

Loving Your Family With the Gospel – Mark 5:1-20

Series: Look and Live #19

There are two main things that Mark reveals to us Mark 5:1-20: (1) the nature of spiritual oppression, and (2) the nature of the call of Jesus.

1. The nature of spiritual oppression

I'm sure the disciples were ecstatic to finally set foot on land after that tumultuous storm on the lake. No sooner than they got off the boat though, they find themselves in another situation. A crazy man comes running right up to Jesus. Mark tells us that this man had given up all normal living and was actually sleeping and living in some sort of grave yard. We also learn that this man was incredibly *strong* and *wicked*. During his free time he walked around hurting and cutting himself.

Jesus *immediately* perceived that this crazy guy was demon-possessed. When he asked the demon his name, Jesus learns that this man was not just possessed, he was under the control of *multiple* demons. (*Legion* is a Roman term that designated a battalion of 6,000 soldiers of war.)

Upon Jesus' command to come out of the man, the demons asked Jesus for mercy. It's the only instance in the entire Bible (that I'm aware of) where Jesus seems to have mercy on demons. They don't want to be banished to a desolate place of torture, so they ask for permission to possess a nearby grazing herd of pigs. Jesus acquiesces. At that, the demons possess the pigs, and the result is that the whole herd of pigs runs down a hill and drowns in the ocean. Everybody was fairly terrified and upset about all of this. But most amazing of all, as Jesus casts out the demons from this lost man, he is instantaneously restored, set back to normal, and set on a course of discipleship with Jesus.

- a. This story tells us so much about what spiritual oppression is, what it's like, and how it happens. We're going to note four things we learn from this text about the *nature of such oppression*
- b. Number one, demons, Satan, and evil spirits are real and personal.
 - i. According to a recent Barna survey, 35% of surveyed American Christians said they believed that Satan was real. Many said that "Satan" was a name for an impersonal generic force of evil and not a person. That's silly and unbiblical.
 - ii. Satan and his spirit-army are real. They are personal and have names and identities.
 - iii. They have thoughts, intentions, and purposes.
 - iv. This is the realm of our battle. We aren't fighting bad ideas in people's brains. We're fighting evil, wicked spirits influencing, cohabitating, and inhabiting the unbelieving world, set on destroying Christ and minimizing his Kingdom.
- c. Number two, we learn that these *evil spirits* can possess or have dominion over a person.
 - i. They can essentially take over a man or woman.
 - ii. This man was actually under the controlling influence of demons.
 - iii. They led him to hurt and damage himself. They gave him *super-human* strength. They even controlled his words and voice. He was under their dominion in every.
 - iv. We get proof of their control when Jesus casts them away and the man is immediately healthy and in his right mind. They were absolutely controlling him.
 - v. The Bible uses the word *possession* (i.e. a demon-possessed man). That seems to be a way of saying that a person is fully *controlled and influenced by* a present demon.
- d. Third, we can also see in this story what a demon might do to a person.

