

THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL HEALING (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

6.6.21

INTRODUCTION

I have a magician friend who lives in Denver. Whenever we would get together, he would show me one of his latest tricks. Two things would happen: (1) He would be so excited to show me the trick, and (2) I would say, “Do it again! He was so smooth and just flat out good at his craft that I could never see how he did what he did. But that was also a huge part of the fun. We’re kind of going to be in that kind of moment today as we continue our journey with the “Radical Rabbi.”

Now last week we looked at a moment in Christ’s ministry where He showed His disciples some of His awesome power — in this case, His power over nature — as He stilled a storm’s mighty winds and intimidating waves simply by the power of His word. Today we’re going to look at a “do it again” moment — another picture of the power of Jesus and witnessed by His disciples. But while last week’s story centered on power over nature, this story today will highlight Jesus’ power over evil, and over Satan himself, and we’ll be letting the gospel writer Mark tell us what happened. So, as we begin, let’s start off with **a moment in prayer.**

TEXT (Mark 5:1-20)

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes — Mark 5:1.

So, proceeding from last week’s story, now that the sea had been calmed, the disciples proceeded to make their way with Jesus across the Sea of Galilee to the eastern side of the lake, in an area called in NT times the Decapolis. This was a region that contained 10 cities that had embraced Greek culture, and so was far more Gentile than Jewish. Archaeologists are not sure precisely where the “region of the Gerasenes” is specifically located, but we do know that Jesus went to the east side of the lake, into a decidedly Gentile area.

When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet Him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones — Mark 5:2-5.

Now while Matthew notes two men in this moment, both Mark and Luke mention only one. This is not a contradiction, however, as Mark and Luke choose to focus their attention on just one of the two — perhaps the one who was the loudest or most agitated and violent in his behavior. Regardless, there should be no surprise at the number of episodes of Jesus dealing with demon possession that we find during His ministry. One of Satan’s foremost strategies is that, wherever God is working, he will be working there as well, trying to undo or at least slow down or distract wherever God is building or reinforcing his kingdom. He will do this in his church families, and he will do it in the lives of individuals. Obviously never was God more clearly at work than while He existed in human flesh in the person of His son.

But it is also important to note what demonic possession had been doing to this guy: According to Matthew, he was “so violent” that no one could even come through that area. The Greek says “exceeding fierce,” meaning that there was a dangerous fury in the man that made passing through that area a scary proposition to say the least. He lived among the tombs, according to Mark, and possessed superhuman, demonic strength that made binding him in any way

impossible; even chains and shackles could not hold him, as in his demonic power he would break chains and literally smash his shackles to bits. Mark emphasizes the incredible strength of this guy to serve as a context to the power he would soon be shown in Jesus Christ.

In addition to all this, this guy would also cry out in his agony, meaning to scream and even shriek, and also cut himself with stones, literally mangling himself, attempting to deface somebody made in the image of God. Luke adds that he lived naked and out in the open country with no shelter, being driven by the demon into solitary places such as the very wilderness in which Jesus and His disciples found themselves now. We've talked before about how Satan, no matter how he presents himself, will always turn his presence into a profound negative. This poor guy is a great example of what Satan's presence looks like.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!" — Mark 5:6-8.

Demons always know and recognize Jesus Christ. However, this knowledge and recognition is out of fear of who they are and who He is — and they know precisely who He is — "Son of the Most High God." But, while they certainly know Him, they are in a panic concerning His intentions for them. Matthew's account of this moment adds an interesting question from the demons: ***"Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" — Matthew 8:29b.*** This fear is based on a couple of pieces of information that demons appear to already have — (1) that their time of activity is limited, specifically because of Jesus, and (2) that their being subject to a future, final, eternal judgment has already been determined. His question to Christ is basically: "Are you sending us to be tortured forever right now, already?" — which is what's behind their comment according to Luke: ***And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss — Luke 8:31.*** The "abyss" is a bottomless pit, a dark, deep chasm where evil demonic beings are imprisoned to await their final judgment. And Jesus tells us what that final judgment will be: ***"Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal (lake of) fire prepared for the devil and his angels" — Jesus Christ, Matthew 25:41*** — the same outcome awaiting Satan himself: ***[T]he devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever — Revelation 20:10.*** That's the outcome that awaits all demonic powers.

And, at the same time, an interesting power play is going on here. Note how the demon tries to command Jesus with the words, "In God's name." He is urgently and passionately requesting Jesus to not torture him "in God's name." Making a request by using a more powerful being was a method employed by exorcists to control demons. In this case, the demon is speaking this phrase in an attempt to control Jesus. But we can also see by his submissive posture before Jesus — falling on his knees in front of Christ, verbally acknowledging who Jesus is — that he does indeed recognize the more powerful force here, even if his words don't say so.

