

Legion

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to look at this for a few minutes this evening and depending on our time, I'm not going to take long, but we might just throw a discussion in as well, but also if anyone has got a Bible, just be aware of the passage, but also have a couple of verses and want anyone to look up at the appropriate point and read out.

So what we find here is that Mark is unfolding a picture and we actually looked at the next chapter last time, so I'm doing it back to front.

He's just unfolding a picture of who Jesus is, okay, and I want us to get that picture of who Jesus is to help us worship, help us imitate Him, and also help us to understand how we share Him better in our day-to-day living.

It's a tremendous passage, I really love it, and there's several things that I want to say quickly and I hope it will be a good forum for discussion next week.

First is the surprise, the surprise element that Jesus wants to teach His disciples, but also obviously us, because He's reaching out here beyond His own borders.

[1 : 25] He's reaching beyond the Jewish country and the Jewish people, because He wants to break down this insularity that the Jews have and that His disciples have about Him being their Messiah and that's all that matters, and their self-importance.

He's come to be their redeemer and their King. It's all about them. So He's really ruffling feathers here. He's really taking them by the lapels and He's going to shake them with the story, because He wants them to know and He wants us to know because it's important for us.

He loves the Gentiles. So He's gone into the Decapolis, which is beyond Israel, it's on the east side of the lake of Galilee.

And we know there was very few Jewish people living there. I think we've seen that before recently. A lot of Roman retired Roman soldiers would live there, but a lot of Gentiles.

Pig farmers obviously, not many Jews were pig farmers. So it was a Gentile country and Mark is wanting us to know as well that the Gospel goes beyond the Jews to the Decapolis, to the pig farmers, to Legion, to Scotland, to Edinburgh, to wherever the Gospel is preached.

[2 : 47] That's why He came. It's a precursor for the Great Commission that He's beginning to push people, push His disciples to remember the Great Commission. He loves the Gentiles. He also wants them to know He loves the unclean, this whole story and the ones that we looked at last time.

It's about people who would be regarded as unclean, obviously here, someone who's possessed by demons.

But also, we've seen it in the other stories with the women who had an issue of blood and then the girl, Gyrus' daughter, who died.

And He loves what they regarded as unclean. And here, it's a person, a life, a person with a name, even though it's not a great name, Legion, a story, a family.

And Jesus is reminding us and His disciples that that's the case. And the surprise is also that there's, in Legion, this guy who's inhabited by all these demons, these demon possessed, that Legion is attracted to Jesus.

[3 : 58] I think that's an interesting aside. The minute Jesus steps off the boat, Legion, it goes to Him. And then in verse 6, we're told again that He runs to Jesus and falls down before Him.

So even in the midst of this demon possessed guy, there's a real person who somehow is attracted to Jesus. Is this His last hope, this guy who's desperately in need?

So there's surprise. But there's also an uncomfortable mystery. Someone want to look up Ephesians 6 verse 12. And then someone look up, no, just Ephesians, I think, just now.

Ephesians 6 verse 12. Someone want to read that out. Sam, you look like you've got it.

So Paul reminds us where the battle is.

[5 : 03] It's the spiritual forces of evil. And that's part of the uncomfortable mystery of this story here is that Jesus is reminding us of where the real battle is in our lives.

Now, in this story, there's lots of mystery. If you don't find mystery in this story, I don't think you're reading it properly because there's demons. And there's demons who believe and who shudder. There's pigs. There's pigs that go galloping down a hill. 2,000 of them. And demons enter the pigs. There's lots of mystery in this story.

There's also that uncomfortable reality about the destructive power of evil. It's an extreme case. It's not just an everyday conversion story.

It's an extreme case. Legion is like the living dead. He's a one man horror movie. Yeah, all you can imagine in a horror movie, Legion is that guy. And it's horrific.

[6 : 01] He's not just demon possessed, singular. He's demon possessed, plural. He's got all these demons in him that have given him his name Legion. He's isolated. He's violent. He's self destructive.

And he's hopeless. He's living in the tombs. No one can go near him. He has shackles and they break them off. So it really is a picture of the extreme dark power of evil.

And of course, there's mystery in the story because there's fear in it as well, isn't there? I don't blame the fact that people for being afraid. Because Christ comes at the upsets, the community status code, isn't he?

Not just by healing Legion, but by sending the demons into their pigs. 2,000 of them, which would have been a whole lot of economic loss.

So there's this fear where there's a human miracle. There's this guy, Legion, that they knew who's healed miraculously. But there's massive economic loss and they didn't understand.

[7 : 03] And we're told that they were afraid and they wanted Jesus to leave them. Don't be too hard on them. I don't blame them terribly much for that. We might have done the same ourselves when we see the power of Jesus and what he's doing.

So you could say, we see a new Legion, but please, Jesus, leave our region. We've got to put it through there for you. Okay, so there's an uncomfortable mystery in this story.

But it's also a story of absolute power, absolute power. And Mark is wanting us to learn that about Jesus, not just for the disciples, but for us.

It's a very dramatic story because the demons recognize who Jesus is. And demons are quite scary for us, the dark side, the underworld.

And yet these demons who sometimes we might be afraid of need permission from Jesus to do anything, they beg of Him to not send them into the abyss before their time.

[8 : 12] That's in the Luke account. We're told that they knew they were defeated. They knew who Jesus was. They give Him as great. He's the Son of the Most High God.

They know. And Mark is revealing for us his power over darkness to bring healing, to bring defeat over sin and death, and to change desperate hearts.

So we have here a beautiful power, as opposed to the ugly power of the demons that we have, the ugly power which destroys and is brutal and rips people apart.

But you've got the beautiful power and the greater power of Jesus to restore and to heal. And there's a reminder that without Jesus Christ, darkness does reign.

Not just at an individual level, but in humanity. When Christ is taken out of the picture and when people stop believing in Jesus or stop believing in God, and I've used this phrase a lot, I like this phrase, it's not that they don't believe in nothing, it's they believe anything.

[9 : 24] And we're seeing that in our society as even God's common grace is sometimes removed from us. There's a disordering, people are not thinking straight and increasingly they're like they're living dead.

You need, and I need to give thanks for common grace, for the grace of God, not necessarily in saving grace, which we also give thanks for, but the common grace that allows His patience to let people not become like Legion.

And then there's the glorious healing of course of Legion, where He's in that great phrase as well, clothed and in His right mind in verse 15. Beautiful, very simple, clothed and in His right mind.

And that's just a picture of the amazing healing that Jesus had brought into His life. So there's that reality of uncomfortable mystery, surprise, absolute power, and then there's more mystery, okay,

and then I'll just apply it for a minute or two.

There's more mystery. There's three cries to Jesus in this passage, three different cries, it's the same word each time, *paricalio*, it's the Greek word, that there's three appeals to Jesus from three different parties in this story.

[10:43] And there's mystery in the way Jesus responds, because if I'd sat here with you and had given you these three requests, and how Jesus would answer, we would all have given the opposite, probably, if we didn't know the story.

So in verse 13, and I'm struggling a bit because it's quite dark at this place, and I'm going blind and the printing is small.

Verse 12, rather, they begged, that's the same word, okay, it's the begging word I'm looking at, they begged Him, that is the demons, send us into the pigs, let us enter them.

And He says yes to the demons. He says yes to the disembodied demons so that they can find a body, pigs, and go into them.

And He then, they knock the pigs over the cliff into the water, and it quite often speaks, I think water had a kind of significance for the destruction even of demons I've read somewhere.

[11:50] So they begged, and He said yes. And then in verse 17, the people also began to beg, it's the same word, to depart from the region.

They pleaded with Him to leave. He said yes, He said yes to the demons, and He said yes to the people to leave the region.

And in verse 18, we're told that, yeah, verse 18, Legion, as He was getting into the boat Jesus, the man who had been possessed with demons, it's not called Legion interestingly there, the man who had been possessed with demons begged Him that He might go with them.

And He says no. Now we would have probably all thought the opposite, wouldn't we, that Legion wanted to go with Jesus, yes, come on, come with me.

The demons know, the people know I'm going to stay here. But there's mystery in Jesus' answers. And that's great because if we're looking at the Gospels, we'll always find that Jesus doesn't do what we expect Him to do.

