

Power Over Evil

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's word to you. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.
- We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good.
- They don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it. That's why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.
- We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and his life and his death and his resurrection. And our stories from last week and this week serve as a pair. They're meant to go together.
- Last week showed that Jesus is the one who has power and control over nature. We're following that up with this week's story, which shows that he has power and control over evil and demonic forces.
- [1 : 0 4] And so these two stories are meant to pair together as twins to demonstrate that Jesus' control and power is over everything. It's over nature and the world. It's over evil and the demons.
- As we come to the Gospel, we're continuing to ask the same two questions. We ask over and over. Question one, who is Jesus? And question two, how do we respond to him? As we saw last week, and we'll see again in chapter 8, these are not questions that we are bringing outside and imposing them on the text.
- They're actually questions that are coming from inside the Gospel that we're bringing out. We saw that last week in verse 41 when they ask this question, Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?
- That's the question they ask. That's the question Jesus will ask in Mark chapter 8. He'll say, Who do you say that I am? As we come to this passage, we're in Mark chapter 5, verses 1 through 20.
- I just want to say there is a lot going on in this passage. And I'm going to stay focused. I'm going to try to stay focused on our two questions. Which is another way of saying I'm going to say something, not everything.
- [2 : 1 1] And I'm going to warn you in advance, I'm not going to talk a lot about the pigs. Okay? Sorry. Everyone has theories about the pigs. I'm not sure if anyone knows quite what's going on.
- If we have any extra time, it's going to be time that I spend talking about demon possession. Okay? With that, we're going to jump in together. I invite you to turn with me to Mark chapter 5.
- You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn in your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And that's why we read now chapter 5, starting at verse 1. They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.

And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs, and no one could bind Him anymore, not even with a chain.

[3 : 14] For He had often been bound with shackles and chains, but He wrenched the chains apart, and He broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue Him.

Verse 5. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains He was always crying out and cutting Himself with stones. And when He saw Jesus from afar, He ran and fell down before Him.

And crying out with a loud voice, He said, What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.

For He was saying to him, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit. Verse 9. And Jesus asked him, What is your name? He replied, My name is Legion, for we are many.

And He begged Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. And they begged Him, saying, Send us to the pigs.

[4 : 13] Let us enter them. So He gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs. And the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

Verse 14. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged Him that he might be with him.

And he did not permit him, but said to him, Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how He has had mercy on you. And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him.

And everyone marveled. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in Heaven, we thank You again that You speak to us.

You don't speak to us in a foreign language, but You speak to us in words that we can understand and comprehend. We ask that You would do that. This morning, we're aware of how weak and feeble we are, that we can't hear clearly from You without Your help.

[5 : 51] And so we ask that You would send Your Spirit to us now, that You'd honor Your promise. In Isaiah 55, that Your Word will not return to you empty, but it will accomplish what You have for it.

We ask that You would use it to accomplish Your purposes in our lives, that You would challenge us, You'd encourage us, and most of all, You would show us Jesus. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. So they say that hindsight is 20-20, and it turns out it was a really good idea for Jesus to take a nap last week, because as soon as He gets out of the boat after the storm, picking up from our previous story, things do not stop for Him.

It is this sort of non-stop action. We see in verse 1, they come to the other side of the sea. That's where they headed out at the end of chapter 4. And so we're just quickly finishing last week's story and beginning the new story for this one.

Verse 1, we see the region they're in there in the Gerasenes, which helps us understand that Jesus is no longer in Jewish territory. You'll remember that we were in Capernaum in the region of Galilee.

[7 : 01] Capernaum had a synagogue in it because it was a place with lots of Jews. Now Jesus is in this place, not with lots of Jews, but lots of Gentiles. And He's just moving. We see this word that's come again and again in the Gospel of Mark, which is immediately.

It also appears here, verse 2. Jesus steps out of the boat immediately. There met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. And so Jesus is still in the same day that started at least in the beginning of chapter 4.

He's been teaching. He's calmed this storm. He's taken a nap. It's the evening. He lands. And the very next thing He knows, He encounters this man with an unclean spirit.

Now I want us to pause for a minute because we need to understand what we are talking about when we talk about demon possession. There are two errors that we can run into when we start talking about demons in this world.

The first error is to believe that everything is demonic. There's a demon hiding behind every door and in every corner. You know, you need to say a prayer before you go to the bathroom in the church because there might be a demon hiding there.

[8 : 08] That's one error. There are just demons all over the place and they're doing everything. The other error that we can fall into is to believe nothing is demonic. There are no evil forces in the world.

