

May 18, 2025

THE KINGDOM SPREADS INTO GENTILE TERRITORY

Mark 5:1-20

(9 of 22 in a series through Mark 1-9)

Most of us are familiar with God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 that he would raise up someone from David's line to be his eternal king. It is why Jesus is so often referred to in Scripture as the "son of David." People are recognizing him as fulfilling this promised role. But one thing we may not pay as much attention to in the text where God makes that promise to David is David's response. David is overwhelmed. He is amazed at the grace that has been shown to him and his line. Saul's line had come and gone before it'd really even gotten started, while David is here promised that he'll have a son reigning on the throne forever. This is why David's first response to the Lord is to say, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? (2 Sam 7:18).

But it's actually something David says in the very next verse that reveals David's astounding insight and understanding. David says to the Lord, "You have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD!" (2 Sam 7:19). What's insightful isn't David's first acknowledgement that God's promise is for a great while to come. That's actually quite obvious. If God promises that one of your sons will reign over the throne of his kingdom forever, responding that this promise pertains to something that will be true for a long time isn't the most astute observation. But it's the second thing David says that *is* quite astute, as he says, "This is instruction for all mankind." Let me explain why.

You see, in the day and time in which David reigned, each territory was thought to be ruled over by its own god or gods. You had the god or gods of the Egyptians, the Philistines, and so on. And to many the God of Israel would have been thought of in these same terms—a regional God. Yahweh would have been identified as the God *of Israel*. That's what so remarkable and insightful about David's declaration in 2 Samuel 7:19. After God promises him that he'll have a son who will reign over his kingdom forever, you'd think David might say, "This is a rich blessing for every Israelite who'll ever live" or "Israel should take note that God has promised them an eternal king from my line" or the like. But instead he says that this promise that God made to him is "instruction for all mankind."

Do you see? He doesn't think of this promised king as one who will reign over merely Israel, and so he's not telling every Israelite to pay attention to this promise. He's telling all mankind to listen up because the king that God has promised will be king of the whole world. That's why the NT authors see the resurrected Christ as the King of the whole world, and it's why Jesus announces after his resurrection that all authority in heaven and on earth (again, not just over Israel) had been given to him (Matt 28:18). But the first moment that Jesus shows that he's not merely interested in reigning over Israel but beyond Israel's borders as well in Mark's gospel is in the text we're looking at this morning—Mark 5:1-20.

We know this story as the story of the Gerasene Demoniac because it's about a man from the country of the Gerasenes who is possessed by a great number of demons. But in some way, that specific element might be secondary to what we're seeing here in Jesus' mission. The main thing we see is that Jesus is spreading his kingdom not only into Jewish territory but now into Gentile territory as well. And the reason why is because of what David understood hundreds of years prior, namely, that God's promised king was not to reign merely over one strip of territory in the Middle East but over the whole world. He is no regional king or Lord, but he is the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. This is the main thing I believe we're supposed to see in this text. So let's first walk through the story, and then I'll show you why I think this is the main point and draw a couple of applications.

This text, of course, picks up after Jesus had calmed the wind and the waves, and he and his disciples make it to the other side of the sea. Mark notes that the territory in which they arrive is the Gentile side of the sea, the country of the Gerasenes. But it's not as if Jesus lands and receives a nice, peaceful, pleasant welcome. Rather, we're told, "And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit" who lived among the tombs (vv. 2-3).

We're also told that this unclean spirit—which we'll soon discover are many—caused this man to live a chaotic life. He lived among the tombs, he cried out constantly and cut himself with stones, was perhaps naked (based on v. 15 about him being clothed, after Jesus delivered him), and he displayed superhuman strength so that no one could bind him, not even with a chain, as he just broke them into pieces. That's the man that confronts Jesus immediately as he sets foot on this side of the sea. Well, I say that's the *man* that confronts Jesus, but it seems that most (if not all) of the conversation Jesus has with this man is actually a conversation with the demons that are controlling and tormenting him. And the first thing they say to Jesus is, "What have you to do with me, Jesus Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me" (v. 7).

With this, the demons clearly anticipate a confrontation with Jesus. And it seems that perhaps they're attempting to neutralize him by binding him with some kind of oath as they say, "I adjure you by God, do not torment me." But whatever their aim, it's unsuccessful. Jesus simply says, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" (v. 8). And then Jesus asks him, "What is your name?"

Now, I'll add here that sometimes people have suggested that what Jesus is providing here is a blueprint for dealing with demonic forces, and that by asking this demon his name and getting him to answer, Jesus is taking some kind of a controlling stance toward the demon.

Consequently, the argument goes, if you and I ever encounter any kind of demonic activity, then we should start by asking the demon to share its name. But I honestly find myself just a bit hesitant on that point, though I want to acknowledge that I'm not speaking from a position of experience. I'm not saying, "Now, when I've encountered demons tormenting someone, I did it a bit differently." I'm simply noting that what Jesus does here seems to stand out in an exceptional way. This is the only place where Jesus casts out a demon *and asks its name*. In other words, this doesn't seem to be Jesus attempting to provide a blueprint for us to mimic.

