

“A Battle of Words”

The Christological Pattern of the Christian Life

Mark 5:1-20

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September 15, 2017

Jeff: Heavenly Father, we are thankful for this day for many reasons. But most of all, we're thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ. We're thankful for Your Son, for the great blessing of His life on this earth, that He might be an obedient servant, fulfilling that obedience even unto death on a Roman cross, that we might have both forgiveness and righteousness in Him. Father, thank You that You loved us even when we were unlovable, when we were yet sinners, whose mouths were open graves. You loved us, and now You have made us Your sons and daughters, and we're thankful for that. And as we bow before You, we are thankful most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet there are other good gifts that we are thankful for. And Lord, we are thankful for Bruce and for his teaching in this group for over twenty years, and for the way he has labored not only here, but in other places. Father, it is our prayer that you would make this servant of Yours well. As we've already prayed, we ask that You would grant him healing and strength. And we pray, Father, that he would have the flexibility and mobility to even return to his duties, that he might serve You again. Father, we ask and pray that You will hear our prayer on his behalf, not only for his good, but for Your glory.

Father, we praise You for the good gift that we heard about with regard to Noah. We are so thankful for that good news. And Father, we pray that You will bless this young man, and that You will let him, for as young as he is, think back upon this moment and remember that it was Your hand that saved him. Father, we also pray for Bill, and we ask that Your strength would be upon him. Father, as we pray and give You thanks for so many things, we realize that there are trials to be overcome. And Father, Bill has a trial to be overcome. Father, we pray that he would be given the strength to do that.

Father, we ask and pray that You would be with us in our study today. We pray that You'll focus our minds and our hearts on Your word. And we pray that in doing so we will come away different. We pray that You will transform us more and more into the image of Christ Jesus our Lord. Remind us that we are involved in an exercise that will not leave us unchanged, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. Well why don't we begin today by reading the Scriptures. And I want us to turn to Mark chapter 5. And in turning to Mark chapter 5, I want us to read the first twenty verses. And Don is going to do that this morning. So Don, wherever you are—oh, there you are, Don.

Don: Yep.

Jeff: When you get opened up to Mark chapter 5, you can go ahead and start reading.

Don: The Lord be with you.

Men: And also with you.

Don: Mark chapter 5, verses 1-20. *“Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met*

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Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one could bind him, not even with chains, 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, neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

“When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. 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!’ And He said to the man, ‘Come out of the man, unclean spirit!’ Then He asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And he answered, saying, ‘My name is Legion, for we are many.’ Also he begged him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.

“Now a large herd of swine was feeding there, near the mountains. So all the demons begged Him, saying, ‘Send us into the swine, that we may enter them.’ And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirit 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.

“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. 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. And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine. Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

“And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. 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.’ And he departed and began to proclaim in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him. And all marveled.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Okay. Thank you, Don. Well when I was younger, I had the experience that many of you have had. I played in the woods. I loved playing in the woods. Those are some of my best memories.

And it wasn't like it is today, you know, I remember being on the railroad tracks far from home, and seeing somebody who I thought was a hobo. And I would come home and I would say to my dad and I would say, “I saw a hobo on the tracks today.” And he would just look at me and say, “Huh?” (*Laughter*) You know, it wasn't like today, where you're calling 911 and what's happening?, and so on.

But we had this great time. And I had this creative brother of mine. And this creative brother would take—and it wasn't his—but he would fashion forts like this. And I can remember those times when he took these hedge trimmers. And he created this fort out of a large jagged bush that looked something like that. It was just tremendous.

And what else would we do? We would pick up sticks. Sticks didn't look like that in those days. Nowadays you can buy the plastic ones. But they were swords. I remember that I had a friend of mine. He picked up a pine tree because he liked the scimitar. And I

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would usually pick up an oak branch because I liked the broad sword. And we would battle, we would play. That’s what we did back then. Imagination is not like it once was.

Participant: That’s right.

Jeff: Let me pause for a minute and ask you a question. What is the gospel? You know, that word *gospel* has a historical context. When we think of the gospel, we think of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we ought to think that way.

