

Homiletics Analysis: Mark 5:1–43

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Mark 5 presents three interlocking miracle accounts, each escalating in intensity and hopelessness: the exorcism of Legion from the Gerasene demoniac (vv. 1–20), the healing of the woman with a twelve-year hemorrhage (vv. 25–34), and the raising of Jairus’s daughter (vv. 21–24, 35–43). The chapter is structured as a Markan sandwich — the Jairus narrative frames the woman’s healing — a literary device Mark uses to invite the reader to interpret the two stories through each other. The progression moves from the most socially extreme case (a naked, self-mutilating man living among tombs, inhabited by thousands of demons) to the most medically hopeless case (a woman whose condition is chronic, costly, and publicly shameful) to the most ontologically final case (a dead twelve-year-old girl). In each case, the situation is presented in terms that signal impossibility: Legion is beyond human restraint, the woman is beyond human medicine, and Jairus’s daughter is beyond human hope. Jesus addresses all three with the same unhurried authority.

The narrative details are characteristically Markan in their vividness — the chains, the screaming, the pigs rushing into the sea; the woman’s calculation and her trembling disclosure; the mourners’ derisive laughter at Jesus’s announcement. Mark slows the pace at each moment of encounter to ensure the reader registers what is at stake. The requests made of Jesus by each party differ: the demons beg not to be destroyed, the woman reaches in silence and desperation, and Jairus falls at Jesus’s feet with a formal request. The responses of bystanders also differ: the Gerasenes beg Jesus to leave their region, the crowd presses in, and the mourners laugh. These contrasts are not decorative — they are load-bearing for the chapter’s claim.

This Text — Intent

God is using this chapter to confront the reader with a Jesus whose authority is absolute — over the demonic, over chronic suffering, over death itself — and to demand a decision about who this man is and what posture the reader will take toward Him. The chapter is not primarily a catalogue of compassion (though Jesus is compassionate throughout) nor a theology of miracles (though the miracles are real and central). It is an interrogation of Jesus’s identity that places the reader in the position of every character in the chapter: Will you beg Him to leave, press through the crowd to touch Him, fall at His feet in desperate faith, or laugh at His claims? The chapter does not permit a neutral response. The one who commands Legion, who stops a twelve-year hemorrhage at a touch, who walks into a death chamber and walks out with a living child, is making an implicit and unavoidable claim about Himself — and Mark intends the reader to answer it.

Subject Sentence: Jesus demonstrates absolute authority over the demonic, the chronic, and death itself — demanding a verdict.

Primary Claim: Through three cases of absolute human impossibility, God is confronting the reader with the totality of Christ's authority and pressing the question no bystander in this chapter could avoid: What will you do with this man?

Interpretive Evaluation

The Nature of the Miracles

Liberal-critical readings (Bultmann and his tradition) have treated the Gerasene exorcism as legend, the hemorrhage account as folk-religious magical thinking, and the raising of Jairus's daughter as either resuscitation misread as resurrection or community myth. These readings are not merely skeptical — they fundamentally misread Mark's literary strategy. Mark is not preserving folk traditions. He is writing with theological precision: the escalating impossibility of the three cases is not accidental but designed to press the reader toward a claim about Jesus's divine identity. A reading that reduces the miracles to natural or legendary categories eliminates the chapter's entire rhetorical purpose. The Reformed reading, following the grammatical-historical method, takes the accounts as historical narrative making theological claims — and the theological claims require the historicity of the events.

The Gerasene Demoniac and Demonology

Some traditions (particularly within Pentecostal/Charismatic exposition) emphasize this passage as a primary template for contemporary deliverance ministry — drawing from it detailed protocols for casting out demons, including naming them, identifying their number, and commanding their destination. This overreads the account. Jesus does not ask the demon's name as a ritual technique but as part of a dramatic unveiling of what is actually inhabiting this man — “Legion, for we are many” is a narrative revelation for the reader's benefit as much as anything. The text does not present Jesus as modeling a methodology; it presents Him as exercising sovereign authority that requires no technique and concedes nothing to the demonic. A Reformed reading acknowledges genuine demonic reality and the relevance of this text for understanding spiritual warfare while refusing to extract from it a replicable deliverance protocol. The emphasis falls on Jesus's authority, not on any human procedure.

The Woman with the Hemorrhage — Faith and Mechanism

Some popular and Pentecostal/Charismatic readings focus on the “power going out from Jesus” (v. 30) as a model for faith-activated healing — as if the woman’s faith mechanically triggered a healing transfer. This misreads the text in two directions. First, the woman’s faith is not presented as the efficient cause of her healing — Jesus is. Her faith is not a technique but a posture of desperate trust directed toward a specific person. Second, the fact that Jesus asks “Who touched me?” is not ignorance but intentionality — He draws the woman out not because He needs information but because she needs the public declaration and His direct word of peace. The healing was not impersonal; Jesus brought it to its fullness by insisting on personal encounter. The Reformed reading emphasizes faith as the instrument of reception directed toward Christ as the sole source of power — not faith as a power in itself.

The Raising of Jairus’s Daughter — Resuscitation vs. Resurrection

Some expositors note the distinction between this event (resuscitation — restoration to mortal life) and the resurrection (transformation into glorified immortal life) and use this to minimize its theological weight. This is an over-qualification. While the distinction is real, it does not reduce the theological claim of the event. A twelve-year-old girl was dead — the mourners’ response confirms this and their laughter at Jesus confirms their confidence in the finality of her death. Jesus’s authority over death in this provisional form is still authority over death. And within Mark’s narrative, it functions as a proleptic sign of the resurrection — the one who raises Jairus’s daughter is the one who will Himself be raised. The Reformed reading welcomes the resuscitation/resurrection distinction as theologically accurate while insisting that the passage’s claim about Jesus’s authority over death is not diminished by it.

The Messianic Secret and Silence Commands

Jesus commands silence in v. 43 (regarding Jairus’s daughter) but commands proclamation from the healed demoniac (v. 19). Wrede’s “Messianic Secret” theory reads the silence commands as Markan theological overlay — invented to explain why Jesus wasn’t universally recognized as Messiah during His ministry. The Reformed reading, following more recent Markan scholarship (Hengel, France, Stein), understands the silence commands as contextually coherent: in Jewish territory (Galilee, the Decapolis), premature declaration of Messianic identity would trigger political-nationalistic misunderstanding before the cross; in Gentile territory (Gerasa), proclamation is appropriate because that misunderstanding is absent. The asymmetry in Mark 5 precisely fits this pattern — the demoniac is sent to Gentile territory to proclaim, Jairus’s family in Jewish territory is told to be silent. This is historically coherent, not a theological fiction.

Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 1:1–2; Psalm 107:29** — God’s sovereign command over chaos (the uncontrollable, the waters) foreshadows Christ’s authority over Legion and the

storm. The reader familiar with the Old Testament hears in Jesus's commands an echo of divine creative authority.

- **Isaiah 35:5–6; 61:1–3** — The Messianic age is marked by healing of the chronically ill and good news to the brokenhearted — Jesus's actions in Mark 5 are the fulfillment of these specific prophetic promises, not merely compassionate acts but signs of inaugurated eschatological kingdom.
- **Ezekiel 37:1–14** — The valley of dry bones: God's authority to restore life where death is total and final. This passage grounds the theological claim of Jairus's daughter's raising within the Old Testament's own testimony to God's sole authority over death.
- **John 11:25–26** — "I am the resurrection and the life" — Jesus's explicit self-declaration in the Lazarus account provides the theological vocabulary for what Mark 5 demonstrates narratively. Mark shows; John interprets.
- **Revelation 1:17–18** — The risen Christ declares: "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." The authority demonstrated in Mark 5 is not a special dispensation for the earthly ministry — it belongs to who Christ is. The one who raised the dead girl is the one who holds death's keys eternally.

Aim: To compel the reader to move from spectator to respondent — to stop standing at the margins of this chapter watching others encounter Jesus, and to bring their own impossibility to the one whose authority over Legion, hemorrhage, and death is absolute.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–2	Jesus and disciples arrive in the region of the Gerasenes; immediately a man with an unclean spirit comes from the tombs	"Immediately" — characteristic Markan urgency; the encounter is initiated by the demonized man coming to Jesus, not the reverse
3–5	Description of the demoniac's condition: unable to be restrained, living among tombs, crying out and cutting himself night and day	The description establishes absolute human impossibility — chains could not hold him; the extremity is emphasized with multiple details

