

# Jesus vs. Legion

## The Power of the Word: Part 8

Mark 5:1-13 8/5/2018

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Summary: To prove that this slow, hidden, seed-like power is real, Jesus does 4 miracles that can be seen immediately. The first (stilling the storm) proves the power of his word over the creation. This, the second, proves his ability to eradicate evil. Confronted with the most unclean situation imaginable, and vastly outnumbered, Jesus effortlessly sends all the demons into the Abyss. But first he shows us how many there were by allowing them to go into 2000 pigs.

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**Mark 5:1-20** They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 4 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. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. 6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" 8 For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" 9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." 10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. 11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12 The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." 13 He gave them permission, and the evil 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.

## Introduction

We are in a section of Mark that is all about the power of the word of Christ. In ch.4 Jesus told some parables about how his word is like a seed that has the power to bring in the glorious, eternal, kingdom of God. It's an awesome, universe-transforming power. It's a power that will be able to reverse the curse, bring the creation under control, and eliminate all evil, suffering, and death forever. All that power is in his word ... but, like a seed. For now, it's hidden and slow and the results won't be seen for a long time, like a seed in the ground. That's Jesus' point in the parables in ch.4. The problem with that is, if it's hidden and slow and the results are far off, how do we know for sure that it's real? How do we know

Jesus really has that much power in all 4 of those categories—enough to control the creation, eliminate evil, eliminate disease, and eliminate death? If the power is hidden like a seed, how can we be sure it even exists? That’s where ch.5 comes in (and the last bit of ch.4). In ch.5, Jesus performs 4 miracles—one in each one of those 4 categories, just by speaking a word. So Jesus says, “My word has long-term, hidden power; and let me prove that by showing you immediate, visible power.”

## Who Is This?

The first miracle shows Jesus has the power to subdue the creation—he stilled the storm with a word. I said last week that everyone always complains about the weather, but no one ever does anything about it, except for Jesus, who finally did something about it. What about evil? Everyone complains about evil in the world, and a lot of folks try to do something about it, but the fact is, not only do we lack the power to eliminate evil, but we are all constantly contributing to the problem of evil. The very people who complain about evil generate more of it every single day! Does Jesus really have the power to eradicate evil? That’s what we’re about to see.

We left off with a boat full of men soaked to the skin, dumbfounded over the stilling of the storm, and scared to death of this awesome being in the boat with them. So have they figured out, finally, that he’s the Son of God? No. Their response is to say, **who is this?** And Jesus says: **4:40 ...Do you still have no faith?** You just shout into the text and tell them, “What do you mean “who is this?” You still don’t get it? He’s the Son of God!” They aren’t rejecting Jesus, but they aren’t accepting the truth either. They are reserving judgment, which is unacceptable. It is not acceptable to be confronted with evidence of who Jesus is and walk away thinking, *I don’t know what to make of that*. Postponed faith is still unbelief.

## An Unclean Setting

Ok, so the storm has been silenced, and now they are making their way across the quiet sea over toward the eastern side.

### **Mark 5:1 They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.**

Now, that right there raises some eyebrows, because they aren’t just crossing a lake; they are crossing a boarder. The other side of the lake is Gentile territory, which meant the entire area, including the ground itself, was unclean.<sup>1</sup> Jesus is taking his disciples to the other side of the lake, which, for a Jew, is the wrong side of the spiritual tracks. But here they are. The sky is clear, the air is still, the water is calm, and the boat glides into the shore.<sup>2</sup> And it’s an eerie feeling. The boat hits the sand, Andrew jumps out with the bow line and ties it up, and as they disembark, they find themselves in a context of total, spiritual darkness. Everything is unclean. Not only is it a Gentile area, but they get out of the boat right next to a graveyard. The #1 most defiling, unclean thing, for a Jew, was a corpse. And here they are surrounded by dead bodies. And then, a stone’s throw away, there’s a giant heard of pigs, which is the most unclean animal there is. And the worst of all, the place is teeming with unclean spirits. Jesus has led these 12 men right into the darkest depths of the most contaminating, defiling uncleanness imaginable. In the movie, “Lord of the Rings,” there is a place like this. It’s called Mordor. It’s full of these kind of pig like creatures called orks, and demonic kinds of beings, and the whole place is just a dark, fiery, dangerous realm. For the disciples, this place would have been their Mordor.

