

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 5:1-20

Topic

Jesus gives the demons who identify themselves as Legion permission to enter a herd of two thousand pigs

Title

"Deviled Ham"

Introduction

I dare you to Google "animals in warfare." It will blow your mind.

Disregard the search if you're an animal lover.

We immediately think of horses and dogs; maybe carrier pigeons. But a lot of other, more obscure, examples exist of animals used for war.

In the Bible we read about Samson employing animals in a unique way against the Philistines:

Jdg 15:4 ... Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails.

Jdg 15:5 When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves.

Outside of the Bible, maybe you already knew that monkeys were set on fire, then released to ravage enemy encampments.

As recently as 2003, Morocco offered monkeys to the United States Military in Iraq. Two-thousand monkeys gathered from the Atlas Mountains were specially trained to be used for detonating mines.

I'm not sure what kind of specialized training you need to step on a mine. We turned them down, probably so that the American public didn't have to see Curious George get blown to smithereens.

Don't get me started on weaponized dolphins. The Soviets were training them to carry explosives towards enemy warships and frogmen, to be remotely detonated.

The program reportedly ran out of funding and in 2000 the dolphins were sold to Iran. You don't want to swim with the dolphins in the Mediterranean Sea. If you do, you might end up sleeping with the fishes.

By far, elephants were the most feared beasts of the ancient world's battlegrounds. They were huge, powerful and very imposing. They were used as tanks, plowing down the enemy, while their riders were firing off arrows.

Elephants were used successfully against the Roman legions - that is, until the Romans developed a counter-measure. Their ingenious anti-elephant weapon was **incendiary pigs**.

You heard me right. Covered in pitch or tar, then set on fire, pigs would be released onto the battlefield. Their high-pitched loud squeals, erratic movements, and the fire, would scatter the elephants.

Pigs figure prominently in our text in Mark chapter five. They are likely the property of the Roman legion stationed in the ten-city area known as Decapolis. It is unlikely they were dedicated war-pigs, although they certainly could be used in that way, as no special combat training was necessary to be set on fire.

They were most likely a food source for the soldiers stationed there. Bacon, hard-tack biscuits, and sour wine were the staple foods of the Roman legions.

The main incident in the Bible story is the deliverance of a notoriously demon-possessed man. But the fact that the demons are allowed to enter into the herd of swine - two thousand strong - and cause them to stampede, hurtling themselves to their death (the pigs, that is; not the demons) is pretty weird.

We'll do our best to make some sense of what was going on. I'll organize my thoughts around two questions suggested by the verses: #1 *When Have You Told Jesus To Go?*, and #2 *Where Has Jesus Told You To Go?*

#1 When Have You Told Jesus To Go?

(v1-17)

When last we saw the Lord, He was in a small boat, in a flotilla of other small boats, crossing the sea.

I want us to think in terms of an invasion - to see Jesus and His boats as an invasion force, landing on the beach, conquering enemy territory.

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

In Matthew's Gospel, we're told Jesus came "to the country of the Gergesenes." These were both ways of referring to the same geography. This was a predominately Gentile territory known as Decapolis, so called because of the ten prominent cities in the vicinity. It's like us saying twin-cities, or tri-cities, to designate an area.

Mar 5:2 And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

Matthew mentions two men. Not a problem. Pam might ask me later today if I saw a particular person at church. If I say "Yes," it doesn't mean that I didn't see a lot of others, too.

One man in particular was prominent. We've said before that the phrase "unclean spirit" was another way of describing a demon.

He comes "out of the tombs." This was a region of hills and cliffs, so most likely the tombs were natural caves used for burial.

"There met Him" is too polite. Don't be fooled into thinking this man wasn't all that dangerous.

Think of this as a potential assault. In another Gospel we're told he prevented people from passing that way. He was violent. This man, possessed by demons, came out to do mischief, to do harm.

Mar 5:3 who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains,

If you weren't already creeped-out that he came *out* of the tombs, you're told he *lived* there. They had tried binding him, even with chains, but to no avail.

Mar 5:4 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.

The more they tried to subdue him, the stronger he got. It was unnatural; it was supernatural.

They couldn't "tame" him, so it appears they tried to contain him in the tombs - giving him a certain freedom to roam about in the surrounding wilderness area.

Mar 5:5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

He never slept. He wandered his territory, vigilant against trespassers. To add to his terror, he would shriek, and cut himself.

I wonder if local kids dared each other to go out there and see the demoniac? You know they did.

Mar 5:6 When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him.

He had undoubtedly witnessed the boats landing, and started out to overpower the intruders. At some point he recognized Jesus.

I say "he," meaning the multiple demons possessing him. This guy had never seen the Lord before, but *they* knew who He was.

"Worship" here means he recognized Jesus' authority. He did not offer Jesus worship in the normal sense of that word, singing *How Great Thou Art*, or some such chorus. It was an every-knee-shall-bow sort of thing. The demons knew they were in the presence of God.

Mar 5:7 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."

Mar 5:8 For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!"

