Power over earth and enemies

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[0:00] So, continuing on our series in Matthew, tonight's reading will be from Mark chapter 4,! verses 35, on to chapter 5, verse 20. And that can be found on page 839 of the Blue Church Bibles, which you should find just under the seats in front of you. Mark chapter 4, verse 35. On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, let us go across to the other side.

And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was, and other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day, among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him, and crying out with a loud voice, he said, what have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the most high God?
I adjure you by God, do not torment me. For he was saying to him, come out of the man, you unclean spirit. And Jesus asked him, what is your name? He replied, my name is Legion, for we are many.
And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, send us to the pigs, let us enter them. So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirit came out and entered the pigs, and the herd numbering about 2,000 rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea. The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country, and people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the Legion, sitting there clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from the region.
As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him, but said to him, go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you. And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And everyone marveled. Let's pray to the Lord for understanding and wisdom as we contemplate his word.
[3:28] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word that preaches strongly of your power to save and reveals your character through the face of Christ your Son. Help us to grasp new depths of who you are tonight, Lord, as we read your gospel and contemplate its meaning. In the name of your most Holy Son, we pray. Amen. Who are you? It might be a bit of a direct question to ask someone the first time you meet them. It's really a rather important question to ask all the same. Knowing who someone is is the foundation of any lasting, meaningful relationship. Who is the person sitting next to you? How would you go about answering that question? Maybe they're family or a friend. Maybe you would simply call them a brother or sister in Christ. But is that the extent of the answer? When I first met Joe Hall, I had only very recently come to faith. I came to Bon Accord seeking to know more about Christ because I knew enough about the gospel to know that really I knew next to

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nothing. So my very first visit, I came up to Joe after the service. Why? Because I knew that he was a minister. If you're looking for someone to educate you about Christ, a minister is probably the first person you would look to. But I was also terrified because to me, someone who had scarcely seen the inside of a church at that point in my life, a minister was a very foreign concept. Would he be stern or harsh? Would he be dismayed at my lack of knowledge or the life of sin I had led up to that point? Would he even have the time for me? Fast forward four years, safe to say I don't think Joe could scare me now if he tried, save maybe asking me to preach a service. But that's besides the point. Now that I know who he really is, we have a fellowship that can stand tests and uncertainty. And that little story is a piece of what tonight's passage is preaching to us about Christ. Mark's gospel, as we've been discussing in this series, addresses the identity of Christ, who he is, and then what he came to do.

We heard last week about the meaning of the parable of the sower and how different people will respond to the word. In tonight's passage, we're going to see people's response to Christ himself, the living word, is similarly dividing, sorting individuals according to what is in their heart.
The passage begins at the start of a series of four miracles, each of which help to demonstrate aspects of who Christ is. We'll be covering the first two of these miracles, which demonstrate primarily aspects of Christ's authority. Mark, who is known for a punchier writing style than most of the other gospels, slows right down to describe a host of details in these miracles. So let's waste no further time in beginning to unpack them. We begin at the end of a very long day of teaching parables.
In verse 35, we learn that it is evening and Christ says, let's go to the other side of the lake. Verse 37 describes a storm that besets them, calling it great with waves breaking into the boat so that the boat was already filling. It's important to note here that many of the disciples were experienced fishermen with extensive experience sailing the Sea of Galilee, which was known for storms just like this one. So these disciples, what they're facing here is no slight rain or mild waves.
It's enough to make men used to storms and sailing fear for their very lives. Contrasting their fear is Jesus, who we learn in verse 38, is asleep in the stern on a cushion. The disciples wake Christ and say to him, do you not care that we're perishing? You could debate on how harsh this line of questioning would have been, whether the disciples were appealing to Christ to save them or admonishing him for sleeping through a threat to all of their lives. But given the response to the miracle Christ performs, I would argue the latter. They likely are thinking they'll wake him for a mere extra pair of hands to bail water out of their fastly sinking ship. But that is not in any way how Christ acts to save them. Verse 39, Christ wakes up from his sleep. He doesn't reach for a bucket or anything else.
[7:33] He speaks. Specifically, he rebukes the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still. And so it was. Brothers and sisters, understand the significance of this. His word is the power he uses to subject the natural world to his will. If you know your Bible, there's only one figure that has that power, and that is God.

