

A Study of Mark's Gospel

Week Six

Mark 4:35-5:20

Day One

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

v. 35 – The disciples were about to enter a storm and look who set the course—Jesus! Often I have thought that my relationship with Jesus would insure a storm-free life. That has certainly not been the case! And I'm sure that is your story as well.

v. 36 – It can be hard to “leave the crowd behind,” especially when the crowd loves you or you're doing good work. Jesus was not defined by the crowd or the numbers of people following at any given time. He was more interested in doing the will of God than serving the needs of the crowd. If God's will meant working with the crowds, He was glad to comply. If the will of God meant turning His back on the crowds, He was willing to do that, too.

I had never seen that there were other boats with Him when He set out. **I wonder what happened to those boats when the storm hit? Did you have other boats with you at one time, only to have a storm hit and then see them fall away or go back?** I know I have. There's nothing I can do about their boat, however; I can only make sure that mine keeps going in the right direction, even if I encounter high winds and waves.

v. 37 – I have been on the Sea of Galilee (which is really a large lake) and the guides explain how this storm was possible. The wind comes through the mountains at the one end of the lake and as the pass narrows, the winds accelerate. Thus, a calm lake can be turned into a churning body of water quite quickly. Keep in mind that some of the men with Jesus were seasoned fishermen, and they were still afraid.

I can't help but think of the psalmist's words here to describe what it feels like when you and I are in a storm like this:

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me (Psalm 42:5-7).

v. 38 – When things don't go as I like, I can easily turn on the Lord, holding Him responsible for the current breach in my personal comfort. **Have you ever thought that**

God was asleep while you were going through a storm? How do you react? Do you fuss like the disciples or do you put your trust in God and rest like Jesus? The goal is to be like Jesus, even in a storm!

Day Two

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. 40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" 41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"^{5:1} They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.

v. 39 – The truth is that the disciples were just as safe *before* Jesus rebuked the conditions as they were *after* the storm subsided. All they needed was Jesus' presence to be safe, but they had to make His presence and not the storm their focus. The same is true for you and me. **Are you wondering why Jesus isn't rebuking the winds in your life right now?** It's not because He doesn't care. It's because He's doing something else in your life, maybe teaching you to trust Him more practically and completely. We must put our confidence in God's love and not God's power.

Weather is fascinating in its ability to overwhelm us and make us feel small, powerless and insignificant. We must acknowledge that we have no control over the weather, even when trying to predict it. I don't like being out of control in my life or environment. I must learn to control what I can, like my attitude and thoughts and leave the rest to God's watchful care.

v. 40 – Jesus asked two questions. Perhaps He is asking you those same questions today: **Why are you afraid? Why don't you have faith after all this time?** You may want to stop, go to your journal or a tablet and write the answers to those questions. You also may want to reflect on your answers to those questions for the rest of the week. They are crucial questions that we must always answer. Jesus asked good questions, and I want to learn to do the same. **Do you want that as well?** I no longer believe I must have all the answers, but I do think I need to equip people with better questions.

v. 41 – It's been a while (in study two) since we've tracked the amazement/fear/shock factor that Jesus had on people. If you remember, I decided to number the times that this occurred. So here we have the fourth instance in Mark and I am calling it *wow 4*. When Jesus calmed the waves, the men didn't say thank you, or express wonder or ask, "How did He do that?" Instead, they were terrified. The storm had frightened them, but Jesus' response to their pleas for help astonished them even more!

Instead of answering Jesus' questions, the disciples generated their own questions. While legitimate questions, I think they would have served themselves better by sticking to Jesus' agenda and ignoring theirs. I am always amazed at my lack of faith. I pray for something to happen and then I have a hard time believing that it is really happening!

Does that happen to you? When it does to me, it is the result of unbelief, pure and simple—I didn't really believe that God could or would do what He did.

v. 1 – The disciples had just finished one storm and they were about to go into another of a different kind. **Did you ever notice how God prepares you for what is ahead?** He won't give you more than you can handle, but He does increase your capacity to endure more. It's like working out. You build muscles so you can lift or do more. The same dynamic is true where faith is concerned. **Are you growing in your capacity to exercise more faith?**

Day Three

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.

v. 2 – It is interesting to me that they encountered this demon-possessed man *after* the storm. **Could the same spiritual forces that oppressed him have tried to keep Jesus from landing on shore?** And did the natural storm serve to prepare the disciples to learn their next lesson: That Jesus was able to speak not only to weather but to demons and all would obey His word (and ultimately their word)?

The man did not run *from* Jesus, but ran *to* Him. This tells me that the man had some measure of freewill, even though his behavioral options were greatly controlled by the demons. **Does it make you uncomfortable to talk about demons and the world of evil spirits?** Jesus seemed to have no problem with it. He knew that evil and the spirits who ruled that world were a real problem for humanity. We deny that today at our own peril and pay severe consequences in medical costs and human life.

