



The Sea of Galilee is roughly 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. Cool winds frequently rush down the steep cliffs surrounding the sea and stir up fierce storms on the surface of the warm water. That night, as the disciples, with Jesus, set out for the other side of the sea, a terrible storm threatens to shatter their little boat. The disciples, who remember were fishermen, were pummeled by the violent wind and waves. They started to fear for their own lives. It wasn't long before the boat was filling with cold water and they were soaked to the bone, cold, scared, and frantically rowing to the other side. Everything seemed hopeless but finally they have enough sense to wake up Jesus who was sleeping. Apparently Jesus was so exhausted that even a storm wouldn't disrupt his nap. The disciples, at the top of their voice yell, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Calmly, Jesus stands and with such authority calls out to the wind and the waves; "Peace! Be still!"

Instantly the wind stopped and the waves turned the surface of the sea into glass. Everything was perfectly calm. Silence and stillness filled the air. Jesus lovingly turns to the stunned disciples and says, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" The disciples were terrified and sheepishly asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

### **A Desperate Man's Situation**

That story sets the context for what happens next. That night doesn't end in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. Mark, the writer of this Gospel and an eyewitness to the events, continues in chapter 5. Mark moves us from a desperate situation to a desperate man. Look with me at verses 1–5.

**They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. 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.**

After Jesus calms the raging storm, the disciples row in stunned silence and finally get to the other side of the sea, to an area called the "region of the Gerasenes." This was on the eastern shore of Galilee. It was made up of 10 cities, called the Decapolis. These were mostly Greek cities and were predominantly Gentile. Very

few Jews lived there. This region wasn't a popular travel destination for Jewish people. It was a pagan region in the middle of Palestine. It was on the far other side of Capernaum where Jesus did a lot of his ministry. In many ways, it didn't make sense for Jesus and the disciples to be there. I picture the disciples grumbling under their breath about this trip, wondering why they were not in Capernaum any longer or in the big city of Jerusalem.

The land of the Gerasenes was also a desperate place. Mark describes a place of fear, brokenness and evil. A desperate place is where we are lost and wondering where God is. Desperate places are agonizing places, but they are also places where God reveals his power and mercy. It's a place where God shows himself in ways we could never imagine. Some of you have been in a desperate place and you know what I am talking about. Some of you are there now.

It seems to me that Jesus' primary reason for traveling to the other side of the sea and risking the lives of his men in a storm was solely to meet with this man possessed by demons. Why else would Jesus go through all this trouble? Unless, of course, Jesus was no ordinary man. The story makes us wonder: Does Jesus really care about broken and hurting people? Is he really willing to go through all sorts of trouble to set a man free from the bondage of evil? Think about it, there were plenty of other people to heal, teach, and be with on the other side. Why this man? Way out here in the Gerasenes? But, God meeting with a desperate man shows us his willingness to meet with us in our own desperate places.

As we get back to the story, immediately upon landing on the shore a man comes running down toward the boat, shouting out to Jesus. This must have scared the disciples to death! Especially if it was still dark out. Just moments earlier the disciples thought they were going to drown and now they are being confronted by a deranged man. Is he going to attack them? How does he know who they are? I bet the disciples didn't even get out of the boat! I wouldn't have! But Jesus did. Mark gives us an incredible but depressing description about this desperate man. He lives in an old graveyard surrounded by dirt and death. In my travels, I've seen a connection between evil and filth. The presence of evil is often seen in places of spiritual filth, where there is evidence of drug abuse, physical abuse, perversion, as well as trash, squalor and stench.

I find it interesting too that the man never gets a name. Why should he have a name? Everyone has given up on him. He has been living in isolation in a cemetery, away from the rest of society for a long time. He was cut off physically and emotionally from others. Isolation and separation can trigger demonic activity. In that day, cemeteries were considered a ceremonially unclean place for Jews to go and believed to be a place with constant demonic activity.

Notice he was completely naked and his body was bruised and bloodied from self-inflicted torment. Were the demons making him cut himself? Was the man trying to cut the demons out? I'm not sure. He also had superhuman strength, because it says no one could bind him, nor could any chains keep him locked up. Night and day he cried out alone, while cutting himself with sharp rocks. Agony, pain, torment and isolation described his miserable life. This man was in a desperate place. This was a full blown demonic possession.

