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Mark 4:35-5:20

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## ENEMY BOUND: THE NEW EXODUS

Today we come to what I consider to be one of the most exciting texts in all of Scripture. It has all the components of a great story: adventure, drama, high tension, unpredictable twists, mystery, tremendous good guys, really awful bad guys, human redemption, and ultimately, a very satisfying conclusion. In fact, it would make a great movie!

More importantly though, this story begs an underlying question which I'd like us to wrestle with today, and it is this: Who is your enemy? When you stop and think about it, who or what do you hold to be your enemy? Everybody's got one, or more. Perhaps it's your college's great rival. For Bay Area sports fans, maybe it's the St. Louis Rams, or even worse, the Los Angeles Dodgers. Even more understandable, maybe it's the Cal Bears. Now that one I'll buy!

All kidding aside, if we honestly examine our interior world, we can all identify people and/or entities we really do consider to be enemies, or at least toward whom we harbor considerable resentment. Perhaps it's an individual who makes our lives miserable at work, at school, or on a team. Maybe it's someone in our family who through abuse, neglect or abandonment, never gave us the blessing and approval we all so desperately desire. Maybe it's a relative who seems to make every family gathering a miserable experience.

Maybe you are like me and harbor a deep resentment toward certain entities such as the media and what seems to be a determination to undermine all standards of godly living. It could be that business competitor who seems to outflank you at every turn, perhaps using unethical, even immoral tactics to do so. It might even be someone who openly hates you for your faith in Jesus.

Whatever our enemy, I want to challenge us today to a new perspective, a new way of thinking about enemies, a new perspective that Jesus was determined to give his disciples and one I believe he desires to give us.

Let's get into the story in Mark chapter 4. In Mark's account, Jesus has just finished an extended time of teaching, primarily using parables. Everything has been explained to the disciples in private, and now it is time for some field work. They are going on a field trip that will rock their world and revolutionize the way they view life, and we are invited to come along.

### I. Stilling the Storm: The Enemy Silenced (4:35-41)

On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down

and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:35-41 NASB)

Jesus is exhausted. The time of intensive teaching has left him physically and emotionally spent. So the disciples take him "just as he was" (read, worn-out), and they head to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

People living near the Sea of Galilee are familiar with how quickly this beautiful body of water can turn frightening. The area is notorious for sudden squalls that come funneling through the Galilean hill country. Even more violent are the occasional winds from the Golan Heights to the east. Regardless, Jesus and his disciples find themselves in the midst of a fierce gale. What a great scene, as the disciples grow increasingly nervous while Jesus snoozes contentedly in the stern of the boat.

"Jesus... Jesus... Jesus! Wake up. We've got issues here! We've got water coming in, a boat going down and you're taking a nap. Little help here! Do you care about what's happening?"

I love Mark's care as a writer here. His contrast of the storm (Satan) with Jesus in verses 37-39 is a wonderful bit of writing:

- a. fierce gale
- b. waves breaking
- c. boat filling up
- a' Jesus in the stern
- b' asleep on the cushion
- c' seemingly without care

Now notice how Jesus responds: "*Be still!*" Where have we seen this before? How about Mark chapter 1:25, when Jesus encounters a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue at Capernaum:

And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet (*phimoo*), and come out of him!" (Mark 1:23-25)

This is the same word Jesus uses when quieting the storm on the Sea of Galilee: *phimoo*, meaning to muzzle, to put to silence.

Suddenly we realize that Jesus is not talking to the wind, he's not commanding the waves. He is addressing something far greater. Jesus is exercising his dominion over Satan and his minions. It is the Evil One who has thrown up this chaotic resistance to Jesus and his disciples. This is more than a little jaunt across the lake, it's an offensive that takes on a whole new sense of urgency.

But there is even more. Mark has additional perspective that I am convinced is rooted in the creation, in the Exodus, and also in

Isaiah's vision of a New Exodus that will be greater than and transcend the original. Not only are there echoes of Genesis and God's dominion over the chaotic waters, bringing order from disarray, but we also hear echoes of God's authority as expressed by Isaiah, such as in chapter 43:

**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isa 43:2)**

So I think Mark sees this event as part of the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise of a New Exodus, a new and greater deliverance of God's people.

**"Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited,' of the towns of Judah, 'They shall be built,' and of their ruins, 'I will restore them,' who says to the watery deep, 'Be dry, and I will dry up your streams,' ... Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.'" (Isa 44:26-28)**

Isaiah had a vision of a great restoration, starting with a redeemer, a great warrior. This warrior would come, not to build an earthly kingdom, but to build a great spiritual kingdom.

