**JESUS RESTORES A DEMON-POSSESSED MAN**

**(Mark 5:1-20)**

***“Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘My name is Legion,’ he replied, ‘for we are many.’” (v. 9)***

What is your opinion about demons? Are they real? How common are they in everyday life? This can be a touchy subject, as many people think of demons as simply an outdated view of mental illnesses. Implying that demons are at work in a person is likened to the Salem witch trials. And yet, there is widespread fascination with paranormal activity. In some cases, it has become so commonplace that people do not take it seriously at all (ex. “Legion” t.v. show, demon mascots). The important questions to ask are, what does the Bible teach us about demonic forces, and how should we respond to them? We can find these answers through the way in which Jesus restores a demon-possessed man in today’s passage. Though the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I pray that we may all learn important lessons that we can apply personally.

1. **The reality of demons (vs. 1-5)**

Verse 1 begins, ***“They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.”*** After Jesus calmed the storm to the bewilderment of his disciples, they arrived on the southeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The region of the Gerasenes was part of the Decapolis, a collection of Ten Cities built by Greek immigrants. It was a multi-cultural place comprised mainly of Gentiles, and was quite civilized for that time. It seemed like a strange place for Jesus to visit, as his earthly ministry was focused on the lost sheep of Israel (Mt 15:24). Then again, Jesus had the habit of going out of his way to seek out even one lost soul (ex. Samaritan woman in John 4).

As the disciples wondered amongst themselves, “Why did we come here?” the answer came screaming towards them on the shore. Look at verse 2. ***“When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him.”*** This poor soul was suffering immensely from the most extreme case of demon-possession recorded in the Bible. He is described as “having an impure spirit”, meaning it could not be blamed on a physical or mental deficiency or on his upbringing. It was a spiritual problem that affected his entire being.

A closer look at verses 3-5 can teach us a lot about what demonic influence looks like. ***“This man lived in the tombs, and no one could 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.”*** Tombs were considered extremely unclean by the standards of Jewish law. We thus find that impure spirits thrive in impure environments and drive their victims into them. The man was totally isolated from society. He lived naked and alone, much like Gollum from the Lord of the Rings. Demons want to break off a person’s relationships with others so they can take full control over their life. The fact that no one could bind him, even with chains, shows that demons promote an insatiable desire for unrestrained freedom. They give a strong urge to rebel against God and against the basic rules of society. It seems like great power, but is actually a loss of self-control. Furthermore, though the man’s family and society did their best to rehabilitate the man or to at least restrain him, their efforts were fruitless. Human sympathy and the intervention of psychiatrists or psychologists can help many people when done with good intentions. But demon-possession is fundamentally a spiritual problem. What sets it apart is a serious animosity against God and his word. Only a spiritual solution can bring true healing. Finally, the man’s self-mutilation show us that the ultimate goal of demons is to destroy their victims. Self-condemning or suicidal thoughts are characteristic of their presence.

Above all, we must remember that demons work under the authority of the devil. If we believe in Satan’s existence, we must accept the reality of demons. No one talked more about Satan than Jesus, who said about him, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy…” (Jn 10:10a).* The one who caused man to rebel against God at the beginning wants nothing more than to steal what’s left of man’s joy and freedom. He longs to destroy the image of God within us, destroy our sense of self-worth and destroy our relationships with God and with others. Ultimately, his goal is to kill us, inwardly, then physically and then eternally.

We might ask ourselves, how did this man get into this mess in the first place? Is demon-possession avoidable? We don’t know the man’s personal background, so we cannot jump to any conclusions. After all, we should always view the demon-possessed as victims, not monsters. But it is true that demons can more easily enter into those who choose to live impure and ungodly lifestyles. It’s possible that this man strived for unrestrained freedom and made himself easy prey. Perhaps he was in a broken home and never felt loved. To gain attention, he started committing crimes, gradually increasing their seriousness. Before long, he had to drop out of school and became addicted to drugs. He became a drunkard and a womanizer and his life fell apart. Demons entered into his life promising freedom, but they only made things worse until he lost all control. In Ephesians 4:26-27, Apostle Paul warns us, “*‘In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”* Stubbornly holding on to angry, bitter, envious, lustful, or any kind of sinful thought is a recipe for disaster. Demons view it as a wide-open door. With such desires, Judas allowed Satan to enter into him so that he carried out his betrayal.