Anyone who believes something like that is a little bit weird. As Christians, we believe not in a closed universe, but in an open universe, which is to say we believe there are supernatural forces in the world.

There are powerful things that we cannot see. First error then is saying that demons always happen. The second error is to say they never happen.

C.S. Lewis talks about this in his preface to the Screwtape Letters when he says, there are two equal and opposite errors in which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence.

The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

[9 : 14] Materialist being a person who only believes in the world that we can see. A magician, someone who believes that everything is magical all the time. Okay, those are our two errors.

That doesn't answer the important question though, which is what are we talking about when we discuss demon possession? People probably have all kinds of different ideas, vague theories about what's going on, and we need to have clarity about this.

So one man presents it this way. When the New Testament talks about demon possession, it is talking about not a psychological problem of the one afflicted, but as a matter of alien occupation.

Okay, not a psychological problem, a matter of alien occupation. And we've seen that already as we read this passage. These demons are in a sense aliens from outside this man.

I don't mean space aliens. I mean they don't belong to him, that live inside of him. They have occupied his body. It is not simply that he has some sort of psychological problem. It is that there is a real, powerful, demonic presence that has taken him over.

[10 : 17] So when we talk about demon possession, one of the ways we prevent believing demons are everywhere is understanding this definition that it is an alien occupation.

If it's a psychological problem, then probably all of us are demon possessed, right? And so it's with that then we can begin to understand what's going on in this story.

It's not just an alien occupation, but there are certain characteristics that we can recognize go along with demon possession. I had a seminary professor whose name was Chris Florence, and he taught us about some of this, and he talked about the characteristic that we see in the Bible of demons having this supernatural, superhuman strength.

And he told us about his time before he'd become a pastor when he worked in a psych ward, and he would meet people who met this criteria. They would have this basically unexplainable strength.

That's one of the ways we know we can suspect that we're dealing with someone who is actually possessed. And it's not just, doesn't just come from this one man. Other sources confirm this. We see this other places in the Bible.

[11 : 24] So for example, in Acts chapter 19, there's a man who's demon possessed. He single-handedly fights seven brothers, and he sends them away running and naked. There is a superhuman, unexplainable supernatural strength.

With that understanding in mind, we're gonna jump right back into the story because this helps us know what's going on. If you remember from chapter four, our previous story, we were told, verse 35, when Jesus sat out on the sea, evening had already come, which reminds us that it is nighttime now when Jesus lands and encounters this demon.

In verses two and three, there's this spooky setting. The word tombs is repeated twice to remind us we're in a place that's filled with death and decay and despair. That's meant to give us a feel and in a sense, some symbolism as well for what Jesus is encountering here.

He is in a sense entering into the land of the dead. He is encountering a man who for all practical purposes might as well be dead. He's living among the tombs, isolated and alone.

We find out verse five that he cries out night and day. And so that might also explain why Jesus is encountering this demon-possessed man at night. It sounds like he never sleeps.

[12 : 41] Maybe that's it. No, I'm just kidding. And so there's high tension here in the story. We, if we're familiar with the Bible, may know how this ends, but I want you to think for a second how you would feel if you were reading this for the first time.

One of your questions might be this, what is going to happen to Jesus? Here's this man. We've heard, we've learned he can't be bound. Is Jesus going to get hurt?

And in fact, we know here this sign checks out for this man because he does have this supernatural strength. Verse three, no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.

So he's strong enough. He's able to break chains. Verse four, he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart and he broke the shackles in pieces.

No one had the strength to subdue him. And so what we're discussing here is a type of strength that's at least a few standard deviations higher than ripping a phone book, right? He is beyond that strong man territory.

[13 : 43] This is a man who rips, not phone books, but chains. No one is able to bind him. That is the tension that we feel in this story because Jesus is coming up against this extremely dangerous and volatile man.

In fact, it sounds like from the story that Jesus does not cast out this demon immediately. We jump here, verses seven and eight, we're actually not told the beginning of the story. We come into it at the middle of the story because we're told Jesus, verse eight, was saying to him, come out of the man, you unclean spirit.

In other words, Jesus seems to be having this process of saying to this man, perhaps multiple times, that the spirit needs to come out. In verse seven, he names Jesus as the son of the most high God.

Let's pause for a second. Remember when we talked about the last time this happened in chapter one, one of the power of the demonic struggle is to know someone's name. And so in calling Jesus by name, this demon is probably trying to gain some sort of advantage over him.