I can just picture Peter pulling Jesus aside here and saying, “Jesus, don’t you have any cultural sensitivities? You don’t take 12 kosher Jews to a pig farm ... in a Gentile country ... next to a pagan cemetery! This is an amazing scene—holiness personified confronting the Mordor of unholiness. You

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<sup>1</sup> When Jews returned to Israel after being in a Gentile area, they would shake the dust off their feet when they came back to the Israel boarder, so they didn’t get the Jewish dirt dirty with unclean Gentile dirt.

<sup>2</sup> Normally it would only take a couple of hours to cross the lake. We don’t know if this whole thing took place that same night, or if they spend the rest of the night fishing, or sleep there on the beach and it happens the next morning.

want to know if the word of Christ has enough power to deal with the problem of evil, there's no better test than this.

## The Confrontation

**2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an unclean spirit came from the tombs to meet him.**

He came from *the tombs*? That's strange. Tell us a little more about this guy, Mark.

**3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 4 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. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.**

Wow. Apparently, the demons would come upon him in episodes, and in between episodes the people would chain him up. That's the best this world can do in dealing with evil—just try to put some restraints on it. If we lock people away in prison, we can protect society somewhat from their evil, but we have no ability to get rid of the actual evil. Incarceration doesn't take the evil out of his heart. If anything, it makes it even worse. And this guy had gotten worse, so that now they weren't even able to chain him up anymore.

This demon spend his days tormenting this guy. He's destroying his body, but not enough to kill him. The guy probably wished the demon would kill him, but he keep him alive for more torture. Can you imagine being held captive and tortured all day every day? That would be a horror if it were people doing that to you, but powerful evil spirits who had control of your mind doing it?

And life isn't exactly roses for the community either. Matthew says no one could pass that way.<sup>3</sup> People who lived around there would always be in constant danger, and nothing could be done about it.

## This is the Strong Man

Now, Mark is very intentional about his choice of words here.

**3 ... no one could bind him ... 4 No one was strong enough**

Where have we heard that language before—about being strong enough to bind a strong man? In 3:27, where Jesus was describing Satan as a strong man. Satan is so strong that no one can steal a soul from him unless he is able to bind that strong man. Mark uses that same language here to show us—this is the strong man. Not the guy, but the spirit controlling the guy, and ultimately Satan himself. And so far, no one has been strong enough to bind him, which means no one can rescue this man's soul. But now the strong man is about to collide with the Messiah. When it says the man came out to **meet** Jesus, that's not meeting in the sense of, "Hello, how do you do? Pleased to meet you." This is meeting like meeting on the battlefield.

## Showdown

Imagine you were there. As soon as you climb out of the boat you want to climb right back in and paddle out of there, because this is like a scene out of a horror movier. You're there on the shore, and you keep glancing up toward those creepy looking caves. Then suddenly out of the darkness you hear bone-chilling shrieks and demonic screams that curdle your blood. Here comes this maniac, with superhuman strength charging you. You see broken chains hanging from him. That means he's under a restraining

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew also mentions that there was a second man who was also violent, but Mark's focus is on the one who did the speaking.

order. Worse than that, he's an escaped convict—a violent felon. He's running down the hill straight toward you—naked, violent, screaming. And you're thinking, *I think I'd rather be back in the storm*. Just before the guy reaches you, you duck behind Jesus. Some others start toward the boat. But Jesus doesn't budge. He doesn't even brace himself.

When the guy gets to Jesus, you expect a running tackle, but instead, the guy sees Jesus and skids to a stop right in front of Jesus. No doubt this was the first time this guy had ever charged someone and the person didn't run away.

And then...v.6 says he fell down in front of Jesus—in a posture of worship. He's not worshipping, he clearly doesn't have a worshipping heart, but he drops down into a subservient position. This is a confrontation between two massive spiritual powers, and it's immediately obvious which is the superior.

This demon knows exactly who he is dealing with. When Jesus stilled the storm, the disciples were asking, **Who is this?** The demons aren't wondering that. They know exactly who Jesus is—the Son of the Most High God.

Why did this guy come running?

### **6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran...**

Evidently, from a distance, the demon didn't realize it was Jesus at first. He just sees some guys getting out of a boat, so he charges down there to attack them, but as soon as he's close enough to recognize Jesus, he stops and drops to the ground. But he's still just as wild.

### **7 He shouted at the top of his voice**

He is there with his face in the dirt, shouting at Jesus as loud as he can. Bizarre, unnatural, demonic hostility.

## **The Initial Command to Come Out**

At this point Jesus commanded the demon to come out (v.8). But he didn't, which is a shock to the reader. That never happens anywhere else in the Gospels. Every other time, Jesus enforces first time obedience on demons just like he did with the wind and the waves, so the split-second Jesus says to get out, they're gone. But Jesus allows this demon to momentarily disobey and even answer back.

### **7 "What do you want with me<sup>4</sup>, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?<sup>5</sup>**

It's like he's saying, "You don't belong here, Jesus!" And I'm sure all the disciples all said a big "amen" to that. This was the last place they wanted to be. But the demon is wrong, and Jesus is serving notice that no place is outside of his jurisdiction. This isn't the time for him to reach the Gentiles with his kingdom yet. That will come later. For now he is called to the lost sheep of Israel, but he does fully intend to expand his reign throughout the nations, and here he is serving notice that that's coming.

And that's a great encouragement for the original readers of Mark, who had been sent out to make disciples of all nations, and who were suffering persecution by people who were telling them, "You don't belong here. Get out of here." The universal reign of Christ gives Christians the right and duty to go anywhere in the world and insert themselves into the contexts of deepest darkness and bring light. No one can tell us we don't belong because our king reigns everywhere.

But this demon tries to stand up against Jesus. Maybe he realized, "Hey, he told me to get out, and I'm still here!" and so he becomes emboldened and decides to confront Jesus.

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<sup>4</sup> Literally, what to me and to you? It's a common idiom in Scripture and, in this context, it is a rebuke.

<sup>5</sup> That seems to be a favorite title for God among spirit beings

- The demon in Acts 16:17 **These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.**

- The angel Gabriel in Luke 1 32 **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High... 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.**

## 7 Swear to God that you won't torment me!

Isn't that amazing? What has this demon just been doing? He's been tormenting this poor guy mercilessly day and night. Then Jesus shows up and he says, "Don't torment me!" He doesn't want a taste of his own medicine.

But the language here is not just a plea for mercy. When he says **swear to God**, that's an effort to put Jesus under oath. It comes across as an authoritative demand, like Jesus would be required to comply. Why did he think he was in a position to put Jesus under oath to leave them alone? In Matthew's account we get a clue. In Matthew he says, "**Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?**" He's saying, "Wait a minute—you can't torment us. We're not at the end of the book of Revelation yet!"<sup>6</sup> The demon wants to give Jesus a lesson on eschatology. Demons didn't know about the two comings of the Messiah any more than the people did. It was a mystery that hadn't been revealed. So this demon tries to pull a Bible verse on Jesus. It's kind of like a criminal saying, "I've got my rights!"

And another reason why this demon may have thought he could pull a power play on Jesus was that he's seeing Jesus in the weakness of his human nature. This is a guy who was just out cold in the boat because of fatigue. Jesus was a human being, and this demon had never had any trouble with any human being before. In Isa.37:36 one spirit killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night.<sup>7</sup> And on top of all that, this demon wasn't alone.

## The Legion

9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." A Roman legion was an army of up to 6000 foot soldiers and 120 horsemen.<sup>8</sup> So the term "legion" would have called to mind not only great numbers, but also efficient organization and formidable, relentless strength. Jesus was not facing a demon; he was facing an army of demons.

That's why this demon is so bold. There Jesus and the 12 are in their helpless, weak, tired human bodies—far from the Temple, outside of the Holy Land. They are on the Devil's home turf. And surrounding them were thousands of evil, vile, powerful and vicious demons – each fully capable of killing people. They were all over the *hillside*, in the boat, on the water, surrounding each disciple – and hundreds of them – hundreds of the biggest and most powerful and most vicious of them – surrounding Jesus and poised for attack.

They have every advantage. And now they have done something we've never seen done before in the Gospels - they decide to challenge Jesus. This is a showdown. It's the fight of the Century. What could be more dramatic? The Messiah vs. a literal army of demons. This is a power encounter of cosmic proportions.

## Go

Mark doesn't describe the battle, so we have to go to Matthew's account to see it. Here's how it went down.

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<sup>6</sup> Demons didn't know about the first and Second Coming of the Messiah any more than the people did. It was a mystery that hadn't been revealed. So when they see Christ they're saying, "Wait a minute – we're not at the end of the book of Revelation yet!" This period in between the first coming and Second Coming of Christ we call the "already but not yet" phase of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is already here in a very real way, but not yet in its fullest sense. The disciples appreciated the "already" but had trouble with the "not yet." They saw the Messiah and said, "Great! The Kingdom is here!" But then they scratched their heads and said, "Where are all the glorious promises?" These demons had the opposite problem. They understood the not yet part - it's not the appointed time for Judgment Day, but they didn't understand the already part. They've got a great thing going here, and they see the boat pull up on shore and say, "Oh no! What is the Messiah doing here already?"

<sup>7</sup> That was an angel, but demons have similar power. In Daniel 10:13 a demon resisted an angel for 3 weeks until Michael finally came and overpowered the demon.

<sup>8</sup> The evil spirits are using him as a miniature Pandemonium, the abode of all demons.

## **Matthew 8:32 He said to them, "Go!" So they came out.**

That's it. One word. No formulas, no incantations, no struggle, no prayer—he just utters a single, one-word command and every last one of those demons goes. Jesus unleashes a tiny little sample of his divine power in a word, and a legion of the most powerful beings in the universe stumble all over each other in a mad scramble to get out. So much for the battle of the century. It lasted one second.

Sometimes people assume that Jesus asked the demon his name as a strategy for casting him out. They say that's one of the tricks of the trade for casting out demons. No. Jesus does not need to know a demon's name to cast it out. He never asks any other demon his name, nor does he use this demon's name when he casts him out. Jesus doesn't need strategies or techniques to win a battle against a demon. Jesus is saying, "I realize you're trying to say it's not time yet and I don't have the right to do this ... whatever—give me your name, now." It's like a police officer pulling out his little notebook and saying, "What's your name?" Those demons are in trouble, and Jesus is taking names. Why? To show the disciples and us what we wouldn't otherwise know. Jesus wanted us to know that there was a whole legion of demons there so that we would see his awesome power when he takes command of that legion. They think they are going to intimidate Jesus or put Jesus under oath, but instead, Jesus gives an order and they all snap to attention. He says march, they march. He says jump, they say, "How high?"

## **Proof of ability to eliminate evil**

This is an awesome display of power. It's probably an even greater display of divine power than what Jesus did on the lake. I told you last week that in order to qualify to be the Messiah a person would have to be able to reverse the curse and eliminate all its effects. Last week: power over creation (check). Now: power to eliminate evil (check).

## **1 John 3:8 The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.**

## **The Future of Evil**

A lot of people stress over the question of the origin of evil. Why did God ever allow evil to exist? But really the question of the origin of evil is moot. Whatever the reason was, and whatever the first cause was, the reality is, evil exists. We can all agree on that much. Evil is a reality, and frankly, I'm not really all that concerned about the *origin* of evil. I'm much more concerned with the *future* of evil. However it got started, it's here, and I want it gone. I long for things to be set right. I want to live in a place where there is no evil.

And only Jesus Christ can do that. All the founders of all the other religions— some of them may have been remarkable men, but did any of them show the power to eradicate evil from the world? No, they weren't even able to eradicate the evil from their own hearts, much less the Universe. Only one person has proven he has the power to eliminate evil: the Lord Jesus Christ. He can do it, and it's not going to be hard. All he has to do is say, "Go" and it will be gone forever.

## **The Demons' Request**

But we still have this question of why Jesus allowed the demons to stay in the guy after the first time he told them to leave. It's because Jesus had something in mind that He wanted to do, and it begins to unfold in v.10. Rewind just a little bit to right before Jesus sent the demons out of this man. The demons are reduced to begging.

## **10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.**

And Luke tells us why.

## **Luke 8:31 And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.<sup>9</sup>**

The Abyss is the place where Jesus will punish the demons forever, and they would rather go through any agony than go there. They are terrified of it. The word “Abyss” literally means, “bottomless.” The Abyss was a terrible place with no bottom—you just keep descending. It just keeps getting worse and worse forever. In Rev.9:1-11 we get a glimpse of it. The lid of that place opens, and you don’t even want to know what came out of there. There are creatures that are described as being like locust (which has to be the most disgusting creature in existence). They are like locust, but they are worse than regular locust, because they are the size of a horse, with tails that sting like scorpions. They have a face like a human face, long hair, wings, tails, etc. And they are mad when they come out, literally, like a demon out of hell. And these demons are begging Jesus, “Please, not the Abyss!” And it’s interesting: many Jews believed that the entrance to the Abyss was at the bottom of the sea.

So the disciples are watching this army of demons panic in fear before this man who just last night was dead asleep on the floor of the boat, and yet who has the authority to send these awesome beings into the Abyss. And now the story takes an even more bazaar turn. They make a request.

### **11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12 The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them."**

How is Jesus going to respond to this request? I would expect him to say, “No, you can’t go into the pigs. You’ll go where I say you’ll go, which is the Abyss. Goodbye!” But that’s not what Jesus does. Look at his response.

## **The Lord’s Response**

### **13 He gave them permission**

What? The demons make a request, and Jesus immediately says, “Deal.” Now, if those demons were smart, they would have been thinking at that point, *Wait a second. That was way too easy. What’s going on here?* Maybe they did think that, but it’s too late at this point for any renegotiation, because, Jesus had already said, “Go!” That’s not, “Go, if you want, whenever you’re ready.” No, this is the same mighty word of Christ that stilled the storm. When Jesus said, “Go,” they were gone, and every one of them had Jesus’ sandal print on their backsides. 13 ... and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in numberPicture that. That is a massive heard of pigs. That would be like pigs as far as the eye could see.

### **13 ...rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.**

2000 pigs charge into the lake! Swinicide. These pigs are just calmly grazing, doing whatever pigs do, and suddenly they all go crazy and charge into the sea and drown themselves.

## **Why Do the Demons Request This?**

Why did the demons want to go into the pigs? Because, they were trying to avoid being sent to the Abyss. They had to know that Jesus wouldn’t let them go into another person, so they figured, if they could at least go into animal bodies they could avoid the Abyss. Were they right? No. They might have bought themselves a couple of minutes, but remember, the sea symbolized the Abyss. I’m convinced that the pigs perishing in the sea would have been interpreted as symbolic of the fact that the demons met a similar fate and went to the Abyss. The destructive powers of the sea that were no problem for Jesus now swallow up the pigs and the demons. It’s like Jesus says, “Oh, you don’t want to leave this area? Fine, I’ll

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<sup>9</sup> The Jews believed that some demons are free to roam around and others are imprisoned already in the Abyss, and 1 Pe.3:19 seems to confirm that belief.

bury you in this area.” And the demons find themselves in the Abyss and say, “Oh, now I understand why he agreed to the pig idea.” They beg to go into the pigs thinking it will save them from the Abyss, and Jesus says, “Oh, you want to go into them? Let me step out of your way.” And they knew something was up. Jesus stepped out of their way like a martial arts fighter steps aside and uses his attacker’s momentum to slam him to the ground.

