

## One with A Mental Illness

Lesson for March 26, 2023

**Unit I:** Called from the Margins of Society

**Scriptural Background:** Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39

**Printed Text:** Mark 5:1-13

**Key verse:** *“So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis[b] how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.”* (Mark 5:20, NIV)

In Nairobi, there was a fence that kept people from the streets out of the church, which was necessary because people were stealing things from the church. All these little street kids were coming to the fence, and he noticed that a bunch of them had scarred lines down their chest. The pastor of the church shared that these kids were from the streets. Locals called them “Glue heads” because they were sniffing glue (local shoe factory), getting high. The glue would drip down their chest... hopeless, lost, sad, outcasts.

The pastor shared the Gospel with these kids through the fence and said five of them received Christ. He later said, “you never know how that will turn out, you know. Was it real?” He continued sending resources and doing ministry there. He later had a friend who went to Nairobi five years later and said, hey this young man Daniel wants to talk to you. (Daniel was one of the five kids who received Christ earlier at the fence). One of the glue heads. “He’s now the Youth Minister of the church!” And he’s the top of his class in this school of technology. The now former pastor said, “Imagine that, the glue head, is now the head of his class and the youth minister in the church. Totally transformed by Jesus.”

Jesus can take glue heads and turn them into gospel heralds; or smelly fishermen into spiritual leaders; demoniac (mad man) into to a missionary. In today’s lesson, Jesus is ministering on the other side of the tracks... the other side of the fence.

### Key terms

1. **Adjure** (verse 7) – To make (one) swear; charge solemnly; implore; make an oath with the prompt “In God’s name” (NIV).
2. **Compassion** (verse 19) – Pity; favor; grace; “mercy” (NIV).
3. **Legion** (verse 9) – A division of the Roman army, numbering about 6,000 infantry with additional cavalry; a very large number.
4. **Possessed** (verse 18) – Under the power of an evil spirit or demon; demon-possessed.
5. **Unclean** (verse 2) – not pure; unclean things; “impure” (NIV).

## Lesson Background

Mark, for whom this gospel is named, was a close companion of the Apostle Peter and a recurring character in the book of Acts, where he is known as “John who was also called Mark” (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37, 39). It was to John Mark’s mother’s home in Jerusalem that Peter went when released from prison (Acts 12:12).

John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5). But he deserted on the way in Perga and returned to Jerusalem (Acts. 13:13). When Barnabas wanted Paul to take John Mark on the second missionary journey, Paul refused. The friction which resulted between Paul and Barnabas led to their separation (Acts 15:38-40).

John Mark’s restoration to useful ministry may have been, in part, due to the ministry of Peter. Peter’s close relationship with Mark is evident from his description of him as “my son, Mark” (1 Peter 5:13). Peter, of course, was no stranger to failure himself, and his influence on the younger man was no doubt instrumental in helping him out of the instability of his youth and into the strength and maturity he would need for the work to which God had called him.

Mark presents Jesus as the suffering Servant of the Lord (10:45). His focus is on the deeds of Jesus more than His teaching, particularly emphasizing service and sacrifice. Mark omits the lengthy discourses found in the other gospels, often relating only brief excerpts to give the gist of Jesus’ teaching. Mark also omits any account of Jesus’ ancestry and birth, beginning where Jesus’ public ministry began, with His baptism by John in the wilderness.

Mark demonstrated the humanity of Christ more clearly than any of the other evangelists, emphasizing Christ’s human emotions (1:41; 3:5; 6:34; 8:12; 9:36), His human limitations (4:38; 11:12; 13:32), and other small details that highlight the human side of the Son of God.

The Gospel of Mark emphasizes both Jesus’ servanthood and His role as the promised Messiah: the Son of God. This is done through a concise, action-packed style. Mark provides relatively few details, instead focusing on actions and simple statements. This relates to the Gospel’s authorship, which is believed to be based on the memories of the apostle Peter. These include many of Jesus’ miracles, in contrast to other Gospels which include many more of Jesus’ teachings and parables. Mark also makes frequent mention of Jesus’ ministry being misunderstood by others.

The last story included in chapter 4 combines with all of Mark chapter 5 to reveal that Jesus is even more powerful than the twelve imagined. They have reached the other side of the Sea of Galilee, after Jesus displayed His authority over a fierce storm which threatened to capsize the boat. The twelve are so amazed they ask, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41). In Mark 5, they will learn more about His power as He performs familiar miracles with an even greater scope.

Mark 4:35—5:43 sees an increase in the scope of Jesus' miracles. He has just calmed a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee. In this week's lesson, He expels a legion of demons, heals a woman without overtly acting, and brings a girl back to life. All three situations—related to tombs, blood, and death—show Jesus bringing healing to unclean circumstances.

## Lesson In Depth

### I. A Cry for Help (Mark 5:1-8)

**Immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit:** This is the most detailed description of a demon-possessed man we have in the Bible. It is the classic profile of demonic possession.

- The man had been demon possessed for a *long time* (Luke 8:27).
- The man wore no clothes and lived like a sub-human, or like a wild animal (Luke 8:27).
- The man lived among the decaying and dead, contrary to Jewish law and human instinct (dwelling among the tombs).
- The man had supernatural strength (chains pulled apart).
- The man was tormented and self-destructive (crying out and cutting himself with stones).
- The man had uncontrollable behavior (neither could anyone tame him). Strangely, some Christians think that this is how the Holy Spirit works: by overwhelming the operations of the body and making one do strange and grotesque things.

This man did not start out this way. At one time he lived among others in the village. But his own irrational, wild behavior convinced the villagers that he was demon possessed, or at least insane. They bound him with chains to keep him from hurting others, but he broke the chains time and again. Finally, they drove him out of town and he lived in the village cemetery, a madman among the tombs, hurting the only person he could – himself.

**Immediately there met Him:** When this man came to Jesus (Jesus did not seek out the man), Jesus said to the demon possessing the man, **“Come out of the man, unclean spirit!”**

**Jesus, Son of the Most High God:** This is what the demons said *in response* to Jesus' command to **come out of the man (for He said to them, “Come out of the man”)**. This was a way they tried to *resist* the work of Jesus.

In the background of all this is the ancient superstition that you had spiritual power over another if you knew or said their exact name. This is why the unclean spirits addressed Jesus with this full title: **Jesus, Son of the Most High God**. According to the superstitions of the day, this was like a round of artillery fired at Jesus. “The full address is not a confession of Jesus' dignity but a desperate attempt to gain control over him or to render him harmless, in accordance with the common assumption of the period that the use of the precise name of an adversary gave one mastery over him.” (Lane)

Therefore, in their address of Jesus, they have the right theological facts, but they don't have the right heart. The demons inhabiting him had a kind of "knowledge" of Jesus. They knew the true identity of Jesus better than the religious leaders did. But it was not a faith or a knowledge of Jesus that could save (James 2:19).

**What have I to do with You... I implore You by God that You do not torment me:** This was the unclean spirit speaking, not the possessed man. The demon did not want to leave his host.

Demonic possession is when a demonic spirit *resides* in a human body, and at times the demon will show its own personality through the personality of the host body. Demonic possession is a reality today, though we must guard against either *ignoring* demonic activity or *over-emphasizing* supposed demonic activity.

**Do not torment me:** These demons considered it **torment** to be put out of this man's body. Demons want to inhabit human bodies for the same reasons a vandal wants a spray can, or a violent man wants a gun. A human body is a weapon that a demon can use in attacking God.

Demons also attack men because they hate the image of God in man. They attack that image by debasing man and making him grotesque – just as they did to this man in the country of the Gadarenes.

Demons have the same goal in Christians: to wreck the image of God. But their tactics are restricted toward Christians because demonic spirits were "disarmed" by Jesus' work on the cross (Colossians 2:15). Yet demonic spirits certainly can both deceive and intimidate Christians, binding them with fear and unbelief.

## II. A Command that Healed (Mark 5:9-13)

**What is your name?** Jesus probably asked for the name so that *we* would know the full extent of the problem, knowing that the man was filled with many demons (**Legion**) and not just one. A Roman legion usually consisted of 6,000 men. This does not mean that the man was inhabited with 6,000 demons, but that he had many.

From the account as a whole, we see that Jesus was *not* playing into the ancient superstition about knowing a demon's name. In fact, Jesus showed that it was unnecessary for Him to know the name of the demon. When they replied "**Legion**," they really weren't saying a name, but simply trying to intimidate Jesus with a large number. **Legion** said, "There are a lot of us, we are organized, we are unified, we are ready to fight, and we are mighty."

If it was important for Jesus to know their names, He could have demanded "name, rank, and serial number" for each of them one by one. But Jesus would not play into their superstitions. His power was greater than them. When it comes to demons and spiritual warfare, we must never be caught up in foolish and counter-productive superstitions.