Jesus, however, is much more powerful than that. It does not work on him in the same way it did not work in chapter one. But it helps us understand why, verse nine, Jesus asks him his name.

[14 : 58] And he replies, my name is Legion, for we are many. Now this isn't a coincidence. Legion would have been a military unit. Reminds us that Jesus is in a sort of military struggle here.

He is taking part in the cosmic war between good and evil. He is in a very serious battle with demonic forces. And they know that Jesus is more powerful.

And so as he tells them to get out, verses 10 through 13, the demons enter into these peace talks with Jesus. They know they're not going to win. And so they want to at least have a surrender that helps them.

Verse 10, they don't want to go out of the country. And so they present this solution. If you let us go into the pigs, that will be satisfactory for us. And so Jesus here, he finds that to be a good compromise.

He lets them go into the pigs. The pigs rush into the sea and they're drowned. That's verse 13. Now we could get caught up in the pigs. Lots of people have lots of different ideas about what's going on with the pigs.

[16 : 03] If we focus on the pigs, we have missed the point of this passage. The point is not the pigs. The point is this man who Jesus meets frees from the power and forces of evil and sets in his right mind.

In other words, the point here is not verse 13. It is verse 15. Verse 15, we find out why this is such an incredible and supernatural event. Because the people from the surrounding towns come in to see what's been happening with Jesus and this man as word spreads and they see something frightening.

The demon-possessed man, the one who had the legion sitting there, clothed and in his right mind. The pigs, in a sense, are a minor detail.

The major theme is that Jesus has taken this man who was living among tombs, isolated and alone, who might have otherwise been dead, unable to be bound, and a pariah in the culture around him.

And he has made him to sit calm, not crying out day and night, clothed, finally, rather than naked, and in his right mind. Verse 15 is the point of this passage.

[17 : 12] As we ask our question, who is Jesus, we see Jesus is not just the one who controls the world. Jesus is also the one who restores people. His power is not just for the calming of storms on seas from last week.

It is also taking people and restoring them to bear the image of God more and more. He is taking people and restoring them to what we read in Genesis chapter one, that they were made in the image of God with dominion over the creation.

This man, more than ever before, is able to image God in a powerful way. And we can assume as he moves forward, he will be able more and more to exercise dominion in this world.

Jesus is the one with power, not just over creation. Jesus is the one who restores and reconciles and redeems individual people. Jesus takes people and sets them that they are clothed and in their right mind.

I want you to see, though, not just Jesus' power, as incredible as it is, also Jesus' compassion. In his divinity, we see his compassion simply in the fact that he moves towards the oppressed and those in bondage.

[18 : 26] Yes, Jesus has the power to free this man. No, he doesn't have to. And he does. In Jesus' humanity, we also see his compassion.

Remember that this has all happened in one day. Jesus has been teaching probably since early in the morning out in a boat all through chapter four. Then he gets into the boat. He's trying to take a nap and there's a great storm and his disciples are frustrated with him.

They wake him up and he has to control nature. Then he makes it to this other shore at the evening. It's probably dark at this point. And Jesus chooses to then, after all of that, engage with this demon.

Jesus' compassion, both in his divinity and his humanity, as he stretches his humanity to the breaking point. Jesus doesn't just have the power to restore people.

Jesus actually does it. Jesus comes to those who are in bondage, those who are filled with shame, those who are isolated and alone, and he sets them free.

[19 : 35] Now, there's a question for us about what we're gonna do with this passage, and we have a problem, which is that, on the one hand, this is a true story, right?

This is not just some kind of metaphor or analogy. Jesus actually healed a man. He cast out demons from someone who is possessed. And I am not currently aware of anyone in our church community at Cheyenne Mountain who is possessed by a demon.

Even more than that, I'm not aware of anyone right now outside of our community who's possessed by a demon. What in the world does this passage have to do with us? This is actually a question that I'm asking about how do we read the Bible?

How do we read stories that don't directly talk about our context and our situation? I believe you talked about this a little bit, those of you who are with Jim Franks in Sunday School, about how we come to these sorts of passages.

And here's what we do. We look at a specific situation, we draw out a general principle, we apply that general principle to our specific situation.

[20 : 39] There's a bridge in other words. We do not frequently share the exact situation of the characters in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. And so we're always pulling out principles and reapplying them to new situations.

Principle here. However, there is this controlling power of evil in the world, Jesus is more powerful. There are real evil and demonic forces in this world and we don't have to fear them because of Jesus' power and his compassion.

