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EXCERPT

**Part I
Power over Demons**

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The Man Who Lived in a Graveyard

Mark 5: 1–20; Matthew 8:28–34; Luke 8:26–39

One of Jesus' disciples might tell the story this way.

On that particular day we crossed the Sea of Galilee going towards the region of the Gadarenes. The sea was calm, and it was a good time to prepare ourselves by talking to the Master. No one asked the Lord why we were going there because we knew that he had a good reason. What none of us knew was that even before we had disembarked a man in the distance was observing us.

I say "a man" not knowing what to call him. By the way he behaved, he appeared to be more like a wild beast. If I had known what kind of a person he was, I would have stayed in the boat in order to avoid meeting with this violent and dangerous individual.

When he saw us from the distance, he came at us like a bolt to frighten or attack us. We all stood paralyzed as we saw him approaching at great speed. But he went straight to the Master and bowed down to worship Him! The man had a beastly appearance. He was almost naked, and his body and hair were dirty and unkempt. His skin was covered with sores—both old and recent—from self-inflicted wounds. He was lean and so strong that he broke every type of chain the people had used to try to control him. We heard that no one dared to use the road near where he roamed.

This passage reminds me of King Nebuchadnezzar's madness when God punished his pride and changed his mentality so that he thought and acted like a beast in the field. He lived among the animals.

A Man Out of Place

The Scripture says in Mark 5:1–2, “Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.” A man with an unclean spirit? This means that he was demon possessed. He lived among the tombs because his mentality is so disturbed that to him it is a fairly good place to live. The following verse says, “who had *his* dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains.”

This man, who had physical freedom because he could not be bound, was spiritually enslaved. Verse 4 gives us more details: “because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces: neither could anyone tame him.” Even though every effort to control this man was useless, he had no peace. In verse 5 we read: “And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.”

What a contrast there is between the life this man led and the plan God has for every person! God’s plan is for each of us to live in a supportive, peaceful family structure. The suffering and despair of this Gadarene were continual. Day and night he screamed and yelled. He lived the way a wild animal would. He sneaked around the graves and injured himself with rocks. If a psychiatrist saw him today, he would call his condition a psychosis, most likely with hallucinations with intentions of self harm. His medical records in a hospital would probably say that “this patient is aggressive and at high risk for harm.” In an institute for mental health patients, he would be placed under constant surveillance.

Yet this man was probably once a healthy boy. When he was born, his mother probably held him in her arms and kissed him over and over. She may have proudly taken him to the neighbor’s house and listened while everyone exclaimed, “What beautiful eyes! What a pretty nose! How well formed his fingers are!” How could it be that this child who happily played with his little friends was transformed into a being that ignited terror and repugnance?

The narrative continues in Mark 5:6, “When he saw Jesus afar, he ran and worshiped him.” Imagine what the disciples must have felt. *We all stayed petrified to see what would happen. Of course, we were willing to defend the Master if necessary, since this man inspired horror and fear. But to our amazement Jesus was not afraid.* In fact, Jesus looked upon the Gadarene with compassion. At the same time, his voice commanded authority. It was the same voice that controlled the Universe. Verse 7 says of the Gadarene, “And he cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.’”

This scene must have been terrifying. The man was raging with all his strength. “What have I to do with You, Jesus?” Then with a breathtaking voice, the Lord Jesus spoke calmly and authoritatively, “Come out of the man, unclean spirit!” (Mark 5:8). The Lord immediately attacked the problem. Then he asked, “What is your name?” Jesus Christ did not ask him his name because He did not know it; He is God manifested in the flesh and knows all things. Instead, He required the man to identify himself. So many people today would tell the Master,

“My name is Luis.” But this man instead named his problem. Today, he might call himself “alcohol” because he can’t quit drinking or “pain and anguish” because his life is dominated by those feelings. The Gadarene said to Jesus, “My name *is* Legion; for we are many.”

Let us study this man’s words. It would seem that the very presence of the Lord Jesus was tormenting him. In verses 10–14, we read,

Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains. So all the demons begged Him, saying, “Send us to the swine, that we may enter them.” And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea. So those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And then went out to see what it was that had happened.

