

A Man with Many Spirits, Part 2 -- Mark 5:14-20

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

"Father, we come today with needs that only You can fill. We have problems that are humanly impossible to solve. We need something supernatural to happen in our lives. And so today we open Your Word that has supernatural power. We ask for the almighty power of the Holy Spirit to move our hearts. And as a result may we leave this place as mighty witnesses of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen"

Two people can see the exact same thing and yet give two completely different reports. Two of us could go to the same restaurant. One might walk away saying, "That food was awful!" while the other might say, "That place has the best food in town!" It might depend on if you like Mexican or Chinese. Two of us could go to the same concert. One might leave the concert saying, "That was such a blessing!" Yet the other might say, "I wouldn't want that played at my funeral!" It might depend on if you like classical music or not. Or two of us might both go to the same football game. One might leave saying, "That was the worst game I've ever been to!" And the other might say, "That was the best game in the history of college football!" It might depend on which team you were rooting for.

Today we are continuing our journey through the book of Mark. As we look at the second part of our story from Mark chapter 5, "A Man with Many Spirits", we will notice two different reports about the same event.

Let's now consider the second half to the story of the man with many spirits:

"After seeing the spirits leave the man and then drown their herd of pigs, those who had been taking care of the pigs ran away. They gave a rousing report to everyone they saw. Some people came to see for themselves what had happened. What they saw filled them with fear, and they begged Jesus to get off of their land. The man who had been demon-possessed begged to remain with Jesus, but Jesus told him to go away and share his experience with his own people. Everyone who heard him was amazed by his testimony."

Let's now consider what Jesus experienced in this story. First of all, He experienced an alarmed response. In Mark 5:14 it mentions the men who had been taking care of the pigs. They had been watching this story unfold. They had seen Jesus' encounter with the demon-possessed man. And they must have watched with terror as their pigs stampeded down the steep mountain into the sea. Naturally, they ran away and told everyone they saw what had happened. In verse 15 of Mark 5, it mentions that some of those who heard the men's report came to see for themselves. What they saw filled them with fear. The word translated "afraid" is the same word that Mark used to describe the disciples' feelings after Jesus calmed the storm on the sea. It's the Greek word, "phobia". Terror. Both these people in Decapolis and the disciples saw an incredible display of Jesus' power and authority. And it filled them with fear. So, Jesus experienced an alarmed response to His act of commanding the spirits to come out of the man.

Second, Jesus experienced being asked to leave. In Mark 5:17 it says these people who were filled with fear and "began to plead" with Jesus to leave their territory. The word translated "plead" is the same word Mark used when he described the spirits "begging" Jesus to not send them out of the country. They wanted Jesus to leave after what they have seen and heard. According to verse 16, others who had been eyewitnesses to what

had happened told these people their account of things. And their report filled these people with fear. This is what the unclean spirits had intended. This is why they had wanted to go into the pigs. They wanted to turn the people of Decapolis against Jesus. And so, their plan seems to be working. Jesus was asked to leave, or as the Greek seems to imply, to get off of their land. These people most likely were overwhelmed with their financial loss with the drowning of the pigs. And they were afraid that more bad things might happen if Jesus was allowed to stay.

Third, Jesus experienced a request to follow. In Mark 5:18 we find someone else begging Jesus for something. The spirits had begged Jesus to send them into the pigs. The local people had begged Jesus to leave. And now the man who had been demon-possessed "begged" to be allowed to go with Jesus, who had gotten back into the boat. This man had developed a strong bond with Jesus. He was enjoying a life of freedom and civility because of Jesus' power and authority. Because of what Jesus had done for him, he couldn't stand the thought of being separated from Him. Anyone who has led someone to Christ can understand this. Those of you who have joined our church by studying with Freda have a special place for her in your hearts. And you have a special place in her heart. That's natural. And that's why Jesus experienced a request to follow. And I'm sure this man also feared the return of the unclean spirits. Maybe they would come back after Jesus left. So, he didn't want to let Jesus out of his sight.

