

The Human Plight

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Mark 5:1-5

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.

This is a remarkable story in the life of our Lord. I chose to stop reading with verse five, but you know the rest of the story. The man, demon-possessed, falls before the Lord. The demons take control of his speaking apparatus and address the Lord. They plead with Jesus that He would not send them into the abyss, the place waiting for some of the severest, most dangerous of demonic fiends, but rather that He would send them into a herd of pigs in the nearby countryside. Jesus grants it and, at His command, this man is released from the dark prison from which his soul was locked fast.

The Bible tells us the demons entered the herd of swine and chaos immediately ensued. They ran violently over a cliff's edges where they drowned in the ocean. The pig farmers rushed back to the city and told the city fathers who came out, and there the Bible says they saw this demon possessed man clothed and in his right mind seated. They pleaded with Jesus to get back into the boat and leave.

The man, now in his right mind, pleads with Jesus to let him follow Him. Jesus tells 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 story in the life of our Lord Jesus reminds me of the very plight of mankind. This week we were reminded of how serious of a problem humanity is in general and our nation in particular. Earlier in the week, we saw that there are two sets of law and order in our country. One for the politically powerful and connected and another for the rest of us. And then just a few days ago we saw the assassination of five Dallas police officers and the wounding of seven others. These men gave their lives protecting the freedom of citizens who were protesting them, the police.

Our nation is on the brink of massive civil unrest if not all out conflict. Much of the nation is dissatisfied with government and its lack of ability to solve problems. More than not government

is the problem. Right and wrong are turned upside down. And young people today are confused about future direction.

Ravi Zacharias, a Christian apologist, wrote an article last week titled, *The Soul of America*:

Listening to the blistering political rhetoric, I am asked all over the world, “What has happened in America?” The question should go deeper. Whatever happened to the American soul? We are truly at the cliff’s precipitous edge and the fall could be long and deadly. Why? We have a deep crisis of the soul that is killing us morally and we have no recourse. We have no recourse because the only cure has been disparaged and mocked by the elite and the powerful. And those very ideologies are now presiding over the slaughter of our citizens while the abundance of speeches is inversely proportional to the wisdom they contain and Reason bleeds to death before our eyes.

He goes on to say there have been three murders in our culture: the murder of morality, the murder of truth, and the murder of reason. History repeats itself, or should I say, because man is ignorant of his past, he is bound to repeat the same mistakes. The problem with the demon-possessed man in our text is a perfect illustration of what afflicts this nation and the world community.

I suggest that, for a few minutes, we look at this man’s plight.

I. Under the Influence of the Enemy

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

This man was possessed by a power greater than his own. He was dominated by a force he could not overthrow. He was, in every sense of the word, under the influence of an enemy. What do I mean by this word *influence*?

A. What is Meant by the Word *Influence*.

In life there are only two choices: you can live under the influence of God or Satan. I am not referring to the two domains, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. I’m talking about the influence of those two kingdoms. It is true you either live in one realm or the other. There is no third option. You are either a citizen of the kingdom and rule of God or you are in the kingdom of the prince of the power of the air, Satan. Clearly the man in our text was locked fast in the kingdom of evil.

But again, I’m not talking about kingdom but influence. The devil can influence even those who are in the kingdom of God. When a Christian rebels against God, they reject the influence of the Spirit of God and submit to the pull of the true dark side, not some impersonal force, but the spirit of this present evil age, the spiritual influences of the devil. Even Christians can be influenced by this dark side.

We see this in Luke 22 when Jesus warns Peter that Satan desired to sift him, meaning tempt him in order to destroy him. Peter later succumbed to the influence of the devil and he denied that he knew Jesus or was His disciple three times. Now Peter had been delivered from the kingdom of darkness. He was in the light, the very light of God, but he chose to be influenced by the lies of fear and timidity. However, that does not mean that Peter left God's realm and entered back into the dominion of sin as a slave. No, he had been freed from that dominion. He had been given so much liberty, that he could choose to obey whatever influence he wanted. Unfortunately, he submitted to the wrong influence. But praise God, the Good Shepherd had prayed for Peter and that Shepherd became Peter's sacrificial Lamb that defeated the devil's treacherous influence in Peter's life. Jesus would not let Satan tear Peter from His secure grip. And if you are God's child, neither will Jesus let Satan pull you from His grip. But that doesn't mean you can't be influenced by this devilish spirit.

