

The Servant Sovereign Over Satan

Several years ago my car was stolen. Someone in my church told a friend what had happened, and went on to say, “But we know God is in control.” This person responded by saying, “God? God has nothing to do with that car getting stolen. That was entirely the work of Satan!”

With that statement, that person revealed her belief about God and about God's enemies. Her view was really one of dualism – there are two equal and opposite forces in the universe – God the good, and Satan the bad, and both are fighting to win this war. But this looks nothing like the biblical picture.

In Scripture there is a Sovereign, all-powerful, good God, and some rebellious, less powerful spiritual creatures who wage war against Him. These spiritual creatures are led by one whose name in Hebrew simply means *enemy* – Satan.

But that person's misunderstanding of spiritual warfare has some real-life consequences. The truth is, we do live in a world which is actually a battleground for souls and for glory between God and His rebel angels. Our lives are more than a few years of eating and sleeping and paying bills. We are players in a cosmic drama, parts of a massive story that began thousands of years before our birth and will continue thousands of years after our death. This world is a vast stage for a mounted rebellion against God by Satan and His angels, and it is the scene of God's victorious response.

To misunderstand the realities of spiritual warfare is either to blame all things on Satan, or to mistake genuine opposition as sinfulness or even God's chastening. We can fall prey to discouragement and downheartedness, thinking God is simply making it hard for us. We can aim our guns in the wrong place, boxing shadows, and charging at mirages.

As Christians, we need to know God's victory and power over the Evil One. We need to know it so that we approach spiritual warfare rightly and respond to our enemies properly.

In this account, we will see our Lord come into full and open combat with these enemies. But instead of it being unseen and invisible, we now have God manifest in human flesh, meeting these demonic spirits who have inhabited a man. In fact, in Matthew we find out that there were two men, but one of them was no doubt silent, and one was vocal. One probably stayed behind, and one ran to meet Jesus. Mark focuses on the vocal one, the one that came to Jesus. As we look at this account, we'll find out what happens when our Lord meets His ancient enemies. We'll track the story by seeing different effects – the demons' effect on this man, Christ's effect on the demons, Christ's effect on the townspeople, and Christ's effect on the man.

I. The Demons' Effect on the Man

Mark 5:1 Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes.

² And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, ³ who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, ⁴ because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. ⁵ And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

You remember what Jesus and His disciples have just come through to get to the other side of the lake. A massive storm, a *mega* – storm, that threatened to sink both the boats the disciples were in and their faith in the Lord. Jesus had woken, spoken to the winds and the waves, which had

submitted to him like submissive dogs pressing their faces to the ground. And in that boat, a new fear replaced the fear of sinking – a fear of Jesus – who was this man? Only Yahweh could command sea and have it obey – who was this? Perhaps the illumination of the Spirit was helping them to see – Jesus was not just *a* Son of God – but *the* Son of God, the eternal Son of God, one with the Father, one with the Holy Spirit, uncreated, pre-existent, equal in glory. What would happen next would make that even clearer. Not only did Jesus have sovereignty over the creation, but He had sovereignty over Satan.

The trip across the lake would not have taken much more than an hour. From Galilee they had headed east, and were now in Gentile territory. More than likely, they were at a place known as *Kersa*, surrounded by cliffs and limestone caves that served as tombs. The town of Gedara, that Mark used to identify, this obscure place, was several miles away. Since Mark told us that they set sail when it was evening, the storm would have taken place either in the twilight or when the darkness of night had set in. So more than likely, they arrived on the other side at night, with not much more than the moonlight to illuminate their way.

To disciples, who had just had a deep dose of fear during the storm, came another bone-chilling event. Here in the night comes the terrifying moans out of the limestone tombs. The Jews associated demons with tombs, and especially so at night. So little could be worse than to have the shrieking moans of this man pierce through the darkness. Jews avoided tombs for fear of ritual defilement, and here comes a heart-stopping cry from the tombs.

A man – no doubt a Gentile man – comes running to Jesus. What lived inside him knew who Jesus was and when He was near. Like buck that can hear or smell lions, like radar that can pick up enemy aircraft, so the evil beings inside this man knew their Enemy was here, even while the disciples were tying up the boats.

Consider Mark's description of this man: first – he had an unclean spirit. He was possessed by and indwelt by defiling and defiled spirit beings. As we see later, there were many of them. This was the root of his problem. For whatever reason, he had become the home for wicked spirits, demons. And from their host, they worked out their cruel, sadistic, malevolent will. Their purpose: to pleasure themselves at the expense of a human being. To destroy, defile and debase one made in the image of God, for their own enjoyment.

Look at the effects. He lived, not in a house, but around the tombs. Ancient tombs, mind you, not our cemeteries with everyone buried underground. Tombs where bodies lay decomposing in caves, filling the air with the stench of decay. Not nice lawns with flowers, but rocky, jagged, limestone caves. A harsh, uninviting landscape, dry, even ugly. A place of death. He was isolated, and obsessed not with life, but with death. Preferring the company of corpses than of crowds. He's deranged, a socio-path, a madman who can no longer even function in society.