But the gospel has a context. And Mark writes knowing the context of that word.

Let me give you an example. In extra-Biblical literature, it was written of Emperor Octavian that “*the birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of joyful tidings, which have been proclaimed on his account.*” That was the emperor Octavian. And those joyful tidings that were proclaimed to the entire world because of him, that’s the word *gospel*.

And so when you think about the word *gospel*, it had a context apart from what we know of as the gospel. And so when we understand that context, when we look at Mark’s Gospel, and we read in Mark 1:1 “*The beginning of the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*”, when we recognize that the glad tidings of Jesus Christ are gospel tidings, this is good news for the entire world. And set in that context, we need to understand that what Mark was saying was that a King had been born. A King had been born, and the glad tidings, the good news of His birth, would be for all the world—good news and glad tidings.

Now I want you to see something. What Mark is doing is that he is helping us to see some things about this King—the nature of His reign and His appearance. For instance, Mark wants to rush us right into the baptism of Jesus. And so we ought to think about that in light of Psalm 2, as His coronation, really of His coming in power as King.

But not only that. We need to understand that Mark is trying to tell us something else. Mark is trying to tell us that this King who ascended to the Throne is the second Adam who was tempted in the wilderness and overcame. And so what we need to understand is that this King is a conquering King. And that’s what we see. He comes and He Himself proclaims the gospel. He says, “*The kingdom is near. Repent and believe*” in 1:14 and 15.

And then what does He do? He calls subjects into that kingdom. He calls followers to Himself. We see that in verses 16-20.

Transcriber’s Note: Mark 1:16-20, NKJV. “*And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him. When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.*”

And what else do we see? Well when the King comes, when the second Adam comes, what does He do? He establishes what we might call a beachhead in this world.

And you know what a beachhead is. When you think about a beachhead, you think about the Navy, right? You think about the Navy coming up to the shore and sending out the battalion—

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Participant: The Marines! The Marines! (*Laughter*)

Jeff: It just goes to show you! Never enter into illustrations that you think you're familiar with in order to please the crowd around you! (*Laughter*)

Anyway, those men enter the ground and they take the beach, and they establish a beachhead so that they can expand their border of domination. And that's what Jesus is doing when He drives the demon out of the man in 21-28.

He also cleanses the lepers, giving a picture of what His atoning sacrifice will do. The paralytic is healed and forgiven in 2:1-12. Alphaeus is again commanded to follow. The man with the withered hand is commanded to extend his hand.

And then comes chapter 4. Chapter 4 is interesting, because chapter 4 slows down. We've been in a rush. Mark's Gospel is immediately this, and immediately this, and immediately this. And all of a sudden, we come to chapter 4 and Jesus stops. He sits down.

It's a long chapter, and He starts to talk to them about His weapon. In other words, He starts to talk to them about how He has conquered.

Now how has He conquered? Well, if you look back over the chapters leading up to chapter 4, you notice that He conquers by the power of His own word. It's the proclamation of those glad tidings going out that is conquering. That's what's happening.

And He sits down, and it's almost as if He pulls out His sword and shows them. "This is how I've been conquering."

Now I want to tell you something. Our trouble is that we oftentimes think of the Word as nothing more than a child's plaything. We do not think of God's word as a broad sword, as the double-edged sword that it is that is able to divide bones and marrow, that is able to divide soul and spirit. Sometimes, at our worst moments, we begin to think that God's word is nothing more than a child's plaything.

Here's why I know that. It's because, when we begin to talk about the proclamation of the Word, and how it has the power to change, we begin to think about people that we know who have heard the Word and are left unchanged. And we say to ourselves in our doubt, "But really? Is it really all that powerful?"

And I want you to know something. We need to forget that attitude, because the bible tells us and Jesus Himself tells us in Mark chapter 4 that He conquers by His word. And that alone ought to be authoritative enough for us to believe it.

I want to ask you a question. What is it that makes us lack trust in God's word? Let's think about it a second. There are things that make us lack trust in God's word, and I want you to think about a couple of them.

