

Mark 5:1-20 || Freedom Fighters

Introduction

Good morning, Mercy Church! If I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, my name is John Hellams and I am one of the pastors here.

This morning we are jumping back into the Gospel of Mark for the third message in our series, "Signs and Wonders". As Pastor Spence has said the last couple weeks, the goal of this series is to confront us with the power of God and how it really changes our lives. And today we're going to be looking at one of my absolute favorite stories: the story of the demon-possessed man in Mark 5.

Like all stories, there are 2 common themes that show up in our story today: good and evil. Think about your favorite books and movies. There's always some sort of good and evil going on.

In my favorite book series, Harry Potter (yes, I am a dweeb and I'm okay with that), Harry is good and Voldemort is bad. In Star Wars, Luke Skywalker is good and Darth Vader is bad. In the great epic Billy Madison, Billy is good and Brian is bad. Even in Disney movies, the same thing happens. In Lion King, Simba is good and Scar is bad.

For most of us, we watch movies hoping and waiting for the good guy to win because we all have a natural desire to see good defeat evil.

When we begin to talk about Jesus and the Bible, a lot of us think about it similarly. There's a good guy, Jesus, and a bad guy, Satan. And like all of our favorite books and movies, of course Jesus is going to win. Because he's the good guy and the story just wouldn't be right if he didn't.

Our problem in this thinking is that we often fail to see how our story is wrapped up in the story of the Bible. How our story is wrapped up in this battle between good and evil it tells.

Some of us are skeptics. We just don't believe there's a battle going on at all because the idea of angels and demons is crazy to us. It's illogical. It's primitive. It's just something Christians came up with a long time ago to make them feel better when something bad happened. Dish breaks. "Ooooo, demon get out my kitchen."

For others of us, though, we go to the other end of the extreme. We are fanatics and are obsessed with all things supernatural. You know these people. Every few years, there's another guy who has mapped out the end times and this is the year that Jesus is finally going to come back.

For most of us, I imagine we fall into another category. And that's that we are apathetic. We feel detached. We nod our

head to the story because it's true, but we're just an extra that's not really affected by it.

My hope today is to make the case for the reality of the battle between good and evil and to show you that this story is really a snapshot of all of our stories. We are all captives to sin, but Jesus has the authority and power to set us free. That's our big idea for the day. If you leave with just one thing, leave with this: **Jesus has the authority and power to set you free.**

Whether we realize it or not, there really is a battle going on between Jesus and the evil forces for your soul and mine, but the good news is that it's really not a fair fight at all.

Alright, if you haven't had a chance to already, please open up your Bibles to Mark chapter 5. Like we mentioned the last couple weeks, Mark reads like a newsreel. Short, quick stories with a powerful punch.

The way we're going to study this story is really simple. We're going to walk through it verse by verse. I'll explain it a little along the way. Then I'll close by showing you how this crazy, graphic story, and the reality it presents, matters for your life.

Explanation

Let's get going. Mark 5. I'll start reading in verse 1. The words will be up on the screen.

[1] They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. [2] And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.

Alright, let's set the scene for our story. At this time in Jesus' life, he had been teaching and healing people (pretty radical stuff) and so large crowds had begun to follow him around. So, one night Jesus and his disciples decide to leave the crowds and sail across the Sea of Galilee to the other side. This is the story we heard last week. A great windstorm comes, the disciples panic, and Jesus calms the storm with just his word. "Peace, be still." And after he does it, the disciples are a little freaked out. So they begin asking one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Here's where our story picks back up today. I want you to think about the emotions the disciples must have been feeling in this moment. They had just gone through a near death experience. They were caught up in the middle of a crazy storm that they thought there was no way out of, they probably all thought they were going die, and yet they had made it through it. Not because they had rowed their way out of it. But because Jesus had calmed it with just his word. All the tossing and turning in the boat mixed with the feelings of "how on earth did Jesus just do that?" probably had them feeling a little on edge.

They finally see land, though. I'm sure they were relieved. "We really made it out of that one?" And then they touch their feet to the soft sand on the shore. What bliss. Finally some time to relax a little. But they had no idea another storm was around the corner. And it wasn't because of that chili they ate on the boat last night.