Is there a problem you are facing that can only be solved by addressing this issue? I knew a pastor who said one time, "You can't pastor or counsel a demon. You can only cast one out!" That is so true! **Are you trying to counsel or reason with something that is unreasonable by its very nature?** If you persist, in the end you will be frustrated and the problem will remain.

vs. 3-5 – This man's demons gave him physical strength, for he could break chains. When you address the spirit world, you had better know what you are doing. You had also better have some power on your side that is able to subdue and control that evil spirit. That power can only come from the Holy Spirit.

This man's demons also drove him to cause himself harm, and he would wail, no doubt in part from internal torment and in part from the physical pain he caused himself.

No one could subdue this man and there he was, running toward Jesus and his men. The men must have been lined up one-by-one hiding behind Jesus. This was a storm of a different kind and perhaps even more terrifying. The man had probably been driven into isolation to this location by the local population or by the demons themselves. I would think men had a hand in it, for the crazed man was undoubtedly a problem to the locals. That is why they tried to subdue him with chains. They would have to feed him, however, if they chained him, so someone was making some effort to not only control him also to care for him. This was all to no avail. Now a different Caretaker was on the scene and His name was Jesus. Let's look at how Jesus was able to help the man..

Day Four

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!"

v. 6 – Here we see this tormented man running to what he intuitively knew was a source of help. I doubt if the man had ever heard of or seen Jesus, but he knew that Jesus could help him. The man knelt, a sign of worship and submission. I am not sure if the demons were doing this, or if it was the man or all of them combined, paying homage to the King.

v. 7 – The man didn't just talk, he shouted! As we shall see, he was speaking for more than himself at this point. The man knew who Jesus was! The Jewish leaders didn't know, but this man knew. The spirit world recognized Jesus and He often had to forbid them from speaking or else they would have revealed His identity. That isn't the kind of demonic revelation that Jesus wanted the people to have. But here He could not prevent the man from blurting out the truth—that Jesus was and is the Son of the Most High God!

How could the man have been concerned about torture? Look at his physical condition. He was already being tortured! **Had he not cut himself? Didn't he live in isolation, eating who knows what? Had he not been tortured for many years by these demons?** Yet now he was concerned that Jesus would torture him. This must have been the demons speaking or influencing his thinking.

I have seen this many times. People are suffering and have a miserable life, but they are afraid to come to God. They will stay in their pitiful condition rather than turn to God out of fear. Like our father Adam, we are hiding in the garden wearing our fig leaves, trembling at the presence of Almighty God—the only source of help and salvation we have!

v. 8 – Jesus was already at work as the man spoke, having ordered the evil spirit to come out of the man. Jesus did not need to interview the man; He had already discerned the problem. **If Jesus could do this, is it possible for you and I to do it as well? I think it is. Is this what Paul was referring to?**

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, *to another distinguishing between spirits*, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:8-11 emphasis added).

Jesus did not spend time analyzing the problem. He used discernment to get to the heart of the matter so that the man could be helped. Jesus must have come specifically looking for this man, so this wasn't a chance meeting. Jesus knew the man was there and what his problem was. Now the Spiritual Doctor was operating and the patient was in good hands, even though still in the grips of powerful evil forces.

Day Five

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.

v. 9 – There are times when you know there is a problem of evil, but you may not be able to discern the exact problem. Jesus knew the man had demons, but He didn't seem to know the name of the problem. **Was this evidence that, while God, Jesus did not have perfect omniscience while on earth? Did He ask for the benefit of His disciples, so they could see the entire process? Did the pack of demons take on a name known only among themselves, sort of like a gang would today?** I don't want to make too much out of this, but it is of note that Jesus had to ask their name. Let's just suffice to say that you must know the exact nature of what you are up against in the spirit world.

v. 10 – The man was speaking but it sounded like he was representing the legion of demons and not his own interests. These demons seemed to have a special interest in that area; it was their home. They did not want to be sent away and Jesus seemed to comply with their wishes. Why was this? I know some have taught on territorial spirits that inhabit certain locations. Even Jesus alluded to this fact when He said:

"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation (Matthew 12:43-45).

I am not sure if the legion inhabited this man at once or if they came and went as they pleased, so that at any one time there were certain ones "at home."

vs. 11&12 – The demons were intelligent beings, for they recognized the pigs nearby and proposed a plan that they be sent into those pigs. Notice that they had to ask permission to go there; they could not go without permission from the Son of God! I know it is controversial and open to various interpretations, but when I read this I think of the scenario in Job:

One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD (Job 1:6-12).

It seems from this passage that Satan himself is subject to God. As one man said, the devil is God's devil and is under God's authority. There aren't two equal gods on the loose, our God and the devil. There is one God and all His creation are subject to Him, including the fallen angels.

v. 13 – Pigs don't like water, yet the force of this legion of spirits was so powerful that the pigs rushed down the hill and drowned. That's a lot of pork floating in the lake! This is what the man had lived with all those years—enough evil to kill 2,000 animals. It is a wonder that he was alive. The spirits probably kept him alive, however, so they could have some place to live. **Where did they go after the pigs were dead?** I don't know but you can be sure that they stayed close to home!

