

*The Conversion of a Demoniac: Mark 5:1-20*  
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The conversion of a demoniac. This is the story we're going to look at this morning in Mark 5. It's a vivid account of this demonized man whom Jesus rescued and changed. It's an account of a dramatic conversion. It's an account of a naked lunatic turned evangelist. It's really a remarkable story in every way.

Let me read the passage for us, and then I'll pray. And then we'll take a look at the story from three different vantage points. First of all, Jesus and demons collide. Secondly, Jesus calms another storm. And thirdly, Jesus evokes fear and faith.

This is a very important story in the Gospel of Mark. The other synoptic Gospels have this story as well, but Mark's account is longer and more detailed than Matthew and Luke. And we usually think of Mark as being brief and concise. This is the shortest of the Gospels, after all. But here he has the longest account of this event. He is anything but brief.

### **Jesus and the Demons Collide**

The first thing to understand about this story is the way that it describes the collision between Jesus and the demons. This is a cataclysmic collision between the Son of God and the forces of evil. And it happens so suddenly and abruptly.

Verses 1-2 are stated in such a matter-of-fact way that it's almost humorous. Remember what happened at the end of chapter 4? They were crossing the Sea of Galilee, and a great storm arose, and Jesus was asleep, and the disciples were terrified, and they woke up Jesus and Jesus calmed the wind and the sea. And the last verse in chapter 4, verse 41, says, "And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" Mark doesn't give us any more details than that, but skips right to their arrival on the other side. And the details that are left out are amusing to think about. Was there just an awkward silence the rest of the trip? I can just picture the disciples sitting there in the boat, quite unsettled, wondering what was going to happen next. They would have felt sheepish and ashamed because of how pathetically they had acted in the storm. And even more than that they were feeling overwhelmed with the dawning realization of who Jesus was. "Even the wind and the sea obey him," they would have been repeating to themselves as they approached the shore.

And Mark just says, "They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped

out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit." Just put yourself in the disciples' sandals for a minute. Their clothes may have still been wet from the horrifying storm they had just come through. They were still trying to regain their composure after such a harrowing experience. Surely what they were hoping for most was simply to have their feet on dry ground, to eat a warm meal, and to rest for awhile as they tried to figure out what in the world was going on. But there was not time for that. Immediately upon their arrival they were confronted by a screaming, naked demonized man. Imagine that. Imagine the terror of seeing something like that. They were still deeply disturbed by what they saw on the lake, and now they are deeply disturbed by what they're seeing on the land. The action is non-stop. And the disciples must have been thinking to themselves, "What have I gotten myself into? What is going on here? Someone please remind me what I'm doing here!"

The location of this event is significant. Up to this point, Jesus had been travelling and ministering in Jewish areas on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. Now He has crossed to the eastern side of the lake, to a Gentile area. And everything about this story says, "Gentile, Gentile, unclean, unclean." First, they are now in Gentile territory. Second, they meet a man who comes out of unclean tombs. Third, the man has an unclean spirit. And fourth, they are surrounded by pigs! For a Jew, you can't get any more unclean than that. This is ceremonial uncleanness to the max.

The significance of this is that Jesus is concerned not only with the Jewish people, but He is also concerned for Gentiles. Jesus said back in Mark 1:38, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." And He will say to His disciples before His ascension, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20) What we're seeing in Mark 5 is Jesus' own mission to the Gentiles. He is going to other towns, even Gentile areas, to confront the forces of evil and to pour out His grace on the nations.

Now let's look at the collision that takes place here. And first we have to understand what is happening with this man. Verses 3-5 cut away from the story for a moment to give us the background. As we look at this description think about the destructive power of evil. Think about the misery that comes with sin and evil. The world, the flesh and the devil are all pressing in on us, and for those who are controlled by evil there will be

extreme misery and destruction. My guess is that none of us have been quite as low as this man. But the reality that we see here in extreme form is just as true in many other ways and to varying degrees. To the extent that a person is influenced and controlled by the world, the flesh and the devil, there will be wretchedness and depression and gloom, and it will lead one down a path of self-destruction. That's the picture we see in this man.

Verse 3 says he lived among the tombs. This is very strange, very demented. The man is living among the dead. His dwelling was a picture of his soul. His life was characterized by death. The insanity of sin and the oppressive evil in his life was driving him closer and closer to the grave. In Luke's account, he adds the detail that this man had worn no clothes for a long time (Luke 8:27). Even more demented and perverted.

And then we also see the tremendous demonic power that resided in this man. Mark tells us in verses 3-4 that "no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him." He was a force to be reckoned with. And this prepares us to grasp the significance of the collision that is about to take place between Jesus and the demons.

Last year I preached through the Old Testament book of Job, and in the opening chapters of Job we learned that Satan is powerful but limited. He is like a pit bull on an iron leash. It's a similar scene here. These demonic forces cannot be restrained by any mere human. This man was so destructive, to himself and to others, that they tried to tie him down. But then he would break through the chains. It must have been a terrifying experience to be one of the guys trying to restrain this man. Who knows how many men it would have taken to hold him down and get the chains and shackles on him. And then to begin walking away only to realize that he has wrenched the chains apart and broken the shackles in pieces.

He lived among the tombs. He was naked. He had tremendous strength. And then verse 5 adds that "night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones." He was always screaming and shouting. He was mutilating his own body. It was evident to all that this man was utterly miserable and that he was on a path of self-destruction. The situation could scarcely be any worse. This was an individual who was ravaged by evil spirits. He is a vivid image of the destructive power of sin and Satan. This is a situation where God let the leash out quite a ways. He allowed these evil forces to have their way with this man. And thus it gives us a shocking image of where we might be if it weren't for God's grace

upon us. If it weren't for the protection of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, if it weren't for the forgiveness of sin and the transforming power of the Gospel, we could very well be on a similar path of self-destruction.

In Genesis 1 God created order. "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep." And out of that formlessness, God created an amazing complexity of order. The pinnacle of His creation is mankind, whom He created in His own image. Mark 5 tells the story of order digressing into chaos and the image of God being distorted and destroyed.<sup>1</sup> This is what demons do. This is the intent and purpose of evil forces: to attack God's good created order, to bring chaos and destruction, to destroy the image of God in the world.

After giving us those background details, Mark returns to the story in verse 6. Here we read of the great collision that took place between Jesus and these demons. And now that we have those details, it makes this collision all the more dramatic. On the one side we have Jesus, who just demonstrated His power over nature by calming a storm. On the other side we have a man who cannot be bound. Good meets evil, and we know that the confrontation is going to be intense. It makes me think of the battles that are portrayed in the Lord of the Rings trilogy or the Narnia stories. You have thousands of warriors lining up on each side to do battle. Good and evil collide.

The disciples would have been terrified. The locals who were standing around would have watched with much interest, waiting to see what the demoniac was going to do to this man getting out of the boat. And then, to everyone's amazement, the demoniac fell down before Jesus (verse 6). If you were one of the locals standing there, and you knew these things about this man, and you saw him running, naked and screaming toward a stranger getting out of a boat, what would you expect to happen next? I think the assumption would be that there was going to be some kind of vicious attack. But instead the demoniac fell down before Jesus and then began to plead for mercy.

What an amazing demonstration of Jesus' power! The confrontation turns out to be no contest. It's curious to me why the demoniac ran toward Jesus and fell at His feet, rather than running away from Him. And this seemed to be what happened every time a demon encountered Jesus. In Mark 1:24 a man with an unclean spirit cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." And in Mark 3:11 it says, "And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God.'" Why didn't they just run away? Well, they

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<sup>1</sup> See William Lane, *Mark*, page 180.

probably knew that they could run, but they couldn't hide. They recognized the authority and identity of Jesus, and they knew that they were no match for His power and could not escape His power. So all they could do was beg for mercy. And it's such a powerful point that Mark keeps bringing to our attention that Jesus' ministry boldly confronted the powers of darkness all around Him. And while the crowds and even the disciples were still confused about Jesus' identity, the demons knew precisely who He was. And they were not shy about proclaiming it. And Mark highlights these stories for us as a way of reminding us again and again, Jesus is the Son of the God. Even if the crowds don't realize it, even if the disciples don't yet fully grasp it, the demons have no doubt about who Jesus is. They know for certain. This man is the Son of God, and they tremble before Him.

In verse 7 of our passage the demonized man says, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? [he proclaims Jesus' identity, and then he begs for mercy] I adjure you by God, do not torment me." Here Jesus does not silence the unclean spirit, like He has done in other encounters, but He does tell the unclean spirit to come out of the man. In verse 9 Jesus asks, "What is your name?" and the reply is, "My name is Legion, for we are many." A legion was a troop unit in the Roman army that would have numbered between 5 and 6 thousand. So we're talking about thousands of demons residing in this man. These demons knew that Jesus had complete control over them and would do to them as He pleased. And they didn't want to be sent out of that region, so they begged to be cast into the pigs. Jesus permitted them, and verse 13 tells us the outcome. "So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the pigs, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea." Again, this shows us the destructive power of demons. What they had not yet accomplished in the man, they accomplished quickly in this herd of pigs. Immediate self-destruction.

That is the result of the collision between Jesus and the demons. It's very clear who is in charge, who is more powerful, who calls the shots. Now let's look at what this story tells us about the outcome of this for the man's life. The first element of the story was to see how Jesus and demons collide. The second element of the story is to see how Jesus calms another storm.