I want you to think about a guy by the name of Richard Rority. Richard Rority was a philosopher at the University of Virginia, a philosophy professor. He was a dangerous, dangerous man. He wrote a couple of books that were just devastating for unbelievers.

But I want you to see his own evangelistic practices in his own words. I'll read this quote to you. But just listen to this quote.

He says, "*We must stop distinguishing between the absolute and the relative.*"

Now that's evangelism, isn't it? But it's not good news. But it is the spread of a certain type of mindset.

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“We need to stop distinguishing between absolute truth and relativism.” Why? Because as long as we do that, we’re going to propel the idea that there is an absolute truth, right?

Participant: Oh, boy!

Jeff: And he said this.

Participant: Is that absolutely true?

Jeff: That’s right. He said, “*So our efforts at persuasion must take the form of gradual inculcation of new ways of speaking, rather than a straightforward argument within old ways of speaking.*”

Do you wonder why the kids today can go to church and affirm what they believe at church, and go to school and affirm what they’re hearing at school? It’s because they’re being taught in very subtle ways that there is no distinction between the absolute and the relative. And so it’s not a big deal for them to go to church and affirm absolute truth, or what they hear is absolute truth, and go to school and affirm relativism, because they don’t believe that those terms exist.

Do you want to know what they believe? I’ll tell you what they believe. They believe Wittgenstein’s language game. Now if you said to them, “Do you believe Wittgenstein’s language game?”, they would say, “Huh?”

Ludwig Wittgenstein was a man who developed what we know of as language games. What do I mean by that? Well, the meaning of a word in this way of thinking is understood in terms of its particular use.

He would say this. This is an example he might give. He would say, “Think of a carpenter.” If the carpenter on the work scene said to his apprentice, “Board!”, what is he saying?

Participant: Bring me the board.

Jeff: He is saying, “Bring me the board.” In other words, he has a sphere where he can use a single noun in a way that’s not normally used. If he would go into a hospital and go into the surgical room and he would say, “Board!”, his helpers might look at him and say, “What, doc? What are you saying? We don’t understand what you’re asking us.”

And Wittgenstein would say this. He would say, “Look!” If you are in a church, the Resurrection has meaning. And you understand all of its meaning. But now go into a science lab and say, “the resurrection of Christ,” and what do you get? It has no meaning. You get the same look that you might get from surgical helpers if the surgeon cries, “Board!”

So what Wittgenstein said was that we need to understand that language has certain spheres of meaning. There is a certain language, there is a certain group of vocabularies that have a sphere of meaning in the church, and a certain group that has a sphere of meaning in the laboratory, and a certain group that has a sphere in a public educational setting, and so on—language games. Words then have no ultimate meaning That’s the conclusion.

Participant: Oh, wow!

Jeff: Now I want you to know something. This is one of the reasons why we begin to see a lack of confidence in the Word. When Jesus tells us that His word is His weapon,

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and we're hearing all around us that the Word is nothing more than a child's plaything because words have no ultimate meaning, we begin to understand why it is that as a culture and even as a church we're beginning to lose confidence in the Word.

But I'll tell you, that's not all. If you ever want to read a philosopher, if you ever read one philosopher in your entire lifetime, this might be the guy to read in his book called *After Virtue*. It's Alistair MacIntyre. He's a research professor at the University of Notre Dame. He wrote a book called *After Virtue*. And this is what he said. He said, "*Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments, and more specifically all moral judgments, are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.*"

Now he doesn't believe that. But he's describing our culture and our condition, isn't he? I mean, we are living in an emotive culture.

He went on to say this. "*Emotivism has become embodied in our culture.*" This is why we are standing alone, men. We're standing alone because we still believe that words have ultimate meaning. We still believe that this Word has ultimate meaning, because it's God's word. And when we speak it, we believe that we're communicating something of eternal value, and not something that just has influence in a sphere. And our culture doesn't understand that, because the persuasiveness of this type of thinking and teaching has become pervasive in our culture.

So we're in a battle of words. Now I want you to understand the battle of words as it comes from this text. I want you to catch this.

