The Hardest Mission Field

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Date: 25 September 2022

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast. A podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Mark chapter 5.

We looked last week at the end of Mark chapter 4 where the disciples were in a storm on a boat. And they were afraid that they were going to die.
That wasn't their greatest concern though. Their greatest concern was their wrong assumption that Jesus did not care. The thought that Jesus doesn't know what you're facing or doesn't care about what you're facing is a much more painful thought than any trial or storm that you face.
And the message from last week reminded us that even in the midst of our storm, Jesus does know what you're facing and He does care.
As we looked at last week, the disciples were in a great storm and they were greatly afraid. And yet it is after Jesus speaks and calms the storm that they were filled with the greatest sense of fear.
[1:24] Recognizing that they were in the presence of the Holy One. Knowing from the Old Testament that only God can speak to the storm and cause it to be still with nothing more than His spoken word.

And that's exactly what they have seen the Lord do. And it ends in verse 41 of chapter 4. They were filled with great fear and said to one another, Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey Him?
What a great question. Who is this man? Who is this man who claims to be God?
Who claims to be eternal? Who says that before Abraham was, I am. Who is this man? Who is this man that can speak and demons are cast out?
Who can speak and the storm is stilled? Who can speak and the paralyzed man can get up and walk? Who is this man? Is he merely a teacher?
[2:42] Is he somebody who is leading people astray? Is he somebody who is just confused and out of his mind? Or is this man exactly who he says he is?

Exactly what Scripture says of the Messiah. Could this be the one sent to redeem? Well, as we've been studying through Mark chapter 3 and Mark chapter 4, we are in the midst of one long day that Mark records for us.
When you come to chapter 5, we are getting on the other side of that. This is a true story in Mark chapter 5. It's a true account given to us by Matthew and Mark and Luke about a real man possessed by real demons.
And the story begins in verses 1 to 5 by introducing us to this disturbing demoniac. It says they came to the other side of the sea to the country of the Gerasenes.
Remember what they've just been through. This life-threatening storm. Remember what it is that they faced.
[4:01] No doubt the disciples here are just wanting to rest. They've just been through what is as fearful of an evening as they've ever faced.

They've just experienced something that shook them, stirred them, shocked them. And now they come to the other side of the sea to the country of the Gerasenes.
They've got in the boat. The storm has passed. They've been filled with this amazing fear when they've seen the power of the Lord.
And they just want to get somewhere and rest. You know how it is after something happens that gives you this big adrenaline rush.
After that is worn out. So are you. And they just want to rest. Let's just go somewhere quiet. Let's just get somewhere peaceful.

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[5:04] Let's kind of quietly in solitude process all that we've seen. All that we've just experienced. Let's just get away from the crowds.

Let's get away from the noise. Let's get away from all the turmoil. And let's just rest. That's what's on their mind. And they came to the other side of the sea to the country of the Gerasenes.
That's what the disciples are hoping for. Verse 2. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit.
So much for a place of peace. They're greeted by this man who was possessed by demons. Verse 3 says, 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, and no one had the strength to subdue him.
[6:12] Night and day among the tombs, and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. They're not going to get the rest they were looking for, are they?

This is the welcoming committee. This is the greeter as they get off the boat. This man who is out of his mind, who is possessed with demons. This man who lives among the tombs.
Matthew records for us there was another man who was with him. Mark zeroes in just on this one particular man. And this man lives here in the cemetery.
Tombs in that day, of course, would have been cut out of the rocky hillside, and that's where he dwells. This man is more comfortable living among the dead than he is being with the living.
I mean, just imagine it. If you were to tell your children, send them to school, if you're in Mustang schools, and you're going to go south here on Mustang Road because your child goes to the middle school or the elementary school or the high school, and you've got to pass Mustang Cemetery, you would have to tell your children, be careful.
[7:45] There's a crazy man that lives at the cemetery. He's known to walk around and to yell and to scream, and people try to subdue him, and they will take ropes and try to tie his hands together, but he can't be contained.

He just breaks the ropes apart. Be careful. Don't go anywhere near him. If you lived somewhere by the cemetery late at night, children might say, Mom and Daddy, what is that awful, horrendous noise?
And they would say, well, you know, there's the man that, he lives among the tombs. He screams. He yells. He cuts himself. Luke adds in chapter 8, verse 27, that for a long time, he had worn no clothes.
Great. It's getting worse. And the disciples have to be sitting here saying, we can't get a break. We've just been through the storm.
We've just been rattled to our core, and now here comes a man with no clothes, out of his mind, screaming, bleeding, cutting himself, yelling.
[9:02] This is, this is a man in a bad way. But we see in verse 6, there is a divine deliverance.

Verse 6 says, when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. Now, it's a good question to ask, why does the man do this? This isn't an act of worship.
It is an act of submission. I don't know for sure why the demoniac ran toward Jesus. Maybe he was just trying to frighten another traveler.
Maybe it was his custom that whenever people would get off the boat there on the shore, because he lived right there by the tombs, right as he would get off the boat, maybe that's what he did. He ran out there and just scared people.
That's just what he did. Maybe he just ran out there at first, because he thought, I'm going to go and mess with somebody else. I'm going to go scare somebody else. I'm going to go torment somebody else. I don't know why he ran out there, but when he did, something happened.
[10:06] And even the demons who had possessed this man will fall down, not out of an act of worship and love, but out of submission in the recognition of the authority of Christ.

It's really amazing. Verse 7, 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. A little reading here of the language. He said, what to me to you? What are you doing with me?
Now imagine this scene. After one of the longest days we know anything about in the life of Jesus, filled with so much ministry, so much opposition, so much travel, so much spiritual work, so much exhaustion, not to mention the threat of the disciples thinking they were going to die on the boat.

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Now they are face to face with the demonic realm, staring eye to eye with the messengers from hell.
[11:28] And the demon cries out, what have you to do with me? He recognizes, the demons do here, that Jesus is the Son of the Most High God.

And he begs, do not torment me. Luke adds that the man says, this is the demon speaking to the man, they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.
It's a reference here to Revelation 9. It's a different sermon for a different day, but there is a plan. The Lord will deal with all the demonic realm. And they know their day's coming. They're well aware. They recognize who Christ is.
They know his authority. They know his sovereignty. And they know that in the end, he will triumph. And they beg, please don't torment us and please don't cast us into the abyss.
[12:36] Verse 8, he was saying to him, come out of the man, you unclean spirit. And Jesus asked him, what is your name? And he replied, my name is Legion, for we are many.

Legion was a military term. It referred to a large group of soldiers in the Roman army. About 5,600 men made up a legion.
It came to be known as just a term that meant a very large, significant group. We don't know for sure how many demons had possessed this man, but it wasn't just one or two or five or ten.
It was many. The fear and the pain and the dread and the misery of being possessed by a single demon would be too much for any of us to even articulate, much less having an untold number.
Verse 10, he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. And now a great herd of pigs was feeding there and on the hillside and they begged him saying, send us to the pigs.
[13:50] These are the demons speaking here. Send us to the pigs. Let us enter them. And so he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs.

And the herd, numbering about 2,000, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned into the sea.
The demons are cast out of the man and the demons here long to be embodied somehow, some way. The demonic spirits are looking for a person or in this case, even an animal to embody them. They don't want to be just simply disembodied spirits. Jesus is calling them out of the man to set the man free. Then the demons say, please don't send us into the abyss.
Please don't torment us forever and forever and forever. And they say, can we go down into the pigs? 2,000 pigs to be exact.
[14:57] We don't know for sure how many demons had entered the man, but at least, at least 2,000. And on that day, a few important theological lessons are shown to us.

One is that the helping, the delivering of a single man was worth more than anything else.
it also tells us that the spiritual realm is a very real thing.
It kind of messes with this a bit because we're used to what we can see and what we can touch and what we can describe and what we can understand. And admittedly, we get a little bit nervous and kind of antsy when we talk about the spiritual realm.
We can't see it. We may see its effects, but we can't see it. We can't fully understand it. It seems so strange.
[16:16] But you need to understand the spiritual realm is real. You need to understand that when the scripture says we wrestle not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers, that the Bible takes very seriously and literally the spiritual realm.

and no doubt that it was an economic loss for this town to lose the lives of 2,000 pigs.
But the deliverance of a human being takes precedent. Which reminds us that spiritual matters are more important than our financial matters.
We so often get that backwards. Because you can see your money. You can count your money. You can go online and look at your retirement account.
You can touch it and feel it and measure it. And so because of that, so often we live and act as though that's what matters the most.
[17:37] And this reminds us that's not true. Everything is subservient to spiritual matters. Verse 14, the herdsmen fled and they 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 the legion, had the many demons sitting there clothed and in his right mind and they were afraid.