In Exodus 13 and 14 we see how Moses and Israel were reenacting the creation as God delivered them from Egypt. We land that story here in the gospel of Mark, because here we can see Jesus reenacting the Exodus—its ultimate manifestation in the person of Jesus the Christ.

How does this work? Let's look a bit more closely: Jesus departs to cross the sea with his 12 disciples. Where have we crossed the sea before? The exodus. Where have we seen 12 before? The 12 tribes of Israel. In the midst of the crossing we see the enemy neutralized, just as Egypt was neutralized. As all this is transpiring, the faith of the 12 is severely tested. Jesus pulls no punches with his men: "How is it that you have no faith?" Just as Israel was taught faith in YHWH in powerful and dramatic ways, so the disciples had to be taught faith in the Son of Man.

Jesus is putting his disciples into training, deepening their faith and preparing them for the task ahead of fighting the enemy and evangelizing the world, in order to start building his spiritual kingdom. But unlike the first exodus, Israel is now on the offensive: they are forging into enemy territory in order to effect deliverance. But in order for Israel to be restored and the exodus to be effected, the strong man must be defeated. His silencing here is but a foretaste of what is to come on the other side of the lake.

## II. The Gerasene Demoniac: The Enemy Identified (5:1-6)

**They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; 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. Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones. Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; (5:1-6)**

Picture this: you are a young Jew, following one whom you believe is Messiah, the one who will deliver Israel from all its oppressors

and restore the nation to greatness. As you follow this one and see the remarkable things he does, your anticipation grows. You are on the inside. You have been selected to walk with him, to be intimate with him, to be a part of his trusted circle as he ushers in a new era of glory, the long-awaited return from exile for Israel. It must be perplexing enough that the work of this one is being carried out nearly 80 miles away from Jerusalem, the center of your spiritual universe and the center of all that is promised to Israel in their return to glory. Now you find yourself pulling up on the beaches of a god-forsaken pagan land near a city called Gadara, in a region called Decapolis, or Ten Cities.

Heading there would be bad enough, but as soon as Jesus and his disciples climb from their boat, they are met by a demon-infested man who lives in a graveyard! If you are a Jew in first century Palestine, there are several things unclean to you, several things you avoid at all costs lest you be considered unclean yourself and ostracized from society. Very high on the list would be those who not only have contact with the dead but are possessed by evil spirits as well—literally the walking dead. There are few scenarios in which Jesus' men could possibly be more out of their comfort zone. And it's about to get worse!

But before we go there, we need to see what's at the heart of Mark's story here. Once again, he has carefully crafted his account so that we can't miss the emphasis:

- a Man with unclean spirit **met him** (2)
- b His dwelling **among the tombs** (3)
  - c *No one was able to bind him* (3)
  - d Bound with *shackles* and *chains* (4)
  - d' *Chains* torn apart and the *shackles* broken (4)
  - c' *No one was strong enough to subdue him* (4)
- b' night and day, **among the tombs** (5)
- a' he ran up and **bowed down before him** (6)

In the very center of Mark's reverse parallel structure he tells us that no one, *no one*, was able to bind this man. They had tried the best tools and technology available, but could not do it. Then, in case we didn't get it the first time, Mark repeats: Chains and shackles were mere nuisances to this man. No one was strong enough to subdue him.

Think for a moment about this image of binding the strong man. We've seen this elsewhere, haven't we? In Mark 3:27, Jesus has been accused of being in league with Satan himself, thereby explaining his power over evil spirits. Jesus replies to the accusation:

**"no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house." (Mark 3:27)**

Imagine again you are one of Jesus' disciples with him that day. You've just entered the house. Right in front of you is the strong man. No one could bind him, no one could stop him. No tool or scheme of man has had any impact. And here you are, face to face with this raging wild thing from the tombs.

But suddenly we realize—the strong man is about to be bound! The plundering is about to begin! Once again, images of the Exodus flood this scene: the enemy is at the mercy of Jesus, just like Egypt in the face of YHWH's presence. The strong man is bound and Israel is invited to plunder the riches of the Enemy. And Jesus is inviting his

disciples to the plunder. But what is it? And just how will Jesus bind the Evil One? What will be the result?

### III. The Gerasene Demoniac: the Enemy Destroyed (5:7-20)

...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!” For He had been saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” And He was asking him, “What is your name?” And he said to Him, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain. The demons implored Him, saying, “Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.” 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.