Why then does Jesus do this exceptional thing and ask this demon his name? It seems because he wants to expose to those with him (and to those of us who are reading this story in the Scripture years later) exactly what he was dealing with because he wasn't dealing with one demon but many. This is shown as the demon identifies himself, saying, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (v. 9).

Now, we don't know the precise number of demons that had been tormenting this man, but a legion of soldiers in the Roman army would number about 6,000 men, and, later, these demons will enter about 2,000 pigs, so we're safe to say, I think, that there are thousands of them. In other words, Jesus is about to show his authority not over a single demon in this encounter but over thousands. And yet, note that even though this is a massive number of demons, ready to take on Jesus, they know and acknowledge that they are no match for Jesus.

In their encounter with Jesus, they rightly assume he could do whatever he wants with them. Therefore, they make no effort to battle him or ultimately resist him. They simply resort to begging him not to send them out of the country but into some pigs, saying, "Send us to the pigs; and let us enter them" (v. 12). And so Jesus gives them permission, they enter the pigs, and they cause the pigs to rush down a bank, into the sea, and drown.

This raises a bunch of questions in your minds, just as it does in mine, that I don't have answers to and that Mark apparently didn't feel the need to tell. Why did the demons not want to leave the country they were in? Why did they want to enter the pigs? What did they gain by destroying the pigs? What happened to the demons once the pigs drowned? Again, I don't know, and any attempt at an answer would be mere speculation. But it seems Mark doesn't want us focusing on those questions. He does tell us, however, the reaction of the townspeople. The pig herdsman rush back into town, tell them what has happened, and when they arrive and see the demoniac now sitting clothed and in his right mind, they are gripped with fear and beg Jesus to leave. And, just as he granted the demons' request, he grants theirs, getting back into the boat to leave.

That's the story, but what I want to argue is that we're supposed to see that Jesus is spreading his kingdom into all the earth.

Jesus is spreading his kingdom into all the earth

Why do I think that's what we're supposed to see in this event? Well, to this point, Jesus has done all of his works among the Jews, but everything about this scene screams that he's no longer in Jewish country. He sets foot in a territory Jews didn't occupy and where everything is unclean. The first man Jesus encounters has an unclean spirit. He lived among tombs (an environment which would make one unclean under the law). The people present are pig farmers, which probably the most unclean profession a Jew might imagine. Jesus is clearly in Gentile territory. He's entered unclean territory. Accordingly, he does things a bit differently.

For example, did you notice that he didn't tell the demons to be quiet when they identified him as "Jesus, Son of the Most High God"? Every other occasion to this point, when a demon identifies him, he has them hush. But not this time. Was it because he liked this demon's designation of him better than some others that he silenced? I don't think so. I think it's because he's in a land inhabited by Gentiles. You see, the Jews would have had certain ideas about who the Messiah should be and could easily adopt wrong ideas about him as Jesus is identified as such. The Gentiles, however, would have no category for the Messiah, and so to be identified as "Son of the Most High God" in Gentile country would put Jesus in no danger of being misunderstood as having some political mission. Gentiles simply had no expectations of what the Jewish Messiah might be or do. This, I think, is why Jesus permitted the demon to rightly identify him here.

The same thing is no doubt true about Jesus' command to the man at the end of the story. We're told that after Jesus delivered the demon-possessed man, he begged Jesus to let him go with him, but Jesus did not permit him. Now, that may feel a bit odd, but what happens next is even more surprising if you've been following Jesus' common practice in Mark's gospel. Mark tells us that Jesus said, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (v. 19). And the man did that very thing.

Now, you'll notice that this is a departure from Jesus' normal practice to this point. You'll remember that Jesus said to the man whom he'd healed of leprosy, "See that you say nothing to anyone" (Mark 2:44). And now he's saying the precise opposite, commanding this man to go and tell everyone. Why? My guess is for the same reason as his altered practice with the demon. These people would have not had expectations for what Jesus might do as the Messiah. Whereas the Jews might have tried to rally him to take on Rome or fulfill some other vision they had for whom the Messiah would be, the Gentiles would not have had that. Again, Jesus' instructions are altered because he's in the land of the Gentiles.

So everything about the environment and Jesus' actions scream that he's expanded his ministry into territory beyond the Jews. But there's one other element that pushes us to see this as the main theme in the text, and it's a parallel with Isaiah 65:1-5. These verses in Isaiah contain so many common elements, it's hard not to think that Mark had this prophetic chapter in mind when recording this event in Jesus' ministry.

In this story where Jesus goes to the land of the Gerasenes, we have not only Gentiles, but mention of living among tombs, of pigs, and of a people who ultimately tell Jesus to get away from him. Okay, so how does Isaiah 65 relate? Well, that chapter begins in the first five verses talking about the Lord coming to a people who did not ask for him or seek him (i.e. Gentiles), a rebellious people, who "sit in tombs," "who eat pig's flesh," and "who say, 'Keep to yourself, do not come near me.'" All of these images from Isaiah 65 appear here as Jesus steps foot into Gentile territory. And how does Isaiah 65 begin? It begins with the Lord saying, "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by my name" (Is 65:1-2).