## **Spiritual Warfare**

Before we continue with the story, I want to address some of the concerns some of you may be thinking. The Bible describes an unseen spiritual world. Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:12 wrote, ***“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.”*** The Bible says we have three enemies waging war against our soul—the Devil, the flesh, and the world. Peter compares the Devil to a roaring lion seeking to devour someone (1 Peter 5:8). John the Evangelist calls the Devil the “accuser of our Brethren” (Rev. 12:10). Paul says that Satan deceives us by pretending to be an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Throughout the ministry of Jesus, we see this struggle. Jesus, before his ministry began, was tempted by the Devil but prevailed. Jesus often confronted demons who inflicted people with mental illness and physical disabilities. Demons are evil angels who sinned against God. Demons serve the devil.

The world is anything or anyone opposed to God. The world is a term used in the Bible to describe the philosophies, desires, structures of thought, tradition, law, authority and religion that are opposed to God's rule and reign. Even if you are not a Christian, you have to wonder what or who is ultimately behind ISIS, human suffering, nuclear warfare, atrocities to children, starvation, war and endless violence.

The third enemy is our flesh. The flesh is our human appetites out of control. In Romans 7 and 8 Paul describes this battle going on within us, ***“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live”*** (Rom. 8:13). An unhealthy appetite for food, sex, excessive stimulation, and substance abuse are several ways we fall victim to the flesh. The Devil, the flesh and the world triple-team

us in this spiritual battle. The flesh provides the means to sin. The Devil provides the motive by lying to us, making us think sin is a good thing. And the world provides the opportunity.

With all that being said, often times I believe we sometimes give too much credit to Satan for some things that happen to us and to our world. Satan is a created being. He is not equal in any way to God. He is not omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent. He is limited. The Devil is a roaring lion but he is on a leash and the length of that leash is determined by the Lord. Christians cannot be possessed by a demon, but we can be influenced by them. Demons lie, tempt, and discourage us. That is why James says, ***“Resist the Devil and he will flee from you”*** (James 4:7). We resist with the truth, the Word of God. We have the armor of God available to us as well. And prayer is a mighty offensive weapon in this battle as well as living in community with other Christians.

It's also important to remember that Christ has already won the battle against Satan and his forces. He did that through the cross. The Bible also tells us about Satan's final destiny. After Jesus returns, the Devil will be thrown into the abyss forever (Rev 20:3). So, when Satan reminds you of your past, remind him of his future! But here's the problem. While the victory has been won, not everyone has received the notice! Satan is the prince of this world (John 12:31), but his time is running out. We are living in what scholars call a time of the “already and not yet.” Christ has already defeated sin, Satan and death. But we are waiting for him to return again and once and for all make all things new and just. Let's read verses 6–10.

**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!”**

**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.**

## **Jesus Confronts the Demons**

Upon seeing Jesus, the man, or maybe it was the demons, come running down to Jesus, bow at his feet and beg him not to torture them. The demons knew this was no ordinary man; they called Jesus, ***“Son of the Most High God”*** (v. 7). The demons knew Jesus was God in the flesh. They knew Jesus had the power to cast them into hell once and for all. So they plead for leniency. Swear you won't torture us, they say. Demons are terrified of their final doom.

What Jesus does next I wouldn't recommend. Jesus asks the demon his name! Notice the multiple personalities—verse 7 singular “me” and then verse 9 plural “we.” The demon's name,

Legion, is a military word that describes an army of 6000 men. The poor man was controlled not by one demon, but apparently a whole army of them. It's no wonder the town didn't know what to do with the guy. They were powerless in the face of such evil. I can't make up what happens next. Look at verses 11–13.

**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.**

### **Jesus Sends the Demons into the Pigs**

Legion begs Jesus to send them into some pigs on a nearby hillside. These demons didn't want to be disembodied, they didn't want to be banished yet from the world. So Jesus commands the demons to come out of the man. The same voice that calmed the storm is now rebuking impure spirits. With a word, the demons were out of the man and allowed to enter a herd of 2000 pigs. Jesus shows his power over nature (the storm) and his power over Satan and his evil forces.

The pigs stampede down a steep bank into the sea and are drowned. Have you ever heard a pig squeal in pain? I have and it is one of the worst noises you can ever hear. Imagine 2000 pigs squealing in misery, tumbling over each other, and the sound of them rushing into the sea like crazed animals. Meanwhile the disciples are watching all this with eyes wide open. My guess is they finally jump out of the boat trying to get as far away from the pigs, the sea, and the man as possible.

If you love animals and pigs, you may be wondering why Jesus would allow this to happen? It may sadden you, but to Jews who read this story, they would cheer. Pigs were unclean. Jews were forbidden to raise, sell or eat pork. I believe Jesus wanted to give the man a graphic, visible, and powerful lesson on the immensity of the evil from which he had been delivered. He also wanted the disciples to see his power over evil. And it's clear that Jesus had a lesson to teach the townspeople. Let's continue in verses 14–17.