As soon as they step off the boat, as soon as they put their feet in that soft sand, a man starts running toward them. A little startling. But this man was no ordinary man. He was coming from the tombs and he had an unclean spirit. AKA he was demon possessed or demonized or a demoniac. I'm sure it must've crossed the disciples minds at some point, "Are you serious?! Now what?!" You ever been in a situation like that? Get out of one storm, one difficult season, only to have another one right around the corner? I know I have.

Now Mark's description of this demoniac in the next few verses is raw and brutal. He describes an incredibly dark scene with the shadow of death draped all over it.

Look at it with me. Verses 3-5:

[3] He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, [4] 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. [5] Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

The words used to describe the condition of this demoniac are absolutely heart-breaking. He had descended into a life of filth, loneliness, and terror. People feared him because of his strength, but they did not respect him.¹ So, at some point he had gotten to a level so low that he preferred the company of the dead to the company of the living. Jews would've viewed simply touching a dead body to be an act of great defilement. This man lived in a graveyard!

Mark says that night and day, he shrieked, he cried out, he even cut himself with stones to relieve himself of the torment he was experiencing.

Imagine what you would do if you saw a man like this? I'd sadly probably just call the police. I'd have him institutionalized because this dude is not only a danger to himself, but to everyone around him. I'd be fearful for my wife to get around him. For my daughter.

I'm sure the Gerasenes probably felt the same way. So they tried to do what they could. They put chains on him when he calmed down, but again and again, he'd snap and break loose of them. So they just gave up. They ignored him and left him to his life of pain in the only place he couldn't hurt anyone else: the tombs.

¹ Daniel L. Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Mark* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 104-5.

The truth is that we still have people just like this man living today, living in our city. It's likely that some people who sit in this room today struggle with similar problems. People who have voices in their heads. People who are violent. Who cut themselves. Who think the only way they can escape the torment they're going through is to rid themselves of this life. We typically classify these people as depressed, or schizophrenic, or even insane, but, I'm sure in some cases, not all, it is demonic oppression. Similar to the townspeople, we don't know what to do with them other than trying to subdue them. So we try to keep them from hurting themselves or others. We just have more advanced ways of doing it now. We have psych wards and institutions with rooms with padded walls.

I am by no means a clinical specialist or a medical doctor. You can ask my wife, any sign of blood or throw up or hearing about bones breaking, I am rolling out.

So, I don't want to go too far here or overstep my own knowledge. I believe, though, that we should treat people like this man holistically, using counseling and medicine as needed. These are incredible gifts the Lord has given us. But while medicine can subdue us and counseling can make us think more rightly, only Jesus can make us whole.²

² I am indebted to Trip Lee's sermon "Lord of the Demons" preached on July 22, 2012 for much of my thought progression throughout the sermon, including this incredible application point.

You see, Mark is trying to graphically show us this same thing. He is trying to show us the futility of man to help this demoniac. No one could subdue him, help him, free him from the demonic torment he was experiencing. No one until the day that he looked out on the water and saw a boat coming. And from that boat, his Deliverer would emerge to do what no one else could do. To set him free.³

Look at verse 6 with me:

[6] And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him.

This demon possessed man had never seen anyone in his life who could heal him, and, yet, when he saw Jesus step off the boat, he knew, somehow, this man can help. So he ran to him and knelt down before him. This is what people do when they finally see Jesus for who he is.

For some of you all, the only reason you haven't surrendered your life to Jesus is because you haven't really seen him for who he is. Because if you have, you will run to him, surrendering your whole life to him. Maybe you have seen him as a teacher or a good man, but you haven't ascribed the right kind of authority to him. More on this in just a bit.

³ Great thought from C.J. Mahaney's sermon "I Wish I'd Been There" preached on February 23, 2014.

Verses 7-10:

[7] And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." [8] For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" [9] And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." [10] And he begged them earnestly not to send them out of the country.

Alright, at this point we know the condition of the man and the effects the demons have had on him. But Jesus just showed up and so everything is about to change.

It seems in verse 7 that a shift takes place. Most scholars agree that the demons themselves begin speaking through the man in verse 7. And what these demons say is fascinating.

