

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

How Much The Lord Has Done For You

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Mark 5:1-20

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 5:1; that’s on page 840 in your pew Bibles. There is a sense in which this story goes with the story we looked at last week. In fact some scholars believe that Jesus was intentionally fulfilling Psalm 65:7

“who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples” (Psalms 65:7 ESV)

Who does that? Who can fix what is broken in the world and what is broken in us? And of course the answer is GOD. God can do that. Only God can do that. And here in these stories we see Jesus doing what only God can do and so the question the disciples asked last week at the end of the story works just as well at the end of this story:

“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41 ESV)

Who is this that is Sovereign over the storms out there and the storms in here? That is the question that is addressed again in this story but along the way we learn some very interesting things about the brokenness of people, the blessedness of Jesus and the life of discipleship and mission.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2 And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. 3 He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, 4 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. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. 6 And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. 7 And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." 8 For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" 9 And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." 10 And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11 Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, 12 and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." 13 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 drowned in the sea. 14 The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. 15 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. 16 And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. 17 And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 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." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. (Mark 5:1–20 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Last week I mentioned that very early on in Christian art the church began to conceive of itself as a boat riding upon perilous seas with Jesus piloting them through the storm. They got that from the story we read last week – the story of Jesus calming the storm. They understood that story as historical – in the sense that it actually happened – and as in some way typological – meaning that it said something profoundly true about their experience as followers of Christ in a hostile world and the same is true with this story. We are supposed to see this story as historically true – it actually happened – and yet as typologically true – it says something about the human story and the human encounter with person and work of Jesus Christ. So for example, James Edwards in his commentary writes:

The purpose of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, as with the stilling of the storm on the lake, is not simply to leave readers awestruck at Jesus' power, however, but to prompt them to consider "'how much the *Lord* has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you'" (5:19).¹

Do you see that? So we're not going to analyze this story as if it were a newspaper clipping – this is the Word of the Lord – and so we're going to read it in terms of what it says about the human experience and what it says about Christ and what it says about discipleship and mission. Let's

James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 153.

talk first about what it says about the human story.

What This Story Says About The Human Story:

I think the most obvious thing it says is that:

1. **Human beings can be horribly and tragically enslaved**

The description that Mark provides is intended to stir up our sympathy for this terribly enslaved human being. Listen to what he says:

He lived among the tombs... bound with shackles and chains, ... he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. (Mark 5:3–5 ESV)

This person is barely recognizable as a human being – and that’s the point! That’s the point of demonic possession and oppression. William Lane writes:

“This account, more graphically than any other in the Gospels, indicates that the function of demonic possession is to distort and destroy the image of God in man.”²

That is the sum total of what the devil aims to do! He wants to destroy and deface the image of God in human beings! Jesus said that:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10 ESV)

That’s kind of a one verse summary of this story isn’t it? The devil sent his demons to kill and destroy this man. But God sent his Son to set him FREE – that’s the Gospel! This story is a PICTURE of the Gospel and it begins with the unpleasant fact that human beings are in BONDAGE TO A CRUEL AND HATEFUL MASTER.

So many people want to dispute that. They want to say that people are free. But here is an uncomfortable truth from the pages of Holy Scripture. You aren’t strong enough to be free. If you

² William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 180.

refuse the Lordship of Christ you will fall subject to the lordship of demons.

One way or the other, the devil will infiltrate your life, your body, your mind and your society and he will destroy and deface the image of God in you.

That's what the Bible says.

We also learn in this story that:

2. Human beings in bondage hurt others and themselves

Dr. Craig is famous in our church for saying that “hurt people hurt people”. And that's true isn't it? And we see it in this story. Mark says that the people had often tried to chain him – they had tried to keep him from hurting others – but it couldn't be done! He broke through the chains and he continued to terrorize the people. How many of you know what that's like? No matter how many restraints are put on you – by the government, by your parents or by yourself – you break through them all and you hurt others. You can't help it and that makes want to hurt yourself. That's where this guy was.

he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. (Mark 5:5 ESV)

He wanted to end it all. He thought he had no value to anyone, and yet we learn in this story, he had tremendous worth and value to God.

3. Human beings have tremendous worth in the eyes of God

To be honest with you, that is the point that modern readers often find so offensive about this story. The story says that when Jesus cast the demons out of this man they went into a herd of swine and the swine obviously freaked out and panicked and they ran down the hill over the cliff and into the sea and they drowned.