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. 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. Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. And they began to implore Him to leave their region. As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him. 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.” And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed. (5:7-20)

Just in case the scene is not uncomfortable enough for the disciples, we now find that the immediate area is swarming with swine! Pork was a forbidden food for Israelite consumption. In some ancient cultures, including Rome, swine were closely associated with idol worship and the demonic forces behind the idolatry. It was probably ancient Canaanite sacrificial practices with swine that led, at least in part, to God’s prohibition of it for his people.

Way back in chapter 1 of his gospel, Mark made it clear that Jesus exercises complete dominion over the spiritual world. It should come as no surprise then when the legion of demons inhabiting this man bows in the presence of Jesus. Knowing they have no chance for survival in the presence of the Lord of the universe, they beg for mercy, asking to be sent into the nearby herd of pigs. Jesus, ever conscious of teaching the 12, permits the demons their request.

At the literary center of this passage, once again Mark shines the spotlight on the point he wants to emphasize. Verse 13:

**“the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea.” (5:13b)**

Once again, we need to stop and ask: where have we seen this before? Egypt! The Exodus. Nearly 1500 years before, Israel’s enemy rushed into the sea in order to pursue and recapture Israel. God closed the sea around them and the armies of Pharaoh were destroyed that day. Once again we see the enemy of Israel rush into the sea, plunging to its death. Only this time, YHWH has taken his people and us to a higher, transcendent place. This time, it is not only the enemy of Israel, but the enemy of all mankind. This time, it is not an enemy

that stands as a metaphor for the true enemy, it is the enemy himself. The strong man has been bound, he no longer has power over mankind and the plundering of his household can begin!

But what does this mean? How does this plundering take place?

Let’s look at the aftermath of this scene. First, we see the herdsmen in a panic. They do what we would all do—run and tell somebody: “You are not gonna believe this!” People then gather and see for themselves this man who was possessed and is now free. Amazing!

Or not. Their response is not one of rejoicing, but of fear. They ask Jesus to leave. They preferred their herds to a healed man. So Jesus, never one to force himself on people, quietly acquiesces and begins to leave. But before he does, Mark gives us a wonderful little detail: the man asks to come along. Jesus responds, “No. Go to your people and tell them what has happened.”

There are some scholars who look at this scene as a missionary trip. And as such, some have determined that it was quite a failure. One lone man saved. I’d like to offer, however, that this was not just a missionary trip. This was war, a full-on assault on the gates of hell, and it was an enormous success.

First, Jesus teaches his disciples that their enemy is not Rome. They will not be mounting an assault in Jerusalem in order to overthrow the oppressive Roman Empire and restore Israel to earthly greatness. Secondly, they find that the enemy is not that which is considered unclean. It’s not the Romans, it’s not the Gentiles in general, it’s not society’s outcasts. Satan is the enemy and all his hosts. Jesus not only defeats the Evil One on his own turf, but he redeems the unclean. The unclean no longer spoils the clean. It is the clean who restores the unclean. In Jesus, the outcast of all outcasts is restored.

Now what about that plunder? In Egypt, God bound the Egyptians and Israel took all the wealth they could carry. He cared for his people by granting them the best of what the enemy had to offer.

What about here? On the surface, it seems as though the only plunder worth having took a flying leap into the sea. And Israel didn’t want it anyway! We have to fast forward a bit to Mark chapters 7 and 8 to get a glimpse. First, in 7:31, Mark tells us in a matter-of-fact fashion that Jesus has returned to Decapolis. He’s gone right back into the place where he was thoroughly rejected and asked to leave. Jesus then proceeds to heal a deaf man, a metaphor for what’s happening all over this pagan land. Then the full impact is revealed.

A multitude has gathered to be with Jesus. As with the multitude in chapter 6, Jesus feeds them in miraculous fashion. Mark then tells us the result:

**“And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. And about four thousand were there.” (Mark 8:8-9)**

The plunder is enormous! The strong man’s stronghold has been breached and he has been bound. His house is now being plundered and the very best of his possessions have been taken—4,000 in this instance. Four thousand captives have been set free because one man was released and he was commissioned by Jesus to tell his story. One small mustard seed was planted, and as Ezekiel foretold:

**On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. (Ezek 17:23 NIV)**

Truly, birds of every kind are finding redemption, a hope and a future in the branches of Messiah. The world of the disciples has been blown wide open.