There are comparisons right back to Genesis 1 that can be made, where God, by his word, orders the universe to take form, commanding waters, land, and sky to arrange themselves like Christ has just done here.
We heard in Psalm 107 of the praise to be offered to God for his calming of the storms and waves. These are, in the words of the Psalm, the Lord's great deeds performed now here by his Son.
So, Christ assaulted the storm. He turns to his disciples and says, verse 40, Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? This, friends, is a truly gentle reproach to the men who just moments ago tore him from his rest, desperate and afraid. Notice what Christ reprimands also, not their lack of knowledge, but their fear. The disciples have seen Jesus work miracles and preach with authority, but they do not yet understand the extent of these things. These men and their time and place are struggling to understand Christ's identity, who he is. We'll see later in Mark that it's only by miracles that men can understand Christ truly, but for now, the disciples cannot have abiding faith in someone they simply don't know. So, fear is natural. Verse 41 tells us they were filled with a great fear on seeing the miracle, almost assuredly greater than the fear they felt of the storm, which didn't rate such a mention. The disciples, while lacking full understanding of who Christ is at this moment, recognize at least that his power exceeds even the greatest natural forces the world has to offer. Friends, what was a cause of fear for the disciples then is a blessed reminder for us now.

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Christ is stronger than any natural forces that we'll encounter in our lives, anything we might struggle against. When these kinds of forces feel overwhelming to us, we need not be afraid, for Christ is far greater. Almost everyone in this passage, including the disciples, feel fear seeing Christ in his earthly glory and the power of his word, but they are invited by Christ here to turn from that fear to faith in him. It is the alternative the disciples must consider and that we must consider today if we find ourselves buried under material concerns and fear. With a Savior as powerful as Christ, as potent and ready to come to the rescue of his followers, why should we be afraid? If there are storms raging in your lives, friends, Christ can see you through them with but his word alone.
Continuing in verse 41, we read that the disciples say to one another, spurred by Christ's saving miracle, who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? Brothers and sisters, that is really the question worth asking. The disciples may be afraid, but here we see that the path that will lead them to understanding. Despite their fears, they want to know who Christ is. And there's only really one answer to that question, the answer Mark has stressed at every turn in the account of these miracles.
[11:01] Christ, proven by his immense power, is truly God, come to dwell among his people in a way he has never done before. As unbelievable as that would have seemed to the disciples then, and perhaps even to some of those present tonight, Christ and his word has made it plain. Our second miracle begins in Mark chapter 5. Following on from the calming of the storm, Jesus and his disciples make land on the other side of the lake and immediately are beset by another trial. It's hard not to sympathize greatly with the disciples for what they must have been feeling at this point, very much out of the storm and into the maelstrom. But the reactions and perspectives take a back seat for a minute as the narrative focuses right in on one Gentile man possessed by a demon.
Verses 3 to 5 describe in gruesome detail the life this man lived while afflicted. Among the tombs, present with the dead and not the living. Friends, family, and all companionship are a distant memory. Impossible and wild strength that led to him breaking chains and other bindings. The word used for subdue here in the Greek often is used to describe the taming of animals.

The man's sense and dignity are completely gone from him. And what state did all this render him in? Howling in the night, cutting himself, suffering, isolation, indignity, and great pains that cause one to cry out in anguish. While the storm on the lake showed Christ's authority over the powers of nature, the things possessing this man are of the spiritual world.
And much like the disciples being tossed around out on the lake, this possessed man is powerless to save himself. Neither can anyone else help him. No one can even keep him chained down to a rock.
Much like we have seen before in the Gospel of Mark, the unclean spirit immediately recognizes Jesus and his authority over it. It makes this man run towards Christ as he makes land and falls at his feet adjuring Jesus by God to not torment him. Jesus, who up until this point in the Gospel, silence to any demon that spoke of him or his identity as the Son of God, instead asks the spirit for a name.
Verse 9, the spirit answers, My name is Legion, for we are many. Now a legion was a large group of Roman soldiers, some 5,600 men strong.
[13:25] This spirit, or collection of spirits, carries with it a small army strength, with a name that compares them to the greatest strength of the armies of the strongest nation on the earth at that time. In the Gospel of John, at several points, we see Christ refer to Satan as the ruler of this earth. He has power in the world of flesh and blood, and that power is, right here, being brought to bear. A bulwark of Satan's forces, a legion, placed into Christ's path.