1. They know his identity.

Did you notice it in verse 7? They call him Jesus, Son of the Most High God! While the disciples are questioning Jesus' true identity in Mark 4, while Jesus' besties still didn't know who he truly is, the demons have no confusion at all. They know who this is. This is the Son of the Most High God. And yet, they still rebel against him.

This is a staggering reminder for us. You see, you can know who Jesus is without knowing him. Because knowing him

involves having a deep, intimate relationship with him, interacting with him, trusting him, and experiencing his love. Memorizing facts and titles is not what Jesus has called us to do. And God is not impressed with our book smarts. You say smart things about God? Good for you. So do the demons. If your knowledge of God has not led to a changed life, you are no better than the demons.⁴

These demons not only knew who Jesus was, though, they also knew his power.

2. They know his power.

The demons refer to themselves as Legion. A Legion was a unit of Roman soldiers and most scholars agree that this meant that there were about 6000 demons oppressing this man. That's a whole lotta power going on up in this man. We saw this power on display earlier. The way these demons had dehumanized this man. And yet, these same demons plead for mercy from Jesus, begging him not to torment them. Y'all, there is no reason to fear if you are more powerful than your enemy.⁵

One of my favorite sports to play is basketball. I try to go up to the Y a couple times a week to get a little hoop in. If you've ever been to the Y, or really any other gym, you

⁴ Lee, "Lord of the Demons".

⁵ Ibid.

know there's always those guys who look the part and talk the talk but for some reason they never get in the game. They got compression sleeves on both arms, fresh shoes, ankle braces (only real ballers wear ankle braces btw). They got everything you'd need....except for game. So they resort instead to stand on the sidelines and talk smack. But they never get in the game, because they know they have absolutely no chance to win.

That is what we see here. A weak, defeated enemy begging for mercy because he knows he has no chance to win.

The demons clearly know who Jesus is and that he has more power than them. But they also know he is their authority.

3. They know his authority.

You see, they realize they have to ask Jesus' permission. In verse 7, they cried out, requesting that he not torment them. In verse 10, they begged him that he not send them to another country. Y'all, you don't ask permission to someone who is your equal.

They realized Jesus was their authority, though, and so they had to.

And in verse 8, you see Jesus knows he is their authority too. He ain't scared of these 6000 demons. Jesus doesn't ask. He commands the demons to come out of the man.

We have all kinds of descriptions of how to cast out demons and deal with evil spirits throughout the history of man. But there is absolutely nothing else like this in ancient literature. You see, every time someone tries to call out a demon they always call on a higher power. It's comedic that the demons even try to do this. Remember in verse 7 they say, "I adjure you by God." Notice, though, in this exorcism there are no long spells or incantations. Like in the story of the storm, Jesus just says a word. Because he is the only one who doesn't have to evoke a higher power, because he is the higher power!⁶

Colossians 1:16 says:

[16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things are created through him and for him.

Even these demons were made through and for Jesus. Though they rebel, they can't go anywhere or do anything without his permission. Jesus is the Lord of these demons. Not only that, He is the Lord of all.

We must believe this with firm conviction, Church. That there is absolutely nothing that exists that is not under the

⁶ I am grateful to Tim Keller for this thought in his sermon "The Defeat of Evil" preached on April 2, 2016.

authority of Jesus. There is no man, woman, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, dog, flower, angel, demon, or devil that is not inferior or under the authority of Jesus Christ. God may allow rebellion for a time, and he may allow you to live your life apart from his Lordship for a moment, but Jesus will make all things new and he will bring all things under his feet one day.⁷

The demons know Jesus' identity, power, and authority, and yet they still rebel against him.

Alright, let's keep going. Lots of good stuff still left. Verses 11-13:

[11] Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, [12] and begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." [13] So 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 drowned in the sea.

Try to imagine the drama that takes place here. 2000 pigs stampeding going down a mountain. The power, the smell, the chaos!

