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“Encounters with Jesus: The Gerasene Demoniac”

Mark 5:1-20

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By Matt Hook

Lately I've felt bound....By my schedule. By my habits. By my lack of organization. By success. By others' expectations. By my choices. By my kids... With that said, I share with you one of my favorite stories, of a man in bondage, set free by Jesus.

Mark 5:1 *“They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 4 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. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. 6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 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!” 8 For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit!” 9 Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” 10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. 11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12 The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” 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. 14 Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15 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. 16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. 17 Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. 18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 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.” 20 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.”*

A freaky man. A freaky place, in the tombs, and a freaky story. Demons sent into pigs. People freaked out, who ask Jesus to leave, which he does, and a healed man who asks permission to go too, which Jesus doesn't. What an encounter! And it's where we begin our Lenten series on Encounters with Jesus...

Right after Jesus calms the storm, Mark writes *“They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.”* Interesting that this place has been lost to history. No one knows where it was.

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

- This crazed man was living among the tombs, the world of the dead.
- In our area, with our wealth of opportunities, it's easy to build your life around all kinds of stuff—none of which is life-giving, but really more life-distracting. How sad. So many people are living comfortable lives...in tombs we've created, every bit as beautiful as the Egyptian pyramids.
- The devil likes to keep you in the tombs, so those who are spiritually dead can influence you. He wants them to drag you down.
- How many of us prefer the predictability of living among the dead, rather than risk opening ourselves up to the unexpectedness of the living?

3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 4 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.

- Remember, this was someone's son, or brother, or friend, or even father. People had obviously tried to help. But they went about it wrong. Isn't it true: we often try to solve spiritual problems with human solutions. And when your problems are spiritual, we face something only an encounter with Jesus can fix.

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

- Sadly enough, it's not as ancient a story as you might think. The Gerasenes Demoniac was self-destructing. He was crying out. He was into cutting. Do you know the emotional pain that people who cut are dealing with? Simply wanting someone to understand them. For some, it's a way to gain control of a chaotic existence. For others, it's a feeling of release. Loners, crying in confusion and self-hate.
- What's your form of "cutting [yourself] with stones?" Jesus already knows. Holding on to hate, self-destructive drinking, or smoking, or drugs. It could be the internet: eating up inordinate amounts of time, keeping you in the tombs, stealing your soul, deterring you from everything healthy, including important relationships.
- Just like the Gerasene Demoniac, so many people today are crying out. They've bought some other lie, either about themselves or God. They have no idea how good God is, or how good they can be. They have no true sense of self-worth. That's why we're journeying through Lent looking at encounters with Jesus. So we can see more clearly His face, His love, His forgiveness. What are your chains today? Doubt or bondage? How many great people never express love and appreciation because they are in bondage? See the lie for what it is. Tombs or no tombs, do the people around you know how much you love them? Does your love help them see God's love?
- Especially young people: While self-destructive habits and addictions aren't restricted to any age group, youth and young adults are most vulnerable. Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year olds.
- Research shows specific ways to heal this wound: a stable family; someone leading teens to spiritual maturity; teaching biblical theology of pain and suffering; spending time with them; loving kids for who they are; developing a network of significant adults; attending a church that models Christ-like love; involvement with positive peers; making friends with your kids' friends; and praying for them. I'm proud that our student ministry and our church in general can help provide these for kids.
- Theologically, Satan ultimately wants to destroy God's image in you.

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 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!" 8 For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

- I think we underestimate the importance of this. Jesus had said “*Come out of this man, you evil spirit!*” In other words, Jesus had been praying for him. Prayer is the one weapon against which everyone is defenseless.
- People may refuse our love or reject our message, but they are defenseless against our prayers. You can aim a prayer at a person’s heart whether you are 10 feet or 10,000 miles away.
- You must know that Jesus has been praying for you, too. Praying that you would give your life to Him for healing, that you would give up the demons in your life, in order to have a close encounter with Him.

9 Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.”

- He had no name, like so many people today. Nobody knows their name. After all, even the good people only talk to other good people. How do people today remain nameless? Maybe they’re a statistic. Or a number. Or a category, like foreigner, or homeless, or an adjective like black, or white, liberal, or conservative. All of us get in trouble when we lose someone’s name. Names are so important in the Bible. I think Jesus hates it we call someone an adjective instead of a name. Before we’re born, God knows us. He knows our name.
- How do you begin naming? Ask God to help you look at a person and see that Jesus shed His blood for them? That nameless person in traffic you see for a second has a life worth dying for?
- Actually, a legion of Roman soldiers was 6,000. But while Roman soldiers all march together in a powerful way, 6,000 demons going every which way can tear you apart. It’s a civil war being fought within your own skin, just like the medieval torture known as “quartering” when your arms and legs are tied to 4 different horses which then gallop in 4 different directions.

10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. 11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12 The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” 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.

- M. Scott Peck, who wrote “The Road Less Traveled” and “People of the Lie,” is respected in both Christian and psychotherapeutic circles. He says demonic possession is real, though very rare. It’s a long, slow process that involves the cooperation of the victim to some degree, in which the person possessed repeatedly sells out to evil. It often involves loneliness. People start by making simple compromises with one kind of evil or another. There comes a point where the evil takes over. Addiction seems like possession. Addicts eventually use words like “helpless” and “powerless.”

14 Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15 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.

- When the established order gets changed, even if it’s for the good, we need to be ready, because people will be afraid. They put their future in the way things are, rather than in Christ. They put their future in the hands of technology, the economy, even...but they never stopped to consider putting it in God’s hands...

16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. 17 Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. (It was a huge economic loss.) 18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 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.” 20 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.”

Do you notice in the end there are 2 parties praying to Jesus? One is the people of the area, praying Jesus would leave, (especially the pig farmers), to which Jesus answered yes. The other is the demoniac praying to go with Jesus, to which Jesus answered no. He answers the locals' prayer, but not the demoniac's. Why?

Perhaps to show He is the Great Physician. Once the doctor heals you, you're free to go. You've been healed to be free. It's the same reason Jesus doesn't call all people to be monks. Jesus *wants* you to bring Him with you in your daily life. That's God's message. Whatever your duties, whether engineering cars or changing diapers, graft your faith on to your work, and redeem your work. Make whatever you do valuable for God.

Jesus answered the local people's prayer by going away. But He didn't go away entirely... He left this man—this Gerasene Demoniac—with His Spirit, so that Jesus continued to be there through him. In his own culture, people would *never* have come to Jesus himself, (especially after the whole pig thing). But they would come to this guy and hear the message. Jesus left him there to continue God's ministry; like today, Christ has gone on to heaven and left you and me here, to continue His ministry in the power of His Spirit. You and I are not equal to Christ in any respect; except by faith: remember what he said to his disciples in John 14: "*He that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*" Like the Gerasene Demoniac, may we go in that faith and help others encounter Jesus.