

Dr. Mark Jennings, Mark, Lecture 9, Mark 4:35-5:20, Calming Storm and the Demoniac

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This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the Gospel of Mark. This is session 9, Mark 4:35-5:20, Calming Storm and the Demoniac.

Hello, earlier in chapter 4 we were looking at Jesus' teaching in parables.

Of course, we know from the description of Mark of Jesus' teaching that he taught with authority. One of the aspects of his teaching was parables. Interestingly enough, Jesus isn't the only person who ever used parables, but it does seem to be that Jesus used parables in teaching at a rate more than anyone else.

As we continue into chapter 4, however, we get a transition back to events and a very specific event that is well known as the Calming of the Storm. I'll read this for us and then we'll discuss. So Mark chapter 4 begins with verse 35.

That day, when evening came, he said to his disciples, let us go over to the other side, leaving the crowd behind. They took him along just as he was in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

A furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat, so there was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, Teacher, don't you care if we drown? He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, Quiet, be still.

Then the wind died down, and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? They were terrified and asked each other, Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him. Now, we've been looking at the theme of authority in Jesus from the beginning.

That's been the constant aspect of the first half of the Gospel of Mark, that Jesus is the stronger one. Here, Mark returns to displays of Jesus' authority. Prior to this, we've had physical healings, we've had exorcisms, but here we get the first nature miracle.

So, there is an escalation, if you will, of the display of Jesus' authority. It's interesting how the event we're looking at today centers around a lake. It's not uncommon.

Many of the things that happened in Jesus' ministry are around a lake. If we look at chapters 6:45-52, the other lake miracle, we get even more of this supernatural power, the divine power of God, in a way that is more substantive, perhaps, than in

the healing miracles. Some things to keep in mind as we go through this: the power over the elements is a constant prerogative of God.

It is something man is completely powerless to control or direct. We look at the way this begins, that day when evening came, he says to them. He says to them is a common introduction technique in Mark.

He often begins events that way. So, then the question becomes, that day, what is that day referring to? In the story, ostensibly, it's referring to a single day's worth of teaching. Perhaps Mark 1-34 is meant to reflect a particular day's worth of teaching.

More probable is that this is the work of narrative construction. After a day of teaching, teaching may be very similar to the parable teaching that we've recurred; there is a next movement that happens. Here we have a boat, which seems to be the boat that began from verse 1 of chapter 4. Jesus began to teach by the lake, and the crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat.

Then it seems, according at least to the narrative, that they're in the same boat here. Interesting to note, we're not really told why Jesus wanted to leave. Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along.

Jesus had said, let us go over to the other side. All we are told is that Jesus wants to go to the other side. Speculation might be that he might have something to do with the growing popularity of the crowd and the size.

We often see that in the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus tries to back away from crowds. Perhaps it is consistent with his desire not to remain in one area. That's been a constant from even that first day in Capernaum in chapter 1, where Jesus declares he's not meant to stay in one spot.

The phrase, as he was there, likely means he was already in the boat. They took him as he was. There's a fascinating little bit here.

In verse 36, there were also other boats with him. The reason I find that fascinating is it's hard to find a reason why that little bit is even mentioned. The other boats don't factor into the story.

You don't have all the other boats crashing in the storm, but only Jesus makes it to the other side. This would have been great because then you could preach, and Jesus' boat would make it to the other side. But we don't get any of that information.

So, there's always this question of why the other boats were mentioned. The reason I find it fascinating is because I think it's an example of a good eyewitness standpoint presentation. That was something that was just true.

Not necessarily a thematic part of the story but something that was observable and known. So, I just find that a little bit interesting. Note this miracle that's about to occur then, though, is clearly given to the disciples and not to the crowds.

This isn't a display of power that the crowds will witness, and they do witness many. This is something that is meant for the disciples alone. So, they have this, they're going to the other side on Jesus' intent.

Jesus says they should go to the other side. And while on the lake, a furious squall came up. Now, there have been interesting discussions.

Was this a supernatural storm that came up out of nowhere? And part of the argument for that stems from the fact that when Jesus responds to the wind and the waves, he rebukes them. And that's the same language that's used with the demons. I think that what works against that, first, is there's no statement from Mark that there is a spiritual power at work in the storm.

Mark is very clear to tell us when something is the result of demonic activity and something is not. And so, the fact that there is no direct reference here I think we should take it at face value. And also, the arrival of storms coming up somewhat unexpectedly is not an abnormal experience.