Isaiah 65:1-7 declares a word of judgment to the nations outside of Israel because of their rebellion.¹ The Lord was ready to do reveal himself, he says, and yet they did not want him to come near them. Now, Jesus is living this out as the incarnate Lord. He comes to a people who did not seek him, reveals his power before them, and is rejected by them—mostly. I say mostly because this demoniac is changed, and he becomes a witness to his fellow countrymen. Despite the rejection of some, Jesus’ ministry is expanding to the Gentiles. His kingdom will know no bounds.

I think that’s the main think Mark wants us to see, but let me note a couple of points of application for us as well. First, we should recognize that this man’s story is our story.

This man’s story is our story

Obviously, it can feel like we’re nothing like this man whom Jesus delivers in this story. Our testimonies probably wouldn’t come close to sounding like his. So, if our stories don’t sound anything like this man’s story, then why am I willing to say that his story *is* our story? Well, Sinclair Ferguson, who’s written an excellent little commentary on Mark, writes in one of his opening paragraphs on this section, “Now, not all men are demon-possessed; yet, by nature, all men are ruled by dark and sinister forces.”²

And he’s not overstating it. When Paul speaks of our condition before we were saved, he writes, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind” (Eph 2:1-3).

You see, I don’t think any of us would question that we were sinners who have been saved, but the Bible says more than that. It says that when we were unbelievers, we were “following the prince of the power of the air” and that he was at work in us. Moreover, Paul says that this was true of all mankind. Similarly, he adds in Romans 6:20 that before our conversion, we were slaves of sin.

So our testimonies aren’t too different, are they? This man could share his testimony saying, “I was under the dominion of demonic forces who drove me to act in ways that were sinful and self-destructive before Jesus came and set me free.” And we could say, “We were under the power of Satan, enslaved to sin, so that we acted in ways that were sinful and self-destructive until Jesus came and set us free.”

¹ Commentators debate whether Isaiah 65 begins by addressing foreign nations or rebellious Israelites. However, Alec Motyer makes a convincing argument that Isaiah 65 is dealing with Gentiles. See *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 523.

² Sinclair Ferguson, *Let’s Study Mark* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1999), 64.

And since things are easier to see in others than in ourselves, imagine you were in the land of the Gerasenes, five years after the events in our text, and you're talking to this guy. He's saying, "Man, I'm just struggling with contentment. I've had a few health issues, some financial struggles, and my life just isn't all I'd hoped it'd be by now." What would you say? My guess is that you'd say, "Brother, you do remember those days when you lived naked among the tombs, yelling out, cutting yourself, and were possessed by thousands of demons, right? Doesn't it seem like you should never get past being thankful?"

But if this man's story is our story, then shouldn't we think similarly. Paul says that through Christ he can be content in all situations (Phil 4:13), and he tells us "in all things give thanks" (1 Thess 5:18). And that doesn't seem crazy if we keep in mind that Jesus has freed us from the wrath of God, oppression of the evil one, and our slavery to sin, does it? Even if we're diagnosed with a terminal illness tomorrow, doesn't it put things in perspective to say to yourself, "I deserve death and hell, but I'll never see it"? I think it should. So let's fight discontentedness and covetousness but the silliness it is, and let's be a people who remind ourselves consistently why we should be characterized by thankful hearts. Our story is this man's story. But it's not just his story that is our story. This man's mission is our mission.

This man's mission is our mission

The townspeople's response to Jesus is odd. I get that they're afraid of Jesus. As I mentioned in the text where Jesus calms the wind and waves, to see someone display power we can't explain is unsettling. When we encounter what we can't explain, fear is a reasonable response. But oddly enough, we're told they wanted Jesus gone when they saw the man, sitting clothed, in his right mind. Apparently, they were more comfortable with the craziness of this demonized man than the one who freed him of that state. And so they ask Jesus—actually they *beg* Jesus—to depart. And he grants their request.

However, as Jesus is getting into the boat, the man whom he had delivered approaches him, also begging Jesus for something. He begs Jesus to let him go with him, but Jesus doesn't grant his request. Perhaps amazingly, this is the first request Jesus doesn't grant in our story. But it's because he has a mission for this man, telling him to go home to his friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for him. And Mark tells us that he began to proclaim "how much Jesus had done for him" (v. 20).

I simply want to note that our task is the same. Jesus has always commanded his followers to bear witness of him. The earliest believers were charged to go tell people that Jesus really did walk out of the tomb that Easter Sunday morning after dying on that Friday and commanded all people to repent and believe. And in the Great Commission, Jesus charges us to make disciples, which entails bearing witness to his gospel and what he's done for us. This man's story is our story, and his task is our task. So let's be ready and eager to bear witness to Jesus and what he's done in our lives.

Jesus' kingdom isn't a regional reality. He's king over all. And that means that his gospel has reached people like you and me in Jackson, Tennessee. But it also means that we are expected to bear witness to our neighbors and the nations as well, and we can start by testifying to all that the Lord has done for us, sharing the good news of the gospel, just like this man in our text. So let's remind ourselves of what all the Lord has done for us as we come to the table. Amen.