Jesus has reenacted the Exodus and taken the story to a whole new level. The One who can bind the strong man has arrived, and he will retrieve his plunder: the exiles will be restored. The Son of Man makes the unclean clean, and the true enemy has been redefined: not Rome and its *legions*, but Satan and his minions. The enemy will be utterly destroyed by the Son of Man: he created with a word, he will conquer with but a word. Chaos and the beasts that it harbors will be set to rights. Out of confusion, order will be restored. And finally, seed will be planted not only in Israel, but in all nations, including the most unclean of the unclean. And from that seed will spring a new people, a new nation that transcends all boundaries. It is a nation of people, plundered from the Evil One, who will rise up and give praise to their deliverer. And still more will come until the end of the age.

#### IV. Reflections

Frankly, this is such a powerful passage I almost hesitate to attempt to add anything more in our study of it today. I do think, however, that there are a few reflections that are important to note as we consider the impact of these things on our own lives.

I began our time by posing the question: who or what is our enemy? Over whom do we expend unhealthy energy? Who generates angst in our lives and causes us to live with tension? I would offer that at the heart of who we perceive as our enemies is fear. We fear what they can do to us, how they can influence us, our lives and the lives of those we love. Our enemies become our enemies because they oppose what we desire, threaten what we hold as important and encroach upon our comfort zones. Jesus wants to redefine our enemies. He longs to give us a new vision into the heart of the matter, and the hearts of those we fear and oppose.

I have to confess to you that in spite of the fact that I work with kids, I often find myself in a critical and condescending place with teens I don't know. I have found myself at times intolerant and judgmental of the wildness of youth and the indiscretions that are a part of growing up and discovering one's identity.

Just last week, I came steaming out of my house right after observing a high school senior, who lives around the corner from us, doing a screeching four-wheel drift in his Honda, right in front of our home. There are no less than eight small children in this part of the neighborhood. I grabbed my somewhat perplexed neighbor Rob, in part for back-up and in part so that I didn't tear the kid's head off, and told him we were going to have a little chat with this young man. Rob could see I meant business, so he dropped what he was doing and joined me.

Fortunately, the walk to the high schooler's house and a quick chat with Rob gave me enough reflection time to remember that this is a kid. He's just trying to make his way in the world, find himself and figure out who he is. More importantly, screeching four-wheel drifts in the neighborhood notwithstanding, Jesus loves this young man and wants to plunder him from the enemy. Oh yeah! He is *not* the enemy. Satan is the enemy and Jesus wants to redeem my young neighbor.

Well, not a lot of redemptive work went on during our little visit, at least none that I was involved with. But I didn't blast him. I made sure he knew that there was to be no more performance driving in our neighborhood. But I didn't blast him, and I did remember that he's not the enemy and did not treat him as such. Small victory.

Who's our enemy? Are we willing to look past the façade, the things of which we are afraid, the things we consider unclean, to see the broken, fearful prisoner, struggling to find himself and make his way in the world? Satan wants to deceive us into thinking that people are our enemies. If he succeeds, then we will not notice the reality. Our enemies need Jesus desperately, just like we need Jesus desperately. Will we be agents of judgment and anger, or agents of grace and mercy so that we too can plunder the true enemy of his possessions?

In the ancient world, the sea was often a symbol of chaos and evil. Jesus deals with the forces of hell by burying them in what symbolizes their dominion. Amazingly, we see parallels between the possessed man and Jesus himself. Both end up naked, out among the tombs of the dead, torn apart by the forces of evil. Both are buried and restored to life.<sup>1</sup> But, unlike the demon-possessed man, Jesus takes the burial himself. And unlike the demons, Jesus rises from the depths, conquering the evil that put him there.

It is into this burial and resurrection that we have been baptized. How can we then go forward with judgment and disdain when we have been given life? We are certainly not called to condone evil. It's good and right to call evil for what it is. But more importantly, we are called to reach the captives, to be a part of God's great work of setting the captives free.

Jesus rebuked his disciples for not having more faith amidst the storm on the sea. I'm persuaded that it was not so much for lack of faith as it was to deepen them, like a coach at halftime driving his team to greater heights. We must be bold, have greater faith and take risks. The disciples themselves were later to take on the forces of hell and Jesus was readying them for the awesome battles to come.

He has called us to the same.

Jesus has called us to make disciples of the nations. He has called us to make disciples in Silicon Valley. Are we treating as enemies the very ones he wishes to redeem, or are we looking beneath to see the true enemy?

1. N. T. Wright, *Mark For Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2001), 56-57.