

Encountering Jesus (Part One)

From Fear to Freedom

Mark 5:2-20

This morning I want to start a new series called “Encountering Jesus”. With Jesus living in our lives, our lives are not the same. In fact if you are a living, breathing Christian, the impact of Jesus should be changing you. You cannot remain the same person after you have experienced Jesus.

All through scripture we find that Jesus changed people. As each of sit here this morning, I hope it is because Jesus has changed you – your thinking, your behavior, your lifestyle, your passions. **You cannot help but be changed by Jesus Christ.**

This morning I want to look at our first example found in **Mark 5:2-20**. It is a story of a man who was possessed by an evil spirit, who was no longer in control of himself, and who was living in a fog of spiritual imprisonment. We read in **verse 2-5**:

2 When Jesus climbed out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil spirit came out from a cemetery to meet him. 3 This man lived among the burial caves and could no longer be restrained, even with a chain. 4 Whenever he was put into chains and shackles—as he often was—he snapped the chains from his wrists and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Day and night he wandered among the burial caves and in the hills, howling and cutting himself with sharp stones.*

Clearly this man was in desperate need of divine intervention. And although we rarely find demon possession a normal part of our western culture, I think it is safe to say that there are similar characteristics of this man that we find all around us.

3 Characteristics of our Current Culture

1. Lack of Self-Control

It tells us that this man could no longer be restrained. There are still many who live life in denial of the fact that they have lost control. Whether it be materialism, drug addiction, notoriety, we live in a time when people are in survival mode waiting for someone to come and rescue them. They have found that what they thought was harmless and controllable, has now become destructive and manipulative. It is a helpless and hopeless scenario that only one thing can change – an encounter with Jesus Christ.

2. Wandering

We have just come off of a series called the purpose driving life – an important look at God’s purposes for our lives. Why do we have to look at these? Because as Christians

we have a reason to live another day, while the rest of the world is simply wandering from one experience to the next, never finding peace, never finding satisfaction, only to keep looking for the next best thing. People will always be wandering around life until they have had an encounter with Jesus Christ.

3. Behaviors of Self-Endangerment

The scripture tells us that this man was cutting himself with sharp stones. We live in a time when pain, fear, insecurity, abuse, self-esteem issues – all these things lead people to destructive behavior. They are in such turmoil and confusion and seek nothing but relief. They self-mutilate, they subject themselves to risky addictions, they put themselves in abusive relationships. Today there are more risk takers who live their lives on the edge of self-endangerment, seeking a thrill or trying to add meaning or satisfaction in life. Those who live like this need peace from the Prince of Peace, and they will never find relief or meaning until they have encountered Jesus Christ.

Can each of us see the similarities this morning. Although not everyone is possessed by an evil spirit, I think it is safe to say that Satan has definitely got a lot of people to buy into his counterfeit way of life, as a means of distracting them from the one who can change their lives forever. We pick our story up again at the point of contact that Jesus has with this man in **verse 6-13**:

6 When Jesus was still some distance away, the man saw him, ran to meet him, and bowed low before him. 7 With a shriek, he screamed, "Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In the name of God, I beg you, don't torture me!" 8 For Jesus had already said to the spirit, "Come out of the man, you evil spirit." 9 Then Jesus demanded, "What is your name?" And he replied, "My name is Legion, because there are many of us inside this man." 10 Then the evil spirits begged him again and again not to send them to some distant place. 11 There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby. 12 "Send us into those pigs," the spirits begged. "Let us enter them." 13 So Jesus gave them permission. The evil spirits came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the entire herd of 2,000 pigs plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water.

Now as we read this, we can get a little freaked out by the idea of evil spirits and we can fall prey to thinking there is an evil spirit behind everything. In fact, we tend to blame our disobedience, emotions, feelings, and all sorts of things on evil spirits, when the reality is that it may be to our poor choices and our paranoia.

Let me first say something about demon possession – You cannot have the spirit of God in you and be demon possessed. Light and darkness cannot coexist. As we look at this story we find one thing that Jesus has that changes this man's imprisonment. Notice a couple of things in our text –

verse 6 the man bows down before Jesus

verse 7 the man calls him 'Son of the Most High God'
verse 9 Jesus demands the evil spirit to give him his name
verse 10 the evil spirits beg Jesus to not send them to a distant place
verse 13 Jesus gives them permission to enter into a herd of pigs.