So Jesus and His disciples are in a boat. They're crossing the Sea of Galilee, and they're coming up to the shore. And as they come up to the shore, one of the things that you realize is that this demoniac comes rushing up to them. And the scene is just crazy when you think about it. The unclean demoniac is running down the hillside toward them as they get to the shore.

Now what Mark wants to communicate to us is something about this unclean demoniac. See if you can get what it is. He is possessed by an unclean spirit. He is surrounded by unclean animals. And he dwelt among the tombs, making him dwell among the dead, and so he is unclean.

What's the idea he's trying to get across? (*Laughter*) He's unclean! And when you think about it in a Jewish context, what we are being told is that this man is as opposed to the holiness of Jesus Christ as you can possibly be, okay? He's outside the kingdom of God.

The King has arrived, and He has created a beachhead. He's moving in. His weapon is His word. This man stands outside of that kingdom.

Now let me ask you a question. But before I do, let me illustrate this another way.

In verse 4 we find that no one had the strength to subdue him. And the interesting thing is that no one had the strength to subdue him. Now what does that make you think of?

Well, if you've read the Gospel of Mark, you'll remember that in chapter 3 we read from the lips of Jesus that "*no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man. Then he may plunder his house.*"

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Participant: Wow!

Jeff: It’s interesting. Jesus has just told us about Satan. But now Satan is embodied, or at least the work of Satan is embodied in this unclean man possessed by a legion of demons. All of a sudden, what we see is the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, squaring off against the kingdom of darkness. That’s what we’re supposed to picture as we go from chapter 3 into chapter 5, this idea of the strong man.

Remember, he isn’t just unclean. No one can bind him! They’d put chains on him. He’d break them off! This is the strong man embodied.

So the question is this. Here’s the question. What might we expect? Jesus rose up on shore with His disciples. This man that could not be bound with chains, this unclean man, this man who is fundamentally outside the Kingdom, he’s running down the hill to Jesus. What might we expect? Here’s what I would expect. I would expect this man who could not be bound with chains, I would expect him to run down the hill, pick Jesus up and body slam Him. Put Him in the camel clutch, right? Remember the camel clutch? *(Laughter)* I mean, that’s what you would expect. You would expect that the strong man would capitalize on his strengths.

But instead, he says this. *“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!”* **Transcriber’s Note:** ESV.

Now I want to say something to you. If you have the New American Standard, you’re going to find four times in this text the word *beg*. Now the New American Standard is good. I like the New American Standard. I’m just using it to show you a difference. If you have the ESV, you’re going to find the word translated *beg* three times. And you’re going to find one time the word translated *adjure*. And that would be right, because the word that is translated here as *adjure* is different from the other three occasions of the word translated *beg*.

Now what does the word *adjure* mean? Let’s think about it for just a second. It means to cause someone to swear. Remember the high priest. *“I adjure You by the living God, tell us if You are the Son of God”*, says the high priest to Jesus. It’s to seek to place someone under an oath, or to exercise superior power over another.

What is happening here? The strong man realizes that there is only one way to defeat the King of the kingdom of heaven, and that is with His own weapon, His word. If he is going to defeat the King, he has to do it by word. Isn’t that striking?

And so what does he do? He attempts to place the King under oath, in other words to bind Him with authority so that He can’t do what He might intend to do. This is not the word *beg*. This is the word *adjure*. And this demoniac is trying to exercise power over the Lord Jesus Christ in a battle of words. He seeks to subdue the Lord with a word.

Now this is great, because when you catch this, here is a great scenario. I mean this would make a great movie! Sig, can we get a couple—No, never mind. That’s a bad idea. *(Laughter)* You know, the mind takes off, right?

I want you to think about this. Jesus comes ashore. The demoniac comes down the hill. Jesus says to the demoniac, *“Come out of that man, unclean spirit!”*, right? What does the demoniac say? The demoniac says, “I command You as one under oath; I adjure

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You, do not torment me!” What does Jesus say? The tense is that He continues to say, “Come out of this man!”