Therefore, the question is what influence are you submitting to this morning? This poor man in Mark 5 is clearly under the influence of dark powers and He is also a prisoner within the kingdom of Satan. He was demon-possessed. The Bible says he was "*a man with an unclean spirit.*" How unclean? Jesus asks the demon, who is the spokesman for the many demons that are in him, "How many are you?" and they say, "We are so many we're called *Legion.*" Legion is a number referring to a Roman battalion of about 5-6,000 soldiers. Were there that many demons in him? I don't know. We do know one thing—2,000 pigs died that day.

We can certainly say there was a multiplicity of demonic powers that had possession of this man. He is a captive subjugated to powers beyond human. And the Spirit of God wants us to read this story about this poor prisoner of the devil as a type and illustration of all of mankind that is under the sway and control of Satan.

The question is, how does anyone come under the sway and influence of Satan?

B. How One Comes Under the Influence of Satan.

How can I be so bold as to say mankind as a whole, minus those who are saved, are under the influence of the same demonic powers that controlled this man? I say that because it's according to the record of Scripture. It started with our first parents, when Satan came to her in order to influence Eve, our first mother. As he always does, Satan promises more than he can deliver. Eve was deceived by the lies of the enemy and thereby brings herself under his influence.

The Bible tells us she took of the fruit of the tree God had forbidden them to eat, she ate, handed it to her husband and he ate, and with that, our first parents and their posterity was plunged into the prison of Satan's control and power. And there we are today. That is the Bible's description of the problem, the plight of humanity. By nature we are forced into a submission that has so changed man from his original state.

Man is now under the influence that he is easily inclined to believe the lies of the devil. That is mankind's condition. That is the prison in which he is bound. Those are the shackles and the cuffs which restrain him, it is his nature, his evil heart. He would rather believe the lie of the devil than believe the truth of God. This is the inclination of the soul of every person born.

That is why this man illustrates the plight of humanity so well. All men are enslaved by Satan and are subject to his seductions. We are so deceived by the influence of Satan that we can hardly recognize our imprisonment and slavery. Oh, we can notice a man who is an addict of whatever kind. We can see that he is enslaved to his own desires until the desire has so consumed him that whatever his addiction is it has complete control over him and he can't break loose. We'll look at that man and say, "Oh, what a poor case he is. So sad. He is an addict and enslaved by his own desires."

Yet, we cannot look at the man well dressed and successful, the top of business and finance, who is in the exact same condition. I'm not saying all businessmen are evil or anyone who is wealthy is demon-possessed, no. I'm talking about the man or woman who is not a Christian. We look at the man who is well dressed and successful and, instead of having sympathy for him, we applaud him and praise him. "Look at him. Look at his genius in finance. Look at his acumen in business. Look at what power he has wielded to accumulate what he has." We make businessmen important in our culture, role models even, and we do not see that, if they are not following Christ, they are enslaved by the same powers that enslaves the addict and are enslaved by their own lust and greed for materialism. This kind of slave cannot break loose from his imprisonment either. He is inclined to compile more and more wealth and is never satisfied with what he has—he too is enslaved. Yet, we applaud him.

We are so deceived by the enemy that we cannot recognize it, even sometimes in our own hearts.

A Christian comes under the influence of the devil by giving Satan a place in a small way. It's the small foxes that spoil that vine. It never starts big. This is part of the deception and the power of his influence. He comes in a harmless way. He comes in a way that seems to be without evil. Again, he promises more than what he can deliver, and if you give place to him and follow his suggestion, you come under his influence.

To accept the devil's influence is to reject God's influence. They are mutually opposed. You cannot submit to both the devil and God. You have to choose which influence. This poor man in our text was bound fast, dark in his own nature, but on top of that sinful nature he is controlled by demonic powers.

I want to show you that the result of such in this man's life is the same as all of humanity.

II. Self-Inflicted Hurt and Harm

Wherever people give the devil place and come under his influence, they end up doing nothing but self-inflicting wounds upon themselves. They self-inflict hurt and harm. Look at verse five.

“And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.” (Mark 5:5)

This man was so tormented in mind and soul, there was no rest or peace. Guilt and shame had so taken over the man that his personality was lost in the myriads of demonic personalities. He didn't know where he was or who he was or what he had become. Yet, there was always this sense of pain, this sense of shame, and he cries out and even lashes himself and cuts himself. Why? That's what happens to any and all who come under the influence of the devil. We inflict harm upon ourselves.