What makes it possible for Jesus to change this man's life and release him from the evil spirits he had within? Jesus' authority. **Jesus Changes people by his Authority.**

When it comes to any form of imprisonment, Jesus' authority is capable of setting us free. Any form of addiction, any form of hopelessness and despair, any form of aimless wandering, Jesus has the authority to override our circumstances. Jesus said in **Luke 4:18-19:**

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, 19 and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."*

The term "anointed" in this passage is defined in the Greek as "to be empowered, or to be given the necessary authority for the task." That explains why Jesus said in **Matthew 28:18-20:**

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

God wants to pass on his authority to us to use to bring freedom to our world. Look at **Luke 9:1-2:**

1 One day Jesus called together his twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to cast out demons and to heal all diseases. 2 Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.*

This imputed authority is not for us to use for ourselves, but it is given so that others may be released from whatever stands in the way between them and God. God gives us this authority so that he can change people's lives. Paul reached out to a crippled man in **Acts 3:6** and stated:

*"I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, * get up and walk!"*

Then when Paul was asked how he healed the man he stated in **Acts 4:10:**

10 Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead.*

In who's name are we given authority to pray for the sick, to see the captives released, to proclaim the good news, to tell the world that there is freedom available? In the name of Jesus. This is by no means to be used as a magic formula in our prayers, it is not to be used as a way to manipulate God, but it is the welcoming of God's power, of God's imputed authority to come and rule and reign in a person's life. **Jesus has been given authority to change people's lives, and you and I have been given the task to take that authority and proclaim it in our world.** Jesus has authority and Paul tells us in **Philippians 2:9-11:**

9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The authority of Jesus led to the man possessed by the evil spirit, led to his freedom. The story goes on in our main text this morning and tells us in **verse 14-16:**

14 The herdsmen fled to the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, spreading the news as they ran. People rushed out to see what had happened. 15 A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons. He was sitting there fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid. 16 Then those who had seen what happened told the others about the demon-possessed man and the pigs.

You would think that the people in the nearby town would be glad that the possessed man had been set free. The man they couldn't control or keep in chains was free, was back to normal, they wouldn't have to live in fear of him anymore. Why were the people afraid? Look at **verse 17:**

17 And the crowd began pleading with Jesus to go away and leave them alone.

They were afraid of the authority that Jesus had over something that seemed out of control. They were afraid of Jesus' authority and power. Church we live in a time when the authority of God is put down, is ridiculed, is seen as some TV Evangelist freak show. Yet the authority of God has been passed on to his Son, and has now been passed on to you and me. Not to be abused and misused, but to **pray in the name of Jesus to welcome the power of God into impossible circumstances and to change the lives of people bringing freedom.**

- When we pray for healing, we pray in the name of Jesus that they find freedom from their ailments.

- When we pray for those out of control, we pray in the name of Jesus that they find freedom and restored order
- When we pray for those who are searching, we pray in the name of Jesus that they find freedom from their sin and hopeless circumstances, and come to know him.
- When we pray for those who are so full of hurt and pain, we pray in the name of Jesus that they find freedom from their pain.
- We pray in the name of Jesus, welcoming his authority and power into this earthly place.

The world will ridicule us for relying upon one man, but you and I know who this one man is, and what he has already done for us. It is only through the name and authority of Jesus Christ that we can be changed. Notice what happens to the possessed man in the end of our story in **verse 18-20**:

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him. 19 But Jesus said, “No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been.” 20 So the man started off to visit the Ten Towns of that region and began to proclaim the great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed at what he told them.*

Many times we simply want to stay in the place where God has changed our lives, but Jesus’ response was for him to go and tell others that God is able to change their lives no matter what they were struggling with. It tells us that the man went to “Decapolis” which was a series of ten towns south and east of Galilee. Notice the message he was to give the people, “What God has done, and how merciful he has been.”

When you encounter Jesus Christ, when you have heard what he has done for you, when you believe it and live by it by faith, when you have owned it as your own, our encounter with Jesus leads us from fear to freedom. **The authority of Jesus may make others uncomfortable, but it is the power that changes.** May we tell others what God has done, and how merciful he has been to us, and may we pray for their freedom by the authority of Jesus name. Let’s pray!