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6–7	The man runs to Jesus, falls before Him, and the demon cries out identifying Jesus as “Son of the Most High God” and begging not to be tormented	Significant: the demonic realm recognizes Jesus’s identity and authority before the disciples do; “Son of the Most High God” is a Gentile formulation
8–10	Jesus commands the unclean spirit out; the spirit gives its name — “Legion, for we are many” — and begs not to be sent out of the region	“Legion” = Roman military unit of ~6,000; the name reveals the scale of possession; the request to remain in the region implies territorial demonic claim
11–13	Legion begs to enter the pigs; Jesus permits it; the herd rushes into the sea and drowns	Jesus grants the request but the outcome is destruction — the concession does not indicate negotiation on equal footing; the pigs’ destruction may signal the demonic realm’s ultimate end
14–17	Herdsmen flee and report; people come and see the formerly demonized man sitting clothed and in his right mind; the people are afraid and beg Jesus to leave	The same Greek verb used for the demoniac falling before Jesus (v. 6) is used for the people begging Jesus to leave (v. 17) — fearful prostration in both cases, but opposite dispositions
18–20	The man begs to go with Jesus; Jesus refuses and sends him to proclaim what the Lord has done; the man proclaims in the Decapolis and all marvel	Jesus’s only command to active proclamation in this chapter — notably in Gentile territory; the man’s testimony is the first Gentile mission in Mark
21	Jesus returns by boat; a large crowd gathers to Him at the sea	The setting shifts back to Jewish territory
22–24	Jairus, a synagogue ruler, falls at Jesus’s feet and begs Him to come heal his dying twelve-year-old daughter; Jesus goes with him; the	Jairus is a named, identified figure — a synagogue official, a person of standing in the community; the urgency is explicit — “at the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	crowd presses in	point of death”
25–26	Introduction of the woman: twelve years of hemorrhage, spent all her money on physicians, grown worse, not better	Twelve years parallels the age of Jairus’s daughter — a detail that cannot be accidental; the woman’s condition is chronic, costly, isolating, and ritually defiling
27–28	The woman hears about Jesus, presses through the crowd, and touches His garment, reasoning that even a touch will be sufficient	Faith expressed in action under difficulty — she is pressing through a crowd despite a condition that renders her ritually unclean and her touch technically defiling to others
29	Immediately the bleeding stops; she feels in her body that she is healed	Markan “immediately” again — the healing is instantaneous; the physical reality of the cure is confirmed from her own bodily awareness
30	Jesus, perceiving that power had gone out from Him, turns and asks who touched Him	The question is not informational but intentional — Jesus is drawing the woman toward personal encounter, not allowing her to slip away with the healing anonymously
31–32	Disciples point out the pressing crowd; Jesus continues looking around	The disciples’ practical objection highlights the improbability and marks the moment — something is different about this touch
33–34	The woman comes in fear and trembling, falls before Jesus, tells Him the whole truth; Jesus addresses her: “Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace and be freed from your suffering”	“Daughter” — the only time in any Gospel Jesus addresses a woman with this term; public declaration of healing replaces shameful concealment; she is not merely healed but blessed and sent in peace
35	While Jesus is still speaking,	The interruption — the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	messengers come from Jairus's house: "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"	Markan sandwich at its hinge; the word "dead" lands with finality; the messengers' phrasing implies that death marks the boundary of Jesus's competence
36	Jesus overhears and says to Jairus: "Do not fear, only believe"	The pivot of the entire sandwich — faith called for precisely at the moment when it seems most irrational; this is the interpretive key the woman's story provides: her faith in the apparently impossible was vindicated; now Jairus is called to the same
37–38	Jesus takes Peter, James, and John and proceeds to the house; finds a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly	The mourning is public and professional — this is confirmed death with full social recognition
39	Jesus asks why they are making a commotion: "The child is not dead but sleeping"	"Sleeping" should not be read as denial of physical death but as Jesus's assertion of His authority over its finality — from His vantage point, death is a temporary state; the mourners' laughter confirms they understand Him to be denying the death they witnessed
40a	The crowd laughs at Him	A significant reaction — contempt and derision; they are certain she is dead and Jesus is deluded or dishonest
40b–41	Jesus puts out the crowd, takes the parents and the three disciples, goes to the	Mark preserves the Aramaic words — a vivid eyewitness detail; the taking of the hand

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	child, takes her hand, and says “Talitha cumi” — “Little girl, arise”	involves deliberate contact with ritual uncleanness (a corpse); Jesus is not defiled — she is raised
42	The girl rises immediately and walks; she is twelve years old; they are immediately overcome with amazement	“Immediately” — the third use in this chapter’s miracle accounts; the twelve-year detail now fully lands as the chapter’s structural echo
43	Jesus strictly charges them to tell no one; tells them to give her something to eat	The silence command in Jewish territory (contrast v. 19–20); the instruction to feed her confirms the reality of the resurrection — she is physically restored, not a ghost or a vision

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–20	The Gerasene Demoniac: Authority Over the Demonic Realm
2	21–24	Jairus’s Request: The Entry of Desperation
3	25–34	The Woman with the Hemorrhage: Faith That Reaches Through
4	35–43	Jairus’s Daughter Raised: Authority Over Death Itself

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Jesus demonstrates absolute authority over the demonic, the chronic, and death itself — demanding a verdict.

