconstructing Lakshmi’s pelvic area. Further treatment and surgeries will be needed. We cannot really imagine what Lakshmi’s life would have been like had the surgery not been undertaken.

Neither can we imagine what life must have been like for the demon-possessed man. Like Lakshmi, he had no hope for a normal life on his own; neither Lakshmi nor the demoniac could do a self-repair. She needed the removal of abnormal physical growth; he needed the removal of an abnormal spiritual factor in his life. Her restoration was due to the advance of medical science; his was a miracle only God could have provided.

Humanity has made much progress in medical science in the 20 centuries since Jesus walked the earth. Yet humanity has nothing to offer to cure spiritual ailments. God is still the only one who has that power.

LET’S TALK IT OVER

1. Of all the places where the demoniac could have lived, why do you think he picked a graveyard? What are some figurative graveyards where people live today?

2. For the demoniac, contact with the forces of Satan resulted in physical self-cutting. In what nonphysical ways does sin cause people to harm themselves today? How can that nonphysical harm result in physical self-harm?

3. How is coming to Jesus often accompanied by inner conflict today?

4. People of the first century were able to recognize the difference between demonization (demon possession) and mental illness. How do we recognize this difference today?

5. What do Jesus' instructions to the man tell us about witnessing today, if anything?**LET'S TALK IT OVER****1. Of all the places where the demoniac could have lived, why do you think he picked a graveyard? What are some figurative graveyards where people live today?**

Being someone whom “regular” people avoided, the demoniac undoubtedly felt unwelcome in other places. Graveyards of the time sometimes consisted of a complex of small caves that served as tombs. If these provided the man with a bit of shelter, his situation may have been like homeless people today who live under bridges. There could be a larger issue: perhaps in his confused state of mind he became obsessed with death.

Many folks around us live among figurative tombs. These could be the tombs of things we have done that we wish we hadn't; thus the failures of the past dictate how life is lived today. At the other end of the scale are those who had some great achievement in the past, and they are constantly “resting on their laurels” or are trying to recreate that past when it's time to move on.

2. For the demoniac, contact with the forces of Satan resulted in physical self-cutting. In what nonphysical ways does sin cause people to harm themselves today? How can that nonphysical harm result in physical self-harm?

Sin has its consequences. Illicit sexual behavior can do much damage spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. Such a compulsion can result in the physical harm of sexually transmitted diseases. People also destroy their lives with substance abuse. The nonphysical consequences that come first can include a state of mind that is focused on getting the next “hit” or “fix.” People will engage in dehumanizing activities to meet that desire. Sin is first and foremost an offense against God. But another major characteristic is that it is harmful to us in both physical and nonphysical ways.

3. How is coming to Jesus often accompanied by inner conflict today?

The demoniac made a successful effort to approach Jesus, but we can be sure the evil spirit didn't want him to! Whatever pressure the evil spirit exerted on the man to prevent him from approaching Jesus didn't work. It is entirely safe to assume that Satan still doesn't want people to approach Jesus. Satan will throw up any roadblock he can to prevent this from happening. It is as if Satan says, “Do you want your inner conflict about this to go down? Then don't worry about it right now. You have some other things to do first.”

But no matter how much inner turmoil we have about going to Jesus, staying away from Him will result only in more such turmoil. This is because we have needs that only He can meet. If we try to fill that “God-sized hole” in our hearts with anything other than Him, the result will be no end of inner conflict.

4. People of the first century were able to recognize the difference between demonization (demon possession) and mental illness. How do we recognize this difference today?

Some students believe that Luke 10:18 and Revelation 20:2 imply that Satan's activities are more limited today than they were in the first century. Thus those interpreters believe that

demonization of people happens much less frequently now, if at all. On the other hand, some missionaries who serve in areas of the world that are very “dark” spiritually have reported cases that they believe can be explained only by demonization.

The primary guardrail we should put into place is to not believe so much in one concept that we eliminate the possibility of the other. Perhaps a good approach is to give priority to the possibility of mental illness and evaluate for that first. A Christian psychiatrist or psychologist has the training to evaluate and treat mental illness, while holding a worldview that acknowledges the possibility of demonization.

5. What do Jesus’ instructions to the man tell us about witnessing today, if anything?

When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, He informed her that He was the Messiah (John 4:25, 26); her witness to her town included that idea (John 4:29). Jesus did not say to the demoniac, “Go tell everyone that you have met the Messiah.” Rather, He said, “Tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee.” Remember that Jesus was in Gentile territory and the idea of *Messiah* probably didn’t mean anything there. We should tailor our witness to the context.

PRAYER

Father, may Jesus’ instructions to the man released from demons be Jesus’ instructions to us as well. May people know without a doubt what great things Jesus has done for us because we have modeled and spoken of those things. In Jesus’ name. Amen.