



THE NEW EXODUS

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 Mark 4:35-5:20
 14th Message
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Years ago, under Ray Stedman's leadership, our pastoral staff had the privilege of holding pastors conferences around the world. When we visited Australia, I became acquainted with a pastor of a church in Adelaide. In his living room there was displayed a large picture of the city, lit up under the night sky. He told me his vision was to reach all of Adelaide for Christ. Here was a man who had faith for great things, I thought. During my week at the church, I got to know one of the interns. Later, after several years of exchanging letters, I asked him how the church was doing. He said that most of the staff, including the pastor, had left, suffering from burn-out. Sadly, this is all too common in the church. We can have the right vision, whether it's attempting to reach a nation, a city, a company, a neighborhood, or a school, but when we use the wrong method, we burn out.

In our studies in the gospel of Mark we have seen in the parables how Jesus would not have his disciples be ignorant of how the kingdom of God grows. Now the lectures are over. It's time for the tutorial, time to see how much they had learned and were ready to put into practice. What unfolds is the birth of the first Christian missionary, who is sent out on the first citywide evangelistic crusade. How will he do in his assigned task?

As our text opens, Jesus embarks on a boat on the sea of Galilee.

I. Stilling the Storm at Sea (4:35-41)

And on that day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." And leaving the multitude, they took Him along with them, just as He was, in the boat; 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. And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And being aroused, He 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 so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (NASB)

Having completed his discourse in parables, Jesus now makes a bold decision to go over to the eastern

side of the lake—a remarkable move. This was a predominantly gentile area, ruled by a very strong presence of idolatry and demonic forces. Even the physical characteristics of the shores are ominous and imposing. Bargil Pixner, who spent twelve years living at the north end of the sea of Galilee, describes it as follows:

The steep cliffs of the Hippene, the most northern part of the Decapolis, loomed menacingly from afar. The city of Hippos...lay there like a fortress on the basalt plateau, resembling the head of a noble steed and looking defiantly across to Tiberias, her rival on the other side of the lake. A number of smaller villages were lying around Hippos like little chicks gathered around the mother hen. Kursi, a fishing village in the northwestern corner of the Hippene, as the region was called, was one of the villages over which the city of Hippos held dominion. There Jesus' boat was heading with other boats in its wake.¹

At first glance, Jesus' choice of direction appears a little odd, but as the story unfolds, we sense we have arrived at a much bigger stage than we thought. A huge confrontation between spiritual forces, a confrontation of the magnitude of Israel's first Exodus, is about to occur. Following an exhausting day of preaching, Jesus finds his way to the back of the boat and immediately falls into a deep sleep, oblivious to the currents, the waves, and the storm. It doesn't require much imagination to see behind the gale force winds the threatened powers of the underworld. They were seeking to prevent the prophet from making an appearance on their shores. Their plan was to swamp the boat and drown his venture in the depths of the sea.

The disciples, experienced in the ways of this sea, are wide awake, however. Sparing no effort to save themselves, they are overcome by the waves. As the vessel takes on more and more water, in exasperation they turn to their sleeping rabbi in the stern. Rousing him from his dream-like sleep, they berate him for not lending a helping hand. How can he sleep, seemingly without a care, while they are perishing? Unbeknownst to them, their actions mirror the poetic images of Psalm 107:23-27,

**Others went out on the sea in ships;
 they were merchants on the mighty waters.
 They saw the works of the Lord,
 his wonderful deeds in the deep.
 For he spoke and stirred up a tempest
 that lifted high the waves.**

**They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths;
in their peril their courage melted away.
They reeled and staggered like drunken men;
they were at their wits' end. (NIV)**

Awakening out of his deep sleep, Jesus immediately takes command of the situation. With but a word from him, the gale force winds, described by Mark as "great," become a "great" calm—an eerie, frightening calm. At this point, Psalm 107 reads like a script:

**Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.
He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.
They were glad when it grew calm,
and he guided them to their desired haven.
(Ps 107:28-30)**

To the disciples' surprise, Jesus not only rebukes the wind, he also rebukes them for their timidity and lack of faith. Was this the faith he had just taught them in the parables, that once a man sows the seed, he *sleeps*, then he *rises* up by day to see divine wonders at work? Perhaps. The same words from the parable, *sleeping* and *rising*, are both repeated here, in verse 38. Rather than sleeping, the disciples were acting like nervous farmers who roused their master from his sleep to inspect the difficult situation. When it was over, their fear of the sea was replaced by a greater fear and wonder. Thus their question, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" Who is this, who does things that only the Creator God is said to have done in the Old Testament? Such questions pressed in on them with greater force than the tumultuous waves which threatened their little boat. Their minds were anything but calm as they glided upon the glassy sea, through the stark stillness, with no wind to aid them or oppose them. However, even more wonders await them on the other side, as the confrontation escalates.

II. The Stilling of the Storm Inside the Demoniac (5:1-20)

Our story takes place in three scenes, with three encounters, as Jesus meets a demon-possessed man, some swine-herders, and then the townspeople.

