

Discussion Guide

Week of December 2, 2012

Mark 5:1–20

Passage Overview:

In Mark 4:35–5:43, Mark brings together four stories from around the Sea of Galilee, which together demonstrate the complete authority of Jesus over the natural world (4:35–41), the spirit world (5:1–20), sickness (5:25–34), and death (5:21–24, 35–43). In particular, Mark contrasts fear and faith. The disciples were afraid when they should have had faith (4:40). The people of Decapolis see a great miracle, but respond with fear rather than faith (5:15–17). The sick woman is afraid to reveal her identity, but Jesus commends her for her faith (5:33–34). And Jesus says to Jairus: “Don’t be afraid; just believe” (5:36). Mark shows us the power of Jesus and also asks us: “Who is this?” (4:41). But he is also telling us that we can trust Jesus in the troubles of life because he is the King and has complete authority.

Understanding God’s Word—Read Mark 5:1–20.

- What are some of the marks of “demonization” in this man? *Note: See excerpt on back for more on demons and the complexity of evil.*
- Look at the details Mark includes in this story and list the different ways he emphasizes the authority of Jesus over the spirit world.
- Why do the people respond the way they do (vv14–17)?

Living and Applying God’s Word

- What are some of the obstacles today in people’s minds that make it hard for them to embrace the fact that Christ is King and has sovereign power?
- This demon-possessed man shows us that faith must go beyond mere intellectual understanding and consent. He asks, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God?” (v7). As in James 2:19, we see here that even demons have good theology! How is faith more than just an acknowledgement that Jesus is who the Bible portrays him to be?
- Even when people do come to understand who Jesus truly is, what does the reaction of the people in verse 17 teach us to expect? What is their real problem with Jesus?

Turning to God in Faith and Repentance

- The man who was demon-possessed wanted to travel with Jesus, but Jesus sent him home to tell his friends what God had done for him. Jesus called this man to live a normal life and be a witness to those around him. How does this give you a sense of calling at your place of work, your neighborhood, and your relationships?
- This story shows us that no matter how messed up or enslaved we are, or how bad our problems might be, Jesus can liberate us. In what ways has Jesus liberated you from destructive and sinful living?
- How does the fact that Jesus is King with complete power over everything affect the way you live and face troubles? What about the way you speak about him to non-Christians, and pray to him for non-Christians?

Prayer:

Thank God that his Son is all-powerful over hordes of demons. Ask God to help you live a life not dominated by fear, but by faith in the all-powerful King, Jesus Christ. Pray also for Teen Advisors as they serve the middle- and high-school students of Columbus.

Announcements

- Children’s Ministry Orientation (Dec. 9, 9 a.m.)
- Ski Retreat (Jan. 3–6) *RSVP to will@insidecrosspointe.com.*

The Existence of Demons and the Complexity of Evil

Our contemporary culture is still rather skeptical of the existence of demons. If a person is an atheist, it is consistent for them to deny the existence of evil spirits. But it is not consistent to believe in God and in a good personal supernatural being and then refuse to believe that there are evil personal super-natural beings. But if we believe in the existence of demonic forces, it does shed light on several things we know about the world and life.

First, demonic forces explain the complexity of psychological problems. The older “physicians of the soul” understood that depression, fear, anger, or inner numbness may be so profound and difficult to deal with because of the multiplicity and inter-relatedness of the many different roots and causes. There are possible physiological, psychological, moral and demonic sources for our problems. In the Bible, demons can accuse and tempt and stir up and aggravate all the other factors, making our emotional dungeons very deep and double locked.

Second, demonic forces can explain systemic social evil. Evil unjust social systems can reign in a culture and have enormously evil and devastating effects, yet no single individual member of the oppressive system seems to be “all that bad.” Think of the average white person in apartheid kinds of societies. Very, very few are actively full of hate or are personally wicked individuals, and yet they participate in a system that is much more wicked as a whole than the sum of its parts. In Rwanda, many Christians got sucked up into genocidal rage in which whole tribes massacred other whole tribes. How do we explain this? There are indications in the Scripture that demons can stand behind human institutions such as governments or nations and can produce evil effects through those systems and institutions.

In summary, it is not possible to explain all the misery and evil in the world as simply the product of individual sinful choices. Evil spirits greatly magnify, aggravate, and complicate the sin in our hearts that we commit toward God, one another, and against our own selves. People get sucked into deep psychological and social abysses of wickedness and brokenness that the Bible says are the result of demonic activity. But Jesus shows his authority can heal the darkest troubles in the deepest recesses of the human soul — individually and corporately. He can handle the forces that enslave us. This enables us to see in Jesus’ ministry of exorcism a paradigm for how the kingdom works. Here we begin to see of how Jesus’ kingdom is more than simply my individual obedience to his will. Jesus comes into my life not simply as a rule-giver, but also as a liberator and a healer. He doesn’t bring simply rules, but a new “realm” of his kingly, healing power. Why? For the first time, we come to see that the alternative to having Jesus as a master is to have some other false and enslaving power as a master. Not everyone is personally possessed by a demon like this man (verses 23-24) who has lost complete psychological control of himself. But Paul speaks in Ephesians 6 and elsewhere that in another sense we are fighting demonic “principalities” all the time. Anything we make into an ultimate value (for example, like our career) becomes a “master” and begins to exercise enslaving power over us. In the case of career-idolatry, it begins to drive us to overwork, deceives our minds into denying how much we are working, begins to erode the strength of our family, etc. When Jesus comes into our lives, and becomes the supreme Lord, his “kingdom” begins to heal us of the denial, begins to heal our family life, begins to liberate us from the anxiety we feel over money and work. He becomes the ultimate Savior and therefore the ultimate Lord (King). The more the gospel of sheer grace dominates our thinking, the more his Kingdom spreads through my life and liberates me from the power of false masters and saviors. This is the work of the “gospel of the kingdom.” As I submit to his Lordship, he surrounds me and brings me into his kingdom, and I become new.

**from *The Gospel of Mark* study, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, pp. 49-50.