

Legion!

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Date: 26 March 2023

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[0 : 00] If you turn with me this morning to Mark's Gospel chapter 5 to these first 20 verses in our ongoing study on this amazing gospel.

And if you remember, if you have been with us over the last number of weeks, we've seen that the theme of Mark is very much focused on a swift journey through the life of Christ, a kind of urgent look at His life because He's so important and wanting to make clear to His readers who Jesus is, and the other side of it is what discipleship is.

So you've got these two elements that come across a great deal in the gospel of Matthew, who Jesus is, and therefore what it means to follow Him. And that's amazingly relevant and amazingly significant for us this morning.

But maybe as we've looked at this passage today, you've been a little bit spooked. You may be spooked because for our kind of sophisticated modern 21st century minds, we're not terribly comfortable with the whole idea of demon possession and maybe even so the seeming destruction of animals that we have in this story of legion.

And I think therefore it becomes a challenge for us. It's a challenge because so often in the lives that we are living today, they're sanitized and we do avoid contemplating evil and the reality of evil that we see around us.

[1 : 26] And sometimes dare I say it even in our own hearts, as Corrie spoke about last Sunday evening. We can fill our lives with little passions, with distractions and with micro-causes, none of which are insignificant.

But often we can use them to salvage our conscience a little bit and absolve our guilt about not dealing with some of the bigger issues of life, avoiding the questions of life and death.

Many people will do that. Many people will simply not consider the purposelessness of our existence if it has no ultimate meaning.

So maybe for today, I don't know everybody who's in here today, probably know most people. But maybe today this will be for you the first step of breaking down some of these unwillingness to contemplate Jesus Christ and the reality, and sometimes the uncomfortable reality of who He is.

Maybe, and I pray it will be the last piece in the jigsaw for some today as we look at God's Word. And if you've been a Christian and had a Christian for many years, maybe it will be, and I pray that it will be a building block for you in your life as you seek to know more about Jesus and know more about discipleship.

[2 : 47] Because in this passage, something really big and significant and important is happening. If you were here last week, Corey looked at Jesus stilling the storm, and the question at the end of that chapter, and of course there's no chapter divisions, originally, is who is this? Who is the great question? Who is this? The disciples asked. Even the winds and the waves obey Him.

And it's a great question that tumbles on into the next chapter as well, as Mark explains more. It's a vital question to wrestle with because He claims accountability and significance in your life. In 2 Corinthians 5, 10, we have these words, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each of us may receive what is due for the things done while in the body good or bad.

It's really significant that we consider who Jesus is because we will all, by the claims of God's Word, stand before Him in judgment.

And He's very much the center of this story. There's other characters in the story, but Jesus is very much the center of the story. And we see that in one word that's used three times in the story of different people in the story, and it's the begging that goes on, the appealing that goes on. And we see three times, different groups of different individuals appeal to Jesus or beg Him or call to Him because He's the center of the story.

The demons call out to Him because they know that He is sovereign and authority to devour them and plead that He put them into the pigs.

[4 : 40] Then we see also that the people of the area, they beg Jesus to leave. They don't want anything to do with Him. They don't want Him at the center. The demons don't want Him at the center. And in Legion, who is healed, He also begs of Jesus to go with Him. And that's the only request that Jesus says no to. He says yes to the other two, but He says no to Legion. And we'll look at that a little bit more later. Each of these answers in many ways is unexpected. But Jesus is the center of the story as it's formed through these three calling out, begging, asking Jesus to act.

So we see something about Jesus, and we will also see something about discipleship. We see Jesus' authority and power in this story, and that's really important. I'm just going to read some verses from Isaiah chapter 65 because we see the beginnings of an outworking of the promise of the Messiah that comes in Isaiah chapter 65.

