

Demons versus Jesus: with Us as the Prize
Sermon on Mark 5:1-13
Weekend of February 11, 2007
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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Introduction: Satan Seeks To Keep Us Unaware of Demons

God's Word warns us: *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.* But God's Word also gives us the victory over all of these through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—whom Satan hates and whom demons are trying to trap: You and I still live in a scientific sort of age. You and I are prone to view our world with a scientific mindset.

We like to think we can predict all phenomena by scientific principles – for example: Newton's laws of motion, or the more advanced physics of Einstein – branches of natural science. We like to think we can treat all illnesses – and finally: resolve them – through medical science. We like to think we can understand the forces that govern nations – and even: influence them strongly – we call that political science.

And I don't mean to disparage those scientific studies, because they are avenues by which the dear Lord has blessed us greatly.

But the Bible opens to our eyes a whole different realm of activity. It's a whole different world, really.

The Book of Ephesians refers to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient; in the Book of John, Jesus repeatedly calls him the prince of this world. The Book of Luke has Jesus healing a crippled woman whom Satan had kept bound for eighteen long years. The Book of Daniel has angels and demons standing behind the political powers of the day.

And today's Word from God to us especially opens our eyes to the battle of "Demons versus Jesus: with Us as the Prize." We'll observe demons confronting Jesus. We'll consider that demons like these are our worst enemies. Then, we'll observe Jesus confronting the demons. And we'll thus find that Jesus is our Best Friend.

Part One: Demons Confront Jesus

To begin with: it must have been in the middle part of Jesus' ministry—after the time Jesus was gathering his disciples, but before the time he kept telling them he would suffer, die, and rise. He had been near his headquarters on the northwest side of the Galilean Lake. And now, we read: ***They*** – he and his disciples – ***went across the lake*** – northwest to southeast, it would have been a trip of about fifteen miles – ***to the region of the Gerasenes*** – on the southeast shore of the Galilean Lake, and there were mostly Gentile people down there.

When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. Literally, the man was *under the control of an unclean spirit*, a spirit whose presence made the man unfit to be the Lord's habitation. Obviously, this involved demons: angels God had created with all the rest during the six days of creation, but ones that rebelled against God, and were expelled from heaven, because of their evil nature.

Now: ***This man*** – with a demon – ***lived in the tombs.*** The caves along the shore doubled as tombs. And this man was at home in those tombs. He was at home with death. He preferred death to life, as demons will do.

And no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. Literally: *no one no longer had any ability to bind him.* He was way too powerful for human strength. Matthew's account tells us he was so violent that no one could pass that way. **For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet.** And just to emphasize it once again: **No one was strong enough to subdue** – literally: *to tame!* – **him.** He was like a wild animal!

Furthermore: *Throughout the **night and day** – he was apparently especially nocturnal – **among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself** – really, more literally: *bruise or beat himself – **with stones.*** Can you imagine? So, these demons were destructive, besides.*

But: **When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him.** It was an ugly sight, too. Luke's account tells us that the demons kept the man shamefully naked.

He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" He knew Jesus' identity. But he did not have a saving relationship with him. **"Swear to God that you won't torture me!"** He knew that Jesus would judge him. And he had to bow to Jesus authority. **For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"**

And: **Then** – finally, tellingly – **Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" – "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."** A *legion*, a substantial part of the Roman army, had at least two thousand soldiers, even in peace time. Apparently, at least two thousand demons inhabited this man—a number corroborated by the quantity of animals the demons would later kill. What an incredible predicament for this guy!

Appropriation One: Our Worst Enemies Are Demons

So, what have we learned about demons here—phenomena we cannot observe scientifically, but which must be studied by way of the Scriptures? Well, they are ... verse two: deathly, verses three and four: superhumanly powerful, verse five: destructive, verse six: shameful, and verse nine: numerous.

Well, thank God they're not around anymore! ...Of course, they are still around; spirits neither die, nor do they go out of existence, nor have they finally been judged yet. Well, thank God, at least, that they're no threat to us anymore! ...Of course, they still are a threat to us. Satan still hates us. His demon coworkers still want to drag us to death, verse two. They're still too powerful for us, verses three and four. They still want to destroy us, verse five. They'd still like to lead us into great and shameful sin, verse six. And there are still many more of them than any single one of us, verse nine.

Part Two: Jesus Confronts Demons

Scary, isn't it?! I mean, seriously, we thought our problems were our sicknesses, or our relationships, or our finances. Our more serious problems are demons! But there's one more thing we need to learn about them—really, the most important thing.

Going on: **He** – the demon-possessed man – **begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area**—not to torture them yet, Matthew says, not to confine them to hell yet, Luke adds.

But: **A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside.** Unclean animals for unclean spirits! **The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them."** And importantly: **He gave them permission.** You see, they couldn't operate apart from Jesus' authority! **And the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number – just like the demons, apparently: two thousand in number – rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.**

Appropriation Two: Our Best Friend Is Jesus

Can you imagine? Two thousand great big pigs! All of a sudden they start galloping one direction, downhill, squealing, thundering, crashing, splashing into the water, and they are – pretty literally! – choked to death, drowned: leaving two thousand floating, bloated pig bodies –quite a reclamation project! – at the potential economic loss in our day of at least two hundred thousand dollars.

Wow! Wouldn't you have liked to have been there to see that?! ...Well, in a way, you were. In a way, you've experienced exactly what we've read about this morning. You didn't see it as dramatically. But it was really just as dramatic....

When you entered into this world, the demons had you. No, they didn't bodily possess you, the way the did this man we read about this morning. But you were under their control. They said, "Fuss!" and you fussed. They said, "Bawl!" and you bawled. They said, "Make life miserable for your folks!" and you did. They said – especially – "Rebel against God!" and we did. That was our whole life.

But then, one day, dramatically, Jesus set foot upon the shore of your life. And the demons had to run and submit to him. Jesus spoke up for you and said, "Flee this individual, you evil spirits! You cannot have him. You cannot have her. He's mine! She's mine! I have buried her sins in my tomb. I have raised him to eternal life. I baptize you – I wash you, I adopt you, I anoint you – in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!"

And the demons ran squealing, thundering, crashing, splashing away from you!

Conclusion: Scripture Seeks To Keep Us Unencumbered By Demons

You see, then, that in reality: today's account is the account of "Demons versus Jesus: with Us as the Prize." The demons are our worst enemies. But Jesus is our Best Friend. And he rescues us.

So, how are we going to react? Well, do you want to have anything to do with demons anymore? Absolutely not! So, you need to learn to recognize the work of demons. And since demons are not visible, that recognition of yours can only come through God's Word, which reveals what is not seen.

When you wake up grumpy in the morning – not wanting to go to work, not wanting to go to school – it's only God's Word which will identify the demons of laziness that are afflicting you, and it's only God's Word that will direct your eyes to Christ's forgiveness, which will inspire you often to overcome them.

When you grow ill-tempered late at night – wanting to say or do mean things to family members who've harmed you – it's only God's Word that can identify the demons of impatience that are afflicting you, and it's only God's Word that can direct your eyes to Christ's forgiveness, which will inspire you often to overcome them.

And when you grow scared late in life – worried that your sins have been too strong, worried that you have left too much good undone – it's Jesus alone who can quiet your concerns. "Your demons are gone, dear brother, dear sister. I have overcome them. Your sins, which were their victories, have disappeared. My blood paid for those. Your tomb, which was their triumph, cannot contain you. My resurrection has guaranteed your liberty. Rest – rest eternally – in peace." ...Amen.

God's Word exhorts us: *Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* And God's Word gives us the victory over him through Jesus Christ! Amen.