[13:03] And that's because He's God, and His ways are higher than our ways. So just briefly can we learn some of the things that we can learn quickly, not just about Christ and ourselves, but also, and I haven't mentioned anything about this yet, sharing our faith.

It's a bad thing in our conclusion to make points that you haven't mentioned in your main bits of preachers, don't do that, okay? The first thing is we all need to be appealing to Jesus in the same way that Legion here appeals, and even the demons appeal to Jesus.

He was falling on His knees. And in our response to Christ, there must always be this foundational falling onto our knees, recognizing who He is.

Let's stop making Him powerless and small and weak and indifferent. You've never met anyone like Legion who needed redeeming. He was the living dead.

Jesus just could speak into His healing. And we need to be appealing constantly in submission to this Jesus for His help and His guidance, for His wisdom and His grace, and for that transforming power in the darkness of our own hearts that sometimes remains.

[14:19] Okay, that's the first thing. We need to be appealing to Him. Second thing is that He knows what is best. It's a great story that reminds us of that with regard to the answers He gives.

His timing is right. His word is true. He's not a joker and He's not a fraud in your life today or in mine.

And maybe especially when we think evil seems to be continuing in its destructive path. When the pigs in your life keep thundering down the slopes and you wonder what on earth is going on, when we don't understand, I don't understand really what's happening with the pigs.

And it's like all these things. You go to all the different commentaries, none of them have an answer to the difficult questions really. They all have theories and ideas about, you know, putting, making the people think about do they care more about pigs and Legion and all that kind of stuff.

But we don't really know. And we don't know why demons would go from a person into a pig and why they needed to be an embodied person.

[15:26] There's lots of questions. And lots of questions about evil, aren't there? We always have lots of questions about evil. But we know He knows and He knows what's best.

And you need to know and remember that the cross is His only answer. It's not one of many, it's not one of potential different answers He could have had to evil and sin in our lives.

The cross 2000 years ago in Israel is the only answer, the only way He could be both God, both just and both loving and both a Savior and Lord.

And it's the most, it's the weakest act, isn't it? Weakest act, being nailed to a tree, but it's also the most powerful act that's ever happened in the universe because of what was unseen, the battles that Sam read about from Ephesians.

And He knows what's best because like the demons who know that there's an abyss to come, there's a judgment to come. He knows that, there's a judgment to come. And we need to know that.

[16:34] In all the mystery and darkness and struggles that we're facing, He knows, okay, that's the second thing. I'm nearly done. Third thing, and I haven't mentioned anything about this, but there was a family who needed healing.

There was a family who needed healing. Verse 19, go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you.

What it says really there is in there, it says go home, go to your own. That's literally what Jesus says to Legion, isn't that beautiful?

And isn't that how God often works? Legion had lost his family. They'd probably battled and tried and prayed and struggled with him, but he was uncontainable and he was dead to them.

He was lost to them. And their pain would have been great, I'm sure, known and loved. So heartache. But what a reunion, eh? Jesus says go home to tell them how much, tell them about the mercy that they've had.

[17:43] And what Jesus is saying there, isn't he reminding us that when we're converted or when someone comes to faith, it always affects more than one person.

It very often affects a family. And when Jesus saved you, he wanted you to be a witness and a testimony to your family, to those who are closest to you.

That's the most important thing, isn't that a beautiful thing that Jesus does? He puts him back, he doesn't take him with him, but he says, look, go back, your family needs healing too. It's not just you.

And when we talk about evangelism and souls, let's remember where our first circle of influence is to our nearest and nearest, to our family, to our wives, to our husbands, to our children, to our siblings, to our cousins, to the people that know us best.

Can you imagine the change? It would have been for them to see him even more than Jesus. And that brings us to the reality that not only a family, and I hope you're praying for your families, just add in that.

[18:55] But also the community needed to hear about God's mercy. I love that part of it. I would have loved to have heard Legion's testimony as he shared it, how much God, the mercy that God had had on him, Jesus had on him, when he told the people in that community, go and tell your family and those that are your own, back into the community.

Now do you see the beauty and the mercy of Jesus there? He said no to the people. Sorry, he said yes to the people when they said leave, go. We're afraid of you.

