



Speaker:
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Seated, Clothed, in our Right Mind

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 15 of 15

8/16/2020 (SUN) | Bible: Mark 5:1-20

Let's read from Mark's gospel chapter 5 and the first 20 verses.

The Sea of Galilee was also the location for what we looked at last week. The Christian life is one of both blessings and trials. The disciples of Jesus last time had seen him preach enthusiastically to large crowds. A great blessing.

But there was to follow a great trial. It would cause the disciples to despair even of their very lives. They resorted to seeking Jesus to deliver them, albeit with a faulty attitude. But the gracious saviour, who was both God and man, rose from his makeshift bed and by his great power turned the storm into calm.

The reason he dismissed the crowds in the first place to set sail across the sea was that he had an appointment. Today, we catch up with him as he stepped onto the opposite shore. They had landed in the country of the Gadarenes. Immediately, they were confronted by a scary sight. Two wild men emerged from the local graveyard to approach Jesus. Mark's account leaves out any mention of the second man, so today we'll focus on the one he does.

The man has an unclean spirit. He wasn't the first demoniac that Jesus encountered, but Mark spends more time describing this event than any of the others. And it is a significant event in many ways. In terms of the state of the man before, the manner of the casting out of the demons, and the remarkable conclusion to the account.

Let's look at this man then. He is a sorry creature. He is as wild as any of the beasts of the field. He lived in the tombs. Whether this was the preferred accommodation for the demons, or the townsfolk had banished him there, we don't know. And without doubt no one would like to have him living nearby. He would make a racket day and night. Perhaps it was cries of torment or screams of madness. But he was also violent. And we're also told that he was self-harming. Curiously, he seemed to have an unnatural strength. I'm sure the people who chained him up knew what they were doing. They knew how to restrain someone. But this man managed to break the chains used on him. If his strength was unnatural, it was derived from the energy of the devils.

You may have noticed that in these episodes of demon possession, the words spoken are sometimes ascribed to the man and sometimes to the demon. Here, the man runs to meet

Jesus. But it's fairly clear that it's the demon that recognised Jesus and confessed his divinity. We're told that he WORSHIPPED Jesus! We've noted before, have we not, that the demons will far more readily acknowledge Jesus as Lord than most of the people in this world. How terrible will be their end if they don't turn to Jesus Christ for rescue.

We witness so many interesting things in this conversation with Jesus. One of the most unusual aspects of this incident is found in the name that the demons use for themselves. It's revealed to all the bystanders that this man is inhabited by a multitude of demons. "Legion" is the name used. In a military sense, a legion of troops would number at least 6000 men. We're not to take this too literally, but as we'll see it wasn't too much of an exaggeration after all.

It's interesting to see how the demons identify themselves. "**My** name is Legion, for **we** are many." There are many but they are of one mind. Truly, Satan is not divided against Satan. He and his hordes of angels are dedicated to causing harm in general and targeting the saints in particular.

As if to prove their enthusiasm for chaos, they make this unusual request. I don't know whether they were worried Jesus might banish them early to the Lake of Fire, or they merely didn't like being homeless, but in any case they asked to instead go into a herd of swine. They asked Jesus' permission to travel that short distance and take up residence in these other creatures of God.

This was a Gentile region, so we shouldn't be surprised at the presence of animals that the Jews wouldn't have kept. And I don't think Jesus set this whole thing up to express his displeasure at the keeping of pigs for food. After all, it was he who would shortly put an end to the Mosaic food laws. I think rather that he intended to create such a memorable spectacle that it would help the spread of his message among the Gentiles.

For the demons, the permission Jesus gave was some consolation. To them, causing mayhem in the soul of one made in the image of God was more valuable than disturbing ten thousand animals. But the pig option was better than nothing. Think about this: what followed was to give them just a few moments more of trouble causing. Such was their zeal for violence that they considered it worthwhile.

The pigs in the field were suddenly overtaken by these wicked spirits. There was very little in the abilities of these creatures to allow much expression for the mischief of the devils. Instead, the two thousand pigs ran very aggressively downhill and threw themselves into the sea where they drowned.

Quite a terrifying account. The people in charge of the herd ran to the town to tell whoever they could all about it. Quite naturally, people came to the outskirts of the city to see for themselves. They were headed to where Jesus was, although I suspect they would've been able to see the hundreds and hundreds of pig corpses floating on the edge of the sea.

They found Jesus. And I'm tempted to think that what they saw would be more of a shock to them than the sight of many dead pigs. I think it's fair to say that everyone in that town would have known about the demon possessed man in the tombs. Were their eyes deceiving them? Could this man sitting here be the same one they'd known all these years?

We shouldn't underestimate the power in the evidence of a changed soul. Now people change all the time. Some turn over a new leaf or they get counselling, or they attend self-help groups, or they listen to positive thinking gurus on the internet. But a genuine Christian conversion is far above all these.