The best attempt that could be made to frustrate God's plans for mankind's salvation. So when we see this legion brought low so easily, understand the power and authority Christ is demonstrating over evil. It's complete, it is overwhelming, greater than the strength of the armies of the spiritual enemies of God. A spiritual war is taking place in these passages, and Christ wins it single-handedly by his defined authority. Truthfully, there was never a contest.
I think that can be significant for us, because sometimes our culture can say, in battles between good and evil, there's always a fighting chance on both sides. But when true goodness graces the battlefield and the Son of God, the battle ends before it's even begun. Another storm quelled.
Continuing in verses 10 to 13, we see the spirits beg not to be sent out of the country, but instead into a nearby great herd of pigs. Christ permits this, and the herd stampedes off a cliff and plummets to their death. Now, as we see in the next few verses, the man is immediately by this

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action restored to his right senses. What was utterly impossible for every agent that could come to the man's aid before that hour? Christ achieves through, again, his word. What a blessing it is to know the power of the Lord finds no contest or challenge from any spiritual power on earth or in the heavens. There is no force or contest that Christ faced in his earthly ministry that he did not have authority over, that he could not defeat. If this was true then, brothers and sisters, is it not true now? I think it can be very easy for us to forget this, that we can let it slip from our minds, that we stand in the protection of our most powerful God, particularly when we're confronted by difficult challenges or severe pains.
The first thing we can assume is either that we're helpless and on our own, or that if any deliverance will come, it will be through our own actions. But the word tells us that we have a savior with power and authority over all the world and powers within it, who has a love for us and a will to save us.
[16:02] Why not then turn to him? Those of you here tonight, I know many have suffered through a myriad of problems. I know many of you have known the joy of turning to Christ amid that suffering and found rest.

To those who haven't or those who are struggling with continuing to turn to him, know that he is as powerful and willing to save now as he has ever been. As your fears may be cast aside when you're protected by his strength, so too are the dangers and concerns of this world made small, even those that seem enormous and incalculable to us. Continuing on, verse 14 tells us of a group of herdsmen, seeing the miracle, fled and gathered others from the region, and they returned to find this previously possessed man who wailed throughout the countryside, demonstrated supernatural strength, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed in his right mind. If we look back to verses 3 to 5, the context clues tells us that this demon-possessed man was not a new problem for the area.
It says no one could bind him anymore. No one had the strength to subdue him. Friends, how many must have tried until the men and the women living in Gerasene exhausted all options? The man was a blight on the region for long enough to be a known quantity. Can you imagine that? This man would have inspired fear and horror. Would you have felt safe to walk the road in this region, even in the day, never mind at night?
But here he is, restored, renewed, and saved. Now we see in this passage two groups of people with two responses to Christ that begin with understandable fear. First, the disciples who we discussed.
Christ, greater than the storm, is a marvel to them, a wonder. If you remember what they asked, who then is this? The disciples are afraid, yes, but they do not cease to follow Christ due to that fear.
[18:03] Let us learn from them, friends. When we face fear in our lives, let us persevere. Walking the path of a Christian will be scary at times. We are mercifully blessed to live in a time and a place where we can preach Christ without fear for our lives, but it's inevitable that fear will still come.

Fears of judgment, ostracism, or the heartache of losing connection with friends and family. Take your pick. But Christ is gentle with your fear, patient as we saw earlier in the passage, yet still we are called to walk with him. Disciples have yet to have revealed to them the full identity of Christ. So how blessed are we then to know that Christ's love for his followers was so great they would interpose his life between them and God's own wrath. With such a loving and powerful savior, don't our fears become so small? Then we have the crowd from Gerasene. They are terrified.
Jesus has just saved the man who lived among the tombs, yes, but in so doing demonstrates his great power and authority. Christ is shown to be unlike anything they have ever seen, and so they beg him to leave. We can't definitively know the exact reason the crowd rejects Christ, but most likely is the sheer impact of witnessing this miracle in the first place, of encountering a man with such life-altering power that Christ has demonstrated. It might make you question why the disciples respond with wonder and a building up of faith, while the Gerasene crowd respond just as powerfully, but in the complete opposite direction, begging Christ to leave the region.
But friends, remember last week the parable of the sower. The word of God is scattered among people, and it takes root in those it will and does not in those it will not by God's design. People are divided by the word of God and separated out by the response to it. Well, Christ is the living word. He is separating out the people by his work. So what can we take from this? Primarily, Christ and the word are intertwined. The word is there to glorify him, and we see the connected effect of both. But in our lives, can we concern ourselves with the fact that while the word will cause some to

