

**Mark:
Christus Victor**

Mark 5:1-20

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

May 30, 2004

We come this evening to what is, by any stretch of the imagination, a strange story indeed. It is recorded not just here in Mark's gospel, in chapter 5, and we're talking about verses 1-20, but it is also recorded in Matthew and it's also recorded for us in Luke. Before we read the passage together, let's once again come before God in prayer and ask for the Spirit's illumination. Let's pray.

Our God and our Father, this is Your word. You caused it to be written. You breathed it out. This is part of Your self-revelation to us. Your will and ways and purposes are made known to us through these words and syllables holy men of old wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. We ask now as we read the Scriptures together that by Your Spirit You would shine a light upon this word, illumine our minds and our hearts. Help us, we pray, once again not only to be hearers but to be doers of Your word. We ask for grace that we might read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Now hear with me the word of God.

1They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. 2When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, 3and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; 4because 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. 5Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones. 6Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; 7and 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!' 8For He had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' 9And He was asking him, 'What is your name?' And he said to Him, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' 10And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the

mountain. 12The demons implored Him, saying, 'Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.' 13Jesus 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. 14Their 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. 15They 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. 16Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. 17And they began to implore Him to leave their region.

18 As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him. 19And 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.' 20And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

Two thousand pigs—that's a lot of pigs. And you can imagine the Society for the Protection of Pigs are offended by this story. Only if you don't eat bacon can you be offended by this story. What, after all, had these pigs done to deserve this massacre? Bertrand Russell, the British early 20th century philosopher, wrote a book, *Why I am Not a Christian*. It was a bestseller in its time. It was read almost verbatim, I think, on the radio in days before television. I think I was telling you just a few weeks ago John Stott's latest little book—it's been up on the window. And that book by John Stott was written partly, he says, in response to that. It's taken, what, eighty years for him to do it? But it's partly written in response to Bertrand Russell. And Bertrand Russell tells us in that book, *Why I am Not a Christian*, that it was this story, this particular story we read tonight, that offended him the most. It wasn't anything to do with pigs as such; it was just that Bertrand Russell said, 'It is unbelievable'...this story of Jesus finding this crazy man in a graveyard supposedly possessed by countless number of demons who escape, or are bidden to be released from this man and enter into these two thousand pigs. And the pigs go running down the mountainside and into the sea and they drown. And there's this sight of dead pigs everywhere. And Bertrand Russell says that story is just unbelievable. Unbelievable—people believe crazy things.

I have a close member of my family, whom I won't mention, who believes that out of her fingers come psychic energy that is able to make muscles hot. I kid you not. Millions of people, *millions of people* in the world today believe that they've been on this earth before as polar bears, or crickets, or even Roman emperors. I was on ebay yesterday. I was actually trying to purchase a CD of *Bruckner's*

Eighth Symphony, but that's beside the point. But the man selling this CD had this spiel that he was selling his entire CD collection because he was on his way to Thailand to become a monk. And he wanted to reach the state of nirvana which he said might take him several lifetimes to accomplish. Crazy stuff. There are many people in the world today who believe that visitors from outer space have come to this earth in time past and continue to do so. People believe that if two planets come within a billion miles of each other that it will affect your love life and your bank account. And crop circles—you can go to www.cropcirclesresearch.com. Do it for ten minutes or so; it'll be an eye-opener. This website speculates that crop circles are, and I quote, “Three-dimensional footprints of higher-dimensional consciousness of energy.” Crazy stuff. So let's try and get a handle on what's believable and what isn't believable. People believe in crazy things.

Strange Thing #1: The Setting

Now to be sure this story has some odd or strange things about it. In the first place, and perhaps the least strange, is the place in which it took place. It's a place that Jesus comes to when the boat comes to shore after the storm on the Sea of Galilee has been stilled. Now is it Garaser? Or is it Gadara? Or is it Gargasa? Now I've been saying for years, “the Gadarene demoniac,” and occasionally I'll say “the Garasene demoniac”; but now, I think, I'm supposed to say “the *Gargasene* demoniac.” The problem is this...and if you look at your Bibles, except if you're reading the trusty King James Version...but if you're using any other version than the King James, you'll probably have a little footnote by this reference to the place, and it'll tell you that there are various manuscripts that give different names. The problem...the *problem* is that Garaser is way down to the southeast and about 35-miles inland, a two-days journey at high speed. Gadara is about six or seven miles inland, again to the southeast and over some fairly steep ravines and waddies. However, there is a town on the northeast shore which is where this incident is traditionally thought to have taken place called Gargasa, and no less than Origen and Eusebius believed that this was the location. Whatever town it was, it was in a region called Decapolis, “Ten Cities.” This isn't part of the Holy Land. This is not a part of the land where the covenants of God operate. This isn't Jewish territory; it was occupied by Rome. Pompey had captured it in 63 BC.

And there are pig farms here, *large* pig farms. Now pigs in the 1st century were smaller creatures. They've been bred so that they've become much bigger for obvious reasons, but in the 1st century they were much more akin to household dogs than to the pig that you and I think of. Pigs were reared, of course, not least for the purposes of selling probably salted pork to the enormous contingent of Roman soldiers that occupied the eastern side of the River Jordan and the region known as Decapolis.

And, and more than that, Jesus has come not only to a place that doesn't belong to Judea or it doesn't belong to Palestine...It's outside of where the covenants of God operate. It's unclean, therefore, to the Jews. But He's also come to a graveyard, to a graveyard, a burial ground. The Old Testament required a period of seven days of cleansing after coming into contact with the dead. According to Numbers 19, failure to do this would mean being cut off from Israel. Rabbinical tradition added to that so that you weren't allowed to touch the bier or the pillow or the mattress on which a dead person lay. And Jesus has come here. He's come what seemingly looks like at His own request, at His own volition, purposely to this unclean location, wherever it was...on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee probably...an unclean location, to a graveyard. That's the first strange thing.

Strange Thing #2: Demon Possession

The second strange thing is the phenomenon of demon possession. What exactly is demon possession? Is it something that belongs to the time of Jesus and perhaps spills over a little into the early apostolic period, but is something that just doesn't exist today? There have been some, especially in the Reformed community, that have said that demon possession doesn't exist today. But most missionaries will tell you and most pastors will tell you and many theologians of great repute will tell you that such a thing certainly does exist today, and there are certain psychiatrists who will tell you that demon possession exists today.

Now some Christians have taken up some bizarre ideas about demon possession. I was reading this week of a large city here in the United States. Something like a small, localized revival had taken place in an uptown area of the city and many people had come to confess faith in Jesus Christ. They were meeting together in what was a home Bible Study in a rather grand house, and during the Bible Study the lights, or at least one of the bulbs in the chandelier, began to flash. And they came to the conclusion that the chandelier was demon possessed, and that the only solution for it was that each one would take a bulb from the chandelier and take it to various parts of the city and bury that light bulb there. Well, strange, weird...Even in Jesus' day, *even in Jesus' day*, demon possession was something rare. You only come across it rarely, even in Jesus' day. It's not as though the whole land was filled with people who are demon possessed.

Now, the actual phrase that's used in verse 15, "unclean spirit"—it's used some thirteen times in the course of the gospels. It means "to be demonized." It has the idea of being under the control or influence or dominion of an external force of some kind. Legion is a victim, who doesn't have full control of all of his faculties. Someone has defined demon possession in this way: "In some way that we cannot totally explain, a demon (or demons) possesses, inhabits, or controls a person's body or faculties against the person's will for its purpose of doing its will

in the material world and to destroy and torment its host physically, mentally, and spiritually.”

So we have Jesus in a graveyard and there's this man there. And he's possessed by demons, and nobody will go there. It's an unclean place to begin with. That's probably why he's there. And you'd hear him at night: you'd hear him shrieking, the most horrid sound. And he mutilates himself with jagged pieces of rock so that if you saw him he's bleeding with cuts and sores and scars from previous wounds. He's deranged. A frightful picture: a man of incredible strength being able to burst asunder metal chains that people had tried to confine him with for his own protection perhaps. You can imagine that the only time they would ever really have to come close to this man would be at funerals when they would have to go to this graveyard. And you can imagine, perhaps, they would throw rocks or stones at him to shew him away, and they'd warn the children not to go anywhere near him.

Here's a man who is demon possessed, and whatever you make of it...and if you're a Christian, if you believe the Bible...you believe in the supernatural. You believe in the powers of the world to come. And you also believe that we live and move in a world where there is demonic power and that as we live our lives as Christians we are bidden by the Apostle Paul to remember that, that there are principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world. And in some, and in this particular man, the devil seems to have had his way. And his minions, demons, many of them, countless numbers of them have come and possessed this man and he's deranged. He's out of his mind.

So the first strange thing is the place (whatever the name of it is), but it's a graveyard. Jesus has come to a graveyard. It's like a B movie, isn't it? Jesus has come to a graveyard, and there's a monster in the graveyard, a deranged man, a man out of his mind, a man you'd be terrified of if you saw him or heard him.

