

## “WHAT IS YOUR NAME?”

Mark 5:1-20

Key Verse: 5:9a

“Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’”

One of the themes of Mark’s gospel is Jesus’ authority as the Son of God (1:1,11). When we hear the word “authority” we may feel oppressed, thinking, “Oh no! Not authority!” This reaction may stem from an experience with abusive authority, even in the church. This makes us allergic to the word “authority” --even Jesus’ authority. However, we need to understand that Jesus’ authority is quite different from any human authority. Jesus’ authority comes from God to bring salvation and true justice. Though Jesus is the Son of God, he never used his authority to oppress people or for his own advantage. Rather, he always used it to serve others and save them from the power of evil.

In Mark’s gospel we see that Jesus has authority to teach the word of God which gives life (1:22), to drive out demons and set people free (1:27), to forgive sins and give us peace and joy (2:10), and to calm a raging storm--rescuing us with his power (4:39). In today’s passage we see a most vivid display of Jesus’ authority over demons. This is good news. Demons are evil and powerful. They destroy human personalities, families, and nations. They are so strong that nothing can subdue them, including human persuasion, military power, or money. They are not afraid of anything. There is only One who terrifies them: Jesus. That is why we need Jesus, who has such authority. Let us consider how demons destroyed one person and how Jesus used his authority to save this man.

First, demons destroyed one young man (1-5). After Jesus taught about the kingdom of God in many parables, he and his disciples crossed the lake to the other side. On the way, they went through a violent storm. At last, they landed on the eastern shore of the lake. They were in the region of the Gerasenes in an area known as the Decapolis, the “Ten

Cities.” It was Gentile territory. At one time, it had been a part of Israel, but in the year 331 B.C., Alexander the Great occupied it. Later this region was taken over by the Roman army. Many veterans lived there. As Gentiles, they liked to eat pork, and the pig business was thriving in that area. Why did Jesus cross over to this Gentile territory? Was it to avoid conflict with the religious leaders? This is not likely. As this story unfolds, we see Jesus’ divine purpose to save a man in Gentile territory who was suffering terribly from demons. Thus Jesus reveals his heart’s desire to show mercy to people living in darkness and advance the kingdom of God.

Jesus and his disciples arrived on the shore early in the morning. The disciples were expecting time to rest and a hot meal. But they met another storm. As soon as they landed, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet them (1-2). He had a ghastly appearance and was shouting and shrieking. Verse 3a says, “This man lived in the tombs...” Ancient tombs were unlike the well-kept graveyards we see today. Far removed from residential areas, they were caves filled with decomposing bones--eerie, unclean, and putrid--and a fitting dwelling for impure spirits. Why did this man leave home and society to live in the tombs? It was not his own will, but because demons had driven him there.

How did people try to deal with this man? Verse 3b says, “...and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.” Apparently, this man had done awful things, including acts of violence. He had become a dangerous monster and an existential threat. So people tried to subdue him for their own safety. In our time, he would be given mind-numbing drugs or electric shock, or in the worst case he would be imprisoned. These treatments might suppress his symptoms but would not solve the real problem. This man became more violent and uncontrollable. He tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. Wow! Where did this power come from? It did not come from human strength, but from the supernatural power of demons. Because of these demons, no human being was strong enough to subdue him (4). These demons drove him to the tombs.

Someone said, "If you want peace, go to the graveyard, where there is no human conflict." Did this man find such peace? No. Verse 5 says, "Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones." He had no peace whatsoever. The demons harassed him night and day. He desperately needed to sleep but could not. Sleep deprivation is a form of torture. It was unbearable. Cutting himself with stones reveals his deep self-loathing. He hated himself and did not want to live any longer. He was totally enslaved by wicked demons--not just one or two, but a legion of demons, which indicates thousands.

How had he become demon possessed? We are not told these details. But in light of Bible teaching two things seem to be clear: he was influenced by pagan culture, and he gave in to sinful desires. Culture is especially important to human beings, like water is to fish. If the water is dirty, the fish will die. But if the water is fresh, the fish will thrive. When a godly culture is formed--reflecting God's attributes of love, truth, justice, holiness, kindness, respect, and trust--good spiritual fruit will be produced. On the other hand, ungodly culture-- characterized by sexual immorality, violence, lies and deceit, greed, hatred, jealousy, division, and unfaithfulness--produces bad fruit.

