

*Years ago, the local church I grew up in, ran the Christianity Explained course, (which was a pretty new thing, at the time) ... And this course, took us through the Gospel of Mark, as it explained what Christianity is ...*

...

*And at about the point we're at today, in the Gospel of Mark, one of the participants (a man, of a science-based profession), asked, "What are all these 'Demons' about? It seems like there was an epidemic of them back then."*

*And our minister at the time explained that:*

- *there are "Good Spiritual Beings" called Angels; and*
- *Evil angels who rebelled against God, are called Demons; and*
- *Angels and Demons **do** still exist today;*
- *but back in Jesus' day, the physical presence of Jesus disturbed them, and they manifested, and so they were more prominent... ....*

*But it seemed to me, that "This bloke, with his science-based background, didn't really accept the answer".*

And a lot of people today, **won't** accept an answer like that... Many people have a lot of trouble with the whole concept of there being "demons" (They confine Demons to being creatures in story books & horror movies). And many people, and even some preachers, want to explain demon possession away, as being "simply the way the ancients explained psychiatric illnesses, because they didn't know any better..."

And so today, many people have the view that the demoniac in today's reading, simply had some kind of psychotic condition....

And yet the way that Mark explains this man's encounter with Jesus, and the way that it all went down, makes it seem pretty obvious that this man's state, was **much more** than some kind of mental illness.

And let me be really 'blunt' here: Any attempt to describe **this** man's condition as "mental illness", well, it doesn't come from the biblical text.... – It comes from a modern person's unwillingness to believe the existence of personal evil beings, and that these demons can control a human...

If we don't believe in Angels and Demons:

- we're never going to 'get' Jesus's perspective of the cosmos, because Jesus **does** believe in Angels and Demons;

And it means:

- we'll always have trouble understanding what the Gospel is **really** about, because a large part of the Gospel, **is** about Jesus' defeat of Satan; and
- we'll never grasp the true power of God; and
- His supremacy in the Spiritual battle

How could we grasp it, if we don't believe that Angels and Demons exist...

Today's reading, is not the story of Jesus curing a mentally ill man – it's a record, of 2 spiritual powers, in confrontation... - a vast legion of demons, up against the One Lord Jesus Christ...

Righto, so let's pick up from where we left off last week:

- Jesus and His disciples were heading across the lake, into Gentile territory;
- A storm came up on the Lake, and when Jesus roused on the wind and the waves (and they stopped), He demonstrated the power He has, over the physical world...

**And now**, as soon as Jesus sets foot on this Gentile shore, there's a test of His power over the **Spiritual** World...

immediately there met him, out of the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit.

And there's no doubt, that this was a case of demonic possession – it had all of the signs:

- This man had a fascination, or an attraction to the macabre – he lived among the tombs;
- He possessed super-human strength – the locals had tried to restrain him with chains and fetters, but they couldn't hold him – he broke them
- He was into self-harm & self-mutilation – he cut himself with stones;
- He was abusive and disruptive – Night and day, would be always crying out (among the tombs, and on the mountain slopes)

....

- He had supernatural knowledge – he instantly recognised, that Jesus was the Son of God; **and**
- he was tormented **by** the presence of Jesus – he was tormented, simply by the presence of the Holy One, who had power to destroy him..

And we see this time and time again, as Jesus encounters demons – they're tormented, simply by His presence...

This man wasn't displaying some kind of psychotic condition – this was a manifestation of demons, taking over the man; of the demons, causing his self-harm and abusiveness,,,,, and yes, it was demons, who spoke through his vocal cords...

And **no one** could control him. No one could subdue him...

<sup>6</sup> And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before Him.

And Jesus was saying to him, "**Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!**"

Perhaps surprisingly (at least it was to me), to a point, the demons held their ground... Yes, they fell down before Jesus... Demons cannot stand, in the presence of God... But they tried their best to keep their hold on the man...

<sup>7</sup> 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."

That's like begging Jesus, "Swear to me, by God", or "In the name of God", "Don't torment me."

Isn't that fascinating – this manifestation of demonic evil, representing **all that is ungodly**, (and against God) trying to manipulate God's chosen one, by invoking the name of God...

And you know, we see this kind of thing happening today: people who have **no** genuine interest at all, in obeying God, invoking some kind of twisted notion of Godliness, to **negate** God's word...

E.g.

The current political debate in Australia, seems to be centring around "religious freedoms", and "the right for Christians or Christian schools, to only hire people who uphold the faith values and ethos **of** that organisation,,,,,

But some who oppose Christ, and who oppose the Christian church, (and so they oppose religious freedom), would say, "But God is about love, and in the name of God, you Christians should love. And if you love, you won't be discriminating against people, based on their beliefs."

And so, basically what they're saying, is "In the name of God, do not discriminate" , when they have no interest at

all, in obedience to God, and they're trying to destroy, the whole purpose of that Christian ministry...

What a twisted tactic that is – for those who have no relationship with God, to invoke the Name of God, for their own wicked purpose...

Did you know, that in the Old Testament, wherever God is referred to as **“The Most High God”**, it's always on the lips of people who **know** who God is, but they're not God's people – they don't have any relationship with Him... And that's the case here: This Demon knows **exactly** who Jesus is – He identifies Him as **“the Son of The Most High God”**... This demon knew that he was in for a 'hammering', and so he invokes the Name of God, to try and get Jesus to go easy on him.

