Mark Lesson 14 (2022)

**RESTORING A MAN FROM DEMON-POSSESSION**

Mark 5:1-20

Key Verse: 5:19

“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.’”

Jesus’ Galilean ministry, described in Mark Chapter 1-3, had already witnessed that Jesus had absolute authority over demons (1:21-28, 34, 2:10-12). At the words of Jesus’ command, demons shrieked and ran away. Yet, the Jewish religious leaders got jealous of Jesus and demonized him by saying that he was possessed by Beelzebub and could only drive the demons because he was the prince of demons. Yet, despite their accusations, they could not ignore Jesus’ power over demons.

Mark’s description of the healing of a demon-possessed man in today’s passage is extraordinary. It provides vivid details of the event, exposing the hidden purpose of demons, which is opposite to that of Jesus. The demons intended to distort and destroy the man. In contrast, Jesus wants to restore him completely (Jn. 10:10). This morning, let us observe how Jesus healed the man possessed by legions of demons and how we can live healthy lives despite the demonic influences and temptations.

Look at verses 1 and 2. “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.” The place where Jesus arrived was called the region of the Gerasenes, which was Gentile territory. (Pic#1) As soon as he and his disciples arrived at his location, a man with an impure spirit came to meet him from the tomb. It was a remote and deserted area that people don’t usually visit. Probably, when this man saw a boat approaching, he got curious and came to see who was in the boat. I am sure that the confrontation with this man must not have been graceful but scary, at least for the disciples (Pic#2). However, Jesus, all-knowing, was not surprised by this man’s sudden appearance. He must have come from Galilee to see this one man. How wonderful it is that Jesus our Lord came to see this one guy whom nobody cared about and was utterly lost. We might think that we have chosen God. But the truth is that before we choose him, God has chosen us first. It’s a mystery of God’s redeeming grace (Jn. 15:16; Ro. 8:29-30).

What kind of man was he? Look at verses 3-5. “This man lived in the tomb, 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 broken 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 could offer details of this man’s condition and other things probably because he was informed by eye-witnesses, primarily Simon Peter. This man lived in tombs, not necessarily because he wanted. Instead, he could not live with others in the village or his family because he was disturbing people. Probably, he was violent. The townspeople tried to restrain him with iron chains to no avail. Nothing could restrain him because he got the strength from demons to break even iron chains and shackles. It’s no wonder people got scared of him.

Years ago, I saw the movie *“The Exorcist.”* The demon-possessed girl’s appearance was awful; she would open her mouth, and gross yellow stuff came out. And her body would be lifted, floating in the air as she wished. She was so powerful that she could move heavy stuff and furniture without using her hands. It was a scary movie. I have seen some crazy people with severe mental illnesses, mostly suffering from bipolar or schizophrenia. Yet, I haven’t seen a demon-possessed man like the man in the passage. It said that this man cried out night and day roaming around the tomb, which indicated that demons tormented him. He also cut himself with stones, most likely to numb the inner pain by hurting himself physically. This guy was in a miserable condition, possessed by demons. The demon may not be able to kill him directly, but it can indeed lead him to self-destruction. This man’s horrible condition reveals the purpose of the demon is to distort and destroy God's image in man (Pic#2A).

Look at verses 6-8. “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!’” As we read the description in these verses, we feel confused. Who was talking to Jesus, the demon or the man? Both. It seems that the demon was behind the man. He knew Jesus by name and acknowledged him as the Son of the Most High God. Yet, he also begged Jesus by saying, “In God’s name, don’t torture me!” I think this part is what the man might be saying, but now sure. The comment in verse 8, “For Jesus had said to him, ‘Come out of this man, you impure spirit!” indicates that the demon, the impure spirit, felt threatened by Jesus’ presence and didn’t want to come out of the man. So the man felt conflicted even more severely. This man might have had some Personality disorders. Yet, demon possession was the primary spiritual diagnosis. The man was in deep torture day and night. We can hardly imagine how much this man had to suffer from his condition.

What did Jesus do to heal the man? Look at verse 9. “Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘My name is legion,’ he replied, ‘for we are many.’” We see that Jesus first exposed the demon by identifying asking his name. When we see some people acting crazy or abnormal, we tend to become critical of their behaviors and appearance and pass judgment on them. So, we fail to help them even before trying. Yet, Jesus didn’t do that. Even though this man’s appearance and behavior were unacceptably terrible, he didn’t pass judgment on the man at all. He tried first to identify the problems that bothered the man. In this case, it was demon possession. Jesus was like an expert psychiatrist who would not judge his patients but try to diagnose the problems first.

