

Text: Mark 5:1-17

Title: “Is America Finished with Jesus?”

ILLUSTRATION – A few weeks ago our family took the train ride up to the top of Pike’s Peak in Colorado. On the hour-long ride up the mountain our conductor told us of the connection between Pike’s Peak and the song “America the Beautiful.” An English professor named Katharine Lee Bate in 1893 took a cross-country train trip to Colorado Springs. On her journey across America she saw the spacious skies and the amber waves of grain. As she approached Colorado Springs Katharine Lee Bates saw the “purple mountain’s majesty above the fruited plains.” Later in her visit she rode to the top of Pike’s Peak, and there the words of a poem began to form in her mind. On July 4, 1895 the poem, now named “America the Beautiful,” appeared for the first time in a church newspaper. “America, God shed His grace on Thee.” Standing at the top of Pike’s Peak that day it struck me that some of God’s greatest creative power is on display in America. We have been blessed by the gracious hand of God with religious freedom that is unequalled in the world. This freedom has allowed the Gospel to move freely throughout our land resulting in our being saved and able to gather today.

And yet for all of these blessings America has become what observers call a “post-Christian nation,” meaning we used to be but we aren’t anymore. We as the people of God once enjoyed what we might consider a “home-field advantage.” But now, more and more, we are being pushed to the edges of our culture as America has pretty much concluded, “We are finished with Jesus Christ.”

Open your Bibles to Mark 5 where we have the account of Jesus’ visit to a region that looks strangely like the United States of America today. You see, we may be discouraged when we look at the mess our nation has become. We may struggle to understand what Christ might be doing with a nation that is gripped by terror and by pervasive sexual immorality and the murder of a millions of babies through abortion. We may grieve as we watch our nation become more and more apathetic, if not outright hostile, toward Jesus and His church. We may despair at the options we have before us as we face a presidential election.

So how do we see *ourselves* as the people of God and the church of Jesus? How do we go about our mission in a culture that is pretty much finished with Jesus? We must fix our eyes on Jesus ... on the One who, without the help of any political party, has the power to radically change people like us and to work through us to impact our culture. We see this power of Christ on display here in Mark 5 where we catch up with Jesus and His disciples:

Mark 5:1 - They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.

They land in what is called the “region of the Gerasenes.” The location is an important part of the story as we are going to see later. This is a region on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, across the lake from where most of Jesus’ ministry played out. It was not part of Israel and was populated mostly with Gentiles. It was a spiritual wasteland, a vacuum into which all sorts of evil could rush, as is evident from that fact that...

Mark 5:2-3a - When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs...

So here in this eerie picture are several faces we need to see. First and foremost there's the face of...

1. THE MIGHTY SAVIOR ... JESUS.

He's the hero of this story. His sovereign power is on full display from the moment He steps out of the boat and encounters "a man with an evil spirit." So there's another face in this eerie picture...

2. THE HAUNTED MAN

Immediately the details of this man's life quickly unfold. He is ravaged by an evil spirit – an angel of Satan whose main mission, according to Jesus, was to steal, kill and destroy.

Mark 5:3b-4 - No one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 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.

This man's life was so out of control that about all the people could do for him was to try to restrain him with chains, but that didn't work. No human power could restrain him.

Mark 5:5 - Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

You can hear his screams. If you dared get close enough you can see the bloody wounds from where he tried to cut himself with sharp stones. He's a living dead man who has lost everything. He's lost his home and is living in a cemetery. He's lost control of his life. He's lost his dignity living like a wild animal, screaming and cutting himself. And other faces come into focus...

3. THE HIDEOUS DEMONS

As it turns out multiple demons of Satan have ravaged this man, as we'll see in a moment. But let me pause here and say that sometimes the work of Satan appears *grotesque*, as in the case of this homeless man. Sometimes Satan's work can look *glamorous*, as a woman sipping a cocktail in an upscale bar.

There's another important angle that we need to see. We can't blame this man's condition solely on demons. You see, there is a depravity in each of us that makes our souls prime space for demons to gather. This man is not more lost because demons have taken over his life. In

fact, he's no more lost than you and I. Listen to how the NT explains our condition apart from Christ:

Ephesians 2:1-2 - As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

We may not be as outwardly out of control as this man who is severely oppressed by demons, but we are all infected with the same disease of sin. And this is the reason for which Jesus came:

1 John 3:8b - The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

In v.6 Mark backtracks a little. The man is some distance away when he sees Jesus' boat approaching and he takes off running toward to shore where he falls to his knees in front of Jesus. Later Mark explains that Jesus has commanded that the evil spirit come out of the tormented man.

