

# Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

## Session Nine – Mark 4:35~5:20

**Mark 4:35-36 - That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.**

### **Big Picture**

Stepping back, we can see a section beginning in 4:35 and ending in 6:6, in which Jesus continues to spend much of his time by – and on - the Sea of Galilee. There are some interesting connections - In the first episode, panicked disciples rouse Jesus from sleep; in the next-to-last episode, he rouses a girl from the sleep of death (5:39).

### **Jesus’ Power**

Jesus “is shown to possess power to still outward storms that threaten life and to still the inward storms of torment and grief that threaten our souls. We learn in these scenes that Jesus is not only sovereign over the demonic forces and debilitating and defiling illnesses, but he is also sovereign over the potent forces of nature and of death.”

### **Stories of Rejection**

Despite the miracles that Jesus performs, this larger second section (3:7 – 6:6) concludes with the report of his rejection in his hometown, just as the first section of the Gospel (1:14 – 3:6) concluded with his rejection by the Pharisees and Herodians. As the parable of the sower outlined, many are unable to hear and bear fruit.

### **Desperate People, Desperate Situations**

This section gives us insight into the desperation of those Jesus encounters:

- The disciples were desperate, fearing death by drowning
- The demon-possessed man is desperate to be delivered of his tormentors
- Jairus is desperate for his daughter to be healed, and raised
- The woman with the “issue of blood” in desperation has spent all she had, and is coming to Jesus as a last resort
- Those not desperate – Pharisees, etc – find it easier to reject Jesus.

### **Fearful Reactions**

Jesus’ miracles do not always achieve the expected result.

- The disciples are terrified when Jesus calms the storm.
- The Gerasenes were “afraid,” and begged Jesus to leave
- The sick woman who was healed was “trembling with fear”
- The people of Nazareth react with skepticism, and “took offense at him”

### **The Other Side**

“The Other Side” means to cross the imaginary line drawn more or less down the centre of the Sea of Galilee, between the entrance and exit points of the Jordan. In this case, Chapter 5 shows that “the other side” is also “the region of the Gerasenes,” a non-Jewish enclave along the eastern shore of the lake, at the base of the Golan Heights. This would certainly bring Jesus away from the press of the crowds.

### **“Just as he was”**

Try as I might, I can’t find a reason for this statement, other than a further evidence of its eyewitness character – as well as the later observation that Jesus was in the stern of the boat, head on a cushion (probably a sandbag used for ballast). It probably means that they left directly from shore, without Jesus first going ashore, for additional clothing or food.

### **Mark 4:37 - A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.**

We’ve seen in weeks past the geography of the Sea of Galilee, and how the winds coming off the Mediterranean can suddenly whip the water into a deadly froth. *“Since the beginning of 2017, seven people have drowned in the Sea of Galilee with dozens of others having to be rescued; acting commander of the marine police at the lake warns of strong winds from the west that can carry swimmers away to deep waters... “The connection between all of the drowning cases this year is the wind,” said Yochai Lankri, the acting commander of the Kinneret’s marine police unit. (August 2017)*

### **Mark 4:38 - Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”**

### **The Sleep of the Faithful**

*Job 11:18-19 - You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety. You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid*

*Psalms 4:8 - In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.*

*Proverbs 3:24 - When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.*

### **Don’t you care if we drown?**

In waking Jesus, the disciples were accusing Jesus of not caring about their fate. There’s no indication that they thought he could solve the problem – but they did want him to share their anxiety. The shoe is on the other foot in Gethsemane – when the disciples fall asleep in Jesus’ hour of need, he asks them why they couldn’t stay awake for him during his crisis.

### **Mark 4:39 - He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.**

### **“Rebuked the wind”**

The word used for “rebuke” is often used to describe Jesus’ commands to the evil spirits – and with Peter, when Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan!” Since wind is an inanimate object, is the storm of a malevolent spiritual nature? Jesus uses the invisible yet forceful character of the wind as an illustration of the work of the Spirit – is this an instance where the wind is a sign of the work of a malevolent spirit?

### **A Demonstration of Divine Power**

*Psalm 107:27-30 - They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits’ end. 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.*

### **Mega Storm, Mega Calm**

Jesus’ words result in a complete reversal of conditions – the words used are literally “a great storm” and “a great calm.” The power of the storm is not greater than the power of the calm! In our own lives, we often perceive “storms” as more powerful than “calms.”

**Mark 4:40 - He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”**

### **Faith is Trust in God**

*Psalm 46:1-3 - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*

**Mark 4:41 - They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”**

### **The Curtain Lifts on Jesus’ Identity – Psalm 89:5-9**

*In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? You, Lord, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.*

**Mark 5:1 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.**

Gerasa, modern Jerash, was thirty miles from the lake. That distance from the sea probably prompted the textual variants locating the incident at Gadara or Gergesa. Some have suggested that the original reference was to a town that is now called Kersa or Koursi, which was later mistaken for the better-known Gerasa, a member of the Decapolis. Most likely, however, this is territory controlled by Gerasa, which extends to the Sea of Galilee.

### **The Invasion Begins**

“Jesus embarks on a daring invasion to claim alien turf under enemy occupation and reveals that there is no place in the world into which God’s reign does not intend to extend itself.”