Don't stay here. In his mercy he said yes. He left them, but he didn't abandon them. Isn't that the great thing? He says, okay, I'll leave.

I understand. I know it's difficult. But look, I'm sending you a new person. I'm sending you one of your own. I'm sending someone you know and he will share how much mercy he's been shown and he will be Jesus' message to you and Jesus' mercy to you.

Isn't that great? Someone that they knew and they despaired of became the one who was the one who testified to the Jesus who had left because they were afraid of him.

[20:17] That's why I said at the beginning, don't be too hard on the people for saying that they were afraid of Jesus. I think we would have been as well in the circumstances, but he didn't just abandon them to that.

He sent them legion, which was a great act of mercy. And I think there's a great calling on us to remind us of what Jesus has asked us to do in the Great Commission as Christians here in St. Columbus and Edinburgh.

We're not to be to go back to another sermon, staring up into heaven watching Jesus who's been ascended. We're not to just ask to follow Jesus in the way legion did kind of luxuriating in the mercy

that he's shown us and just sitting looking at him and growing and grace and in faith. Important though that is. We're to do more than that. We are to recognize that he sends us, he sends us to those who are lost because I think it would be too much for them to see Jesus as it were.

That's speculative. But he uses us and that's his calling. And so I would just say in conclusion, share our story.

[21 : 39] Go and tell your people and those who know you how much the Lord has done for you and how he has ad-merci on you.

It doesn't say give the three steps of the gospel or the five steps of the gospel or even the Roman road. Whatever valuable these particular techniques of sharing the truth are.

And I think today people more than ever see through formulaic presentations of anything, including the gospel. But if we can learn, and this is the hardest thing of all, if we can learn to share how much the Lord has done for us, how he's transformed us, well none of us are legions.

I know that. None of us are in the same boat, it's not a good illustration, because he didn't get in the boat. But nonetheless we are legion.

He's symbolic of the deadness in our souls without Jesus and of our desperate need. And so we are in many ways all legion. We are all the sick women.

[22 : 48] We are all the daughter of Jairus. Because that's what Mark is trying to tell us, that we are people who have a story as Christians.

And stories are great today. Stories are powerful today. I think that my friend is the key to evangelism.

It can't be taught in some ways. It needs to be lived and learned. And we need to be aware of mercy before we can share it.

So the deeper our understanding of what Jesus has done for us will enable us to mould our story. Even if we practice it in front of the mirror, there's nothing wrong with that. Do that. Practice it in front of the mirror. Your story. Practice the difference Jesus is making. And maybe it's going to challenge us, well actually what difference is he making?

[23 : 49] Is there anything that really sets me apart? Of course there is in our own hearts and souls. But we need somehow to be able to verbalise that so that people know and understand.

And we leave the rest to Jesus. He just sends us. And he wants us to be his witnesses. So that's a great story. And there'll be great questions will come from that which you can discuss.

It'd be good just to have a quick discussion for five minutes but I know it's not a great environment for discussion or questions or anything about the story.

But has there been any questions that they want to ask? I would love a bit of discussion. I'd love a bit of discussion. You could try and catch me out even.

I didn't ask you to come ready to discuss so. But it's great. And I hope that it will spark a lot of discussion when you meet.

[24 : 55] And I hope you will go and think about it as well. Very much. Because it's a great challenge for us isn't it? We love to see the church grow.

We love to see new people come in. We would love to see people come into faith in this dark, difficult, hard context in which we live.

And I think understanding the Legion and the way what Jesus is teaching us from Legion will help us and will help our prayers. We'll educate our prayers towards that.

So okay. I'll pray briefly. Father God, we thank you for just the privilege of sharing that story.

One we know well. One we've maybe read many times and we've maybe laughed at the pigs running down the hill and wondered what on earth that's about.

[25 : 52] We confess we don't really know. But we recognize there's really deep truth here. And really fresh, significant truth.

And about our understanding ourselves. Understanding what you've done for us. And bowing our knee to you as the one who's worthy of worship.

And we thank you that you always so often do what we least expect. Because your ways are higher than our ways. And if we're going to live like that, if we're going to live in that higher way ourselves, we need to be rooted deeply in your character and in your love and in your grace and in your power because we can't do it on our own.

Amen.