

Home Study

Mark's Epiphany



TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Demons. What do you think of when you hear that word? Halloween? Horror movies? Most of us probably don't think about how demons might be at work in our lives today, but the writers of the New Testament certainly did. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

TODAY'S READING

In our reading today, Mark tells us about an interaction between Jesus and the spiritual forces of evil. Read Mark 5:1-20 and as you read, make note of what catches your attention, or surprises you.

Jesus' foot has just touched dry land in the country of the Gerasenes (opposite side of the Se of Galilee from Jesus' territory) when he is approached by a man with an unclean spirit.

Mark gives us some background about the man. When he was possessed by this unclean spirit, he became so destructive that the people of the town chained him up. The chains, however, did not hold him. He broke free from the chains over and over again. Finally, the people drove him out of town. The possessed man lived in the tombs, cutting himself with stone and crying out, lamenting his pitiful life.

Take a moment or two, and try to imagine how this man felt. What might it feel like to be cast out by family and friends? Forced to live among the dead? Possessed by demons? He was a man without hope.

While his physical situation is extreme, his spiritual situation is not so far off from our own. We may not have been possessed by demons before Jesus intervened in our lives, but we were people under the forces of evil. We were blindly contributing to everything that is wrong in the world. We were helpless, we were hopeless.

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In the story, Jesus steps off the boat. The demons command Jesus to leave them alone but Jesus ignores them. The demons try to intimidate Jesus with their number, but Jesus is unfazed. Seeing their defeat, they now beg Jesus to allow them to enter the herd of pigs nearby. In a final act to mar God's creation, the pigs rush into the sea and drown.

Notice the demons' fall, from commanding to intimidating to begging. What does this interaction tell us about Jesus? Is there anything the man did that made him worthy of this miracle?

Just like this man, Jesus has freed you from the forces of evil that once held you captive. We were all born into the rebellion against God, but through baptism, God makes rebels into sons and daughters. In worldly affairs, how are rebels often treated? What does this tell us about the character of God?

The demons have been expelled but the story is not over. The herdless herdsman rush into town to report what they've just witnessed. People come down to the water and marvel at what they see. It's the possessed man. But he's not out of control, he's not ranting and raving; rather, he's in his right mind sitting at the feet of Jesus.

We know who Jesus is and we know that this is wonderful news, but the townspeople are afraid. Pigs are running into the sea and possessed men are in their right mind! The arrival of this Jesus has led to all sorts of crazy events. The people hear the full story and are afraid. Maybe they're afraid of more spiritual events, maybe they're afraid of more economic loss, either way, they beg Jesus to leave.

In what ways are we like these townspeople? In what ways do you resist what God desires because it is not what you expect, or it is not what you have in mind? In what ways does God scare you?

Jesus grants the wish of the townspeople and gets back in the boat. Before he leaves, a final request is made. The formerly-possessed man begs to go with Jesus, but Jesus denies him. Jesus sends him to his family and friends to tell them what the Lord has done for him.

Jesus grants the wish of demons and ignorant town people, but refuses a request to follow him. Why? What perspective might this encounter give us for our own prayer life, and some of the requests that we make of God?

While some Christians follow the call of the Holy Spirit to witness around the world, most spread the word of God among family, friends, and neighbors. Who is someone you could try to initiate a spiritual conversation with in the near future?

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This world is filled with demons, evil spirits that would love nothing more than to steal your faith away. Be on guard, but be not afraid, for Jesus Christ your Lord has overcome every form of evil and has filled you with a new spirit, the Holy Spirit. We do not walk in fear of evil but in opposition. To oppose evil is to choose what is good: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.

PRAYER

Jesus Christ, Lord of all creation, no one can justify themselves before you, no evil can stand against you. Thank you for rescuing me/us from my/our enslavement to evil. Strengthen me/us by the Holy Spirit to resist the temptations of the devil, and let me/us set my/our hopes not in my/our own strength, but in you, my/our Lord, who will have the final victory. Amen.