

What is the Extent of Jesus Authority?

Mark 5:1-20

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A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, I was in Junior High School. I remember some of the exciting and turbulent times of Junior High. In one of our classes, the teacher struggled with class control. There were a couple of people who regularly challenged her authority. On this one day, they started going at her. "No, I'm not going to do that." Or they sneered at her attempt to establish control. Maybe she was having a bad day. Maybe she felt quite weak. But she suddenly left. We were in a portable class a little distance from the school. For a moment, everyone was quiet.

But then those who tormented her kind of had this celebration party. They crowed about how they had shown her. Many joined them in their celebration. I think they even said things like "ok class, do what you want." There was some laughter but also some nervousness about what would happen. This went on for about 15 or 20 minutes. We wondered if she would be gone for the rest of the class. Things got pretty loud – people got up and walked around. It was kind of chaos.

Then the door opened. In stepped the principal of the school with a furious look on his face. Everything went quiet immediately and people out of their seats rushed back to sit down. He said something like "I've just been informed that this class thinks it rules over the teacher. Now I want anyone who showed disrespect to the teacher to immediately speak up and go to office. In those days, "going to the office" did not mean you were going for a social visit. You were in trouble.

No one moved or spoke up. So the principal turned to the guy with the biggest reputation for trouble. He was one of the ringleaders in disrespecting this teacher. The Principal said, "George, what were you doing?" George lied "I was talking a little." The principal cut him off. "Get out." Then the principal went to the second most notorious trouble maker and called out their name and followed that up with another "get out." I think he did it one more time. All those who had disrespected the teacher or gone against her suddenly got up and went to the office. I think 15 out of 25 in the class left. The principal said to the remaining ones "Study your notes and do not say a word."

Authority had been reestablished in that class. The fallout from that event reverberated for a couple of weeks. The principal sat in the class a few times or the vice principal. They coached the teacher a bit in standing up for herself and laying out some clear boundaries. But the chaos was gone. I remember experiencing relief because before that every time I went to that class, I didn't know if we'd be in for another tense standoff or chaotic atmosphere. I wondered who would be in charge.

Our world can sometimes seem like that class when the teacher left. We wonder who's in charge. We see a widespread rejection of and rebellion against the authority of God. Some people think that's so liberating because they can do whatever they want without any immediate or long term consequence. But when we break God's standards, we will eventually bring harm upon ourselves or others because God's standards are for our good and best. Others of us who desire to follow God may wonder who's in charge because of all the bad stuff going on around us in or in our lives. We question, "If God is so great, why is this garbage part of my life? Why do these difficult things keep happening? Why do we have to go through this cycle of destruction and pain again?"

Who's in charge? The people living during Jesus' ministry in Galilee had many similar questions. Who was really in charge? God was supposed to be. They lived under Roman military occupation. So the Romans were certainly in charge. They also live under Herod and his auxiliary soldiers. They enforced a heavy taxation on them so they could barely survive. Herod certainly was in charge. Then there were the demons. We've seen already in Mark multiple instances where Jesus casts out demons. People bring their sick and demon-possessed to be healed or delivered. So though they are supposedly the people of God, demons have infested their community and oppressed them openly. It looked like the devil was in charge or at least had a lot of power. Who's in charge?

But I'm here to tell you today that Jesus had a resounding answer for that question. We are going to see this by His actions in one of the most dramatic encounters in the Gospels in my opinion. As we walk through this account, we will first discover the answer of who's in charge. Then we will spend some time figuring out how we live today in light of this answer.

Please find Mark 5 in your Bibles. (Page 708).

Mark 5:1-20 (ESV)

5 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. ²And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. ³He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, ⁴for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. ⁶And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. ⁷And 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." ⁸For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" ⁹And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." ¹⁰And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the

hillside,¹² and they begged him, saying, “Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.”¹³ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

¹⁴The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened.¹⁵ And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.¹⁶ And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs.¹⁷ And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region.¹⁸ As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him.¹⁹ And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

The Story

Jesus and his disciples are in a boat. They have just experienced Jesus’ calming the raging sea by a word. Now they reach the other side of the sea according to Mark. They land in “the country of the Gerasenes.” It was on the east side of the Sea of Galilee and inhabited by Gentiles or non-Jews. Jesus main base of operations was on the north and west side of the sea around Capernaum and Galilee. Jews populated those regions. But this was a Gentile region. So Jesus is already bringing the kingdom of heaven beyond the Jewish community.

