

# TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

## MARK: THE DEMONIAK

MARK 5.1-20

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1. Last week's story and today's story have some things in common. In both cases, Jesus and his disciples are faced with a violent threat, ending with Jesus exercising his authoritative power, resulting in peace and order. In both cases people begin by being afraid of the violent threat but end with being afraid of Jesus, whose power is superior to the threats. So today we consider Jesus healing the demoniac.

### **THE TEXT**

1. After crossing the Lake they come to the east side, Mark says to the country of the Gerasenes. Now we have an old textual problem here, because ancient Gerasa was 35 miles from Galilee's shore, so it's confusing why Mark says they landed there. It is possible that Mark is referring to the general region in which the city of Gerasa lies, and that this region stretches all the way to the shore.

2. Or it's possible that Gerasa is not the original word written by Mark. Matthew's account has Gadara, and there is another reading in some manuscripts which has the location as Gergesa! So what are we to think?

3. Probably we can't know for sure, but there are good reasons for thinking the place this story actually happened was ancient Gergesa, on the NE shore of Galilee; today the place is called Kersi or Koursi. One mile south of this spot is a steep slope within 40 yards of the shore where the pigs could have run off, and 2 miles from that there are cavern tombs which have signs of having been occupied. So Gergesa, modern day Kersi, is a very good possibility for the location of this story.

4. Now as soon as Jesus gets out of the boat he is confronted by a demonized man from the tombs. Mark tells us he has an unclean spirit, i.e. this man is under the power of a demon, or, as we'll see, many demons.

5. And the man lives in a graveyard. Now before we get much further I need to mention how many elements of uncleanness are contained in this story. First, the demoniac is said to have an unclean spirit. Second, he lives in a graveyard which is an unclean area. Third, this region is a gentile region known as "Decapolis," the ten cities, and being a gentile region it would be considered unclean. And fourth, we'll see in a minute that at this same location there is a massive herd of pigs, which are an unclean animal according to the OT. By setting foot on shore Jesus has entered an area of supreme ceremonial defilement.

6. Let's continue Mark's description of the demoniac. Why does he live in the tombs? Because he's been driven away from normal society. At one point people had tried to bind him with chains but the spirits inside him give him supernatural strength and so he breaks them; obviously this would make it impossible for anyone to subdue or control him. So what does the man presently do with his time now that he's driven into the tombs? He spends his time wailing and screaming, cutting himself with stones and just basically being an insane maniac.

7. Now let's take a quick pause and ask a question: How do you suppose the man got this way? Maybe his mother told him to eat his broccoli as a kid or else something bad would happen to him, and he refused the broccoli? No; I assume it takes something worse to get a man to this state. The text doesn't tell us so we don't know, but I want to point out one part of the story that might give us a clue

8. And it's the one we just read. Mark says the man continually cut himself with stones. Now why did he do that? Perhaps it's nothing more than the demons trying to destroy and torment him. On the other hand, as one writer puts it, self-mutilation is a very old form of demon worship.

9. Maybe you remember Elijah's showdown with the prophets of Baal? And remember how Elijah said, "Alright. Let's see who the real God is, Yahweh or Baal." And the prophets of Baal spent hours trying to get Baal to respond? They jumped around and wailed and made a ruckus, and they also cut themselves with blades until the blood flowed.

10. Maybe you also recall that Leviticus 19 forbade Israel from cutting themselves for the dead. Now I don't know for certain that these various texts connect; they may not. But it's possible they do. If they did, what clue would they give us about how this man got to the miserable condition he was in? I think the obvious clue would be that this man may have got to his present condition through idol worship, or what we today would basically call the occult. If so, this man called on demons and much to his dismay, the demons came. So much for the description of the demoniac.

11. Next, the demoniac runs to Jesus and bows before him! This bowing is the first of a number of parts of the story which all express Jesus' superiority over the demons in this man. Why is he bowing? Because he recognizes his superior. In this vein we also see the demons ask Jesus not to torment them, again, the request of an inferior power. Then in v10 the demons beg Jesus not to send them out of the region; Jesus is in charge. They ask to go into the pigs and Jesus permits it, like a superior. And finally there is the simple fact of the exorcism itself. Jesus has the authority to command these powerful spirits with a word, and they have no choice but to obey.