Not all people are demon-possessed and all people are slaves to evil apart from Christ. Not all people are demon-possessed and all people are slaves to evil apart from Christ.

This is what Ephesians 2, verse 1 tells us. We're dead in our sins and our trespasses, which is a way of saying that outside of God and his intervention in our lives, we are spiritually dead.

We might as well be possessed by many demons living among tombs, crying out night and day by ourselves. There are places where we are not in our right minds because of sin.

[21 : 57] And so, yes, not everyone is demon-possessed. Everyone lives in a world with evil and evil forces. And Jesus comes to you and me as people who would otherwise be in the bondage of sin, spiritually dead, and he also exercises his power and authority and control over evil.

He also comes and sets us to be clothed and free in our right minds. We are also freed from the power and bondage of sin. For some of us, that's the freedom of being able to finally say that we are sober.

That is a form of being in your right mind, whether it is being addicted to a substance, whether it's sobriety that comes from a time when you were enslaved to sexual sin, whether it's pornography or something else.

You've had seasons of fighting in community with others, confessing sin in transparency, working forward as God is at work in your life with his people and by his spirit. And you know the peace and the joy that comes from being free from the bondage of addiction.

And if you've experienced that, you know exactly what I'm talking about. You know what it's like to feel like you are finally clothed and in your right mind. Maybe for you, it's not sobriety and addiction, but you have been a person who's enmeshed in relationships with no boundaries and you've found that the fear of God is what shrinks and weakens the fear and the love of man.

[23 : 23] Maybe it's being freed from the power of evil that makes you feel like you always have to justify yourself. You're the sort of person who always has the last word in every discussion because of your insecurity and your shame.

You have to control every situation. You can never be at rest or at peace. You think that it makes you strong, but instead it reveals how fragile and weak you actually are and you don't realize the toll that it's taken on you and your relationships.

You believe you have to hold the world together and there's a pile of bodies behind you to prove it. And so sitting clothed and in your right mind is being able to sit still and be at peace even when being misunderstood.

It's being able to have the relief and breathing room that comes from being willing to repent and know and admit when you're wrong. Not occasionally wrong, but frequently wrong. It's the ability to say that you messed things up, especially to those who have less power than you.

It's the ability to say you don't know everything. When we come together every Sunday morning and we confess our sins, when we confess our sins throughout the week and in worship, the invitation is for you to come and to finally be in your right mind.

[24 : 42] It is to finally be in touch with reality. When we speak our sins out loud to God and one another, there is a sense in which it breaks the power and the bondage of that sin in our lives.

It is one of the tools that God has given us to restore us to our right minds. This man, despite his possession, is coming to admit his need to God.

We're in our right minds and as we understand God's reality and his power. We're in our right minds as we understand the twins of grief and relief that go together. On the one hand, we grieve recognizing our sin and letting go of the lies that we've believed.

And on the other hand, we have the relief that comes from knowing that we're not the ones who hold the world together, but God does. We have the relief that comes from knowing that we can be human and admit our imperfections and sin and rebellion.

We have the relief from no longer having to keep the game and charade and act together of being always perfect and always competent. We have the relief that comes from struggling with sin and our appetites, not being a slave to sin and our appetites.

[25 : 54] Jesus comes. He sets us so that we can be clothed and in our right minds. I had a friend in college who had a radical transformation and in his encounter with Jesus and afterwards, he went back on his computer and he looked at the old list of all the bookmarks, all the sites that he had gone through.

Now, I don't think there was anything salacious there, but he was shocked by his previous self because there were ideologies and communities that had been so attractive to him and now in his right mind, they didn't even make sense.

He wasn't even sure why it was that those things had appealed to him so much because Jesus had come and transformed him. Who is Jesus?

Jesus is not just the one who changes. He is the one who changes our hearts and minds and lives. Christianity is not simply a different mental map, although it is. Christianity is a complete and absolute change and transformation in our hearts and our minds and our lives.

Christianity does not just change the periphery of our lives, it changes the center. This is what we talked about a few weeks ago. It is not an accessory commitment, it is a keystone commitment. It is something that comes and changes everything.

[27 : 14] It changes our values and our beliefs and our lives. And so this passage tells us that when Jesus comes, he gives all of us a radical change.

change. You may not be possessed by a demon. And in fact, I hope you're not. And if you are a Christian, your transformation is no less miraculous.

Jesus has taken you from spiritual death to spiritual life by the power of his word. the change that Jesus brings in your life may seem more mundane from a worldly perspective.