What does the man say? “I adjure you!”

“Come out of this man!”

“I adjure you!” You know, that sort of battle. Isn’t that great? (*Laughter*) I’m telling you! A battle of words!

But I want to tell you something. Sometimes I get excited. I paint it the way it ought not to be painted, because I want to tell you something significant. This battle that we’re looking at is not a battle of volume.

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff shows a cartoon of two children arguing in a crowd.

Jeff: It’s not two people who are trying to win their side. And so the one gets louder than the other gets. That’s not what this battle is all about.

I’ll tell you what this battle is all about. This battle is all about authority. This battle is about authority. And when you think of it like that, then you understand that Jesus wins. Jesus wins. The King of heaven and earth wins the battle.

And I want to tell you why. It’s because He’s not playing with a sword, that is, a child’s plaything. His word is a double-edged sword that divides soul and spirit, bone and marrow, and gets to the heart of the matter. And we need to get ourselves back to thinking like this about the word of God.

You know, I try to remind myself every time that I get up to preach and teach that I’m doing something in the lives of men and women and children that will last for all eternity, not because of what I’m doing, but because God says that as His word goes forth, He will use it and it will not return void.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: He has a purpose for it, because He is the authoritative King. That’s the kind of thing that we need to remember. When you speak the word of God into the lives of your family and into the lives of the people around you, you need to have that kind of attitude about it, because it is God’s word. Let me ask you a question. Why the pigs? Yes?

Participant: Unclean?

Jeff: Unclean. But why did the demoniac say, “Send us as a legion of demons into the pigs”? And then Jesus grants it, and they go off and drown.

I mean, if you are thinking, you’re saying to yourself, “Wait a minute! Immaterial spirits can’t drown. I am in big trouble!” That’s what you’re thinking. Why the pigs?

I want to tell you what I think. You can feel free to disagree because we’re not given the interpretation of why the pigs, and we’re not given the interpretation of why this might have helped the demoniac, or anything like that. So I’m going to give you my thought on it.

My thought on it is that the demoniac might have reasoned that those spirits aren’t dead because immaterial spirits can’t drown. Now if you’re a 21st-century person, then I’ll tell you what you say. You would say, “Those first-century people were so stupid that they thought spirits could drown.” You know, that’s the kind of thing liberals want to say, right? So this is sort of stupid, you know?

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No. A first-century person realized that an immaterial spirit couldn't drown. But I'll tell you what else he realized. He realized that if Jesus had the power by His word to send a legion of demons out of him into a group of pigs, then Jesus had the power of His own word to say, “You cannot return to this man.” The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of heaven and earth, has the power to direct a legion of demons. And this demoniac would have taken comfort in the fact that though they weren't in the pit of hell where they belonged, they were at least not in him. And they could not come back into him.

You know, I think about this when I think about our battles with sin. Sometimes I think that we can allow our sins to grow to a degree that we think that they are a monster that cannot be tamed, and that they are a force that cannot be driven from us. And you know, a story like this reminds us to come back to reality, doesn't it?—the reality that God's Spirit is at work in us. And as He is at work in us, He is doing things in us that will last for all eternity. And sin in us will not be for eternity. And so by His Spirit He is little by little driving out what is in us, that we might become more and more like His Son.

You know, when you think about the demoniac and a lesson like this, it's a lesson for us. Well, why the pigs? I think that's an important question in terms of application. But I also want you to know this. What we've been looking at is the task of every gospel minister. And it's not only the task of every gospel minister. It's the task of every believer. Every believer has been sent out to speak the Word to people. And we need to do it with this kind of assurance and confidence in God's word.

Well, what's next? What's next is kind of an interesting question in terms of this text. You know, we do not always have a way of tying up loose ends in Scripture. Sometimes we're left just to wonder about how the situation ended. For instance, think about Jonah. What do you think about him? It's a loose end, right? You don't know what to think about him.

But not always. Sometimes in the Scriptures God ties up the loose ends for us.