A. Humanity Subjects Itself to Self-inflicted Wounds.

Look at the way we live. Look how we turn on one another. Look at what's going on in this very nation. I hear politicians all the time say this is the greatest nation on the earth, or the greatest nation there has ever been, but look at us—you call this greatness? We're turning on one another, self-destructing, inflicting mortal wounds upon our own selves. How do you explain this? It is what the Bible says: the influence of the evil one.

I found this question written on an Internet forum from a young man that is confused by two competing philosophies about man's condition. This is what he asked:

I'm 19 years old and granted although I'm fairly young, I have seen a great deal of cruelty and hate whether it be personally or from the media. Every day you see people murder one another from greed or jealousy. Every day would be world leaders wage wars against their neighbors to conquer land or because they have conflicting beliefs, war and destruction are as old as mankind itself; some say it's in man's nature to destroy himself, and sometimes I think that's true.

I was taking a philosophy course in college and the subject about the true nature of man arose, some say that man was born innocent, with a pure spirit, and that it is society that corrupts them, others . . . say that man is born evil and selfish, only looking out for himself, willing to do anything to prolong and add pleasure to his own existence. Although this is an extremely pessimistic way of viewing the world, I can't help but to agree. Over the years, after seeing and studying people hurting their fellow man over and over again, I've become a sort of [a] misanthrope [hater of humanity].

You can look into the history books time and time again and any civilization, any society, no matter how “perfect” they claim to be, ends up usually being overtaken by crime, poverty, cruelty and war, whether it be the great city of Rome or Constantinople; history repeats itself and mankind makes the same errors again and again, as if we cannot help ourselves.

The young man concludes by asking his readers the questions:

...What do you think? is humanity naturally flawed? are we destined to destroy ourselves? or is there still hope for the human race?

What I found amazing about this is that he claimed to have no religious beliefs one way or the other. He is not a professing Christian; he's just a young person—not even 20 years old—who has come to this conclusion by sheer human observation. He has noted man's calamity and problem and as far as he can see, it seems to come from within and not from without. And he's right.

All we do in the attempt to try and improve ourselves is wound ourselves all the more. Why? Because the human heart cannot be satisfied.

B. Man's Heart Cannot be Satisfied.

I wish some of you who have yet to believe the Gospel would believe this. If you could accept this as truth it would literally change your course. Because up to the point you believe this, you will be doomed to the futile task of trying to heap up for yourselves pleasures that will not satisfy and somehow quell or calm your heart's cry for something that it cannot define. You will be destined to a doomed attempt to try and find meaning and purpose and peace and contentment and there can be none. There is no place for these things within the grasp of your own hands.

Here's how deceptive sin is: Everything a person believes to be good and hopefully brings peace and joy to his or her heart, only ends up perverted. It does not do what is expected but the very opposite. For those of us who are Christians, we can only say this is true. I remember. I remember the many things I tried to satisfy the screaming of my heart. I remember the self-torture. I didn't cut myself, not with a sharp physical object, but I cut up my soul with the things that I thought would bring me contentment and peace. All they did was rake my heart all the more and left me more discomforted and disquieted. I was in more turmoil than before.

The things that you now think will bring the pursuit of happiness to an end, that will finally satisfy, that will bring that sense of balance and purpose and meaning, I'm telling you, once you grasp and get it, it will only mutilate more. It will be another self-inflicted wound.

As we see in this story, mankind is doomed to the failure of his own attempts to deliver himself.

III. The Failures of Humanity to Deliver

Mankind tried to help this poor case. They did many things to try to bring some kind of solution to the man's problem but they all failed, as mankind's attempts always do. Look at verse three.

“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.” (Mark 5:3-4)

They knew this man was harmful to himself and dangerous to them so they knew they had to do something. Like we do today, people who are beyond control, whose sanity has departed, we put them in straightjackets, do we not? This is the same attempt. They were trying to constrain the man from harming himself or someone else. But all their restraints would not work; like Samson of old, he broke them.

“Neither could anyone tame him.”

No counseling, no therapy, no homemade remedy, nothing worked. This is the futile plight of man. Anything man devises will not solve man’s basic problem: his own heart.

