

# RESISTING THE MOB & ITS LEADER

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During the past four Sundays, we have taken a look at a few of Jesus' miracles as they appear in Mark, Chapters 5 and 6. And each one not only demonstrates His amazing power as the Son of God, but they also show us that we need to come near to Him in order to meet our needs—and how Jesus will meet those needs if we will just lay down our burdens at the Savior's feet. This morning, I want us to consider another miracle that actually appears earlier than the others. This miracle is just so very relevant today—particularly in light of the recent events in Charlottesville where Neo-Nazis and other miscreants clashed with protestors. The unfortunate thing is that there is just so much hate displayed on both sides. It's almost like an evil cloud descended on all of those in that mob of people and rained anger and violence and evil all over them. And they so eagerly soaked it all up and let that hatred fill their very souls. It is as if they all became demonically possessed—and in a sense, maybe they were, because the only one left smiling is Satan as he sows nothing but his chaos and confusion all over the entire scene—a scene that riot control police appear helpless to address.

So, what is the miracle that is so relevant to all of this? Well, it is found at the very beginning of Mark, Chapter 5. For our purposes this morning, I am going to read from *Today's English Version* because I think it puts this particular narrative into today's perspective a bit better than the rest—notice how it focuses upon the “**mob**” mentality, and just how evil it really is. It's a rather long narrative, but one well worth reading—here is what verses 1-17 have to say to us: <sup>1</sup> Jesus and his disciples arrived on the other side of Lake Galilee, in the territory of Gerasa. <sup>2</sup> As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, he was met by a man who came out of the burial caves there. This man had an evil spirit in him <sup>3</sup> and lived among the tombs. Nobody could keep him tied with chains any more; <sup>4</sup> many times his feet and his hands had been tied, but every time he broke the chains and smashed the irons on his feet. He was too strong for anyone to control him. <sup>5</sup> Day and night he wandered among the tombs and through the hills, screaming and cutting himself with stones. <sup>6</sup> He was some distance away when he saw Jesus; so he ran, fell on his knees before him, <sup>7</sup> and screamed in a loud voice, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? For God's sake, I beg you, don't punish me!" <sup>8</sup> (He said this because Jesus was saying, "Evil spirit, come out of this man!") <sup>9</sup> So Jesus asked him, "What is your name!" The man answered, "My name is 'Mob'—there are so many of us!" <sup>10</sup> And he kept begging Jesus not to send the evil spirits out of that region. <sup>11</sup> There was a large herd of pigs near by, feeding on a hillside. <sup>12</sup> So the spirits begged Jesus, "Send us to the pigs, and let us go into them." <sup>13</sup> He let them go, and the evil spirits

went out of the man and entered the pigs. The whole herd—about two thousand pigs in all—rushed down the side of the cliff into the lake and was drowned. <sup>14</sup> The men who had been taking care of the pigs ran away and spread the news in the town and among the farms. People went out to see what had happened, <sup>15</sup> and when they came to Jesus, they saw the man who used to have the mob of demons in him. He was sitting there, clothed and in his right mind; and they were all afraid. <sup>16</sup> Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the man with the demons, and about the pigs. <sup>17</sup> So they asked Jesus to leave their territory. Mark 5:1-17 (TEV)

To modern ears, this story may seem far-fetched. So-called “modern” people are too sophisticated to believe in demons inhabiting a human frame and taking it over. They all insist that what ancient people saw as demon-possession is more easily explained today in medical terms as some kind or psychological or neurological disorder. Yes, to a degree that may be true—most people with psychological problems who may appear to be demon-possessed, are not really possessed. Nevertheless, we shouldn’t toss this story about Jesus and the demonic mob aside too quickly. Satan is just as active today as he was in Jesus’ day—perhaps even more so. This story is not a fable—it is part of God’s Word and, thus, by definition, absolutely true. Yet, the doubters might instantly say, in a snobbish manner, “*How naïve can you be?*”

