

October 14, 2018

Demonology  
*Do You Believe?*  
Mark 5:1-20

**Opening words** Today, I begin a new two-part sermon series, *Demonology*. Webster defines demonology as, the study of demons or of demonic beliefs. It is how I am going to respond to Halloween this year. What is a demon? They are agents of Satan, himself. They are evil spirits, which can possess a person in this world or torment a person in hell for eternity. Did you know there are over twenty stories in the Bible where there is a demonic presence? I am going to look at two from the Gospel of Mark. Both stories emphasize the authority Jesus had over demons. Our scripture reading for today is Mark 5:1-20, the story of Legion. Let me call this message *Do You Believe?*

**Mark 5:1-20** They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup> When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. <sup>3</sup> This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. <sup>4</sup> For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and in the hills, he would cry out and cut himself with stones. <sup>6</sup> When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. <sup>7</sup> 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!" <sup>8</sup> For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!" <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." <sup>10</sup> And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. <sup>11</sup> A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. <sup>12</sup> The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. <sup>15</sup> When they came to 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. <sup>16</sup> Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. <sup>17</sup> Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. <sup>18</sup> As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> 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.

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When Jesus was leaving the disciples, he gave them these parting words, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*" (Matthew 28:18) If you are thankful for Jesus's complete authority, say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves today in the fifth chapter of Mark. The fourth chapter of Mark ends with Jesus trying to escape a crowd in Galilee. He sails about five miles to a place where he was far less popular, Gerasa. Unlike Galilee, it had a Gentile population. Jesus arrives as the sun is setting, which makes the perfect background for this eerie story. There is no crowd, only a single individual. He will never be voted the most popular or the best dressed. His problem is obvious. He is demon-possessed. He has all the signs. He lives in isolation, in the caves where the dead were kept. No one could subdue him. His strength is second to none. Even chains can't hold him. He is in constant pain, he cries out and maims himself. There is no other way to say it, the man is pathetic. Yet, he is not that removed from society. He identifies the Master correctly. He ran to Jesus, and he asked him a straightforward question, "What do you want from me, Jesus, Son of the Most-High God?" Actually, it is not the man who correctly identifies Jesus, it is the demons inside the man. How many demons are inside this man? His name, Legion, reveals the answer. A Roman Legion had 6,000 soldiers. The man has many demons, yet in the end, Jesus prevails. The man is healed and becomes a powerful witness for Jesus. He is to tell his world what Jesus has done for him. If this story sounds familiar, say, "**Amen!**" On the surface, this story is about demon possession. That is fine with us because, as a society, we are intrigued by demons and the dark side.

On December 26, 1973, the movie, *The Exorcist*, was released. Starring Linda Blair, it is one of the most profitable horror movies ever made. It was made for \$12,000,000 and has earned over \$441,000,000. The movie was based on a book of the same name and recounts the story of a demon-possessed twelve-year-old girl. Her mother is determined to win her back, so she arranges an exorcism, conducted by two Catholic priests. I will be honest with you. I have never seen the movie, because I am afraid. Yet, many have seen it. Everyone seems to have a reaction to the movie. Linda Blair received death threats from religious zealots, because they believed the movie glorified Satan. However, most seemed to enjoy the movie because it dealt with the dark side. Can I ask you a question? How many of you have seen the movie, *The Exorcist*? Do you enjoy horror movies? It is painfully true. Our society is intrigued by demons. Do you believe in demons and the dark side?

Every night there seems to be another ghost hunting show on. Perhaps you have watched one. The other night, I watched *Ghost Adventures* for a few minutes. They are all different, yet they are all the same. There is a group of professional ghost hunters. The members of the team are young, except for one old man with a beard, who has an accent. They are smart enough to run their electronic devices. However, they are not that smart. They are sitting in the dark in a former school, hospital, mental institution, or prison. The black and white picture, with green highlights, is blurry, but the sound is good. I hear dripping water; they hear a tormented soul crying out for help. They can

never turn the camera fast enough to see the ghost, but they are convinced that they are not alone. They are experiencing paranormal activity. Do you know anyone who goes ghost hunting? It is big business, because our society is intrigued by demons and the dark side. Do you believe in demons and the dark side?

In America, we have no shortage of scary places. Several years ago, I was in Salem, Massachusetts. It is the site of the infamous witch trials and executions. They say it is haunted. As a young person, my parents took me to Sleepy Hollow, New York. I remember next to nothing about that trip, but I do remember my own mother saying the town was haunted. Someday, I want to go to the Winchester Mansion in San Jose, California, because they say it is haunted. I have been told one of the most haunted places in America is Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. On that ground, 50,000 soldiers died or were wounded over a three-day period. Do you get the point? Our society is intrigued by demons. Do you believe in demons? If you react in any way to demons or the dark side, say, "**Amen!**" However, it is not just true of Americans. It is true of the world. People around the world are intrigued by demons and the dark side.