All the accounts, Mark, Matthew, and Luke, have Jesus asleep, which is an indication too of his human nature, that he's weary and he's tired and he's sleeping, as well as the disciples' panic. Now, it's interesting when we compare and contrast this event with Jonah in the Old Testament. Jonah 1:5-6, Jonah is also remarkably asleep during this storm.

Though Jonah was below in the boat, Jesus was above. They're sleeping at the stern for Jesus, like he's at that section that was raised. Like Jonah, Jesus is awakened by a panic-stricken crew.

But Jesus, there's an important difference, is not asked to pray for divine intervention, like Jonah is asked. And so, there's an elevation of that story. And there's an immediate miraculous end in both accounts to the storm.

When Jonah is cast overboard, here the ending of it is to Jesus. And in some respects, the Jonah story, if it's being echoed here a little bit, serves as a foil to show the power and the difference of Jesus. That God controlled in the Jonah story when the storm would exist and when it would cease.

And it would cease when Jonah was tossed overboard. Here, similarly, Jesus controls when the storm will cease. It is not by prayer to God, and it is by his own words.

There are some potentially interesting parallels here. Here, we have the storm, and we get information about the severity of the storm. The waves are breaking over the boat and there's a squall.

There's this constant attention in this narrative to wind and water, both of them together. And so that was nearly swamped. And remember, a majority of these disciples are used to boats.

This is not a group of men who haven't ever been out on a boat in a lake during a storm. So, the fact that they're starting to panic might speak to the severity of the storm. And they wake him up and they begin by saying, Teacher, don't you care if we drown? Now, some have seen this reference to the teacher as an indicator that the disciples are lacking in reverence.

Perhaps they're lacking in understanding. I'm not as sure here that the fact that they cause teachers should be an indicator of that. I don't think they're being disrespectful.

They are trying to wake him up. Mark has just told us about his teaching for 33 verses, so that's been an important element of his presentation of Jesus here.

So, he was a teacher. That was one of the authoritative things he did. Healing, exorcism, and teaching.

And the question is certainly a request for help. The way that the structure of the question is, if you have a look in the Greek, it has the assumption of a positive answer. So the question is not phrased in such a way as to say, Teacher, you don't care at all, do you? It's the teacher, don't you care? The assumption is, yes, you do care.

Now, interesting enough, whatever the disciples thought Jesus would do, it clearly isn't what he did. Because they become amazed at that. So, the request for help might have been just a simple all hands on deck.

We need everyone here to help us get us through. So he's rudely aroused from his slumber. And Jesus 39, he got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, Quiet, be still.

And as I mentioned before, this rebuking is the same language in the exorcisms. There's an anthropomorphic quality, perhaps, to this picture of what he's saying to the storm. Does it mean, again, that the wind and water are evil forces? Wind, water and storm have a, though strong, symbolic element in the ancient world for chaos and for power that would be against humanity.

We see that imagery in Psalms 18, Psalms 104 and 106, Isaiah 50, Nahum 1, and other places. So even if there isn't an overt demonic spiritual presence, the storms and the waves and the chaos were long seen as a force in the ancient world. And the speaking, though, of course, also fits with Jesus' authority pattern we've been seeing.

That Jesus speaks and something happens. He speaks and there's healing. He speaks, the demons are silent and immediately come out, and here he speaks.

And I think even as we look at this, this quiet, be still, followed by the wind dying down and it was completely calm, the structure of quiet, be still, if I'm reading this correctly, the quiet is being spoke to the wind and the be still is being spoken to the waters. Just by the way, there's always this constant presentation of the squall and the waves broke over. He rebuked the wind and said to the waves.

Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. And so I wonder if the quiet is to the wind and the be still is to the water. Regardless, there was an immediate result, which is what we've been seeing all along.

The immediate result of Jesus' words. And then he said to his disciples, Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Now, I believe that language, why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Doesn't refer to verse 41 in the statement, are they terrified? But referred to the reason why they woke him up. And that's made more clear in the Matthean account, where the activity of the disciples rousing Jesus is connected with the rebuke.

And so then the question becomes, what is it that they did wrong? Here was this massive storm, storm that is swamping the boat. And the disciples go to Jesus for help. On the surface, that seems the exactly right thing to do.

In fact, you could have a nice theological, spiritual application of this, that when the storms of life come up, go to Jesus. It would work. It seems right. But clearly from Jesus' response, what they did indicated a lack of faith.

And their question, of course, was, don't you care if we drown? And so I believe the rebuke is the fact that they were afraid that they were in danger. That somehow their lives were in danger, the boat that Jesus was on was in danger. That they had, at this point, still failed to recognize the strength and the mission of Jesus.

They were worried that everything is going to come crashing to an end, their lives could be over in this storm. And that there was a lack of trust that this moment was going to be a safe moment. That Jesus would not drown in a boat.

And so, I wonder if that was why Jesus was upset with them. That the right approach might have been to let him sleep and trust that they would get to the other side. After all, it was Jesus who said that's where he wanted to go.

Of course, after asking them why they're so afraid and still have no faith, no trust, we get this statement about how they were terrified and asked each other, who is this, even the wind and the waves obey. If we look at the Jonah story, the Lord is praised at the end of the coming of that storm. But here in the gospel, the Lord is questioned, if you will.

In other words, it's who is this? There is confusion and terror. Christ does what only God can do. Think of Genesis 8, Job 26, or Isaiah 50, where Jesus has spoken to wind and waves, and they have obeyed him.

So the scale, so the disciples' response to the miracle, the fear, notice they're responding to the miracle, not the rebuke. They're amazed at what has occurred. They don't seem to be responding to the question of why you still have so little faith.

They have a great fear. This language of great fear is fascinating because that puts the fear in a greater sense of what they had on the storm. They were afraid of the storm, and now they have this great fear, perhaps a reverent fear at work.

The scale of the miracle was beyond what they thought possible. Here, if we're going back to the story of Jonah again, Jesus is playing the role, if you will, of the one who can stop the storm in the same way that God was the one who could stop the storm in Jonah. Now, finally, before we move on to chapter 5, the question of who this is, We continually get questions in response to Jesus' teaching and acts.

Who is this who speaks with such authority? Who is this that the demons obey him? Who is this that even the winds and the waves obey him? I point that out because we're eventually building to a question in chapter 8 that will be now on Jesus, who will be asking about what people think of him instead of the people themselves asking about Jesus. All right, let's move now to chapter 5. We're still in the public ministry of Jesus. We've been working through part of this activity.

There's been healing on the Sabbath, the calling of the Twelve. We've had the discussion about who is my family, the controversy with Beelzebul, the public teaching of the parables, the calming of the storm. And so we're in this aspect of the first part of Jesus' public ministry.

But there is a change that occurs here. A change we get into both geographically as well as in terms of the exorcism. So, I'd like to look here then at 5:1-20 and as has been our custom, I'll read it and then we will come back and work through.

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. The man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.

For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day, among the tombs and in the hills, he would cry out and cut himself with the stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me. For Jesus has said to him, Come out of this man, you evil spirit.

Then Jesus asked him, What is your name? My name is Legion, he replied, for we are many. And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside.

The demons begged Jesus, Send us among the pigs, allow us to go into them. He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there, dressed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man and told about the pigs as well.

Then, the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him but said, Go home to your family, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.

So, the man went away and began to tell the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and all the people were amazed." Lots of odd bits in this account, to say the least. We have this adjuration by the demon, and this conversation is what takes place. There is a question of process, even.

It seems that this exorcism looks a little more delayed than the other exorcisms, because of that conversation. There is the extremely strange banishment into the pigs. Then there is also the negative response by the crowd to what they witnessed to the people, and also the rejection of the man to be a follower, to continue to follow Jesus.

There are some even odd geographical bits if you will. It is near the sea, but there is also a mountain and a steep bank. The vocabulary is a little bit different.

The structure is a little bit different. It is not surprising, then, that certain scholars have assumed the rigidity of a form here, of a form transmission that has had editorial work done to it. There is no evidence of this in the manuscript tradition.

This is a very tight document. In other words, we don't have a lot of variations of this account, with the exception of verse 1 and the place where it is happening. It is very tight.

You do have this interesting structure. You get the setting, which we are going to spend a lot of time talking about in the first five verses, followed by the exorcism in verses 6-13, followed by the reaction of the people, and then Jesus' departure. Now, how this works in the narrative of Mark, before the storm, he had said he wanted to go to the other side in 4:35, and then in chapters 5-1, when they got across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes, so it picks up where this story began.

The territory here is a bit confusing to decide exactly where it is at. There are several names for the area around here. There was a city called Gerasa, located 37 miles from the sea.

There have been different terms used and different spellings used for this area. I think it is hard to say with any specific certainty that we know the very location that this occurred on because there is some textual confusion. But regardless, we do know, based on the end of the passage, that this is in the Gentile area of Decapolis, that now Jesus had moved his ministry into a more Gentile-dominant area.

