

“Jesus’s Mercy Towards the Lost”

Mark 5:1-43

Pastor Jacob Hanson

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Opening Prayer

Who is the most hopeless person you know? Who is it that, for whatever reason, is completely beyond the pale, beyond healing, beyond help, totally at the end? Such questions might prompt us to think about family members or friends who are completely engulfed in addiction. Drugs, alcohol, fast living, or money consume their lives to the destruction of all else. Such questions might also bring to mind those who are medically doomed. Visions of hospice halls or cancer clinics or dialysis wards may come. You may think of the man or woman who has done such evil that they will never again be free. Tried and convicted for their horrific actions, they will spend the rest of their miserable lives in a cell. Or maybe, to bring it even closer to home for many, you might think of the person, maybe even yourself, who is just plain old lost. On the outside everything seems fine, but inside it is dark and cold and hopeless. All of these people, Beloved, define the word lost. This morning’s scriptures from Mark five should fill us with pause, and encouragement, for even the most lost in any of these categories can be found... can live again by His mercy.

The first twenty verses of Mark five are about the Gerasene Demoniac. This was a man who, by all accounts, was utterly and hopelessly lost. In the course of Jesus’s ministry in His home area, He instructs the disciples that they should go to the other side of the sea of Galilee. They hop in a boat, and they sail from one end to the other, landing on the eastern side of the sea. The eastern side of the sea of Galilee was sparsely populated, a rural area, that included many more Gentiles and non-Jewish influences. We can see evidence of this since there is the large herd of swine grazing nearby. This jaunt is different than many others for Jesus. He isn’t speaking here to Jews, He doesn’t teach an incredible message, and He leaves the area rather quickly. His one order of business is this demon possessed man who lives in the tombs. The most hopeless of hopeless cases, Jesus has come to save this utterly lost man.

We could spend many weeks looking at this account, and we could talk endlessly about demon possession. In our post-enlightenment world, we often are biased

against talking about anything spiritual. Many speculate that instances like this in scripture are where Jesus heals some kind of mental illness. It is a great tactic by Satan, to have the western world pretend like spiritual forces don't exist. Letting scripture speak for itself, it is clear that Jesus really does cast out demons. Because it is something that sticks in people's minds, it is worth noting how a person is protected from becoming demon possessed, if only so that none of us walk away frightened (unless it is warranted) this morning. If the Lord dwells within you, then there is no room for demons. You cannot be demon possessed if Christ rules you, because He is infinitely greater than any created thing. With that note hopefully giving you a little peace, going back to the account shows just how merciful Christ really is. Jesus has come to this side of the sea of Galilee only to save this lost man.

“When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him... Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and shouting with a loud voice, he said, ‘What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!’” The demons know what most everyone else can't comprehend, that Jesus is Lord. Jesus's order of business, it turns out, does involve the demons. He casts them out, freeing the man of his plight. The demons, with Jesus's permission (for again, He is infinitely greater than them) rush into a huge herd of pigs and drown themselves in the sea. The pig herders upon seeing all this, go and bring out all of the nearby townsfolk they can find. All who arrive see something absolutely astonishing. The most lost man they had probably ever known, this formerly demon possessed man who would cut himself constantly with rocks and stones, who lived in the tombs and howled day and night, was sitting at Jesus's feet in his right mind.

This is terrifying to the people, who probably hadn't even heard who Jesus was. A man shows up, frees the terrifying demon-possessed hermit who lives in the tombs, and two thousand pigs are inhabited with the demons and thus drown. Everything about this screams power and might, and they beg Jesus to leave out of their terror. Jesus, who hadn't come to preach to them, gets ready to leave. The only person who wants to come with, who is willing to follow Jesus, is the former demoniac. He pleads with Jesus to be allowed to come with, but instead Jesus has a mission field ready for him. “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” The man did as Jesus

told, and went and shared the Lord's mercy with others. In many ways, this was telling of the Lord's mercy not only on this one lost man, but to all those who he would come in contact with in his home region. The Lord uses those who have received mercy to further extend His mercy to others Beloved.

I want you to conjure up in your mind what it would have been like for this man's parents when he returned home. Their son, who was utterly lost to them, who had almost certainly found his way into demon possession by his own hands, had been given the greatest mercy possible and had returned whole. Imagine the account that would have followed for the next ten generations of this man's family, of how the Lord had mercy on him... and on them. Similarly, if you have ever seen such mercy or experienced it yourself, it would be good to connect that to this man's account. The Lord still pulls out of the pit the most lost folks possible even today, out of His mercy. The Lord cares for the lost who have wandered away Beloved, and they are always welcomed home if they will hear His call. That is one type of lost individual who receives mercy in Mark 5. There are two more. The woman with the hemorrhage and the young girl who was dead. Both too receive His mercy.