This demon was cunning, and he didn't give up easily... Jesus had already him, to get out of that man, but he resisted... – there **was** a very real battle going on here...

You know, sometimes **we** give up way too quick – God calls us to a mission, or an assignment of some kind, and we give it a bit of a go, and we're not immediately successful, and so we just give up... And sometimes I think we have a distorted view of how easy (or how hard) it's supposed to be...

We usually get the image of Jesus just speaking the word once, and it's done... And with a lot of the demons Jesus drove out, that was exactly the case. But this was a much more difficult case – this wasn't just one demon – this was a

legion of demons – thousands of demons, resident in one man...

<sup>9</sup> And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many."

Now, in a Roman legion, there were 6000 troops... Were there 6000 demons in this one man? Maybe... There were at least 2000, because when they went, they went into 2000 pigs...

<sup>v10</sup> And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country.

For some reason, they didn't want to leave the geographical location they were in. And it seems that sometimes, demons **are** tied to a particular locality. For example, when the prophet Daniel prayed to God, immediately, an angel was dispatched to answer his prayer. But for 21 days, that angel fought "the Prince of Persia"<sup>i</sup>, until a more powerful angel came to his aid... (That demon, was tied to the locality of Persia)

Now, we know that the eventual fate of all demons, is to be cast into the lake of fire (that God has prepared for Satan and his demons)..., but for now, when demons are cast out of those they possess, it seems they wander<sup>ii</sup> until they find a new place to take up residence...

And so, Jesus didn't send them to the pit (not yet – their time will come) – He sent those thousands of demons, into the pigs... And about 2000 pigs ran down a steep slope, into the sea, and drowned...

Wow, that would've been something to see, wouldn't it...

And what an amazing demonstration of the power of God, over evil... Nobody else could even restrain this man – because of the power of thousands of demons... They couldn't even restrain him, but Jesus set him free...

Now of course, when word got out, of what had happened, people came for a look... And what did they find???

<sup>15</sup> ... they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man - the one who had had the legion (and he was completely transformed – he was), sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.

How does one respond, to a miracle of God???

You know, I've heard so many **un**believers say, "If God wants me to believe in Him, all He's got to do, is do [insert your miracle here], and I'll believe." - as if, all they need, is a spectacular demonstration of God's power, and then they'll believe... Rubbish...

Our Christmas season, is in full-swing right now:

- Christmas carols;
- End of year events;
- Christmas parties;
- Catalogues advertising Christmas presents;
- Decorations are coming out;
- The houses are getting lit up...
- Today, it's only 9 days until Christmas

At Christmas time, the true celebration, is that Jesus came to save us...

But perhaps a more pertinent question for us is “How do we respond to His coming?”. – Jesus **came** for us, but how do we respond to Jesus???

Jesus liberated the man, who was so thoroughly captivated by evil. And the townsfolk's response (to this demonstration of supreme Spiritual Power) was to ask Jesus to leave.

Jesus came for us, but are we like the townsfolk? – “Jesus, you're not really welcome here.”

It is ridiculous, that Jesus isn't even welcome in Christmas any more... It is astonishing (to me), how quickly the Christmas greeting has changed from “Merry Christmas” to “Happy Holiday”...

Do you know where the word “Holiday” comes from “Holy Day”... So, I want you to feel quite free, if someone wishes you “Happy Holiday”, why don’t you respond positively, and say, “Wow, I’m so glad that you do see this as a **holy** day – the day that we celebrate the birth of our saviour, Jesus... You’re right – it is a holy day.”

Or are we like the man who had been set free? All he wanted, was to get in the boat with Jesus, and to go away with Him...

Now, that’s not such a bad thing, is it? – wanting to be with Jesus...

But Jesus said, “No, you can’t come with Me... – You’ve got a mission right here;”

**“Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”** <sup>20</sup> And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marvelled.

The amazing thing about becoming a Christian, is we’re not just saved for ourselves...:

- we’re not just saved, so that we can have our nice ‘private’ time with Jesus;
- We’re not saved so we can just get into our nice church huddle (and there we stay)...
- We’re saved, to be disciples of Jesus, with a mission.

That man, was told to stay local – tell the locals – tell your friends, how much the Lord’s done for you... Tell everyone how he’s had mercy on you...

And isn’t that our mission??? You don’t have to be some great public speaker to be a witness for Jesus... You don’t have to be a fabulous preacher, to be a witness for Jesus...

We can just tell our friends what He’s done for us (that’s all it takes)... And once we’ve told our friends, we can tell other people... This man went to a group of 10 cities, and told everyone how much Jesus had done for Him...

You know, I reckon your friends, would be more moved by you personally sharing with them, what Jesus has done for you, than what they’d be, if a famous evangelist came to town...

And that’s all Jesus asks of us – to be grateful, and for us to tell our friends how much Jesus has done for us...

And Jesus may not have driven thousands of demons out any of us, but don’t we all have so much to be thankful for??? Haven’t we all been shown so much mercy, by Jesus??? We’ve got plenty to tell.

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<sup>i</sup> Daniel 10

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 11:24