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The word for afraid is phobos. We get our English word for phobia. The people were afraid. They were used to seeing this crazy man naked, naked, now he's clothed.
They were used to seeing him running around out of his mind, now he is sitting with his full senses. They were used to avoiding him and they had no doubt taught their children and grandchildren, don't go near him, have nothing to do with him, don't ever go over that direction because that's where that man lives, there among those tombs.
And the people would eventually, when he would break free, some brave souls would go and try to restrain him for the good of the townspeople there and they would wrap his wrist and bind him as though in handcuffs, but it doesn't matter how many ropes they used or the strength of how many men try to make it as tight as possible because of the power of all the demons within him, he could just pull them apart.
[19:33] He would take stones and gash his own flesh. And now they find him clothed, sitting, and healed.

He's delivered. the same voice that said to the winds, hush, be still, has now spoken to the legion of demons and said, come out.
The man who calmed the storm is the one who has set this man free. And the people are filled with fear. They're terrified.
you might wonder, how would the people respond? Would they embrace Jesus? And would they say, we've never seen anything like this before?
And would they inquire of who he is? Would they believe that he's the son of God? Would they say, please stay, don't get back on the boat, don't go back on the other side, stay here, teach us, let us learn of who you are, let us worship you, tell us more about what we must do to be saved.
[20:54] Will they hold on tightly to him so that they would try to prevent him from leaving? The answer is no.

Verse 17, they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. Jesus, you're not welcome here. Please leave us alone. go back on the boat that you came here on and go back home or just go away. We don't really care where you go, just don't stay here with us.
I think they feared maybe he was not going to be controllable. people. I mean, there was this man that was filled with demons.
The townspeople couldn't really control him either, but they could at least let him be relegated to the cemetery. What do you do with someone who has power over the uncontrollable?
[22:05] people. They probably feared for their own economy. They lost 2,000 pigs that day, and if this happened again, it's not going to be good economically.

Let's just get this guy out of here. Maybe they just feared Jesus would disturb and disrupt their lives. Whatever it was, it was obvious this stranger to them, Jesus of Nazareth, was someone they did not want.
They didn't just ask him to leave, verse 17 says, they began to beg him to leave. Please get out of here. You're not welcome here.
We don't want you here. We don't know who you are, or where you're from, or what you do, and you scare us to death. Just please leave.
And as he leaves, this man expresses a definite desire here in verse 18. This is an amazing, amazing brief conversation.
[23:19] As Jesus was getting into the boat, now just stop for a minute. He's getting into the boat because the townspeople begged him to leave. The man who had been possessed with the demons begged that he might be with him.

The townspeople are begging Jesus to leave. The healed man is begging to go with Jesus.
In fact, the language here, it's in the imperfect tense, which means he kept doing it over and over and over again. They kept begging Jesus to leave, and the man kept begging to go with him.
Jesus gets in the boat, and the man is begging, can I please go with you? Can I please go with you? Can I please go with you? Don't leave without me. Is there room for me on the boat? Can I please go and be with you?
Can't blame him, can you? He's ready for a fresh start. I mean, can you imagine what this man's life's going to be like if he stayed back?
[24:30] Where everybody knows his worst day, it doesn't matter how much change happens to him, he's always going to be the crazy, naked, demon-possessed guy who cut himself that

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everybody ran away from.

Never mind the fact he is now clothed and in his right mind, and he'll deliver it and set free. For the rest of his life, when he goes to talk to somebody, they're going to say, I've been warned about you. We know all about you. Aren't you the guy who used to cut himself with sharp objects? Where this guy goes and applies for a job, puts on a nice coat and tie, metaphorically, sits down for the job interview in the office, and the man says, let me see your resume.
He looks at it and he says, aren't you the guy? you're the guy that used to run around, he lived among all the dead people, and I used to warn my kids to make sure they never went near you, I'm sorry, we don't have any positions available.
That would be this guy's life the rest of his life. He was so eager to get away from his past. Just give me a fresh start.
[26:14] It's like somebody who grows up in a town and maybe their life was filled with sin and bad choices and just mistake after mistake after mistake and they graduate high school and they think I just want to get out of this town.

Not so much because they hate the people as much as they hate being reminded of who they were. So he's begging, Jesus, can I go with you?
Jesus, can I be with you? And if you've never heard the story before, you would have no reason to expect any response other than follow me, let's go.
Because that's what Jesus has been saying in most of his conversations. When he called the disciples, come follow me. And what did they do? They dropped their nets and immediately left. Why? Because to this point, to follow Jesus meant you get up right then and you just go. You don't go wrap up loose ends.
[27:21] You don't go say goodbyes. You don't do any of that. You don't wait until it's a better time. You don't wait until you have things in line. You don't wait until you're able to have a good season to go away.

Up to this point, when Jesus calls, if you want to follow him, you just go. You just say, hey, I'm living by priority and I'm going to miss my job and I'm going to miss my friends and I'm going to miss my home and I'm going to miss my career.
But Christ has called me and nothing is better than Christ. And if he calls, I'm just going. Wherever he goes, I'm going. to this point, that's all that it's been.
So when this man begs Jesus, can I go with you? I'll leave home. I'll leave what I know. I will walk away today.
I will never look back and wherever you lead, I will follow. If you've never heard this story before, you would have no reason to expect anything other than Jesus to say, come on.
[28:22] Let's go. But look at verse 19. He did not permit him.

Jesus said no. He gives this man in verse 19 a disappointing denial. No, you can't go.
which is why the man was begging. The language, he kept begging, he kept doing it. Why? Because Jesus said no, you can't go with me. Please let me go.
No, I can't stay here. No, please, please, there's room on the boat. I can sit right there. I'll crawl over in the corner. I'll do whatever I have to do.
Just please let me go. when Jesus says, you can't come. It doesn't seem to fit all the other conversations we've heard.
[29:38] It seems such a strange, hard reply.

And it's not just that he gave him a disappointing denial, you can't come with me, but he gives him this difficult demand on top of it. He did not permit him, but said to him, verse 19, go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.
Jesus says, you can't go with me because you're a missionary now. And when you and I hear the term missionary, we always think of people who leave.
But Jesus said, you're going to be a different kind of missionary. You're going to stay right in your hometown.
And you're going to go back to the people who have known you all your life, the same ones who have mocked you, laughed at you, tried to tie you up with rope, who have avoided you, the same ones who have warned their children to never even make eye contact with you.
[31:24] You're a missionary now. And your mission field is home. The hardest mission field of all.

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You're going to stay right here. And everybody who knew you on your worst day, that's your mission field.
And all the people who have laughed at you as long as you can remember, that's who you're supposed to preach to. And when people say, but why should we believe you?
Didn't you live among the dead people? all you can do is say, yes, that was me. But Jesus has saved me.
You will have no ammunition other than the name of Jesus. You see, friends, the gospel must be preached to the nations, but it must not be withheld from the neighborhoods.
[32:41] At our church, we say a lot around here that our call is to take the gospel to the neighborhoods and the nations. And for most of us in this room, if we were completely honest, while it may make us nervous to share the gospel, period, if we had to pick, we'd rather do it to the nations and the neighborhoods.

Because when you go on a mission trip, yes, there's some financial expense and you've got to ride in a crowded airplane and you've got to eat strange food and you may have uncomfortable living conditions and you may talk to people you don't really know and there may be a language and culture barrier, but after about seven to ten days, you leave.
And if people mocked you, you never see them again. And if people hated you, you never have to talk to them again.
And if the ministry goes horrible, you never have to show up again. And if people ask you questions you can't answer, you won't ever run into them again.
Now, we need people to go to the nations. Our church spends a lot of money funding the gospel going to the nations. neighborhoods. But we cannot neglect the neighborhoods.
[34:09] We cannot neglect being faithful right here at home. Sometimes it's easy to go on a mission trip and get very consumed with evangelism only to come home and grow silent.

But Jesus tells this man, you can't go with me. And it's not because Jesus is cruel, it's because he has a calling for this man.
And he is calling this man to be a missionary right at home. Jesus says, go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you.
the man may be hearing that and thinking that won't take long. I don't have any friends. I mean, there's one other guy that the other gospel writer mentions was another man that lived among the tombs with him.
And after that, who else is this guy going to talk to? Well, he's going to have to go make friends. He's going to have to go be friendly. He's going to have to go work to start relationships with people who have been avoiding him for years.
[35:33] You know, it's funny, sometimes we think about how hard that call would be if God called us away. How hard is it if God calls you to stay?

And you are to take serious the responsibility to tell the own neighborhoods about Jesus. But in verse 20, the story ends with a devoted decision this man makes.
He went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And everyone marveled.
He obeyed. He obeyed even though Jesus didn't do what he wanted him to do. He obeyed even though Jesus' answer to his first question, can I go with you, is not what he expected.
I have no doubt that this man thought Jesus was going to say, come on, let's go. go. And even in the face of disappointment and a demand from Jesus far harder than anything he could imagine, yet the man went away and immediately began to obey.
[37:04] You know what's interesting? this guy has no theological training, no seminary, no Sunday school.

He's read no books. He has sat in on exactly zero Bible studies. He hasn't watched preaching in person, he hasn't read about it, he has no accountability partner, he has no small group, he has no congregation, he has no library to go back and study.
The only thing this man has, the only thing he has, is the testimony of who he was and who saved him.
That's it. And if you look at verse 20, he went and proclaimed what Jesus had done for him.
And friends, that was enough. Now, if you know me, you know I believe in training. Our church spends a lot of energy to train and equip people in the word.

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[38:31] It's a biblical mandate to do so. But the lack of it is not an excuse to be disobedient.

Don't miss that. Yes, it is our call to train and equip people in the word. That's biblical. That's Ephesians 4, verbatim.
But, if you know Jesus, if you've been delivered, if your life's been changed, you have enough to proclaim to somebody else who Jesus is.
And everyone marveled. Let me give you three implications from this text just very briefly just to take home with you today.
Number one, the hardest but first mission field must be home. The hardest but first mission field must be home.
[39:34] College students, middle school students, you may think in your mind, I think God may call me to be a missionary one day.

I think God may call me to some kind of Christian vocation one day. That's great. We'll help you. We'll train you. We'll get you ready for that. But your first mission field is your school.
Your first mission field are those people that mock you. Your first mission field college students are those students who sit beside you in class and mock the Christian faith.
Your first mission field college students are those people that live in your dorm that talk and act so much like the world and you think they would never believe.
Well, who would have ever thought that the man possessed by a legion of demons would believe? But that's what the power of Christ can do. your hardest but first mission field is home.
[40:49] Second, even your worst days can be redeemed by God's grace. Even your worst days can be redeemed by God's grace.

I mean, the reason this man wants to leave is he doesn't want to be around people who knew who he was. And yet, Jesus says, go tell them how much the Lord has done, which means his testimony is going to have to include who he was in his sin for him to explain how Christ has set him free.
And so, even your worst days by God's grace can be transformed and used for great good. Which leads to one final thing.
The most amazing part of your life is Jesus. That's verse 20. He proclaimed how much Jesus had done for him.
The most amazing part of your life is not your education, it's not your spiritual gifts, it's not your experience in ministry, it's not your business success, it's not your level of influence, it's not the wealth you've accumulated, it's not the prestige that you have, it's not your popularity in the middle school, your most amazing thing about your life if you're a believer is Jesus.
[42:26] So if that's true, why don't we tell people? if that's true, why do we stay silent?

Your coworkers know who your favorite football team is. They know because you talk about it. Nothing wrong with that.
They know who you vote for. Nothing wrong with that. But the reason they know is because you talk about it.
And you post about it. And you're passionate about it. They know where you went on vacation. They know that your grandbaby just learned to crawl. They know your little girl just started first grade. They know your son made first string.
[43:49] They know your kids are getting married because you talk about it. Would you think about what Jesus has done and how much he's accomplished for you?

Now go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you.
It's the hardest mission field of all. Your home. Your school. Your friends.
church let's take the gospel to the nations. You bet. Let us not miss the neighborhood.
Lord we thank you for your word today and pray that you would use it to give us encouragement to bring conviction to bring hope And Lord we pray that you would stir us on to love and good deeds by having been here among your people today.
[45:13] Amen. In just a moment when you leave you're going to pass by at our exit doors a wooden giving box it's a place for our members to give financially of course we would never ask or expect our guests to give ever but if you have a question of how you can know Christ if you have prayer requests if you have questions about the Bible the Christian life we want to help you with that if you would take that connection card and just complete that force member or guest on your way out if you would drop that in the connection in the your connection card in the box we would very much appreciate that tonight our evening service at five we've got a special treat our passion

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student choir it's middle school and high school choir they'll be in our evening service to lead us they'll have 80 90 students who will be here to lead us always a special time when they're able to come in here and be with us so we'll sing together you're going to be blessed by the ministry of our students you'll want to come and hear them and support them be led and worship by them we'll be preaching

God's word and then at the end of the service tonight we're going to take finally we've got family matters that's coming up it's a free dinner coming up in a few weeks we want you to be here member or guest just a chance for you to learn about our church to see where the Lord is at work to see how the Lord is leading us you can sign up for that today at the ministry connection! reminder of what we've studied today might be an encouragement to someone in your life that needs to hear the gospel you can go to that website or scan that QR code take you to a summary of the sermon today that we pray would be an encouragement to you might be something you want to walk through with your family in family devotion time this week and talk about how your family can take the gospel to the neighborhoods how could you as a family this week apply what we study today so that we don't just learn but we obey how do we take the gospel to the neighborhoods even this week you can use this devotion here as a family this week to be able to help encourage you to live out what we have studied we hope that's a blessing to you God bless you you are dismissed

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