

The Madman of Gadara

Key Verse:

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”

2 Corinthians 4:4

Level 5 lesson 5

Extra: Find more evidence of God’s power over evil spirits.

Read Mark 5:1-20

Further reading: Matthew 8:28-34; and Luke 8:26-37

Many people today treat the devil and his demons as a joke, or not actually real; some even consider it ‘fun’ to experiment with ouija boards and conduct séances. New Age gurus encourage us to consult or listen to ‘spirit guides’ and it’s portrayed as harmless - even helpful. Thousands of young people fill their minds with music which glorifies Satan, death and evil.

Don’t be fooled! You may ‘play’ with the devil - but he doesn’t play with you! He ‘plays for keeps’ - ruining human lives and ensuring that people spend eternity separated from God, in Hell.

1 Peter 5:8,9 describes him as “a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour!” and tells us to “resist him.” Ephesians 4:27 reminds us “not to give him a foothold in our lives.” Even Christians sometimes treat him lightly and let sinful habits develop in their lives. Look at this man’s terrible condition - see what the devil really wants to do in our lives!

This man had no self-control (a fruit of the Holy Spirit - Galatians 5:22) or self-respect. He was a dangerous menace, feared by everyone. He lived among the tombs, often naked and with no rest night or day, always screaming out and cutting himself with sharp stones. What a mess – and no-one, it seemed, could help.

THE MIGHTY DELIVERER

However, a mighty Deliverer was at hand - Jesus Christ! As He stepped off the boat, this ‘madman’ ran and fell at His feet. In response to Jesus’ command to leave the man, the demon cried out, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Promise that you won’t torture me!” The demons [see v7 & 8] knew Jesus was God, with authority over them. They know their day of judgement is coming (Matthew 8:29). The devil is powerful - but Christ is all-powerful!

THE DECEITFUL ENEMY

Demons don’t care about their victims - only themselves. Jesus wanted to free this man from his terrible bondage, but the demons wanted to continue their ruinous hold on him. Satan still does this today. He blinds the minds of unbelievers [Key Verse] so that they regard Jesus as an enemy and not a Friend and Saviour. He tells them if they become Christians they will lose their ‘freedom’ - they won’t have any fun. Of course, Jesus only wants what is BEST for us! He sets us free from sin, to live in harmony with Him. This often means our behaviour changes when we accept Christ as Saviour; we just don’t enjoy our old lifestyle any more. Now we have far greater joys and pleasures. Don’t believe Satan’s lies; Jesus is no tormentor - but our loving Saviour!

THE CHANGED MAN

Jesus allowed the demons to enter a herd of pigs feeding nearby. Immediately, they rushed down a steep hill into the sea and drowned! We can see two things clearly from this; 1] the demons had to do as Jesus commanded. 2] The true nature and intent of the demons - to destroy and ruin. What a difference to the work of Christ in this man’s life! Delivered from the demons, the townspeople arrived to find him “sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed, and in his right mind.” What a transformation – all through Jesus’ mercy and power!

THE FOOLISH PEOPLE

Incredibly, these foolish people pleaded with Jesus to leave! They seemed blind to the wonderful deliverance Jesus had brought this man and were concerned only for their pigs. The man begged to stay with Jesus but Jesus told him to go home and tell his friends what great things the Lord had done for him. We read that he did this all around the area. If you have been saved from sin, will you too, tell others “what great things the Lord has done for you?”

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did Jesus cross the Lake of Galilee?	.....
2. Why did the man think Jesus would torment him?	.....
3. Mention one of the great things that Jesus did for the man.	.....
4. What did the Lord tell the man to do after he had been healed?	.....
5. Why do you think the people wanted Jesus to go away?	.....

My Name is Age

A Woman and a Girl Healed

Key Verse:
"Your faith has healed you."

Mark 5:34

Level 5 lesson 6

Extra: What contrasts and similarities do you find between these two events?

Read Mark 5:21-34

Further reading: Matthew 9:18-26; and Luke 8:41-56

The Lord returned by ship from Gadara, and was soon surrounded by a crowd of people. Among them was Jairus, a ruler in the Jewish synagogue. His 12 year old daughter was lying at home, near death. Desperate, this highly respected and important man fell humbly at Jesus' feet, pleading with Him, "Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live!" Graciously the Lord responded to his faith by going with him. The crowd followed, eager to see what would happen.

A WOMAN'S FAITH

As Jesus made His way to Jairus' house, a poor woman who had suffered with a horrible bleeding illness for over 12 years, came to seek His help. She was a pathetic case; although she had spent all her money on doctors, she "was no better, but rather, grew worse." However, when all hope was gone, she heard of Jesus! Confident He could help her, she thought to herself, "If I can just touch His clothes, I will be well." Overcoming her natural shyness and fear, she pressed through the crowd until she could reach out her hand and touch the hem of His cloak. Immediately "she was healed of her suffering." What a contrast! The doctors had cost her everything for nothing - Jesus, the great Physician, gave her everything for nothing!