This man lived in a pagan culture, full of idols. Idols are man-made gods, such as Zeus or Diana, or in modern times celebrities, money, power, fame, and pleasures. These idols may seem harmless. But idol worship is closely related to demon possession (1Co 10:20). Idol worship is demon worship which makes people immoral, violent, and harmful. As the man lived in such an idol worshiping culture, he was vulnerable to demons. This is not just an ancient story; it is true in our time as well. In order to obtain political power, some people are willing to do anything, including lie. As a result, our public arena is filled with deception, and has become an environment for demons to exploit. Celebrity is another powerful idol. Some people have lost their minds trying to gain internet fame. Let us remember that idolatry breeds

demonic activity. May God's truth influence our nation to be a godly culture, where godly values can thrive.

A more fundamental reason for the man's demon possession is that he gave in to sinful desires. Every human being has two kinds of desires: holy and sinful. Holy desires are things like love, purity, truth, justice, beauty, peace, and righteousness. If we follow holy desires, we can grow in noble humanity to be like Jesus. Sinful desires include impurity, promiscuity, debauchery, selfish-ambition, discord, hatred, substance abuse, and the like. When we give in to our sinful desires, demons creep into our hearts one by one until we can no longer control ourselves.

When we are caught by demons, serious consequences follow, including loss of our identity. We don't know who we are, what we are doing, or where we are going. We do not do what we want to do, but what demons drive us to do. Then we become extremely frustrated and begin to hate and torture ourselves. Some people curse themselves or others. Some try to drown their inner anguish with drugs or alcohol. Some actually cut their bodies until they bleed. Some cut their relationships with others and withdraw into their own world. They may watch online videos or play video games day and night without eating or sleeping. The work of demons is not theory; it is reality. The man in this passage gravely wanted to escape his nightmare existence. However, he could not escape from himself, nor the demons within. He desperately needed a Savior.

Second, Jesus restored the man's true identity (6-20). When this man saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him (6). 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!" (7). It seems that the man was responding to Jesus, but in fact the demons were speaking through him. The demons immediately knew who Jesus was: the Son of the Most High God. They screamed at Jesus. It was a shriek of fear, defense, and rebellion against God. We hear this scream today: "Why are you interfering with me? Get out of my life!" Actually,

it is not the people who say this, but inner demons who want to get far away from Jesus as fast as they can. The demons were terrified that they would be tortured. This response followed Jesus' words, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!" (8) When Jesus met this man, he had immediately confronted the impure spirit and drove it out. Jesus saw how much the man had suffered from the demons. Jesus knew he was bound by demons and helpless. Jesus intervened in his life out of his great mercy.

Here we learn that Jesus distinguishes between people and demons. Usually we see people and demons as one. We attribute the demons' work to people and see them as useless and incurable. But Jesus treated the man and the demons as separate entities. Jesus did not rebuke the man, but the impure spirit. When doctors examine patients, they distinguish between the patient and the disease. Doctors believe that with the right treatment the disease will be healed, and the patient will get well. The problem is that evil spirits are invisible and hard to detect. We cannot discover them with an MRI or a CT scan. They are exposed only before the word of God.

Jesus followed up his rebuke of the demons with a question to the man. Let's read verse 9a. "Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'" Jesus' question had a profound effect. Jesus exposed the full power of the evil spirits. The man answered, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (9b). A legion was a unit of 6,000 soldiers in the Roman army. This indicates that there were many demons in this man, and they were like a cruel, invading army. Yet, this entire legion of demons had knelt down before Jesus and were totally subject to Jesus' authority. Jesus could not only force them to leave the man, but he could tell them where to go. Jesus wanted to reveal that his authority over a legion of demons was irresistible and absolute. Under the protection of this Jesus we are safe from any demon army.

There was a deeper reason for Jesus' question. It was to make a relationship with the man and to restore his true identity. The man's answer contains both a personal and a plural pronoun: "my" and "we."

