

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

MARK 5:1 And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

3 Who had *his* dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

4 Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any *man* tame him.

5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

6 But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,

7 And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

8 For he said unto him, Come out of the man, *thou* unclean spirit.

9 And he asked him, What *is* thy name? And he answered, saying, My name *is* Legion: for we are many.

10 And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

11 Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

12 And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

13 And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

14 And they that fed the swine fled, and told *it* in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done.

15 And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

16 And they that saw *it* told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and *also* concerning the swine.

17 And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.

18 And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.

19 Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.

20 And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all *men* did marvel.

NOTES

Jesus Casts Out Legion

Lesson Text: Mark 5:1-20

Related Scriptures: Matthew 8:28-34;
Mark 3:22-27; Luke 4:16-21; 5:1-8; 8:26-39

TIME: between A.D. 26 and 30

PLACE: territory of Gadara

GOLDEN TEXT—"Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee" (Mark 5:19).

Lesson Exposition

Having calmed a storm, Jesus easily overcame a man possessed by demons, demonstrating that He rules over both the natural and the supernatural.

THE SETTING—Mark 5:1-5

Meeting the demoniac (Mark 5:1-2). There is no conflict between the Gospel accounts of this miracle happening in the land of the Gergesenes or the Gadarenes. The small town of Gergasa was in a region associated with Gadara, a larger city. As Jesus and the disciples landed, they saw a wild naked man running at them (cf. Mark 5:2, 15; Luke 8:27).

Description of the demoniac (Mark 5:3-5). This man was miserable and abused by unclean spirits. He cut himself and lived in a graveyard. He was isolated from everyone except the demons. The term "unclean spirit" is synonymous with "devil" (cf. vs. 16). We should not waste time trying to draw nuanced distinctions, since Mark uses both interchangeably (vss. 2, 12).

The man could not be restrained. Demons can confer supernatural strength. He seemed beyond help.

THE CONFLICT—Mark 5:6-13

Demons (Mark 5:6-9). The devils recognized Jesus. The man begged Jesus not to torment him. Usually, Jesus cast demons out without talking to them at length. This story is not a template for modern-day exorcisms, as some seem to assume when they ask for demons' names.

We do not know how many demons this man had. A Roman legion was over six thousand if both infantry and cavalry were counted. However, they only declared they were many, not that they were the exact count of a Roman legion. Their numbers highlight the power of Jesus.

The demons knew Jesus' identity, that He had power over them, and that He would one day judge them. They begged not to be tormented "before the time" and not to be cast into the abyss (cf. Matt. 8:29; Luke 8:31).

Pigs (Mark 5:10-13). The demons begged to be sent into the pigs. Surprisingly, Jesus granted their request. Why? Since the Gospels do not clearly provide the answer, we will survey some explanations. It is possible the demons were trying to stir up trouble

for Jesus. Or perhaps the demons simply liked death and destruction.

Since demons do not seem to like being without a host (cf. Matt. 12:43-45), some think they were not intending to destroy the herd. Jesus allowed them into the pigs, and either the pigs preferred to drown rather than be possessed or Jesus drowned the pigs to judge the demons. While Jesus did curse the fig tree (cf. Mark 11:12-25), there are no other recorded destructive miracles of Jesus. It seems unlikely Jesus drove the pigs into the sea.

Still, why would He allow the pigs to die? Several ideas have been proposed. First, the death of the herd revealed what Jesus was facing. It highlighted how many demons there were and how great Jesus' power was. Second, those tending the pigs went back to town and reported what happened (5:14-16). That caused Jesus to be more widely known. Third, pigs were unclean for Jews. Some wonder whether there were Jews who helped raise these pigs or ate them. Jesus could have been preventing some Jews from sinning. In any case, one man was worth more than thousands of pigs. This miracle brought attention to Jesus' power and compassion.