THE SAVIOUR'S RESPONSE

Having been healed, perhaps she hoped to go quietly home, thinking no one had noticed. Jesus had noticed though; He would not let her go without acknowledging her faith. Stopping for a moment, He asked, "Who touched me?" At first, no-one admitted it, perhaps fearing that Jesus was angry. Even Peter said, "Master, you can see the people crowding against you; many have touched you - and yet you ask, "Who touched me?"

True, many were touching Him, but Jesus meant this woman's touch - the touch of faith. Finally, the woman stepped forward and fell trembling at His feet. She blurted out her sad story and explained how she had been instantly healed. Jesus of course, was not angry with her! "Daughter," He said tenderly, "Your faith has healed you: go in peace, and be freed from your suffering!" Oh how often in our guilt, we too, fear to draw near to Jesus, thinking He will only punish! We forget how much He longs to forgive and restore. That's why He said, "Those who come to Me, I will not turn away." (John 6:37) It's just the same today. Jesus still responds to the genuine cry of faith in love and compassion.

A GIRL'S HEALING

While Jesus was speaking to the woman, messengers came to Jairus with sad news. "Your daughter is dead, why trouble the Master any more?" Poor Jairus! This news must have broken his heart. Jesus however, knowing his thoughts and grief, encouraged him, "Fear not, only believe and she will be healed." As they reached the house, a great crowd of people were there, weeping. Death is a very sad thing. However, our Lord told them, "The child is not dead but asleep." Some laughed out loud at Him - they knew the girl was certainly dead! Jesus though, was the One who could say, "I AM.. the Life!" He put them all out and entering the room where the girl was lying He said to her, "Little girl, arise." Instantly she sat up, restored again to life and full health by the power of God!

The humble, trusting faith of both Jairus and the sick woman, led to healing and new life. Today too, faith is still the vital link between us and God. He can do nothing for us if we have no faith. Faith admits our need and receives the help and blessing offered. Our greatest need is found within our hearts - a need for forgiveness of sin and strength to live upright lives. If we trust Jesus as Saviour and Lord we too can know His power to save and keep.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What statement proves that Jairus had faith in the Lord's power?	.....
2. Why did the Lord ask "Who touched me?"	.....
3. What did the Lord say had made the woman well?	.....
4. What encouraging message did Jesus give to Jairus?	.....
5. What may we receive from the Lord through faith in Him?	.....

A Funeral Procession Halted

Key Verse:

“I am the Resurrection and the Life: He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies.”

John 11:25

Level 5 lesson 7

Extra: Find some reasons why the funeral was so traumatic for the mother.

Read Luke 7:11-23

Further: Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1

A Jewish funeral procession in the Lord’s Day was very different from one today. Graveyards were always outside the city, and when someone died, the corpse was carried on a ‘bier,’ or open coffin, to the gravesite. Women always walked at the head of the procession, then came the hired mourners, or other family members, then the coffin, and behind that came the people of the city who were joined by other mourners as the procession passed along.

SORROWING

Once, as Jesus and His disciples entered Nain, a city near the Sea of Galilee, they met such a procession. A young man, a poor widow’s only son, was being carried out for burial, and a large crowd mourned with the widow in her grief. Of course, for a widow in those days, to lose her only son was especially tragic as he would have been her means of support and protection. Now she was alone and helpless.

REJOICING

Jesus, saw the poor woman leading the procession and knowing her situation, felt such pity for her. “Don’t cry,” He said to her kindly. Going up to the coffin, He told the pallbearers to stand still. Then, He spoke to the corpse, “Young man, I say to you – ARISE!” In front of all the amazed onlookers, the dead man sat up and began to talk. The LORD OF LIFE had spoken, bringing the young man to life again! It is hard to imagine the widow’s surprise and joy as Jesus gave her back her only son. All the people who saw this miracle feared and glorified God saying, “A great prophet is risen up among us; God has visited His people.”

It is worth mentioning that Scripture doesn’t record any comments made about the ‘afterlife’ by this young man, or any of those in Scripture raised back to life. In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus told a parable, which gives us a small glimpse into life after death. In that story, messengers were not permitted to send messages back to relatives; - instead people are told to believe the message of “Moses and the prophets” i.e. God’s Word, the Bible. Why did He say this?

This is because God intends that we should live by FAITH (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17) depending entirely upon His Word for all information concerning this life, and life after death.

God expressly forbade His people from consulting Spirit mediums or those who claim to tell the future (Deuteronomy 18:14). Instead they were to listen to God as He spoke through His prophets. Read this whole portion of Scripture if you like (Deuteronomy 18:9-22) It is also interesting to note that most supposed ‘messages’ from people who have died, say they are ‘happy, comfortable and not to worry.’ This is **very different** to the message the rich man wanted to send back to his family! Remember our enemy, Satan, is a liar and deceiver.