Day Six

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.

v. 14 – I've heard the term "sheep herder" but not often the term "pig herder." With 2,000 pigs scavenging for food, however, I guess someone had to try and keep them in line. I wonder if there were pig dogs like there are sheep dogs? At any rate, the hired help watched this incident happen and took off to tell the owners of their financial ruin. I am sure that the herders were quite concerned, for it was their responsibility to tend the pigs, not to send them off swimming! I doubt too if the owners had pig insurance. This

caused quite a stir in the local village, so everyone came to check things out. Thank goodness there weren't any pig activists to protest this inhumane treatment of pigs!

v. 15 – The people beheld a fearful sight when they arrived at the scene. There was Jesus and the man who they knew to be crazed. Now, however, he was seated, clothed and in his right mind. This was not cause for celebration, but cause for concern. In fact, the locals were downright frightened by what they saw. This is what we call **wow 5**, another instance of Jesus' behavior created wonder and even fear in those who saw it. I have always thought that this was a curious response to an amazing miracle. They weren't expecting a miracle like that and they knew that something strange and terrible had happened. Let's study their response more in the next verses.

vs. 16&17 – When the locals received the full report, they didn't jump for joy that the man was finally free and would not torment their region any longer. They didn't reason that if Jesus had healed that man, then perhaps He could heal the other sick and dying, lying nearby in their villages. They did not ask Jesus what happened or to explain His side of the story so they could understand this power that set men free.

Instead of all this, the people asked Jesus to leave their area! He had just done a good deed, a magnificent work of deliverance and His reward was a deportation notice. They threw Jesus out! The people had more compassion on 2,000 pigs and sensed their loss more than the joy of one man healed and delivered. This gives you an idea of why these people were pig farmers; in a sense, they were pigs themselves!

There is one more thing they could have asked Jesus; they could have asked him to restore their pigs! They could have said, "Lord, we relied on those pigs for our livelihood and now they're gone. Can you help us like You helped that man?" They could not even think like that, so they missed their day of visitation from God, all because they had lost their pigs.

Don't forget that pigs were unclean animals according to the law. **Was Jesus making some kind of statement that they should not have been raising pigs in the first place? Was He practically showing how unclean pigs were by sending unclean spirits into those unclean animals?** My own thought is that Jesus was indicating that the value of one man is worth much more than any number of animals.

This story shows that the people had their values and priorities out of order and, consequently, they could not accurately evaluate what had just happened. They put economics ahead of people. That is the story of the 21st century as well. **Do you have your values in proper order?** If you don't, then you could be sending God away from some area of your life because you value money, prestige, or position more than you value His will.

Day Seven

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.

v. 18 – Jesus complied with their wishes and immediately departed. The man who was set free was now afraid, for his source of healing was leaving. He begged Jesus that he could come with them. It does seem a bit strange that Jesus would travel all that way to reach that man, enduring the storm and great danger, and then get right back in the boat. Jesus made all that effort for one man, a man whom no one valued in the region, whom no one even cared was cured and healed.

You could say that the man was praying to Jesus, making fervent petition. But Jesus said, "No, you can't come!" People say that God doesn't answer every prayer, but He does. Often He just says, "No!" **No is an answer, isn't it?**

v. 19 – Jesus left the man behind to tell the story of his deliverance. The people were caught unawares when Jesus came, healed the man and the pigs were lost. They weren't looking for God or a miracle. Jesus knew that if the man stayed, some people would continue to think about the situation and may even come to seek Jesus out as He publicly ministered. So Jesus left the man behind to give and be a testimony. In time, perhaps the locals would repent and turn to God. For now, the man was of more use to Jesus there than in the same boat with Him.

v. 20 – The man obeyed! He didn't sneak off to be with Jesus, but he obeyed! No one can refute your testimony. They may not like it, they may ignore or refute it, but it's your testimony. You can tell it to whomever you wish. When I have been in a debate with someone about the things of God and we are just arguing, I know I will probably not win them over to my way of thinking. It's at that point that I just tell them my testimony, something that God has done for me. They just listen and stop arguing. No one can argue with a testimony!

What is your testimony? Do you have one? More than one? Do you tell it often? Do you broadcast it through writing and other media? How old is your last testimony? Does it still have life or is it a bit stale and moldy?

The man wanted to be with Jesus, but Jesus sent him away on an assignment. **Do you have an assignment from Jesus? Or do you just live out each day, trying to make enough money to eat so you can sleep to get up the next day to repeat the same routine?** There's more to serving God than that. If you don't know what it is for you, I suggest that you pay any price to find out what your assignment is.