He was confused and oppressed by the demons. He could not answer, and in fact, we do not hear his name. Only the demons answer. Yet Jesus saw through the demonic activity to the man himself. Jesus spoke to this man whom no one wanted to be around. Jesus wanted to restore his true identity. His true identity was given by God his Creator, who made him in his own image. So he was a beloved child of God, commissioned as a steward and a ruler of God's world. Deep within, the greatness of God was in this man. But when he gave in to his sinful desires, demons entered his heart and he lost all of God's blessings and privileges. He became a slave of demons, an ugly monster. He was crying out for release from the demons' cruel manipulation. Jesus heard his cry and worked to restore his identity as a child of God.

The serious consequence of breaking one's relationship with God is to lose one's identity. After Adam's fall, God called out, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9) It did not mean God was trying to find Adam's location. Rather, God wanted Adam to realize that he was now lost, and to come back to God to restore a relationship with him. The patriarch Jacob, after gaining honor, love, and wealth, was not satisfied. So he asked God for a true blessing. Then God asked him, "What is your name?" When he replied, "Jacob," God gave him a new name, "Israel." This was his true identity. Real blessing is to find one's true identity as a child of God.

Numerous people live in confusion because of the power of sin and demons. Though they have God-given greatness and beauty, and are surrounded by loved ones, they listen to demons whisper, "You are no good. You are unloved. Your life does not matter at all." They unwittingly find their identity in the lies of the evil one. This is the deep source of misery for so many people. Jesus came to bring good news. 1 John 3:8b says, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." When Jesus comes into our hearts, he shatters the lies of the evil one. And John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...." When we just believe in Jesus, he gives us a clear identity as children of God! As God's children we are loved, we are forgiven, we have the Holy Spirit within, we are holy priests in this fallen world, and

we have an everlasting inheritance in God's kingdom. By faith in Jesus we can say, "I am a child of the one true God!"

In the process of restoring this man, Jesus demonstrated one thing more: his willingness to sacrifice. In verse 10, the demons beg Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. They liked the pagan culture of the Decapolis. They certainly did not want to be sent into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. So they begged Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs. Jesus gave them permission. Then the pigs became crazy and rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned (11-13). As a result, the man was set free from the power of demons. He was sitting there, before Jesus, dressed and in his right mind (15a). Why did Jesus sacrifice a herd of two thousand pigs for this man? Jesus valued this one man more than the herd of pigs. In order to restore this one man, Jesus was willing to sacrifice even more. Eventually Jesus sacrificed his own life for us (Mk 10:45).

How did the townspeople respond? They were afraid and pleaded with Jesus to leave their region. They were deeply sorry that they lost a large herd of pigs. So they made a big mistake and asked the Savior of the world to leave. Jesus was sorry about their unbelief. But he did not argue; he got into the boat to leave. The man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him (18). He wanted to follow Jesus anywhere, and be with Jesus forever. But Jesus did not let him. Jesus wanted to reach out to the people of that area who did not know him. Jesus wanted them too to be saved from their sins and from demons. So Jesus appointed the man as a missionary to the Decapolis. Jesus 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" (19). So he went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed (20).

Telling of Jesus' mercy on us is the mission of all believers. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Jesus visited me

when I was a young college student, imprisoned by the power of lustful desires, pride and selfishness, and vulnerable to demons. Jesus set me free by his power and gave me new life and a new direction to serve college students as a pastor. For over 40 years I have been sharing Jesus' mercy with others. About 10 years ago, I visited North Korea as a UBF representative with Christian Friends of North Korea. Our team was assigned guides who accompanied us everywhere. One of them was a short, stocky man who always wore dark sunglasses. After praying for him throughout the ten days of our visit, I had a chance on the last day to tell him how Jesus had rescued me through the ministry of a Korean missionary. As I shared with him that God loved him and Jesus died for him, suddenly two drops of tears began to roll down his cheeks from under his sunglasses. Then he suddenly turned and went away. I believe the seed of the gospel was planted in him, even in North Korea. The testimony of Jesus' power and mercy to save is indeed powerful. In these times, what American young people need most is to know Jesus, the mighty and merciful Savior. Let us share the good news of Jesus with them.

In this passage we have seen Jesus use his great authority to destroy the devil's work and to save one man who was helplessly bound by demons. Jesus is mighty to save. Jesus is full of mercy. Let's trust in Jesus who came to restore our identity as children of God. Let's share this good news with the suffering people of our times.