A. The Human Race Tries to Deliver Itself.

Go back to the first sin and you will see the ready method that was chosen by Adam. What is it? It’s the same one we choose first and that is to redefine the problem.

First, man tries to redefine the problem. Men suggest that the problem of man’s condition is not morality. It’s the same thing in the Garden. “Adam, where art thou?” “I was naked and afraid, therefore I hid myself.” He’d been naked before, this is the way the Lord had made him. Now he’s trying to say to the Lord, “My problem is not my sin, my problem is I’m not clothed. My deficit is not my heart but my garments—I have none and so I hid from you.” Trying to redefine and deflect from the real issue.

Man supplies himself with answers, attempts at trying to deliver himself. “My problem is not one of morality, it’s not spiritual, because there is no such thing as morality. Material matter is the premise of all life and matter is amoral, neither moral nor immoral. Matter is matter.”

What are we trying to do? Redefine the problem. More guilt is heaped upon us by psychological babble. Many today are telling us that moral guilt is the consequence of a psychological problem brought on by religion. You have to help man think right. So they tell us that religion is the problem with all of its rules and commandments and regulations, all we’re doing is heaping on condemnation and guilt and we’re destroying ourselves with these rules of religion. If we could save ourselves from religion, then we would save ourselves psychologically and culturally.

Where has that got us? Nowhere. Psychology has not solved the dilemma of the moral man.

Mankind tries different philosophical answers. Man’s problem is not spiritual but financial, some say. This is the answer of the disciples of Karl Marx. Marxism, socialism, communism says man’s problems stem from private ownership and the desire for wealth. You hear it often from many in high position today. “If we could just redistribute the wealth.”

They proclaim that the problem in our society is the wicked one percent on Wall Street. The problem is corporate greed. Crony capitalism, that’s the problem. If we’ll redistribute wealth and

make everyone equal, then our problems of morality would be solved. It's even being touted and offered as a solution to radical Islamic terrorism. "These poor young men in these middle east countries are locked in their poverty. If we could lift them out of poverty and make them socially viable, then they would lay down their weapons of Jihad and violence would cease. We just need to infiltrate financial wealth into those places in the world."

That's not the solution. The problem is deeper than this. This man's problem was much deeper than the environment of tombs and cemeteries. The problem is not sociological either, as some have advocated.

Some say that it isn't men themselves that are evil but society itself.

The 18th century French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau said that man isn't naturally evil, but it is society that makes him that way, he states the following:

'The first man who had fenced in a piece of land, said "This is mine," and found people naïve enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.'

Sociologists tell us the problem with mankind today is that our sociological structures are wrong. Then there are those who say the problem is, again, religion itself.

This is the answer of the philosophical naturalism from which Darwinism, evolution, and modern atheism springs from the doctrines of men like Karl Marx. What has that got us? Stalin had killed his millions. Mao Zedong, in his communistic revolution of China, killed his tens of millions. All communism has done is bring more depravation, poverty, crime, and misery.

All of man's attempts to solve man's problems ultimately fail. Even your own attempts will fail you.

B. The Failures Are Irrefutable Proof of Man's Hopelessness.

"and no one could bind him . . . neither could anyone tame him."

It's not within the power of man to fix his own heart because the heart is the problem. Why do we give influence to the devil? Because the heart is inclined to do so and to believe his lies rather than believe the truth of God. Jesus said it's out of the heart that "precedes evil thoughts, murders, adultery, fornication, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. These are the things that defile a man"—it comes from within.

I would like to ask the French philosopher Rousseau, that if he believes the fence was the initial beginning of man's corruption, where does he think the idea of the fence came from? Do you think it just appeared one day? Some big bang and you're left with a fence? No. It was the very greed of the human heart that caused one to say, "This is mine. I claim this." It is not a sociological problem; it is a sin problem. It starts from within, not from without.

The problems of society are a result of the evilness within man. Our environment hasn't created the mess we are in, our evil hearts have. That's the problem. You say, "This is not going to fly in the face of modern man." Friends, there is no other argument than the truth. We must say it in love but we must say it unashamedly.

I don't want that doctor telling me, "You've got a cancer and we've got to love it to death." No, cut it out. Get it out now. Immediately. Man's attempt to fix himself will not work. Grasping for more things will not work. Sex will not work. Drugs do not work. Money does not work. Families do not work. Churches do not work! Only Jesus works.