Mark then introduces us to a person in great need. A man with an unclean spirit comes to meet Jesus. But he didn’t just casually stroll up to Jesus to have a conversation. According to verse 6 he ran and fell down before Jesus. So Mark alerts us that this will be no ordinary encounter.

To help us further understand this, he describes this man’s life in detail in verses 3-5. He tells us the man lived among the tombs. Now I don’t know about you, but the cemetery is not high up there on my bucket list as some place I have to live in. I think it would be kind of creepy. For this guy, it was likely the only place he could live. People didn’t want him in the village or near their farms. He was an outcast forced to live in one of the least desirable places because of his own problems.

But why did he live there? According to the end of verse 3, “no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.” The word “anymore” indicates there has been a sustained attempt to control this man. In fact verse 4 tells us that “he had often been bound with chains and shackles.” Chains were used to hold people’s hands together. Shackles were

applied to the ankles with a chain attached to each so that the shackled person could not move quickly or easily. But this man wrenched the chains apart and broke the shackles in pieces. Normally, people couldn't do that. So he has some sort of supernatural strength. At the end of verse 4, Mark tells us no one had the strength to subdue him.

But why did they want to shackle him? Verse 5 – “Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.” Well that is pretty disturbing. People don't like other people crying out all the time. It's disturbing to see someone cut themselves with stones. So they probably tried to subdue him with chains to keep him under control. But he's too strong. He roams around freely. Yet, he does not live a charmed life of freedom. He cries out night and day. He cuts himself. So he is suffering great internal torment.

Now if we didn't have verse 2, what might we conclude about this man? If he came into an emergency room today, what might the doctors think? Maybe he suffered from some severe psychotic illness. Or maybe he suffered some trauma in the past or abuse. Maybe he's acting out on that. I'm not saying that those things aren't real. But Mark tells us clearly the source for all of this in verse 2. He had an unclean spirit. That's a demon – a fallen angel – a member of those who rebelled against God. Now this demon gives the man great strength. But it's not so the man can benefit from it. The demon wants to somehow inhabit this man for its own benefit. And it shows no regard for the man because it torments him so that he cries out in pain or tries to stop the torment through cutting himself with stones. This powerful, wild, tormented person whom no one can bind, runs and falls at the feet of Jesus.

Then in verse 7, the unclean spirit speaks through the man. “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” Well that's interesting. The demon asks Jesus “what he (Jesus) wants with him.” But the question does not just mean “what do you want with me?” It's more like “why are you interfering with me” or “stop intruding in my affairs.” The demon has authority over this man. He does not want Jesus to mess with its authority. It does not want to lose its little kingdom. Notice it knows it's in the presence of one with greater authority. “Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” This demon confesses clearly Jesus' identity and authority.

Then it makes a remarkable request. “I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” The demon rebelled against God. But now appeals to God's justice for protection. The demon torments the man night and day. But the demon itself does not want to be tormented. Then we find out that the demon and Jesus had already been talking. Verse 8 – “For he

(Jesus) was saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” So the demon has resisted this command of Jesus up to this point.

But then comes verse 9. And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” The word legion referred to the largest unit in the Roman army. A full legion had 6000 men. That doesn’t necessarily mean that there were 6000 demons in this one man. But it does mean there were a lot. Suddenly, we get a clearer picture of the situation. One reason this man had such strength was from the multiple unclean spirits in him.

But even though there are a legion of spirits in this man, they know who’s in charge. Verse 10 – And he (the spokesperson for all the demons) begged him (Jesus) earnestly not to send them (the legion of demons) out of the country or region. So they all recognize Jesus’ absolute power and authority. They beg earnestly. This is not the bartering of two equals. The lesser begs the greater for a favor.

But what are they so afraid of? Why don’t they want to leave the region? Well, apparently they know that they would one day be sent to a place called the abyss during the end time. You read about it in Revelation 9 where there is this place where some demons are kept before the last judgment. It was a place of restriction and binding. They didn’t want to go there before the appointed time. In this region, they had some rule. They could roam about without chains.

Then in verse 11, Mark tells us “a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside.” Now what is one of the primary foods kosher Jews don’t eat? Pork! Pigs were unclean animals. So this emphasizes they are in a Gentile region. The demons realize they are not going to be able to hang on to this man. So in verse 12 they again beg Jesus, the Son of the Most High God to send them into the pigs. Somehow, dwelling in pigs was better than going to the abyss before their time.

So Jesus gives them permission. Unclean spirits go into unclean animals. Then all chaos breaks loose. The pigs go crazy and the great herd rushes down a steep bank into the sea and drown. Now even for a pig, that’s not a rational thing to do. But with the demons present among them they suddenly stampede in fear. Mark tells us the herd numbered 2000. So there weren’t one or two unclean spirits. There were a sufficient number to disturb this entire massive herd of pigs.

Now if you’re a pig lover, this seems really cruel. How could Jesus do that? But actually Jesus didn’t kill the pigs. When the demons inhabited the pigs, they suddenly stampeded. Though some people might think pigs are cute, the man

was way more important to Jesus. And what happened to the demons? We're not told for certain. But it's likely that with no one left to inhabit or oppress in that immediate area, they ended up in the abyss. Their skillful begging may not have worked at all.

Mark then introduces us to another group of people who witnessed all of this. Herds of 2000 pigs didn't just wander around freely. They were probably a combination of herds from the owners in the surrounding community. Each herd had a herdsman. Now their herd is wiped out. So they run through the country and nearest city to tell what has happened. Imagine the economic impact of this event on that region. A major portion of their economy has just been destroyed.

People come from everywhere. They likely see the bodies of the pigs in the sea. Then they see the man who has terrorized the people and broken free of the strongest bonds put on him. He sits there in his right mind. Maybe this is the first time in their lives that they've see him like this. What do they do? Do they celebrate such a great deliverance? Do they marvel that someone had the power to overcome the spirits oppressing this man with just a word? No, they are afraid!

The herdsmen describe what happened. But this still does not deal with the people's fear. They respond also by begging Jesus. But they don't beg him to let them stay in the region. They beg him to leave. A man with such power, even though it was for good, disturbed their peaceful lives. They could handle one crazy person walking around at night screaming but they didn't want someone with such power who could drastically impact their entire community.

Jesus responds to their request to leave with a yes. He begins to get back into the boat. But as He's leaving, the suddenly released man also begs Jesus. But his request is to come with Jesus now as a disciple. Jesus says no to the man. Instead, he commands him to go home to his friends and share how much the Lord has done for him.

Can you imagine that scene of that guy's homecoming? Wherever this guy was from, he shows up there that evening. At first people run from him but he goes to his former friends. He assures them it's him and then shares the story. Though the people of that region didn't want Jesus to stay, the message of Jesus likely rapidly spread throughout the region. In fact it went beyond the Gerasenes to the whole Decapolis or region of 10 cities. And all heard the news of how much the Lord, the Jewish God had done for this man through this Jesus of Nazareth. Everyone marveled.

So who's in charge? Through this account we learn that **Jesus has supreme authority over the kingdom of darkness**. Jesus has total authority over the kingdom of darkness. Who is part of the kingdom of darkness? Well we certainly know it includes the devil named Satan or the great dragon of Revelation. He is the chief fallen angel. Then we see a hierarchy of this kingdom in Ephesians 6:12. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." So there we see rulers, authorities, powers and forces. Then throughout the Gospels, Jesus encounters demons and the devil. Yet, Jesus is never overcome by this kingdom. He's never outsmarted or overpowered. The only one who does not seem to quake in Jesus' presence is the devil. But even he cannot trip up or overcome Jesus. Jesus has supreme authority over this kingdom.

Yet we must recognize that **the kingdom of darkness is real and active in our world today**. Listen to these Scriptures. 1 John 5:19 – The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Ephesians 2:1-2 – And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. 2 Corinthians 4:4 – The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers. 1 Timothy 4:1 – Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons." So we do need to take seriously the reality of the kingdom of darkness and its work in this world.

But we need not give in to fear. Why? **Jesus has completely and resoundingly defeated the kingdom of darkness at the cross**. Colossians 2:13-15 - "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. "This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

Did you notice that Jesus disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him? He disarmed them by nailing our record of debt to the cross, because Satan's power is that he's a great accuser.

So Jesus already had authority over the kingdom of darkness during His time on earth as portrayed in this account. But He absolutely defeated this kingdom at the cross. In a sense, the whole Bible tells this story of the advance of the kingdom of heaven into the realm of the kingdom of darkness. God continues to do this today when the kingdom of

heaven invades a person's life and dispels the darkness found there. When Jesus healed someone or cast out a demon, it was another advance of God's kingdom.

So that means we have a choice to make. How will we respond to Jesus who has this ultimate authority over the kingdom of darkness? This account in Mark presents us with two possible responses. One is to **Keep Jesus at arm's length** like the people from the region. Instead of getting to know Jesus with His great power over the kingdom of darkness they beg Jesus to leave. There might have been times maybe even now, where we don't want Jesus to get too close to us. We're comfortable where we're at. We're okay with having a little kingdom of darkness in our lives. We don't want to change. But if that describes you, don't fool yourself. The kingdom of darkness does not care about you. It wants to harm you and use you for its purposes. So don't get comfortable with darkness. It's a kingdom that will one day be destroyed. And it will take those living in it with it.

The other response we see is found in verse 19 where Jesus commands the delivered man. "Go home to your friends and **tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.**" Friends, when we first came to Christ, God rescued us from the kingdom of darkness. We weren't getting out of there on our own. We were entangled and held captive just as much as the man in this story. So if you're a Christian, you can always tell others how much the Lord has done for you in rescuing from that kingdom.

But then we must take up the fight against the kingdom. **Since Jesus has authority over the kingdom of darkness, we must call for His help and stand firm in His strength.** The devil still prowls around looking for someone to devour. He sends his flaming darts to discourage us in our faith. He tries to trip us up with temptation. He will send his minions to oppress and disturb.

So we need to call for help and **pray for protection.** Constantly. Don't assume that the enemy will miss an opportunity to attack or intervene. I shut off my car radio on the way to every meeting at church and pray for protection. We need to pray for the Spirit to continue to release us from the devil's lies and demon's teaching.

Put on the armor of God. Spend time in Ephesians 6:10-20. Look at all God has provided - the belt of truth (for the devil is a liar); the Breastplate of righteousness because right living before God (that's a great defense against giving the devil a foothold or entry point into life; Feet with the gospel of peace – with the good news that God's kingdom continues to advance. He commands us to take up the shield of faith to extinguish his flaming and

discouraging darts. We must put on the helmet of salvation for protection from the devil's head shots. God has provided the sword of the Spirit, His Word, to cut through the lies of the devil. With all of this we can stand firm in the strength of the Lord.

We can also **pray against the activity of Satan in dependence on Jesus and His name.** Yes there is value in doctors and counselors and medicine. But we also need to pray against oppression by the kingdom of darkness. So we pray against Satan's activity in Jesus' name. The name of Jesus causes demons to quake and the devil to leave. Remember Mark 3:22? Jesus has bound the strong man – the devil. Now he plunders Satan's goods which are people who have been oppressed or held captive by him.

If you have never received Christ, this is the vital first step to dealing with the devil's oppression in your life. Jesus has the authority to release you from any captive hold the devil has over you. When you receive Jesus, you receive the Holy Spirit. You will have God in you who is infinitely more powerful than any unclean spirit. Then you can call out to Jesus and call on the name of Jesus to resist the enemy's assaults and oppressions in your life; mind and family.

We started today by asking the question "who's in charge in this world?" The reality is Jesus has supreme authority over the kingdom of darkness. So instead of living as if the devil rules, we need to live in light of the kingdom of heaven's advance. Call out for Jesus' help. Stand firm in His strength. Let's do that now as we pray.