THE FALLOUT—Mark 5:14-20

The response of the people (Mark 5:14-17). Jesus had greater power than the demons who had previously made this man impossible to overcome. Perhaps the people asked Jesus to leave because of their financial loss from the pigs. Luke gave a different motivation: they were seized with great fear (cf. Luke 8:36-37). They asked Him to leave, and He obliged. If we ask Jesus to leave us alone, He often will.

The response of the man and of Jesus (Mark 5:18-20). Jesus granted the requests of the demons and of the people. Surprisingly, the only re-

quest He did not grant was that of the man when he asked to follow Jesus! Instead, He told him to proclaim what the Lord had done. In response, the man proclaimed what *Jesus* had done. What Jesus does and what the Lord does are inseparable. Mark began his Gospel by calling Jesus "the Son of God" (1:1), and he continued to pile up evidence to support that claim.

The man went through the Decapolis declaring what Jesus had done. His testimony caused everyone to marvel, and when Jesus later returned, a crowd was ready (cf. 7:31-37). This man was an effective witness. If there are people you consider hopeless, do not give up. God may have plans for them!

—Tom Greene

QUESTIONS

1. Do the Gospel writers contradict each other on where this story took place?
2. Is there a difference between unclean spirits and devils?
3. Why couldn't the man be restrained previously?
4. What was unusual about Jesus casting out these demons?
5. Do we know how many demons this man had?
6. What three things did the demons immediately know about Jesus when they met Him?
7. Why *might* the demons have driven the pigs into the sea?
8. Why *might* Jesus have allowed the demons to drive the pigs into the sea?
9. Why did the people ask Jesus to leave, according to Luke?
10. How effective of a witness was the demon-possessed man?

—Tom Greene

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Jesus can help those who are otherwise hopeless (Mark 5:1-5).
2. Remember that demons are real and affect the world (vss. 6-9).
3. People are more important than animals or financial considerations (vss. 10-13).
4. Sometimes when people see the power of God, they reject Him. If we share the gospel and someone does not listen, that does not necessarily mean we have done something wrong (vss. 14-17).
5. Jesus does not always call us to what we would like to do (vss. 18-19).
6. Jesus calls us to share what He has done with our friends and family (vss. 18-20).

—Tom Greene

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you think that unclean spirits were more active during the New Testament period than today? Why or why not?
2. Why did the demons beg Jesus not to torment them (Mark 5:7)? (Refer to Matthew 8 and Luke 8 if needed.)
3. How is this encounter different from other examples in the Bible of Jesus and others casting out demons?
4. Why do you think Jesus allowed the demons to go into the pigs, and why did the pigs drown (Mark 5:13)?
5. Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, performed this miracle, and then crossed back over the sea again. What does that tell us about Jesus, and what does it tell us about this miracle?
6. What do we learn about Jesus from this story? Why do you think Mark included it in his Gospel?

—Tom Greene

Golden Text Illuminated

“Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee” (Mark 5:19).

During His earthly ministry, Christ displayed supreme power over every realm and supplied a preview of what His future reign and kingdom will be like. He will bring the planet back to its pre-Fall, paradise conditions when He comes again to establish His kingdom.

Christ overcame Satan (cf. Matt. 4:1-11), and He could make the most powerful demons beg for His mercy. One example is our text. Jesus removed the demons with ease. However, when the man asked to accompany Christ, He refused and said, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee” (vs. 19). This scene has powerful implications.

First, Christ still has full dominion over the spiritual realm, even though He is not physically present on earth. We might be frightened of demons, but they tremble in fear at the Son of God.

Second, Christ’s compassion for the man reminds us that Christ is not just the supreme authority but a Savior of infinite compassion. He knows and cares about the afflictions we face.

Third, this scene gives a glimpse of what all the earth will be like in the kingdom of the Son. All demonic activity will be subdued, the nations redeemed, the curse of sin broken, and Christ will rule and reign over all. These realities give us courage to persevere, knowing that the best is yet to come.

—Jerod A. Gilcher