

The Secret of Jesus' Kingdom *The Gospel of Mark*

Jesus Heals Our Fragmented Identity

Mark 5:1 – 20

Introduction:

(SLIDE 1) What is it like to hear the voice of Jesus? (SLIDE 2) It is an experience that calls for a very personal response from us. Usually, we build our identities by listening to other people's voices. I remember when I was 10, I wanted to hear my parents and friends approve of me. I recall one day, I was in swimming practice with the team. It was near the end of the practice, so I think my mom was already there to watch the tail end of it and then take me home. And my coach said, 'Ok, now we're going to do relays.' I loved relays, because they took up a lot of time and you only had to do one or two laps of it!! Then my coach said, 'We're doing butterfly relays.' And my heart sank, because I hated butterfly. It's that stroke where you lift your head up like this and I always swallowed water sometime during the lap. Our coach picked two team captains: my friend Jack and another kid I didn't really know that well. Now I was a little disappointed because I wasn't picked as a captain, but I figured if there was status in being a captain, maybe there was status in being picked first. I was ready, and I was excited, because Jack was my...friend. So I was sure that he would pick me first because he was my...friend, right? Well Jack didn't pick me first. He didn't pick me second. I was picked next to last, and the guy who was picked after me had breathing problems – so you know how I was feeling! Well the relay started. Typically in swimming relays you put your fastest person last to be the anchor. My team decided to switch that and put me last. So by the time I was up, I had a pretty big lead over the other team. I dove into the pool. I didn't take one breath – I didn't want to lift my head and choke. So I didn't see until the end that the guy next to me had actually caught up to me and just beat me to the wall. I looked up from the side of the pool, and saw that the opposite team was cheering, and some were cheering me! They were having their own little party! My teammates, though, were disappointed with me. We would have to pull out the lane lines and cover the pool. I didn't even want to look over at my mom. I began to discover what it all meant. What did it all mean? What did I learn from this? It meant that friendship didn't mean a thing. Friendship didn't mean a thing, and it didn't, did it? The fact that Jack was my friend didn't mean a thing. And I learned that other peoples' success is based on my failure. And conversely, that my success is based on other peoples' failure. So I went through much of my younger life hoping that other people would fail more frequently than me. You say, 'That's a terrible way to be'? Yes, I was terrible. I became more and more cruel – my own voice became more cruel towards some – until I finally gave my life to Jesus.

Let me also say that listening to Jesus' voice above all others is not just for your piece of mind, but is a basic matter of sin and evil, plain and simple. The reason we do not live as Jesus intends is because we wind up listening to other voices. We think other voices, even our own voice, is more trustworthy than His. And the consequences are bad – they may start small, but they have a subterranean influence in our hearts.

Context:

We are in the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus is showing his earliest followers how to understand him. He is disclosing himself slowly as the promised king who offers a new humanity to us. These are the days when the Jewish disciples thought that their king or Messiah would be a military champion over the Romans, as opposed to a divine-human champion over humanity's evil. Jesus' purpose in taking his followers on these encounters is to teach them about his identity and his mission, which would then translate into their identity and their mission. We study it because it tells us about our identity and our mission.

The Suffering Man: v.1 – 5

Let's set the context. (SLIDE 3) Verse 1: They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. The scene is the southeastern shore of the sea of Galilee, near the mouth of the Jordan River. Gerasa was one of ten+ cities in a league called the Decapolis, which had been mostly a Greek settlement since the time of Alexander the Great. They were on an important trade route, so the city of Gerasa was very prosperous. They had temples to Artemis and Zeus there, and two magnificent theatres. In fact, a hundred years later, in AD 129 – 130, the Emperor Hadrian would be so impressed with this city that he paid them a visit and built an arch of triumph in Gerasa.

(SLIDE 4) I found a picture that shows what the eastern shores of the Galilee look like.

Yet in spite of the greatness, just outside this city is despair. The time is most likely night. Imagine this scene at night. The moon shines through broken clouds; it casts eerie shadows around the shore and the sea. The hills are made of limestone rock, and the limestone is peppered with caves. Those caves are used for graves. It seems like death is breathing through those holes. Jesus and his disciples get out of their small boat. The disciples are shaken and exhausted, and after pulling up their boat onto the shore, they're ready to lie down on the ground and rest.

But out of the darkness comes a man, and he heads straight for Jesus! (SLIDE 5) ² When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, ³ and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴ because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones.' Now is it just me, or does this sound like *The Exorcist* to you?! What kind of guy lives among the tombs? And what is his life like?'

There are some painful contrasts being drawn about this man. First of all, he probably once owned a house in the city, but now he lives in the graveyard. If he lived in 21st century Boston, we would say that he once lived on Newbury Street, but now he lives in the cemetery right next to BC. It's ironic not just because of the total reversal, but because you would have thought that his best chance to get healed and get treated was in the city. After all, that's where skilled people live. But society could only chain him up, as we learn.