Demons have a very orthodox Christology. They know Jesus to be the unique Son of God, the Second Person of the trinity.

I would add that they know Bible prophecy, and that they take it to be literal, not figurative or allegorical. Let me explain what I mean.

The "torment" the demons were referring to is explained in the other Gospels as sending them to be incarcerated in the abyss "before the time." It is referring to future, prophetic events.

When Jesus returns, in His Second Coming, He will have Satan bound and cast into the abyss for one thousand years. His demons will likewise be incarcerated.

At the end of the thousand year kingdom of Heaven on the earth, just before the creation of the new earth, the devil and his demons will once-for-all and forever be thrown alive into the Lake of Fire that was created for their eternal punishment.

Demons are aware of these prophecies, and they believe them, to the letter. They don't see them as figures, or allegories. Neither should we.

Jesus had authority over the demons. You and I, as believers in Jesus and His ambassadors on the earth, have His delegated authority. His authority, not our ability, overcomes demons.

By ability, I mean that we don't need a crucifix or holy water or special prayers and incantations.

There *are* some demons who are more difficult than others. In those cases Jesus said we must be fasting and praying - *not* learning ancient Latin spells, or collecting relics.

Don't be drawn to ritual exorcisms or special prayers or the identifying of territorial spirits or demanding their names. It's not biblical.

Mar 5:9 Then He asked him, "What is your name?" And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

"Aha!," you say; "Jesus *did* ask him for a name."

Yes, He did; but it wasn't a regular thing Jesus did with demons, and it's clear from the rest of the story that He asked about it for our sake - not as an essential part of defeating them.

"Legion" would immediately cause you to think about the Roman legion stationed in Decapolis. A Roman legion was at the least six thousand troops, both mounted and infantry.

Were six-thousand demons in this one man? Maybe. If not that many, there were a lot, because, in a moment, they are going to possess two-thousand pigs.

Jesus had defeated Satan in one-on-one, champion combat, in the wilderness temptations. He had effectively bound the strong man and had been going around casting demons out of folks, recovering from Satan his stolen property.

Here on the beach Jesus confronted thousands of demons at once and resoundingly defeated them, suffering no casualties.

It was a powerful testimony to His disciples that Satan was a defeated foe. Sure, he continued to battle; but the war was won.

Mar 5:10 Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.

They did not want to be sent prematurely to the abyss; neither did they want to be sent out of their immediate territory.

Pretty bossy for conquered demons, don't you think? It is reminiscent of Satan's parley with God in the opening two chapters of the Book of Job, where God hears-out the devil, then grants him limited permission to mess with Job.

I can hear the objections. Why would a God of love give the devil and his demons permission to do harm? Why not simply crush the devil once-and-for-all?

The reason the devil goes on, temporarily, will become clear at the incredible reaction of the citizens. After Jesus defeated Satan by delivering a man from thousands of demons, who had been viciously tormenting people in the region - **they refused to believe in Him for salvation and instead asked Him to leave.**

It isn't that God is unable, or unwilling, to reign-in the devil. Jesus had the devil bound, and He would have remained so, except that the majority of people were unwilling to submit to Jesus Christ.

Mar 5:11 Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains.

Mar 5:12 So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them."

Yes, this is weird, and it's OK to say so. No one can answer the "Why's?" of this:

- No one can answer why Jesus give His permission.
- No one can answer why Legion wanted to go into the herd of swine.

The text doesn't tell us, so we can't know. Beware the wild speculation here - like the teaching that demons must seek out hosts in order to carry-out their nefarious plans.

We don't see rampant demonic possession today. I don't think it's because we are too skeptical; I think it's because Satan has changed his strategy.

Demonic possession was not a big thing in the Old Testament. One of the commentators goes so far as to claim that there are no recorded cases of demonic possession at all.

(King Saul doesn't qualify. An evil spirit was sent to torment him, but he was not possessed, and he was never exorcized for it).

When Jesus was on the earth, and shortly thereafter, there was a tremendous spike in demonic possession. Apparently the presence of the unique God-man was met by a virtual invasion of demons into Israel.

While demon possession may be down, there is an absolute explosion all over the globe of occult and supernatural activities that *are* sourced by Satan. He's adapted, and his strategies are more sinister and dangerous than ever.

Mar 5:13 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.

Many commentators assume that it was Jews who were herding the swine in contradiction to the Law of Moses, and that their destruction was therefore a deserved judgment.

While that conveniently solves the moral dilemma of Jesus allowing demons to destroy someone's property, it's highly unlikely. This was Gentile territory; Jews would not be swineherding in Decapolis.

BTW - When Jesus told the famous parable of the Prodigal Son, it's likely that Decapolis was the far country His audience would think of as the place he was reduced to feeding the swine.

The size of the herd argues for it being provision for the Roman legion stationed in Decapolis.

The demons called themselves Legion; and there was a Roman legion there. Is there a connection?

Maybe. Here is one thought I had. On the night He was crucified, Jesus commented that, if He asked, His Father in Heaven would supply Him with more than twelve legions of angels, to fight for Him against His enemies.