So what's next? Well, one of the things that's next is this. *We are encouraged to listen.* Mark chapter 4 verse 3 is a powerful incentive for us.

Transcriber's Note: Mark 4:3, ESV. “*And in His teaching He said to them, ‘Listen! A sower went out to sow.’*”

Jeff: This is Jesus. “Listen, see or behold! Listen! Listen to what I'm saying.” You know, it's interesting. The word *listen* is an interesting word. It has the word *list* in it. And if you look it up in the dictionary, one of the things that you find is that the word *list* has the idea of a farmer planting seed in a furrow, or the idea of a list—putting down the list, one thing after another.

My wife makes the worst lists in the world when it comes to the grocery store. (*Laughter*) She'll say to me, “Will you go and pick up a few things for me?” And I've gotten to the point where I say, “You know what? Let me see your list.” (*Laughter*) Because she would have me going to the meat aisle one minute and to the vegetable aisle the next, then back to the meat aisle, and I can't follow it. It's not a list I can follow. So I've got to rewrite it so I can follow it.

Don't tell her I said that! Don't tell her! You're already looking at me like— (*Laughter*) Don't tell her I said that!

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All right, now listen! When you listen, what are you doing? You’re trying to follow the logical flow of someone’s words. The Spirit uses that.

And the Lord’s living and active word can overcome post-modern language games, pragmatic relativism and deconstructionism. I want you to know that.

Here’s the question. Do we trust the Lord enough to speak His word into the lives of others, and, I might add, preach the gospel to ourselves?

Participant: Yeah.

Jeff: But here’s the thing. Here’s the thing I want you to grasp. God’s plan and purpose is tied up in this story for us. How so?

Think about the townspeople and the demoniac. I want you to think about this. Everybody in this story gets what they want. The townspeople come running out. “Get out of here! Will you leave this area?” Jesus says, “Okay.”

The demoniac says, with the legion of demons, “Can you drive us into the pigs?” “Okay.”

After he’s healed, the demoniac himself says, “Take me with you.” “No.”

Everybody gets what they want in this story except the believer! Think about that! I mean, that’s a lesson in and of itself, isn’t it?

But God has His own ends and His own purposes. Think about this. In mark 5:20 this is what it says. *“And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him. Everyone was amazed.”*

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: Jump ahead a minute. That’s Mark 5:20. Jump ahead. In Mark 7:31, *“Again Jesus went out from the region of Tyre and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee within the region of”* where?

Participant: The Decapolis.

Jeff: The Decapolis. And guess what happens? *“The people from the Decapolis brought to Him one who was deaf.”* They didn’t come out and ask Him to leave. They heard the demoniac’s preaching, were amazed by it, believed in it. And the next time Jesus came within the region of the Decapolis they brought Him a deaf man.

That’s amazing! It just ties up for us the story. And here’s what it shows us. It shows us that though the demoniac did not get what he wanted, he got what God wanted. And God had a purpose for him greater than himself.

And I think that sometimes that’s important for us to keep in mind, because I think we sometimes want things, and then we don’t get them. And we wonder where God is. Where is God? See now, I thought He was my heavenly Father.

And God is looking down at us saying, “Oh, you poor child! You know, you have a lot of growing to do, a lot of wisdom to learn, because I’ve got better things for you, or I’ve got different things for you.” And those different things may not be better things in your mind, but they may be better things for someone else. And God is going to use you as an instrument in their lives.

So I think it’s important for us to keep this in mind. It’s a wonderful story. It’s a story that reminds us that the battle is the Lord’s. And it’s an important story to remind us about His word.

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Participant: To go back to what you had said earlier on, I’m not quite catching the practical implications, to stop making a distinction between absolute and relative.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Can’t we just use the authority of the Word and not debate whether it’s—

Jeff: No. Thanks for asking that. No. Richard Rority would be saying that we need to stop using that distinction. I would say do not stop using that distinction, because that distinction is our bread and butter.

Participant: I thought you were promoting that.

Jeff: I’m not promoting Richard Rority! *Laughter*) I’m not promoting that at all. Anything else? Yes, Don?