Mark 5:7 - He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!"

Here is a mighty collision between the power of light in Jesus Christ and the power of darkness in Satan. Jesus said, "The thief (Satan) has come to steal, kill and destroy. But I have come that they might have life and have it to the full." Jesus could have vanquished this evil foe without even speaking a word, but instead He chooses a different tactic. First, a command...

Mark 5:8 - For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

Next there was a question...

Mark 5:9a - Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

Jesus knows who He's really dealing with here, but for the man's sake Jesus asks for his name. The demon answers...

Mark 5:9b - "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."

Notice the confusion in this man. "*My name ... we are many.*" In fact, it's very hard to tell when the man is speaking and when the demon is speaking. This is how sin and Satan can so ravage and fragment a soul. He had begged Jesus not to torment him, but that's exactly what the demon had done. A legion was a Roman regiment of 6000 troops. What we know is that his life was infected with and dominated by a mob of demons who disfigured his whole personality.

Mark 5:10 - And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

What was it about this area that made the demons want to stay, so much so that they earnestly begged Jesus not to send them out of the country?

So these demons were terrified of Jesus and did not know what Jesus planned to do with them. Satan isn't omniscient. He doesn't know everything Jesus knows. Jesus is sovereign. He can do with these hideous beings whatever He wants to do with them. Greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world!

Mark 5:11-12 - A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them."

So Jesus starts with a command, followed by a question and now there is a decisive, overpowering action...

Mark 5:13a - He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs.

He gave them permission ... He let them have their way. Again, here you see the sovereignty of Jesus over Satan and his minions. They had to ask permission of Jesus to do what they wanted to do. And the demons show their true intent ... to destroy.

Mark 5:13b - The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Can you imagine what it did for this tormented man to see the demons to go into the pigs and the pigs run over the cliff into the lake and drown? What a mighty demonstration of the power of Jesus to deliver a soul from sin and Satan.

Mark 5:14 - Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened.

So now more faces come into the picture ... the faces of ...

4. THE HEARTLESS COMMUNITY

Mark 5:15-16 - 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. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well.

So in one conversation Jesus accomplished what society couldn't accomplish. In one conversation Jesus reversed the terrible activity of sin and Satan in this man's life. He *changed* the man and *clothed* the man and *calmed* the man.

Notice the response of the people in this region. They saw how the man had been transformed; you would think they would rejoice. But the wording of the text shows that the thing they were most concerned about was that 2000 pigs had been destroyed. And their response?

Mark 5:17 - Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

Connect this back to the request of the demons earlier for Jesus *not* to send them out of their region. So here is a place where demons didn't want to leave and where the people didn't want Jesus to stay. Here's a country where animals (pigs) were more important than human beings. Here's a place where people were more concerned about lost revenue than a lost man. That sounds a lot like the land where we live, doesn't it?

But Jesus is Lord and He's still is on a mission. As difficult and challenging as this place was, let's see what Jesus' strategy was for impacting this country.

Mark 5:18 - As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.

That's what people typically did when they were touched and changed by Jesus. They followed after Jesus and His disciples. And that's what this man wants to do, but Jesus had other plans for him. So there's a new face in the picture. The face of ...

5. THE TRANSFORMED MISSIONARY

He's a new man with a new mission ... a new person with a new purpose. **Read Mark 5:19-20.**

This is what Jesus came to the earth to do ... to defeat the works of the devil. That's why Jesus doesn't just walk away from the "Ten Cities." He has a vision for this land and *His plan is a man*. This man was to go to his people, to his family and tell them how the Lord had shown him mercy and transformed his life. He was to go to the people who knew him best to demonstrate what a difference Jesus had made in him. Jesus had to leave, but the man would stay behind as the first Christian missionary to his people. And he didn't just go to his family ... he went to the whole Decapolis. Would anyone have imagined that this crazy guy who roamed around in the cemetery and shrieked and frightened people and tried to kill himself would one day become a missionary?

Church, we have to stop moaning and groaning about the mess our nation has become and let Jesus scatter us to our neighborhoods and our offices and schools and our clubs as men and women and young people on mission. Let's go to the hard places and tell the Gospel and how much the Lord has done for us in Christ. That's what America needs to see. In our day of skepticism there's great power in personal testimony of the impact of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What if Jesus unleashed an army of witnesses like this on Fort Worth TX?