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Mark 5:1-20

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English Standard Version

Power and Compassion

The 12th Sermon in a Series on The Gospel of Mark entitled
“The King and His Cross”

1. Welcome

- a. Good morning!
- b. Turn to Mark 5
- c. We’re going to be taking a break from Mark for the next 5 weeks as we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus. We’re going to be spending the Advent season in Psalms.
- d. But anyway, let us turn our attention to the Word of God.¹

2. Read Scripture – Mark 5:1-20

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. He lived among the tombs. And 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. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. 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.” For he was saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, “Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.” So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs;

¹ The background and exposition of this text is adapted from the commentaries Mark by R. Kent Hughes, pp. 115-121; The Message of Mark by Donald English, pp. 107-112; The Gospel of Mark by William L. Lane, pp. 179-189; The Gospel of Mark by R.T. France, pp. 226-233; Mark by R.C. Sproul, pp. 97-106.

and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

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. 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. 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.

3. Pray

4. **Introduction – A study in contrasts**

- a. This morning let's start with contrasts. Life is full of contrasts, and we tend to order our lives around them too. It's just easier that way. Not more accurate or nuanced, but easier. They tell us our choices really. A quick few contrasting choices can tell you who to be friends with and who to vilify. Who is "Us" and who is "Them".
 - i. So a quick show of hands, I'm going to read off a few contrasts, and you raise your hand for which side you want to be on.
 - ii. First, an easy one. Good or Evil?
 - iii. Let's move on to the really controversial stuff: Captain America or Iron Man?
 - iv. And finally, the make or break contrast.
 1. People who like pineapple on their pizza and people who are sadly mistaken. Alright, just joking.
- b. Contrasts often are really helpful. Sure, they lack nuance, and the world is usually not black or white. And when I talk about contrasts, you immediately start thinking about opposing groups, like we just did. Sort of like picking sides.
- c. But I find that we actually use contrasts in a different way. They can help us discern differences between things. They help highlight the realities of your own position. In essence, contrasts can crystalize realities for us, to bring them home.
- d. For instance, I went on a mission trip to the Kibera slum in Kenya in 2010. At the time, it was something like a million people crammed into a square mile, and I was shocked by the poverty that I saw. Mud-brick homes with corrugated tin roofs that hang down at about head height threaten to take your off because the alleyways are so narrow. And you're sort of waddling because you're straddling a ditch that runs down the middle of the "street". And you're doing everything to avoid that ditch because there's no running water, and that's their sewage line. And then you turn a corner and there's a break in the buildings because you've come to one of the small landfills that dot the slum. It's a heap of rotting, stinking, gag-inducing waste. But all of that pales in comparison to the anxiety of simply being a foreigner in that place. The pastor we were partnering with had told us to stick close to our guides, who incidentally were some of the most feared men in the slum, because Kibera is a dangerous place. And that harsh, dangerous life is something that my brothers and sisters in Christ who live there deal with every single day.
- e. And you instantly, instinctively make the comparison, the contrast, with life back home. The realities of the wealth, comfort, privilege, and safety that I enjoy here in

Virginia were made clear to me in a way that I hadn't perceived before. Those truths that I sort of take for granted were suddenly very apparent to me.

- f. And I think that's a little bit of what Mark is trying to communicate to us in this passage. There are 4 contrasts that really drive home the reality of Jesus's power and compassion. And so we'll be looking to find a Contrast in Power, a Contrast in Life, a Contrast in Sight, and a Contrast in Response.

5. Contrast in Power: Demons vs. Jesus

- a. So, the first contrast is in power. On the one hand you've got the Demons. They're quite powerful. Remember, the people of the area had tried to subdue this man. I mean, that makes sense. You've got this feral, naked, crazy dude that is constantly screaming and cutting himself. And so they tried to bind him with shackles and chains, but to no avail. With the superhuman strength granted to him by the demons, he didn't just escape, but he shattered the shackles and broke the chains. That's some intense power. Not to mention the fact that the demons had completely hijacked this man's consciousness. We often think that our minds are free, that no one can tell us how to think. But these demons didn't just make him strong, they made him their slave in every way. So there is not only physical power, but also an almost incomprehensible mental and spiritual power that completely overwhelmed this man.
- b. And on the other hand you've got Jesus.
 - i. Jesus' authority is so clear. Even the demons confess that he is the Son of the Most High God. He's clearly got power, and he comes off as being calm and in control.
- c. So you've got two big powers going at it, but it's really not much of a contest. I mean look at the differences in the way that the demons are described and the way Jesus is.
 - i. **Demons:**
 - ii. Starting in verse 7, the demons cry out with an inarticulate howl and then address Jesus. "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."
 1. 2 quick things:
 - a. That word, "adjure" is a word of command by oath. It is usually spoken by the exorcist, but now the demon is desperately grasping at straws to have some sort of power over Jesus. Clearly that's not gonna work.
 - b. Notice that the demon confesses that Jesus is the Son of the Most High God, not as an act of worship, but as an attempt to gain power over him. There was a belief back in the day that if you knew and declared the true name of someone or some spirit, that you could have power over them. Another desperate attempt at overpowering Jesus. Kinda ridiculous, especially because of the name invoked. I mean this Legion is going up against the Son of the Most High God.
 - iii. And then skipping down to verse 10, "And he **begged** him earnestly not to send them out of the country."
 1. "Begging" is an apt description of what the demons are doing. Begging has a sense of understanding the inferiority and

powerlessness of one's position. You've really got nothing compelling, and so you're reduced to begging.

iv. Jesus:

- v. And I love how Mark describes Jesus in this story. If you look carefully, Jesus doesn't actually get much in the way of description. Mark simply records Jesus as telling the spirit to come out of the man, to ask the demon's name, and to give permission for Legion to enter into the pigs. It's so delightfully understated. He's so superior, this powerful Legion doesn't even ruffle his feathers.
- d. It's like a picture of a little kid that's trying to fight a teenager. He's taking wild swings, kicking with all that's in him, giving it his all. Meanwhile, the teen simply puts his hand on the kid's head and holds him at arm's length so that all those attacks catch nothing but air. There's a futility to the kid's efforts because the power balance is so skewed.
 - i. And so it is between Legion and Jesus.
- e. But we pretty much knew all of that already, and Mark started his Gospel identifying Jesus as the Son of God. And so what is Mark doing highlighting Jesus' power, both last week and this week?
 - i. You see, this is a **Gospel**. It's a story about the good news of Jesus going to the Cross for your sins and mine. And in this story, we have a redeemer in Jesus. But we need to know if this redeemer is **capable** of doing the massive job of overcoming sin, our corruption, and the curse. And so the Cross casts a shadow over all that comes before it. We need someone amazing to be our savior. And so Mark deliberately is being comprehensive in his point. From last week's passage in Mark 4:35-the end of chapter 5, we see Mark deliberately grouping stories together to hammer home the truth of Jesus' overwhelming power and authority over all things. Last week it was over the storm, nature, and the Creation. This week it's over demons and the spiritual realm. The next time we'll be in Mark, it'll be over disease and death. In each instance, Mark is trying to highlight that Jesus is not like anyone else. He has power we can't even dream of. And He's the one that will be going up to be our representative on the Cross.
- 6. Transition: But Jesus's power never comes in a vacuum. It's never a simple flex of raw power and authority. It comes within the context of transforming **people**, which brings us to our second contrast: a Contrast in life.
- 7. **Contrast in Life: Before and After**
 - a. You see, while the overarching context is certainly the Christ's march to the Cross, there's a more immediate context as well. You see, all of Jesus's miracles have a personal, intimate context too. He's not just calming the storm just for kicks. He's doing so to save his friends. He's not just casting out demons for fun. He's doing it to save the man that was possessed.
 - b. Let's consider the life of the demoniac.
 - i. All his life, everyone has focused on the demons, the inhuman/supernatural strength, the incessant wailing, the uncleanness. He's been forced from society and made to live in vermin-infested caves with bones for carpet. His mind is in tatters, but you have to bet that the demons allowed him some lucid

moments, if for no other reason but to torment him with his plight. The little note about his cutting himself with stones is proof of his own awareness of the wretchedness of his existence. He's throwing himself on the rocks and cutting himself, either in an attempt to drive out the spirits or to end the suffering through suicide. And so he's a naked, wild, dirty, bleeding, sick whirlwind of flailing limbs that could not be subdued. And to top it all off, he was wildly unclean, not only being possessed by an unclean spirit, but living among the dead which would have been beyond unclean.

- ii. And for a Jewish person, the horror of this man would have been all at once revolting and terrifying. Imagine you're one of the disciples, acutely attuned to ritual cleanliness. Oh the horror.
 - iii. This pitiful existence is shown for what it really is with the mention of the pigs. I mean, everyone wants to know about the pigs. But the pigs aren't really important. They're just pigs. Let's not read too much into this other than to see what the demons make them do. They run down the hill and drown in the sea. Destruction, utter destruction is where the demons want to go. They want to destroy the man that they possess completely and utterly. They are doing everything possible to destroy the image of God in this person in every way. And in the end, they'll try to destroy and take even his life.
 - c. But all of that, every little bit of this man's life, changed on the day that this man met Jesus.
 - i. After Jesus, this man was changed. And the transformation is stunning. Mark took great care to highlight just how stunning this transformation was.
 - ii. Let's look at verse 15.
 1. "And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, **the one who had the legion, sitting there, clothed, and in his right mind,** and they were afraid."
 - iii. The contrast can't possibly be any more clear. This was the demon-possessed man, and in case you forgot which one, he's the one with the legion. And boom, he's seated, controlled, calm, clothed, and talking like anyone else. The before and after are jarring. Could this even be the same person?
 - d. Remember how I said that contrasts can bring things home? Well, the herdsmen and the people who came might have heard about this Jesus who was doing incredible things for the lowest of people. They might have had a sense that he was a powerful man of God. But to see **this**. To see the boogie man of the tombs transformed like **this!** Wow!
 - e. And what a double whammy for the disciples. First it's the calming of the storm with a word. And now the storm in demonic form is calmed with almost just Jesus's presence. Remember, the demoniac is the one that initiates all of this. He's the one that is begging Jesus to let them go. Remember who's doing most of the talking. It's not Jesus. Jesus needs a simple word of command and permission to accomplish his purpose in a radical display of power.
8. Transition: But that idea of purpose is important. Because we tend to just deal with the facts of the interaction. Jesus vs. the Demon. But Jesus doesn't just see the demons. He sees the man too, and he's filled with compassion to save him. And here's where we shift a little bit.

The last 2 contrasts deal with Jesus's power, but these next two deal with his compassion. And so we're going to talk about a contrast in sight.

9. **A Contrast in Sight: Jesus and Everyone else.**

- a. Let's talk about how people viewed or reacted to the demoniac. The plight, the filth, the demons, the uncleanness, the terrible life. **That's all anyone ever saw.** He was the guy that little children would have nightmares about. He was the guy that people prayed they would never have to interact with. This is a man who was used to his circumstances defining who he was. This was a man who was used to the idea that even the best people would run from him screaming in terror.
- b. But Jesus has a very different reaction to this demoniac. Jesus didn't run in horror or terror. He wasn't intimidated by the superhuman strength. No. There's a quiet determination to save this man. And you can sort of read between the lines in the text. Remember, Jesus didn't have to save this man or drive out the Legion. To just about any upstanding person, this demoniac would have been the embodiment of evil. He had terrorized the people of the area, and so it would make sense that this was a great sinner. But yet the Lord Jesus stands up for this man to the demons within him.
- c. And why? Because he **saw** the man. He **saw** the image of God being destroyed in front of him, and he could not let it go. Sure, he saw the plight and everything that everyone else did, but he also didn't let it get in the way. He **saw** one of his children, and he took action. He was going to do what it took to transform, restore, and save this man.
- d. And so, He's not just the most amazing person ever, with power and authority over all things. He's the most amazing person ever, with power and authority over all things, who **sees** the man beneath the filth, beneath the behavior, and beneath the sin. And he **loves** him in spite of it all.

10. Gospel:

- a. And this is how we're pointed to the Gospel, not in seeing Jesus facing down demons, but in seeing Jesus saving wretched humans like this demoniac.
- b. You see, you and I are just like this demon-possessed man. Sure, we're not full of demons, but we have plenty of evil within us, evil that, at times, seems to control us. It's an evil that we say we hate, but we often just try to mitigate it as much as possible and then just live with it. And in that, we're not that much different from the demoniac. For some of us, we've resigned ourselves to sin and sinning because we can't seem to overcome it on our own.
- c. And what does Mark 5 have to say about that sin that you just can't seem to shake? What does Jesus's overwhelming power and authority to transform lives say to that part of you that you absolutely hate and know is evil, wrong, or sinful?
- d. The Gospel not only says that Jesus has the **power** to transform even the most wretched of lives, to change even the most ingrained sin patterns, but he sees past all of it to **you**. That's the wonder of the Gospel, that in the midst of our wretchedness, in the midst of our sinfulness, in the midst of the filthiness of our souls, Jesus not only **sees** us, but **loves** us.
 - i. That's Romans 5:8 – God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
 - ii. It is at the Cross that we see the greatest contrast of all. A sinless, perfect savior being crucified. At the Cross we see the horror, the filth, the guilt, and

the worthlessness of our sin being placed upon the most beautiful, clean, innocent, and worthy person ever.