In verses 21-34 Jesus returns back to the western side of the sea of Galilee. When He gets there, immediately a crowd gathers, and a synagogue official named Jairus begins pleading with Jesus to heal his young daughter of twelve years of age. Jesus goes with Jairus, but on the way there a woman who had been suffering with a bleeding condition for twelve years comes and touches the fringe of His cloak, surmising that if she can but do that then she would be healed. It is worth telling, Beloved, that this woman with her condition would have been ritually impure by Jewish law. It wasn't a sinful thing, but it did keep her from entering the temple. Leviticus 15:25-27 mandated that she couldn't enter to worship in the temple until her bleeding had ceased, and it also mandated that everyone who touched her would be ritually impure for the entire day and would have to ritually bathe to be ceremonially cleansed. In a world ruled by ritualistic Pharisees, this meant that she would have been a spiritual outcast, in need of saving from her affliction. This woman, Beloved, is lost in a different way... she is alone. That all changes when she touches Jesus's cloak.

The moment she touches the fringe of Jesus's tassel, the very edge of His cloak, she is healed. She feels herself cured internally. Jesus, knowing full well what

was going on, calls out to the crowd, asking who it was who touched Him. When the woman sheepishly steps forward, He proclaims openly what has already happened in her heart. “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.” The woman who was lost physically and in several ways spiritually was mercifully found. She not only could once again enter the temple, but had also been given direct access to the eternal kingdom by her Creator. At the height of this powerful moment, things take a turn once again. Jairus’s friends come and tell grim news, that his daughter had died. In the greatest showing of mercy and healing yet, Jesus states to them as they cry out “Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep.” While the crowd has no concept of what He is talking about, Jesus knows that in a moment He will raise this little girl from the dead.

We know how the chapter ends, gloriously Jesus does for Jairus that which is unthinkable. He brings his daughter back from the dead. She who was lost, dead in fact, beyond saving, was saved by the Almighty in His mercy. Beloved, this is the perfect account for us to end on this morning, because it shows God’s wonderful mercy in saving the lost, those who were formerly dead. Maybe you already guessed where I was going with this, but you and I have something in common with all three of these individuals. Once, you and I were horribly lost. We were full of wickedness and sin. We were in the same boat as the demoniac until Jesus came and unblinded us, loosed us, freed us, and made us whole. Like him, we too are now sent out to share the good news of what the Lord has done for us. Like the lady with the bleeding ailment, we were once unclean. Unable to enter the temple, unable to be holy, unable to ever be cured of that which cursed us... until Christ healed us by faith. Touching just the hem of His cloak, we have had our uncleanness removed from us completely. You and I, by His mercy, now have full access to the Lord. Like the child who had died, we too were once dead Beloved. Without hope, lost, and yet in the Lord’s eyes we were anything but. By His almighty power, by His mercy, we are raised from the dead. What joy there is in God’s mercy, in His salvation! There is one last thing to talk about yet this morning before we depart. Perhaps you have guessed this as well. Beloved, if these three folks are not beyond saving, if you and I are not beyond saving, then we should recognize that God’s mercy can also extend to the lost around us.

I asked you at the beginning of the sermon to think about those who are the most lost. The people who are horrifically lost in sin, those who are lost medically or

financially or morally, and those who are at the edge of death. Beloved, none are beyond saving for the Lord. Jesus's power over life and death, and His immense mercy, ensures that there is a chance for even the most heartbrokenly lost. Your son or daughter or father or mother or friend or coworker who is lost in sin, they are not without hope so long as Christ reigns. Keep them in your prayers regularly, reach out when you have the chance, but in those times where you wonder don't forget that Jesus still loves them. He would travel the world over for them, and who knows what He can do? If the demoniac can be cured, why not them? Don't lose hope. For those who feel spiritually unclean, filled with regret or anguish or pain that keeps them outside, there is hope. They are not lost forever, just as the woman was not lost. Perhaps there are some of you who feel this way, that you are not worthy or that you cannot be loved by Christ because of your past. Take courage, for Christ's power overcomes any and all impurity. If you but touch the hem of His cloak, coming to Him in faith, He will heal you and make you whole. Praise God that there is hope even for those with a difficult past! Finally, for those who we fear will die in their sins, for those we grieve over, recognize that Christ's power is greater even than the spiritually dead. There is nobody without hope so long as Jesus reigns. Beloved, praise God for His mercy towards us. Praise the Lord that those who seem lost to human eyes are not so lost when it comes to Christ and His almighty mercy. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer