

Exegetical Notes, Mark 5:1-20
“Jesus and Legion”

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Mark 5:1-20

Verse 1

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.

- After the storm had quieted at Jesus' command, he and the disciples continued to cross the Sea of Galilee. (See Mark 4:35-41)
- They went to a village named Khersa, sometimes spelled Gerasa. There is, to this day, a cliff near this village overlooking the lake. In the area there are caves which appear to have been used as dwelling places for the homeless.

Verse 2

When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him.

- As Jesus got out of the boat, he was approached by one of the persons who lived in these caves. Caves were also used as burial places. So they are called tombs. It may have been that this man lived in a cave in which someone had been buried.
- Literally, the Greek text says that this man was “in an unclean spirit.” The word “in” means that he was under the control of a spirit which was not his own nor was it the spirit of God. The word, “unclean” is religious in nature. It implies that this spirit caused the man to live outside of the law of God and to do so without thought or concern. The word, “spirit” implies that this control force was other than human. It was a supernatural manifestation.

Verse 3-4

This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.

- This spirit gave the man supernatural strength. No human force was strong enough to restrain it.

Verse 5

Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

- The spirit kept the man in constant torment. He could not be still. He cried out.
- The spirit made the man self-destructive. He was into self cutting!

Verse 6-8

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won’t torture me!” For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit.”

- Even from a distance, this evil spirit recognized Jesus and knew exactly who Jesus was. The Bible teaches that the spirits know who Jesus is but they refuse to accept him as Lord.
- This spirit fell down before Jesus and actually appears to pay homage to the Christ. However, his real concern is not to honor Jesus. He knows that Jesus has power over him and he is afraid for his very life. He falls down before Jesus to beg Jesus not to hurt or destroy him.
- The problem is perception. To those watching, it must have seemed as if the man was begging Jesus not to hurt him or that the evil spirit in the man was bowing to his master.
- The spirit was afraid because Jesus had commanded it to come out of the man. That is, Jesus had commanded the spirit to release the man from its control. The spirit knew that though it was stronger than any human power, it was no match for the Son of God.

Verse 9-10

Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

- A Roman legion was a military division that contained 6,000 soldiers. By identifying himself as “Legion” the spirit was suggesting that many such spirits had control of this man. In this case, there were about 2,000 demons controlling the man (see verse 13).

- Spirits tend to be territorial. These spirits begged Jesus not to send them out of that area because this place was the place to which they were assigned.

Verse 11-12

A large herd of pigs was feeding on a nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.”

- There were many Gentile people who lived in this area. They kept pigs.
- Pigs are “unclean animals.” The Law of Moses forbids Jews to eat pork. Remember that these spirits were identified (verses 2 and 13) as “evil” but the Greek word so translated means unclean. This is the same word which would have been used by Jews to describe the pigs. Both are unclean.
- In this verse the evil spirits are identified with Satan. They are called demons.
- The demons realize that Jesus does have authority over them. They beg him to send them into the pigs grazing on a nearby hill rather than send them back to their Master, Satan.

Verse 13

He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

- Jesus gave the demons permission to leave the man and enter the pigs.
- The demons entered the pigs. The pigs ran into the lake and drowned.
- It is amazing to note that what no human force was strong enough to do, control these evil spirits, Jesus was able to do without lifting a finger.

Verse 14-15

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

- The pig tenders went and told those who owned the pigs what had happened to them. Word spread all over the area. People came to investigate. They found the man with Jesus cured, normal, no longer controlled by the demons.

- This observation frightened them because they had no rational explanation for what they saw.

Verse 16-17

Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man — and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

- The eyewitnesses told what had happened.
- The people asked Jesus to leave the area. This was probably so for two reasons. First, the pigs would have been valuable. Jesus would have been held accountable for destroying a large valuable resource. Second, other demons in the area, also territorial in nature, would have moved to maintain their control of it.

Verse 18-20

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

- The man, now in his right mind and free of evil spirits, wanted to remain with Jesus when Jesus decided to leave the area. However, Jesus did not let him. Instead, Jesus told him to go and tell his family what God had done for him.
- The man did that and also shared his story throughout the Decapolis, a non-Jewish region.
- Those who heard his story were amazed.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Jesus and Legion*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)