Here he lived, maybe foraging food, or eating things most people would not. Perhaps townspeople left him food, like a zoo animal. Not only that, but Luke tells us that he was unclothed. He had lost all dignity, all shame, all sense of what Adam and Eve felt in the Garden - the need to cover our nakedness. His conscience was mortally wounded, his own sense of dignity reduced to that of an animal. He was perverted and no doubt as sexually debased and evil as they come. A moral monster, the kind that in our day and age ends up committing sexual crimes that end up on CNN.

Mark goes on to tell us that people had attempted to tame him by chaining him. This was how they did it. He was wild, a lunatic, a danger to society. They didn't have padded rooms, or injections to

sedate people or straight jackets, so they chained him up. Cruel and heartless, it seems, but they were probably desperate. What would you do if this fellow lived near your town, near your children, near your spouse? He was such a threat, that Matthew tells us no one would pass that way, because he was so violent.

But the demons had given him, as is often the case, a superhuman strength. He would break the chains, snap them like pulling off a little silver necklace. Picture the awfulness of having a man obsessed with death, utterly debased in nature, and unable to be arrested, restrained, or secluded, live nearby.

More than that, this man lived in a continual mental torture. He was crying out and cutting himself with stones. His mind was so ripped apart by these wicked beings living inside him that he would scream in agony, and even cut himself trying to find relief from his own pain. Perhaps he was trying to take his own life.

Stand back and have a look at Satan's plan for your life. This is it at its most extreme – a human being unable to love, a moral monster, a threat to others, preferring death over life, and living in a torture chamber of one's own burning conscience. This is the essence of hell on earth. But Satan doesn't often do it this way. He has different approaches - for the refined academic, for the stay at home mom, for the tough mechanic, for the number crunching programmer, for children, for older people. For some, the plan is addiction to drugs or alcohol or food, others pornography, immorality, others a cultural refinement that makes God seem primitive, others comfortable materialism, others self-centred family life, for others its nice crossless, gospel-evaporated religion.

As long as it takes you away from Christ, and real belief – it is fine. But the end is the same – destruction.

That's part of the reason why we don't see as much of this in Western, secularised societies – it doesn't serve Satan's purpose here. Here he wants people to be anti-supernatural. But go to other places – India, Nepal, Benin, Haiti, places where tribes and religions are steeped in ancestor worship and spiritism – and you will see this in abundance.

Nowhere in all of Scripture do we find a man as vile and ruined as this. This was the demon's effect on the man. However, the dawn was coming, both physically, and in this man's life. Christ was on the shore.

II. Christ's Effect on the Demons

⁶ When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. ⁷ And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me." ⁸ For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!"

From his place upon the hills, he had probably begun his usual terrorising of these foreigners mooring their boats. But as he descended, the spiritual antennae of these demons recognised who it was that had landed on their beach. How did they know? They were demons – they had more knowledge than simply what eyes and ears could pick up. They knew when He was near. And no doubt His great works in Israel had spread terror through the satanic kingdom. From producing fear, these evil beings are themselves in panic.

I see Jesus slowly stepping up a hill, and without looking up, calling out in a steady and rising tone, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit". And here this violent, uncontrollable, superhuman

nightmare of a man comes to Jesus and falls down at His feet. He worships. Not worship as we praise Him with adoring hearts. But worship in the sense of bowing before a ruler. This is a rebel who knows the King has arrived in town. He knows the King can execute him, and he is now begging for mercy.

Listen to his words: *"What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me."*

How amazing that while the Pharisees said that Jesus had a demon and was a child of Satan, here the demons recognise His identity and confess it: Jesus – the Son of the Most High God. These demons were orthodox in their doctrine. James tells us the devils believe there is one God and tremble. It takes more than right belief to be pleasing to God. You need to not only know Jesus is the Son of God. You must have trusted Him in deep, sweet dependence, the dependence of love.

These demons have no love for Jesus, only terror. They say what the demons would often say – what do we have to do with each other? They swear an oath, using God's name, imploring Jesus not to torment them. You see, according to Scriptures in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, some demons are chained up in hell, incarcerated forever, perhaps for their part in the sin of Genesis 6. Others have limited freedom until the time of the very end. These demons are essentially saying, "You can't be here now! It's not the time of the end, yet, is it? It isn't the final day of judgement yet, is it?" They knew the Scriptures. They knew the end time prophecies. They didn't think that Messiah's first coming would bring their judgement. So they are pleading for mercy.

Now step back and ask yourself – who is Jesus, if these beings, who are thousands of years old, who have terrorised this man and his townspeople, and would be our worst nightmare were we to meet them, are crying out to Jesus to not torment them before the time? Who is Jesus in their eyes? He cannot be a fellow angel. He is not just a Spirit-filled man. They recognise Jesus as their Creator, the Lord they disobeyed, their Judge.

There is no contest here. They know when they are completely outgunned. Jesus is not simply superior to them. He is infinitely more powerful than them. They were made by Him, originally holy, their very powers came from Him.

There is no challenge here. The only thing to sort out is when and where Jesus will send them, not if.