Don: Jeff, I think your comment about how a lot of people even in the church regard the word of God as child’s play is well taken. That’s basically how I was brought up. All these stories in the Bible—Noah and the ark, Daniel in the lion’s den, David and Goliath. They’re nice stories, and they might be good for us to use as models for life. But they don’t see the whole picture. People even in the church today don’t see the whole picture. The Bible is a book about redemption from beginning to end. And I think that kind of mentality explains—and I’m probably going to step on toes here!—it explains how, in a lot of churches, expository preaching has been replaced by topical sermons, or sermons about how to have a happy marriage, or whatever, and not thorough exposition of the word of God.

Jeff: Yes?

Participant: I don’t really understand why the pigs ran into the sea. Was that God driving them, or the demons, or—

Jeff: Yes. I don’t know why the pigs ran into the sea. The only thing I know is this. It was a catalyst for the townspeople to say to Jesus, “Leave!” So really, that incident—

Participant: It is quite a waste of bacon. *Laughter*)

Jeff: It’s a waste of bacon. I mean, I want you to think about this. Can you imagine all these townspeople kind of cresting over the hill. You know, if this was a film, imagine this. The camera is following the townspeople out of the town. They crest the hill. The camera rises. And the bay is filled with pigs.

And can you imagine Jesus and the disciples leaving. They have to roam through all of those pigs. *Laughter*) An amazing scene, right? It does become the catalyst for them to say to Him, “Please leave.” Yes, Jim?

Jim: I remember as an English major that I never read the bible till I was converted. I started reading through the Gospels and I came to that story. There had been mental illness in our family in the past. And it was a common thing to say, “Well, all that stuff is just nonsense. We know better today. This was mental illness.”

Jeff: Sure.

Jim: Going to the page, it said to me that this was an objective reality. These demons really did exist. It wasn’t just in his head. In fact, they left him and went into the pigs. That was a clear statement that they did in fact exist.

Jeff: Yes, in fact, their driving the pigs into the sea is a clear indication that there’s a connection between the spiritual and the material.

“A Battle of Words”

Participant: Isn't that really a sign that those demons will never come back again? Those pigs will never be touched; they'll be drowned.

Jeff: Yes. That's a great insight. I like that. Yes.

Participant: I'm just curious. Why did they say, "Don't send us out of the country?" The demons said, "Don't send us out of the country."

Jeff: Yes. You know, it could just be territorialism. Don't you get that idea in Daniel, where there are different demons over different parts of different empires?

Participant: Maybe they didn't want to go back and tell them.

Jeff: Well, I think that's really true. *(Laughter)* They don't want to go to the Pit before it's time. That's very true.

Participant: Doesn't it show us that the townspeople valued the two thousand pigs more than they valued the—

Jeff: Oh, absolutely. Here's the village idiot, right? And he's cured. But he's not worth all these pigs. And the great thing about it, the beauty of it, is that you get this deaf person who is brought to Him in chapter 7 that causes you to recognize that they came to realize the importance of people rather than pigs.

Participant: That kind of mentality today is PETA's mentality.

Transcriber's Note: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Jeff: Yeah.

Participant: No animals have been harmed in the making of this gospel. *(Laughter)* The church has always tried to deal with the language in the context of the culture. I'm just thinking about the Nicene Creed, where the idea of "one substance with the Father" is not especially a Hebraic idea. It's kind of a translation. So when the Hebrew gospel comes into a Gentile community, the church has always done that. *(Unclear)* So it's not an alien or strange thing. We're always doing it

Second Participant: A thought I had was that the danger of high value in a society, and our society, is pork bellies. Could that not be a metaphor of Christ, that He cleanses us?

Jeff: That could certainly be an application of this text. I'm not sure about an interpretation. That's why I stepped back and said, "Let me give you an application of this." I think I'd move in that realm for that.

Participant: It's to say that spirits want to be in flesh. They have to be incarnated.

Jeff: That's good. That's a good insight. Okay. You guys saved up all of them for the end. *(Laughter)* All right. The Lord bless you. *(Applause)*