We also know there has been a chronology change. The move has been from evening, when the storm is present, to morning. And so, this area, this region, what is important for us to understand is we are not in predominant Jewish territory.

So, let's look at the setting here. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. Now, we get a lot of information about this man.

Mark does not usually give us a lot of information. So, even think about the first demon-possessed man we had in the synagogue. It was simply a man with an unclean spirit.

But here, we start getting a lot of detail. First, this man lived in the tombs. Now, the tombs, especially from a Jewish perspective, which is what these disciples and Jesus are coming from, the tombs are an unclean area.

This was an area of death. Also, the tombs are always associated away from the community. So, he is in an area already isolated.

The man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, indicating that there had been multiple attempts to bind this man, and none of them were successful. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore his chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. Then, the thematic statement was that no one was strong enough to subdue him.

I think that is an important part. So, we have this structure. It begins with no one can bind him, this reference to chains, another reference to chains, and then a final statement that no one is strong enough.

It's almost a chiasmus, which is a very specific type of structure where different elements correspond to other elements. A, B, B, A structure here. Bind them, fetters, chains, chains, fetters, strong enough to subdue him.

But we get all of this information first about him, about how strong he was, that the people had tried to chain him and he could not, they were not successful, and no one was strong enough. So, this puts it straight into this theme of authority that we've been dealing with. But we also get, in addition to the strength that is occurring, this beyond-human-like strength information about the pitiful reality of this man.

Night and day among the tombs and in the hills, he would cry out and cut himself with stones. And I think that's also an important aspect because this presents this picture of what, the self-destructive nature of demonic possession. They were in this host, in this man, and there was such strength that was coming from that, but they were often also cutting; he was cutting himself, they were causing harm and danger to him, and he was crying out in agony.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. And I think that's important. We've seen this before, and this falling on his knees is not worship, it's more submission, it's a recognition, so there's an immediate recognition from a distance, that's why we know it's morning, he was able to see him from a distance, that there's this immediate recognition of the authority of Jesus, and he falls, and then we get this question, what do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? This is almost verbatim, very close to the statement that the demon in the synagogue on that first day said, what do you want with us, was the language there, here is what do you want with me, and there's a fascinating interplay, by the way, between the singular and the plural. In the first exorcism, it was a single demon and a man saying, what do you want with us, probably there indicating, talking about demons in general, and we talked about how that structure of what you want with us, the particular language of that, is a language of separation to the point of enmity, depending on context.

But here, we know this will be multiple demons, from what we'll find out later, and it's what you want with me. So, there's, I think, a fascinating continual interplay between the singular and the plural. Jesus, Son of the Most High God, again, there's this recognition that demons have had in Jesus and Mark regarding some relationship based on authority between Jesus and God. And here, we get this added little bit, swear to God that you won't torture me.

This swear-to-God reference is fascinating here, but is it pulling on an oath statement that the demon is asking Jesus to do? Another way you could work with this translation would be by God kind of idea, which is saying a recognition of the destruction is evident, but the destruction was supposed to be later or delayed, or they know the destruction may come at some point, and they're asking for time until the delay. There are a lot of different understandings of that, but they want Jesus to make a statement that they won't torture them, and this torture has the idea of judgment associated with it. I think it's fascinating that these demons have been tormenting this man, and now, in the presence of Jesus, they're worried that they might receive torment.

And then we get this number 8, for Jesus had said to him, come out of this man, you evil spirit. So, the response comes from Jesus' command for exorcism. So, notice, like before, there's no battle here.

This isn't a 12-round fight. This incredibly strong possession, because Mark has told us how strong this man is with all of these demons, because of the chains being broken, etc., has immediately, upon hearing that they must come out, the demons have immediately said, just don't send us to judgment. There's no question of if they're coming out or not.

And then we get something different. Then Jesus asked him, what is your name? Now, some have argued that this is an example of Jesus needing to know the name in order to have spiritual power and that in the ancient world, to know the name of one was to declare magical superiority. It doesn't fit the context, though, because they've already surrendered.

They've already been beaten. So, the question becomes, why does Jesus ask the question? Why are we hearing this? And if this goes with the assumption we've been working through on the Gospel of Mark, that Jesus doesn't do anything by accident, and we're working through that, he wants this name to be heard, witnessed, and known. So, Jesus asks, what is your name? My name is Legion, he replied, for we are many.

Now, this has sent lots of decisions on what is happening here. Is this Mark making an anti-Roman statement? You know, if the idea is Mark is writing to the church in

Rome, then Mark has adapted this story to insert Legion as the name, in other words, to make a subtle statement against Rome. The problem with that is twofold.

