

A Struggle with Holiness

Can you imagine what it must have been like to live in the country of the Gerasenes (ESV)? Especially if you were a fisherman who had to go to the sea near the tombs every day? According to **Mark 5:1-20**, there was a man possessed by an unclean spirit with super human strength that made himself a nuisance. Who knows what kind of violence he had perpetrated. Clearly he annoyed the people because they had apparently tried to bind and shackle him, but he kept breaking loose. He wandered about crying out, cutting himself. Do you think the residents of the region wanted something done about him?

Enter Jesus.

In **Mark 5:1**, Jesus came to the port of the Gerasenes and the man with the unclean spirit came out to Him. The long and short of it is Jesus healed the man, casting out the spirit, or I should say spirits, for they were Legion. You would think the people of the Gerasenes would have been ecstatic. You would think they would have welcomed Jesus into their region the same way the Samaritans of **John 4** did. But they didn't. Why not?

When Jesus cast out the spirits, He let them go into a nearby herd of pigs that immediately rushed down a steep bank and drowned in the sea. When the locals heard the entire story, instead of being excited the man was healed, they were afraid of Jesus.

This demonstrates the struggle with holiness many of us face. No doubt, every one of us have aspects of our lives we want God to clean up. We want forgiveness for each of our sins? We beg God to take our guilt away. Further, there are some temptations we want to get rid of. How many times have we asked God to remove one temptation or another? I can imagine the people of the Gerasenes had begged God to do something about the man with the unclean spirits. But when He did, they were afraid because of what happened to their pigs.

And that is the struggle. I want holiness, but often I want it on my terms. How about you? It is almost like the Gerasenes were saying, "God, take away our problems, but save our pigs." And I think I sometimes say the same thing. "God, take away the sins I don't like, but save the things I do like." Do you ever do that?

"God, take away my arrogance, but save my flesh from thorns." "God, take away my drunkenness, but save the parties with my friends." "God, take away my struggle with pornography, but save the tv shows I like even though they have sex scenes and immodesty." "God, take away my outbursts of wrath, but save my rights." "God, take away my marriage problems, but save my _____ (fill in the blank with whatever is appropriate: my man-cave, my sewing den, my golf game, my credit card purchases, my job, my control, my ability to blame others, etc.)."

Are you getting the point? The Gerasenes would rather have had an unclean spirit in their midst than go without their pigs. The pursuit of holiness often cuts deeper than we initially thought. Rather than taking a Gerasene approach and being afraid of Jesus when He slaughters our pigs, we need to pray, "Lord get rid of my pigs and unclean spirit; do whatever it takes to make me clean and holy. Thank you."