- i. The demonic influence and control over him leads him to do three things: isolate himself, associate with evil, and even self-destruct.
- ii. **Isolation:** God made us social creatures. We are social and we need accountability from one another. Satan and his minions try to destroy people by leading people *away* from good society and healthy relationships and into isolation and loneliness.
- iii. **Associate with evil:** Did you notice that everything in this story is “unclean”? Jesus goes to an unclean land to an unclean place to meet an unclean man with an unclean spirit which he then drives into unclean animals. Unclean is a term from the Old Testament that refers to anything God forbade his people from associating with. These demons led him to participate in things that God had forbidden.
- iv. **Self-destruct:** Demons are hell-bent on getting man to self-destruct. That might mean physical pain, drugs, alcohol, promiscuity in sex, debt, or even suicide.
- e. The single most important thing we learn here is actually this: demonic oppression is related to our fallen condition, and Christ has absolute authority and *can* have absolute victory.
 - i. I don’t think most people understand that in the Gospels, being controlled by demons is related to being lost, fallen, and a sinner before God.
 - ii. Paul says that *every* unbeliever outside the Kingdom of God is a follower of Satan. Everyone who does not yet belong to Christ still belongs to Satan and follows his general course and lead. (Eph. 2) The reason every person *does that* is because they individually are living lives of rebellion against God.
 - iii. So this demonic oppression here is simply an extreme outworking of that. It’s like taking a normal lost person and their general course of life which is following the ways of Satan and then just *exacerbating that or taking that to the worst extreme*.
 - iv. Therefore, the “fix” for demon oppression and influence is going to be similar to the “fix” for any old lost person who is rebelling against God and following the course of the prince of this world. The fix is not magical. You don’t need special water, wooden crosses, words or incantations. In fact, the Bible forbids those things as mystical sorcery.
 - v. No, our hope is not in *special objects or words*. Our hope is in Christ and his Gospel!
 - vi. A person possessed by a demon is a lost person who has been submitting to their fallen passions and desires to the point now of total submission and obedience to evil (in this case, an evil spirit). The evil *spirit* is now their lord. They are following *its* lead, *its* word, *its* desires. Basically, they have as their god a demon.
 - vii. Christ needs to replace the demon as Lord and God of that person’s life.
 - viii. Praise God, Jesus is able and willing to powerfully free a man, like this man, from following and serving evil and bring him to follow and serve Christ himself.
 - ix. And that’s exactly what he did for the man in this story. Christ essentially *replaced* the demons as the god of this man with himself.
 - x. The demons are expelled and the man is won as a disciple of Christ, all by the power of Christ’s Word. With that, the man is now a follower of Jesus. (See also Matthew 12.)
 - xi. Here’s the gist of all this: Satan and demons are *real* and *literal* and they’re here. And the Bible never once permits us to fight them with magical ideas and practices.

- xii. Let's be a church that acknowledges and remembers their existence. Let's always keep in mind that since control of demons is a matter of fallen spiritual rebellion, the answer and hope is really simple and it's something we have to offer: the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - xiii. That's how a demon-oppressed person is healed. That's how a demon-possession is broken.
 - xiv. Christ comes to that person *as we proclaim the Gospel to them*, he frees them from their bondage and obedience to evil and he draws them to himself and makes them an adopted follower of himself.
2. We also said that Mark was revealing to us in this story the nature of the call of Jesus.
- a. After the people are terrified by the 2000 dead pigs, they all unanimously ask Jesus to leave.
 - b. Understandably, this man who is now saved begs Jesus to let him go with him.
 - c. Jesus tells him, No, "go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." Go home to your people and tell them all!
 - d. There's so much significance in Jesus looking at this brand new disciple and saying, "No, you cannot come with me. You need to go back to your family and love me there, be my disciple there, in their midst. No, you can't give up on your old relationships. No, you can't just abandon your friends and family. Go back and change the nature of your relationships, go back and love them by telling them and showing them what I've done for you in the Gospel."
 - e. So what does that mean to us?
 - i. It means that it is very possible that God has drawn you to himself, not so that you would forsake everything in your current life and start all over. It's probably that the Gospel coming to you means Christ would have you stay right where you are, but now to have your life completely restructured and reoriented.
 - ii. Christ would have you stay and reorganize your life so that your friendships are now about pursuing Christ together and serving the community with the love of Christ.
 - iii. It means that he would have you see your current relationships, current location, and current job as God's plan for spreading his Kingdom *to those places and relationships through you!*
3. Closing challenge:
- a. If you are part of an unbelieving family (or workplace or friendship) consider that God is extending his Kingdom *to those places*, and he has started with you. He is purposing to do it through you.
 - b. And therefore number two, feel some sense of responsibility for your family, friends, and coworkers who are not living in repentance and seeking God's Kingdom. Take some responsibility for them. God gave you that relationship and then he gave you the Gospel. He has providentially purposed to take the Gospel *to those people through you*. So *love* your family, love your best friend, love your cubicle mate with the Gospel of Christ!

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 April 26, 2009