One, there's no other indication at all that this is about Rome. You don't have Roman elements. Two, Legion is a description of a military force, military number, of a large number.

Also, the term Legion with demons is used elsewhere in Second Temple Judaism, in some of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical documents. So, it's also not sort of a... it would have naturally been always associated with Rome. And so, I think the sense of it is we should see that this response, my name is Legion, is really a depiction of the numbers that were involved, not an overt statement against Rome.

God even said, my name is Legion, for we are many. And he begged Jesus again and again not to send him out of the area. One of the most fascinating pieces of this passage is when Jesus seems to relent or acquiesce to the request.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. Remember again, we're in a Gentile land. Pigs in a Jewish land would be considered unclean.

Pigs here are a form of livestock. The demons begged Jesus to send us among the pigs. Allow us to go into them.

Again, when we look, they were living in the tombs, and now they want to go to the pigs. There is even a similarity there of desiring to be in what was considered a culturally unclean setting. Perhaps an interesting connection there.

And he gave them permission. And the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about 2,000 in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

As I think through this, I ask the question of why he allowed them to go into the pigs. And I think the sense of it, one, is, without assuming a one-to-one relationship, the fact that close to 2,000 pigs all of a sudden changed in their behavior gives a visual picture of the number of demons that were inside this man tormenting him. So one of the things that this allows to happen is now those who are witnessing see, demonstrated for themselves, the infestation, if you will, of demons that were in this man. And it was in such a state that it was a picture of 2,000 pigs now gone chaotic.

Also, the fact that they rush off the cliff and drown themselves, and there's no indication that Jesus forced the drowning. I've heard some argue before that Jesus let them go to the pigs because they knew they would kill themselves. Rather, I think a better explanation of it is the fact that they ran down the steep bank in the lake

and were drowned, showing the self-destructive nature of demons on their host that they are harmful and they are chaotic and they are self-destructive.

This then would strengthen the picture of Jesus' authority, that Jesus' authority wasn't simply over a demon, but was over a legion of demons best represented by a chaotic herd of pigs that has now gone mad. Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this to the town and the countryside and the people went out to see what happened. And so, you know, this has gone out.

Understandably, this has been this huge moment. And then they came to Jesus. Notice the first thing is they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there, dressed and in his right mind.

And they were afraid. There are two things to note here—first, the complete restoration of this man.

He'd been in the tombs crying, cutting himself, breaking chains. Now he's sitting there, dressed and in his right mind. He's been completely restored.

The response also is that they were afraid. This is not unlike the response of the disciples that we just heard in the boat, where they looked at the storm and were greatly terrified. These town folk, again, these are Gentile town folk, who have come, recognize that there is a power here that is causing them fear.

But then, of course, those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man and told them about the pigs as well. There's a certain economic aspect probably to this. The pigs probably were part of the economy of the area.

Then, the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. And that's, of course, the sad turn of events: instead of seeing this man whom they could not control, who was possessed by, in essence, a herd of mad pigs, instead of celebrating and praising the Lord and being grateful, they begged Jesus to leave—not unlike the demons begging Jesus to allow them to go in the pigs.

Now, these town folk are begging Jesus. In their mind, there must have been this powerful, unsettling sorcerer that had come in, and they would rather not have him around, even though he had restored this man to his right mind. And so, you get this initial response to Jesus as being very negative.

As he was getting into the boat. So again, Jesus is leaving. They want him to leave, and he is.

The man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with them, which would make sense. How could you not? But Jesus did not let him, but said, go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you. Interesting enough, so you have this, almost probably this first Gentile now wanting to follow Jesus.

And Jesus tells him, no, he can't. But he doesn't tell him to be silent. In Mark, frequently, there are commands to be silent, to tell no one, or to go to the religious leaders.

There's evidence of what happens, that you can be restored, etc. Here, the exact opposite happens. He says, go and tell everyone what the Lord has done.

In some ways, this anticipates, I think, the Gentile mission. Here's this Gentile who has been restored, and Jesus is telling him to go tell people. Indeed, when we come back to this area, the next time Jesus comes to Decapolis, there will be a fervor that will approach him.

He will be expected to heal, and he will be speaking, and there will be followers of it. To some extent, we even get later on in Mark 7:31, 8:10; we get perhaps hints of the success of this man telling everybody what the Lord has done, that the seed has indeed been planted. Next time, we'll pick up with the rest of Mark, chapter 5, as we continue to look at the public ministry and the authoritative works of Jesus.

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