If we stay with the military, spiritual warfare, aspects of this story, then, at the very least, Jesus was establishing that no "legion" could affect Him - not a demonic one, not a human one.

- Satan may have legions of demons, but Jesus has more in terms of angels.
- Men may have their legions, but what are they against legions of angels? In the Old Testament, a single angel killed 185,000 fierce Assyrian warriors.

Mar 5:14 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.

Mar 5:15 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.

Mark must have been modest, because only now do you understand that, in addition to shrieking and cutting himself, this guy went around naked. He was "clothed," meaning he was *not* clothed before.

Mar 5:16 And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine.

You might think that an amazing work of God was ready to break-out. Certainly masses of people would seek out the Lord.

Mar 5:17 Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

What? We ought to be stunned. There must have been among them many who were suffering from diseases and infirmities.

Then, too, as far as they knew, two- to six-thousand demons were still in the area, on the loose, presumably looking for new human hosts.

Have you heard the expression, "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't?" It means that it is often better to deal with someone you are familiar with and know, even if they are evil, rather than take a risk with an unknown person.

In this case, the people were saying, "Better the devil we know than the Lord **we don't want to know.**"

Despite the legion of demons, and the legion of soldiers, the citizens of Decapolis were doing OK. It seemed a reasonable trade-off, the needs of the many outweighing the needs of the few - or, in this case, the two demoniacs.

Look around. I think we each could give an example of how our society has learned to live with the devil to maintain physical prosperity.

They told Jesus to "Go." When have **you** told Jesus to "Go?"

If you are not a believer, you're telling Him to "Go" right now. Sadly, if you keep telling Him to "Go," one day it will be too late to receive Him. He will have to tell *you* to depart from Him into outer darkness, to eternal conscious suffering.

Saying "Go" means - and brace yourself - you'd rather the world continue in its current messed-up state than have God really, truly intervene. You might be the last person who gets saved in this church age. After that person gets saved, the resurrection and rapture of the church happens; then, soon after, the seven-year Tribulation.

We've already said that, at the end of the Tribulation, at His Second Coming, Jesus will bind and incarcerate Satan, and his demons. So, in that sense, it is people who are refusing salvation that are responsible for the devil's continued freedom to do harm.

God has a plan to crush Satan once-and-for-all, and He has revealed it. Men would rather continue in their sin than be saved, and by default, they would therefore rather that Satan remain the ruler of this earth.

No nonbeliever has the right to blame anything on God. He is offering salvation, wholeness, forgiveness, healing, all freely by grace. They prefer the status quo rather than to receive Him into their hearts.

I would suggest that we believers can also tell Jesus to "Go." There are probably a million ways we can do it; you'll have to search your heart.

Anytime we choose sin, or to be selfish, we're telling the Lord to "Go," to leave us alone to live our lives our way, rather than His.

#2 Where Has Jesus Told You To Go?

(v18-20)

Evangelists say it all the time: Jesus is a gentleman, and won't force Himself on anyone. He must be invited in.

Asked to leave Decapolis without preaching or teaching or performing any miracles besides this one - He departs.

One person wants to go with him. *I bet you can guess who.*

Mar 5:18 And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him.

He "begged" Jesus. He had experienced the demons within him begging Jesus to not send them into the abyss; to not force them to leave the area; to let them enter the herd of swine.

Surprisingly, Jesus answered their request affirmatively.

Clothed and in his right mind, he had listened and watched as the citizens implored Jesus to depart. Jesus answered them, too, in the affirmative.

How could Jesus refuse him?

Mar 5:19 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."

This is crazy. The two entities you'd think Jesus would deny, He grants their requests. The one guy whose request you'd think Jesus would grant, He denied.

It makes perfect sense. Jesus commissioned the former demoniac as a missionary to Decapolis.

It makes perfect sense; that is, when we see it in someone else's life. When God says, "No" to me, I'm not always immediately on board.

Mar 5:20 And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

Imagine his testimony. He could point out people he'd terrified, he'd chased, he'd scared half to death, maybe even he had assaulted. Could this really be the same man?

It was, and it wasn't, the same man. It was him alright, but him transformed by his encounter with Jesus Christ.

If I, or someone else, were to ask you, "Where has Jesus told you to Go?", would your answer be, "Right where I am today"?

If so, great. I'm guessing most of you - most of us - **are** exactly where the Lord wants us. We're there to make a difference with the Gospel.

We are witnesses. We are not the judge, or the jury, or the attorneys. We give testimony to what Jesus has done for us.

If you can't honestly say you are right where you need to be, spiritually, well, that's something you need to address, with the Lord.

- You might need to be stirred-up to have greater impact right where you are.
- You might need to move-on from where you are.

You probably weren't exorcized of thousands of demons when you got saved. No, but in just as profound a way, you were delivered from your captivity to the devil, and set free from sin and death and Hell.

You may not have been demon possessed, but you were the devil's possession.

Now you belong to Jesus Christ. "Go" forward with His name on your lips, His love in your heart, His grace in your words, His compassion in your serving.

Others need deliverance, and **you** have the words of eternal life.