It is no less radical. It is no less powerful than what we see here. And if you're a Christian, you have had this sort of interaction with Jesus whether you realize it or not, whether you admit it or not.

it is a miracle to take someone from spiritual death to spiritual life. Jesus sets this man free from bondage that is no less true of you if you're in him.

[28 : 39] Jesus has also made you clothed and in your right mind. Jesus and only Jesus is the one who has the power to do that.

So how do we respond to him? Just like we've seen before, we have some positive examples and some negative examples. Our negative example here are the locals who in verse 17 after seeing Jesus' power, his ability to cast out evil in this world, ask him to live among them for years and transform them as well.

or not. Verse 17, they are desperate for Jesus to leave. Why? Well, Jesus has severely disrupted the bacon industry in the country of the Gerasenes.

God has done. It's time for Jesus to leave before things get worse. That is all these people are able to see.

They have this extremely narrow field of vision. They can only see what's right in front of them. This is what C.S. Lewis talks about in *The Weight of Glory*.

[30 : 02] He says, It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us.

Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

These folks want to go on making mud pies in a slum because that's all they can see. They don't realize that Jesus' power is showing them that he's the one who can actually bring a holiday at the sea.

They have let proximate things eclipse ultimate things. They have let good things replace the best things. And so they miss out. Jesus to them is merely an inconvenience.

Jesus gets in the way of what they want most right now. The man on the other hand gives us a positive example and not just a positive example.

[31 : 11] He goes above and beyond. Jesus tells him verse 19 he's supposed to go home and tell his friends how much the Lord has done for you and how he's had mercy on you.

And so we would expect if he's good and obedient he would go home. He'd tell his friends how much the Lord had done for him, how much mercy he had on him. Except he doesn't do that.

19 home and friends. Verse 20 he goes throughout the entire Decapolis. Decapolis is a term deca ten polis city. He goes throughout the entire ten city region on a tour to explain to people in these ten cities how much Jesus has done for him.

It is not enough for this man to simply go home and share with a few of his friends how good Jesus is. No, he is preparing the way for Jesus later in the gospel of Mark by going around to ten different cities spreading the word to everyone he meets about Jesus' goodness and mercy and grace.

Reminds us of Jesus' words that he who has been forgiven little loves little. He who has been forgiven much loves much. This man has been so affected and transformed by Jesus' love and power in his life that he can't help himself from going around and telling everyone how good Jesus is.

[32 : 35] Where were you when Jesus found you? If we have good news of transformation of Jesus in our lives, we have to remember one of two things.

Either where we were when Jesus found us. Or if we can't remember that, if you never knew a day when you weren't following after Jesus, ask this, where would you be without him?

If you wonder why you don't have more joy in your spiritual life, this is one of the answers. Joy comes through repentance, joy comes as and when we recognize our need.

Joy comes when we realize how bad things were without Jesus and how far he's taken us and transformed us. Joy comes when we see how great and powerful God is in our lives.

And so the application here is not to lay guilt on us and say we must go and share like this man. The application is this, when we know and see and understand how much God has done for us, when we experience the depth of his transformation in our lives, we will have no choice but to share what he has done.

[34 : 08] I doubt that this man went home and had to psych himself up to go out to the ten cities. strategies. I doubt that he had to read a book about evangelistic strategies so that he could convict himself to go out and share about Jesus.

No, his life transformation was so joyful and radical and complete that there was no other option for him. Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us.

We must understand how much God has changed us in Christ. we must know that his love and joy and transformation, his power over evil and demonic forces has come and is true for us as well.

If you have lived as a Christian your entire life, it is easy to forget where you would be without him. And Jesus' power, his transformation are no less real and no less miraculous for you.

Jesus has changed your life. we see Jesus' power over evil ultimately in his death and his resurrection.

[35 : 21] Because it's in Jesus' death and his resurrection that he puts the greatest form of evil to death. He puts death to death. That's what 1 Corinthians chapter 15 tells us.

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the one who has power over evil. And so, Jesus is the one who frees and restores you and me. How do we respond to him?

We know what Jesus has done for us so that we can share what Jesus has done for us.

[36 : 26] Verse 15. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion sitting there, clothed, and in his right mind.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you again for the reminder from your word of your power, and not just your power, but also your compassion.

We thank you that you use your power to set us free. We ask that you would remind us this week of the glory and the grace of your transformation in our lives, that we would be filled with the joy that comes from that knowledge, and we would share it with those around us.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.