This leads us to a very important point: while demon-possession is a rare, extreme case, demon-oppression is much more common, even in the lives of Christians. Demons take our anger towards others and blow it out of proportion until divisions are formed. They keep us enslaved in materialism and lust of the flesh so that we can no longer control ourselves. They are also the source of those self-condemning voices, accusing us of being unlovable and unworthy of God’s forgiveness. Do any of these sound familiar to you? We should not see such thoughts and behaviors as “normal”! These are the work of Satan and his forces and have no place in the lives of God’s children. The first step we must take to be free from their influence is to not give the devil a foothold. We must actively protect our hearts and minds from sources of impurity at home, at work or school and while on the internet. Additionally, we must depend on the power of Jesus’ name for healing and restoration, as we will learn today.

1. **“What is your name?” (vs. 6-9)**

How did Jesus react to this wild, demon-possessed man? According to verse 8, his first words were, ***“Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”*** Jesus didn’t blame the man for his condition. Instead, he confronted the demons directly, not to compromise, but to expel them immediately.

Now look at the man’s response in verses 6-7. ***“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? In God’s name don’t torture me!’”*** Here we get a glimpse of the intense inner conflict taking place within the man. Based on the demons’ fear of Jesus, it appears that it was the man’s conscious decision to come to Jesus seeking healing. And yet, though it was the man’s voice that spoke, the demons were the one’s doing the talking, begging for mercy. Demons are not spiritually ignorant (James 2:19). To the amazement of the disciples, they immediately recognized that the Son of God was in their midst. They knew the verdict against them. Fearing that they might lose their hard-earned victim, they threw themselves at Jesus’ feet, even appealing to God’s holy name.

At this point, Jesus asks a simple yet critical question. Let’s all read verse 9 together. ***“Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘My name is Legion,’ he replied, ‘for we are many.’”*** Based on the response, it seems as though Jesus was addressing the demons. His aim was to confront the enemy directly, clarifying exactly who he was dealing with. Demons hide themselves so well that most humans doubt their very existence; but there was nowhere to hide from the Son of God. Jesus got the answer he was looking for when the demons replied, ***“My name is Legion…for we are many.”*** A Roman legion was comprised of as many as 6000 soldiers. The man was like a walking barracks for a demonic army! The Bible teaches that just as angels have a hierarchy and a chain of command, so too are demons organized into ranks under Satan. They do their work in highly trained, coordinated attacks, and they care nothing about “playing fair”. It was a scary, intimidating situation, enough to make the disciples want to run back into the boat and sail far away. But Jesus had them right where he wanted them.

But the most important reason Jesus asked this question was to make a clear distinction between the enemy and the victim. While his strategy was to “divide and conquer” the enemy, his primary objective was to wholly restore the victim. We can thus think of Jesus’ question, ***“What is your name?”*** as being as much directed toward the man as toward the demons. A major problem with demon-possession is that victims lose their identity. Demons fill their heads with so many evil and false ideas that they eventually begin to accept them as their own. In effect, Jesus was telling the man, “You are not these demons. You are not your broken lifestyle. You are my beloved child. And I am here to give you your life back.”

This has enormous implications in regards to demon-oppression in our own lives. For we must *discern* between the voice of Satan and the voice of God to hold on to our true identity. Satan’s voice includes things like temptations, condemning thoughts, judging/criticizing others and doubting God. On the other hand, God’s voice of truth is clearly proclaimed through the Scriptures. For example, Satan may cripple us with a sense of inferiority, saying, “God doesn’t love you. You’ll never be good enough.” But God says, *“Son, your sins are forgiven…[I] will never leave you nor forsake you” (Mk 2:5; Deut 31:6).* Or if Satan says, “Those people are terrible for what they did. It’s your right to fight back,” we must listen to God, who says, *“…love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you…” (Mt 5:44).* Only after we are able to win the spiritual battle within our own hearts will we be equipped to help our family members, friends and Bible students. In doing so, we must emulate Jesus’ compassion to love the person and help them to reaffirm their identity before God.

**III. Jesus restores the man at great cost (vs. 10-17)**

At this point, “Legion” were squirming in agony. They begged not to be sent out of the impure area they loved so much (v. 10). So these crafty demons came up with what seemed like a clever compromise. Look at verse 12. ***“The demons begged Jesus, ‘Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.’”*** If demons aren’t able to torment humans, their next favorite victim is animals. And what better animal for an impure spirit than a pig, one labeled “unclean” under Jewish law. But no one could anticipate what happened next. Verse 13 reads, ***“He gave them permission, and the impure 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.”*** Why did Jesus agree to the demons’ demands? Rather than being a concession, I think there are three very good reasons why Jesus responded this way.

First, this was vivid, concrete evidence that demons indeed exist. It would be all too easy to write off the man’s problems as a case of mental illness and his words as an elaborate act. But watching 2000 pigs suddenly rush to their deaths after Jesus gave permission to the legion of demons was undeniable proof. It was a lesson his disciples would not soon forget.