We know our friends and family just like they knew us in the old days. No matter what they do, people don't change that much. But when a man or a woman is born again and launches out in their new Christian life, the change is very often *startling* to the world. And that sort of character-changing power is a powerful testimony to the greatness of God.

It hasn't gone unnoticed with Bible students that there are parallels between this incident and the previous one:

- In one, Jesus stills a storm on the sea; in the other, he stills a storm within a person. (In the past, some examples of mental illness were called “brain storms”.)
- In both accounts, the power of Jesus Christ is displayed.
- And here, as with the storm at sea incident, the greatest fear among the people was seen *after* Jesus had performed his miracle.

And so here we see the people so frightened by the display of power by Jesus that they, incredibly, ask him to leave town! We'd expect a different reaction, wouldn't we? Why didn't it go that way? I wonder why they didn't say, *Such power! This man must be from God! We should worship him. We should find out what we must do.*

None of that. They wanted him to go before he caused more “trouble”. They'd rather go back to the way things were with their godless lifestyle and their mad men. But then again we shouldn't be surprised at any of this. It happens all the time in our day.

I think I told you the other week about a friend of mine who had been gloriously saved out of a life of violence and drunkenness. His friends, troubled by this dramatic change in him, said they wished they could have their old mate back. He was stunned. He asked them if they really wanted the return of a character who had even threatened them and their families! And their response was that although he was a nasty man, it's what they were used to. That, my friends, is the level of darkness in the human heart. Sin loves company. The more people that join them in their sin, the greater is their feeling of safety. The days of this fallen human race will soon be at an end, and then they will realise that “safety in numbers” was only ever a delusion.

Now we've done a brief survey of the passage, I'd like us to focus on something that was said in verse 15: “And they come to Jesus and see him that was possessed with the devil and

had the legion sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind—and they were afraid.” The three points I have for you today are based on this description. *Sitting. Clothed. In his right mind.* This presents us with an image of a sinner who has been converted through Jesus Christ. I want to consider our own situation and see how, in a spiritual fashion, it reflects the state of that man.

Here’s my first point. **We are presently sitting at the feet of Christ.**

We sit at Jesus’ feet. It’s the place a pupil takes when his master is to teach him. It’s the position a child takes before their parent begins reading a story. It’s a place of submission. Our life of frenzied sin is over. Jesus Christ sits us down.

God himself is pictured as sitting in the heavens in Psalm 2, so being seated can mean different things. Here’s another reference (Psalms 26:5): “I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked.” Sitting down with people implies fellowship, good or bad. And when God saves men he, if you like, shows them to their new seats. They sit, not with the wicked, but with the righteous and with God himself. **We now sit with our feet well and truly under the table**, the Lord’s table—the “top table” if you like.

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 8:11. “And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” This has happened! In that we have been added to the number of saints through the ages, we are said to be joining all those who have gone before us.

We sit at God’s table. But it gets even better. In Revelation 3:21 it says, “To him that overcometh will I grant **to sit with me in my throne**, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” And we can prove from that book that this overcoming is a *present* blessing. Can it be true? Can we be said to sit with God on his very throne? The language used in the scriptures to describe the exalted state of the believer is truly mind-blowing and incomprehensible.

Here’s my second point. **We are presently clothed in the righteousness of Christ.**

One image the Bible uses to describe a lost state is nakedness. When the Holy Spirit is in the process of bringing a sinner into the kingdom of God, he first makes them aware of their nakedness:

- They realise they don’t have the right outfit to join the wedding feast
- They’re made to realise that they’re incapable of making their own outfit
- They come to see that it is only a wedding garment given to them by God himself that can allow them access to God’s presence.

Isaiah says, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD. My soul shall be joyful in my God. For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation. He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” (Isaiah 61:10)

Both in his character and in his obedience to the perfect law of God, Christ Jesus shows the perfections of his righteousness. And not only are God's elect credited with this perfection as if it were their own, but they're also *made* perfect. In God's miracle of conversion, the new creation does not become divine, but it has a righteousness as pure as God's. I don't know what to say about that except what I said a moment ago: incomprehensible.

A little previous to that Revelation quote is Rev. 3:18. "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Like I said, this is not just future but present.

The most exciting picture of a change of clothes, however, refers to something altogether different. Something that is definitely in the future. I'm referring of course to the Resurrection of the body of the believer. Have a look at 2 Cor. 5:1-4. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, **earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven**, if so be that being clothed **we shall not be found naked**. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Each of us is promised a new body after death. It's likened here to a new house. We don't leave this world and go to our house in the sky. The house comes to us! What's more, Paul describes the idea of being disembodied as *nakedness*, and he certainly doesn't want that. His hope is in the resurrection of the body. And whether we think of this as moving into a new place or having God clothe us with something new, the reality is the same. *Although worms destroy this body, Job says, I'll see God again...in the flesh!*

Here's my third point. **We presently have the mind of Christ.**

God has changed us so that we're in our *right mind*. The storms of rebellion in our minds have been quelled. We are level-headed. In a recent message I titled *Mad for the Gospel*, I remarked on the irony that the world thinks the convert has lost their mind, whereas the truth is they've never been more sober-minded. And the converse is just as ironic: the worldling thinks he's thinking rationally, whereas he's the one that's mad. He considers the storm in his soul as normal, and the peace in ours *abnormal*.

