

Mark – The First Gospel

010 – Power to Redeem and Recreate – Mark 4:35-5:20

All outlines, audio recording of discussions, and works referenced may be accessed and viewed at <http://markthefirstgospel.blogspot.com/> .

I was on a couple of away-from-home trips during the time I put this study together, so it isn't as complete or comprehensive as it typically would be.

First Thoughts

Mark returns to miracle stories to demonstrate the power of Jesus' teachings. There are four or three such stories next, depending on how one chooses to combine or not the first two. One commentary suggests that the first two – the calming of the storm, and the demoniac – are both exorcism stories and the two together tell a single story. Commentaries that treat them as two though, do note and acknowledge their relatedness.

The episode of the demoniac is very long – in fact the longest account of any found in Mark, and the longest version of this story in the Synoptics – in a gospel known for its terseness, pointing to its importance in communicating Mark's purpose.

As we read these accounts we must set aside our modernist, scientific reasoning. In the world of Jesus and Mark, storms are caused by supernatural forces and demons are very real. We must resist the temptation to reason our way out of what to us may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable readings of this text. We need to step into the ancient Roman and Jewish worlds and seek to place ourselves among the original audience and make an effort to not just hear what was said, but feel what they felt.

Redemption of Nature

4:35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" 39 And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (ESV)

1. Narrative picks up where the teaching episode leaves off – should be seen as “historical fiction”
2. In previous episode, Jesus was pictured as teaching from a boat, so it is convenient for Mark to pick up this new story of crossing the lake
3. They are not alone as they leave – other boats follow Jesus

4. The “sea” is part of the original Creation story and the Flood story
 - a. It represents chaos and frequently the domain of evil and demons in ancient thought
 - b. Creation is brought about by bringing order to chaos
 - c. The dry land after the Flood appears as the waters recede
 - d. In this story the waters of chaos and evil threaten to destroy the God’s family
5. Jesus is asleep
 - a. He is so tired that not even a violent storm wakes him
 - b. He has no fear, so even a violent storm cannot cause him to wake from fear
6. The disciples wake Jesus
 - a. Their tone is that of a rebuke – they try to control Jesus’ actions and tell him what to do
 - b. First, an accusation: don't you care?
 - c. Second, a statement: we are perishing
7. Jesus rises and standing as one who commands, rebukes the wind
 - a. This is a picture of exorcism
 - b. Jesus rebukes the evil spirits and demons of the wind and storm
 - c. The storm vanishes, replaced by a great calm
 - d. In both Hebrew and Greek mythologies, only God or gods possess that kind of power
8. Now Jesus rebukes the disciples
 - a. Fear is the root of human problems
 - b. It leads to self-seeking and attempt to control others
 - c. It is the opposite of faith
 - d. Faith is not merely intellectual assent to a set of knowledge or acceptance that God can act, but actually placing one’s trust in God and living a life based on that trust without fear
 - e. The disciples had been given plenty of examples already of Jesus’ power over disease and demons – they should have extrapolated the prior evidence to the storm
 - f. Like the seed that fell on rocky and weedy soil, the faith of the disciples were not yet sufficient to weather the storm
 - g. These miracle stories illustrate Jesus’ teachings
9. The disciples were filled with great fear
 - a. It could be read that they had great awe and respect for Jesus, coming to understand something about his true identity
 - b. It could be read that they were truly even more frightened because they have begun to realize Jesus’ true identity
 - c. Or it could be both
10. This story would have been great comfort to Mark’s original audience
 - a. Jesus is God and has all the requisite authority to command even nature
 - b. Therefore, Jesus is greater than any earthly power and anything that may be invoked in the name of any other being
 - c. Caesar and the Romans have no real power over Christians
11. The problem of God’s apparent silence and absence, especially amidst our trials
12. Compared to the story of Jonah

- a. What was the human response to divine command?
 - b. What caused the storm?
 - c. Where is God in the story?
 - d. What was the human response to the storm?
 - e. What stopped the storm?
 - f. What is the image of God pictured by the story?
13. How does this story reinterpret and reapply the Creation account?
 14. How does this story change how someone might have viewed the character of God?

Redemption of Humankind

5:1 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2 And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. 3 He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, 4 for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. 6 And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. 7 And 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." 8 For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" 9 And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." 10 And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11 Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, 12 and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." 13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

14 The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. 15 And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. 16 And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. 17 And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. (ESV)

1. First Markan record of Jesus in Gentile lands
2. Not just Gentile land, but a place of tombs—the dead
 - a. Jesus enters what is known to be unclean
 - b. Jesus takes the battle to enemy territory
3. A vivid description of the man with unclean spirits
 - a. No human power is able to control or restrain him
 - b. He has been driven away from human society and connections

- c. He inflicts self-harm
 - d. He no longer behaves in a human manner
 - e. He is the very opposite of the original Adam
4. The man cannot even speak for himself
 - a. The spirits attempt to gain control over Jesus using his full name and title
 - b. The spirits (ironically) appeal to the only power stronger than Jesus in order to try to control him
 5. The invasion of the kingdom of God reaches even into Gentile lands, into the realm of the unclean and dead
 6. Jesus does not have absolute power and authority over the demons
 - a. Or, the audience needed to see that Jesus destroyed the demons
 7. The demons simply cannot disappear—they must do the work of destruction
 - a. Jesus permits their work to occur in pigs nearby
 - b. In their destruction of the herd of pigs into the sea, the destruction and return of the demons to their place of origin, the sea, is symbolized
 8. The hired hands go and tell the herd owners what has happened
 - a. They return, with the rest of the city, and witness the infamous possessed man, now clothed and in his right mind
 - b. The man's humanity has been restored; he is a new creation
 - c. They put the two together and understand what had happened
 - d. They become afraid—very much like the disciples after the calming of the storm
 9. The citizens are fearful of the consequences and demands of having Jesus continue his invasion of the kingdom of the world and so ask him to leave
 - a. Jesus never insists to stay when he is asked to leave
 10. The man asks to go with Jesus
 - a. Understandable: the citizens didn't want Jesus around. Why would they want the man around?
 - b. Jesus does not permit the man to accompany, but sends him out as the first apostle to the Gentiles
 - i. No discipleship course or training
 - ii. No set of fundamental beliefs or a creed
 - iii. Just the instruction to tell everyone about God's mercy that was shown
 - iv. This is the heart of genuine evangelism
 - c. There is no restriction placed on this man, unlike with the Jews
 - i. The Gentiles do not have Messianic expectations that would place Jesus in conflict with Rome
 11. The man's testimony is accepted around the region
 12. Similarities with this story and Jonah's account in Nineveh, another Gentile city?
 13. What do we do with the "problems" in this story (in our modernist view)?
 - a. Demon possession?
 - b. Jesus permitting destruction of pigs (life and wealth)?
 - c. Jesus not having absolute control or power over evil?