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area — Mark 5:9-10.

Now by using the name "legion," the readers would naturally have thought of the Roman legions of which they were so familiar. A Roman legion could consist of anywhere between 3,000-6,000 men. Whether or not that particular application is true, his name certainly reflects that there were

a large number of demons possessing this poor guy. But the demon continues to beg Jesus time after time after time not to send them out of this area. But note that there is no negotiation going on, as if the two parties are somehow equal. Begging — yes, but negotiation — no. This demon recognizes that Jesus holds all the power to do pretty much anything to him He wants to, at pretty much any time He chooses, so begging seems the appropriate stance. In fact, the begging shows us very, very clearly exactly who holds the power — and it ain't the demon. Even he knows that!

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned — Mark 5:11-13.

Once again, we get a picture of the consequence of the presence of Satan, this time in terms of purity versus impurity. This whole moment is flooded with impurity. We have (1) an impure spirit dwelling within (2) an impure man around (3) impure tombs (dead bodies were considered unclean) and near to (4) impure animals (Levitical law had commanded pigs be considered unclean). And we also get a very clear affirmation that it is the power of Jesus Christ that is driving this moment, and nothing else.

Jesus gives them the permission they request, and the demons left the man to enter into the pigs. This was a large number of pigs — 2,000 in number — who now, crazed by their demonic possession, rushed headlong down a steep bank and were drowned. They didn't drown because they couldn't swim — the impact with the water probably didn't do them much good, but some pigs are actually very good swimmers — but ultimately because of the consequence of any connection with Satan: destruction!

Now the sheer number of pigs, and the fact that the entire herd became demon-possessed, tells us the massive indwelling of evil this guy had been experiencing. But it seems that demons need a life to possess so, in their new habitation being destroyed by drowning, it is possible that they were now literally homeless, and therefore consigned to the Abyss that they feared so much, to await their final judgment.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man — and told about the pigs as well — Mark 5:14-16.

As you can well imagine, these swineherds — the guys whose job it was to watch over the pigs — were in a panic about what they had just seen. How in the world are they going to explain this? The people of the town, and others scattered throughout the countryside, had put them on charge; they were responsible for the safety and care of all those pigs — who were now some 2,000 very watered down pieces of bacon. But regardless of all that, they ran off and told everybody they came across what had happened. Pretty soon a sizeable crowd had gathered in the area where 2,000 pigs used to be. And as soon as they arrive, they see Jesus of Nazareth. They also see the former “madman of the tombs” — but not like they'd ever seen him before. He was cleaned up, dressed like anybody else would be, and he seemed to be in his right mind; he wasn't screaming and cutting himself and scaring people half to death at all. So as this crowd

looks at the “new man” and then at the empty fields and then at them, the swineherds all point their fingers at Jesus and say, “He did it!” I picture two things — Jesus looking directly at all those people, and all those people finding themselves far more scared of this “stranger in town” than they ever were of the screaming, shrieking wild guy; in fact, Luke says they were “overcome” with fear.

Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region — Mark 5:17.

So, what is their response to Jesus of Nazareth after all that had happened — including the “radical healing” of this man? What is their response to this Rabbi from Nazareth who has this kind of amazing power? “Please leave,” says one. “The sooner the better,” chimes another. “For all our sakes,” says a third. In other words, we don’t care who you are or what you can do. We’ve seen enough. Just go. And that’s exactly what Jesus does.

But before he goes, there is a very sweet moment of “new life” talk between Jesus and this healed man: ***As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed — Mark 5:18-20.***

This guy has experienced one of the greatest “all things new” moments of all time, and he simply wants to stay and give his life to the One who just gave him life. While I am sure that Jesus absolutely loved His desire, the fact was that Jesus had a better idea: “Go back to your own people, and tell them what happened. Tell them about the Lord’s mercy on you; tell them about all He has done for you. Do that for me!” And that’s exactly what this guy did. And while Jesus often told those who had experienced his miracles to keep the news to themselves, in this case, Jesus tells this guy to tell everything to everybody. So what was the difference? This was a Gentile area, with little of the Jewish tradition of God, and with likely even less idea of the promises of a coming Messiah that was so much a part of Judaism. Jesus came for all the world — Jew and Gentile — and one proof of that was Jesus directing this new child of God to become an evangelist — to be a bringer of good news to all who would listen in this predominately Gentile area.