IV. The Ultimate Irrationality of Sin

You see this in the story, not in our text but a few verses afterward.

"Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region." (Mark 5:17)

Here the city fathers come out and find the man clothed and in his right mind. All of their attempts had failed prior to, but here's this man, this Galilean, this man from Nazareth, and He commands the evil spirits and they must obey. What would you think, after all your attempts had failed and here's this Man who just commands the demons to leave and they leave? Wouldn't you want to give Him the key to the city? Wouldn't you say, "We think You ought to run for the mayorship. We think You could solve all of our societal problems. If You can do this, why You can do anything"?

Is that what they said to Him? No, they pleaded with Him to leave. If that is not an irrefutable argument for man's irrationality, then I don't know one. Sin makes us think illogically. It slants and biases your reasoning so that even though you have functional logic, you are biased to wrong conclusions, conclusions that leave out Christ.

You want to find a different solution, that's why you're pursuing the things you're pursuing. You know this is the truth I'm speaking to you. There is something inside you even now arguing, you feel it, you know that this is the word of God. At the same time you feel an indictment that you have rejected God's ways. That misery cannot be silenced by running from Christ but by submitting to Him.

I think one of the greatest biblical displays of the irrationality of sin is the Sanhedrin themselves. They were the masterminds behind the arrest and death of Jesus Christ. After they had crucified

and murdered our Lord, they go to Pilate and say, “The Imposter said three days after He died He would rise again.” That’s amazing to me. It’s amazing because His own disciples did not understand what He said when He told them about His death and resurrection—but His enemies did. They suggested to Pilate that if the disciples stole the body, then the myth and legend of Jesus would be worse than Jesus Himself. So they devised a plan, Pilate and the chief priests. Pilate tells them, “You use your guards, your own soldiers, to guard the tomb and I will put the Roman seal on it so that if anybody tampers with it they will have the whole Roman empire to come down on them and crush them.”

The plan was set. They went through the preparation, satisfied they had done what was necessary. Three days later the earth shook, angelic beings came from out of the sky, the stone rolled away, and those soldiers saw it all. They were witnesses of the resurrection. They were there. They saw the angels. They saw the earthquake and their senses were so overcome that they fell back unconscious. When they returned to consciousness, they ran back to the high priest and told him what had happened.

You would think at that moment the chief priest would rend his garments as he had done when Jesus said He was the Son of God. Don’t you think he would do it again, fall on his knees, and cry out, “Oh God, if there is any hope of mercy, please be merciful to me!” He could run to the temple and fall on his face, crying out to God for mercy. Is this what he does? No. You see the irrationality of sin.

They bribed the guards to say, “Tell the people that the disciples came and stole the body.” These men who knew what had happened by the testimony of the guards were more determined to fight against this new Christian faith than they had against the Founder of it. It is believable that a few untrained men overcame a squadron of well-trained soldiers and risked the Roman Empire’s wrath to perpetuate a lie. Not at all. But that’s the irrationality of sin.

Dear friends, as believers, there is no excuse for listening to the influence of the devil. There’s no reason. There’s no ground. There’s no evidence that can prove that is an acceptable option. Yet we do it so frequently. What is the answer for us? You know it already, do you not? It is to come, as this poor, possessed man did, and fall on our knees at Jesus’ feet and He’ll break the spell of Satan over our hearts and lives. He’ll set you free. He’ll show you the truth. If you’ll just believe, you will be at liberty this present moment.

The answer, my dear friend, if you’re not yet a Christian is the exact same. We’re essentially in the same position. We’re the same. The only difference is I’ve been set free from the domain of darkness. I don’t live there. That’s not my address anymore. I can choose to submit to the influence of the devil. You have no choice. Your own nature, your own heart betrays your remedy. Your own heart won’t let you be saved.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

Your own heart is your prison. On top of that, the warden and guard is the devil himself. Do you want to be set free? Do you, as a captive, want to be released? Here's the good news—it's Jesus! He's in this room to set men and women and children free, if you will believe! If you will trust the truth and see the lie for what it is—a deception and rouse from the devil, the father of all lies.

Will you come to Him? Will you look at Him and say, "Ah, if a legion of demons must obey, then surely He has the power to deliver me from my sins and deeds." May God help you. Ah, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ carry you to the Father's throne of mercy. There you will not be expelled, turned back, or rejected. Being received, you will receive remedy for your plight. Amen