

The Gerasene Demoniac: Mark 5:1-20

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The power and greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ is illustrated throughout the gospels. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and raised the dead. Even the wind and the sea obeyed His voice (Mark 4:41). Jesus possessed and displayed power over all nature, and understandably so, since He created all things (Col. 1:16). His power did not end in the realm of nature, however. He also ruled in the spiritual realm, and this can be clearly seen when Jesus exercised all rule and dominion over Satan and the demons. One such example can be found in Jesus' exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk. 5:1-20; Matt. 8:28-34; Lk. 8:26-39).

The Demon Possessed Man

Having just calmed the treacherous, stormy sea, Jesus and the disciples "came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes" (Mk. 5:1). It is here that Jesus encountered a man with an unclean, defiled spirit. The demon had taken over the body and possessed complete control over the man. Through his actions a glimpse into the power and character of the unclean spirit is offered.

The living conditions of the demoniac were in complete disarray. Naked and destitute, he was not fit to live in society. Instead he lived in the wilderness, dwelling among the tombs (Lk. 8:27). Although he did not live in society, he was known by the general public. Crying out all day and all night, his incessant shrieks and shrills certainly made their way to the ears of the townspeople. No one dared pass by his way due to his violent behavior (Matt 8:28). He cut himself with stones and apparently offered a real threat to any in his presence. His actions necessitated a response from the community. He was kept under guard and bound hand and foot in chains. The people of the town attempted to control this uncontrollable man, but they failed in their endeavor. The demoniac wrenched apart the chains and broke the fetters in pieces (Lk. 8:29). Mark's account twice mentions the inability of man to control the demon. Continual efforts were made to restrain him but "no one was able to bind him" (Mk. 5:3). The text also notes "no one was strong enough to subdue him" (Mk. 5:4). The word *subdue* carries the idea of taming. As a wild animal can not be controlled, neither could this demoniac.

The Response to Jesus

The preeminence of Christ is declared in every detail of this account and His supremacy over every creature is unmistakably illustrated. Although this demon wrought fear in every man, his response to the Savior betrays his inferiority. As soon as Jesus stepped out of the boat, the demon possessed man immediately ran to meet him. The demoniac was a violent man that threatened the safety of any traveler who passed his way. Other pilgrims likely witnessed this same scene and ran the other way. This encounter was different: Jesus did not run, and the demoniac did not attack him. After approaching the Savior, the demon controlled man bowed down to Jesus, rendered in many translations as "worship." The word means "to express in attitude or gesture one's complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure" (BDAG, 882). The demon had a deep reverence for the Savior and he likely fell to his knees in recognition of His greatness. Jesus repeatedly commanded the demon to vacate the body of the man

whom he occupied, eliciting a response from the demon. “And crying out with a loud voice, he said, ‘What do I have to do with You, Jesus, son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me’” (Mark 5:7).

The demon’s reply provides a three-fold insight into his understanding. First, he recognized their lack of fellowship. Jesus ordered the demon and he responded with a rhetorical question about their relationship. What do Jesus and the demons have to do with one another? Paul asks the same question in 2 Corinthians 7:14. “For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” The answer is none; they share no fellowship, no unity. However, this did not prevent Jesus from commanding the demon according to His purpose. Second, the demon knew who Jesus was. He was the Son of the Most High God! The demon’s language portrayed his respect, reverence, and faith in Jesus. A reaction of faith should not be surprising. James says, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder” (2:19). Some people in an attempt to justify the unjustifiable doctrine of “salvation by faith alone” will condemn the demons for having an insufficient faith. The demons, however, had an immensely powerful faith. They have the same faith that is required of us today. Their problem was that they did not accompany their faith with works of obedience to God. Finally, the demon recognized the consequence of their lack of fellowship. He would be tormented. Matthew’s account adds the phrase, “Have you come here to torment us *before the time*?” (8:29, emphasis mine – jns). The fate of the devil and his demons was fixed. A time would come when their power would be limited, and ultimately, they would suffer torment eternally (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). The demon appears to think that Jesus’ intervention was premature.

Christ again spoke to the demoniac, inquiring his name. Apparently, it took repeated requests from Jesus to receive a response. The demon finally replied by saying, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” The name Legion would be quickly recognized by everyone of the first century. It was the principle military unit of the Roman army consisting of 3,000 to 6,000 men. The demon’s name referred to the multiplicity of unclean spirits that inhabited this particular man, leaving him much worse than a single demonic possession (Matt. 12:43-45). Legion proceeded to the business of his departure, asking permission to enter the swine. Jesus granted them permission, and they entered the swine, causing them to run off the cliffs to their death.

The Result of their Encounter

After witnessing such a spectacle, “their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country” (Mk. 5:14). An amazing event usually leads to spreading the news to others. The demoniac had terrorized the whole region, so the herdsmen informed the whole region of his change. With curiosity and wonder, the informed crowd approached Jesus to see if the news was true. They witnessed the answer to their question as they observed the result of Jesus’ power and mercy. The man who was once naked, violent, and deranged was calmly sitting down, clothed, and in his right mind (Mk. 5:15). The power and compassion of Jesus was unquestioned, but sadly, it was also misunderstood. Out of fear, the multitude urged Jesus to leave. As Jesus began to depart, the once demon possessed man sought to accompany Him. With a completely altered life and an inability to repay the Lord, he desired to follow Jesus as one of His disciples. The man could have undoubtedly benefited from his time with Jesus, but the Lord’s will

would not have been accomplished. Instead, Jesus told him to “go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you” (Mk. 5:19).

Miracles of the New Testament testify to the message that Jesus instructed the demoniac to spread. They illustrate His power and His ability to do “great things.” The demon seemed invincible to other men but powerless in the face of our Savior. Furthermore, miracles demonstrate the character of Jesus. He is a Savior with supreme lovingkindness and mercy. In casting out Legion from this man, Jesus did not merely seek to display His power, although He did accomplish that. He acted out of a sense of compassion. The demoniac was without hope and living in a terrible situation. Jesus, perfect in all ways, overcame the demon and displayed His true character.

What about Today?

The message of the Bible is a wonderful message, but it is not simply an antiquated work of history to be admired. The Bible contains the very word of God and provides perfect instructions for life in every culture, country, and time period. The book of James admonishes, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (Jms. 1:22). If we fail to apply the lessons of the bible to our lives, we have missed the point. Notice a few lessons from the Garasene demoniac in Mark 5.

Although Satan does not work in the same way today, he still has a tremendous amount of power. He seeks to exercise this power to our detriment and ultimate damnation (1 Pet. 5:8). The clutches of sin can be just as devastating for us as they were for the demoniac. Sin enslaves, defiles, entangles, and destroys a man (2 Pet. 2:19-20). When we sin, we are senselessly gashing ourselves with stones. Every person stands condemned in the presence of God due to sin, and like a demon possessed man, we have no power to save ourselves (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Eph. 2:8). Someone greater must intervene. Thanks be to God that Jesus is that person. He has the compassion, power, and willingness to overcome the clutches of Satan. He extends to us an opportunity to overcome with Him (1 Jn. 5:4-5). We will either choose to repent of our sins or to remain in our sins. There are no other choices. To choose sin would be to choose the tortured life of this demon possessed man. Lastly, having encountered Jesus, we should be compelled to tell others. After receiving the Lord, it is not God’s desire that we immediately die and join Him in heaven (Phil. 1:21-26). We must tell others of the great things God has done, and how He had mercy on us.