Second, Jesus was teaching that a human life is more valuable to God that any number of animal lives. When we learned about the Passover, we saw how the slaughtering of tens of thousands of lambs was the necessary cost to redeem the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt. In the same way, it is no cheap thing for a human to be set free from demonic influences. What starts out as one small foothold of sin requires extensive and costly payment to undo.

Third, and most importantly, Jesus used this opportunity to show who he is and why he came. As the Son of God, Jesus has sovereign authority over all forces of evil. He is the only one who can tie up the strong man and plunder his house (Mk 3:27). We must know that the salvation that Jesus came to this earth to give us is more than the forgiveness of our sins, more than our inheritance in the kingdom of God. It involves complete freedom from Satan’s rule in this life and the next. Apart from Christ, we were helplessly assaulted by impure spirits sent to steal, kill and destroy us. But Jesus defeated Satan through the Cross. He ascended into heaven to grant us the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who gives, builds up and imparts life. The power that Jesus exercised over the Gerasene demoniac is the same power he granted to his disciples to expel demons (Mk 3:15) and the same power that is available to us today. It is the power of Jesus’ name. Those who have the strongest relationship with Christ will have proportionally greater power to fight the spiritual battle against Satan and his forces. Jesus gives us this power so that we may use it for our good and the good of others. Let’s not waste it!

Verse 15 tells us of the man’s dramatic restoration. In the blink of an eye, he went from naked and raving mad to being ***“dressed and in his right mind.”*** No longer would he have to live alone among the tombs. No longer was he a threat to himself and others. It was a time to celebrate: the man had his life back. But not everyone saw things this way. When those tending the pigs ran off to tell the townspeople what had happened, they responded with fear and began pleading with Jesus to leave their region (v. 17). This is so tragic. Why were they so cold-hearted towards the man’s healing? Why didn’t they seek to learn more about who Jesus was, or bring him their sick and demon-possessed? The simple answer seems to be that they were most concerned with the economic loss of pigs they had suffered. They were already worrying about their chickens and cattle. Their materialistic value system left little room for Jesus’ light to shine into their souls. For all their criticism of the demoniac, they too were under strong demon-oppression. They missed the time of God’s coming to them and the opportunity for the salvation of their souls. This is a lesson that we must not value the temporary things of this world more than the spiritual liberation that we’ve been given in Jesus’ name.

**IV. The first missionary to the Decapolis (vs. 18-20)**

Look at verse 18. ***“As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.”*** Jesus was now everything to this man. Jesus loved him when everyone else had cursed and abandoned him. Jesus lifted him out of the pits of hell. Just being in his presence was heaven on earth. Jesus was worth more to him than life itself. So he made up his mind, “I will follow him wherever he goes, even unto death. As long as I am with him, they will never be able to take me captive ever again. My life belongs to him now.”

However, verse 19 tells us, ***“Jesus did not let him, but said, ‘Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’”*** Jesus’ response may seem strange at first. Isn’t Jesus longing to raise sincere disciples who are committed to following him? Doesn’t he promise never to turn away anyone who comes to him in faith? These things are true, but we cannot argue with God’s perfect wisdom. Jesus knew what was in the man’s best interests. He also knew what an incredible opportunity this was for the evangelization of the Decapolis. This was a largely Gentile area that wouldn’t have had great access to Jesus’ ministry. So Jesus sent the man out as the first missionary to the Decapolis with a simple message: the Son of God made me whole!

Look at verse 20. ***“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 the man ran from town to town, people could scarcely believe their eyes. “Is *that* the Gerasene demoniac?! It can’t be!” But he replied, “Yes, it is I! The one they call Jesus set me free from those monsters! The prophecies are true! The Son of God has come to rescue us!” People were blown away by the man’s night-and-day change. Once Jesus forgives our sins and frees us from the influence of evil spirits, he then restores the purpose for which God created us: to joyfully testify about God’s redeeming love and to be a channel of life and blessing to others. 1 Peter 2:9-10 say, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”* As dearly loved disciples of Jesus, let’s be faithful to obey his will for us in this generation and joyfully declare his praises to this suffering world!

Has your view of demons changed as a result of studying today’s passage? How might your life be different if you were able to discern the work of Satan in your own life and in the lives of others? Jesus didn’t give his life on the Cross so that we would waste ours in doubt, anxiety, depression or hatred. He came to give us freedom from all forces of evil. Let’s earnestly pray that the Holy Spirit may protect every member of our congregation from Satan’s attacks and guide us in the truth. Let’s place our trust in the name of Jesus and live out our lives for the praise of his glory.