**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. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.**

### **The Town's Reaction to Jesus**

Word of the event spreads quickly to the town. We expect the town to come back to Jesus by the thousands wanting to be healed, to see more miracles, and to be taught by the Master.

But sadly that was not how they respond. When the town heard about the pigs, they ask Jesus to leave. They ask the most perfect, holy, sinless, creator, master, teacher, Lord, and Savior to leave.

By allowing the pigs to drown, Jesus tested the townspeople in the most sensitive area of their body, their pocketbooks. The people obviously didn't care about the demonized man; they tried to chain him down. But they care deeply about the wealth the pigs brought them. Most likely these pigs were owned by several people, not just one person. Pigs were an essential part of their income and town economy. Jesus by his actions reveals the materialism that dominated their pagan culture. Pigs were more important than hurting people. What we see in Jesus is a man who cared deeply for a man the town had given up on. And the thanks he receives from them is an invitation to leave and never come back again. The formerly demon-possessed man responds much differently. Let's read verses 18–20.

**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 a how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.**

### **The Demoniac's Reaction to Jesus**

The real point of the story is often overlooked. People love to sensationalize the demonic activity and the exorcism and think that was the point of the story. It's not. The true miracle took place in the life of a desperate man. The man was now "sitting there, dressed and in his right mind." The shame of his cuts and bruises were now covered by clothes. His mind and body were no longer controlled by demons, instead he was experiencing the kingdom of God.

I wonder what Jesus and the man talked about. Did the disciples finally have the courage to interact with the man? What was said? Mark doesn't tell us much. But what he does say is important. The power of God radically changed this man from a naked and insane demoniac to man with a mission. The man begs to go with Jesus, back to the other side of the lake. He wants to be part of his entourage, to be mentored by Jesus and tell his story to others. Hundreds of people followed Jesus, what's one more? I'd want to follow Jesus too after all this.

Instead, Jesus gives him a life-changing mission. He tells him to, "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." Jesus says, "You can't go with me, because I need you, right here. There's work to be done right here and you are my man to do it." So this man became the first missionary of the church to pagan Greeks on the east side of the Sea of Galilee.

This story teaches us several things, but one is for sure, no matter how desperate your situation is, you're never hopeless. Jesus loves to show up in desperate places, among the tombs, in filth and sin, in doubt, isolation, in abusive and perverted places, he comes to the rescue. Jesus is all about rescuing people in desperate places. He is the master of taking broken people and putting them back together again. He loves to mend hurting marriages. He loves to give people hope, purpose and abundant life. He longs to release people from addiction. No one ever has a real encounter with Jesus without experiencing his power.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, did you know Jesus crossed a violent storm to rescue you? That storm was the cross where he paid a debt you and I could not pay. He died for your sin in order to set you free from a life of tomb living and chain wearing. Our problem is we try to fix ourselves. We try to pull ourselves up from our own bootstraps. And every January 1 we make another failed promise to become a better person, to stop a bad habit, to be a better father or a more loving wife, only to realize we do not have the power to change our real problems. The core of our problem lies within our heart. The heart is the place where our will, intellect and emotions drive everything we think and do. And only God can change the heart.

This story leaves us with a choice. We can respond like the demon-possessed man or the townspeople. The man humbled himself, ran to Jesus and in desperation threw himself down at his feet and said, God help me, I need you. He was set free by placing his faith in Jesus. Jesus then gave him a mission to tell his story not only in his hometown but in all the Decapolis.

But there was another response. We can respond like the townspeople and have nothing to do with Jesus. We can ask him to

leave. It's true, if you come to Jesus he may be bad for your business. He may hurt your reputation. He may disturb your little world. But, he loves you enough to allow you to make the choice to follow him or not. If you don't want him, he'll leave you alone.

Most of us have already responded like the demon-possessed man and have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord. The man then went out and told people how much Jesus had done for him. What has Jesus done for you? What life did he bring you out of? What changes did he make? What is he currently doing in your life? How has he shown mercy to you? It's important to reflect about those things because we have a tendency to forget.

Finally, I want to give us all one challenge. Like the man, who are you going to share your story with this week? The demoniac was given a mission field, Decapolis. I have every reason to believe that he went to each town telling the Good News of Jesus Christ and sharing what Jesus did in his life. Archaeologists have found ample evidence of at least a dozen churches in that area proving that it was once a large Christian community. The man did exactly what Jesus asked him to do, and his ministry flourished.

What about you? You and I have a mission field right here. You are a missionary to the Bay Area. On the outside everyone looks good and successful. But, on the inside, many people are living in desperation. Who can you share your faith story with this week? Pray about that, and I bet God will give you that opportunity.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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