When I was in high school, everyone loved to go to scary movies. But I must admit that one of those movies was just a little too scary for me. It was the 1973 classic film entitled, *The Exorcist*. The movie dealt with someone who was demonically possessed, and the story follows the process of exorcizing the demon—i.e. removing the demon from the person. Last December, there was an interesting article in *Vanity Fair* magazine about a man named William Friedkin. He was the director of that movie. And in this article, Friedkin admitted that he had never witnessed an actual exorcism. Being an agnostic himself—i.e. he can’t come to admit that God exists—he decided to get to the bottom of the premise of his own movie. You see, it seems that Friedkin had always assumed that demon-possession was nothing more than a scary story—such a thing, in his mind, never happened in real life, regardless of what the Bible may say. So, this is what he decided to do. He decided to document an exorcism on film and then have it analyzed by a medical expert to expose the whole process as being a fraud. He actually went all the way to Italy and filmed an exorcism performed by a real exorcist on a woman who was deemed to be possessed by a demon. He then returned to the U. S. and presented his video evidence to Dr. Neil Martin, chief of neurosurgery at the UCLA Medical Center. He thought that surely someone of Dr. Martin’s background and experience would see right through this thing. But, after viewing the video, all Dr. Martin could say was this: “There’s a major force at work within her somehow. I don’t

know the underlying origin of it . . . This doesn't seem to be hallucinations . . . It doesn't look like schizophrenia or epilepsy . . . I've done thousands of surgeries, on brain tumors, traumatic brain injuries, [etc.] . . . and I haven't seen this kind of consequence from any of those disorders. This goes beyond anything I've ever experienced—that's for certain.”<sup>1</sup>

Well, Director Friedkin had hoped for something a little more definitive than that, so he decided to let another expert take a look at the exorcism—perhaps he could see that this was a hoax and that demon-possession is nothing more than mere superstition. This time he showed the video to Dr. Itzhak Fried, another neurosurgeon, who is also a clinical specialist in epilepsy surgery and seizure disorder. So, what was his conclusion? All he could say is this: “It looks like something authentic. She is like a caged animal. I don't think there's a loss of consciousness or contact . . . I believe everything originates in the brain . . . [But] can I characterize it? Maybe. Can I treat it? No.”<sup>2</sup>

There are just some things that science cannot explain. They are just plain supernatural. And those supernatural things that are inspired by Satan—well, they are inherently evil. In the magazine article, Friedkin's comments indicate that he was beginning to understand that his movie, *The Exorcist*, may have been more reality-based than he had originally thought. Reviewing what his experts had told him, Friedkin had to admit: “They wouldn't come out and say, 'Of course this woman is possessed by Satan,' but they seemed baffled as to how to define her ailment . . . I went to these doctors to try to get a rational, scientific explanation for what I had experienced. I thought they'd say, 'This is some sort of psychosomatic disorder having nothing to do with possession.' That's not what I came away with. Forty-five years after I directed *The Exorcist*, there's more acceptance of the possibility of possession than there was when I made the film.”<sup>3</sup>

As it turns out, Friedkin didn't need to travel all the way to Italy to gain insight on the reality of demon-possession. He could have gotten all he needed right here in the States. Dr. Richard Gallagher, a professor of clinical psychiatry at New York Medical College, says he has witnessed over one hundred people who appeared to have conditions that cannot be explained except within the context of demonic activity. In a recent article in the Washington Post, Dr. Gallagher stated, “For the past two-and-a-half decades and over several hundred consultations, I've helped clergy from multiple denominations and faiths to filter episodes of mental illness—which represent the overwhelming majority of cases—from [what is] literally, the devil's work.”<sup>4</sup> In Dr. Gallagher's opinion, incidents of demonic possession appear to be on the rise today—a fact that should not surprise us considering what the Book of Revelation predicts concerning the End of Time.

Now, let's get back to Jesus and His casting out of this "mob" of demons who had possessed this poor man who lived in the tombs of Gerasa. First of all, let me be clear, the demons in this man were very real. The demons certainly knew who Jesus was and that He had the power to cast them wherever He wanted. As it turned out, Jesus cast this demon-mob into all those sheep. And, as we can see more than once in the Gospels, sheep without the Good Shepherd—well, they can end up in some awful positions, particularly if they are possessed by Satan's demons. But when Jesus heals those who are possessed—especially those possessed by anger and hate and violence—they come to experience something quite different. Instead of raging through graveyards among the dark shadows of tombstones, they enjoy a peace that surpasses all understanding<sup>5</sup> in the light and newness of life that comes through Jesus Christ.