Fourth, Jesus experienced sending out to testify In Mark 5:19 it says Jesus did not "permit" the man to go with Him. This word translated "permit" means to "send forth" or to "invite". It's a picture into the Oriental culture in Palestine. The only way someone could go with a person of superiority is if they were invited. Jesus did not invite this man to join them but instead told him to go away. Why did Jesus tell him to go away? Mark says it was so that this man might "tell" how much the Lord had done for him. The word translated, "tell", means to "announce repeatedly or in detail" as well as "retell". Jesus told him to go home to his "friends". This word "friends" actually means "those in your house". So they would have been his family members. Jesus did not invite this man to join Him, but instead commissioned him to testify of how the Lord had shown mercy to him.

Let's consider now what the man with many spirits experienced. First of all, he experienced a new beginning. In Mark 5:15 it describes the man as "sitting". When he had been under the control of the unclean spirits, he had been convulsing and screaming at the top of his lungs. Now he is experience a peace like the "great calm" after a storm. Mark's description of him sitting also likely gives a picture of him listening to Jesus as He teaches him about the kingdom of God that He had come to establish. Mark 5:15 also describes this man's new beginning in that he was "clothed". Someone had shown him kindness by giving him their clothes. It could have been Jesus or one of His disciples. As a result this man has regained his dignity. Last of all Mark 5:15 pictures this man "in his right mind". In "a sound mind" might be a more literal translation. He was no longer out of control. The spirits had left him and now he is in control of his own mind.

Second, this man experienced being marginalized. His fellow countrymen came to see what happened and instead of rejoicing with him, they were "afraid" (Mark 5:15). The wording in Mark 5 verse 16 gives the impression that the people compared his outcome with that of the pigs. They had gained him, but lost the pigs. And as a result they begged Jesus to leave (verse 17). They marginalized his being set free. They didn't welcome him back into their fellowship. Neither did they show appreciation for his liberator. Instead, they begged Him to leave their "region" or, more literally, to "get off of their land".

Third, this man experienced being denied. In Mark 5:18 this man "begged" to go with Jesus. The word translated "begged" here is the same word used of the spirits and of the people. The spirits had begged Jesus

to not send them out of the country, but to send them into the herd of pigs. The people had begged Jesus to leave their land. Their requests had been granted. But this man's request was not. According to verse 19 Jesus "did not permit" him. He was not invited in.

Fourth, this man experienced being commissioned. Jesus told him to "go and tell what great things the Lord has done for you". This was a privilege not given to others who had been healed in Galilee. Jesus had told them to keep quiet in order to minimize the opposition to His ministry. But this man was given free rein to go and share his experience. He was sent to share how the Lord had "compassion" on him. This word translated "compassion" can also be translated "mercy". The Lord had not treated him as he deserved. And as a result he had an incredible conversion story to tell.

Last of all, this man experienced a receptive audience. According to Mark 5:14, a rousing report had already gone out throughout the whole country concerning the events in this story. But the result of this report had been fear. However, the response to this man's report is much different. In Mark 5:20 it says "all marveled" at his testimony. This word translated "marveled" means to "wonder at" or "be amazed by". The people's response turned from fear turned to wonder and amazement. Mark says this man went "in Decapolis". In other words, he didn't stop with "those in his house". He continued sharing his testimony throughout that region.

This story has been recorded for us. It has been preserved down through the centuries so that we might know what it means to be a healthy and dangerous Christian. Jesus has shown us in this story what this means. There are two ways in which Jesus is revealed as our example in this story. First of all He is our example in that He accepted a change in plans. We have learned from Mark's account already that Jesus had come to this side of the Sea of Galilee for rest and relaxation. He had come to take a break and to be physically restored. As a result, though, of being merciful to the people there, He was asked to leave. He didn't argue or force Himself on them. Instead, Mark says He simply "got into the boat". He didn't try to sneak down shore to catch a few hours of sleep. He trusted His Father with his own needs. And so He is our example in this. He shows us that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who remains faithful in the midst of disappointment. It's someone who is able to remain hopeful after a closed door. They believe that a change in plans means God has something better for them.