According to the superstitions of the day, the onlookers probably felt that the unclean spirits had the upper hand. They knew and declared a full name of Jesus. They evaded His request for their name. And finally, they hoped to frighten Jesus with their large number. But Jesus didn't buy into these ancient superstitions at all and easily cast the unclean spirits out of the afflicted man. "The answer may be evasive, the demons desiring to withhold their true names from Jesus in a desperate attempt to thwart his power. It is also possible that the name may have been selected to invoke the fear of a powerful name." (Lane)

**Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country:** Luke 8:31 tells us that the demons also *begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss*. They did not want to become "inactive." "Lo, it is another hell to the devil to be idle, or otherwise than evil-occupied." (Trapp)

"Satan would rather vex swine than do no mischief at all. He is so fond of evil that he would work it upon animals if he cannot work it upon men." (Spurgeon)

In Mark 5:7, the demons demonstrated that they knew who Jesus was. Here they demonstrate that they can "pray" to Jesus (begged Him earnestly). This shows that you can know who Jesus is and not surrender to Him. You can pray to Him and not surrender to Him.

**Send us to the swine, that we may enter them:** The demons wanted to enter the **swine** because demons are bent on destruction, and they *hate to be idle*. "The devil is so fond of doing mischief, that he will rather play at a small game than stand out." (Poole)

Notice that the demons can't even afflict *pigs* without the permission of God. "Since a demon cannot enter even into a *swine* without being *sent* by God himself, how little is the *power* or *malice* of them to be dreaded by those who have God for their portion and protector!" (Clarke)

**And at once Jesus gave them permission:** Instead of putting these unclean spirits completely out of commission, Jesus allowed this because the time of the total demonstration of His authority over demons had not yet come – it would come at the cross. Colossians 2:15 tells us that at the cross Jesus disarmed demons in their attacks on believers, He made a public spectacle of their defeat, and He triumphed over them in His work on the cross.

**The herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea:** The destructive nature of demonic spirits was shown by their effect on the swine. They are like their leader, Satan whose desire is to *steal, and to kill, and to destroy*. (John 10:10)

This shows another reason *why* Jesus allowed the demons to enter the pigs – because He wanted everyone to know what the real intention of these demons was. They wanted to destroy the man just as they destroyed the pigs. Because men are made in the image of God, they could not have their way as easily with the man, but their intention was just the same: to completely destroy him.

“‘But the owners of the swine lost their property.’ Yes, and learn from this how small value temporal riches are in the estimation of God. He suffers them to be lost, sometimes to disengage us from them through *mercy*; sometimes out of *justice*, to punish us for having acquired or preserved them either by covetousness or injustice.” (Clarke)

### III. A Commission to Proclaim (Mark 5:18-20)

In the intervening verses between the last segment of the lesson and this one, the shepherds of the pigs saw what Jesus did and probably feared for their own lives. Finding themselves rather without a job they ran off becoming newsboys in the surrounding cities and towns.

The people were distraught over the prowess of Jesus, but probably more distraught they were at the disturbance wrought by the exorcism. They were confronted with spiritual matters too big for them. They were discomfited by the now sane man. The comfort of their possessions was disturbed. They preferred to usher Jesus away from them so they could get back to their old ways.

Now, we find Jesus and the former demoniac conversing.

**He who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him:** The man who had been set free by Jesus just wanted to be with Jesus. This man didn't want only what Jesus could do for him. The true change in his heart was shown by his desire to **be with** Jesus.

**He who had been demon possessed:** “That is a striking name for a man, ‘he that had been possessed with the devil.’ It would stick to him as long as he lived, and it would be a standing sermon wherever he went. He would be asked to tell the story of what he used to be and how the change came about. What a story for any man to tell!” (Spurgeon)

**Jesus did not permit him:** Jesus did not allow this because He knew that the man had a more important ministry with his own family and community.

i. Sometimes we have a hard time understanding the ways of God. The people of the city made an evil request: *they began to plead with Him to depart from their region*, and Jesus answered their prayer. The man **who had been demon possessed** made a godly request: **that he might be with Him**, and Jesus said no to that prayer.