Primary Claim: Through three cases of absolute human impossibility, God is confronting the reader with the totality of Christ’s authority and pressing the question no bystander in this chapter could avoid: What will you do with this man?

Applications

1. Identify the “impossibility” you have decided Jesus cannot address — and bring it to Him. (*Mind/belief*) Every character in Mark 5 came to Jesus with a situation that had exhausted every human alternative. The Gerasenes had tried chains; the woman had tried every physician; Jairus received the news that it was too late. The chapter is structured to expose the reader’s own version of “too late” or “too far gone.” The application is not “try harder to believe.” It is the prior diagnostic: What have you decided, functionally, is outside Jesus’s range? Where have you quietly concluded that your situation is the one exception to His authority? Name it — because the chapter names Legion, it names twelve years, it names death — and bring it to the one who addressed all three.

2. Receive the identity Jesus speaks over you — stop hiding in the crowd.

(*Affections/worship*) The woman with the hemorrhage wanted to obtain healing and disappear. Jesus would not permit it. He insisted on personal encounter — drawing her out to hear Him say “Daughter.” She came in shame and left with a new name. The application is not about a general principle of vulnerability or community. It is about this specific dynamic: many people seek the benefits of Jesus while avoiding the person of Jesus — taking the healing, the comfort, the answers, while staying anonymous in the crowd. The chapter shows Jesus refusing to let the woman reduce the relationship to a transaction. He calls her out to give her something the healing itself could not give: His own word of peace spoken directly to her. Are you seeking Jesus’s benefits while avoiding His gaze?

3. Let the woman’s vindicated faith speak to you at your own “the child is dead” moment.

(*Mind/belief*) The Markan sandwich is not a literary accident. Mark places the woman’s healing immediately before the news arrives that Jairus’s daughter has died precisely so that the reader — and Jairus — can hear Jesus’s “Do not fear, only believe” in light of what has just been demonstrated. Jairus witnessed the woman’s faith rewarded. Now he is called to the same faith at a higher cost. This is the chapter’s pastoral architecture: God does not demand faith in an abstract principle but in a demonstrated person. When the worst news arrives, the call to faith is not naïve or cruel — it is grounded in the accumulated evidence of who is standing next to you. What has Jesus already done in your life that He is now calling you to remember at your own moment of “it’s too late”?

4. Stop managing Jesus — fall at His feet and ask. (*Will/behavior*) Jairus is a synagogue ruler — a man of religious standing, community authority, and institutional identity. He falls at Jesus’s feet. The chapter records this detail without irony or embarrassment. There is something the ruler of a synagogue cannot do for himself, and he knows it, and he prostrates himself before the itinerant teacher to ask for it. The application targets the reader’s own management of proximity to Jesus — maintaining a respectful, dignified, institutional relationship that never reaches the point of prostration. Jairus got to prostration because his daughter was dying. The chapter asks: What would it take for you to get there? And then: Why wait?

5. Marvel rightly — do not be like the Gerasenes. (*Affections/worship*) The chapter records three responses to Jesus's power: the Gerasenes beg Him to leave; the woman worships in fear and receives His blessing; the witnesses of Jairus's daughter's raising are "immediately overcome with amazement." The Gerasenes' response is the chapter's haunting shadow: they saw Legion healed and clothed and in his right mind, and their response was to ask the Healer to go away. Something about the presence of absolute power disturbed their equilibrium more than the demoniac did. The application is a call to self-examination: Is your primary response to Christ's authority awe and trust, or the low-grade discomfort of the Gerasenes — preferring a manageable, slightly domesticated Jesus who does not disrupt the local economy of your life?