I remember experiencing a couple dead ends with some young ladies that I was interested in. I was pastoring in New Mexico at La Vida Mission and met a young lady from Hawaii. She was a beautiful, talented person. And I was disappointed that things didn't work out for us to get together. There was another young lady that I corresponded with for a while on the internet. When it became clear that things weren't going to progress beyond a friendship, I was disappointed. But it's because things didn't work out with these two young ladies that I am married to the woman who is my wife today. And now I'm thankful that things didn't work out with the other ladies.

When we were looking for a house to move into out of our apartment, there were several houses that we would have liked to move into. And we were disappointed when they fell through. But it's because those houses didn't work out that we are in the house on East Allen Street. We can look back and see how God had something better for us. And we are thankful now that those other houses didn't work out.

And so, Jesus is our example in this story in that He remained faithful in the midst of thwarted plans. He shows us that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who continues to hope in God in the midst of disappointment. They keep believing that God has something better for them.

Second, Jesus is our example in this story in that He showed tough love. The man who had been demon-possessed asked to go with Him. But Jesus said, "No." That must have been tough to do. A bond had been created between them. It was natural that they would want to be together. But Jesus show tough love in that He didn't comply with this man's request. Jesus didn't give him what he asked for, but He did give him what he wanted. Jesus knew that this man wanted to experience more of His power and compassion. He had experience a taste of this already, and he simply wanted more. In sending this man away to share how much the Lord had done for him, Jesus was giving him what he wanted. He was giving him a "greater blessing", as Ellen White describes it in her book, Desire of Ages. She says that we are brought near to Jesus through sharing the gospel of salvation. What this man wanted could be gained not by physically being in his presence alone, but by sharing what Jesus had done for Him.

And so Jesus reveals in this story that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who cares enough to say, "No". Sometimes we feel forced to comply with intimidating or nagging people. But Jesus sets the example for us in that He had the strength to look this man in the eyes and say, "No." I remember my parents making the tough decision to send my brother and I away to academy. It was a decision that we all struggled with. I remember my Dad and brother crying the weekend we were to leave. It was the first time I ever remembered seeing my dad cry. But my parents knew their limitations. They knew that we needed positive and uplifting social interaction. And so they cared enough to say, "No", to their desire to keep us home and to my brother's desire to stay home. This world needs people who care enough to not give people whatever they ask for, but instead, to give them what they need. Many people are in need and ask for money or a hand out. But being a healthy and dangerous Christian might mean saying, "No", in order to give them what they need – a motivation to use the abilities God has given them to support their own families. Children are often shortsighted and as for things that they shouldn't have. If I gave Abigail a multivitamin every time she asked for one, she would probably eat an entire bottle every day and die of an overdose. Sometimes it takes tough love to say, "No". But often that is what it means to be a healthy and dangerous Christian.

There were two different reports circulated throughout Decapolis. One was given by the men with the pigs. Their report was based on what they saw. The other report was given by the man who had been possessed by the legion of evil spirits. His report was based on what he had personally experienced. As I have considered their differing reports with such different responses from those who heard them, I have become convinced that the reason for their reports were so different is because the men with the pigs were spectators while the man who had been demon-possessed was a participant. The men with the pigs simply told what they saw happened. But the man who had been possessed by the legion of unclean spirits told what had personally happened to him.

A similar drama-filled story took place close to 2,000 years ago. Instead of taking place in Decapolis, it took place outside Jerusalem on a skull-shaped hill. Instead of involving the transfer of thousands of evil spirits, it entailed the transfer of millions upon millions of sins. Instead of 2,000 pigs drowning in the Sea of Galilee, in this story the Son of God was plunged into the waters of eternal damnation. And instead of one man being set free, the whole human race was redeemed. What about this story? Are we spectators or are we participants? If the events at Calvary are nothing more than something you've seen in a movie or read about in the Bible, then you are only a spectator. But today is your day to become a participant. If you have experienced the freedom that comes from this story on Mount Calvary where Jesus died for our sins, then you are a participant. And the world needs to hear your report.

“Lord, You are here. Though we can’t see You with our eyes or hear You with our ears, Your presence fills this sanctuary. Some of us have built up walls that separate us from You. Others of us here are connected to You, but have been keeping silent. Today may the walls come down. May our mouths be silent no longer. May we all experience You in a very real way. I ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.”