This was because this man could be a light among the people of these Gentile cities in a way that Jesus and the disciples could not. But it was also to cure the man of any superstitions. He might have thought that he had to stay close to Jesus to keep the demons from coming back. “Perhaps, too, his prayer was not answered, lest his fear should have been thereby sanctioned. If he did fear, and I feel morally certain that he did, that the devils would return, then, of course, he longed to be with Christ. But Christ took that fear from him, and as good as says to him, ‘You do not need to be near me; I have so healed that you will never be sick again.’” (Spurgeon)

**What great things Jesus had done for him:** This was a great message to tell. This is a gospel we should all be able to preach. The man set free did, because **he departed and began to proclaim... all that Jesus had done for him.** His story showed the value of *one life* to Jesus, because this was the only reason why Jesus came to this side of the Sea of Galilee. His story also showed that with Jesus, *no one is beyond hope*, because if this man could be changed then anyone could.

**Began to proclaim in Decapolis:** “The Decapolis was ten Greek cities on the eastern side of the sea of Galilee, including Damascus. It was to this gentile community that Jesus commanded this man to go and bear witness.” (Stedman)

“Decapolis literally means The Ten Cities. Near to the Jordan and on its east side, there were ten cities mainly of rather a special character. They were essentially Greek. Their names were Scythopolis, which was the only one on the west side of the Jordan, Pella, Dion, Gerasa, Philadelphia, Gadara, Raphana, Kanatha, Hippos and Damascus.” (Barclay) The spectacular remains of Scythopolis can be seen today.

“He was told to publish what great things *the Lord* had done for him. He went and published what great things *Jesus* had done for him. Did he make any mistake? Oh, no! It is but another name for the same Person: for Jesus is the Lord; and when you speak of him as divine and talk of him in terms fit only for God, you do but speak rightly; for so he deserveth to be praised.” (Spurgeon)

## Lesson Summary

Jesus, throughout His ministry had empathy and concern for those marginalized by society. In today's lesson we see:

**Jesus' Compassion** - Everyone in that region feared this man. Jesus Christ did not avoid this man; He made a special trip across the sea and braved a storm simply because He wanted to deliver this one man from the grip of Satan. Thank God for the boundless love and endless compassion of the Savior! Praise the Lord, there are no hopeless cases with Him.

**Jesus' Confrontation** - Jesus confronts the demons, ordering them to release their captive (v. 8). The demons acknowledge the deity and authority of Jesus, v. 7, and they beg Him not to “torment” them. It teaches us that all spirits are subject to Jesus. They recognize His authority.

**Jesus' Command** - Every effort of man had failed this poor soul. Everything he had tried to retain a grip on his own sanity had proven useless. But one word from Jesus and He was free!

**Jesus Changed Him** - No longer is the man running around, crying out and cutting himself. You cannot meet Jesus and remain the same. He changes all those who come to Him (John 3:3, 5; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:10)

**Jesus Clothed Him** - No longer is he naked, but now he is clothed. This is just further proof of his change. What we need to notice here is that what Jesus does in the heart of a man is ALWAYS worked out on the outside of a man (Matthew 12:35)

**Jesus Calmed Him** - We are told that he is in his right mind. Where there has been turmoil and agitation, there is now perfect peace! He has been changed spiritually, physically, and mentally.

**He Was Committed to Jesus** – Once Jesus healed the man, he was “commissioned” to “*Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you*” (v. 19). The people of that region were afraid of Jesus (v. 15) and they demanded that He leave their country. For these people, this episode was just too much! They might have been able to handle a little preaching, but when Jesus started changing lives and costing them money, they wanted no part of Him. So, they drove Him away.

What can we learn from this lesson:

**Jesus can save anyone.** There is no one too gone for Jesus to save! Even those marginalized and cast out by society as this man was. To the watching world, the demon-possessed man was unsavable with no hope. He was mentally, physically, and spiritually gone. He seemed beyond repair. But, our God loves the unlovable. And He is in the business of saving the unsavable. Our God goes after people who are bound in chains, who are oppressed by the enemy, and isolated from the love of community. He unbinds their chains, defeats the enemy with just the sound of his voice, and adopts them into his family.

**Jesus can conquer any evil.** The man in today’s lesson was possessed by 6000 demons. He cut himself. He beat himself. Because it was the only way he thought he could escape his hopeless life. And yet, there entered into his life a way to true freedom. A person. Hope himself, Jesus Christ, came to deliver this man. To set him free. He won the battle for this man’s soul, but later in the book of Mark his ultimate defeat of evil would occur. Jesus can save any one, he can conquer any evil.

**Jesus will use your story.** Jesus set this demon-possessed man free and then he sent him out on mission. He didn’t let him stay with him. He didn’t put him into a three-year discipleship program to learn all about the Bible. He didn’t even have him walk around with other more seasoned believers to learn how to share his faith. He saved him and then he told him to go share what the Lord had done for him to his friends and family.