A. Jesus encounters the possessed man (5:1-9)

And they came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. And when He had come 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. And constantly night and day, among the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out and gashing himself with stones. And

seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What do I have to do with You, 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."

Immediately upon disembarking their boat, in hostile pagan territory,² Jesus and the disciples come upon a man who made his dwelling among the tombs. Mark's depiction of the man's dark depravity is lengthy, poignant and gripping. This nameless one makes his home in extreme isolation. Cut off from all the living, he resides among the dead, existing at the mercy of the evil spirit possessing him, a spirit so formidable that no shackles of this world are able to "bind" him. Tortured and tormented, his cries ring out endlessly through the night, his only relief his self-inflicted wounds. I wonder if this graphic portrayal is not an apt description of what goes in the silent seclusion of the souls of many in our world who suffer from the destructive oppression of addictions that lead to self-hatred and, in extreme cases, suicide.

Was this why Jesus came to this side of the lake? I think so. He was the one who came to "bind" the strong man and plunder his goods. Now he had come to seek this unnamed man whom society had cast off as the walking dead. How will he deal with him? Notice he does not address the man, but, rather, the evil spirit residing within him. When he asks the spirit his name, the answer comes, "Legion," a word with military overtones (actually, the technical name for a Roman military company consisting of several thousand troops).³

What follows next is as surprising as it is gripping.

B. Jesus encounters the swine-herds (5:10-14a)

And he began to entreat Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there was a big herd of swine feeding there on the mountain. And the demons entreated Him, saying, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them." And He 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. And their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country.

The demons immediately recognize Jesus for who he is, the Most Holy One of God. Fearing his authority, and recognizing that their days of oppressing this man are over, they beg Jesus not to send them out of the country: "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them." Why pigs? Bargil Pixner comments that this may be

an allusion to the Roman legions with whose help Pompey had founded the Decapolis. Pompey came from Syria in 63 B.C. and conferred pagan-hellenistic

city rights on the Decapolis. Because of these legions, the demons insist that they have the right to remain in this region, if not in people, at least in the pigs.

Why pigs? The Canaanites had sacrificed pigs to the demons. The archaeologists have found altars erected for that purpose...So this special relationship between pigs and demons becomes understandable. Moreover the emblem of one of the most famous legions, the Decima Fretensis, was that of the wild boar (cf. also Is 65:48).⁴

This scene is packed with military imagery. And not just in the term "legion," a direct reference to Rome, but also, notes Rikki Watts, "[*send*]" (v. 10) connotes a military command (i.e. to dispatch), [*herd*'], clearly inappropriate for pigs, indicates a band of military recruits, and [*rush*'] (v. 13) describes troops rushing into battle."⁵ It is significant that what Jesus did to the demons in casting them into the sea, is exactly what the Jews were hoping to do to the Romans. Jesus has redefined the enemy. It was not Rome, but demon hoards that had bound Israel and the surrounding gentile territories.

In a word, the spirits evacuate the man and rush into the pigs. They in turn are so startled they rush off the rocky precipice that drops into the sea. What a sight: two thousand pigs flying off into oblivion. The demons are banished, and with them the land is cleansed of any semblance of their idols. What a sign this must have been for the man: a sacred sign and permanent seal of his effective cleansing. This would be comparable to an alcoholic seeing every bottle he had ever touched, every bar stool he had ever sat on, every liquor sign whose neon lights had mesmerized him, and every beer commercial he'd ever seen, all gathered together, and in a moment, cast off the cliff of his city and swept away by the sea, leaving not one drinking establishment for him to enter.

What of the herdsmen? Stunned by what they had seen, they immediately run away and spread the news both far and wide, in the city and the country.

Now comes the ultimate question. How will the townspeople respond to this miracle?

C. Jesus encounters the townspeople (4:14b-20)

And the people came to see what it was that had happened. And 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. And 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 entreat Him to depart from their region. And as He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was entreating 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 marveled.

The herdsmen's report spreads like wildfire, and everyone comes to see what has occurred. Arriving at the summit, they observe the no-name man, who once walked about naked and demon-possessed, clothed and rational, as quiet as the calm sea. A miracle! A legion of demons had possessed him with a grip so strong that no shackles could contain him. Yet now, with but a word from the prophet, he had been made whole. The sight seizes them with fear. But then they learn of the high price of the cleansing of this one life: it had cost the territory its idols, and them their livelihood. As their materialistic minds ponder the value of this life versus the cost of their idols, they ask Jesus to leave their country. How ironic, that their entreaty echoes the demons' entreaty, in v. 10; but in this case, it is Jesus, not them, who is to be banished.

*Take your leave, Jesus,
and take this friend of thine.
You love his soul,
but we love swine.*

What will Jesus do? Here is another irony. He who conquered the storm with a word, who subdued and bound the strong man, who commanded demons at will, yields when he faces resistance from the human heart.⁶ If the human will says, "No. Please leave," Jesus condescends and leaves. No argument, no pleading, not even a response is recorded. Jesus will not coerce himself upon the human heart. Did you know you had such power over deity? As Jesus embarks in his boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begins entreating him that he might go along. But Jesus instructs him to stay home and declare the great things the Lord had done for him, and how he had mercy on him. The man obeys and goes throughout the whole of the Decapolis, doing what Jesus had asked him, and "everyone marveled."

