Jesus Wow! Series Part 21

Jesus – Lord over Demons

Mark 5:1-20

Pastor Andrew Neville 13/9/20

Sermon Summary

When Pastor Andrew was only 8 years old – and living in a tropical non-Christian country – he was taken to a religious festival and experienced his first encounter with spiritual evil. Despite the heat, he felt cold as he watched a man wielding a heavy instrument and rushing about the place smashing anything he could find. Some were forcing skewers through tongues; others were having steel hooks pushed through their back muscles and then pulled backwards by a third person. None of these were magical performances designed to impress watchers. They were not made-up. They were real examples of demonic evil at work.

During a church camp in 1973, at an evening service Andrew was attending, a young woman fell on the ground writhing and screaming. An example of demon-possession. Eventually, someone managed to cast out the demon from this woman by the "name of Jesus." Andrew recounted that he could feel the evil around the people in both these examples.

Mark 5:1-20 describes one of the most pitiable events in the Bible. It is the account of Jesus' confronting a legion of demons and overcoming them, rescuing a person from Satan's captivity.

Verse 1 in the NIV describes the place of this event as being the "region of Gerasenes." There has been much scholarly debate as to the exact spot Mark refers to, especially as other variants have different spellings of the name: Gadarenes and Gergesenes. Wherever it was, it was certainly a non-Jewish area and bounded by a steep drop.

Verses 2-3 describe the characteristics of the man who came out of the tombs to greet Jesus. In Luke's version (8:27), he is described as naked. From his history, he was possessed with incredible strength which nobody could overcome. He roamed the burial area, yelling and carrying on, even to the point of cutting himself with stones. [Do you know of people who cut themselves today?] Think of the pain this person had; he was so strong it drove him away from other humans; he was so lonely he could only find solace among the dead. Nakedness equals humiliation. [Think of the Nazi treatment of Jews, to have them undress and form lines totally naked.]

The man's state indicates he was supernaturally possessed. When Jesus asked the man his name, the spirits within him answered, "Legion – for we are many" (v.9).

In the Empire of Rome, a legion was the basis of their armies –5000-6000 men. [Equivalent to a brigade or regiment in modern armies.] The more powerful Satan makes a person, the weaker becomes that person's freedom.

"Whatever controls us is our Lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by acceptance. We do not control ourselves; we are controlled by the Lord of our lives" (Rebecca Pippert).

Whatever Satan gives – he takes more away. Enslavement to him slowly takes over. However, when we put Jesus first, Satan has no authority over us.

In verse 6, the man ran towards Jesus and fell at his knees. Despite the man's enormous power, he quailed with fear in the presence of Jesus. The demons within the man instantly recognized who Jesus was. They were nothing compared with the power within Jesus. When Jesus ordered them to come out of the man, they pleaded with him not to send them out of the area; if they had to go, could they go to the large herd of pigs nearby? Jesus assented. Once they were in the pigs, the pigs in a frenzy ran to the cliff edge and dropped into the sea. If Satan cannot destroy a human, he will try to hurt something close to that human. The number of dead pigs (2000) would be a huge loss to the owners.

We undervalue evil today! We think evil has its origin in human activity. Therefore, we think we can solve the problem ourselves. This is a lie. No one has the power to control the work of Satan.

"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" (Ephesians 6:12).

Humanity requires a greater power than itself to overcome Satan. Only Jesus has that power. In this passage today, we see the three reactions of the demons within the possessed man:

1. They display **pride** in their control over the man.
2. When recognizing a power greater than their own, they turn to **pleading**.
3. They cannot overcome the **power** of Jesus.

Verses 14-16 contain an interesting phenomenon. The people of the area (non-Jews) were afraid of Jesus as a result of his action. They saw Jesus as someone able to destroy their livelihoods and consequently had no desire for him to hang around. Then in verses 18-20, the man freed of his demons wanted to stay with Jesus, but Jesus said, "No, you must go and tell your people all about me." He did, perhaps becoming the first non-Jewish missionary for Jesus.

Today, in NZ culture, we rarely see a manifestation of demonic possession. Consequently, we don't see exorcisms either. For it is only the name of Jesus that drives out a demon.

It is possible demon possession is mimicking psychological problems or imitating illnesses in society. More common examples of Satan's work today occur as attacks on the human mind with the spreading of false information, doctrines and ideas.

The Christian response: **"And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Timothy 24-26).**

The stock way to deal with Satan and his work today is to preach **gently**. Are you an influencer – for God, not Satan?

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:27-30).

Satan cannot snatch a Christian away from God, but one must remember the caveat, **"Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).** Satan has countless ways of tempting us and will continue to do so. We must go back to standing firmly in faith on God's Word.

Make sure Jesus is No. 1 in your life.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever witnessed a demon-possessed person exhibiting the traits of a controlling spirit?

2. If you did, did you know what to do?

3. What do you understand by the exorcism expression: "In the name of Jesus."

4. How does Satan operate in today's world?

5. Under what conditions are demons more likely to possess people today?

6. The demoniac, in this story, cut himself with stones. Have you heard of this self-inflicted punishment today? Can you explain it?

7. Why does nakedness, in front of other people, cause humiliation? And why does it not bother people who call themselves "nudists"?

8. If we think evil has its origin in human activity, then we think we can do something about it. How is politics an outworking of this point of view? How about the positive psychology that recommends “dealing with one’s demons”?

Prayer Points for Life Groups for this Week

Prayer suggestions for Life Groups

Pray for the persecuted church in the 10 most dangerous countries for followers of Jesus: North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Eritrea, Sudan, Yemen, Iran and India.

For New Zealand Christians that God in his mercy and by his Spirit, will enable them to attend church again, and that they will relish the opportunity.

Ask God for the sacrificial love of Jesus to see our brothers and sisters in Christ globally as real spiritual family… always seeking to understand their needs and to be generous towards them with our prayers and our material riches.