

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Sermon Title: Getting Free

Scott Dudley

*Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.*

---

### Scripture:

---

#### Mark 5:1-20

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup> When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. <sup>3</sup> This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. <sup>4</sup> For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

<sup>6</sup> When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. <sup>7</sup> He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" <sup>8</sup> For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." <sup>10</sup> And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

<sup>11</sup> A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. <sup>12</sup> The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." <sup>13</sup> He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

<sup>14</sup> Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. <sup>15</sup> When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. <sup>16</sup> Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. <sup>17</sup> Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. <sup>19</sup> Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." <sup>20</sup> So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

---

**Transcript:**

---

After three years of successfully avoiding COVID, I finally got it, a super mild case. I feel fine, but the sermon is going to be on video. This will be interesting because we live near a fire station. I have a cough, I'm a techno idiot. There are so many things that could go wrong and we may have to edit some stuff out if I cough or the fire station, so it may be some jump cuts there, but the word of the Lord is going to be preached. So Jesus, as we turn to your Word, help us to know what it means and how it applies to our lives, in your name, amen. Well, one time when our kids were really little, my wife heard a speaker who compared our relationship with God to being like a sacred romance novel. It's a love story. She came home very inspired only to find that our dog had gotten sick all over the house and she had to clean it up. Our kids were crying, one of them needed to be changed, and the toilet was clogged, and I was at work so I couldn't help her.

As she was unclogging the toilet, she thought, "I have a master's degree from Stanford and I'm using it to unclog toilets. If life is a sacred romance novel, I'm stuck in the subplot." Do you ever feel that way, like just harried and hassled and harassed by a whole assortment of things? Maybe it's just the busyness of life, maybe just all the pressures of school and work and kids and tests and sports and all of that, or maybe it's fears of rejection or fear of failure, or worries about money or relationships. Depression and anxiety are epidemic in our country right now. What harasses you? What is bothering you? What is troubling you? Because that's what the story that we just read is about where Jesus delivers a man who is harassed by demons from those demons. We don't talk about demons very much in our culture. It's true that a lot of things that people ascribe to demons back in the Bible times we know today to be things like mental illness or addiction, and thank goodness for therapy and medication that can help with all that.

But even that said, sometimes, not all the time, but in some cases there's also something supernatural going on. The same Bible that affirms that there is a God, which most of us accept also says there are spiritual forces that work against God's purposes, the devil and his demons. I have seen this personally. There have been a couple of times where I have prayed for a troubled person and everything about them suddenly changes, like something supernatural. They're just transformed almost into a different person. I've seen that a couple of times. We have an inner healing prayer ministry here where people are set free from wounds from the past, fears, anxieties through prayer. If you want to know more about that, you can talk to one of our prayer ministers after the service or one of us up front and we can connect you with that ministry. It's also important to note that the Bible never really talks about people being possessed by demons.

It gets translated that way sometimes, but in the original Greek text, the word that is used there is demonized, so harassed by demons, troubled by demons, bothered by demons.

Satan is very good at amplifying our fears and our wounds to make us more harassed than we otherwise would be. But this text shows how Jesus sets us free from all the things that harass us, trouble us, bother us. It says, "When the demon-harassed man saw Jesus, he ran and fell on his knees in front of Him." This is step one to getting free of the things that trouble us and harass us. Step one, run, don't walk to Jesus. He is our only hope. We are bodies, minds and souls, and therapy can help heal our minds and medication can help heal our bodies, but only Jesus can heal our souls. This became really clear to me when I was doing college ministry. Some of you've heard me tell this story before, but had a student severe anxiety and depression, suicidal thoughts, and she was taking medication. She was doing therapy and those things were helpful, but she still wasn't completely free. The breakthrough came when we put a prayer team around her that would pray with her a couple of days a week for over an hour each time.

Once we put that prayer team around her over the course of six months, she got free of all of those things, it took all three. It took medication for her body, therapy for her mind, and Jesus for her soul to set her free. Sometimes that happens quickly, other times it takes longer. In my own life, there have been things that have taken me years to get free of, and then sometimes we get free of something and then a new one, a new thing comes along; a new anxiety, a new hassle, or something comes along because at every new level, you meet a new devil. But what I have seen in my life and other people's lives is that Jesus does set us free from the things that plague us, harass us, especially when there are supernatural forces at work on us. So then it says, "He shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?'" Even the demons know Jesus is the Son of God. "In God's name, don't torture me." So this is interesting.

At first, he runs to Jesus, but then he says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, Jesus, I'm not so sure about this. Back off." This is so us, right? We say, I do this, "Jesus heal me, help me, set me free," but then we add one little word, "Unless, unless it means I might have to do something hard, and unless it means I might have to do something uncomfortable, then maybe I don't want to be healed so much. I don't want to be set free if it means my friends are going to laugh at me for following you. Maybe I don't want to be set free of this thing if it's going to be difficult and hard." As I said before, we want Jesus to give us a life-changing experience without actually changing the way that we live, and the devil loves to do this. He loves to whisper in our ears, "If you give yourself completely to Jesus, you won't be happy. He's going to ask you to give up lots of stuff. You can't be happy and holy at the same time.

Your friends are going to laugh at you. All kinds of things are going to go wrong." But the devil leaves out the freedom and the joy that Jesus gives because the end of this story, after all, is this man is set free. So then it goes on and it says, "Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'" He does this because names matter. They matter a lot. They symbolize something. How many parents

named their kids Genghis Khan these days, or Adolph? No, because names have, they symbolize stuff, and especially in biblical times, names weren't just like a label you had, they were thought to communicate something about your essence, about your soul. It's like the names of medieval kings. Medieval kings, they always had a name and then they had a descriptor after their name, some of them really cool, like Charles the Great or Charles the Bold. Then others weren't so cool. Like Alfonso the Slobberer, that's a real name. Alfonso the Slobberer does not inspire confidence, right? "Let's follow Alfonso the Slobberer into battle. Yay, the Slobberer!"

It's the same with us. We get these names put on us, some of them good, some of them bad, some good names like Beloved Child or Delight in my Heart, some not so good names like never good enough or not worth my time. Sometimes even more damaging than the negative names we get are the seemingly positive names we get. "You are funny," which creates pressure to always be funny. "You are good looking," which creates fear of losing those looks. Praise quickly becomes a prison. These false names are a major part of what troubles us and harasses us. The negative names create worry and insecurity and performance anxiety and the seemingly positive names, again, put pressure on us to keep it up. Keep it up. Make sure you keep doing whatever you're doing. That's good. So step one to getting free of the things that hassle us is run to Jesus. Step two is get your real name from Him.

Obviously I don't mean like a voice will come out of the sky and say, "Fred, your real name is Stan." But in prayer, paying attention to the thoughts that maybe aren't yours, they come from God, maybe sometimes what comes from your community from other people, what name does he call you? There's a woman in our church who served as an elder before I got here. During that time, she had to make some difficult decisions, had to enter into some conflict, do public speaking, all of which made her nervous. So the interim pastor gave her a card and wrote on that card, "You are a mighty warrior." The card brought tears to her eyes 'cause she hadn't thought of herself like that. In fact, I was in a meeting with her once and she told that story and said, "I don't think of myself as a mighty warrior," and everyone in the room said, "Oh no, that's who you are. You are a mighty warrior." That card helped her to hear what God called her, the name that God gives her, helped her see the strength inside of her that she didn't know she had.

When that happens, when we know what God calls us, it begins to take away some of the stress, the worry, the fear, the anxiety, the things that bother, trouble and harass us. "Then Jesus asked, 'What is your name?' Then the demon replies, 'My name is Legion for we are many.'" Legion was a Roman military term and it meant about 6,000 soldiers. Man, I don't know about you, but sometimes life feels that way like, "I am being harassed and hassled by 6,000 things. So then Jesus drives the demons out of this man, drives the demons away from this man. Then we get this weird moment where it says, "The demons beg Jesus, send us among the pigs, allow us to go into them.'" There was a herd of pigs there. So Jesus sends the demons into the herd of pigs, and then the herd of pigs go crazy and run off the cliff and they all fall into the lake and

drown," the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. That's so weird. Why the pigs? Why did the demons want to go into the pigs? What's up with the pigs?

What's really important for you to know about this is that nobody has a clue. Seriously, nobody has a clue what the pigs are there for. Scholars are all over the map. They all disagree with each other. Now, there is something important about the pigs, which I'll get to in a minute, but no one really knows why the demons wanted to go into the pigs, especially since they'd run off the cliff and drowned themselves. So then after the pigs go off the cliff, the villagers come running out. It says, "They saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there dressed and in his right mind." So before he was naked and now he's clothed, before he was harassed, but now he's at peace because Jesus has set him free, but then this weird thing happens. This is a weird story. Then this weird thing happens. It says, "Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region." What? He just did this huge miracle and they want him to leave. You would think it'd be the opposite.

You'd think they'd be saying, "Jesus, stick around, man, do some more miracles. I got a bunion on my toe. It'd be really great if you could take care of that." But instead, they say, "Go away." Why? The pigs, we're back to the stupid pigs? See, raising pigs was the way they made their living and the pigs, Jesus just caused the pigs to run off the cliff. So this brings us to step three of getting free of the things that trouble and harass us. Run to Jesus, get your real name from him, and then third, embrace the disruption of getting free. The villagers do not want Jesus to stick around, even if it means he will deliver them from the things that trouble them because he disrupted their economy, and they didn't want that touched. See, this is us again, because sometimes, not always, but sometimes we are stuck with the things that trouble us because we don't want to give them up or we don't want to give up what we need to be set to do to be set free from them.

This is the way the devil works. He promises us the things we want, but at a terrible cost. You can have all the success you want, but at the cost of worry, stress, anxiety, you can be part of the coolest, most elite crowd there is, but at the cost of always wondering, "What if they deem me at some point not worthy to be one of them?" So a good rule for life is, don't prefer pigs to freedom. That's just a good rule of life. Don't prefer pigs to freedom. In order to heal the broken marriage, embrace the disruption of counseling. Embrace the disruption of maybe having to ask forgiveness or go through hard conversations that are uncomfortable but will lead to a healed marriage. In order to be free of constant performance anxiety, embrace the disruption of maybe not feeling like you have to get it perfect every single time. Run to Jesus, get your real name from him, embrace the disruption, and finally tell your story.

After he has been set free, Jesus says to this man, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you." So the man went away and began to tell in Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and all the people were amazed. He becomes a storyteller. That's the title of our sermon series, He Becomes a Storyteller. The reason Jesus commands him

to tell his story, there are three reasons that we need to tell our stories. First, when we tell our stories of what Jesus has done for us, it makes it more real to us. Second, it encourages other people that Jesus can do something in their life too. Third, it makes Jesus look good to people who don't know Him. In fact, the text said, "The man went and told all about this in the Decapolis," and that was a region where there weren't any Jewish people. In other words, none of them believed in the God revealed in Jesus.

But then a few chapters later, Jesus returns to this region and this time, instead of kicking him out, they embrace him probably because this man who's been set free went and prepared the way for Jesus by telling everyone what Jesus had done for him. Tell your story. So two action steps for this week. First action step, ask yourself this question, "How am I hanging on to unhealth because I don't want the disruption of getting free?" How are you hanging on to unhealth because you don't want the disruption of getting free? You don't want the uncomfortableness or whatever it is of getting free and you're hanging on to unhealth. Once you can answer that question, do everything else I just talked about, run to Jesus, get your real name from Him and then tell your story, which leads to the second action step. The most ancient way of telling our stories and the most ancient way of getting our new name is called baptism.

That's the second action step. There are two hints of baptism in this text. First, the demon pigs run off the cliff and are drowned, and that is very symbolic of baptism because in baptism, we go under the water and our old self dies and we come up out of the water and we are reborn to new life. The second hint of baptism is that the demons called Jesus the Son of God. That is the name God gave Jesus at His baptism when He said, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." Baptism is a way of publicly telling our story. Look at what Jesus has done for me. In some traditions you even get a new name when you're baptized. So on March 5th, we are going to do baptisms, and not just for kids, kids too, but not just for kids, also adults. So if you've never been baptized, March 5th is your day, your time as a way of making a public statement that says, "Jesus is my savior and my Lord and He's changing my life."

But even if you have been baptized, on March 5th you can also renew your baptism. This is part of our Presbyterian tradition and it's a good thing to do. Maybe Jesus has become more real to you recently. That would be a good reason to renew your baptism. Maybe you were baptized as a kid but didn't claim your faith until you were adult. Maybe you've seen something, maybe He's freed you of something. All of those would be good reasons to reaffirm your baptism. So on March 5th, you can either get baptized for the first time or reaffirm your baptism. We are going to do this in the most traditional way. There is. We're going to do this in the way that Jesus was baptized. Oh yeah, we're going to dunk you, full immersion if you are physically able. If you're not physically able, we will sprinkle you. The reason we're doing it this way is A, it is the most traditional way to do it. It's how Jesus was baptized, and B, it's just such a good visual symbol.

We go under the water, our old self dies. We come up, and our new self is reborn. I know right now you got lots of logistical questions. "How are you going to do this? What would I wear, blah ... ?" We are going to help you with all of that, and we'll give you details as the weeks go ahead, or maybe you are thinking, "I don't want people to see me up there getting baptized." Well, first of all, there'll be some music and other things happening while we're baptizing people. So not all eyes will be on you. But also, really you're going to let that stop you from taking a significant step in your faith 'cause that would be a shame? We'll give you details in the weeks ahead, but be praying about it. I hope lots of people do this because it is a good thing to do. Be praying about it. It is a way to tell our stories publicly. I heard a pastor a while back talk about praying for a man who had cancer.

A few months later, his wife called this pastor and said, "You prayed for my husband who had cancer." The pastor heard the word had, and thought past tense. "He's been cured, a miracle," and she said, "He died," but don't feel bad because before you prayed for him, he was filled with anger because of the cancer. He would lie in bed and curse God and he was terrified to die. But after you prayed for him, an unusual joy entered into him. These last months have been the best months of our lives. We've sung, we've laughed, we've prayed, we've told stories. They've just been wonderful days." She said something profound. She said, "He wasn't cured, but he was healed." That man died free from the demons of anger and fear and all the other negative things that were hassling, he died free of those, died at peace, died having spent several wonderful months with his family because Jesus delivered him. Jesus does that in difficult, painful situations like that, but He also does it in more ordinary situations.

Throughout this sermon series, I've asked you to tell your stories to other people and even send me some of your stories so that I could tell them anonymously to encourage the congregation. So last week, a woman, I'll call her Betty, sent me a story about how one time she was praying the Lord's Prayer, and this one line just popped out at her, and she knew it was the Holy Spirit, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive others." She thought, "Is there someone I need to forgive?" Pretty quick, her mother-in-law popped into her brain. Some of you can relate, can't you? Her mother-in-law popped into her brain and her mother-in-law over the years had really irritated Betty, annoyed Betty. Some of that was just little stuff, but some of it was actually truly hurtful things. Worse, her mother-in-law didn't ever even acknowledge that she ever does anything wrong. Betty found it very difficult, very unpleasant to be around her mother-in-law. But she said, "When God focused my intention on forgiveness, I realized I needed to forgive her, even if she never apologized, even if she never realized she'd done anything wrong."

Betty said, "I didn't want to do it. It felt unfair. It felt like I was letting her off the hook. But finally, after a struggle, I promised God that I forgave her and asked for his help to help me really truly do that." She said, "In that moment, I felt love and a bright light wash over, wash over me, and I knew I had done the right thing." Betty said over time, after she did that, over time, two things happened. First, Betty began to notice the ways that she was contributing to the problems in their relationship. It wasn't all her mother-in-law. Betty started to see the way she was contributing to that. The second thing that happened over time was that Betty really began to

enjoy her mother-in-law and looked forward to spending time with her rather than dreading it. Betty said, "Her behavior didn't change at all. What changed was that I forgave her and started to love her instead of resent her." Betty ran to Jesus. Embrace the disruption of forgiveness.

It is very disrupting and difficult to forgive, and Jesus freed her from being harassed by anger and hurt and resentment. In the process, Betty got a new name. Irritated became joyful, resentment became forgiveness. Jesus can do that for you just like he did for Betty and the man who had cancer. So what is it? Run to Jesus. Get your new name from him. Embrace the disruption of getting free and tell your story so that the name I have to achieve to be loved, is turned into the name I am loved no matter what. So that the name weak, becomes the name strong, afraid becomes courageous, mighty warrior, friend of Jesus healed to healed others, partner in redeeming his world, beloved son, precious daughter, holy, righteous, one of the redeemed, set apart, brand-new heart, you are free indeed. So Jesus, thank You that You set us free, and we bring to you all the demons that harass us. Drive them away from us, give us peace, and we will give you all the glory, in Your name, Jesus, amen.

---

### **Discussion Questions:**

---

*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Ice-breaker Question:** Which Oscar-nominated movies have you seen? Or what's the last movie you've seen that you would recommend to a friend?

**Introductions:** Spend a few minutes getting to know everyone in your group this week. Share a little bit about yourself and listen to everyone else share a bit about themselves. If your group already knows each other well, share a brief update about what's been happening in your life since your group last gathered.

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What could help you embrace disruption in order to get free of something in your life right now? Share a story of what has helped you in your past that might be helpful to others or to you again.



**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.