

February 6, 2011

## *I am Legion*

Mark 5:1-20

### INTRODUCTION

We have all heard the expression that Jesus loves the sinner and hates the sin, and that a Christian is to do the same. And we have all seen that little saying abused by building a whole theology around it. The assumption is that this attitude of Jesus is somewhat indiscriminate: that there is really nothing to overcome except to be more loving and conquer some of your ‘private problems.’ In this way of looking at things, everybody starts out saved or at least neutral. Now certainly that cannot be the way that Jesus loves the sinner and hates the sin. But have you ever thought about the other extreme? Maybe we could use this thinking to excuse our own building obsession over other people’s sins—because, after all, we are only hating their sin and still loving them! In fact we flatter ourselves by thinking about how much we love them *because* we hate their sin so much. And we take a true aspect of the heart of Jesus and lift ourselves up to his perspective. We then begin to categorize sin by respectable and manageable, on the one hand, and downright anti-social, on the other. Well Jesus has left an example for us today to follow in his steps.

- THE CONDITION OF THE ONE JESUS LOVES TO SEEK
- THE CONFRONTATION FOR THE ONE JESUS LOVES TO SEEK
- TWO DIFFERENT REACTIONS TO THIS SALVATION

**The Big Idea** is that Jesus is driven to seek and save those who are oppressed and isolated by their own sin.

A word of disclaimer<sup>1</sup>: This passage is not teaching *everything*, just a few important things. For example, this passage is not meant to teach that sin and judgment in this lifetime are nothing but victimization. Jesus never says about this man, “Oh this should never happen to a guy like this: no one deserves this!” But what it *is* saying may be so challenging to you that your only category will be to say, “So, we don’t oppose this man’s sin in itself?” As you listen, watch and listen to Jesus carefully: What is He angry at—once He calls the man—

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<sup>1</sup> Also this does not address legitimate discernment about protecting children and other weak from harmful physical activity.

and what does He place his surgeon's knife in between? How does He see this man as opposed to how He sees the problem? Those are better, more specific, questions.

## DOCTRINE

### I. THE CONDITION OF THE ONE JESUS LOVES TO SEEK

#### A) This is the One Thing Jesus Came to Do {vv. 1-2, 18, 20}

1. Mark and Luke both speak about the one man with a host of demons. Matthew mentions another man as well. So whatever Jesus had in mind in healing or saving both men, He wanted to do something very dramatic with this one man (which is why he is Mark's focus). *They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes (1)*. One thing we're going to see is that this country on the other side of the sea is a place of outsiders already because it contains the Gentile Decapolis [cf. v.20]. It is true that Jesus says that He was "sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" [Mat. 15:24], yet He models, on several different occasions, his reaching out to the Gentiles in order to show us his whole heart. He says in Luke that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" [19:10]. And this particular action of seeking and saving in Mark 5 really shows that.

2. Now if you will look at the beginning of this account and at the end, you will notice that the moment Jesus gets off the boat, He has this conflict—*And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately (2a)*—and then, the moment it is over down in verse 18, He re-boards the boat. Now if you remember, Jesus was the one who insisted on crossing the sea to begin with. And what that means is that the Son of God was internally driven across the sea and through a dangerous storm to go get this man. And then what kind of a man was this?

#### B) This Man Was a Menace to Himself and Others {vv. 2-5}

1. Death lived in him and he lived in the place of death: *there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs (2b-3a)*. The darkness inside of him and an environment of darkness were a perfect match. There is no doubt that part of what Mark is doing in filling in these details is to tell us that this man was not the sort of person you wanted wandering around town or letting near your kids. Luke adds that, "For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs" [8:27], and Matthew adds that he didn't just keep to himself either, but was "so fierce that no one could pass that way" [8:28]. So he was a danger to people. He wasn't simply unfit among God's people. He was unfit for the human race. He was a menace to society.

2. No physical restraints could subdue his wickedness: *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 (3b-4).* What is wickedness that makes us think we can put a fence around it or shut it in a jar? It seems silly to think about trying. But isn't that what we tend to do both in religion and in society? We pass laws in order to make people better and we follow rules for spiritual maturity. The idea is that the external force in front of us will motivate us to change directions. But can it change our hearts?

3. Sin is rapid, deluding, ugly self-destruction: *Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and bruising (or cutting) himself with stones (5).* This guy wasn't just howling at the moon in some stupor that he could sleep off the next morning or look back and laugh at later on. This was the depths of despair. This was someone who couldn't even hear his own voice anymore, who couldn't even bear to look at himself. The energy that kept him alive was nothing more than the demon's desire to torture him another day. And what separates him from any other sinner is a little turn of events, a little isolation, a little darkness, and one little opportunity for an unclean spirit. Paul reminds the believer:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, *hated by others and hating one another.* But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy [Ti. 3:3-5].

Now this is the same Paul who also heard voices, screams. They were the screams of all the Christians he murdered and the voice of the Lord saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" [Acts 9:4]. But Paul heard a greater voice from the Lord that drowns out every demon in hell and that same voice would come calling to this man who brought hell on earth.