His name is infamous, Rasputin (1869-1916). He actually did have a first name, Grigori. Do you know his story? He was born to a peasant family in Siberia. He didn't stay down and out his entire life. In 1905, he traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia. He was recognized as a Russian mystic and self-proclaimed holy man. He intrigued both church and social leaders. Soon after, he met the last Russian Tsar, Nicholas II. Those were difficult days for the Tsar and his family. For you see, the Tsar's only son, Alexei, the heir to the throne, suffered from hemophilia. The Tzar, and especially his wife Alexandra, believed in Rasputin. They believed in his healing power and they believed he could save their son. I have been told he did heal Alexei, but only for a short period of time. Many believe his power came from a dark place. However, it doesn't end well for Rasputin. Even his ending is disturbing. He was poisoned, with enough poison to kill several men, but he didn't die. He was shot in the back, but he didn't die. He was shot two more times and beaten with clubs, but he didn't die. Finally, they wrapped him in a carpet and threw him into the Neva River. It was reported at the time, as they wrapped Rasputin in the carpet, they looked into his eyes and found them to be bright green and luminous. Where does a man get that kind of power? Many believe, it came from Satan himself. They may be right! This is the question you must answer: Do you believe in demons? I really don't care if you believe in demons or not. What matters to me is that Jesus believed in demons. That is good enough for me. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

There is a man by the name of Dr. Roger Barrier. He has been in the ministry for over forty years. He now contributes to a website called *Crosswalk*. It is a simple concept; people email him questions, and he answers them. One woman asked him the question, where have all the demons gone? It is a good question. Everywhere Jesus went there seemed to be a demon-possessed person. When was the last time you saw a demon-possessed person? Many will tell you demon possession in the Bible is mental illness.

They may have a point. Maybe the the phrase *demon possession* was overused in Biblical times? However, maybe the phrase is underused in our time. Like me, Dr. Roger Barrier believes in demon possession, but it is not that common today. He says there are three reasons why.

1. **We don't see demons because we don't have enough faith.** Around the world, God is doing some miraculous things. In some parts of the world, people witness healings, exorcisms and massive conversion. Those people have faith, because they are spiritually alive. We are spiritually dead. That observation connects to the second point.
2. **We don't see demons today because we are trapped in materialism,** so Satan doesn't have to bring out the big guns. We live at a standard of living that is the envy of the world. That is why so many want to come here. Spiritually speaking, our prosperity is a curse. We just don't feel like we need God. We can take care of ourselves.
3. **We don't see demons because Satan works in seclusion.** Satanists don't worship in public. They worship where they will never be found. Their membership is hidden from their own members. Everything is hidden in secrecy.

If you can agree with any of those points, say, **"Amen"** However, the story of the exorcism of Legion is not really a story about demons. They are only part of the story.

The story of Legion is really about the authority of Jesus. As a matter of fact, this section of Mark is about the authority of Jesus. The story prior to our reading is about Jesus calming the storm. Jesus has authority over nature. The story beyond our reading is about Jesus healing a young girl. Jesus has authority over illness. The story of Legion is a story about Jesus's authority over his spiritual enemy, Satan. The authority of Jesus is not something that should be dismissed. The authority of Jesus changes everything. If you are thankful Jesus is the ultimate authority, say, **"Amen!"** I want to end this message with a confession.

I really struggled with this message. The reason is obvious. I do believe in demons, and I do believe Satan is alive and well in our world. I started working on this message late last Sunday night. I researched the topic and read stories about people who were demon-possessed and trapped in the occult. Those stories really bothered me. They bothered me so much that by Tuesday night, I decided to walk away from it. But the topic wouldn't let me go. On Wednesday morning, I started again. Of all the stories I read, this is the one that I will always remember:

The young man's name was Bob. As a teenager, he was intrigued by the dark side. He saw all the scary movies, and he read everything he could on the topic. He didn't know

it then, but he knows it now: He was being pulled into the dark side. One day, he received a hand-written note in red ink. It was an invitation to a Satanic worship service. It was to be held in a certain location in the woods in the middle of the night. With no real adult supervision, Bob decided to go. When he arrived, everyone's face was covered, and they walked around an open fire. Small animals were sacrificed to Satan, and Bob was hooked. Soon, he was contacted by two men. He needed to prove his worthiness to join the coven, the local Satanic church. He was asked to go to a local church and disrupt the service. Bob was excited about this opportunity, and he chose a store-front church. The two men accompanied him to the church, but they never went in. Later, Bob found out why. The two men couldn't go into the church, because they were afraid of Jesus.

This is the Good News for today: You have nothing fear, because you are a disciple of the Son of the Most High, Jesus Christ! The Master wasn't wrong. He is the ultimate authority. Do you remember Jesus's own words? He said, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me!*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"