

FOLLOW ME

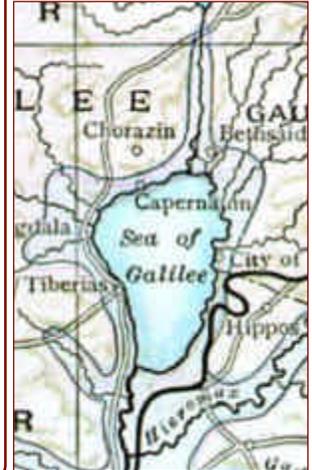
LESSON SEVEN: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 5



FAST FACTS

- Jesus exorcised demons from a demoniac in Gerasa.
- The demons were allowed to enter a herd of 2,000 swine, which then ran into the water and drowned.
- Jairus, the ruler of a local synagogue, asked Jesus to heal his daughter.
- Before Jesus reached Jairus' daughter, a woman was healed from a flow of blood by touching Jesus' garment.
- Jesus praised the faith of the woman who reached out to Him for healing.
- When Jairus' daughter died before Jesus could reach her, Jesus said she was only sleeping and then raised her.

MAP



MARK 5:1-20

St. Mark begins this chapter with a description of Jesus exorcising demons from a man in Gerasa. Notice the desperation of the demoniac: he was so wretched, and so threatening to himself and others, that he had been futilely bound with chains in the tombs outside town. His condition teaches us about the goal of demons: they torment humanity, attempting to damage the image of God in each person (the destructiveness of the demons is also shown in their desire to drown the herd of swine (vv. 12-13)).

The demons responded to Jesus much like the demon in chapter one did: they acknowledged Jesus' authority over them (even using the Gentile phrase, "Son of the Most High God," which the Gentile Gerasenes — and St. Mark's Gentile Roman audience — would have recognized as acknowledging Jesus' status and authority), and begged Him not to destroy them. Jesus did not at that time send them to eternal torment — which St. Mark refers to simply as another country (vs. 10), but St. Luke refers to as "the abyss" (8:31) — but he did compassionately free the man from their power (vs. 19).

We should pay attention to the response of the Gerasenes: after seeing Jesus' power, they begged Him to leave the area. Why? Some commentators point out that the reaction is similar to that of the Pharisees in chapter three: they were afraid of Jesus, because they refused to acknowledge that His power and authority were evidence of His deity. Other commentators point out that the Gerasenes also had a selfish reason for wanting Jesus

IT'S IN THE BIBLE...

We are not sure of the exact location of where Mark 5:1-20 occurred. The oldest and most reliable manuscripts have *Gerasa*, thirty-five miles from the Sea of Galilee. St. Matthew mentions the location as *Gadara*, a city six miles south-east of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:28; the NKJV also gives this name in Mark 5:1 and Luke 8:28). Later copyists of the Gospels whose work was translated in the KJV give the name as *Gergesa*, which corresponds with ruins on the eastern shore of Galilee.

IT'S IN THE BIBLE...

Demons control those whom they possess. We might think that we are superior to the demoniac because we are not controlled by demons. The Holy Apostle Paul, however, asks, "Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness" (Romans 6:16)? He therefore reminds us,

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification. (v. 17-19)

You need to ask yourself: am I a slave of sin, or of righteousness?

to leave: they were afraid that He would perform other miracles that might cause them to lose property or money, just as they lost money when the swine were destroyed. Do we Christians, who have experienced God's goodness and power, still value our money and possessions more than we value Him?

TIME TRAVEL

The Decapolis was a region of ten cities southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Greek traders and immigrants had settled in the region several centuries earlier, and thus Jews were in the minority. Many of the citizens of the Decapolis became followers of Jesus (see Matthew 4:25).

to prostrate himself before Jesus and ask for His help.

Jesus, even after hearing that Jairus' daughter was dead, told Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe" (vs. 36), and later commented that the girl "is not dead but sleeping" (vs. 39). Christ's exhortation

is central to the funeral services of the Orthodox Church, where we proclaim our belief that the dead have not ceased to exist, but have simply "reposed" and are resting in Christ until the Day of Resurrection. It is for this reason that in the *Panikhida* service we frequently pray, "Give rest, O Lord, to the soul of Thy servant," and in the burial service of the Western Rite we pray of the dead, "Rest perpetual grant to them, O Lord."

MARK 5:21-24, 35-43

St. Mark next describes Jesus' encounter with Jairus, the leader of a synagogue. If you remember that the Pharisees — with whom the leaders of most synagogues were affiliated — were bitterly opposed to Jesus, you will realize what an act of courageous faith it took for Jairus

said, 'trembling'); and He caused her to be of good courage, and together with health of body, He gave her also other provisions for her journey, in that He said, 'Go in peace.'"

This story provides a powerful example of faith. The fifth century saint Peter Chrysologus writes, "In faith she touches God. With her hand she touches His garment, knowing both healing and forgiveness may be bestowed...In an instant, faith cures where human skill had failed through twelve years." This story emphasizes the Orthodox understanding of *synergy* (which comes from the Greek words *syn*, meaning "same, together," and *ergos*, meaning "work"): the Christian life involves actively cooperating with the grace of God. Jesus did not simply heal an unfortunate woman who passively sat on the side of the road — He healed the woman when she reached out to Him in faith.

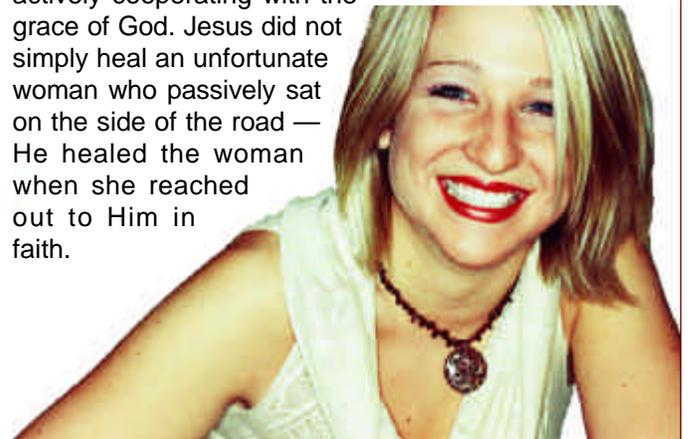
MARK 5:25-34

The story of the woman with a flow of blood teaches us a great deal about God's love for us, and the power of faith. The woman's continual menstruation was not only a physical problem (as serious as this was), but was also a religious matter: according to the Law, a menstruating woman was ritually unclean, meaning that this woman was religiously unclean for *twelve* years. Jesus showed His love not only by restoring her health, but by restoring her place in the community. St. John Chrysostom says, "For this cause He brought her forward, and proclaimed her praise, and cast out her fear, (for 'she came,' it is

OUR FAITH TEACHES

The Greek word for "well" in verse 34, *sozo*, also refers to salvation, which in the Orthodox Church we understand to mean being restored to spiritual and physical wholeness. Fr. Stanley Harakas explains:

This healing vision of God at work in the world is...inclusive. It speaks primarily to the religious, the spiritual and the moral dimensions of life. But not exclusively so. Being inclusive, it forms a matrix of concern which includes every aspect of life, restoring and healing it toward the transfigured life which is fully in communion with God and His creation.



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- How would I have reacted if I had seen Jesus exorcise the demons in Gerasa? What is it about my relationship with God that would make my reaction different from that of the Gerasenes?
- How can my faith be like that of the woman healed from the flow of blood?
- Why did Jesus tell Jairus to "not fear, only believe?" How can I follow Jesus' command when there are things in my life that cause me to be afraid?