12. Now we find out from v8 that Jesus began the encounter by commanding the demons to leave the man; they are able to resist very briefly, just long enough for a short exchange with Jesus. Here's what the demon says:

13. He first uses a phrase which effectively says, "You and me have nothing to do with each other, so why are you here?" Lest we think the bowing meant the demons like Jesus, the fact is they hate and fear him, and want nothing to do with him. The

demon also identifies Jesus as Son of the Most High God. Now this title, according to one writer, is constantly used in the OT by non-Israelites to speak of Israel's God.

14. This is to say that many among the nations worshiped their own gods but also knew that the God in Israel was on a different level from any other supernatural power. So this special title refers to Yahweh's supremacy over the other gods, such as the little unclean gods presently controlling the demoniac.

15. Then, ironically, the demoniac uses a phrase common to the exorcists of the time, "I adjure you by God!" Now this is almost silly! The demoniac is trying to get exorcistic control over Jesus, as if Jesus were the one possessed by a spirit which needs to be expelled! We are witnessing a power encounter between two rival spirits, and the demoniac is doing his darndest to defend himself from the power in Jesus!

16. Not only this, but when the demoniac uses Jesus' name and title that also was common practice of the day for exorcists! We have ancient texts which reveal the idea that to know and declare the name of some man or spirit gave one power over them. So the evil spirit is doing his best. I wonder if you've ever seen a flea shake it's fist at a tank?

17. Now all of this effort is simply defensive. The evil spirit begs Jesus not to torment him. And to what does this torment refer? If you read Matthew's account you'll see three little words added to the demoniac's sentence here: "Before the time." The torment which this evil spirit fears is nothing other than the coming Lake of Fire. That explains the demon's confusion; he was sure he still had a handful of millennia at least to devour men.

18. Well it doesn't take long to see that resistance is futile. The demon is coming out, per Jesus' command. And the manner of Jesus' exorcism is actually very

unique as compared with other documents of the time which concerned exorcism. Let me read a quote to you from a commentator:

*"The discovery of Greek magical papyri in Egypt informs us of the long and convoluted formulas, spells, conjurations, and catchwords that ancient exorcists employed as they sparred with demonic opponents to gain advantage over them. Likewise, Philostratus describes a long and involved conversation of Apollonius with a demon, including empirical signs that the exorcism had been effective. But with Jesus there is no elaborate protocol, nor is the effectiveness of the exorcism dependent on the words he utters. The power to prevail over the demonic resides within Jesus himself."*

19. So as ancient near eastern exorcisms go, Jesus is in a class of his own. But just before the demon leaves Jesus does ask his name. The demon answers, "My name is Legion, for we are many."

20. This is the point in the story where we should actually gasp in horror, as we realize this man isn't merely demon possessed; he is being tormented by a whole gang of demons. The word "Legion" comes from a Latin word which referred to a contingent of Roman soldiers, around 6,000 of them! Now I don't think the demon's point is that he just did a head count and he knows the exact number so much as that in this man Jesus is facing not one demon but an army of them.

21. Well, it really doesn't matter how many there are. Jesus could face every demon of hell at once and the same thing would happen. Now the demons beg to be sent into the pigs rather than be without a host. Jesus permits them and the whole herd of 2,000 pigs rushes down the bank into the Lake and is destroyed. The herdsman run to town and tell what happened, and a crowd gathers to see what's going on.

22. When they arrive they find the well known demoniac; only he's no longer a demoniac! He's now clothed, in his right mind, and sitting at Jesus' feet. One

commentator mentions that in this we have a picture of discipleship and salvation: A restored individual seated at Jesus' feet.

23. v17 tells us the crowd urged Jesus to leave the region! You'd think they'd be excited about the restored life sitting right in front of them. For some reason they want Jesus gone. What's their reason?

24. Of course there is the little matter of having just lost 2,000 head of swine. Edwards says this would have been an enormous financial disaster for the owners. In fact this is so much so that many commentators are rather scandalized by Jesus permitting the swine to be thus destroyed. And perhaps this is bothering the crowd at the moment.

25. However, I think the reason they want Jesus gone is actually in v15. They see the former demoniac totally transformed and it makes them afraid. Afraid of what? Not the demoniac, since he's no longer a demoniac! The people are scared because they know they are in the presence of a Person possessing terrible power. And they don't like it. So they want Jesus gone. And the fact is, we are witnessing here the normal response of fallen men to encounters with God. Listen to Edwards:

*"Most people, if asked, would probably say they would like to see a manifestation of God; but this story is a cold shower for such religious pipe dreams: when God manifests himself in Jesus most people ask him to leave."*

26. It is strange, nonetheless, to see them respond this way to the healed demoniac. Notice the parallel here between the last story and this one; the fierce storm ends in a great calm and the former demoniac sits peacefully at Jesus' feet. Mark reminds us here of the first chapter of Genesis where Yahweh brings peace and order out of chaos.

27. Jesus submits to the request of the crowd and starts to leave when the former demoniac urges him to take him along so he can be with Jesus. Now the language

here is identical to that in chapter 3 where Jesus appoints the 12 so that they will be with Jesus. This man is requesting personal discipleship.

28. Now don't miss the contrast in v17 and v18. Behold the opposing reactions of different sinners to Jesus: In v17 the crowd implores Jesus to take a hike; in v18 the former **demoniac implores Jesus to take him with!** It's the same word. This is what Jesus does to men: He splits them down the middle; he polarizes every room. Those who can taste the goodness of his redemption and glory long to be with him. Those who frankly like their space from God would rather do without.

29. Jesus doesn't allow the man to come. He has another mission for him. Jesus sends him to preach about what good things the Lord has done for him. It would be hard to beat the testimony of the man who used to be named Legion! And so the man goes away and does as commanded, only what he tells is the great things Jesus has done for him. This is a not too subtle way for Mark, once again, to coordinate Jesus with God.

### **A CLOSING QUESTION**

1. Why did Jesus cross the lake in the first place? Notice he didn't actually do anything apart from rescuing the demoniac; he was asked to leave and instead of journeying somewhere else in Decapolis they just get back in the boat and return where they started. My answer to the question is this: Jesus crossed the lake in the first place just to rescue this man.

2. This is even more persuasive if we think again about the destruction of the herd of pigs. The writers note how surprising it is that nothing is said about such a devastating financial loss as a result of the exorcism. It gives the impression that, for Mark and Jesus, compared with the deliverance of a human soul from terrible demonism, financial ruin is a mere nothing. Jesus doesn't bat an eye at it. His mission was to rescue this man and the costliness of the cure was basically irrelevant.

3. Add to this one more thought: You realize this man is a gentile? He's not one of the chosen people of God; for Jesus to cross the lake just for him is kind of bizarre. I'm tempted to call it random or arbitrary. But we could only call it that if we forgot the nature of electing love.

4. In the grand scheme of things, what value is there in one, random, gentile demoniac whose life is a living hell over in the Decapolis? Why should Jesus even notice him? I think we can say nothing else except that God loves sinful men and he has purposed to save some of them. The beauty of it is God is so constantly targeting people that we wouldn't even notice, and usually wouldn't want!

5. And lest this seem too strange to us, we might just remember that to all appearances, our own salvation is just as "arbitrary." Why exactly should You and I be released from Satanic dominion? Did we have something over the other folk who are still there? Not in the least; we were children of wrath just as they. The simple difference is the redeeming love of God has been extended to us and not to them. What maketh thee to differ, oh man? Only the sovereign love of God.

6. I hope the reading of this story moves you as it does me. I hope it awakes you to the terrible reality of life outside of Christ. I hope it reminds you of the literally thousands of people outside this building under the power of the devil. They may not have a Legion inside them but they have one without, commanding them and owning them like cattle. The sad thing is they often don't even know their life is miserable. If they've never tasted the light of Christ they may have nothing to contrast their misery with.

7. And we are not Jesus so we can't just break Satanic dominion with a word. We evangelize and often our efforts are powerless. There is only one solution. We must commit ourselves to believing prayer and creative evangelism; any kind of sharing of the word we can think of. I don't mean gimmicks, but plenty of creativity avoids the charge of gimmickry. How can we expose the Gospel of Christ more fully in this town?

8. I hope we are a praying church. I would happily add another prayer meeting to increase our time calling on the Lord and pleading for his power to be revealed. I have zero faith that anything can be done without it.

9. Give some time to thinking how our church can increase in evangelism, and lets grow in prayer so we can see more men and women released from Satan like the demoniac.