

Mark 5:1-20 (Pew Bible, p. 1558)

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could even bind him anymore, 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. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills, he would cry out and cut himself with stones. 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 me that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." 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. Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 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." 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.

As we consider the passage we've just read, I want to give some notes of context:

While the setting 4 Mark's Gospel takes place almost exclusively among Jews
Mark's original readers were primarily Gentiles (non-Jews)

And so, a story about Jesus' ministry among Gentiles in Gentile territory
Would have been particularly significant to them

In the same way it would be for us if the Gospels told us

Jesus made stops in Jenks or BA or Owasso or in the heart of Tulsa

Jesus' presence in Gentile territory showed he valued the people there

And we know Jesus is in Gentile territory because of clues in the story:

First, the reference to the Decapolis—a unit of 10 Cities on other side of Sea

Second, no Jew would raise pigs or live in a region where they were raised

Not only did the Mosaic law label pigs as unclean animals

But they were particularly offensive to Jews b/c only a few generations prior

Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek invader, came by force into the Holy Land

And sacrificed pigs on the altar of the Temple of Jerusalem

Not only that, but the flag of the Roman garrison occupying Jerusalem

At the time of Jesus had a wild boar branded across it (pigs = mark of enemy)

And finally, no Jew would ever live within the catacombs or tombs

Proximity 2 pigs & close contact w/dead would make 1 ceremonially unclean

And it's that general spirit of uncleanness that seems to have gripped the man
While the text tells us in v.1 that the man had an "evil spirit"
A better translation would be an "unclean spirit" – a spirit of uncleanness
When a person was ceremonially unclean, they were social outcasts
If a leper entered a crowd, they'd have to yell "Unclean! Unclean!"
To warn others not to come in contact with them—it alienated them

This man was not only ceremonially unclean
He was possessed by a legion of unclean spirits
That was commandeering his will & torturing him from the inside-out
It was forcing him to do things that were self-destructive like cutting himself
And the extent of his social interaction was people who were afraid of him
Trying to restrain him with chains (though they were unsuccessful)
The legion of demons within him was corrupting and polluting and distorting
The identity/dignity/capacity of a man who was created in the image of God

And that's precisely what happens when humans created in God's image
Behave in ways that are outside of God's design for human flourishing
When we subvert God's good plans and assert our own authority
To define what is good and right
And it's that spiritual *coup d'état* that the Bible calls "sin"

When we sin—
Willingly rejecting God's wisdom for how to experience abundant life—
That we invite dehumanizing forces into our lives
Forces that make us less than we were meant to be as imagebearers
Yes, God said not to eat the fruit of that tree, but *don't we know better?*

Take sexuality as an example.
God designed sex as a good & beautiful part of his creation (p.1 of the Bible)
God gave the command to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful & multiply!"
It's not as if God's original plan was asexual reproduction
No! A reading of the WHOLE Bible teaches us
God designed sexual relations to be a GIFT for his people
A gift to be enjoyed within the safety/intimacy of a lifelong, exclusive
Covenant relationship between a man and a woman

And yet look at how sexuality, practiced outside the boundaries of God's wisdom
Is perverted and used by the enemy
As one of the most destructive and dehumanizing forces out there
That the concept of sex-trafficking exists should make us all
Fall on our knees and weep at the depravity of the human condition
Or how a person could choose to break a covenant of marriage
By seeking sex with someone they're not married to
Or the danger of hook up culture, which strips sex
From a context of intimacy/commitment and consequently
Wreaking havoc on one's heart

There's an actress, once a model for adult magazines
Who is now going on a lecture circuit with a Jewish rabbi
Talking about the extreme dangers of pornography
On the surface, she seems an unlikely candidate to speak on this subject
But she is someone who has seen the dark side of this industry
She acknowledged "There's something really wrong
When within a marriage, a person has hidden themselves in another room
Finding stimulation by looking obsessively at a screen
When the opportunity for real intimacy is only feet away"

Sex and sexual love, enjoyed within the freedom/boundaries of God's design
Was meant to be a GIFT for men and women created in his image
In fact, it was meant to give us a picture for the love of Christ for his church
And yet, hijacked and subverted it becomes a force
That makes us less than human, reducing us to our appetites
And a creature driven only by their appetites is an animal
That's what sin does to us. It turns us into addicts to our appetites.

But this man, whom Jesus has encountered in Mark 5
Was not a casualty of his own sins, so far as we know.
He was kidnapped, he was occupied, he was kicked out of the driver's seat
And became the campground for the Enemy

When Jesus asked the name of the demon
The response was not a name, but a description. He had a Legion within.

A Roman legion of soldiers was upwards of six thousand men

As Jesus stood before man w/unclean spirit, the battle lines were drawn
And it was Jesus against a legion. A clash of kingdoms.
Jesus' first sermon was "The Kingdom of God is at hand"
And now the KOG is coming toe to toe with the Kingdom of the enemy

It's worth noting before we proceed

That if we take the Bible to be the revelation of God's Truth
We must accept that there is a realm, a reality beyond empirical evidence
That somehow overlaps with our experience of human existence
That not only is there one God, creator of all
But that there is an enemy, the devil, *satan*, the accuser & there are demons
Who in no way represent separate but equal power to God (no yin/yang)
Who nonetheless lie/cheat/steal & try to subvert the image-bearing capacity
Of men and women as in the case of this man in the region of the Gerasenes

While in the Western world we'd be inclined to say this man had a mental illness
We should point out that Jesus words and behavior toward the man
Do not suggest a DENIAL of his possession by demons but an affirmation of it
Jesus gives us no reason to think this man had a mere chemical imbalance
This man was covered in the fingerprints of the enemy
[Don't hear what I'm not saying. Chemical imbalances are very real.
If your doctor/psychiatrist has prescribed medication for you, keep taking it]

When thinking about things like spiritual warfare, there are often two extremes:

- 1.) Blame everything on the devil
 - 2.) Blame everything on our sinful nature (on ourselves)
- Third way: Acknowledge HUMAN FREEDOM in a world w/outside influence
Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent, but they CHOSE to rebel.

A mother who separated her kids when they were fighting asked her daughter: "Why did you let the devil put it into your heart to pull your brother's hair and kick him in the shins?" She said, 'Well, maybe the devil put it into my heart to pull his hair, but kicking him in the shins was my idea.'

The legion of demons within the man cried out to Jesus

"What do you want with us, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?"

And pleads with Jesus to send them into the pigs
And as odd as it is, he honors the legion's request.
The demons exit the man, take up a new host in the pigs
And subsequently run off the cliff and into the sea.

Now for us Westerners, whose first point of concern in this part of the story
Is (embarrassingly) the economic impact & not the deliverance of the man
We must resist getting sidetracked
Don't miss the point of the pigs.

And the point of this pigs is this:

This man had been possessed and tortured and internally damaged for yrs.
He had been dehumanized and isolated and corrupted from the inside
Think of Gollum from Lord of the Rings
And it wasn't just one demon doing this
There were so many demons within the man that when Jesus cast them out
It took 2000 pigs to contain the forces of evil that had previously been in him
The point of the pigs was not mere amusement—it quantified the evil within

No wonder the man would cry out and cut himself throughout the night
The man was internally under siege. He was a prisoner of war.
The forces of evil within him were so strong that chains couldn't bind him.
Yet there was nothing he could do to loosen the chains around his heart/will
What hope was there for this man?
Who could deliver him from the legion within?

Do you ever feel like you have a legion within you?

A private torture-master in your own heart?
Oh, on the outside you may be right as rain, a picture of perfection.
But when the doors are closed and no one can see.
Or in the private theater of your own mind, it is a different story
Secret sins (gambling, pornography, substance abuse, depression, anxiety,
Self-hatred, suicidal thoughts, endlessly comparing yourself to others)
On the outside you may look like you've got it all together
But on the inside you're like this man, crying in pain throughout the night
Because the legion within is *ruining* you and *nothing* and *no one* can help.

I'm here to tell you this morning that Jesus Christ is the Chainbreaker
The Lord of heaven and earth
The anointed Son of God
The commander of the angel armies
The One through whom all things were created
And the One to whom all of creation will one day bow in worship

Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me
Because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor
To proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind
To set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
He said, "The Kingdom of God is at hand!"
And the enemy must flee in the presence of the King.

If you're a prisoner, if you're in chains, if you're a victim of a legion within
Hear the good news:
Jesus Christ came to loosen chains and proclaim freedom
And you can experience freedom by faith in his name.
Though sin & the enemy have alienated & emaciated & desolated you
The Lord Jesus will restore you to your dignity as an imagebearer
Return you to place of belonging and give you a peace you never thought
It was even *possible* to experience.

And like the man Jesus who once hosted the legion within
You're going to have a story to tell
About all the good things that the Lord has done for you

"Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven, given
to man by which we must be saved."

My friends, this morning I encourage you, I implore you, I urge you:
Throw yourself on the mercy of Jesus Christ. Put all your hope in him.
It is for this very reason that he came into the world.
Jesus said: It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.
I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."
If you need a doctor, if you need a deliverer, if you need a Savior, run to Jesus.