This is a lot like today. There are some people who struggle with the deepest evils. And the rest of us just don't want to deal with it, and can't deal with it. So we push it somewhere else. Or if it's in us, we pretend it's not there. But Jesus goes there. He goes to that place where people are struggling with the greatest evils.

This poor man has been demonized for years. Later, we find out this group of demons called themselves 'Legion' after a Roman legion, which is a group of six thousand soldiers. When Jesus casts the demons out, according to Mark they demonize two thousand pigs. So this guy has between two to six thousand demonic voices ringing in his head! He is totally fragmented. He even names himself in v.9 after his problem, 'My name is Legion, for we are many.' I am multiple people. There is no one 'me.'

Illus: In my teenage years, I listened to all kinds of voices. I had different groups of friends and I was proud of that. My high school was 70% Asian and with them I was intense and goal-oriented. But my swimming friends were entirely non-Asian, and with them I was laid back and a party-goer. By my senior year of high school, I was in student government with my friends thinking that we ran the school, so we thought of ourselves as having different faces: one face for the parents, one face for the administration, and one face to the students. We thought we were so sophisticated. Then I went to college, and right away I started hanging out with the Grateful Dead crowd because my roommate was a pot-smoking Grateful Dead fan. This type of thing went on until I had a dream one night. I dreamed that all my friends from my different worlds were suddenly getting together at my house. And I was paralyzed. I didn't know how to act! I woke up in a cold sweat. I asked God to peel back in my mind each of the layers of me, and I discovered after many layers being peeled, I was an onion! I had skins but no core. That drove me to Jesus. His voice defined me, he set me in my right mind, and now I don't have dreams like that anymore.

How does your world fragment you? It's not that all the voices are necessarily evil, but the way we deal with them is to become a mixture of voices with no real identity. Maybe you've just gotten yourself into this place where you've got so many different images to maintain, you're not sure which one of them is really you. Maybe the voices of your parents say this: 'You need to be successful!!' And you hear that voice if not playing in the background of your memory, then on the phone when you call home. Maybe you're at a place where you've become cruel, like I had become. Or you're not really sure what your own voice is. You're ready for an encounter.

The Encounter: v.6 – 8

(SLIDE 6) ⁶ Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; ⁷ and shouting with a loud voice, he said, 'What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!' ⁸ For he had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!'

Now why would he say 'Do not torment me'? Who is that talking? The demons? Or the man? If it's the demons, then it means they're afraid Jesus will send them into the abyss where demons will ultimately go. If it's the man,

then it was painful for the man to let the demons go. Which is it? Mark gives the reason in v.8, 'For he had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man.' Let's try and figure this out. The Greek word 'to torment' (*basanizo*) comes from the root word 'to torture,' so this is intense pain. Furthermore, it is translated once in Matthew 14:24, 'to batter' as when the waves were battering the fishing boat. It is also used of a woman suffering labor pains (Rev.12:2). From these occurrences, this word seems to mean pain that comes in waves, once and then again. Torture and torment comes in waves. And Jesus himself is causing that pain.

How? In verse 9, we learn that Jesus 'had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man...And Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him.' Here's where we get into something very sinister about this event. It's possible that the man didn't totally want the unclean spirits to leave. For some reason, he wanted to hold on to all of those voices. The biblical narrative is vague, and perhaps deliberately, because we have to consider this possibility. But could it be true? Could it be that the man wants all these voices inside of him? In order to be demonized in the first place, it usually means that you were actively doing something occultic. And the Old Testament view of Gentile cities is that they're places of occultism and demonic activity (see Isa.14 and Ezk.28). So it's not unreasonable to say that this man at some point invited those demons in and now he wants to keep them so much so that it is torment for Jesus to force those voices out.

Illus: C.S. Lewis had this thought when he was on the verge of accepting Jesus Christ. 'All my acts, desires, and thoughts were to be brought into harmony with [God]. For the first time, I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion.' (*Surprised by Joy*).

If you sin, then what you're really doing is saying, 'I'm going to listen to other voices instead of Jesus.' Then those voices become more and more powerful in your life. Then you start to have more voices inside of you that really don't match up at all.

Jesus is asking you, 'What is your name? What is your identity? Who do you trust? What do you love?' You cannot love Jesus AND love success. You cannot love Jesus AND love the approval of people. You cannot love Jesus AND love money. You cannot serve Jesus AND your own selfishness. You cannot put Jesus first AND your parents first. Jesus will take you as you are, but he is weaning you off all the other voices in your life because every step of trust in other directions leads you into cruelty, into self-deception about how evil you really are, into lies.

So if you're like this man with many voices, Jesus is asking you just like he asked him, 'What is your name?' Why does Jesus do this? For this man, because Jesus is making this guy realize that he cannot answer this simple question. Who are you? What is your name? This man now has to ask himself, 'What IS my name? I have so many voices inside me, I can't tell me from them. I don't know who I am, and it hurts me to answer that question.' And then a voice blurts out of his mouth, 'My name is Legion, for we are many.' That is the most bizarre response. Who's speaking really? The personal pronouns go from the singular to the plural. My name: singular. We are many: plural. He can't answer the question! I have 2,000 – 6,000 voices inside me. The deeper I let that question go, the more confused I get. That is what is tormenting.

Illus: I want to illustrate for you how this affected two people I know. James and Christine (not their real names) dated for two years. During their senior year of college, they had trouble deciding what to do about their relationship. James felt that they could be together no matter what; it's just a matter of commitment. Christine felt more torn; she loved James but didn't know what it meant to be 'in love.' When their friends questioned them, they found disturbing things. James had never really made a hard choice that involved real tradeoffs. He double majored because he didn't want to choose between two options. He became easily overcommitted to things, like the students' association, tutoring, and ministry, especially because he was trying to be a good Christian. He had a hard time anytime he disappointed someone, in part because he was so capable, but in part because his parents demanded a lot of him and he was deeply afraid of failing others. His parents' voices rang in his head, 'You've got to do more.' This set the pattern for his approach to life. He had wrapped his heart up in fears while he successfully earned people's approval, and he was a victim of these voices. He thought if he tried hard enough, he could make nearly anything happen. It was no surprise James thought their relationship could last by strength of will.

Meanwhile Christine wasn't sure if she knew herself well. While she and James were dating, she was attracted to another guy in a casual way. But she was attracted to him for the opposite reasons she liked James. Christine

thought this other man was reckless, flirtatious, and even a bit superficial, but she had felt attracted nevertheless. The situation had resolved itself because this other guy started flirting with another woman, not because of any concrete decision on Christine's part. Christine was also unable and unwilling to take a stand in her inner conflict. In spite of the fact that Christine was a Christian and knew about certain Bible passages that challenged her, she never seriously questioned her parents' affluence, opinions about who she should marry, opinions about other people, or vision of her future lifestyle. Whenever she had questions about her future, she would eventually come back around to agree with her parents. Her individuality and individual relationship with God had never really developed because Christine had been sheltered and she feared the voice of rejection. She, too, had never made a hard tradeoff, like choosing to obey God when it meant disagreeing with her parents.

So when their friends approached them and said, 'We're not sure about your relationship, but what's clear to us is this other underlying issue,' they recoiled. They avoided the subject, they tried to bring the conversation to an end, and basically they didn't want to face up to it. They were saying, 'Don't torment me! This is the only way I've known how to live my life!'

If you read the Old Testament, you find a pattern of sin leading to fragmentation and many voices. Genesis 1 – 11 begins with all Creation at rest, humanity at rest, and God's one voice. But it ends with sin, all humanity fragmented at Babel, and many voices. Then, the nation of Israel follows God's voice. But then, they sin by listening to the voices of fear or doubt or disbelief, and they become fragmented by civil war, they have two kings and countless false prophets. We've got a fragmented humanity, a fragmented nation, and finally here in Mark 5, we find a fragmented individual. This is the most intense point I see in the development of this pattern. Being legion is the result of not finding your identity in Christ. Sooner or later, it always happens. But now, we're going to see who can reverse it. Who can reverse this pattern? Answer: The God of Israel, who said, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is ONE.' And the Son of that God, who is ONE with the Father and who becomes ONE with us, to make us ONE.

The Healing: v.10 – 13

Now there are three major changes that Jesus makes happen. First is the change in the demons. ¹⁰ And he began to implore him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain. ¹² The demons implored him, saying, 'Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.' ¹³ Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea.'

The demons cannot stay in Jesus' presence and in v.13 the demons go into a pack of pigs. To a Jew, swine is unclean. So the situation is poetic from a Jewish perspective. The unclean spirit takes on unclean flesh. Jesus makes what was invisible visible, just as he had done with the man, revealing what had been going on inside him. And he sets the situation aright. The pigs tumble down a steep hill and drown.

The second change is in the man. ¹⁴ 'Their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. And the people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind...' The man is now sitting down as opposed to wildly crying out. He is clothed as opposed to naked. He is in his right mind as opposed to being raving mad. He's let Jesus heal him. He's stopped hurting himself. Finally, we have a picture of a person at rest, whole, and complete in Christ.

Illus: Let me go back to the story of James and Christine, because at the time I knew them, I did see a picture of a person learning to find rest, wholeness, and completion with Jesus. Those two people had never gone through any identity-pruning struggles. In other words, they had never listened to Jesus' voice above everyone else's. While on the outside, they seemed like solid people, on the inside, they were fragmented and living by many voices. They avoided conflict with others and avoided making their own hard choices. So what happened to their relationship? It dragged on for a year after they graduated, and then they went through a confusing breakup. James learned fairly quickly after that that he had been listening to too many voices, and he needed to put Jesus' voice first. It wasn't until years later that Christine came to the same conclusion. She was engaged when she realized she didn't have consistent reasons for liking the guys she dated. They were all different because she didn't know who she was. Watching the movie *Runaway Bride*, about a woman who repeatedly runs from grooms at the altar, struck a chord.

She realized she had just adapted herself to different voices and put on different personas each time. It was more important for her to be liked than to *be someone*. ‘What is your name?’ Jesus asks.

The Resistance: v.14 – 17

The third change is in the other Gentile inhabitants. From the city and the country, they come to see this Jesus. And they become frightened (*phobeo*). Literally, they were put to flight, they were terrified. Look at verses 15 – 17 (SLIDE 7): ‘¹⁵ They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the ‘legion’; and they became frightened. ¹⁶ Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. ¹⁷ And they began to implore him to leave their region.’

The people’s response is: Go away! Depart! Why? Don’t they like what Jesus has done? No. They could have said, ‘Wow. Look at this guy. You did something we couldn’t do. You have power. And you’re a Jew; you came all the way over just to heal him? That’s a lot of compassion. What do we think about that? And maybe we should talk to this guy and hear his story?’ But no; they just say, ‘We like our pigs. We believe in property rights over the love of God.’ On a deeper level, it’s because Jesus is revealing what is unclean in them, and they sense that he will punt and jettison everything unclean in them, all the other voices. They can sense his holiness, his love, and his authority, and they don’t like it. And so they act just like the demons, except worse. They entreat Jesus, just like the demons did. They beg him. But whereas the demons asked permission to leave Jesus’ presence, the people send Jesus away. Sometimes, that is how people reject Jesus today – just as they did then.

The Proclamation: v.18 – 20

(SLIDE 8) Fortunately Jesus does not let them forget him in verses 18 – 20: ‘¹⁸ As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring him that he might accompany him. ¹⁹ And he did not let him, but he said to him, ‘Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you.’ ²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.’

So Jesus left the man healed as a witness, as a public sign. They cannot forget him. It was not yet time for Jesus’ full ministry to the Gentiles. First he had to finish his mission to Israel, he had to teach his Jewish disciples more, but one day he would return in the person of his Spirit indwelling his disciples. And Jesus wanted this community to be ready for those disciples to come back and speak his words in their voices. What if these verses read like this: ‘Return to your friends and family and describe what great things God has done for you. So they went away, proclaiming throughout the whole campus and hometowns what great things Jesus had done for them.’ This is our mission to the world, and in particular for the years that you are at Harvard. Being missional and loving others is not an extracurricular activity in the Christian life. It is absolutely central. God becomes flesh in Jesus, cleanses his humanity and offers all humanity a new humanity, to punt and jettison what is unclean in our flesh. Jesus enters into us by his Spirit, and his spoken word becomes our spoken word.

Conclusion

So how many voices are we listening to? Are we listening first and foremost to Jesus’ voice? I want to close by telling you a story by Max Lucado called *The Wemmicks*. The Wemmicks were a wooden people that lived in their own town. They had all been made by Eli the Woodcutter. All day long, the Wemmicks gave each other stickers. If a Wemmick was tall, or good-looking, or jumped far, the other Wemmicks would gather round and give gold stars to that Wemmick. But if a Wemmick had chipped wood, or fell down, or was clumsy, that Wemmick would get gray dots from the others. Well one of the Wemmicks was named Punchinello. He wasn’t especially good looking so he got gray dots. He wasn’t especially talented so he got more gray dots. In fact, the other Wemmicks gave him gray dots just because he had so many gray dots already. Punchinello felt rotten. Then he met a Wemmick named Lucia who had no stickers on her. Punchinello watched as other Wemmicks came up to her and tried to make a gold star stick on her, but it fell off. Others tried to make gray dots stick on her, but they fell off, too. Punchinello asked her, ‘What is it about you that these stickers don’t stick?’ Lucia replied, ‘I go to see Eli the Woodcutter, and I listen to him.’ Punchinello went to Eli’s cottage on the edge of town, and he was greeted by a booming voice. ‘Hello, Punchinello!’ ‘You know my name?’ asked Punchinello. ‘Of course I do. I made you. I see you’ve been given a lot of gray dots by the others.’ Punchinello looked down and said, ‘Yes. I came because I met someone who had no marks. Why don’t the stickers stay on her?’ ‘Because she has decided that what I think is more important than what they think. They stickers only stick if you let them. And I think you’re pretty special, Punchinello. I love you. The

more you trust my love, the less you care about their stickers.' And as Punchinello left Eli's cottage, a gray dot fell to the ground.