But then, you might be wondering, "*How does this relate to the mob in Charlottesville?*" And the answer is this: It relates to them (and at times to us) in the same way that it relates to mobs everywhere that are filled with hate. You see, ***you don't have to be demon-possessed to be possessed by Satan.*** When we get into hate, it is always wrong, with one exception that Paul will tell us about later. When we allow ourselves to become instruments of violence, that is always wrong as well. It is when both sides of any conflict become part of the "*angry mob*" that Satan begins to smile in delight. Satan is at work today like never before—because his time is running out. His end is coming soon. In the meantime, don't allow Satan to possess you. The best way to prevent that from happening is to allow Jesus into your heart. If your heart is filled with the love of Christ, there will be no room for Satan to enter in and fill it with hate.

The man who Jesus freed from the mob of evil spirits—he went on to live his life for God by spreading the Good News of Jesus. But after Jesus cleansed him from the filth of those demons, what if he had said: "*Well, right now I'm still on the fence—right now I am allowing my heart to remain empty, and someday I will decide how to fill it.*" An empty heart—that is the most dangerous thing of all, because a heart can never be empty for very long. You know what happens to people like that? Jesus warned: <sup>24</sup> "When an evil spirit goes out of a person, it travels over dry country looking for a place to rest. If it can't find one, it says to itself, 'I will go back to my house.'" <sup>25</sup> So it goes back and finds the house clean and all fixed up. <sup>26</sup> Then it goes out and brings seven other spirits even worse than itself, and they come and live there. So when it is all over, that person is in worse shape than at the beginning." Luke 11:24-26 (TEV) I read a church sign along the highway this week that puts that in perspective. It read: "The one who is almost saved, is totally lost." You can't sit on the fence. You must either come to Jesus, or Satan will come to you like a roaring lion and he will rip you apart.<sup>6</sup> Then

he will fill you with hate and make you part of his angry mob—the one that destroys itself like sheep running over a cliff. Earlier, I said that it is always wrong to hate, with one exception. The Apostle Paul tells us that the only thing that we are to hate is evil itself.<sup>7</sup> But when we turn our focus on individuals who are evil and we hate them as well, we become part of the problem, not the solution. That is counterproductive. To use the words of a prominent pastor from the past—that kind of hatred “is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat.”<sup>8</sup>

If the recent events in Charlottesville teach us anything, they teach us that. They prove to us that Satan is on the move today and loves to stir hatred and violence in his angry mob. And while riot control police may try to contain such a mob, they really are not too well equipped to deal with the underlying problem—only Jesus can do that. And Jesus tells us how to do that—through love, not by hate. Jesus demands that we “love our enemies”<sup>9</sup> not just our friends. Love is the living water that extinguishes the fires Satan starts. Hate is like pouring gasoline on the fire.

Throughout history, Jesus has had to deal with the angry mob again and again, just as He did in this passage at the beginning of Mark 5. If you don’t want to be part of the mob (and more importantly, if you do not want the mob *inside* of you), come to Jesus today to enjoy His peace, come to know His love—and learn of the riot control **within your heart** that only Jesus can apply.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2017

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<sup>1</sup> William Friedkin, “Battling the Devil,” *Vanity Fair* (December 2016); PreachingToday.com, submitted by Jerry De Luca, Montreal West, Montreal, Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Gallagher, “As a psychiatrist, I diagnose mental illness. Also, I help spot demonic possession,” *The Washington Post* (7-1-16).

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 4:7 (TEV) And God’s peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 5:8 (TLB) Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 12:9 (TEV) Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, Edythe Draper, *Draper’s Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 304.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 5:43-45 (TEV) <sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your friends, hate your enemies.’ <sup>44</sup> But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may become the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil.