

At our house we have different categories for what we watch on telly. **{Slide 2}** I prefer to watch films, which might be a bit thoughtful, maybe artistic, with great cinematography and complex characters.

Karen likes **{Slide 3}** Movies. They are fast paced, with loads of action, the sort of thing that has you on tenter hooks as car chases and gun battles are played out.

The book of Mark is Hollywood action movie equivalent of a gospel. **{Slide 4}** Mark's Gospel is jam packed with fast paced action, he moves from one scene to the next keeping us on the edge of our seats as he describes the events of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry.

The reading we heard in chapter five this morning certainly fits with that description! And in this action packed, fast paced, highly dramatic account of the healing of a demon possessed man, and the destruction of the demons, Mark describes the Kingdom of God and its affects. This morning as we explore this passage together we are going to focus on three areas. **{Slide 5}**

Firstly we will look at what Mark tells us about Jesus authority over the natural world, then we will talk about Jesus' encounter with the demon possessed man and his authority over the spiritual world man and finally we will look at the responses of those who witness this event.

But before we go any further with that this morning, let's pray and ask God to guide us.

Pray:

1) the Natural World

{Slide 6} The positioning of this account in the Gospel of Mark is no accident. The order of the events is no random occurrence. Chapter five comes after Jesus has told four parables and performed a miracle.

Skip back to the start of chapter four with me and look at the titles of the parables, firstly is the Parable of the sower, where Jesus explains how God's message is like seed scattered, some will take root and some won't.

Next in 4:21 we see the parable of the lamp stand, Jesus reminds the disciples here that a light, the Kingdom of God, must be lifted up to illuminate, not be hidden away.

Then the other two parables are the parable of the growing seed, which reminds us it is God who ushers in his Kingdom, and the parable of the mustard seed, where Jesus explains that the Kingdom may start small, but it will grow.

Then we come to the miracle where Jesus calms the storm.

In that passage we see the authority of Jesus over the physical world we live in. The storm is raging so hard that the seasoned fishermen among the disciples feared for their lives, yet a simple word from Jesus sees the storm dissipate completely. Mark is showing us that Jesus has awesome power, power which points to the same reality Jesus has been teaching about in all of those parables, the Kingdom of God breaking into the world.

This passage emphasises Jesus announcing the rule of the Kingdom of God. As we see that it isn't only over the natural world that Jesus has authority and dominion, but it is over the spiritual world as well.

2) Spiritual World

{Slide 7} In verse one we are told that the account takes place in the region of the Gerasenes, this is a fairly vague description, we aren't given the name of a particular town here, but we know that gentiles inhabited this region not Jews.

It seems the most likely place for this event to have taken place is the near modern town of Kersa, a kilometre and a half south of the town is a steep slope close to the lake and it has caverns used as tombs nearby.

As soon as Jesus steps out of the boat he encounters the demon possessed man.

In the Talmud, which make up a part of the Jewish scriptures, there are four signs of madness, Walking around throughout the night, spending the night on a grave, tearing your own clothing, and destroying things.

The description of this man tells us that he lived in the tombs (vs3), he broke the chains he was bound with (vs 4), that he was awake both day and night, crying out (vs 5) and that he must have been naked, due to the fact that in verse 15 special mention is made of the fact he is now clothed. This man is seriously afflicted and oppressed by demonic forces.

The people of the town he lived in, fearing his behaviour have bound him with chains to protect themselves from his violence. But even this was futile, and so he has been cast out from among them to wander alone. He is so desperate, so afflicted by the torment of the demons which trouble him that Mark tells us he has cut himself with stones.

And so it is no real wonder that as verse 6 describes 'he saw Jesus from a distance, ran to him and fell on his knees in front of him'

It's an understandable response isn't it? We know of some among us who have been in such desperate situations that they have had no option but to run to Jesus for release and freedom.

It's a spotlight on our human condition, people are oppressed by rebellion against God, and when we are confronted with the reality of Jesus Christ we can run to him to be freed from our affliction.

If we've accepted Jesus as our Lord and saviour, if we have believed in our hearts and confessed with our tongues that he is Lord, then we've been there haven't we? I can remember as a 14 year old responding to His gospel, because I knew that things I was caught up in were holding me back from fullness of life.

When I heard the gospel and understood it I couldn't make any other response but to give my life to God, for it is only Christ who is able to free us from slavery to sin and its miserable oppression. It is only in Christ that we can be delivered, when we recognise who he is.

In v.6-7 the demon does just that, and it confesses that Jesus is the Son of the Most high God. The spiritual forces which oppose God instantly recognise Him, and plead with Jesus not to torture them.

This is a real key to the passage in the wider story of Mark, because right away the demon knows just who Jesus is, yet his disciples are still struggling to work it out.

Jesus' next action, to ask the name of the demon and then send the Legion, that is the many, into the herd of swine, shows his real power over spiritual forces. Jesus is more than a good moral example, more than a friend in troubled times.

Jesus Christ is God. His power is obvious here, he terrifies these demons which have totally wrecked this man, with no more than his presence.

We are reminded in this encounter that spiritual forces are real. We live in a culture which likes to explain everything in factual, rational, logical terms. It gives very little credence to anything unusual; and dismisses such things as nonsense but Jesus shows us that spiritual oppression is real.

The intention of our enemy, Satan, is the same as that of the demons, the destruction of God's creation. The demons are working to totally mar the man they inhabited, even to the point where he would be destroyed.

They are so hell-bent on this that when they are sent into their new hosts, the herd of pigs, they carry out this goal by driving them into the sea v. 13. It's an unusual pattern of events, but it demonstrates clearly the will of Satan to oppose the work of God, and to afflict as many people as possible.

Satan wants to enslave and oppress us. He might not possess us but he dangles lures for us.

We meet them daily, we have confessed them today, the reality is we are tempted in our ignorance, we are tempted in our weakness, we are tempted to deliberately disobey God, we are tempted to be cowardly and fail to do the things we ought.

This work is the work of our enemy who will take every opportunity to mar God's children. The warning for us today is simply to be aware, spiritual forces are real they aren't just old superstitions, Jesus treated them seriously, and we should as well. We must pray for protection, and bring those snares into the light. Because in Jesus we can be freed.

When the oppressed man was freed from those demons he was set totally and utterly free. The change in him is amazing. He is no longer bound, no longer naked, no longer unsettled in himself, but we see in verse 15 that he is dressed and in his right mind.

That is the transformation that the townspeople saw when they came to see what had happened, and it is to these people we now turn as we consider our third and final event today, the response of the witnesses.

3) The Response

{Slide 8} The swineherds, those who were looking after the pigs turn on their heels and run off to inform the owners of the pigs that they are dead. The owners return, they see the changed man, and they are terrified.

Those who saw it all happen tell the story again, they tell of the demons being sent out of the poor soul by Jesus but their response in verse 17 is not to shout with joy at the redemption of this man, their response is not to be awed by the power of Jesus and to proclaim him as the Christ, their response out of fear, anger and greed is to drive him away.

They are angry at their financial loss, and so they reject Jesus.

They reject the Messiah, the one with authority over the physical world, the one with authority over the spiritual world and as they do so, they reject the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

It's the same today isn't it?

People continue to reject the proclamation of God's Kingdom.

We are witnesses, we know Jesus, we've seen him at work in our own lives, changing us by the power of his Holy Spirit, yet even we can reject God's Word; we can shut off those parts of our lives we don't want the light to shine on. Or we excuse ungodliness for fear of hurting feelings, or causing conflict.

For those outside the church, those who don't know Jesus, they can reject him because they are afraid of the changes he makes, they can be afraid of his authority, and where that leaves them before God as sinners, or subjects to a new King. Dethroning ourselves and recognising Jesus as King is so costly. But in his Kingdom reign there is hope.

There is hope because the man who was healed responds in the most amazing way. Verse 18, he begs to go with Jesus. He now knows salvation, and so he

begs to go with Christ, to be near him, to do his will and to serve him. The instruction Jesus gives this man is the same as the instruction that he gives to all who believe in him, all who have been set free by his grace.

“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you”. But it doesn’t end there, the man does just that, but he goes to the wider area as well, he shares in the Decapolis, a group of ten cities. And we see that people are amazed at what God had done.

{Slide 9} We have hope, and confidence to face the trials before us. Not just earthly trials, but to do battle again the enemy who is at working to seek and destroy. Who snares us in sin, and tangles us in shame. Who seeks to separate us from our God and destroy us.

Our sin and trials won’t always just disappear, the struggle with sin may be long and hard. But struggle friend. Ask God for renewed strength, a renewed mind, a renewed will, and seek God in prayer.

He is good, and loving, and merciful, and kind. He comes to bring life in all its fullness as his Kingdom breaks into this world. He is Lord over the natural world, over the spiritual world.

Seek him. Seek help. (pray, share with someone - me, a house group leader, a friend). Seek encouragement, support, accountability. Come to the feet of Jesus.

Why don’t we pray and ask God to help us with that now.

Pray: