

MARK

In this lesson, we will be examining Chapter 5 of Mark, and I believe we will discover things in this lesson that we haven't noted before, even though the passages are very familiar to many of us. Just as we have seen in previous lessons, large crowds continue to follow Jesus and his disciples. As the chapter opens, we find Jesus once again on a boat. You will recall from our last lesson that, after teaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee—and with the crowds growing very large— Jesus got into a boat in the evening and sailed across the Sea of Galilee to the other shore. During the trip, they encountered a great storm. Demonstrating his power over the elements, Jesus calmed the storm and the sea.

In the current lesson, Jesus and his disciples are arriving on the other side of the sea, at Gerasene. Here, Jesus will demonstrate his authority over the demonic world. It's interesting to note that Chapter 5 is comprised of three teaching events, one with the demoniac at Gerasene, and the other two demonstrating both his power to heal as well as his power to raise people from the dead. I have included two pictures of the Sea of Galilee, one showing a calm sea and a boat traveling from one shore to the other just as Jesus and his disciples would have done on many occasions. The other picture is taken from the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, it shows us what the countryside looked like, especially along the shore, as Jesus landed in the beginning of Chapter 6.

In our study, I would like you to consider a question that perhaps you have never considered before. Specifically, we have already seen in just five chapters of Mark that Jesus was attracting crowds in the thousands. They were coming from all parts of the area, from as far south as the land around Petra, and from as far north as Lebanon. These are people who were surrounded by, and living in, a very religious culture with strict religious leaders. Isn't it interesting that the Jews themselves would be so hungry for spiritual truth, healing, and forgiveness that they traveled all over the Sea of Galilee just to hear Jesus? And the Gentiles did as well, as we will see in this lesson. Do you think this observation might also apply today?

For example, today we live in a country that was theoretically founded on solid Christian principles—and yet many in this country continue to seek answers from everything and everyone except Jesus. Clearly the "church" would appear to be failing—but is it? Do we need to take a step back and look at the Gospel message being preached today? Is it addressing the needs of the people it should be reaching? Have we either abandoned the main doctrines of the faith or watered down grace to the point where it is of no value? Are we more concerned with looking like Christians and being politically correct, rather than spreading the gospel? Have we forgotten what the lost look like? Have we gotten so comfortable in church, that the very work of the church has been forgotten?

I ask these questions because clearly this was the case in Jesus' day. The Jews who were to be "the light unto the Gentiles," were not. In fact, they were not even light unto themselves. Those responsible for administering the faith had abandoned the truth and sought instead to elevate themselves for personal gain and attention.

Today is no different. Millions are lost and are looking for the truth, i.e., the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May we as followers of Christ, and as a nation founded on Christian principles, begin a great revival, so that, like Christ, the crowds who come to hear the gospel are many, in the hundreds of thousands. The need is urgent, and the time is now. We need to get in our boats and go fishing for the millions of lost souls around us.

So let's join Jesus as his boat comes ashore in the region of the Gerasenes. Just as he arrives, he is met by a demon-possessed man. There is much we can learn from this account in Mark Chapter 5.

Read Mark 5:1-20, then consider the following questions:

1. The demon world is real. In fact, it is just as real today as it was in the time of Jesus' ministry. However, as we observed in our study of Angels & Demons, man's idea of the demon world—vs. the truth about it—are worlds apart. Particularly today, the influence of novels, plays, and Hollywood has distorted the world's view of demons. Swinging wildly from almost a comic character ("the devil made me do it!"), to the bizarre and horrifying scenes in movies (like "The Exorcist," we come to this passage not truly understanding the real world of demons and demon possession. Let's look closer at this story and see what we can learn. First, how do we know the man is actually demon-possessed, aside from the fact that Jesus drove them out of the man?
 - a. ANSWER 1: It was clear that, for years, the village had witnessed the extremely abnormal behavior of a person in torment.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Secondly, he had been living in tombs, screaming and crying out and cutting himself. He was living in a real and visible struggle..
 - c. ANSWER 3: Finally, he could not be held down or tied down. He was so enraged and had such strength that each time the town bound him, he would break free.
2. What do you note occurs in the very moment that Jesus steps out of the boat? Who meets Jesus when he gets out of the boat? Look at the scripture carefully, particularly verses 6 and 7. (see Mark 5:1-7)
 - a. ANSWER: Many would respond to this question by stating that the man with the demon possession comes from the tombs to meet Jesus when he gets off the boat. But that is not what happened at all. The demons drove the man to run to Jesus. The demons wanted to confront Jesus, and when that didn't work, they pleaded with Jesus to allow them to go into the pigs.
3. How is this man's behavior different than what we've seen portrayed in the world today? How does Hollywood, for example, depict demon possession?
 - a. ANSWER: Man tries to make demon-possession into something "supernatural," as man defines the supernatural and not as the Bible defines it. For example, biblical demon possession does not describe to us someone whose head is rotating or facing backwards. Nothing is spewing from the mouth of the demoniac as a weapon against other people in the vicinity. Nothing is being thrown by the power of the demon; there are no bodies being tossed wildly across rooms, and so on. Additionally, we do not see anyone described as levitating. Demon possession, in its simplest form, is simply that, a demonic spirit or spirits who take up residence in a human and torment that person almost beyond comprehension. The struggle is real, but none of the Hollywood special effects are a part of real demon possession. Frankly, demon possession is much more subdued and not easily observable in many cases.
4. Realizing that demon possession is nothing like Hollywood's portrayal, what can we observe about the difference between how Jesus treated the demon possessed man, versus how Hollywood portrays exorcism?
 - a. ANSWER 1: In the fictional world, an elaborate ceremony involving incantations and crosses and other such activity is required in order to drive out a demon. Not so in the Bible.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Jesus very directly called out the legion of demons from the possessed man. There was no magic, no special spells, signs, incantations, etc. Jesus simply commanded them to come out. When they asked to go into the pigs, it says that Jesus simply "gave them permission" to do so. The entire event lasted perhaps no more than a minute or two until the demons entered the swine.
5. Again, this event is in the book of Mark to teach us about Jesus' power over the demonic world—power that even the demons themselves acknowledged. Why do you suppose, with all of Jesus' authority over these things, that he would ask what the demon's name was. Wouldn't Jesus have already known this?
 - a. ANSWER: Clearly Jesus would have known their name; it was Legion, meaning many. In the days of Jesus, a Roman legion measured six thousand troops. It may be that there were that many evil spirits in the man, or perhaps it was simply a title to show that "many" were there. It is also clear that these demons were acting as a single unit with a chosen leader who was now speaking. This could be showing us that the demon world is not as disorganized as we would like to think. Satan has a single agenda: to lift himself above God and defeat Christ. Satan failed at this event with the Gerasene, he failed at the Cross, and he will fail at the Final Judgment. Nonetheless, his efforts are well-organized no matter how chaotic they may seem to us.