### **Jesus Calms Another Storm**

In the previous passage, which we studied last week, Jesus calmed a storm on the sea. There was a *great* windstorm, and then Jesus spoke and there was a *great* calm. And after the calm there was *great* fear. The disciples, who had been afraid of the storm,

were now even more afraid, because they were asking one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" In God's providence, and in the divine poetry of Jesus' life and ministry, there is a beautiful parallel between the storm on the sea and the storm of the demoniac's life. First, there was a great storm, as Mark described for us in verses 3-5. This man was tormented, demented, perverted, oppressed, enslaved. He was naked, screaming, cutting himself. There was a storm in his soul that raged just as fiercely as the storm on the sea.

And now observe the great calm that followed, and the fear that followed the calm. Verses 14-15, "The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid." What a stark contrast! This man had formerly been demonized, and Mark emphasizes the severity of the situation by reminding us that he was "the one who had had the legion." He had been running around among the tombs, unable to be bound. Now he is sitting. And Luke's account adds that he was sitting at the feet of Jesus (Luke 8:35). He had been naked. Now he is clothed. He had been screaming and cutting himself. Now he is in his right mind. What an amazing transformation. The demons had turned order into chaos. Jesus now restores order from that chaos. Just as He calmed the storm on the lake, He now calms the storm inside of this tormented individual.

This is the conversion of a demoniac. His stormy soul is now at rest. He is finally experiencing a great calm as he sits at Jesus' feet. His self-destructive lifestyle is going to turn into a selfless lifestyle, as we're going to see in a moment. He was a danger to himself and to others, but now he is going to be a messenger of hope to all the cities in the region. This is a radical conversion.

It's also interesting to contrast how the people tried to subdue the man, to no avail, and the way that Jesus brings a great calm to his life. When the man had the demons, he could not be bound. The people wanted to confine him, but their chains would not hold him. They tried to control him by the use of external means, but it would not work. Jesus, on the other hand, changed the man from the inside out. Jesus was not holding the man down. Jesus had not put handcuffs on the man. He was not holding a gun to his head telling him to be still. It was not any external restraint that brought change to the man's life, but an internal change. Jesus had changed the man's heart, so that he now wanted to be at Jesus' feet, he wanted the peace and calm of being in Jesus' presence.

This is something we need to realize as we think about true conversions. Real conversions don't happen through external restraints or manipulation. The chains and shackles of religion are futile. You can guilt trip a person as much as you want, and lay on them all kinds of religious tasks and burdens, you can give a person lists of "do this" and "don't do that." But our sinful nature will break those shackles into pieces. External rules may restrain certain behaviors, but they will not bring about true conversion. What we need is for Jesus to change us from the inside out. We need Him to change our hearts, to change our desires, so that we are not enslaved to self-destructive behaviors, but rather we want to sit at His feet.

That's my prayer for anyone here who is not a believer. Maybe this morning you're hearing this story of the demoniac, and you're saying to yourself, "You know, in some weird ways I am kind of like that guy." Maybe you're not living among the tombs. Maybe you're not screaming and breaking through chains. But maybe you can see how your addiction to pornography is destroying your life. Maybe you can see how your drinking problem, or your drug addiction, or your eating disorder, or your gambling is taking you down a path of self-destruction. Maybe, like this man, you find some kind of weird pleasure in cutting yourself. I've counseled people before who have struggled with that, and it's a fairly common problem. Maybe you have suicidal thoughts. Maybe you have dabbled in the occult, and it seems kind of fun and exciting, but you can also see the dark and destructive power inherent in it.

Maybe your destructive tendencies are less apparent. Or maybe they take the form of behaviors that are accepted and encouraged in our society. Maybe you have an insatiable desire for money and material possessions and power and prestige, and your marriage and your family and your health are suffering as a result.

Friends, let me tell you that apart from Christ, you will end up destroying yourself in one way or another. And the answer to all of these issues is not the shackles of religion. I'm not here to give you a 5 step plan to overcome your addictions. That is not what we need. The answer is in the person and work of Jesus Christ our Savior. And that's who I'd like to tell you about. Not a personal self-help plan, but a person. Not external restraints, but an internal transformation. That's what Jesus can do in your life. He can bring a great calm out of a great storm. He can bring true peace into your heart.

I plead with you today to trust Him. Acknowledge the sin in your heart and the brokenness in your soul, and cry out to Him for help. Ask Him to forgive you and make you whole. Ask Him

to give you a new heart and transform you from the inside out. He can do this, because He gave Himself up to destruction in order to save us from destruction. He was tortured and hung on a cross to die. He was powerful enough to overcome all the evil forces that were aligned against Him, but he subjected Himself to destruction in order to set us free. This is the good news of the Gospel, and I pray that God will give you ears to hear this and be transformed by it even today.

### **Jesus Evokes Fear and Faith**

The last thing for us to consider in this story is how Jesus evokes both fear and faith. At the end of verse 15 it says that the people were afraid. The people saw this man in such a radically different condition, and they were afraid. They must have been saying to themselves, "Who then is this, that even the demons obey him?" Just like on the lake, there was a great storm, a great calm, and then great fear. But look at the effect of this fear. The result was that they wanted Jesus to leave. Verses 16-17, "And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region."

Last week I said a lot about faith and fear. If we have an appropriate fear of the Lord, then we need not fear anything else. If we fear Him and follow Him, then there's nothing else to fear. The fear of the Lord will draw us to Him and cause us to rest in Him and be in awe of Him and delight in Him. But what we're seeing here is the wrong kind of fear. It is not a godly fear. It is not a trusting fear. It is an unbelieving and apathetic and selfish fear. These folks were amazed by the power of Jesus, but ultimately they just cared about their pigs. They were mad because 2,000 of their pigs just drowned in the lake. And that's understandable. But they were missing the wonder and beauty of what had just happened to this man. I guess they would've rather had their pigs back and have this guy running around like a lunatic in the graveyard again. For them, the former situation was preferable to the current one. And so they saw the supernatural authority of Jesus as an impediment to their livelihood rather than seeing Him as Savior and Lord.

Indeed, this is how many people react to Jesus. Maybe they have seen some wonderful things in the church or in the Bible or in the lives of Christian friends, and they recognize that something powerful is there. But rather than drawing them to Jesus, it actually repels them. They don't want Jesus to mess up their plans. They don't want Jesus to get in the way of their career goals. They don't want Jesus to cause a rift in any of their



relationships. They don't want Jesus to rob them of their worldly pleasures. That is tragic.

We see the tragedy in this passage in that these people saw something miraculous and glorious, and their reaction was, "No thank you. Please get out of our lives. We beg you to leave." They were not willing to consider that the unpredictability of being with Jesus may actually be better than the security (or at least the illusion of security) that came from their herds of pigs. Jesus is certainly not safe, and He's not predictable. He is powerful, and He will do as He pleases. And His ultimate goal is not to protect our personal comforts and pleasures. But to follow Him is so much better than anything else.

This is what the demonized man realized. There's a stark contrast here between the people who feared and wanted Jesus to leave, and the demon-possessed man who was healed and wanted to be with Jesus. Look at verses 18-20, "As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled."

The man who had been healed wanted to be with Jesus. It's the same wording that's used in Mark 3:14, speaking of the 12 disciples. Jesus "appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might *be with him* and he might send them out to preach . . ." This demonized man wanted to join the group of disciples. If Jesus was going to leave, he wanted to go with Him. But Jesus had a different plan for him. He commissioned him as an evangelist to his own people.

It's interesting to contrast this with the leper whom Jesus healed at the end of Mark 1. Jesus told him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest . . ." Here in Mark 5 it seems that Jesus is not yet concerned about the mob mentality in this Gentile region where He is not yet widely known. And so He sends this man home to proclaim what *the Lord* has done.

The man, then, goes forth and proclaims "how much *Jesus* had done for him." We are very used to equating the words Jesus and Lord. But this is another shocking and controversial claim of Mark's Gospel. Jesus is the Lord. Only the Lord God could transform a demoniac like this. And Jesus did it. Who, then, is this man? He is the Lord God.

Jesus also highlights the mercy He has had on this man. And the man gladly obeyed Jesus' orders. He became a bold and passionate evangelist throughout the Decapolis, which was the ten

cities of that region on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. And thus he provides us with an encouraging model for evangelism.

If this guy can be an evangelist, so can we. You say you have a messed up past. Surely you're no worse off than this guy. You say you don't have much training for evangelism. This guy had none. You say you don't know what to tell people. Just do what this guy did. Tell people how much Jesus has done for you. Say to people, "I don't know where I'd be without Jesus in my life." Share with people about how Jesus has changed you. Talk openly with friends and family about how you have faced particular trials and Jesus has given you a peace in the midst of those trials. With neighbors and co-workers look for ways to mention specific ways that you've been encouraged through God's Word. Don't think of evangelism as a complex sales presentation where you have to impress and persuade and have an answer for every question. Just tell people how much Jesus has done for you, how He has had mercy on your life.

This is an amazing story. A story of a messed up demonized man who was radically converted by Jesus and then sent out by Jesus as a preacher of this good news. This should give us great hope in the power of the Gospel and should be an incentive to share this good news with others.