Turn with me if you wish to 2 Tim. 1:7. It says, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of **a sound mind.**" **Only now can we think straight.** In our former days, we could be said to be self-harming. (I don't mean this to be understood literally, even if some Christians did use to self-harm in the way it's currently understood.) I mean rather that, being driven by that spirit of rebellion against God, we were on a self-destructive path. Not only were we harming ourselves along the way, but it was a career of sin that would have ultimately led to *eternal* destruction by God.

The Bible tells us this in Romans: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 12:2) Not only does God give us a new mind to work with, he mercifully provides the means by which we can see our minds renewed day by day. Through leaning on God, we can experience changes for the better in the way we think. And the way we think needs to conform more and more to the perfect ways of God.

- We want our minds to be more hateful of sin
- We want our minds to be more attracted to God
- We want our minds to be more resistant to temptation
- We want our minds to be more ready to obey God's will.

Remember I said a few moments ago that the devils who inhabited this man were as one. They were individual spirits, *but they were of one mind*. And this is also true of the Church of God. All the church disagrees about stuff. I have friendly but loving arguments with fellow believers about doctrine and practice. But underlying all this is a common bond. Listen to Romans 15:5-6. “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus. That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There's not a true believer on this planet who doesn't love God. There's never been a Christian in history who hasn't wanted to obey him. There will never be in the future a genuine convert who doesn't want more than anything else to stop sinning. There are traits without exception common to believers throughout history. And I think one of our prime duties is to so focus on Christ, and be so submissive to his word, that the views within the church gradually converge more and more.

We're sat at the feet of Christ. We're clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We currently have the mind of Christ. And here's my final point:

We presently bear the testimony of Christ.

The man in our story must have been a bit disappointed. Jesus AGREED to the demons' request to go into the pigs. Jesus AGREED to the people's request to depart from their towns. But when this man makes a request of Jesus, it was refused!

He just wanted to accompany Jesus. Who wouldn't? Instead, he was given a mission. He was to stay where he was. He was to tell the people where he lived about what great things the Lord had done for him. What may have made his disappointment greater was the knowledge that he might never see Jesus again.

You who are believers will sympathize. You too feel the yearning to be at Jesus' side—in the flesh. You desire the interaction, the closeness. But we must wait. Like this man, *we* are to do *our* duty until that day comes when we see Jesus face to face. But let me emphasize: **that does not mean that we cannot have close communion with Jesus Christ right now.** God

promises that if we draw near to him he will draw near to us. And I'm happy to recommend to you that you take that promise and run with it as far as you want! I pray to God that you'd be able to enjoy joyful communion with him that would thrill your soul.

We share this man's mission, too. It's our duty also to tell people whenever we can about the things God has done for us. And please don't use the excuse that you're not trained. Please don't leave it to people who've been to Bible College. This is not a job for pastors and evangelists only. Consider the man in our account. *He knew virtually no doctrine whatsoever.* He knew less than all of us. Yet he was sent out by Jesus.

He was being instructed to go out and tell people the state he was formerly in, the great miracle by which he was delivered, and his belief that the miracle worker was of God. He wasn't equipped to answer all their questions like "Where did God come from?" or "Why does God allow bad things to happen?" He wasn't able to enter into discussions about doctrine. If he were ever asked any of these types of questions, he'd simply have to answer, "I don't know" and not be ashamed of saying that either. He wasn't commissioned by Jesus to be a walking encyclopaedia of the Bible. He went out with a five-minute story **but told it to a great many.**

Friends, no matter how little you know, you have been commissioned by God to tell other people what he has done for you. Psa. 66:16 says, "COME AND HEAR, ALL YE THAT FEAR GOD, AND I WILL DECLARE WHAT HE HATH DONE FOR MY SOUL."

How you do this is for you to work out! But we have a message:

- To those in a state of frenzy, perhaps trying to earn salvation, we speak of being been shown to our new seats with Christ.
- To those who are naked or wear clothes of their own making, we speak of having received the garment of Christ's righteousness.
- And to those who are maddened by sin, we speak of having been given the sound, rational and wise mind of Christ.

I hope that this account will not only edify you as you consider your position in Christ, but also encourage you to take this man's example and let it inspire you to find courage to testify about Jesus in this hostile world until he comes again.

Amen.