APPLICATION

There are some great outcomes of this story that are graciously given us to take into our daily lives:

First, God and Satan are not equals — never have been, never will be. God is the Creator; Satan, for all his power, is a created being. Look at how the Bible describes God versus how the Bible describes Satan:

- 1) As opposed to God’s being everlasting — ***Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God — Moses, Psalm 90:2,*** and as Isaiah tells us: ***The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth — Isaiah 40:28a,*** Satan is a finite, created, limited being. He is not everlasting but was instead created at a specific moment in time. In other words, while there was never a time before God, there absolutely was a time before Satan.
- 2) As opposed to God’s absolute sovereign ruler over the entire universe — ***Let them know that You, whose name is the Lord — that You alone are the Most High over all the***

earth — *Asaph, Psalm 83:18*, Satan can only operate within God’s ruling parameters. For example, in the Old Testament, Satan could only impact Job’s life as God set the limits. He is not free to do whatever he wants.

- 3) As opposed to God’s being perfectly truthful in all things — *As for God, His way is perfect: The Lord’s word is flawless* — *David, Psalm 18:30a*, and as God said through Isaiah: *I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right*” — *God speaking, Isaiah 45:19b*, along with the author of Hebrews: *[I]t is impossible for God to lie* — *Hebrews 6:18a*, what Satan declares was perfectly captured by Christ: *“He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies”* — *Jesus Christ, John 8:44b*.
- 4) As opposed to God desiring that we come to know Him — *“I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob’s descendants, ‘Seek me in vain.’ . . . Come near me and listen to this: “From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there”* — *God speaking, Isaiah 45:19a, 48:16a*, the Bible describes Satan as one who has to disguise himself to hide his true intentions: *Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light* — *Paul, II Corinthians 11:14*.
- 5) As opposed to God being all-powerful — *Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you* — *Jeremiah 32:17*, the Bible describes Satan’s power as limited, illustrated by the fact that God has dealt and will deal with him according to His infinitely greater power during the end times — *[Satan] was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him* — *Revelation 12:8-9*, and by the fact that, at the end of time, *[T]he devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever* — *Revelation 20:10*.
- 6) Satan was also not powerful enough to interrupt God’s plan of salvation — *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross* — *Paul, Colossians 2:13-15*. Satan couldn’t hold onto the sins with which he accused us. He couldn’t stop the cross from disarming him. He couldn’t stop being made literally a cosmic joke, so complete was God’s triumph through Jesus Christ on the cross. No wonder that the great reformer, Martin Luther, writing the explanation to the second article of the Apostles Creed, said that Jesus Christ, *who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood*. The devil was powerless to prevent Christ from dying on the cross or coming alive out of the tomb. And no wonder Paul so triumphantly wrote: *“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory*

through our Lord Jesus Christ — Paul, I Corinthians 15:55-57 (quoting Hosea 13:14).
Satan is not equal, in any way, shape or form, to God!

Second, no one is beyond God's reach. This man, completely possessed by multiple demons, was completely cleansed by the power of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul certainly understood this as well; he wrote in his first letter to Timothy: *Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life — Paul, I Timothy 1:13-16.* Would any of us dare say that our salvation is any more likely than anybody else's? The power of God's amazing grace — that's what saves, not any of our perceived worthiness. And because His grace is backed by His unlimited power, no one is beyond His gracious reach. As His ambassadors, we can never forget that.

And all of this also tells us that it is not in our job description as Christians to analyze whether or not somebody might come to Christ, or whether such and such an effort is “worth it.” We are simply to be faithful to the moment whenever we have an opportunity to testify to the greatness of our God. Every moment matters, every opportunity matters, every seed matters, no matter how brief or how small, because it is no one less than Almighty God who will make the growth that He desires to see.

CONCLUSION

Third, I have to conclude this with a “God-moment” I had this past Wednesday while driving home. It was such an ordinary day, and it all of a sudden occurred to me that the Rapture will take place on such a day — a day where nobody is looking for it. And I had an incredible shot of adrenaline as I realized: “Wow, this could happen today, right now! It reminded me of two things: (1) How excited I am for that to happen because I know that I'm ready; I know where I'm going, and (2) how much work there still is to be done, precisely because so many people are not ready, because so many people do not know where they're going.

But you know what that tells me more than anything? God wins! All His plans will happen; His kingdom will happen; His kingdom will be established for all eternity. Why? Because when Jesus Christ died on that brutal cross, sin was destroyed. When He came out of the tomb, death was destroyed. And in doing those two things, Satan was destroyed. Do you believe that? It's not so much believing in what will happen but much more in who is going to make it happen. God will make it happen and, if we are His kids through Jesus Christ, it will happen with us. Wow!

That's the ultimate conclusion that Jesus wanted His disciples to see. He showed them His power over the physical world. Now He has shown them His power over the spiritual world. What else is left?

Folks, that's the God, that is the Savior we are invited to rest in with confidence, with trust that everything He has said, everything He has promised, will happen. He will make it happen. And that's the world we are invited to hope for, to plan our lives around. I can't wait to see it. How about you? Let's pray!