Strange Thing #3: The Man's Name

And then there's a third strange thing, and that's his name. And Jesus' asks his name, and his name is Legion. His name is Legion. Imagine...imagine if you were to ask someone's name and they said to you, "My name is Green Beret," or "My name is Army Rangers," or "My name is 82nd Airborne." "Right," you'd say, "That's pretty strange." The point is, you see, that from Antioch to Beersheba, from Joppa to Jerash, the 1st century Syria-Palestine was occupied by a legion, the Roman legion. Now you all know, of course, what the legion was. The legion was the basic unit of the Roman army. It was made of somewhere between five to six-thousand career soldiers, professional military men, and almost all of them were infantry or foot soldiers. Now the exact number of legions would vary from time to time depending on the military needs of the empire.

Under Caesar Augustus there were said to be as many as 28 legions at his disposal. One of them was called “the 10th Roman Legion,” and in the year 6 AD was stationed in this region, in Decapolis, in the Syria-Palestinian region on the eastern frontier. It was said to be the most dangerous assignment of the empire at that time. Every legion had a nickname, an emblem, as do many American military units. It seems appropriate on Memorial Day to talk about some of these things. The 82nd Airborne based in Fort Bragg in North Carolina is known as the “All Americans,” and its emblem is two A's, “All American.” The 101st Airborne based in Fort Campbell in Kentucky is known as “The Screaming Eagles,” and their emblem is an eagle with the mouth open.

The 10th Roman Legion's nickname was “Fretensis.” “Straights of the sea,” it means. Now they got that name because the 10th Roman Legion in the century before Christ had been the guardians of the Straits of Messina, that piece of sea between Italy and Sicily. And you remember in your Greek mythology that the famed whirlpool named Charybdis and the great sea monster named Scylla, Charybdis and Scylla, and between those two dangers ships would navigate at their peril. Now the 10th Roman Legion, nicknamed “Fretensis,” had been the guardian of these Straits of mythological proportion. And they had in addition to the emblems that many legions had of an eagle and a bull; it also had the emblem of a dolphin *and, and* it had the emblem of a wild boar, a pig, a swine. Now that was a long time in coming but can't you...can't you see Mark's first readers...who, by the way, are living in Rome. They're living in the heartland of the Roman Empire, in Rome itself. And when they're reading this story...they come to chapter 5 and somebody reads out this story about this lunatic who dwells in a graveyard and Jesus is going to come and deal with him, and what's his name? His name is Legion. And they would think, ‘Yes, not only is Jesus king over this crazy man, but Jesus is also the reigning rule and power far greater than even the 10th Roman Legion, and far greater than the Roman Empire itself.’ He's possessed of many demons. Sometimes Jesus seems to speak to them as though they are one, because these demons ultimately are under the control of Satan himself.

And something unusual is before us here: Satan has brought out one of his most powerful forces. And maybe Satan having failed to drown Jesus in the Sea of Galilee is now trying to prevent the influence of Jesus from spreading outside of the Jewish territory and into Decapolis. Well, first then is the strange location, the graveyard. And, secondly, is the strange account of the demon possession...and, thirdly, the strangeness of this man's name.

Strange Thing # 4: The Man's Response

But there's a fourth strange thing that happens, and that is what this man did when Jesus came to him. Because he comes to Jesus and he kneels, as though on the one hand he's saying to Jesus, ‘Have mercy on me,’ and yet at the same

time he doesn't want Jesus to do something because he's frightened of being tormented. "Have you come to torment me?" he says. He wants Jesus to help him, and he doesn't want Jesus to help him. And you see what's happening here, that Jesus is going to have dealings with the worst of men. And you can't imagine a worst depiction of humanity than this man. I dread to think what it is, what's worse than the condition of this man. Imagine this man's existence. The Bible talks about the existence of certain lepers living in leper colonies and so on, and their existence was pitiful. But I think the existence of this man, the circumstances that surround the life of this man is even worse. What's worse than Legion living his days in the mountains and in the graveyard, and people being terrified of him, and having these crazy attacks whereby he mutilates himself with rocks and so on?

And Jesus comes to the worst of men. He comes to the worst of men, the worst sinner imaginable. He stops and He has time and He ministers to people in their tragic conditions, in their tragic conditions, that the world has done the worst to and that Satan has done his worst to. And Jesus comes to them and He has time for them and He has compassion for them, and He ministers to them. Ligon was telling us this morning to have mercy from the book of Jude, to show mercy, to have mercy on the worst of men, and here it is. Here's the template of how to do what Ligon was telling us in the book of Jude this morning. Here is Jesus showing mercy to the worst of men. This man had nothing to offer Jesus. He had absolutely nothing to offer Jesus. All he could do was beg for mercy.

And Calvin says that what we have here is a sign of what Jesus *always* does with sinners, what He *always* does with people who are in need and are begging for mercy: He changes them from being violent and naked and untamed to—look at verse 15. Look at verse 15. He's sitting and clothed and in his right mind. Isn't that beautiful? For a psychiatrist that is beautiful. He's sitting and clothed and in his right mind. That's what Jesus always does! He never saves but He transforms. He never forgives but He makes new. And even Satan's best infantry cannot withstand the power of Jesus. When Jesus wills to work, just watch Him work. As He stood in that boat in the midst of the storm and He began to order the wind and the waves to cease, now He's ordering Satan's worst, Satan's best infantry, and He's telling them to get out, to get out of this man. He spoils principalities and powers and makes a show of them openly, triumphing over them in the cross, Paul says.

Strange Thing # 5: The Pigs

Now there's one more strange thing and it's pigs, because the demons beg to be released into this herd of swine that are grazing on a nearby hillside. The parallels are in Matthew 8 and in Luke 8—In Matthew the demons beg to be released because the time hasn't come. They don't want to be dealt with before the time. It's as though the demons are conscious that a time of their doom is

sure and certain...but it's not yet. It's not yet. And in Luke they beg that they don't yet enter into the abyss, but that they be allowed to enter into the pigs. And there are some commentators who suggest that this is a temporary residing place before the lake of fire into which they eventually will be cast. And Jesus complies with that. The demons can do nothing without the permission and decree of Jesus Christ. There's sovereignty for you. There's sovereignty for you. And these exorcisms—and, actually, this is the third one in Mark's gospel—they don't spell the end of the devil as yet, but it does...it *does* signal to us a guarantee of his final destruction. Now some commentators have tried to give some explanation of what's going on here, as you can imagine, and some of them are very colorful. One suggests that actually the devil is cheated, as though Jesus pulled a fast one: 'Yes, you can go into these pigs,' but a few minutes later the pigs were dead in the sea. But I think the best explanation of what's going on here is that Jesus is giving to this man a visible guarantee, a visible guarantee that these devils were gone for good. All he'd have to remember that incredible sight of these dead pigs floating in the sea and lying on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and that would be his confirmation that these devils were gone for good. Strange Thing # 6: Jesus Has to Leave in a Hurry

Now what have we seen? A strange place, a graveyard in Decapolis on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. We've seen a man demon possessed and possessed by many demons. We've seen something of the strangeness of his name, Legion. We've seen the fact that he wanted and didn't want to be cured. And we've seen something about these pigs. But there's one more strange aspect of this story: That Jesus has to leave in a hurry, that Jesus has to leave in a hurry.

Calvin suggests that what the demons did in going into these pigs (which, consequently, all died) was to arouse the countrymen of Decapolis and to arouse them to have to make some kind of decision regarding who Jesus was and what His ministry was. And Jesus knew that and He was putting them to the test, and it was a test which they failed. Which was more important to them: their pigs, their livelihood, their career, their finance *or* fellowship with Christ and the assurance of sins forgiven, and the assurance of a place in heaven? Which was more important to them? And they chose it. Now possibly it was the swineherds themselves who bid Jesus depart from Decapolis so that there was going to be no doubt as to who was responsible for the death of these pigs.

Whatever might have been their rejoicing at the recovery of Legion—and isn't it strange there is no mention here—? You know in the parable of the lost son and of the party, the ring and the gold and the calf that is slain, and the time of rejoicing when a prodigal son comes home...And wouldn't you have thought that there might have been some celebration at the recovery of Legion? But, no! They want Jesus out, and they want Him gone. And do you notice the contrast? And it's very deliberate. What does Legion want? Legion wants to go with Jesus. He wants to get into the boat and go wherever Jesus was going. And Jesus says "no" to him. He says, "yes," to the folk who want Him out, and He says "no" to

Legion who wants to go with Him.

And do you know, my friends, when Jesus says “no” to those whom He loves, it's *always* because He has something better? It's *always* because He has something better for you. What did Jesus want Legion to do? He wanted him to go to his own family. He wanted him to go back to his own people, and He wanted him to become a missionary in a place where Jesus could no longer minister. He sends this man, “Tell them,” He says. ‘Tell them that I had mercy on you.’ That's the message. ‘Tell them that I had mercy on you.’

Some of you are about to leave on a mission trip, and some have already gone. And you may be wondering in the small hours of the morning, “I wonder, I wonder if I can ever do this great task.” Well, do that, my friend. Tell them of God's mercy to you. Do you see what this story's ultimately about?

Mark is writing this story because he's bringing before you a choice. What will you do with Jesus? What will *you* do with Jesus? Are you wanting Him to go away, young people? Young people, teenagers, are you wanting Jesus to go away? Are you just longing for the day that you can leave home and that you can have done with all this religion? Well, it's not religion we're offering you, my friend; it's *Jesus*. It's a relationship with Jesus Christ. And are you saying to Him tonight, “I want You to go away”? “I want you to go to the other side, somewhere where I can't see You or hear You anymore”? Are you saying with Legion, “I want to be with You”? “Wherever You go I go. Wherever You stay, I stay. You're people will be my people. You're God, my God.” Is that what you're saying tonight, my friends? Because that's the question, that's the question that Mark is asking you. What are *you* doing with Jesus? Let's pray together.

Our God and our Father, we thank You for this wonderful, wonderful, but strange story. We bless You most of all because we see in it a picture of the kingliness of Christ, His regal power over the forces of darkness and Satan himself. Our Father, we pray for anyone amongst us tonight still unsure what to do with Jesus Christ. Have mercy, we pray, upon their souls and draw them effectually to embrace Christ. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

A Guide to the Evening Service

The Themes of the Service

Tonight's sermon focuses on the kingly work of Jesus casting out demons in demonstration of His identity as the Lord of glory. All three hymns we sing this evening focus directly on our dear Savior.

It is ever the Holy Spirit's work to turn our eyes away from self to Jesus; but Satan's work is just the opposite of this, for he is constantly trying to make us regard ourselves instead of Christ. He insinuates, "Your sins are too great for pardon; you have no faith; you do not repent enough; you will never be able to continue to the end; you have not the joy of His children; you have such a wavering hold of Jesus." All these are thoughts about self, and we shall never find comfort or assurance by looking within.

But the Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self: He tells us that we are nothing, but that "Christ is all in all." Remember, therefore, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee – it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee – it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument – it is Christ's blood and merits; therefore, look not so much to thy hand with which thou art grasping Christ, as to Christ; look not to thy hope, but to Jesus, the source of thy hope; look not to thy faith, but to Jesus, the author and finisher of thy faith. [C. H. Spurgeon]

The Hymns and Spiritual Songs

O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing

Frank Colquhoun says "O for a thousand tongues' . . . is indisputably one of Charles Wesley's finest hymns It rings with the notes of Christian praise, joy, and assurance. It magnifies the name of Jesus and the power of His atoning sacrifice. . . . And it abounds in scriptural phrases and allusions. These are the things that characterize so many of the six thousand and more hymns that Wesley wrote. Perhaps it is not surprising that there is something special about this particular one, for it was written just a year after his evangelical conversion and published in 1740 under the title *For the Anniversary Day of One's Conversion*.

I Will Sing of My Redeemer

Written by Philip P. Bliss in 1876. This is perhaps the last hymn Bliss wrote before he died in a train wreck. He survived the initial crash, but was killed trying (unsuccessfully) to rescue his wife. The lyrics were found in his belongings after the accident.

How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds

This is my favorite hymn in the hymnbook—come to think of it, in all of hymnody! I have loved it from the first moment I heard it as a believer in 1971. Written by John Newton, it says all that can be said about his love for Jesus Christ. It says almost everything that a good hymn should. The tune, St. Peter, is one of those tunes that is married to the text. We could hardly allow the first notes to be heard

without thinking of these wonderful words. As you sing this evening, ask yourselves, "Is the name of Jesus sweet to me?"

The Sermon

"The healing of the Gerasene demoniac, especially the part about the pigs (swine in the King James Version), has occasioned some bizarre interpretations. One commentator suggests over fifteen possible interpretations of why the demons left the man and destroyed so many pigs. Today, we ask about the morality of killing 'innocent pigs'—a question which would not have occurred to Mark. Whether the sermon tonight resolves this moral conundrum, we shall have to wait and see; what is more important is to see that Jesus restores a life that was lost. His work is a demonstration that he had come to establish a new order of reality: one in which sin and Satan will play no part.

Legion was possessed by demons. When Christ asked him, 'What is your name?' 'My name is Legion,' he replied, 'for we are many.' (v.9) That is a fascinating and revealing reply. Had this man become obsessed with the marching armies going through his country, totally dominated by that figure? Now that a troop of preternatural invaders had penetrated and taken over his very humanity did he know that he himself had become an occupied person? 'My name is Legion.' That name also tells us that he was an outpost of demonic activity in this world. Perhaps, in this military language, we are meant to catch the fact that Satan's opposition to the kingdom of God is not haphazard but ruthlessly well organized" (Sinclair Ferguson, *Let's Study Mark*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1999, p.65).

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