Some commentators have suggested that the swine preferred to die rather than to live with the demons. The destruction of the swine clearly indicates the perverse instinct of the foul spirits that invaded them. Verse 14 tells us: “And those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened.”

Of course, among the Jews, swine were unclean and were not consumed. It was even illegal to raise them. Yet the owners are upset because they lost a great herd of something they were not supposed to possess anyway!

Jesus’ Compassion

This miracle especially interests me because it shows Jesus Christ going to the other side of the Sea of Galilee solely to reach this man. It would have been more convenient for the Savior to stay where he was and to reach multitudes with his message. However, the Messiah crossed the sea just to reach one man who was a danger to society. No one except Jesus Christ would have considered this individual so important.

This is one of the most attractive parts of the story for me. In some ways, I believe that Jesus’ leaving his duties to meet this man is of more importance than the healing itself. Notice the obvious change in the healed man. Mark 5:15 says, “And they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind: and they were afraid.”

The fact that he is sitting down shows us that now he is at peace. He is not yelling like a wild beast. He is also dressed. We are not told where the clothes came from; we just know that before he had gone around almost naked. Now he is modest, honoring the Savior with the way he has dressed. We are also told he was in his right mind. The same word is translated in other parts of the Bible as “sober.” He has a transformed countenance. His eyes reflect peace and love for his Savior. His mind is clear and normal. He is no longer agitated and confused.

I find it interesting to see the reaction of the people in the community. They could have chosen to listen to Jesus of Nazareth. But instead they demanded he leave the region. They were focused on their economic loss; they would rather have swine than miracles. In the beginning they were afraid of the demon-possessed man. Then they were afraid of the Man who performed the miracle. Instead of listening to His teachings, they wanted Him to leave. Jesus Christ's power frightened them. Verse 18 tells us, "And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him." What a tender scene! The Lord Jesus was getting into his boat, as the boat was leaving the shore, there was one man left alone at the water's edge waving good-bye. Maybe his eyes were full of tears, but he had a changed his life. Jesus had saved him!

While the boat sailed away to the rhythmic sounds of oars striking the water, the One who was God manifested in the flesh was leaving, too. Jesus Christ had accomplished what He came to do. The people in the region pleaded with Him to leave. Before He left, though, he had a command for the healed man, as we read in verses 19–20: "Jesus did not permit him [to go with Jesus], but said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you. And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.'"

Observe that He said, "Go home." Home is the best place to begin testifying to what the Lord has done for us. Until the day this man found Jesus Christ, he had lived among the graves. Now he returned home as the prodigal son did, maybe to his parents or to his wife and children. To "your friends" would include family. In the Middle East at that time families were large; cousins were called brothers and sisters. There was no doubt in this man's mind that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah. The cemetery was again a peaceful place, and the dangerous road was now passable. The "No Trespassing" sign had been taken away. Instead, there was now a man traveling from town to town with the message, "Jesus Christ had mercy on me."

We don't know why Jesus wanted to heal this man. But it is an example of the marvelous grace of God! God is still performing miracles today like this one, transforming lives that have been almost destroyed by sin. Just think—one day by God's grace, we shall be in glory and we shall see this man. What a contrast there will be between the demon-possessed man who lived among the graves and the one of whom it says in 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

I like to imagine this story in the Scriptures to be like a symphony. The orchestra begins with a "fortissimo." All the instruments resound with maximum intensity, and there are dissonant chords that express the arrival of the fierce man. When Jesus Christ appears on the scene, I imagine a flute playing a celestial melody. The music ends with the scene where the former wild man is sitting at Jesus' feet. There, the harps produce ascending chords full of beauty and ...

Themes for Preachers and Teachers:

- The difficulties faced by those living without peace, without joy, and without Christ
- The power of Jesus Christ to change lives
- Jesus Christ's compassion on many types of people
- The Lord Jesus' authority over demons
- The assignment to give testimony of the great things the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us