Now we come to the theological and practical implications of this story.

III. The Implications of the Story

A. The Bay of Pigs = the New Exodus!

When this story is properly understood, it takes on magnificent proportions. The account evokes powerful memories of the Exodus, when Israel came through the sea under divine protection, and then watched as the Egyptian armies with their horses and chariots were swallowed up into the sea. So moved was Moses by the sight that he wrote the long poem of Exodus 15, celebrating the fact that the Creator God had become a Warrior who did battle to deliver Israel from her enemies.

During Israel's exile, the cry came again, "Where is he who brought them through the sea...who divided the waters before them?" (Isa 63:11-12 NIV). The answer comes, that God will bring about a New Exodus that will end Israel's exile once and for all:

**“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are Mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with
you...**

**Thus says the Lord,
Who makes a way through the sea
And a path through the mighty waters,
Who brings forth the chariot and the horse,
The army and the mighty man
(They will lie down together and not rise again).”
(Isa 43:1-2, 16-17 NASB).**

Now “Jesus appears as the Creator-Warrior of the first Exodus as he rebukes the chaos waters, and, in the second, this same Creator-Warrior demonstrates his ability to deliver Israel from the oppressive legion of idol-demons by drowning them in the sea.”⁷ So on the shores of Galilee the Exodus is re-enacted, but on a grander scale, for it is not Rome, but the devil who is defeated.

So why should you fear, O Christian? There is no place where you should fear to tread. No opposition can resist his will. The early Christians rushed headlong into Satanic strongholds to deliver the captives and set them free. But not today. As our world becomes more multicultural, it is not excitement but fear that seizes us, and we withdraw into our safe Christian ghettos.

B. Are you fighting the real enemy?

The second thing that causes me concern is the fact that after Jesus has redefined the enemy for Israel, we continue to fight the wrong foe. The enemy was not Rome; it was the devil and the idolatry that had infiltrated Israel. So why do many Christian ministries focus on Washington? Politicians are not the enemy. In fact, even when they are our friends, they can't do much to advance the kingdom, because no amount of legislation can remove the grip of idolatry. The real enemy is the idolatry that has infiltrated the church.

C. Where is the real point of contention with the world?

When Christ confronted the demons, not only were they banished, the land was cleansed of all idolatry. Two thousand dead pigs testified to that. So we learn that when evil is confronted and cleansed, communities can suffer severe financial cost. This is why we face such widespread opposition to the gospel. We need to count the cost, and remember that just one life made in the image of God is far more valuable than economic systems based on idolatry.

D. What do we do when we are rebuffed?

Finally, we learn that though the gospel may face almost universal rejection, we should not try to counter with rebuttal or more force. Let us look instead to the tiny remnant which does respond. In this instance, the

remnant was but one, a tiny mustard seed. Yet Jesus tells this insignificant one to go and share his story throughout the “Decapolis,” the ten cities, the area east of the Jordan and Galilee. G. A. Smith, the great Palestinian geographer, writes that this was a flourishing area at the time of Jesus’ ministry: “Permeated by Greek influence, but cosmopolitan by reason of commerce, history, and geographical position,”⁸ it was home to philosophers, teachers, temples, amphitheaters, art, games and literature, and served as a bridgehead to empires to the east. Our own Bay Area is remarkably similar to this region.

This was where this “no-name” went to tell his story of the great things that Jesus had done for him, and “everyone marveled.” “*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound—That saved a wretch like me!*” And when Jesus returns there, he will harvest the fruit of this man (Mark 7:31). Pixner writes,

In less than four centuries a magnificent cathedral would stand there on those heights. The presence of a bishop of Hippos at the very first Church Councils (Nicea, Constantinople, etc.) will bear witness of how Christianity conquered heathendom. Did the Christians of Hippos remember their first missionary by building the chapel which can still be seen at the site of his tomb-cave on the slope above Kursi?⁹

Therein lies the power of the kingdom for those who have eyes to see, a kingdom for which you never have to burn out. Amen.

1. Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus Through Galilee According to the Fifth Gospel* (Rosh Pina, Israel: Corazin, 1992), 42.

2. Rikki E. Watts in his excellent work, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997, 166), suggests that there may be some ambiguity as to whether this man is a gentile or a Jew. The geography is certainly gentile, though “we know that during the Maccabean expansion Alexander Jannaeus seized Gerase ca. 82 B.C. ...and that a number of Jews remained in the regions, at least to the time of the First Jewish Revolt.” The context of Isaiah 65, from which there are many allusions, also suggests he might have been Jewish.

3. “By the end of the 1st century A.D. the legion contained about 6000 men.” W. White, in the *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 3:907.

4. Pixner, *Fifth Gospel*, 43.

5. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 159.

6. This is Pixner's observation, *Fifth Gospel*, 45.

7. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 161.

8. G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 9th ed. pg. 601.

9. Pixner, *Fifth Gospel*, 46.