6. Living on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee, the demoniac was now clean of all of the demons; he was "re-born." Jesus had given this Gentile a new life. Incredible! The demons possessed the swine, and the entire herd of some 2,000 of them drown. How does the village react? Compare it with how the man reacts? (see Mark 5:14-20)
 - a. ANSWER 1: The villagers are shocked, stunned, almost speechless. They have known this possessed man for so many years, and now he sits on the shore clean and sane. He is a normal man once again. Immediately they are afraid. Who is this man Jesus, and what has he done? Fearful of both Jesus and his authority, they wanted Jesus to leave immediately.
 - b. ANSWER 2: The possessed man's behavior was the opposite. He was so overcome by Jesus' great gift to him that he wanted to follow Jesus wherever he was going. But Jesus told him to go into the "Decapolis" and tell all of the Gentiles what had happened.
7. What is the difference between the instructions Jesus gave the Gerasene after driving out the demons, and the instructions that Jesus had previously given others after healing them. Also, why the Decapolis? What exactly is a "Decapolis" anyway? (see Mark 5:19-20)
 - a. ANSWER 1: In previous healing miracles, Jesus had healed predominantly Jews; and he had instructed them not to tell anyone what he had done. However, he told the Gerasene to go home to your people, into the Decapolis, and tell them "what great things the Lord has done for you."
 - b. ANSWER 2: Jesus did not want the Jews to understand that he was the Messiah until the appointed time, but having the Gerasene tell the Gentiles was a different matter altogether.
 - c. ANSWER 3: The Decapolis was a collection of 10 ("deca") Roman cities in the Holy Land, covering both modern-day Israel and Jordan. While Jews lived in these cities, the majority of the population in each of the ten cities was Gentile. Jesus, during his ministry, will travel to the Decapolis; many from the Decapolis came to hear Jesus teach, and witnessed his miracles. Some scholars believe that the Gerasene was from the city of Jerash, one of the cities of the Decapolis.
8. Then we see Jesus crossing back over the Sea of Galilee in a boat, probably to the shores of Capernaum. As before, having seen Jesus' boat coming, a large crowd has gathered. Upon Jesus' arrival, a synagogue ruler approaches Jesus and asks him to come and lay hands on his dying daughter. (You will recall that Jesus has been teaching regularly in the synagogue at Capernaum.) He implores Jesus to put his hands on her so that she might be healed; he clearly does not want his daughter to die. In the description of this event found in Luke 8:42, we also learn that this is the ruler's only daughter. We can only imagine his heartache, and his faith in Jesus, as he begs Jesus to heal her. Jesus agrees, but what happens as they walk toward the home of the ruler from the synagogue? (see Mark 5:21-24)
 - a. ANSWER: A crowd gathers and surrounds both men. In fact, the Bible tells us the crowd was "pressing" in on them.
9. The crowd grows as Jesus and the ruler walk toward his home. In the narrow streets of Capernaum, it is easy to imagine the crowd "pressing" in on them. There are many in the crowd who are eager to see what Jesus does at the ruler's home. I am sure that there are also those who want to hear more about the demons that Jesus called out of the Gerasene; and there are those who are seeking healing as well. One of those pressing in on Jesus was a woman; she wanted to desperately touch Jesus' cloak and be healed. Why couldn't this wait until Jesus had cared for the dying girl? What was this woman suffering with that needed healing? (see Mark 5:25-29 and Leviticus 15:25-27)
 - a. ANSWER: For twelve years, the woman had suffered with non-stop bleeding, most-likely either a menstrual problem or uterine hemorrhage. It had cost her all that she had for treatment, but she continued to get worse. Aside from the physical issues related to her illness, she was out of resources, and—equally as bad—she was seen as unclean by the entire village. She was now desperate to be healed; and her faith was such that she knew that she would be healed if only she could touch his cloak. Not wanting to suffer for another moment, she pressed into and through the crowd, touching Jesus' garment as he walked toward to the house of the synagogue ruler. Instantly she was healed.
10. Believing that she could be healed by merely touching Jesus' cloak, the woman was miraculously healed instantly. Was Jesus' cloak "magic?" (see Mark 5:30-34)
 - a. ANSWER: No. Jesus clearly tells her that her faith healed her and not his cloak. There is nothing in any material object that can heal us, apart from our faith in Jesus. No magic, no secret incantations, nothing; we are saved by faith and by God's grace.
11. Why is this particular healing event included as part of the story of the synagogue's ruler and his dying daughter? What is Mark showing us—moreover, what is Jesus showing us—by having this miracle occur when Jesus is supposed to be going to heal a man's dying daughter? (see Mark 5:35-37)
 - a. ANSWER: By delaying his arrival, Jesus was testing Jairus' faith, as well as teaching another important lesson to those following him; namely, that Jesus had authority over everything, even death.
12. Jesus allows only the parents of the deceased girl and three disciples to witness the girl being raised from the dead. Who were the three? Why them in particular? Why not all of the disciples? (see Mark 5:38-43, Deuteronomy 17:6, Mark 9:2, and Mark 14:33)
 - a. ANSWER: Jesus was ensuring that the proper number of witnesses, aside from the child's parents, would be present. He chose Peter, James and John; the same three who would go on to witness his transfiguration and witness him in Gethsemane just before his betrayal.

13. What exactly did Jesus do to raise the girl from the dead? What special phrase or incantation did Jesus use when he did this?
- a. ANSWER: He spoke. In particular, Jesus spoke directly to the little girl and told her to "get up." There was no use of magic, or special incantations. Just as with the Gerasene, Jesus simply used his authority and instructed the girl to get up.
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At the beginning of this lesson, I said that I believed we would see things in this passage that we had not noted before. Clearly that was the case for me. When we look at both the demoniac and the little girl who died, we see that Christ used his authority over both the demon world and death. He did not need special incantations, man-made objects, or any magic. He spoke, and it was so. This is the power of Christ.

We saw this as well with the woman who had bled for twelve years. It wasn't Jesus' magic cloak that healed her; it was her faith in Jesus. Nothing made, or invented, by man comes close to the real thing, whether it be our portrayal of the demonic world or our ideas about them. Jesus tells us that if we know him, we will know the truth, and it will set us free. Never put your faith in anything man-made or imagined by man.

If you are uncertain of your relationship to Christ; if you are more interested in the demonic world than you are the eternal world that awaits those who follow Christ; if you are fearful of the world around you (both seen and unseen); if you think that there is no hope; then today is the day to place your faith in Jesus. Today is the day to surrender and see the miraculous things that Jesus will do in your life. Just as he created three new people in the events of this lesson, he will give you new life as well. We are saved by his grace; all you need do is ask him. Simply read John 3:16 and ask Jesus to come into your heart today. He will change your life forever.

Thanks for studying with us! Have a great week!

In Christ,

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