## II. THE CONFRONTATION FOR THE ONE JESUS LOVES TO SEEK

### A) The King Has Pity on the Demon-Oppressed {vv. 8-9}

1. Note the thought of repetition: *For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" (8).* **Saying**—Get off of him; get away from him; get out of him! The moving picture being painted here is one of Jesus running from the boat in approach to the man, almost like a Good Samaritan confronting a bully in public who is picking on someone weaker. Jesus was the initiator across the sea and Jesus is the initiator in this confrontation. So before this

man came running, Jesus had already been moving forward and calling out loudly, saying: Come out of the man!

2. Mark gives us one more glimpse of why this man is so pitiable: *And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (9)*. Let me get you to think and imagine here: Who was Jesus speaking to when He asked that question? I'm not asking you hear all that Jesus knew in his human nature. He's already indicated that it's a demon in there that had the microphone. I'm asking us to consider whether this is all showdown and no healing, or is it both. A **legion** was a military unit of 6,000 men in the Roman army. That doesn't necessarily mean that there were literally 6,000 demons in this man; but what it does mean for certain is that two things are being emphasized: a great many and a great force. After all, this wasn't simply a legion of any old people. It was a large force of trained assassins who had occupied the territory of this man's soul for one purpose only—to conquer it, and that is exactly what they had done. But this man's soul was not their rightful territory and so when the real King lands on the shores, notice the immediate deference paid!

#### B) The King Has Judgment for the Demons {vv. 6-13}

1. First, *when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him (6)*. The "he" there is both the man and the Legion. Naturally it took the man's physical body to do the seeing and running, but it took the demonic possessors to notice the King for who He was. They did not fall down before him in adoration but in complete terror, hoping that there was some way they could trick him into letting them live on. But this was no real war or bargaining session. This was a pathetic few seconds.

2. Second, he began *crying out with a loud voice (7a)*. Was this surrender? He screamed out, *What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me (7b)*. Is that surrender? It is desperate, it is pleading, it is self-preserving, it is even reverent, but it is not happy to see its Master. But it matters little because Jesus had gotten what He had come there for—his lost sheep.

3. Finally, *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" (10-12)*. Now this is odd. What do we do with this? One way to view it is that the demons were really so deluded that they were trying to trick Jesus to at least keep them among their natural domain of death, near the tombs, so that they could inflict more damage when the

coast was clear. In other words, here they didn't calculate on the pigs going overboard, or, that going into the water didn't harm them anyway. He goes on to say that, *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 were drowned in the sea (13)*. Another way to view it is in light of what happened. The demons drove these pigs into the sea and that was symbolic of their own judgment or even the way they left this world, but that was better than continuing to stare in the face of Christ. They would rather enter judgment now than stand before their Judge another second. Either option is speculation, but both would work biblically. My own view is that the sea was symbolic for judgment, so that this is a sign (regardless of what immediately happened to the demons). This lake was symbolic of another lake on the Last Day, where,

the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the **lake of fire and sulfur** where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever [Rev. 20:10].

### III. TWO DIFFERENT REACTIONS TO THIS SALVATION

#### A) The Proper of this World Only Care About Their Business {14-18}

1. It says that, *The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened (14)*. They fled and told. In other words, they were fleeing to people because of what happened to their stuff. They were tattletales. Notice the same basic reaction in the crowd that the disciples had when Jesus had calmed the storm: *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 (15)*. But unlike with the disciples, this fear went to waste. They may have been amazed for a moment; but like so many of the other people who had witnessed the miracles of Jesus, their thoughts quickly turned to their material well being. When it came to true wonder at Jesus they were spiritually indifferent. And spiritual indifference breeds spiritual resistance.

2. Notice the irony that the clean folks who were threatened by this dirty man could only find it in their hearts to treasure the very symbol of uncleanness: the pig! *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 (17-18)*. We can picture their eyes widened and saying, "Incredible! Tell me more...wait, what, He did what? He killed your pigs?" And

Mark uses the word, “beg,” here—a strong reaction for something that they didn’t understand.

3. It may be a difficult doctrine for ‘proper people,’ but there is a massive truth everywhere in the Bible about the passion of Jesus to seek and restore and build up the ‘improper people.’ In my experience, most well-off Christians in America tend to nod their heads at this and say, ‘Oh, yes, shame on us for being like those Pharisees or like these townspeople,’ but then they don’t put any effort into changing their mind and asking what ideas about the gospel and church lie behind this attitude. But Jesus tells us what gets heaven excited: “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” [Lk. 15:7]. It is not OK to do church as a reaction against the Seeker-Friendly church and say, “Well, we’re just the ministry to disciple the saints.” Amen—we should be discipling the saints and the Seeker-Friendly church has been wrong in ignoring this. But in the matter of which attitude of grace is more like heaven, the Seeker churches are actually more doctrinally correct than so many red-state attempts to over-correct them! Jesus continued in Luke, “Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” [15:10].