I revealed myself to those who did not ask of me. I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call in my name, I said, here am I, here am I. All day long, I held out my hands to an obstinate people who walk in ways not good pursuing their own imagination. A people who continually provoke me to my very face, offering sacrifices and gardens and burning incense on altars of rocks. Who sit among the graves and spend their nights keeping secret vigil. Who eat the flesh of pigs and whose pots hold broth of impure meat.

Who say, keep away, don't come near me. But I'm too sacred for you. So there's a big, we see even in this passage that a recognition that Jesus Christ is coming to fulfill the messianic promises of the Old Testament that are at least hinted at in that passage in Isaiah, linking it with this story that we have here. That Jesus has come not just to be Savior of the Gentiles, of the Jews, but also the Gentiles. That the Great Commission will send the gospel out into the whole world, far beyond the borders that the Jews expected. This gospel itself, Mark, was mainly written for Gentiles, for those who weren't Jews. And he's breaking down the misconception even of his disciples or of the Jews around him, that he was bringing this radically divine initiative to go beyond the borders of Jewry, toward the borders of Israel, to break over to sail into the Decapolis, which was a Gentile part of the world. And foreshadow the gospel going to the ends of the earth. Jesus is no bit player. He's the fulfillment of the redemptive historical plan of history. And you saw last week if you were here as authority over the power of creation. It's a remarkable passage.

We take it for granted, but here is Jesus who just spoke. And that wow moment as God and man as the Redeemer who could sleep because he was tired, who could sleep because he was God and at peace. And when he woke, he was able to still the waves. And here, of course, that stumbles forward, or tumbles forward towards his authority, and not only over creation, but over the unseen dark spiritual world of demons and of evil through the healing of Legion. Now, it's interesting, isn't it, that we often see in the gospels that those who were demon possessed nearly always recognized who Jesus was, where the people didn't. The people were very slow to recognize who Jesus was, but often those who were demon possessed, the demons themselves, they recognized those coming from the unseen dark spiritual domain recognize who Jesus was. And we see that in this story. They said, what have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? They knew who Jesus was. And Jesus is declaring

[8 : 59] His power and authority over darkness and over evil, over sin and over death. And nobody seems to even need to explain the reality of evil and good in the Bible stories and the reality of demons and Satan and possession. And that's important for us to remember, because evil is a reality. It's a reality in our lives. It's a reality in our experience and it's a reality in the world in which we live. And the great problem, as much for the, in fact, more for the atheist than for the Christian is the origin of evil and what is evil and how can it be explained? If we are content to recognize God as the giver of good, then we have to defend the reality of evil as God explains and exposes it in His Word. And malevolent spiritual beings who rebelled against God and who brought humanity with them. So there's a bigger word here, there's a bigger message here, that

God is sovereign, that God is good, and that God is powerful in Jesus Christ over the powers of darkness and possession. So much so that He simply speaks, as He did with the waves and with the sea, He simply speaks, He commands the evil spirits to come out of this poor individual. And as He sends Legion home, He says, go tell the people what the Lord has done for you. This authoritative claim of who He is and what He's done. We see that, therefore, Mark is exposing for us the authority of Jesus, but also His great love, His authority and power and His great love. He immerses Himself in this unclean environment, as it would have been known to the Jews particularly. He was going into the Gentile territory, which was the Decapolis on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, a pagan area, regarded by many as a retirement place. Decapolis is the 10 cities, a retirement place for Roman soldiers, probably wasn't that many who actually got to retirement. But it was a hard as nails kind of place. And it was, there would have been much influence of Greek and Roman culture.