**Mark 5:2** And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. **3** He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; **4** for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. **5** Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.

### **He Shows All the Signs**

This demonized soul, screaming in his tortured isolation, lives in the unclean place of the dead and has become himself a dwelling place for unclean spirits. Tombs were frequently located in caves and were known as haunts for demons. The man fits the four characteristics of madness found in rabbinic literature: running about at night, staying overnight in burial places, tearing apart one's clothes, and destroying what one has been given.

**Mark 5:6** When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; **7** and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." **8** For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"

### **A Struggle**

Somehow, the man struggles to approach Jesus, despite his demons, who do not immediately respond to Jesus' command, but enter into a debate. Seeking the upper hand, they invoke Jesus' name – and the name of God! This is a particularly hard case.

**Mark 5:9** Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." **10** He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. **11** Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; **12** and the unclean spirits[c] begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them."

### **Turning the tables**

Jesus turns the tables on the demons, demanding their name; the struggle continues, as in effect they say, "We have many names." Nevertheless, they know they are vastly outranked and overpowered, begging to enter the swine.

### **Why enter the swine?**

We're into strange stuff here. It was popular belief in the first century that evil spirits were not content to wander aimlessly about. They abhor a vacuum and want to inhabit something. A human host is best; wanting that, a bunch of pigs will do. Anything is better than wandering in dry places or being consigned to the sea if you are a land demon. *Matthew 12:43* - "When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it."

**Mark 5:13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.**

### **King of the Sea**

The destructive power of the sea that almost sank the disciples' boat now swallows up the pigs. Jesus, who has just demonstrated his dominion over the sea, does not need to know the names of the evil spirits in order to drive them out. The demons “fall victim to their own designs and tumble headlong into chaos.”

### **A Double Victory**

The demons, trying to trick Jesus, fall into their own trap. In the Testament of Solomon, a demon about to be exorcised pleads: “Do not condemn me to water.” From a Jewish perspective, the scene is a double victory: unclean spirits and unclean animals are both wiped out in one fell swoop, and a human being is cleansed.

### **How Mark's Audience Might Read This**

Those reading this story after the destruction of Jerusalem may have made another connection. The Tenth Roman Legion (Fretensis) took part in the sieges of Jerusalem and Masada and was stationed in Jerusalem after its fall. Its standards bore the image of a wild boar. According to Josephus, it had a complement of a thousand horses and two thousand foot soldiers – a Roman Legion. Many Jews would have liked nothing better than to see this Roman legion—guilty of defiling the land, destroying the holy city, and killing and enslaving thousands—driven into the sea!

**Mark 5:14-17 - The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood.**

### **Fearful in the Presence of Power**

Just as the disciples were afraid upon realizing they were in the presence of divine power, the townspeople are afraid as well. Their fear overpowers any gratitude they might have felt, and they fail to understand that Jesus' power is for good – and for their good. Rather than the key to the city, they give him the cold shoulder. People are afraid of power they cannot control.

**Mark 5:18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 But Jesus refused, and said to him, “Go home to your friends (and family), and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.”**

## **Back to the Man**

The spotlight shifts back to the man, whose fear of Jesus is vanquished with the expulsion of the demons. He is seated, the position of the disciple, and requests to “to be with Jesus,” the role of the disciple. The community has begged Jesus to leave them; this man begs to be with Jesus.

## **A Compassionate Refusal**

While Jesus’ dismissal of this man may seem like bad news, it can only be good news for the man who doubtless yearned for the warmth of family, for a sense of place and identity, and for a sense of purpose. Jesus sends him to his own house so that he can be restored to his family and friends.

**Mark 5:20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.**

## **Who will people listen to?**

Jesus is rejected by the community, but he leaves behind a local witness to his identity and mission. He does the same in Samaria, where the Woman at the Well functions as an “advance guard” into a community which Jesus could not otherwise penetrate. Who is there in your life who would hear better from you than others of what Jesus has done?

## **A Reversal**

Up till now, Jesus is constantly telling those who had been healed and delivered to not spread the news of what had happened. In this case, Jesus reverses the pattern, instructing the man to tell everyone. In this “remote place,” the same danger of unmanageable numbers of people crowding around Jesus and preventing him from ministering is not a factor.

## **The Decapolis**

The Decapolis was a league of free Greek cities under the protection of the Roman governor of Syria: Damascus, Raphana, Dion, Canantha, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippos, Pella, Gerasa, and Philadelphia. During the time of Christ, the ten cities of Decapolis and the surrounding region were inhabited mostly by Gentiles, not Jews, and the area had a strong Greek influence.

## **An Important Connection**

Matthew notes that many people from the region of Decapolis followed Jesus (Matthew 4:25). In AD 69, when Jerusalem came under attack by Rome, the city of Pella, in southern Decapolis, proved to be a place of refuge for Christians who fled the coming siege, repaying the efforts of Jesus to bring the faith to the area.

**For Mark 5:21-43, and the stories of Jairus’ Daughter and the Woman with the Issue of Blood, see the sermon of November 14, “All in God’s Good Time”**