- iii. And then at the resurrection, we see all of that brokenness, all of it, being transformed into glorious life. As we try to wrap our heads around that contrast, the reality that we're profoundly and deeply known comes crashing in, and with it, a sense of the immense love that God has for us.

11. Transition: And that love demands a response, which brings us to our last contrast in our passage today and where we will end.

12. Application/Conclusion: A Contrast in Response: A Scandalous Grace

- a. Look with me at verses 16-20:
 - i. 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. 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.
- b. The Gerasene demoniac was a living testimony of the power of the Gospel to love the unlovable and to transform and restore them to the way they ought to be. But that love isn't always well received. The responses to this power and compassion were almost polar opposites.
 - i. The demoniac's response is the one that we expect. His life has just been saved. He's been given a gift that boggles the mind, and he desperately wants to follow his savior. This is how we, as Christians, hope to respond every time we think about what Jesus has done for us.
- c. But the rest of the townspeople and herdsmen's reaction is interesting, and I think instructive. They beg him to leave. Now the big question is "Why?". We don't really get much in the way of a reason why they react that way. All that we get is that when they hear what has happened, they're afraid. But of what?
 - i. Are they afraid of Jesus' clear power? There's a healthy fear that comes when you think about the idea of God being right there in front of you.
 - ii. Are they afraid of losing more money? After all, the herd of pigs was quite large and worth a considerable amount of money. This isn't Jewish country. This is a Gentile-region. They might not want the potential financial cost of Jesus in their midst. Who knows which herd of pigs may be next! And as we know, the cost of faith in Jesus is significant.
- d. I think that there's certainly all of that in play, but I think there is also a sense of discomfort over the demoniac being restored to health and society. Remember, this man was a terror. He would have hurt people, potentially destroyed property, and posed an ever-present danger to the rest of the populace. He's not particularly popular amongst the people because he's done some pretty bad things. And yes, he was under the control of demons, but that rarely makes relationships better. It would have been awkward to say the least as the demoniac now has to reconcile with all these people.

- e. And here's the rub for me. There are just some people that I don't want to see saved. The line of thinking goes, "How can that guy get into heaven? He's like the worst person in history. How is that fair? God loves him?" It's like, "How would I feel if Hitler had become a Christian before his death?" But I don't have to deal in hypotheticals.
- f. Serial killers Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer are reported to have come to Christ while on death row. These men were the epitome of evil. They raped and murdered countless people, mostly women. Dahmer even ate some of his victims. But Dr. James Dobson and Rev. Roy Ratcliff testify to the sincerity of these conversions. I actually found out about these stories this week as I bounced ideas off of the other pastors. And honestly, my first impulse when I learned about their conversions was to be skeptical and annoyed. And then I was chastened. You see, these serial killers' salvation was scandalous to me. And when I thought about it that way, I was reminded of just how scandalous it was for Jesus to die on the Cross. He was totally innocent and righteous, and yet he bore the full wrath and curse of God upon him for the sin. That scandal means that grace covers over sin no matter the depth of it.
- g. These men would be the closest modern-day equivalent of the Gerasene Demoniac. They were evil-filled men that wrought terrible destruction and brought fear to many. And yet, they met Jesus and were changed. That's how the Gospel works. And while I might not be as evil as these men, I'm certainly still wildly sinful. My sin is still infinitely bad because it is committed against an infinitely good God, and that doesn't even take into account that I sin against people too! And so, my own salvation is scandalous. I'm sure that there are folks out there that would be surprised and upset with the idea that God saved me. I'm sure that there are people out there that are not looking forward to seeing me in heaven. And yet, grace is given in abundance to those that don't deserve it. It's given to those that don't deserve it, by definition.
- h. Grace is inherently scandalous. It never works the way we expect. And so, I hope that the conversion accounts of Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer are true. I hope that I will be rejoicing in heaven over the repentance of great sinners like them, just like I hope that there will be rejoicing in heaven over the repentance of a sinner like me. And by the power of Jesus' transforming grace, we will be restored, saved, and set free, just like the Gerasene demoniac.

13. Let's pray.