#### B) The Improper Risk the Improper to Spread the Word {19-20}

1. Those who have had hell inside them make room on earth for heaven. *As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him (18a).* Either Mark likes the word “beg” and is overusing it, or else, he wants to contrast one kind of reaction with another. In both cases there is a strong approach to Jesus: a strong reaction. Now he did not permit him to come with him and the disciples, but that has nothing to do with qualification or looking down on him as somehow unequal to the other disciples.

2. We have to notice that, for whatever reason Jesus did not want him traveling back across, He at least freed him up to do evangelism among his own: *Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you (19b).* Jesus didn’t commit this new man to the care of his proper religious neighbors. He placed him as a prophet over them: ‘Tell them about me!’ ‘Tell them that there is mercy in me and that I might have mercy on them too!’

3. Let me show you one last thing about this man’s calling. And we will have to go back to the demons to see it. The word used for “country” (*choras*) means something more like a general “territory” more than a homeland or nation—in other words, a territory such as a

military force would occupy. Some scholars have always argued that Mark—writing from Rome as he is—wants to draw an allusion to Roman occupation by focusing on this “legion,” so that our natural view toward this King Jesus would be checked in one more way. When the liberated man requests to go with the King, he has in his mind to join his “merry men” to defeat more legions of people occupying the King’s territory. Instead he is told, in effect: ‘No, no, friend—go to your family and friends and other acquaintances and tell them the good news. That is how you live in my kingdom now.’ The disciples had to be told roughly the same thing: “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” [Lk. 10:20]. The servant King takes back what is his in this age only through proclaiming the good news. That’s where the power is.

## **APPLICATION**

**To our Philosophy of Ministry** – What does it mean to be the worst of the worst, the lowest of the low, the chief of all sinners—to feel and really seem like a demon in human flesh? Well most people are not on the extreme of being physically isolated from other people and doing physical harm to themselves, but there are still voices. They are the voices of a courtroom with a long list of wrongs; and there are voices that answer back—the attempt to justify ourselves—as Paul says, “while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” [Rom. 2:15]. You see demons and proper people have one thing in common: they think that the offense of sinners is against them and they have a chain and a voice. And when a sinner is awakened to his guilt, he attempts to solve his guilt problem apart from Christ.

The extreme end of this is insanity. Many theologians who have studied psychology (or psychologists who have studied theology) are convinced that when self-justification gets off on its own—we would say, away from the gospel—the voices multiply and speed up, and the person begins to put up walls of mistrust, or, if they’re more honest, they’ll only listen to the condemning voices and submit to the tyranny of those who can perform better than them. And this is a great danger for the church. Because the church represents God, the things that we speak to people who are hurting have a weight to them. One of the main things that can send a man out to live among the tombs is if we focus on our (or their) performance instead of focusing on Christ’s performance. When the demons saw this man, they saw a weakness to exploit. When the townspeople saw this man, they saw a tumor to root out. But when Jesus saw this man, He saw only one thing that drown out everything else that He could have dwelled on.

The Puritan pastor Richard Sibbes summarized this Christ-like attitude well:

Christ, for the good aim he sees in us, overlooks any ill in them, so far as not to lay it to our charge. Men must not be too curious in prying into the weaknesses of others. We should labor rather to see what they have that is for eternity, to incline our heart to love them, than into that weakness which the Spirit of God will in time consume...Some think it strength of grace to endure nothing in the weaker, whereas the strongest are readiest to bear with the infirmities of the weak.<sup>2</sup>

So if I could expand on our **Big Idea**, I would say that Jesus is driven to seek and save those who are oppressed and isolated by their own sin: *and* the way that He loves the sinner and hates the sin is by making war against the sin as part of the old man, and, at the same time, treating the new man as one of his own and sending him. His anger and warfare is directed against the devil and record of sin in the form of these voices. He treats them like bullies who are ganging up on his sheep.

**To the Sinner Who Hears Voices** – How do you understand this character? How do you identify him? If you're only asking the question—*What do I do if this guy shows up?*—you're still not really hearing. He *has* shown up! You're looking at him and listening to him. How did you feel this week as Jesus landed on your shores? *I* felt like a demon in human flesh a few times.

When God declares you *not guilty* because of his Son, there are two things that doesn't mean: It doesn't mean you don't really commit sins anymore (and remember, every sin deserves the judgment of God); and it doesn't mean that the voices go away. The voices will be talking about real sins that you really did commit and really do deserve the curse of God. It just means you have an infinitely powerful answer. Jesus speaks a better, louder word than the voices of hell.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree' [Gal. 3:13].

To anyone who is oppressed by the record of real guilt against them or anyone who is isolated in their sin, do not harden your hearts or plug your ears in disbelief. Jesus loves to saves people like you, but you must repent of your sins and trust him that He will apply his righteousness to you and remember your sins no more.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh 1998, fp. 1630); pp. 32-33