DOUBTS ANSWERED

The news of this miracle spread far and wide - even John the Baptist in prison, heard about it. He had thought Jesus was the promised Messiah but now, imprisoned and alone, it seems he began to wonder, “If Jesus is the Messiah – why doesn’t He come and rescue me?” John sent two of his disciples to Jesus. They told Him, “John the Baptist has sent us to You asking; are you the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Jesus had been working all sorts of miracles, even as they approached Him. He simply replied, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and the Gospel is preached to the poor.” These were all proofs that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, as prophesied in Scripture. He added this personal word for John, “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me”(v23) Jesus knew that John’s faith in Him would soon be sorely tested. What a comfort to John this promise would be, as he faced the executioners sword! His unwavering faith would receive a rich reward. John’s doubts were answered.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was this widow so terribly sad?	.....
2. What did Jesus say to the dead man?	.....
3. What has God given us to inform us about life after death?	.....
4. What proof of His Messiahship did Jesus give to the disciples of John?	.....
5. What do you think Jesus meant in verse 23?	.....

The Death of John the Baptist

Key Verse:

“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.”

Level 5 lesson 8

Extra: How should Herod and Herodias have responded to John’s words?

Read Mark 6:14-29

Further readings: Matthew 14:1-12; and Luke 9:7-9

Jesus once called John the Baptist the greatest prophet ever born. In our story today, we read of how this wonderful man was executed without committing any crime - simply to please an evil Queen. How could such a terrible thing happen?

A BOLD STATEMENT

Perhaps you remember how King Herod had John imprisoned, because he had publicly rebuked him for his sin. Herod had married his brother Phillip’s wife, Herodias, thereby breaking God’s seventh commandment (Exodus 20:14). John bluntly told Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”

Notice John did not say, “It is not wise, or appropriate for you to have her”, but - “it is not lawful!” It is contrary to God’s law. It is not right. People today don’t like to be told what is right and wrong do they? They like to think they can choose or decide what is ‘right for them’. But God is the one who ultimately determines what is right and wrong - not us. He is the final, absolute authority - and we are responsible to Him to obey.

This fearless, straight-talking no doubt annoyed King Herod, but it also infuriated the Queen! She pressured Herod to throw John into prison. She really wanted him killed, but Herod was not prepared to go that far. He knew John was a righteous and holy man, and he actually respected him highly. In his heart he knew that what John had said was the truth!

A WICKED PLOT

However, wicked Queen Herodias was determined to get rid of John the Baptist somehow, and it wasn’t long before her opportunity arose. To celebrate King Herod’s birthday, a great banquet was held, to which all the important people in his kingdom were invited. It was a very extravagant occasion, no doubt, with much food and drink and raucous entertainment. At one point, the Queen sent in her daughter to dance before the King. The King was carried away by the girl’s seductive display, and foolishly made an oath, swearing that he would give her anything she wanted - even up to half of his kingdom!

The girl went to her mother saying, “What shall I ask?” We can almost hear the hatred in Herodias’ voice as she hissed, “The head of John the Baptist!” The girl returned to the King and said, “I want the head of John the Baptist!” The Queen’s wicked plot had worked to perfection!

Herod now realised that he had acted foolishly and been ‘set up’ by the two women. He was terribly sorry, but what should he do? The whole crowd was waiting for his response. Should he behead John or break his promise? Of course, he should have admitted his terrible mistake in making such a foolish oath, and denied the Queen her evil request. But sadly, the King’s pride was too great. He didn’t want to look foolish in front of his friends - he was scared what they might think of him.

A DREADFUL CRIME

So, poor weak Herod ordered an executioner to go to the prison; and John, an innocent godly man, was beheaded. His head was brought to the girl, who took it to her mother. Some day they will all answer to God for this dreadful crime. Revelation 6:9,10 speaks of “the blood of martyrs (like John the Baptist and countless others) crying out to God for justice.”

Herod, we know, had a terrible conscience about this dreadful thing he had done, for the rest of his life. Verses 14-16 of our reading tell us that when he heard of Jesus and His mighty works, he exclaimed guiltily, “It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead!”

It is clear that he was a cowardly, sinful man. He feared Jesus, he feared John, he feared the multitude, he feared Herodias, and he feared those at his dinner party. He illustrates perfectly the Scripture which says, “The fear of man brings a snare, but the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom!” (Proverbs 29:25, Proverbs 1:7).

Our conscience must be enlightened by righteous knowledge, the knowledge of God’s Word, to function accurately. How much better if Herod had listened to the voice of his conscience as it responded to the Word of God, brought by John.

We too, need to treat conscience as a friend, not as an enemy. Listen to its voice. When it worries you, don’t stifle it - instead, confess and repent of your sin. You will find peace from its accusations as you trust in the blood of Jesus to cleanse you from all sin.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was King Herod so fearful when he heard of the mighty works of the Lord Jesus?

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2. Who is the final authority on what is right and wrong?

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3. What does conscience need to enable it to function accurately?

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4. Why did the plan of Herodias succeed?

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5. How would you describe Herod?

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