Now, I'm sure most of you guys are thinking, "What is up with these pigs?" I get it. It's really, really weird. Not the kind of thing that someone would just make up. The

consensus is that this really happened just the way it said it did. But beyond the reality of this event, scholars are all over the place with why it happened this exact way. Maybe it was to give confidence to the man that these demons were never going to come back. What is clear, though, is that these demons purpose was to destroy. What these 6000 demons couldn't get a man to do was easily taken care of as soon as they entered the pigs.

While modern readers respond, "Oh, poor, little, cute pigs," the townspeople were thinking a little differently. Check out their response in verses 14-17:

[14] The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. [15] 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. [16] And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. [17] And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region.

The people came to see the man and what they found was a miracle! The man who was once running, naked, screaming, and crying out for relief was now sitting, clothed, and, best of all, in his right mind. What no shackles could bind, a Savior now unbound! This man was set free!

⁷ Lee, "Lord of the Demons".

So a revival broke out for a week, everybody celebrated, and many more were added to the Kingdom?

Nope. The people were terrified. It was the same way last week in the story of the storm. Jesus calmed the storm and even his disciples, even his followers, were afraid. People see his power and they just don't know what to do with it!

The townspeople's reaction to the delivery of this man was no different. 2000 pigs had just died, so I'm sure they were a little afraid for their wallets. That's a whole lotta bacon lost.

But, more importantly, they feared the One who could cast out demons by a word. What else can this Jesus do? If he can change a man like that, what might he do with me?⁸ They were afraid because of Jesus' power and authority. They did not understand him, but they knew they couldn't control him. So, some of the saddest words in all the Bible, they asked him to leave.

Verse 18-20:

[18] As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. [19] And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." [20] And

⁸ Mahaney, "I Wish I'd Been There".

he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

The townspeople begged Jesus to leave, but this man begged and pleaded with Jesus to remain.

It's not hard to imagine a scene where this man is lining up with the disciples to get on the boat.⁹ "What you just did for me, Jesus, I want to go with you. I don't want to stay with these people anymore." Imagine what this man must have felt when Jesus interrupted him, though. "The demons asked that you go into the pigs and you permitted it. The greedy townspeople asked you to leave, so you did. But I ask you if I can stay with you and you say no? What if I'm not strong enough by myself? What if the demons come back? This all happened so quick." But Jesus didn't permit him to go. Why? Was he really that mean?

No. He had a very special assignment for this man. He had a mission to invite this man into. Simply go and tell others what I, the Lord, have done for you. Start in your home. Tell your family and friends of the mercy I have had on you. Just give your testimony. You were lost and now have been found. You were once a slave to Satan, but now you are a servant of the Son of God.

⁹ Ibid.

The Gerasenes might not have wanted Jesus to stay, but he would not leave them without a witness.¹⁰ The man who was once longing for freedom himself, was now to go out as an ambassador, as a representative, as a fighter for the freedom of others.

And, unlike most followers of Christ, and many of us here today if we're honest with ourselves, this man did not argue, complain, or make excuses. He went and did exactly what Jesus told him to do. He stayed, he proclaimed, and people marveled. And it appears he was effective because the next time Jesus returns to Decapolis he had to do a miracle to feed all the people who came to him. Praise God for this life transformed by the gospel!

Now, we have reached the end of our story and I imagine many of you might be thinking to yourselves, "Wow. That was cool. But why are you telling me this?"

Great question. We've seen that Mark's primary purpose in writing us this story is to show us the power and authority of Jesus to set people free. I want to spend the rest of our brief time together this morning sharing how I believe this story is a snapshot of all of our stories. And how it gives us a few promises that should affect our lives today.

First promise is that:

¹⁰ Akin, 109.

1. Jesus can save any one.

This story screams that there is no one too gone for Jesus to save!¹¹ To the watching world, the demon-possessed man was unsavable with no hope. He was mentally, physically, and spiritually gone. This guy 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 unbounds their chains, defeats the enemy with just the sound of his voice, and adopts them into his family.

For those of you who think you're too far gone for Jesus to save, the reason he came to this earth was to save people like you and me. He loves you. He is ready to set you free. And the cost he is willing to go to make it happen? He crossed the Sea of Galilee when he knew there was going to be a storm to get through just for this one guy! To deliver one tormented man.

