

Time to Reflect

- Who is Jesus for us? Of all the messianic titles that are applied to Jesus, which is your personal favourite and why?
- What impacts us most in this incredible episode about the power and authority of Jesus?

In our last study we focused on one of the most famous events recorded in the Gospels – Jesus calming the storm. We encountered themes of faith and trust, and we were reminded about the importance of journeying through life with Jesus by our sides. This week we come across another familiar passage, one that is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke in their gospels. In this episode we see the authority of Jesus over evil, the compassion of Jesus towards the afflicted, and the power of Jesus in bringing about radical transformation.

“Until chapter five Mark has portrayed the ministry of our Lord among the multitudes. This chapter teaches us how important individuals are to the Saviour.”

(Victor Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant in Mark's Gospel*, p58)

Specifics

- This week's passage is set immediately after the calming of the storm which we studied last week. Therefore, this episode must have happened later that same evening or when night-time had fallen.
- In (4:35) Mark tells us that it was evening when Jesus and his disciples started to cross the lake to get to the other side. Lake Galilee is eight miles wide at its broadest point. At this particular place, where Jesus and the disciples were crossing, it was nearer five miles wide.
- This is an important background detail as we begin to reflect on this passage. William Barclay writes, **“This story becomes all the more weird and frightening when it is seen as happening in the shadows of night.”**¹
- The region of the Gerasenes (v1) was on the eastern side of Lake Galilee and may have been under the influence of Gerasa, one of the cities of the Decapolis (which is mentioned in v20).
- As soon as Jesus got out of the boat he encountered **“...a man with an impure spirit...”** (v2). A three-fold description of this man is offered in (v3-5).
 1. He lived among the tombs, surrounded by the reality of death (v3).
 2. No one was able to bind him, not even with chains (v3-4). This man was so fierce that he was untameable. We get the impression that he struck fear into people.
 3. He spent the hours of day and night among tombs and in the hills crying out and self-harming (v5).
- This was a deeply troubled man. Yet, when he saw Jesus from a distance, **“...he ran and fell on his knees in front of him”** (v6).
- Note how the man cried out, addressing Jesus as the **“...Son of the Most High God.”** Note how he begged Jesus not to torment him (v7). This demon-possessed man knew who Jesus really was and was aware of his divine authority.

¹ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1975), pp117-118.

- In (v8) we see how Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to leave the man. (v9) offers further detail relating to the act of deliverance.
- When Jesus asked the man for his name the response was “...Legion...for we are many” (v9). A legion was the largest unit in the Roman army and generally numbered six thousand soldiers. This implies that there were multiple demonic influences in this man’s life.
- Please note the variance in the use of singular and plural descriptors and pronouns by this man. For example, in (v9) we see “My name is..” and then “...we are many...”
- Very quickly, however, our attention is drawn (once again) to the authority of Jesus. The man begged Jesus not to send the demons out of the area (v10).
- (v11) tells us that a large herd of pigs was located nearby and the demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them” (v12).
- Note also that before this could happen, Jesus had to give them permission (v13). Yet again, the authority of Jesus is highlighted and his power over evil is made very clear.
- The man was delivered from demonic influence and, as we shall see, his life was transformed.
- The final verses of this passage are quite revealing. Ralph Earle observes, “When He (Jesus) gave His permission, the unclean spirits (v13) went out of the man and entered the hogs. The result was disastrous. The whole herd of two thousand stampeded down the mountain side into the lake and were drowned.²”
- This was duly reported throughout the nearby town and countryside, and people went to see what had happened. They saw the healed man and they heard about what had happened to the pigs. This led to two responses.
 1. They recognised the transformation in the man’s life and this serves as evidence that a miraculous healing had taken place. We are told that they were afraid (v15). Put slightly differently, they were in awe at the authority and power of Jesus in bringing such radical transformation.
 2. Their understanding was physically based and lacked spiritual understanding. This is, perhaps, best revealed in their reaction to what had happened to the pigs. They were focused on business and finance, and this led them to ask Jesus to leave the area (v17).
- Victor Maxwell offers a good summary of the responses of the local people. “In the city there was no great rejoicing for the deliverance of the demonised neighbour. They were too blind to recognise that this was the greatest thing which had ever happened in their community...These hard hearted and small minded people had to learn that one individual life is worth more than a fortune in pork. It is sad when the community thinks more of sales than of souls.³”
- As our passage ends (v17-20) we see the extent of the transformation in the man’s life. He wanted to go with Jesus but he was given a clear instruction instead.
- Jesus commissioned him to go home and tells his own people “...how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (v19).
- The man followed this instruction and he told of the great things that Jesus had done for him. What a transformation!
- Victor Maxwell finishes his reflections with an interesting observation and question. He writes, “Could it be that because of the influence of this one man’s testimony that when Jesus came to the coasts of Decapolis later in His ministry, over four thousand people came to hear him?⁴”

² Ralph Earle, *Mark: The Gospel Of Action* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p47.

³ Victor Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant in Mark’s Gospel* (Belfast: Ambassador Productions, 1996), p61.

⁴ Ibid, p61.