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accept and others to reject, so too will works of faith carried out by those who are faithful.
Let me be absolutely clear. I don't expect any of you to leave here and perform miracles on your way home. If you do, please come back and let me know. But when you act as Christ would in your life, centering God's will in your actions, what do you think the response of the world will be? [20:50] I think sometimes we might convince ourselves that it's just what the world calls controversial that will catch backlash. But you'll find just as many in the world that will reject kindness or care if they know it is coming from a heart that worships God. Because ultimately, brothers and sisters, the response of others will always be shaped by who God reveals himself to and who he does not.

So take heart when someone rejects you for a good work done faithfully, and do not do those works seeking the praise of others. Trust God is working in it all, revealing himself as he chooses to.
And speaking of men who God has revealed his face to, in verse 18, we see as Jesus is getting into the boat to leave, this previously possessed man begs not that Christ will stay, but that the man can go with him. This man has been saved, given his life back, and having been saved, he wants nothing more than to give that life to Christ. It's an admirable offer, and it demonstrates this man sees Christ more truly than anyone in our passage tonight. But Christ has other plans. He does not permit the man to come with him, but instead sends him back to the city he comes from to tell of all the good the Lord has done for him.
The man returns to where he has come from, a place called the Decapolis, that's the gathering point of ten confederated cities under Roman rule. And verse 20 reads, he began to proclaim how much Jesus has done for him, and everyone marveled. This man, saved by God through his son, was not just saved because God is merciful, but because he had purpose for him, partnered work he wanted this man to partake in. He went over and above the task Christ gave him, preaching to everyone he can find, not just friends and family. See here a final demonstration of the power of God's word. The impact that has on this man, giving him courage to preach in a way that makes those around him marvel at his words. Can we not lay claim to that same bravery tonight? Friends, as this man was delivered from earthly suffering in his possession, have we not been delivered from so much more, from our sin? Are we not aware that God has given us every good thing through Christ? This man went into a pagan heartland and preached without discrimination or reservation. Why? Because a God far more powerful than any threat he could ever face had saved him and called on him to tell others of that act of salvation. So when we feel fear in our context, understandable as that is, can we not turn from that fear to faith in Christ with confidence and gladness? Can we not preach Christ knowing he's called us to do it? He has authority and power to accomplish his will through that work, even if we find our contributions so often flawed and faltering.
As well as this encouraging story, Mark leaves us with a final signpost to who Christ is before the account of these two miracles ends.
[23:47] Christ instructs the man to tell of all the Lord has done for him, referring to God. But the man speaks of what Christ himself has done. The man has demonstrated and who he has chosen to preach of that he understands the great and simple truth at the heart of the gospel. Christ is the Lord, he is God, and he's powerful to save. Brothers and sisters, if there is one thing I can draw your attention to just before we close, note this last point. A people sought to reject the gospel in Gerasene. Despite plenty of evidence sitting right in front of them at the feet of an effective savior, they begged him to leave. And because one man was saved from death and brought to faith, the miracle of the gospel went out anyway. Never doubt what God can do with you when you recognize how much you owe him, who he is, and how powerful he is in his authority.

Let us rejoice to know we have a savior with power and authority over all. With that, let us pray to God, thanking him for the power with which he protects his people and our preservation amid a world subject to his authority. Heavenly Father, thank you for how you have demonstrated divine authority and truly awesome power through your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. May we all live courageously, preaching your word freely, knowing we stand under the protection of your strength and knowing that you are a loving and gentle God, revealed through our savior, who is merciful to sinners and quick to forgive our weakness. In Christ's name and for his glory we pray. Amen.

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