And He immerses Himself by going over into that culture. And He has an appointment there with someone who's utterly devoid of love and of life, separated from humanity, from His family, from society, a raging bull, untamed and untameable, a lost cause to all around Him, hopeless, brutalized, a living dead individual. That's really what He was, living in the graves, Legion. He was a living dead individual. And Jesus goes, and Jesus goes specifically, not only to the region, but to Him. You see, it's, it's, He goes there, although it's Legion that comes, runs out, Jesus has gone doubtlessly with that purpose in mind to meet Legion, to deal with this desperate issue and to reveal who He was. He comes to this demon possessed man, His name kind of reflecting in many ways the crushing power of the Roman Empire, overwhelming, relentless, brutal Legion. And it's almost like He's a representation of darkness in many ways. You could rename Him maybe Pandemonium, which is, He represents all this evil forces coming together. You know, Pandemonium is the name of the capital city of hell in Milton's Paradise Lost, all the demons. And it's almost like there's almost a personification here. But His condition is terrible. He is possessed by many demons. And Jesus heals Him in great love and in great power. He gifted Him new life. I wonder whether He gifted Him a new name. It'd be interesting to know. I'm sure

He did. Or maybe He went back to His real name because Legion was the name He was given because He was possessed by so many demons. It was an amazing divine moment. And it spoke, you know, that the Jewish people were misguided by thinking the Messiah would come and destroy the Roman Empire. He was destroying something far more than the Roman Empire. He was destroying the powers of darkness of which Legion was a representative name in many ways, although a real name. Not just of His power over societies and cultures and great world powers, but over a much greater darkness that we're all faced with, power of death and separation from God.

So great love for the area, great love for the individual, but also great love, I would argue, for the confused community of the decapolis. Verses 17 to 20 of this passage tells us that, you know, when they saw what was happening, they begged Jesus to depart from their region.

[14 : 34] He was getting into the boat. The man who'd been possessed with demons begged Him. They might be with Him. He did not permit them. They said, go home to your friends. Tell them how much the Lord has done for you, how much the Lord has adorned you. He leaves, He grants them what they want. Please, Jesus, go away. But He sends Legion back to His family who live there to be a testimony to them, to tell His personal redemptive story, to live a new and powerful and spirit-filled life among them, to bring healing to that people who said, sent Jesus away. Jesus sends Legion back. And it's interesting, isn't it? Quite often when He heals Jewish people in the Gospels, He says, don't say any more. Don't talk about me. But to Legion, He says, go and tell everyone. And why is that? Well, it may be just a difference in the context and the people that Jesus was speaking to, the Jews. It was a specific time-bound punishment on sharing the gospel because they misunderstood. They were looking for a different kind of Messiah and He didn't want that to be spread about. It wasn't the good news that they were spreading, but Legion was spreading the good news of His salvation. And it was part of a judgment also, as we know, on the repeated rejection of the Messiah by the

Jewish people. But this command to Legion predicates the gospel age for us. So the whole story of His authority and power and His love point forward to the climax, don't they? Climax and the pinnacle of the work and the mission of Jesus for humanity on the cross. The crushing of and defeat of evil and death, His resurrection and His ascension.

And Christ's initiative to reach out in love, personal knowledge and power to bring the gospel to us, we are Legion. We are Legion without Christ. Without Christ, all humanity is the walking dead. We just look different. But we all are by nature separated from God. And as Christians, we can say we've got a new name. And we can say we've been forgiven and healed and redeemed. We're not redeemed and possessed, I know that. But there's a recognition that we are separated from the living God without Christ. And that is the power of the gospel for us in our lives. So we see Jesus and we reveal more about Jesus in this passage.

Also briefly, can we look at discipleship? Because that's the second main point that we always find Mark is getting across. Now, as we do so, can I give you a challenge when we think of these last few verses in the response of the people? Can I challenge you, if you think more about what happened to the pigs first, then I think there's an issue there of your priorities and of your need to seek a deeper understanding from what it looks like just on the surface. Because the local people had seen something absolutely incredible.

Legion was well known. He was reputed. He was uncontrollable. He was hidden from sight. They probably knew his family, they knew his history. And they knew about the family's shame and fear and embarrassment by their son. And then they see in an instant that Legion is healed. He's sitting there in his right mind and he's at the feet of Jesus, whole, dressed, new to look at even in his life. He's at the feet of Jesus. But the pigs, you know, oh yeah, Legion's been healed by the pigs. You know what, by the pigs, their priorities are on the pigs and not on this remarkable new life that they see in front of them. And it was all too much. It's all too much. And there was fear in what had happened, obviously. It was challenged. My well being, there would have undoubtedly been income loss.

[18 : 46] It wasn't any pig insurance for them. It would have been huge. And it was all too much. So they just asked Jesus to leave. It's just too much. They asked Jesus to leave. Now sometimes it's possible for us to suppress the reality of evil and the reality of facing up to what Jesus says about our lives and about our need of a redeemer and about the reality of the world in which we live. And just as they couldn't face up to one who awoke their conscience, it's possible for us to be in the same way and to think the same way. The Bible and Jesus Christ makes us look at ourselves like a mirror and what exposes is ugly with a view of healing. But sometimes we'd rather not feel that and sense that. And so we just plunge ourselves into a material world, our own comforts, the avoidance of spiritual challenge.

And that means more to us than facing up to Jesus and the reality of Him commanding and asking and demanding to be the center of our story. Because He's our Creator, He's our Lord, He's our Savior, He's our judge. And if we do so, we're just waking dead. That's all we are. We're waking dead, living under His grace for sure, but waking dead. And it's important for us in our ongoing lives, and it's important to challenge those who are brutally deceived by thinking this is simply a material world and this is all there is to bring them to the point of seeing who their Creator is and what life is about and to recognize that dealing with Jesus is far more important than simply ignoring Him or plunging ourselves into a life of potentially hedonism or pleasure or just materialism without Him.

So there's a challenge there in the whole issue of the pick. I don't deny there's great mystery there. He's the Creator and He's the Lord. He's reminding us of the image bearing, nature of legion. He was a child of the living God. And it's about priorities and significance, at least in some way. But true discipleship then very briefly, three things very quickly.

One is that true discipleship runs to Jesus. He's the center of the story. And true disciples will always run to Jesus, God the Son, the great mystery of the triune God. True discipleship will run to Him, not away from Him. The temptation is always to run, no, go away, go away. But we run to Him. Especially as Christians when things are difficult, we run to Him, recognizing who He is. And He makes the first move. If you're here today and you've not been in church before or you've not considered the gospel before, He's made the first move that by the fact that you're here, by the fact that you're under a sovereign word. And He reaches out with open arms. He makes us, we are helpless. Everyone's testimony today is that as Christians, we were helpless, we were lost, we're spiritually dead, we're deceived. And Jesus came in His great love and says, live, live and know me. And that's ongoing for us as Christians.

We keep needing to be people who run to Jesus seven days of prayer. It's just a reminder for us. We keep needing to run to Jesus. We keep needing to go back every day and every way and every moment to Jesus, not from Him because He's Lord. That's who He is. So true discipleship runs to Jesus. It also enjoys a new life. I mean, Legion's a great paradigm of new life that we get in Jesus Christ. Christ is the source and the giver and the companion who enables us to walk into a living, miraculous relationship of a relationship with Him. That's I think what it means to pray without ceasing. It just means that we recognize who He is.

[23 : 01] He's in our company. We're indwelt by His Spirit and we can speak to Him at any time of our lives. What a great picture Legion is sitting, clothing in His right mind at the feet of Jesus. Oh, undoubtedly there would have been tough days ahead for Him. No doubt about that. And He was going to face death again. But death was defeated for Him. And death was a falling asleep for Him. And Jesus is for every Christian. I doubtlessly would have been tough days ahead for Legion. It wasn't that He became a Christian and then just floated on a bed of feathers. His life would have been challenging and difficult but a new life and then a new commission from God. So, we enjoyed new life and that's what we need to remind ourselves. Maybe even Christian for a long, long time. And it's all a bit weary. You're tired when you'd reminded that we enjoy new life in Jesus each day.