But we still have the question: if Jesus is just going to send them to the Abyss anyway, why does He grant their request to go into the pigs? Why not just send them straight to the Abyss?”<sup>10</sup> Because, the whole point of this miracle is to give us proof of his awesome power, so we can trust what he said about his word being like a seed. He wants us to see how much power his word has, and if he just sent the demons directly to the Abyss, we wouldn’t have any visible evidence that there was actually a whole army of demons. So Jesus lets them go into the pigs, and the disciples and everyone else who was there could see with their own eyes how many demons there were.<sup>11</sup> He was making their invisible defeat visible. If each one of the 2000 pigs has at least one demon, that’s proof that you are dealing with at least 2000 demons. The demons made this man a self-destructive maniac, and as soon as they are in the pigs, the pigs become self-destructive maniacal pigs. So it’s obvious that it’s the same demons. Jesus makes it so it’s impossible to deny the miracle.

Although people still try. Some have tried to say there was no miracle. There are people today who say that the demon stories in the Bible just reflect the superstitious ideas of a primitive people who didn’t understand mental illness. Mental illness. Is that all this is? No demons? Is that reasonable, rational thing to assume—that this was just one giant coincidence? Are we to believe that a dangerous, maniacal, raving lunatic with superhuman strength was instantly healed of his mental disease with one word from Jesus, and by sheer coincidence 2000 nearby pigs at the same split second develop a severe case of acute, clinical bipolar manic/depressive suicidal psychosis? Is that a reasonable explanation for this?

No, that’s a ridiculous and very unscientific explanation. Pigs are not like lemmings. They don’t just follow each other off a cliff and commit mass suicide. In fact, I did some reading about pigs and found something very interesting. Did you know pigs can swim? Pigs are actually strong swimmers. If a herd of pigs did get confused and jump into a lake, they would just swim to the shore and go back up onto the land, because pigs can swim. Why didn’t these pigs swim? Because demonized pigs can’t swim. The same self-destructive behavior the demons had been inflicting on the man are now seen in the pigs.

## Conclusion

Well, there is a lot more to this story. In fact, we haven’t even gotten to the best part yet. This is where it starts really getting good, but we’re out of time. So I hope you can all make it next time so we

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<sup>10</sup> Some say it was to teach the people a lesson—pigs are unclean, and they shouldn’t have had pigs. But these are not Jews. They are Greeks, and Greeks can have pigs if they want. Besides, shortly after this Jesus declared all foods clean even for Jews and brought an end to the dietary restrictions of the OT. – Mk.7:19

<sup>11</sup> Some have wondered if this is ethical for Jesus to allow these pigs to die. Believe it or not, that’s a major discussion in the commentaries. After reading a lot of arguments along that line I have to admit I still don’t understand what the problem is. God allows all pigs to die. But these pigs died in a very good cause, just like the millions of lambs God required the Jews to kill over the years.

The NIVAC points out that characters such as Piglet, Porky Pig, Miss Piggy, and Babe have won our hearts, and we feel no aversion to pigs. Consequently, some background on the Jewish aversion to pigs helps explain why their violent demise would have evoked cheers instead of tears. The deep antipathy toward these animals is not limited to the biblical injunction against eating pork (Lev. 11:7–8). In first-century Palestine, swine’s flesh was associated with the brutal persecution of Jews by pagans, who wanted to eradicate peculiar Jewish practices. An account in 2 Maccabees 6:18–31 and 7:1–42 poignantly describes the gallantry of those who endured extreme torture and refused to compromise their faith when forced to eat swine’s flesh, a symbolic rejection of the religion of their fathers. Swine were therefore indelible reminders of paganism and persecution. On hearing this account, Jews would have hailed the swine’s destruction as a token of God’s ultimate vindication over the powers of oppression. There is no similar phenomenon associated with animals in our culture, although modern readers would probably not think twice if the animals destroyed by demons run amok were a pack of bubonic plague-carrying rats or a nest of venomous snakes.



can see what happens next because what happens next will teach us in very practical ways how we can unleash the mighty power of Christ in our struggle against sin in our own lives. Until then, just remember, the mighty power of the word of Christ, the power that stilled that storm, the power that defeated a legion of vicious demons, the power that will restore the universe and establish the kingdom of God—that power is right here, in his word.