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Mark 5 reveals Jesus as possessing a category of authority that belongs exclusively to God in the Old Testament — authority over the chaos of the demonic realm (echoing God's authority over primordial chaos), authority to heal what no human remedy can address, and authority over death. This is not merely compassionate intervention — it is sovereign command. Jesus does not pray for Legion's departure; He commands it. He does not grieve over the woman's condition and seek healing on her behalf; power goes out from Him. He does not ask God to raise Jairus's daughter; He takes her hand and tells her to get up. In each case, the authority is intrinsic and direct. The chapter thus makes a Christological claim of the highest order: the man standing in the Gerasene tombs, the man feeling power leave Him in the crowd, the man speaking to the dead child is exercising divine prerogative — and Mark intends the reader to draw the obvious conclusion about who this man is.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Mark 5 is a sustained demonstration of the Reformed principle that grace comes entirely from Christ's initiative and intrinsic power, not from the worthiness or spiritual condition of the recipient. The Gerasene demoniac did not seek Jesus — Jesus crossed the sea to reach him. The woman's faith is honored, but the power is Christ's, not generated by her faith. Jairus's faith falters at the worst possible moment — "your daughter is dead" — and Jesus calls him forward anyway with "only believe," not as a condition of earning help but as a grace-enabled response to the One who is already moving toward his house. The chapter also advances the covenant-redemptive arc: the Messianic age's arrival in the person of Jesus — proclaimed by Isaiah as healing for the broken, release for the captive, good news for the mourning — is happening in real time in the villages and tombs of Galilee and the Decapolis. The kingdom has come. These are not random acts of compassion. They are the credentials of the King, displayed in the most

hopeless corners of human experience, pointing forward to the ultimate defeat of death in the resurrection.

Main Takeaway

The chapter has shown you three cases: a man too far gone for chains to hold, a woman too long suffering for medicine to cure, a girl too dead for mourning to help. Jesus addressed all three with the same authority, without technique, without hesitation, and without failure. The question He leaves you with is the same one He left every person in the chapter: Will you fall at His feet with your own impossibility, or will you beg Him to leave your region? The Gerasenes saw exactly what Jesus could do — and asked Him to go. Do not be the Gerasenes.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the three miracles as independent sermon units without reading them as a unified theological argument.** Each miracle in Mark 5 is illuminated by the others. Preaching Legion alone produces a theology of spiritual warfare that lacks the chapter's Christological center. Preaching the woman alone produces an individualistic theology of personal faith disconnected from the escalating impossibility the chapter is building. Preaching Jairus's daughter alone produces a theology of death and hope without the faith-architecture the woman's story provides. Mark constructed this chapter as a unified argument — it should be preached that way.
- **Reducing the applications to "have more faith."** This is the chapter's most common homiletical misuse. The point is not that these characters had extraordinary faith and therefore received extraordinary results. The demoniac had no faith in the conventional sense — he was inhabited by Legion. The woman had desperate, fumbling, almost magical faith in a touch. Jairus's faith collapsed at the hinge. The chapter is not a manual on faith technique. It is a demonstration of Christ's authority that calls forth faith — rather than a display of human faith that activated Christ's power. Applications generated from the former are gospel-shaped; applications generated from the latter are moralistic.
- **Spiritualizing Legion away from genuine demonic reality, or alternatively, using this passage to construct a deliverance ministry template.** Both errors exist. Liberal exposition tends to psychologize the Gerasene demoniac and lose the genuine demonic reality the text affirms. Charismatic exposition tends to extract from this passage a protocol for contemporary exorcism that the text does not provide. The Reformed reading honors the demonic reality as genuine while

centering Jesus's authority rather than any human procedure — and resists the temptation to make Mark 5 the foundation for a specialized ministry methodology.

- **Missing the Markan sandwich and therefore missing the interpretive link between the woman's healing and Jairus's crisis.** The sandwiching of the hemorrhage account inside the Jairus narrative is the chapter's interpretive key. When Jesus says "Do not fear, only believe" to Jairus at v. 36, He is not offering an empty spiritual platitude — He has just demonstrated, in front of Jairus, what faith in His power produces. Preaching that does not surface this literary structure will flatten the passage's most deliberately constructed pastoral moment.
- **Handling "the child is not dead but sleeping" (v. 39) as a literal medical claim —** i.e., suggesting the girl was in a coma or unconscious state and Jesus simply recognized it. The mourners' laughter and the chapter's own framing make clear that the girl was understood by all present to be dead. Jesus's statement is a theological assertion about His relationship to death's finality, not a medical diagnosis. Preaching the alternative flattens the miracle, undercuts the Christological claim, and makes Jesus guilty of either ignorance or deliberate crowd manipulation rather than sovereign authority.
- **Preaching the Gerasenes' response as merely cultural (they were worried about economic loss — the pigs) without pressing the existential application.** Yes, the pigs represent economic concern. But the text does not reduce the Gerasenes' response to pragmatic calculation. They were "afraid" (v. 15) — the same word used of the disciples in Mark 4:41 after the stilling of the storm. The presence of absolute divine authority is terrifying, and the response of asking Jesus to leave is a recognizable and recurring human posture. Reducing it to "they were worried about their pigs" lets the congregation off the hook. The harder question the text is pressing — and the one that should not be avoided — is whether the congregation is more comfortable managing their situation than having it radically addressed by Christ.