But Jesus would go even further for you and me. At the end of Mark, he would eventually trade places with the demon-possessed man. The unclean ones. The enslaved. With you and me. You might remember the story:

¹¹ Huge thanks to Matt Carter for his thoughts on this point in his sermon "Liberator to Captives" preached on September 9, 2012.

- Jesus is naked and stripped of his clothing.
- Jesus is crying out and bleeding.
- Jesus is driven into the tomb.
- And though it seems he has been defeated for a moment, three days later he rises again in power. Defeating death and sin.
- You see, He absorbed evil into himself. **He died on the cross that one day so that he could wipe out evil without wiping out us.**¹²

What power! What authority! What mercy!

There are some of you here today, though, who don't think you are as bad as this guy was. You know you needed Jesus to save you. You're thankful he died on the cross. But you weren't living in the graveyard, right?

Ephesians 2 is a stunning reminder of all of our conditions prior to our conversion:

[1] And you were dead in your trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

Every single one of us had this broken condition before we met Jesus. We were living in the graveyard, enslaved by

Satan and his demons, bound by the chains of our sin. But just like the demon-possessed man, if you are in Christ, one day you met your Deliverer. Verses 4-5:

[4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.

If you are in Christ today, this is your story. You were broken and unsavable. But Jesus ran to you. He pursued you and he made you physically, spiritually, and emotionally whole. Jesus took the unclean and made it clean.

What a beautiful picture of the power and authority of Jesus in saving you and me. A power and authority that is not used to oppress his followers, but to set them free.

If you've never experienced the love and true freedom that comes from Jesus, I compel you to not leave today without talking to somebody about it. I'll be down front with a group of other pastors and prayer team members, ready to talk at the end of our service. I compel you, don't wait. Come down and talk with one of us.

Alright, first promise is that Jesus can save any one. The second promise this story shows us is that:

¹² Keller, "The Defeat of Evil".

2. Jesus can conquer any evil.

Y'all, this man was possessed by 6000 demons. He cut himself. He beat himself. All, I believe, because he was trying to commit suicide. 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.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus put Satan and his demons to open shame. He showed everyone how weak they are. Yes, Satan and his demons continue to rebel against God. There is still sin and evil in this world. But when Jesus returns, he will finally defeat sin and evil and the brokenness in this world.¹³

Today, no matter how bad or deep or enslaved you feel to your sin, you can find hope too. If you are in Christ, Romans 6 reminds us that we are no longer slaves to sin but instead we are slaves to righteous.

Whether you are struggling with suicidal thoughts or anxiety or lying or an addiction to pornography or demonic oppression, whatever evil you are experiencing today, you

can find freedom. Because of the resurrection, you are no longer enslaved to your sins. So run to Jesus. Trusting that he has the power and authority to set you free. Because he can. And he one day will.

Jesus can save any one, he can conquer any evil, and finally I believe this story promises us that:

3. 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.

Church, this is how we are going to see the awakening we've been praying for happen in our city. By you and me going out and telling people about the mercy Jesus has shown to us.

Now I know you might be saying, "It's easy for him to do because he has a dramatic story to tell. I don't."

¹³ Lee, "Lord of the Demons".

I want you to know today that your story exceeds his story because his story took place prior to the cross.¹⁴ You see, you are telling the story of the Son of God who died for our sins. Who satisfied the wrath of God. Whose finished work on the cross ensures our forgiveness of sins. Who triumphed over the devil and his demons. Who God raised from the dead.

You are more aware in this moment what the Lord did for you than what the demon-possessed man knew when he went out to share.

Is there anyone in your life who does not know what the Lord has done for you? If so, you've got some work to do! Go share what the Lord has done in your life. How he has shown you mercy.

Conclusion

The reality of evil is very present in our minds this morning because of what is going on in Charlottesville. Church, we should grieve. But even on a weekend like this, we can have hope. Because Jesus can triumph over any and all evil. And one day he ultimately will!

Jesus has triumphed over evil at the cross. He has the power and authority to set you free. Run to him. Fall before him. Trust him. And tell others.¹⁵

PRAY

¹⁴ Mahaney, "I Wish I'd Been There".

¹⁵ Lee, "The Lord of the Demons".