The man said that his name was legion. I am sure the man’s real name was not “legion.” It was the demon who was behind. A legion is a Roman regiment consisting of 6,000 Roman soldiers. We don’t know how many demons were inside this man, but there were hundreds or even thousands (Pic#3). It’s so disgusting. The demons knew they could not stay inside the man since Jesus ordered them to leave. But they didn’t want to leave the area, so they begged Jesus not to send them out of the area. I don’t know why they liked the area so much.

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.” Reading this passage, some questions arise. If I see roaches in the kitchen cabinet corner, I will try to terminate them. To me, cockroaches are harmful. So if I didn’t terminate them, I would have regretted it. I wonder why Jesus didn’t terminate the demons. He should’ve known better. It’s another mystery. I don’t think we can get the answer easily. We might only say that God has his time plan to terminate the demons. Of course, I wouldn’t say I like it. But I am not God. Yet, I do believe that God knows better.

We also must remember that Jesus didn’t command the demons to enter pigs. He just allowed them to do so. I wonder what would have happened next if Jesus didn’t allow them to enter the pigs. I am just puzzled. Yet, this incident vividly demonstrates the purpose of demons is to destroy and kill. Indeed, they deserve God’s righteous judgment. I believe God will do so in his time. And we must not forget the main point of this event: Jesus drove demons out of this man through his power and authority. And the man was set free from demon possession. His purpose is to save and restore us (pic#4).

Look at 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 see 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 pig as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.” It seems that the herds of pigs, about 2,000, belonged to the townspeople. They saw their pigs drowned while the demon-possessed man was restored to normal, well dressed, and groomed. They had mixed feelings, feelings of surprise and fear. They could have thanked Jesus for healing this demon-possession man and asked Jesus for wisdom on how they could rebuild their ruined pig business. Did they? No. Instead, they were upset that they had lost their income source and asked Jesus to leave their region. They cared only about their livelihoods. But nobody cared about this poor man except Jesus.

Does anyone care about you? Maybe your parents? What if your parents are not available? Your friends? Someone might say, “yes.” But do they genuinely care about you? After all, do you care about others besides yourself? A sad reality is that all humans have limitations. They cannot truly care for others. But the Bible testifies that the Lord God cares for us deeply. He is also able to do much more than we could ever dream. 1 Peter 5:7 states, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” Proverbs 3:5-6 states, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Look at verses 18 and 19. “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.’” The formerly demon-possessed man experienced the deep love of God through Jesus and was deeply grateful. In his gratitude, he wanted to follow Jesus. Yet, Jesus didn’t allow him to do so. Instead, he instructed him to go to his own people and share what the Lord had done for him.

It does not mean this man could not become a follower of Jesus. Instead, Jesus possibly intended this man to be his genuine disciple by remembering God’s grace and mercy and sharing what the Lord had done for him. Following Jesus physically does not mean that we become his disciples. We need to live by the grace of God day by day. Receiving God’s grace and mercy is one thing, and maintaining and developing our faith in God’s grace is quite another. So, it’s indispensable to hear what Jesus said to this man, “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.”

Some Christians become more graceful, beautiful, and humble, and their faith seems to mature as they hold on to what the Lord has done for them. As we grow older, we can either become beautiful or ugly, depending on how we remember God’s grace in our lives. I know that it’s easy for us to forget, ignore and even minimize what the Lord has done for us, especially when we no longer seem to have nagging problems in our lives. Then, we cannot truly experience God’s kingdom as fresh and fabulous as it can be in our lives. We instead become the old-wine skin Christians. So, it must be intentional not to forget or minimize God’s grace and mercy in our lives. I believe that it’s good to write our spiritual autobiography (life testimony) from time to time.

Look at verse 20. “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.” We know the name of the Twelve Apostles. Many Christians name their children after the Apostles, like Peter, James, John, Matthew, etc. Yet, the name of this man is not known to us. Yet, his life wasn’t insignificant. His changed life became a marvelous testimony, which might have encouraged and inspired many people in the area. People want their names to be known and remembered by others. Yet, the importance is that God knows us, and we remember God’s grace and mercy and share it with others.

We may have better Bible knowledge and deeper theological understanding with many experiences. Yet, our faith may not grow much, and we may not be able to go deeper into the secrets of God’s kingdom unless we remember God’s grace and mercy in our lives as the first importance. Apostle Paul was a good example. He confessed in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10, “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

God’s grace is something that science cannot explain. It’s God’s mysterious redeeming power. God’s kingdom grows in us through his grace and mercy. Today’s world is infested with demonic and evil influences and temptations. We need God’s grace, the mysterious healing power of God. When clothed with God’s grace, we can overcome demonic influence and temptations (Ro. 8:37-39). Is your heart filled with God’s grace? Is God’s kingdom growing in you? May we remember and share how much the Lord had done for us and how he has had mercy on us.