And lastly, true disciples, as Mark I think is teaching us here, not just the runs to Jesus and joys new life, but accepts His no and His go. Because that's what we have from Legion here. He's the only one that Jesus said no to. Isn't that strange? He says yes to those who don't submit to His Lordship and authority in love and grace and in salvation.

He says yes to them in His mercy. But He says no to Legion and go to Legion. And that's very often the paradigm of discipleship. It's no and go. There'll be unexpected turns.

He may be our friend, but He's not in our pocket. He's not our genie. He's not the one we come to fulfill our dreams. He is the living God. And the great prayer that we'll wrestle with all our lives as Christians is not my will but yours be done. That's the hardest prayer that God gives us in the Lord's Prayer. It's the biggest, hardest, most long running prayer that we'll ever meet, not my will but yours be done. So that there's times when He says no. And He said to Legion, no, don't come with me just now. I'll still be with you, but don't come with me. I know I understand why you want to come, but no, go. Go and tell.

Go and live your life. And that's such a challenge for us in our own lives, a lifelong challenge. I think primarily it is selfishness ultimately, although I'm not blaming Legion here for being selfish, but it's that He always knows better, always knows better. He always has a better plan for us, always. There's never a time when He doesn't. So there will be times He says you think absolutely and entirely this is the way that He should take me. This is the way I should go. And He says no. It seems a good way, it seems a godly way, it seems a right way. And He says no. And He says no, because I've got a better plan. You may need to wait on that. You need to be patient. You may need to be revealed, but I know better.

[26 : 12] And that's such a challenge for us because we're all little gods. We all want to be in the throne. We all want to make the decisions. We all want to say yes, yes, yes. But He says sometimes no, because He's learned this. It's a huge challenge for us. But He says no, but go. I'm appointing you. I'm giving you a calling. I'm asking you to go and do something really important. Be my ambassador. Reconcile with your family. Bring them joy. Tell them that your life has been transformed by the Lord, the great things He's done for you that you've received, mercy, so that we go in our lives and we're not kind of... we're not testimony machines. We're not going out there to give people a tick box list of what it means to become a Christian and kind of cold gospel truth. We're going with a story of what God has done in my life, in my heart, and how much the Lord has done for me. It's not a cold diagnosis. It's your personal redemption. You can go out today or tomorrow as Christians and say, the first thing you can say is, I owe my life to Jesus. You know when the opportunity comes up? That might be the first thing you can say, I owe my life to Jesus. Your physical life is your Creator, your spiritual life because you're lost. I owe my life to Jesus.

That's the point of His Lordship. That's the point of His authority, isn't it? I owe my life to Jesus. Legion said, I owe my life to Jesus. And so we can do the same as we go.

We don't need any great techniques. We don't need any great courage and wisdom in our self. We simply need to go at recognizing what He's done. We have great hope to share as Legion did. And so we're reminded in this passage, and I hope you're reminded and challenged in this passage, I certainly am. How well we know Jesus and what it means to follow Him and be His disciple. Let's pray. Father God, help us to know and understand you better. Help us to find fresh things each time we come to Your Word. Remind us that Your Word is a living Word and that you want to reveal yourself to us. You want to reveal that great secret of the gospel to us as we open our hearts and ask to receive Your diagnosis and also receive Your salvation. Help us in our walk as Christians in our discipleship.

Help us to follow You and learn from You and grow and knowledge of You. And as we come to seven days of prayer, Lord, we cry out for the people that we prayed for for a long time. Maybe since the very beginning of seven days of prayer, we think, what's the point?

Maybe a challenge for us today, Lord, as you're saying, well, you're the point. I'm sending you, go and help us to just feel the privilege and the strength and the support of His command and His empowerment and His resources to do that today and in the days ahead. Help us to come together, to pray for our friends, to pray and ask that you would work in their hearts and you would use us or other people to bring them to faith if they don't know you. Ask in Jesus' name. Amen.