And many modern readers are offended at this point. They point out that 2000 animals perished in this story. They point out that the local herdsman who owned these pigs would have been

RUINED by this event. I did a Google search and discovered that in modern market terms that herd of swine was worth \$400,000 and Mark makes no comment on that as if to say that the life of this one human being was so valuable to God – so valuable to Jesus that the loss of 2000 animals or \$400,000 was not even worth mentioning.

Not even worth mentioning.

Because this man was made in the image of God.

That truth OFFENDED these villagers and it offends people still. People are angry when we say that there is NO COMPARISON between the life of an animal and the life of a human being. People are offended when we say that even the youngest humans and the oldest humans have TREMENDOUS DIGNITY and WORTH and must not be killed simply because they have become inconvenient. But God's people always side with human life. We always side with human dignity. Jesus did. He came looking for this guy because he was made in the image and likeness of God.

We learn a lot about the plight and the value of human beings in this story. We also learn a great deal about the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

What This Story Says About The Person And Ministry Of Christ:

The most obvious thing we learn is that:

1. Jesus Is God

If I were only allowed to make one point in this sermon – that would be it. I mentioned last week that the New Testament is like a painting that is painted in colours borrowed from the Old Testament. We are supposed to read passages like Psalm 65:7 where it says:

“who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples” (Psalms 65:7 ESV)

And then we are supposed to see Jesus doing things that only God can do – calming the seas and

the tumult of the people – and we are supposed to connect the dots. If Jesus can do what only God can do then clearly – say it with me – JESUS IS GOD!

That is the main point of this story!

And its pretty hard to miss isn't it? Even the demon gets this one right. He greets Jesus and he says:

“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? (Mark 5:7 ESV)

Of course we don't want to be dumber than the demons; we want to get this right too and so Mark gives us another helpful hint at the end of the story. Jesus tells the man whom he has set free:

“Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”
20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him (Mark 5:19–20 ESV)

In the Old Testament “the Lord” was Yahweh; the Lord was GOD but here this brother immediately understands the Lord is Jesus. Jesus is God. That's the point. That's the point of Mark's Gospel and that's the point of this story.

But there is more. We also learn that:

2. The Word of Jesus sets the captives free

In this story we see a man held captive by a legion of demons and we see Jesus coming to set him free. Obviously this is a historical story but it is also a PICTURE OF THE GOSPEL. That is why it is in the Bible! The author of Hebrews says:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. (Hebrews 2:14–16 ESV)

Ok, so that's the Gospel! Human beings were created to be under God and over everything else.

But we fell. The devil crept into the garden and appealed to our pride and caused us to reach up beyond ourselves and in reaching up we fell down and guess who took our place? The devil and all his fallen angels. We were created to be OVER THEM but now, because we have fallen, we are UNDER THEM and their rule over us has been brutal and inhumane.

But the Gospel says that God saw and God cared and God came! In Christ he took on flesh so as to DESTROY the one who now has the power of death over us – that is the DEVIL – and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. And then look at that last bit. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham! He helps the children of the promise.

Are you seeing that? Jesus is not on the side of the fallen angels! He did not come for them he came for us! He came to give us back the world and to give us back ourselves! This is the Gospel and this is the song of the church! Do you remember we used to sing:

*“He breaks the power of canceled sin
He sets the prisoners free”³*

This story is a picture of the Gospel! It is the story of how God comes, in Christ and sets us free and I want you to see exactly how he does it. Look at verse 8.

He doesn't do a dance, he doesn't spray holy water around, he doesn't draw a pentangle on the ground – HE JUST SPEAKS. And his word is power. He said:

“Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” (Mark 5:8 ESV)

Again this is what amazed the disciples last week. Last week we saw that in the middle of a serious storm Jesus arose and he SPOKE. Mark says that he:

rebuked the wind and **said** to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. (Mark 4:39 ESV)

So it is here. Jesus speaks. The demons flee and the man is free. Notice this my friend, nothing

³ “O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing” – Charles Wesley

else worked for this man. Nothing! They tried chains. They tried restraints. People tried to subdue him and NONE OF IT WORKED. But notice this – one Word from Jesus and this man was free. The Word of God HAS THE POWER OF LIFE AND CREATION. It brings dead people out of the tombs and it sets the captives free – thanks be to God!

One last thing I want you to see:

3. The presence of Jesus brings people peace

Look at what happens to the man who is set free; people came to find out what had happened to him.

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. (Mark 5:15 ESV)

They were afraid, but he was at peace. We was sitting there, clothed and in his right mind. He was at peace. That is what the word “peace” means in the Bible. In Hebrew it is the word “shalom” and it means “completeness, soundness, welfare, peace.”⁴ That’s what this brother had now and that is fundamentally what it means to be a Christian. It is to have PEACE from GOD because of Christ. That is why in the New Testament the standard greeting between Christians was some version of “grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is all over the NT.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:7 ESV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:3 ESV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:2 ESV)

Galatians, Ephesians, we could go on and on. To be a Christian is to enjoy the peace of God because of the grace of God in Christ!

That’s true for people and its true for places; I think that is part of the message here too. Scholars make much of the fact that this was the FIRST visit by Jesus to Gentile territory. In general he focused on the Jewish people during his earthly ministry and so this foray into Gentile territory

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Shalom-meaning.html>

seems to have some symbolic value. One commentator puts it this way. He says:

“This is the first time in the Gospel that Jesus has been in Gentile territory, so it is the more noteworthy that his holy presence routs and banishes uncleanness. In effect the land is cleansed by his coming”⁵

The coming of Jesus totally transformed the spiritual landscape of that region. It made peace possible. It made liberty possible. It made human flourishing possible. It **CLEANSED THE LAND**.

Which begs the question of course what if the land subsequently **REJECTS** the person and presence of Christ? We live in a land that has flourished, that has enjoyed liberty and peace to a great extent, in large measure because the person and presence of Jesus was once **WIDELY EMBRACED** in this land. But now things have changed and the Lord is less welcome than in former days and so the question becomes will the peace remain or will the demons return?

Jesus taught about that. He said:

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. 44 Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. 45 Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.” (Matthew 12:43–45 ESV)

What happens to a person can happen to a country – to an entire generation! Many people in this country enjoy the peace while rejecting the person who made it possible and those people, according to Jesus, live at incredible risk. There is a warning in this passage for people and places like ours.

Lastly we need to look at what this story has to say about the life of discipleship and mission.

What This Story Says About The Life Of Discipleship And Mission:

This story concludes with a picture that is literally worth a thousand words. Mark says that when the villagers ran to find out what had happened they found this former demoniac, clothed and in

⁵ D.E. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Penguin New Testament Commentaries. (London: Penguin Group, 1992), 151.

his right mind sitting at the feet of Jesus.

1. Discipleship is essentially about sitting at the feet of Jesus

That is the very essence of what it means to be a disciple! Mark has been making this same point over and over again! One time his mother and his brothers came to fetch him because the authorities were out to get him and Jesus took that opportunity to say:

“Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34 And looking about at **those who sat around him**, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! (Mark 3:33–34 ESV)

My intimate community is made up of those who sit at my feet. That’s what it means to be a disciple! And that’s why God gives you your right mind back – so that you can use your right mind to listen and to learn from Jesus. That is discipleship in a nutshell.

This story also tells us a couple things about mission. It says first of all that:

2. Reaching out will often require us to step outside of our comfort zone

As I mentioned before, it was odd for Jesus to have to come to this particular place. The Decapolis, as the name suggests, was a cluster of 10 Gentile cities that had been established inside a largely Jewish territory. The place was known as a religious and cultural hodgepodge. In fact everything in this story would have made an orthodox Jew uncomfortable. We’ve got Gentiles, pigs, tombs and demons – pretty much everything and everybody that a good Jew was supposed to avoid. And yet Jesus appears to have gone there on purpose. I think that is the point. I think that Jesus is saying that you have to cross over, you have to get dirty, you have to make contact if you are going to set captives free.

I think that has to be part of what we take out of this passage.

And yet, obviously, we also have to say that:

3. Reaching out doesn’t necessarily mean leaving home

Mark says:

the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 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.” 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. (Mark 5:18–20 ESV)

This man BEGGED JESUS to make him a cross cultural missionary – and Jesus said no. He sent him home to his own people to tell them how much the Lord had done for him. And so he did and everyone marveled.

New believers always think that mission happens OVER THERE. When it fact new believers as all believers are best positioned to minister right here. Where you know the language. Where you know the culture and where the culture knows you. They know who you were, they know who you ought to be, they know who they are and they see who you are and they wonder why. And when they do all you need to do is tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.

Now of course it may be that at some point God will call you to go over seas and to go somewhere else, but whether he does or not – this I know for sure. There are 30000 people headed towards a Christ-less eternity within 10 km of this place. They are in horrible bondage – some to their own angers, lusts and ambitions, some to alcohol, drugs and pornography, some to generational ignorance and dysfunction – whatever SHACKLES the devil has managed to slip on them – THIS I KNOW FOR SURE. You know the one who can set them free. You know the one who can SPEAK to the storm and make it cease. You know the one who RULES OVER WIND AND WAVE AND SEA. You know the one from whom the demons flee. You KNOW JESUS!

So what are you waiting for? Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you. Because this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.