⁹ *Then He asked him, "What is your name?" And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many."*

¹⁰ *Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.* ¹¹ *Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains.* ¹² *So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them."* ¹³ *And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.*

Jesus demands the name of this demon, and it is a collective name – Legion. A Roman Legion had several thousand soldiers, so the name probably just represented the fact that many had indwelt this man. So these terrified foes of God ask Jesus not to send them directly to the place of torment. They ask instead to be sent into a herd of pigs nearby. Why, we don't know. Perhaps evil spirits develop a taste for being embodied. James 3:15 might suggest that the sensual and the demonic are related. Whatever the reason, that's their request. They know they're going out of the man, and they won't be allowed into another man. So they choose animals.

Notice this wasn't Jesus' idea. Jesus simply gave permission and allowed them. The result is more destruction. The crazed herd runs over the cliff, and falls into the lake of Galilee and drowns.

Some have asked, how could Jesus have done this to other people's property? A few answers. First, Jesus simply allowed it, He didn't order it. Secondly, it may well have been a fitting judgement on the nearby town which seemed to care more for its pigs than its people.

And that's exactly what we see next.

III. Christ's Effect on Society

¹⁴ So those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. ¹⁶ And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine. ¹⁷ Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

The pig herders go into the town, and the town comes out to see. It's probably early morning by this time and as they come out, there they see the man who had terrorised them, and been the stuff of nightmares for their children, sitting down, quiet, his expression totally different, wearing donated clothes from the disciples, no doubt. Able to speak, perhaps eating something. And the pig-herders recount the whole scene to the townspeople.

So what would we expect these people to do? For however long, they had no doubt wished that they did not have to deal with the demon-possessed man and his companion. They wished he would go away. They tried to chain him up. Now they see Jesus has completely transformed him. He is normal and ready to rejoin society. And who do they request leave them? Jesus.

It wasn't about the pigs. No doubt, they were down on the lake fishing those pigs out quickly, and undoubtedly had an early pork-chop sale. They hadn't expected to sell the pork all at once, but if they needed to, so be it. Unexpected early bonus. No, it wasn't the pigs that bothered them.

It was Jesus Himself. They had never seen or heard anything like this. They knew they were in the presence of a power far greater than their own. And it bothered them. It upset their neatly-planned lives. It overturned their ideas about life and God and eternity, and they did not want to deal with it. So the sooner Jesus left them, the better. They were not thankful; they were not curious; they were not interested; they were simply afraid of change. They had been more comfortable with Satan in their presence than with God in their presence.

All the miracles in the world won't change stony hearts. Society won't be changed because of miracles or because they see mercy. Society is only changed when one heart at a time repents and comes to Christ. That's what we see in the man who was healed.

IV. Christ's Effect on the Man

¹⁸ And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. ¹⁹ However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." ²⁰ And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

Jesus does what this town asks Him to. The people in Galilee were asking Him to stay and He said

'no' so he could come and help this man in Decapolis, and now the people of Decapolis ask Him to leave and He says 'yes'. So sad, that when people reject God and ask Him to leave, He sometimes answers that prayer.

But the sadness of their rejection is completely overwhelmed by the joy of seeing the man. This same one who was criminally insane, perverted beyond description. As we just saw, he was now in his right mind, stable, at peace. But more than that, he was a disciple. Verse 19 and 20 shows us that He realised Jesus was the Lord. Verse 18 shows us that his chief desire in the world was to follow Jesus - accompany Jesus. From demoniac to disciple.

But does Jesus let him? No. Instead, he tells the man to go home and tell them what great things the Lord had done for Him. And that's what he did. He went all around that town and that area and became Jesus' first missionary to the Gentiles. He didn't have much training, but He didn't need any. He just needed to share his testimony.

“You would not believe what I used to be. Let me tell you what I had become under Satan's power. But it took just a few words from Messiah Jesus to change my life – and He can change yours too.”

That's what each of us are to do, isn't it? Tell others what great things the Lord has done for us.

What was the response? Verse 20 says all marvelled. He was a walking wonder, an unmistakable testimony to the grace of God. And above all, he was the primary piece of evidence to declare who is the hands-down victor in the battle between God and Satan.

So what do we do with this? We don't encounter demon-possessed men like this every day. But we do live in a world where this spiritual battle goes on every day. What is to be our response?

*James tells us. **James 4:7** ⁷ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

A lot of people think that resisting the devil means binding and rebuking him. But there is no command in Scripture to bind and rebuke Satan. None of the apostles ever did that, and none of them in their epistles ever command that. Nor are we to dismiss them and pretend they do not exist. This passage tells us how dramatically real they are.

Instead, we are to take our stand entirely in the One who is the Victor. This passage shows us how decisively victorious powerful our Lord is over the forces of darkness. What should we do? Submit to Him. Rest entirely in Him. To submit to Christ is to become Christlike – which is the spiritual armour of Ephesians 6. To submit to Christ is to be sober and watchful, which is what spiritual soldiers do. To submit to Christ is to have complete peace and trust that He is sovereign.